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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	ERAC Plenary Meeting, 12-13 June 2025, Gdansk (PL) Summary report

Delegations will find in annex the summary report of the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) plenary meeting, held on 12-13 June 2025 in Gdansk (PL).

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ERAC Plenary meeting, 12-13 June 2025, Gdansk

Summary report

On 12 and 13 June 2025, the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) held a plenary meeting in Gdansk, hosted by the Polish Presidency of the Council. It discussed an agenda of significant topics in the area of Research and Innovation (R&I). The meeting was chaired by the two co-Chairs – Marc Lemaître, the Commission Director-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD), and Feite Hofman, Director-General of Higher and Vocational Education, Science and Emancipation of Netherlands. Representatives of eight countries associated to *Horizon Europe* also participated.

The co-Chairs gave updates on the recent European Research Area (ERA) Policy Agenda 2025-2027, adopted by Council recommendation, and on several novelties under the 'Choose Europe for Science' initiative and the adoption of the European Semester Spring Package. The Commission co-Chair confirmed that on 16 July the Commission will table the proposals on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), together with the proposals for regulations on the Competitiveness Fund and on the new Framework Programme.

Highlights:

ERAC held three strategic debates and adopted its Opinion on Research Infrastructures and Technology Infrastructures in Europe:

- **Current and future R&D investments – mobilising and complementing of EU initiatives, national commitments and private sector investments**

The strategic debate offered an opportunity for ERAC to assess the combined impact of national and EU public and private investments, to share good practices, and to explore opportunities for more effective coordination and mobilisation of resources. The discussion also aimed to contribute shaping the scope of the future ERA Act on bringing national efforts closer to the long-standing 3% R&D intensity target, including in particular regarding its focus on the policy coordination and funding alignment, in order to identify strategic funding priorities.

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The discussion was introduced by contributions from four panellists. Barbara Weitgruber (DG for Scientific Research and International Relations, Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Research) presented Austria's joint approach on mobilising and better coordinating public national and EU R&D investment; Mateusz Gaczynski (Deputy Director of the Department of Coordination of the National Reconstruction Plan, Polish Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy) spoke on the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), cohesion funds and the link with defence and security in the context of the landscape of R&D&I investments; Alexandr Hobza (Cabinet of the Commission Executive Vice-President Stéphane Séjourné) referred to EU's broader priorities on competitiveness, innovation, and strategic investment, including developments in the planning of the R&D&I dimension of the Competitiveness Fund; and Luke Georghiou (Manchester Institute of Innovation Research, University of Manchester) addressed the subject on how stronger public R&D investment can help leverage more private R&D investment under certain conditions, including on the strategic and coordinating role of the Policy Support Facility in the context of the landscape of R&D&I investments.

In the ensuing debate, speakers confirmed their concern that investment in R&D was still below the 3% of GDP target established more than 20 years ago, both public and private investment being below expectations. Public investment remains low, uneven and largely uncoordinated across the EU, while private investment has remained broadly stagnant over time, notably when compared to other global players. They agreed that measures were needed in particular to unlock more private investments - taking into account the specific expectations of return on investment - either through better public support instruments or by streamlining the regulatory frameworks and creating better conditions for investment, both at national and European level. Sharing national experiences and good practices, the delegates also referred to the need to overcome fragmentation and innovation divide, to strengthen national R&I systems through structural reforms, to reinforce the bottom-up strategic perspective, predictability, stability and directionality, to simplify regulatory rules and reduce administrative burden (particularly regarding state aid rules), and the importance for R&I policy to avoid being siloed from other key strategic areas. They also raised issues on the retaining and attracting talents, on completing ecosystems and on the necessary investment on defence and dual-use technologies. The new Start-up and Scale-up Strategy recently launched by the Commission and the preparation of a European Innovation Act and of an ERA Act were welcomed. In the Commission's closing remarks, the potential role of the European Semester as a tool to monitor and guide national R&I investments was underlined.

