



CALL FOR EVIDENCE FOR AN IMPACT ASSESSMENT

European Research Area (ERA) Act (RTD.A2)

10 September 2025

Reflections on how to increase the impact of the ERA, from the ERIC Forum perspective

The ERIC Forum brings together 30 European Research Infrastructure Consortia (ERICs) to strengthen coordination and enhance collaboration across Europe. ERICs are established under a dedicated EU legal framework and are recognised as strategic assets of the ERA. Operating across borders and legal systems, they encounter many of the challenges the ERA Act seeks to address, making them both affected and well placed to contribute solutions for strengthening research careers and securing Europe's talent base.

In this context, we submit this contribution focusing on the careers of researchers and research support staff at ERICs. Our feedback emphasises measures essential to attract and retain talent and maintain a robust pool of competencies in Europe, while also pointing to broader priorities for ERICs that are essential for the ERA Act to succeed and for all Member States to benefit fully from these capacities.

The ERIC Forum proposals

We propose that the new EU legal instrument include:

- A standardisation of employment rules and contractual regimes across the ERA;
- Adoption of a Europe-wide harmonised framework of job titles and job descriptions, which would enhance the mobility between states and also between sectors (Research and Academia, the commercial, and the productive sector);
- Measures to promote greater uniformity in the level of social security protection for employees moving between countries, supporting the concept that employees who work in research and innovation are citizens of Europe and not single member states.

Alongside improving research careers, in the view of strengthening the framework for Research Infrastructures and ERICs more broadly, the ERA Act should address further issues, such as: consolidating and supporting existing infrastructures as strategic assets of the ERA to avoid duplication and ensure efficient use of public investments; investing in skills and capacity building to maintain Europe's competitiveness and guarantee high-quality services; amending the ERIC Regulation to remove remaining hurdles and enable smoother operation of Research Infrastructures across Member States; and promoting interoperability and federated systems so that data, services, and platforms can be shared seamlessly across Europe.

Supporting Arguments

ERICs transcend national boundaries, pool resources, and deliver scientific, technological, and societal impact. Spanning life sciences, physical sciences, energy, environment, social sciences, and cultural heritage, they provide open access to world-class facilities and expertise. ERICs provide cutting-edge technologies and advanced data services that empower researchers, industry, and policymakers to address Europe's greatest challenges. Importantly, it is the highly skilled professionals who operate, maintain, develop, and enable open access to these infrastructures that transform them into engines

of discovery, innovation, and competitiveness, empowering Europe as the innovation leader in the Global landscape.

In recent years, the scope of the concept “research careers” has been extended to include professionals managing and supporting research and innovation activities. We support this broader perspective, which ensures Europe’s position at the forefront of research and innovation, since researchers alone cannot address all key challenges, valorise research, or bring innovations to the market. Strengthening the entire research ecosystem in this way is crucial for enhancing Europe’s competitiveness.

Despite this and other positive changes the ERA has introduced, more than two decades of efforts in promoting research professionals’ mobility and improvement in employment conditions have not removed significant obstacles:

- Portability of employment across Europe is hindered by divergent social security and pension systems;
- A wide variety of employment rules and contractual regimes across Member States;
- Recognition of qualifications remains inconsistent across Member States.

These differences are mainly due to the fact that labour law falls within national competence. While the EU sets minimum standards in some areas, national legislations diverge considerably. Establishing European unified standards for working hours, holidays, work-life balance guarantees, benefits, and pension schemes would reduce the extent to which professionals base their choice of workplace primarily on material conditions, instead of research opportunities. Currently, this leads to a marked concentration of research professionals in some countries and a “brain drain” from others. Such a framework should also address wage levels across different countries, possibly by setting common standards to be adjusted by coefficients reflecting national costs of living, as in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie scheme.

Given the lack of full EU legislative competence, efforts to harmonise certain labour law elements, for example, through a 28th legal regime, would be welcome. However, the scope of such a solution will be influenced by the forthcoming judgment of the CJEU in Case C-19/23, which may provide guidance on the acceptable limits of EU competence in adopting minimum requirements in the field of labour law.

A Europe-wide harmonised framework of job titles and job descriptions would bring clarity and predictability, ensuring that researchers and research-support professionals are recognised wherever they work. Such a framework would also enable smoother career progression across institutions, infrastructures, consortia and Member States, fostering mobility and integration within the ERA. Moreover, a harmonised framework could provide a clear identification of competencies that can be mapped and interoperable across sectors, enhancing inter-sectoral mobility.

Taken together, these measures would position ERICs as essential instruments of the ERA and should be embedded in the ERA Act to maximise its long-term impact and contribute to Europe’s scientific excellence and competitiveness.