



Council of the  
European Union

144674/EU XXVII. GP  
Eingelangt am 12/06/23

**Brussels, 12 June 2023**  
**(OR. en)**

**10029/1/23**  
**REV 1**

**ERAC 5**  
**RECH 260**

**NOTE**

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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	ERAC Discussion Paper/ Note
	National implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024: State of play with regard to national policy vehicles

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ERAC delegations will find in Annex the document " National implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024: State of play with regard to national policy vehicles", drafted by the German delegation, with a view to the ERAC meeting on 21-22 June 2023.

## ERAC Discussion Paper/ Note

**National implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024:**  
**State of play with regard to national policy vehicles**

rev 12 June 2023

**Background**

The success of the European Research Area (ERA) relies on the co-creation and – implementation among the different levels, EU, national and regional. Besides the work in the ERA Forum, each Member State is encouraged to foster the implementation of common goals at national level through national processes or policy vehicles (see Pact for R&I in Europe, ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024/ERA Action 18<sup>1</sup>).

In the light of this “tailor-made” approach for national implementation of ERA, the Council left it open to Member States and Associated Countries to decide if a dedicated process or policy vehicle is put in place and, if yes, what type of policy vehicle to choose. This could be a national action plan, a roadmap or any other approach identifying ongoing or planned measures at national or regional level which contribute to implementing the ERA policy agenda and other priority areas for joint action.

This discussion note presents the results of the survey conducted by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) with support from the General Secretariat of the Council (GCS) and the European Commission (EC) between 6 March and 15 May 2023. 28 ERAC Delegations handed in the filled in questionnaire. The results of this questionnaire present the range of options, trends and common challenges among Member States and Associated Countries during the implementation of ERA. The results open up opportunities for mutual learning and better insight to implementation at national level.

ERAC is asked to discuss the results of the ERAC survey. The discussion may also help to identify upcoming policy demands with a view to the next ERA Policy Agenda.

**Questions for discussion:**

- Which conclusions do you draw from the analysis of the ERAC survey for the present (and future) ERA Policy Agenda and ERA Governance?
- Most Member States indicate a lack of resources as the major challenge for national implementation of ERA. What can we do to take this fact better into account?

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<sup>1</sup> Council Recommendation on a Pact for R&I in Europe ([13701/21, VI pt. 7](#)); Council Conclusions on the future governance of the European Research Area (ERA); Annex ([14308/21](#)), both Nov 28, 2021.



## ANNEX I:

### Analysis of the ERAC Survey on national policy vehicles

#### Introduction

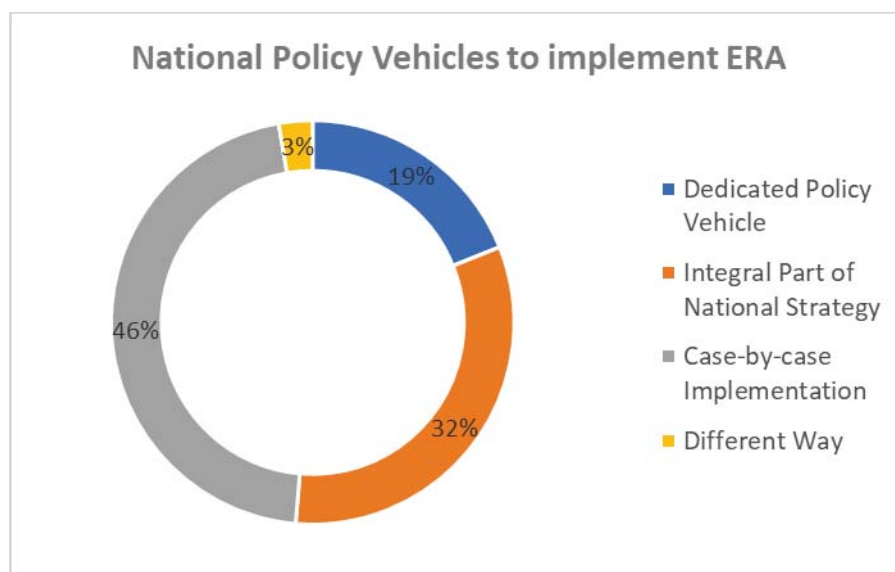
This analysis presents the findings of the ERAC survey carried out among Member States (MS) and Associated Countries (AC) between 6 March to 15 May 2023. It aims to assess the state of play with regard to national policy vehicles used to implement the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 at the national, and where relevant, regional level. In total, 28 ERAC Delegations<sup>2</sup> participated in the ERAC survey and handed in the questionnaire. The overview of results starts with a summary of the policy instruments used to implement ERA policy priorities. In the next section, the governance (e.g. inter-ministerial coordination) and types of stakeholder involvement are presented. Based on the results, the analysis identifies main challenges and presents lessons learnt and recommendations for the future ERA Policy Agenda.