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- **ERA from ambition to action – Setting ERA Act priorities and refining frameworks for enhanced R&I coordination and alignment**

The objective of this strategic debate – complementary with the first one – was to support the ongoing consultation process for the preparation of the future ERA Act, announced by the Commission for 2026. The delegations have been invited to identify the most critical barriers to a truly integrated ERA, while considering whether those barriers could be most effectively addressed through EU-level legislative action, through strengthened coordination mechanisms or by other measures.

The Commission presented the context, recalling the existing ERA framework and the remaining challenges, notably the fact that the EU still cannot rely on a fully effective ERA capable of attracting, retaining and nurturing its talent under optimal conditions. The identified barriers include the inadequate prioritisation of R&I in public budgets (with only five countries meeting the 3% GDP target for public and private R&D investment); the insufficient coordination of R&I policies across ERA countries; the persistent fragmentation of R&I systems and regulations; as well as the performance disparities and administrative burden. The aim of the ERA Act should be to strengthen the capacity and performance of EU R&I ecosystem, crucial to protect the EU's position as a global scientific leader and bolster innovation and economic competitiveness, in order to close the persistent innovation gap with other global players. The Commission also shaped the area of potential intervention - with a zoom on the issue on freedom of scientific research, including with reference to the initiative "Choose Europe for Science" – and gave information on the ongoing work and next steps.

ERAC delegations clearly supported Commission's approach and expressed in their interventions a very strong will to focus on researchers' careers. They stressed the urgent need to overcome the fragmented nature of existing framework conditions for researchers and knowledge, and to put in place measures for attracting foreign talents while encouraging the EU talents, with special attention to the issues on mobility, recognition of qualifications and exchange of data. They agreed that the challenges around employability and working conditions for researchers should be addressed, with voiced even suggesting legally binding minimum standards for researchers careers to be introduced.

- **Capitalising on excellence and overcoming the innovation divide – challenges and opportunities for the next MFF cycle**

The third strategic debate took place as a follow-up to the ERAC Opinion on the next Framework Programme for R&I, adopted in June 2024, which recommends to further elaborate on the issue of capitalising on excellence. The opinion urges the collection, analysis and interpretation of data on various aspects related to the implementation of the 'Widening Participation and Spreading Excellence' programme – this information was not yet available in 2024 but provided by the Commission for this debate, together with additional input from Member States.

The Member States' co-Chair team presented some of the important outcomes of the data provided. Generally, the data show progress in the participation and collaboration between Member States across Europe in comparison to previous programmes. However, substantial differences between countries persist, not only between widening countries and other Member States, but also among the widening countries. Success rates among Member States are generally converging, with the notable exceptions of the European Research Council (ERC) and European Innovation Council (EIC) programmes. Higher participation rates are closely linked to an increased number of proposal submissions — a success factor clearly observed in several widening Member States.

Some common challenges in raising submission levels identified by ERAC delegations include capacity limitations, low awareness of opportunities, fragmentated support, limited access to networks, weak consortia-building experience, saturation, and perceived complexity. Multiple countries have installed national support schemes to improve submission levels and success rates, for instance through financial incentives for proposal preparation, co-funding of projects, and travel and coordination grants. National Contact Points (NCPs) play a key role in raising submission levels and supporting higher quality applications.

It was also concluded that widening countries have significantly improved their financial returns from the Framework Programme. Collectively, they now receive a higher EU contribution relative to their GDP compared to the non-widening Member States.

The analysis also confirmed that national R&I systems still require stronger investment commitments and structural reforms to improve the allocation of funding, build stronger science-business linkages or more effective innovation framework conditions and public support programmes to boost private R&D investments.

Delegations highly appreciated the data and analysis provided and shared their views on the relevant challenges to be addressed in order to better capitalise on excellence across the EU, referring to issues linked to networks, support, investments, infrastructures, but also reforms, with very strong focus on the need of investment and collaborative research. Maintaining the widening element in the next Framework Programme was strongly supported by several delegates, while keeping the focus on excellence was also stressed. The good progress of widening countries' participation was recognised and welcomed, and the need to continue the Commission support on widening measures – "widening is a journey" - was confirmed.

