



ESFRI

**ESFRI**

**Position Paper**  
**on the European**  
**Research Area Act**  
**(ERA Act)**

January 2026

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## INTRODUCTION

The European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) was established to support a strategy-led approach to policy making on Research Infrastructures (RIs) in Europe, in alignment with broader policy goals, and to facilitate multilateral initiatives leading to the better use and development of research infrastructures, at EU and international level.

Since its establishment, ESFRI has witnessed the critical role of the integrated ecosystem formed by Research, Technology, and Digital Infrastructures in fostering excellent science, attracting talent, driving innovation, and enhancing Europe's competitiveness. As highlighted in Commissioner Zaharieva's Mission Letter, securing this role requires a long-term strategy to advance European Research and Technology Infrastructures, with the ultimate goal of creating a truly pan-European ecosystem of infrastructures and services<sup>1</sup>.

As part of this strategic vision, ESFRI welcomes the forthcoming European Research Area (ERA) Act, which aims to guarantee a "fifth freedom" within the EU Single Market—ensuring the free movement of researchers, scientific knowledge, and technology.

The input presented here sets out ESFRI's perspectives on key elements of the upcoming ERA Act that can address these challenges and enable the realization of the fifth freedom for Europe's research and innovation ecosystem.

In this context, our contribution aims to highlight and put forward solutions to several barriers that remain within the research infrastructure landscape, linked to the main blocks of policy measures that could be included in the ERA Act.

## KEY POINTS FROM ESFRI ON THE FUTURE ERA ACT

- *Policy Block: Reinforced alignment of investments, policies and programmes around strategic priority areas.*

⇒ **Better coordination for the optimization of the overall RI ecosystem**

For an increased recognition and alignment with ERA policies of RIs, ESFRI advocates strengthening the ESFRI role providing strategic recommendations at the highest level. In this sense, ESFRI's successful experience supporting a coherent and strategy-led approach to policymaking on research infrastructures in Europe should be an asset leveraged when discussing the infrastructure ecosystem.

Therefore, ESFRI's participation in ERAC, the ERA Forum and other relevant bodies and the cooperation with the European Commission, European Council and others could be further strengthened, particularly when expertise in managing the infrastructure ecosystem is

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<sup>1</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/833e082a-0c39-4bc6-a119-e0760ebc7360\\_en?filename=mission-letter-zaharieva.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/833e082a-0c39-4bc6-a119-e0760ebc7360_en?filename=mission-letter-zaharieva.pdf)

required. Additionally, it is recommended to revisit and clarify ESFRI's reporting structure and its dependence on ERAC, the ERA Forum and other relevant bodies and the cooperation with the European Commission, European Council and others.

⇒ **Achieving optimization of the RI ecosystem calls for a comprehensive approach involving multiple actions:**

- Coordination mechanism for Research and Technology Infrastructures:

In line with the European Strategy for Research and Technology Infrastructures, ESFRI proposes a light overarching governance for the research and technology infrastructures ecosystem in which ESFRI should play a proactive role to coordinate and consolidate a cohesive ecosystem of RIs and TIs and avoid further risks of fragmentation.

- Consolidation of the RI ecosystem:

The overall goal should be to facilitate the clustering of RIs needed to tackle the complex problems and challenges that the EU is facing and the need for consolidation of the infrastructure landscape to bolster excellence and to keep it sustainable in the long run. In order to promote this collaboration and avoid fragmentation and duplication of efforts, scientific, technical and financial incentives should be laid out to promote a more consolidated RI ecosystem.

Actions in this direction could be:

- Expand existing ERICs to include new related RI initiatives.
- Facilitate mergers between ERICs with overlapping or complementary scopes.
- Promote synergies through initiatives such as a dedicated INFRA-INTEGRATE call.
- Provide support for the consolidation of the RI/TI landscape, necessary to increase the overall technological readiness of MS/AC (capacity building in industry and personnel), the breeding ground for excellent science and cutting-edge technology.
- Consider options to allow participation of private entities in ERICs and open the discussion of increasing engagement in economic activities for ERICs as well as for other legal entities for RIs, bearing in mind that collaboration is a two-way street where both infrastructures and private entities should be open to sharing resources, data and outcomes in a mutually beneficial framework. EC could work together with the ERIC Forum and the ERIC Committee to find a common framework valid for all ERICs, to avoid leaving the decision to the Council of each individual ERIC.

⇒ **Need to improve the integration of funding streams.**

To further integrate funding streams ESFRI proposes to take full advantage of ESFRI's established and well tested procedures for the implementation of the Framework Program 10 (FP10).

The upcoming FP10 should be used to coordinate policies and investment priorities by applying a holistic view to the infrastructure ecosystem and accompanied by adequate and coordinated funding streams from national and European sources. FP10 will then facilitate a coherent and effective development of the entire European research and innovation

ecosystem, supporting curiosity-driven projects, technology development and EU competitiveness. In particular, the new perspectives opened in FP10 on contributing up to 20% on capital expenditures of “critical new world-class capacities”<sup>2</sup> of European RIs should be clarified and the process to allocate these funds must be transparent, merit based, profound and aligned to the ESFRI roadmap process.

Additionally, a clear operational procedure should be proposed to guarantee that the development of RIs of a global character difficult to implement only at the EU level is aligned with EU policy priorities. Once again ESFRI’s policy competence and experience should be leveraged and employed in the development of the procedure.

- *Policy Block: Improvements in framework conditions for research(ers) and research organisations in Europe.*

⇒ **Increase geographical and intersectoral mobility for researchers in the EU.**

For the limited geographical and intersectoral mobility of researchers in the EU ESFRI advocates for an improved legal framework for Research Infrastructures.

Actions in this direction could be:

- Implement a regulation that facilitates cross border employment.
- Promote pension systems that allow mobility for RI personnel.
- Guarantee visa and border free mobility for researchers, research personnel and other relevant professionals between the EU Member States and implement a «Research Visa» to bolster personnel mobility in the R&I ecosystem including, where needed, with non-EU Member States (and where appropriate differentiate between associates/like-minded countries and other countries).
- Pan-European qualification standards.

In this context, the upcoming ERA Act provides a timely opportunity to consider targeted legislative adjustments to the ERIC framework, given the central role ERICs play within the European RI ecosystem. However, it is important to minimize that rules applying to ERICs are spread across different regulations.

⇒ **Improvement of the ERIC framework**

Additional aspects where the upcoming ERA Act presents an opportunity to discuss potential legislative changes to the ERIC framework include:

- Streamlining and speeding-up the ERIC establishment process. Whenever new ERICs are being set up, the procedures (in the MS and the EC) should be streamlined without compromising the rigorousness of the evaluation. The current extended timeline decreases the attractiveness of becoming an ERIC.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2025:543:FIN>

- Participation of International Organizations (IOs) and third countries in ERICs remains a challenge, particularly regarding founding membership. Therefore, the current avenues by which Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) can become founding members should be clarified and strengthened.
- Incentives should also be introduced to encourage the expansion of existing ERICs to include related infrastructure initiatives, or even the merger of ERICs or other infrastructures with overlapping scopes.