#### Main results from the survey

##### Type of policy instrument

The MS and AC were invited to describe their national process or policy vehicle that is used to implement the ERA Policy Agenda and its goals in the national context. The responses show variation in the type of policy instruments that are used at the national level and are summarized in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1:** National Policy Vehicles to implement the ERA Policy Agenda.



<sup>2</sup> *Participation by MS:* Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.

*Participation by AC:* Georgia, Kosovo, and Norway.

Out of the 28 responses, 7 have a dedicated policy vehicle, i.e. a national action plan in place (Austria, Flanders in Belgium) or plan to set up a plan in the nearest future (Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, and Norway). About one third of the respondents (n=12) indicated that the national implementation of ERA is organized as an integral part of a national strategy. MS referred to two main strategies that have been adopted by a large number of EU member states, not showing any geographical clusters. In these cases, ERA policies are frequently implemented as part of a broader national research and innovation strategy, as mentioned by Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Slovakia, and Slovenia, and/ or a national smart specialization strategy, as indicated by Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Ireland, Hungary, Slovenia, and Spain. In Croatia, it is additionally linked to the national open science strategy and national development strategy. In Slovenia and Belgium, it is also part of the national international cooperation strategy. In Lithuania, ERA implementation is located in a national progress plan that sets out the main governmental objectives. Such an integrated framework of ERA implementation is described as an instrument that helps to integrate ERA actions more flexibly within existing national policy frameworks.

17 of the respondents apply a case-by-case approach that locates ERA implementation within national policies and/ or initiatives in more general terms. ERA policy goals are generally located in the national research, development and innovation policy or the internationalization policy of the respondents and use the policy instruments that are already available in the specific policy area to implement ERA. In Denmark and the Netherlands, ERA actions are assigned to governmental officers/ experts at the ministerial level that support and coordinate the implementation within the national policy context of the ERA action. Denmark called this a “pragmatic approach” as it reflects the individual challenges in the MS and AC with respect to the scope, policy dimension and maturity of individual ERA actions on the national level.

It is noteworthy to mention that seven respondents (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, and France) prefer to use a combination of different national policy instruments, such as national strategies in some ERA actions and a case-by-case implementation in other policy areas of ERA to have the flexibility to integrate ERA actions within the national policy framework as fits best and applying the “tailor-made approach” within the national context. As the policy cycle of ERA Policy Agenda does not necessarily correspond with the cycles of national strategies and policies, integrating the European and national framework is particularly challenging and may benefit from better alignment.

### Governance structures

The respondents have listed a variety of governance structures for ERA implementation. The national governance instruments for ERA implementation are mostly integrated in the national research and innovation policy framework. The MS and AC with a (planned) national action plan, i.e. Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, and Norway, have actively set up new governance instruments that are dedicated to ERA. For example, Austria set up a new ERA governance consisting of an ERA Stakeholder Forum and an ERA-NAP Executive Board in which two ministries are leading the coordination of ERA actions. It is aligned by a yearly ERA Symposium to have a discussion platform for ERA topics. Germany plans to set up a national ERA Forum to promote an ERA action-specific exchange between the political level and the national stakeholders.

Some MS/ AC have installed new political bodies to specifically address ERA implementation. For example, the Czech Republic has initiated a new Council for International Cooperation in Research,

Development and Innovation that acts as a central governmental coordination body and includes a sub-group exclusively dedicated to ERA. Respondents reported to have or plan to set up different formats of inter-ministerial co-work. For example, Portugal will start an inter-ministerial working group to address the challenges of coordination with respect to ERA actions that fall under the competence of more than one national ministry. Similarly, Norway uses an inter-ministerial committee and Finland an inter-ministerial group to address the coordinative issues of ERA implementation.