The updated information for the Member States' survey on the capitalising on excellence discussion is annexed to this summary report.

- **ERAC Opinion on Research Infrastructures and Technology Infrastructures in Europe**

The draft ERAC Opinion on Research Infrastructures (RIs) and Technology Infrastructures (TIs) in Europe was presented by the Spanish delegation on behalf of the group of rapporteurs composed of members of FR, ES, IT and CZ ERAC delegations, supported by the Commission. The group of rapporteurs developed the draft Opinion on the basis of delegations' responses to a questionnaire and two rounds of comments, focusing the Opinion around two main questions:

- How to strengthen the ecosystem of cutting-edge facilities and services of RIs and TIs to optimise their role for scientific, technological and innovation excellence and competitiveness, including issues like accessibility, skills development, critical technologies and digitalisation;

- How to ensure a strategic governance that improves the prioritisation and pooling of investments in RIs and TIs.

The draft Opinion, inter alia, recommends:

- a coordinated EU-wide mapping of RIs and TI, clarifying their roles across TRLs and SRLs ;

- an enhanced and robust system of transnational access that is tailored to their distinct missions;

- increased digitalisation and data sharing;

- clarification on the positioning of TIs within the wider European R&I ecosystem;

- a staged approach to developing a light dedicated governance framework for TIs. This proposed body would interact with the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI), in order to have strategic steering for the entire research and technology infrastructure ecosystem including RIs, TIs, data and digital infrastructures at the European level;

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- different funding approaches for RIs and TIs due to their specific missions (this should also be reflected by EU funding instruments).

In this context, the Chair of ESFRI José Luis Martinez and its Vice-Chair Elena Hoffert presented the work of the forum, including its report on RIs funding, published in January 2025, welcomed by ERAC delegations which agreed that ESFRI experience should be largely used. The Commission co-Chair referred to the preliminary results of the European Investment Bank study on the funding of technology infrastructures.

The ERAC Opinion on Research Infrastructures and Technology Infrastructures in Europe was adopted by unanimity.

Other items discussed:

- **Presentation and updates on the current and incoming Presidencies' priorities on Research and Innovation (PL, DK, CY)**

The Polish Presidency reported about the ongoing and achieved activities on R&I under their term of office, with focus on the mid-term evaluation of *Horizon Europe* as well as on the Council Recommendation on the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027, the Council conclusions on artificial intelligence in science. Special reference was made to the Warsaw Declaration on the strategic role of the future Union Research & Innovation Framework Programme for EU competitiveness and beyond, adopted by ministers at their informal meeting in March.

The upcoming Danish Presidency's priorities under finalisation, include an ERAC plenary planned in October in Copenhagen, as well as conferences on artificial intelligence, science for diplomacy and innovation gap. The focus will be indeed on the preparation of the next Framework Programme, with proposal expected on 16 July. DK also stressed its intention to prepare Council conclusions on the EU startup and scaleup strategy and the EU strategy for life sciences.

The future Cypriot presidency is also preparing its programme, which should be finalised in December 2025.

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- **The role of R&I in Ukraine's recovery**

The ERAC co-Chair representing the Commission updated on the intense Commission measures in support of Ukraine in the area of R&I, including new measures under the 2025 *Horizon Europe* Work Programme, the European Innovation Council, the Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission, Chapter 25 of the EU acquis, and the PSF project for Ukraine. The Italian delegation informed on the preparation of the session on science, research, and innovation that the Italian Ministry of University and Research is organising within the Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC) 2025, and the proposal to establish an International Coalition for Science, Research and Innovation in Ukraine, which will be launched during this session.

- **Next meetings:** the next ERAC plenary will take place on **16-17 October 2025 in Copenhagen**.

