EASSH Position on the European Research Area Act

The European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH) welcomes the proposed European Research Area (ERA) Act and sees it as an essential step towards a more integrated ERA. The ERA already includes a significant number of laws and regulations intended to strengthen education, research and innovation. To add value, the Act needs to address persistent implementation gaps and improve the practical conditions for the circulation of knowledge and researchers. Significant differences in funding, administrative procedures, career conditions, evaluation practices and legal interpretations continue to limit the potential of ERA. An ERA Act needs to address these differences holistically, ensuring high levels of engagement from Member States and relevant stakeholders. Beyond this, the ERA Act offers an opportunity to manifest Europe's position as a beacon for the free circulation of researchers and scientific knowledge, thus upholding shared European values at a time of intense societal and environmental challenges and democratic backsliding.

1. Sustainable funding through the ERA

Serious underfunding continues to weaken the potential of research in Europe significantly. The 3 per cent target for research and innovation remains a fundamental need to enable R&I in Europe to address current societal demands. While a small number of countries have reached or even exceeded this target, in many Member States, a considerable distance between political commitments and actual provision can be found. This gap is particularly evident in the social sciences and humanities, which continue to receive a smaller share of overall research funding, even producing similar or higher number of publications compared to STEM at the global scale.[1]
Excellent research and innovation rely on a wide range of scientific fields, innovation stages, and institutional profiles. Therefore, the ERA Act should ensure that increased directionality does not reduce the space for multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, or curiosity-driven research. It should also help address disciplinary imbalances, in which some areas of science are systematically favoured over others. Funding schemes, including measures to make Europe a more attractive destination for researchers from around the world, should be discipline-agnostic, funding all areas of research in line with their excellence and potential to address societal challenges.

2. Career development as a systemic ERA issue

A central tool for strengthening European research lies in investment in research careers. However,, research careers have become less attractive over time. This is, in many cases, linked to insecure career paths leading to growing researcher precarity. The strong reliance on short-term project funding, especially for early career researchers, and the very low success rates of funding applications have created structural insecurity across large parts of the research system, working against the objectives of a strong ERA.

The ERA Act should support the establishment of framework conditions aimed at a better balance between fixed-term and permanent employment. It should also contribute to providing robust, basic funding for research institutions, enabling open-ended positions for researchers. At the same

[1] ESFRI Landscape Analysis 2024; Matthews, D. (2025) How EU research stacks up against the world, in three charts, *Science Business* 11 December 2025.

time, funding instruments need to be adaptable to different disciplines and forms of research communication.

The Act should also call to pursue measures and structural incentives, especially in areas where Member State reluctance hampers progress and homogenisation – such as tax, pensions, gender, workplaces, salaries, and the challenges linked to scale-ups of firms and cross-border mobility of people and funds.

Despite significant investment in research (including the Choose Europe scheme), Europe's global attractiveness is further weakened by complex and often counterproductive visa and residence regulations for researchers from non-EU countries. Researchers are frequently confronted with lengthy, non-transparent and fragmented procedures. Existing legal possibilities for facilitation are unevenly applied at the member-state level. The ERA Act should establish minimum standards and consider flexible, efficient visa and residency rules as instruments to promote brain circulation.

3. Academic freedom as a fundamental right

Academic freedom is a fundamental right and a basis of the European Research Area. It includes the freedom to conduct and communicate research, to teach. Being a fundamental right, academic freedom should not be restricted unless it conflicts with other basic rights.
Academic freedom has declined worldwide and is also in danger in the European Union. The ERA act should include concrete measures to safeguard academic freedom in Europe. Measures related to knowledge security, strategic prioritisation, or international cooperation need to be designed in a way that, in practice, does not undermine academic freedom. Restrictions require a clear legal basis and justification. They must be proportionate and should not be applied generally or preventively.
The ERA Act should also enable a systematic assessment of academic freedom, in order to flag and counteract any threat that may arise.
This also concerns the area of knowledge security. Poorly designed policies in this field risk isolating European research from international cooperation and weakening its quality and innovativeness. Safeguards are therefore needed to preserve the openness on which scientific excellence depends. The proposed idea of an European Charter on Knowledge Security could hereby provide a framework for the development of related policies.

4. Gender Equality

The European Research Area (ERA) must embed inclusive gender equality as a core
principle across all its structures and processes. Linking the EU framework programme, to the national policies and funding, and institutional practices, will encourage a more holistic system. This integrated approach will help bridge the widening gaps among Member States and institutions and prevent backsliding on fundamental values. By strengthening policy coordination and accountability at all levels, the ERA Act can solidify progress made and address persistent challenges, securing a truly inclusive, safe, and equitable research and innovation environment for Europe.