Other respondents, for example Ireland, Austria and Estonia, practice a whole-of-government approach that entails ERA implementation by more than one leading ministry in charge of an ERA action. In addition, Belgium applies a whole-of-government and all-of-governments approach due to its federal political system that has to take into account all institutional levels.

Other respondents, for example Spain, incorporate regular policy dialogues that should overcome challenges in policy coordination of ERA actions. Slovakia has installed an advisory body that is called Council for European Science Policy to provide support on ERA implementation. As pointed out by Portugal, MS and AC face the challenge of fragmentation of responsibilities and alignment between sectoral priorities with respect to ERA actions. This may also vary between ERA actions. The results underline that those ERA actions that touch different policy areas and responsibilities are more challenging to implement and raise the need for coordination at different policy levels, be it national, regional and/ or EU.

### Stakeholder involvement

Almost all ERAC Delegations stressed the importance of stakeholder involvement, starting early in the policy-making and throughout the entire implementation cycle. Mostly, ERA-related stakeholder involvement draws on formats that have been established for the general European research policy. The respondents indicated that they regularly have activities that include the national stakeholders by means of seminars, workshops, and conferences. Besides these general activities to share information with stakeholders and have a platform to exchange views and experiences, there are also targeted instruments. For example, Cyprus invites national stakeholders depending on the ERA action at hand. France has established a standing group on European research to foster the dialogue between the political level and stakeholders. Based on the national action plan of Austria, a national ERA Forum and yearly Symposium are introduced to institutionalize the exchange between ministries and national stakeholders. It should likewise be mentioned, as noted by Ireland, that the risk of stakeholder fatigue arises especially whenever the same national stakeholders have to engage in numerous ERA actions and their implementation.

### Main Challenges

The respondents assessed the key challenges in the implementation of ERA policy goals, differentiating between general challenges, challenges in some ERA actions and no problem for implementation. The overall results are summarized in Figure 2 below. The top five of general challenges are as follows:

- Lack of staff and resources (n=22)
- Lack of funding for incentivizing ERA implementation (n=9)
- Inter-ministerial coordination (n=7)
- Balance between ERA Policy Agenda and national priorities (n=7)

- Limited buy-in from sectorial ministries to ERA actions (n=6)

The results underline that the lack of staff and resources is the most pressing general challenge that is identified in 22 responses. The open questions in the questionnaire support the conclusion that staff and resources play a key role in the successful implementation of ERA policy goals. The respondents pointed out that it can be a limiting factor that has to be considered with respect to national ministries as well as national stakeholders that are equally invited to implement ERA actions in their daily working routines. It is also noted that the skills of employees have to meet the context of the ERA policy framework and staff shortage needs to be actively addressed. As the coordination between European and national policy goals requires additional work load and efforts between ministries and other involved actors in the policy area, resources have to be used efficiently. Small countries noted that the large number of ERA actions presents a distinct challenge to them with respect to staff and resources. Here it is emphasized that ERA actions need to have an added value for the national research and innovation system and it has to be made explicit and clear to all actors that are involved in ERA implementation.

**Figure 2:** Challenges in the implementation process of ERA actions.



Figure 2 illustrates that ERAC Delegations perceive some ERA actions as more challenging with respect to a limited buy-in from sectorial ministries and national stakeholders, followed by challenges in inter-ministerial coordination. ERA actions are different in scope and complexity and require the coordination between different actors in varying degrees. It is a challenge to bring in stakeholders, as Estonia for example stated, once it is not straightforward what the ERA action entails and what the added value should be. This makes it harder to clearly communicate to the political and civil actors involved in ERA implementation what is expected from whom and what outcome is intended. Additionally, lack of funding establishes a barrier for incentivizing ERA implementation. It is argued that the commitment to ERA actions decreases with the need to mobilize additional national funding. Finding synergies between ERA actions may help to use funding more efficiently and may also reduce administrative burden, as pointed out by Austria, Lithuania and Portugal.

## **Lessons learnt/ Recommendations**

In addition to the national implementation of ERA policy goals, respondents were asked to share lessons learnt and pointed out some general issues and recommendations.