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ANNEX

Updated information for the Member States' survey on the capitalising on excellence

1. Intensity of Participation

Most countries report that success rates under Horizon Europe are stable or improving. However, there is widespread recognition that **submissions remain uneven**, and that boosting the volume and quality of applications (especially from underrepresented institutions) is critical to increasing participation.

Common Challenges Identified

- Capacity limitations and insufficient support hinder participation (Bulgaria, Slovenia, Slovakia, Montenegro, Malta).
- Lack of awareness about the opportunities, limited proposal writing experience and/or lack of strong research management structures (Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Hungary, Montenegro, Portugal)
- Small or fragmented R&I ecosystems (Iceland, Montenegro, Lithuania, Croatia, Malta).
- Limited access to international networks or weak consortia-building experience (Bulgaria, Slovakia, Portugal, Lithuania, Slovenia, Malta).
- Saturation of national or cohesion programmes discourages further coordination or proposal writing in HE (Croatia, Czechia, Iceland, Greece).
- Administrative burdens and/or institutional complexity (Belgium, Bulgaria, Iceland, Slovenia, Greece, Montenegro, Malta, Spain).
- Misalignment with EU calls calendars (Belgium)
- Uneven participation in ERC, MSCA and/or EIC schemes, especially outside top-performing centres (Greece, Portugal, Croatia, Malta).
- Need for more SMEs increasing their investment in R&D (Ireland)

Measures Taken by Member States

- **National support schemes** for proposal preparation and co-funding:
    - Croatia, Slovenia, Denmark, Spain: Microgrants for applications and SoE projects.
    - Netherlands: "Matching Horizon Europe" complementary co-funding scheme.
    - Portugal: ERC-PT programme and Widening-linked funding, with state budget and ERDF combined

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- Slovakia: Travel and coordination grants.
- Czechia: Travel grants and expert pre-screening service for coordinators
- Hungary: EU_KP call for proposal preparation and consortium building
- Lithuania: €36M Horizon Europe Acceleration Programme for training, proposal support, and co-funding
- Ireland: several funding support schemes to allow companies to progress
- Malta: financial support for proposal writing, mentoring and coaching initiatives for ERC and EIC

- **Pre-screening, proposal support or expert feedback systems** offered (Slovakia, Netherlands, Slovenia, Germany, Czechia, Portugal, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Montenegro, Lithuania, Malta).
- **Training services, awareness-raising and outreach campaigns**, including institutions from underrepresented sectors or less research-intensive regions (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Slovakia, Montenegro, Slovenia, Portugal, Netherlands, Greece, Lithuania, Malta, Denmark, Spain).
- **Strategic use of Widening instruments** to develop coordinator skills and build consortia experience (Slovakia, Portugal, Greece).
- **Coordination of stakeholders**, definition of KPIs for national performance monitoring and monitoring of barriers (Croatia, Austria, Netherlands, Montenegro, Portugal, Slovenia, Denmark, Spain).

2. National Contact Points (NCPs) and Support Systems

Well-Resourced, centralised NCPs

- **Austria**: 31 full-time NCPs housed in FFG; broad service offering (including training programmes and dedicated support) and stakeholder engagement.
- **Lithuania**: 19 FTEs, centrally coordinated at the Research Council; strongly linked with national reform strategy.
- **Germany**: 140 individuals across thematic agencies; strong coordination, branding, and training systems.
- **Netherlands**: All NCPs located at RVO in a unified, interdisciplinary team; strong data analytics and high client satisfaction. Covers all areas and legal and admin issues of the FP.
- **Iceland**: All NCPs hosted within RANNÍS; integrated with national funding.
- **Hungary**: 13 FTEs (11 at NRDIO, 2 for ERC at Academy of Sciences)
- **Ireland**: Led and centrally coordinated by Enterprise Ireland (15 FTEs) plus eight FTE sectoral experts from relevant Ministries and agencies

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- **Denmark**: 19 NCPs located at DAHES. NCPs also act as Programme Committee members