5. Research assessment and evaluation

Generally, evaluation and funding practices determine what kind of research is possible and supported in Europe. This is particularly visible for disciplines that do not rely on a narrow set of quantitative indicators. The ERA Act should support research assessment practices that are adapted to the diversity of disciplines, career paths and research contributions.

In line with CoARA principles, this includes recognition of a broad range of outputs and contributions, such as monographs, journal articles, editions, data or societal engagement. ERA monitoring should track current reform in this area, particularly evaluating whether national evaluation systems recognise this diversity. We also aligned with the CoARA submission to the ERA Act.

6. High quality research and knowledge valorisation

Investment in research and innovation has a prime aim to expand our knowledge for developing peaceful and prosperous societies, where education and wellbeing are core values. All disciplines contribute to citizens' wellbeing, and all types of research provide critical understanding for public and private sectors to flourish. Over the last 60 years, research investment has historically privileged research tech-driven economic growth and only recently looked at fostering human centric investment to improve human and citizens' conditions. ERA Act must foster an open and dynamic investment which aims at strengthening European social values.

7. Open science

Open science in the ERA has made significant progress over the last two decades. At the same time, implementation remains uneven across Member States and has created new legal, economic and cultural challenges. These challenges are particularly relevant for the social sciences and humanities, where books and other forms of scholarly output continue to play a central role and because over 60% of the research output of European researchers is already in open access.[2]
Efforts to fully achieve open science should also account for the varying publication practices across institutional and disciplinary contexts. It remains critical to develop safe digital infrastructures to fully implement FAIR data principles, especially in situations where data are sensitive or at

[2] The OA Diamond Journals Study (2021) by Jeroen Bosman, Jan Erik Frantsvåg, Bianca Kramer, Pierre-Carl Langlais, Vanessa Proudman. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4558704

particular risk of misuse. Where appropriate, the ERA Act should recognise that restricted access remains a legitimate option for FAIR data.
Uneven implementation of copyright-related legislation between Member States continues to weaken collaboration and data sharing. This is despite legal provisions in support of scientific research. Harmonisation through the ERA would reduce legal uncertainty and the legal risks faced by individual researchers.
The ERA Act should support sustainable open-access models adaptable to diverse publication types and forms of scholarly communication. There is also a need for more substantial harmonisation in the context of text and data mining, where existing European legislation safeguarding the rights of scientific, publicly funded researchers is unevenly implemented across Member States.

8. Monitoring

The ERA Act should make implementation gaps visible so they can be addressed. Monitoring frameworks with comparable indicators across Member States and regular reporting obligations. Indicators need to take scientific diversity into account and be developed together with the research community. This includes monitoring the number of researchers for disciplinary areas and funding schemes

9. Guidance on artificial intelligence in research is fragmented

EASSH supports any efforts to create a common set of guidelines fo use of AI in research for researchers, research performing organisations and research funders across the EU
AI will accelerate scientific progress, across all disciplines, and across all aspects of the research pathway. However, rapid deployment also creates risks for research integrity, transparency and public trust. Common EU guidelines are therefore essential.
An EU-level framework can support high standards in research, clarity in drawing the boundaries for appropriate use, while allowing flexibility for disciplinary and national differences. Most Member States already provide guidance in some form; this is inevitably more developed in some Member States than others.

However, while there is some variation the existing guidance converges around three core principles. First, researchers must be transparent about their use of AI in all stages of research, from research design, data collection and analysis to writing and editing outputs. Second, researchers retain the full responsibility for their work: AI does not replace human accountability for tools, methods, analysis and verification of results. Third, researchers have a legal obligation to comply with relevant law, especially with respect to personal data under GDPR, and the EU AI Act.
Guidelines should be proportionate and risk-based.

Research performing organisations and funders should provide training, clear policies and support to encourage transparency. There should be consideration of integrating AI use into the research ethics and integrity systems. Funders should be able to explain the intended use of AI and risk management related to the use of AI. Misuse of AI tools or misrepresentation of data and results should be treated as research misconduct. Existing whistleblowing and misconduct processes are sufficient to address AI related cases.

promote learning and research in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) as a resource for Europe and the world, and to engage with policymakers and research funders in support of the social sciences and humanities.