First, respondents stressed that the diversity of the MS and AC and their political systems needs to be respected as it plays the key role in ERA implementation. It is argued that ERA actions usually face different stages of maturity in the MS and AC which will have a huge impact on the style of policy implementation, e.g. with respect to resources and expertise that is needed and fitting ERA actions into the national policy frameworks. The Netherlands emphasized that MS and AC may have different approaches to ERA implementation (top-down vs bottom-up). This will have an impact on how the cycles of policy-making at the European and national level are perceived and coordinated. Some respondents hinted at the value of aligned policy cycles to ease ERA implementation.

Second, reflecting on the different experiences and lessons learnt by the MS and AC, the exchange of good practices and mutual learning exercises (MLE) was generally seen as a key instrument to boost effective ERA implementation. The respondents noted that MLEs for specific ERA actions are highly valued and help to advance in the national process of ERA implementation. The exchange of new approaches and good practices may have an impact on capacity building at all institutional levels. As Denmark noted, due to the need to effectively use available capacities, national ministries sometimes have to prioritize between different reforms and policy initiatives. The complexity of some ERA actions and their connection to different European programs is additionally highlighted as a challenge. Ireland voiced that the ERA Policy Agenda should consider the absorptive capacity of national systems, for example sufficient time is needed to implement ERA.

Third, the important role of the European Commission was underlined and should continue to support activities that help MS and AC to implement ERA policy goals. For example, the Commission could maintain contact points for individual ERA actions. Institutions such as ERAC and the ERA Forum could additionally circulate information on supportive actions. The political dialogue with the Commission is also considered a valuable tool. As some respondents pointed out, not all ERA actions are self-explanatory and it is not always clear and outspoken what the ERA action should encompass. The Commission could actively address the issue of vagueness and ambiguity and provide (consecutive) information. MLEs and instruments at the European level such as the Tour des Capitales may help to raise the national awareness of the ERA Policy Agenda.

Fourth, stakeholder involvement is highly appreciated and considered as an important factor in ERA implementation throughout the entire policy cycle. Hence, involving stakeholders from the start is largely seen as a prerequisite for the successful implementation of ERA policy goals. The different formats of stakeholder involvement, via conferences, workshops, etc., may also increase the visibility and awareness of ERA actions in the eyes of the stakeholders. It was noted by Austria that the high-level commitment on the political level is a prerequisite to encourage implementation by stakeholders.





ERAC  
March 2023

## Questionnaire on modes and modalities of national ERA implementation with special focus on the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024

### General information

Country:

Contact person (name, email):

### 1. Do you have or plan to set up a concrete national process or policy vehicle in order to implement ERA policy goals in your country?

- ☐ We have a dedicated ERA policy vehicle **in place** since *(date)*:
- ☐ We plan to **set up** a dedicated ERA policy vehicle operational by *(tentative date)*:
- ☐ ERA is implemented as an **integral part** of an existing national/ regional strategy
- ☐ ERA actions are implemented **case-by-case** within the respective national policies and/ or initiatives
- ☐ We implement the ERA actions in a different way as described above

If so, please indicate the following points with regard to your national implementation model:

- **timeline**
- **type** (strategy, roadmap, action plan, coordination mechanism or other)
- **status** (level of political support, i.e. whole-of-government approach, limited number of ministries, one ministry, regional level or sub-governmental)
- **link** to other/ overarching national strategies (i.e. smart specialization strategy, national growth strategy, international strategy, etc.)

### 2. What key challenges do you expect or face in developing and implementing ERA actions at national level?

	General challenge	Challenging for some ERA actions	No problem
Balance between EU priorities (ERA Policy Agenda) and national priorities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inter-ministerial responsibilities, priorities and timelines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Limited buy-in from national stakeholders to ERA actions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Limited buy-in from sectorial ministries to ERA actions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Lack of staff & resources

☐☐☐

Lack of funding to for incentivizing the national implementation of European initiatives

☐☐☐

If relevant, coordination amongst the regions

☐☐☐

☐ Other challenges

Please elaborate on challenges

**3. Which governance instruments are you (planning to) use to support the implementation of ERA policy goals and ERA actions (e.g. inter-ministerial task forces, regular exchanges with stakeholders, national conferences, etc.)?**

Please elaborate

**a. If relevant, how and to which extent is the regional level involved?**

Please describe

**b. Do you plan any activities to increase the visibility of the ERA at national level?**

Please describe

**4. What are your lessons learnt or recommendations for other countries concerning national ERA implementation? Do you have additional comments?**

Please share