Mixed or Decentralised Systems

- **Belgium**: ~27 FTEs across federal and regional structures; distinct NCP entities in Wallonia, Brussels, Flanders.
- **Greece**: Shared roles among GSRI, EKT, and PRAXI; mixture of coordination by GSRI and outsourcing
- **Portugal**: Decentralised and thematic; most NCPs part-time with multiple responsibilities.
- **Croatia**: NCPs hosted at various institutions; Ministry leads, but only AMEUP staff are full-time.
- **Bulgaria**: Hybrid and mostly voluntary model; no core funding for coordination.
- **Spain**: Approx. 60 people as NCPs across multiple national and regional institutions. Full-time at CDTI (21 FTEs) and FECYT (10 FTEs). The rest of NCPs dedicate only part of the time to this role.

Lean or Volunteer-Based Systems

- **Montenegro**: Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation staff coordinate with academic and innovation sector volunteers.
- **Slovenia**: ~8 FTEs across distributed part-time roles; many double as programme committee members.
- **Malta**: Centralised system with 6 NCPs, 1 coordinator, and 1 administrator. NCPs also act as Programme Committee Members and work on NCP network projects and other national initiatives within their respective areas.

Notable Good Practices

- Pre-screening and expert feedback systems (Czechia, Slovakia, Netherlands, Slovenia, Germany, Portugal, Greece, Montenegro, Lithuania, Malta).
- Dedicated national platforms and training programmes and events (Austria, Netherlands, Portugal, Lithuania, Malta, Spain).
- Thematic or regional outreach initiatives, e.g. regional summer school and “Coffee with NCP” (Slovakia), NINET (Czechia), on-site workshops (Belgium).
- Comprehensive data monitoring on national participation, used to shape strategy (Netherlands, Croatia, Portugal, Greece, Denmark).
- Implementation of fund transfer mechanisms and synergy alignment (Lithuania, Croatia, Montenegro — data collection phase)

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- Use of human resources instead of digital/AI tools for proposal submission support (Netherlands)
- NCP agency is involved in research commercialisation as well as direct and indirect equity investment at all levels of the Irish deep-tech ecosystem (Ireland)
- National network of all public NCPs and EU-funding advisors meet twice per year to share and exchange best-practices, national network of EU-support staff at universities related to Horizon Europe meet twice per year to share and exchange best-practices (Denmark)
- AEI funding scheme dedicated to the preparation and management of European projects and international talent attraction (Spain)

3. National Investments and Use of the Seal of Excellence (SoE)

Seal of Excellence (SoE) Usage

- **Active and strategic use**:
    - *Lithuania*, *Slovenia*, *Slovakia*, *Croatia*, *Czechia*, *Portugal*, *Malta*, *Spain* — support MSCA, EIC, and/or ERC-linked proposals. Countries mentioned SoE as an important instrument of co-financing excellent research projects as it provides an opportunity to use the evaluation results and to co-finance excellent projects evaluated the international context
- **Partial or regional use**:
    - *Belgium* (notably Flanders), *Bulgaria*, *Greece* — limited support or past pilot schemes
    - *Ireland* – No formal process or dedicated funding allocation for SoE awardees in Ireland. However, experience with EDIHs.
- **Minimal or symbolic uptake**:
    - *Germany* — only one regional scheme (Hessen); no national plans to expand.
    - *Netherlands* — no systematic support; only one known example (Leiden UMC).
    - *Hungary*
    - *Iceland*
- **Not used:**
    - *Denmark*

Transfer of Funds (SoE or other mechanisms)

- **Successfully used**:
    - *Lithuania*: €18.5M transferred under ERDF; second tranche pending.

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- *Croatia*: New programme (DIGIT project) launched in late 2024.
- *Portugal*: ANI financial support to companies for EIC Transition and Accelerator Calls.
- *Slovenia*: cofinancing SoE in e.g. MSCAIf/PF or ERC
- *Malta*: €5M from ERDF to Horizon Europe.

- **Interest expressed or mechanisms in preparation**:
  - *Bulgaria, Portugal, Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia* – preparing legal or strategic frameworks
  - *Montenegro* – currently collecting data on this
- **Not used or low priority**:
  - *Austria, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Greece, Denmark, Iceland (n/a)*

4. R&D Investment Trends and Policy Coordination

High Intensity and Strategic Leadership

- **Austria**: 3.35% of GDP (target 4% for 2030)
- **Belgium**: 3.37% (3% target met in 2020)
- **Germany**: 3.1% (2023)
- **Denmark:** 2.97% (2020)

Growing or Transitional Systems

- **Netherlands**: 2.23%, targeting 3% by 2030
- **Slovenia**: 2.13%, aiming for 3.5% by 2030
- **Iceland**: 2.47% (2020), target 3.0%. No newer data.
- **Spain**: increased investments accompanied by the private sector.
- **Portugal**, **Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia**, **Lithuania**: actively growing, often supported by RRF and Widening
- **Ireland:** National target of 2.5% of GNI* (rather than GDP) by 2030. GNI* is considered a more accurate measure of the size of the Irish economy for the purpose of intensity rate calculations.

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Challenges Remain

- **Montenegro**: No recent R&D data; system-building underway
- **Greece**, **Bulgaria, Malta**: Underfunded public R&I systems; need for increased public investment and alignment

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Country	R&D intensity 2020 (% of the GDP)	R&D 2020 target (% of the GDP)	Compound annual growth 2010-2020 (%)	Gap to reach the target in M euro
Austria	3,35%	(new government programme target 2030: 4%)	0,75%	
Belgium	3,37	3,0	5,05	Target reached in 2020
Bulgaria	0,85	1,50	29% total growth	400 M euro
Croatia	1,43%			
Czechia	1, 83% (data for 2023)	3% (for 2030)		
Germany	3,10%		4,98%	
Greece	1,49%	1,55% (estimate)	6,14%	
Lithuania	1,07	No target for 2023 Lithuania has no yearly investment targets, but we have a long term target – 1% of GDP from the national budget to R&D in higher education and government sectors by 2030, set in the Agreement on Lithuanian Education Policy, signed by the parties in the Parliament. In the period of 2022-2024 governmental funding for R&D doubled: from 185 mEur in 2021 to 348 mEur in 2024. It is estimated that in 2025 governmental funding will reach 0,52 % of GDP (in 2021 – 0,31% of GDP).	0,38	
Montenegro				

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Country	R&D intensity 2020 (% of the GDP)	R&D 2020 target (% of the GDP)	Compound annual growth 2010-2020 (%)	Gap to reach the target in M euro
Netherlands	2,23%	3%	n/a	€14.3 billion from 2022 to 2025 To reach 3% of GDP for R&D spending in 2025, an additional €14.3 billion would be required compared to the €21.6 billion spent in 2022, according to the most recent GDP forecasts.
Portugal	1,70	2,02	The compound annual growth based on millions of euros dedicated to R&D in 2013 and in 2023 is 6,73%. The compound annual growth between 2013 and 2023 based on the % of GDP is 2,48%. Apparently, the table presented for 2010-2020 used the % of GDP (1,60% in 2010 and 1,61% in 2020).	860
Slovakia				
Slovenia	2,13	3,5 %[i]	0,22% Internal calculation,based on formula: CAGR = (EV / SV)1 / n - 1 where: EV = Investment's ending value-2023 SV = Investment's starting value - 2010 n = Number of investment periods (months, years, etc.)	874 mio

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Country	R&D intensity 2020 (% of the GDP)	R&D 2020 target (% of the GDP)	Compound annual growth 2010-2020 (%)	Gap to reach the target in M euro
Hungary				
Iceland	2,47	3,0		
Ireland	1,59% *(2023)	1,12% (2020)	0.005%-1.5% (2013-2023)	
Malta		2		
Denmark				
Spain	1.49 % (Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, OECD)	2.12 % by 2027 (EECTI)	0,36%	9,464

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