

September 2022

# ALLEA STATEMENT FOR AN ERA OF FREEDOM AND EXCELLENCE

## Building a New European Research Area

The European Research Area (ERA) is a vision for a single, borderless market for research, innovation and technology across and beyond the European Union (EU). Although the ERA has in fact been in development since the year 2000, there is now an initiative for a new ERA<sup>1</sup> and an ERA Policy Agenda for 2022-2024<sup>2</sup>, which reaffirms the commitment to strengthen the free circulation of researchers and knowledge, joint and more efficient use of research infrastructure, excellence, attractive careers, equal opportunities, and cooperation between research and innovation actors across Europe. As the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities in the Council of Europe region, ALLEA has always been fundamentally committed to the ERA and welcomes this renewed political commitment.<sup>3</sup>

With this statement, ALLEA reflects on the ERA Policy Agenda Action Points developed in the consultations of the ERA Transition Forum, in which ALLEA participated as a stakeholder organisation representing the Academies of Sciences and Humanities of Europe. We generally believe that the Action Points are well chosen, and that the actions reflect our core values and strategic priorities regarding a strong and united ERA. We look forward to furthering this multilateral dialogue with the aim of implementing an effective ERA beneficial for all Europeans.

A resilient and sustainable Europe requires an inclusive diversity of scientific disciplines; that is, truly transdisciplinary and cross-border responses with contributions from all relevant scientific disciplines. ALLEA stresses the importance of clarifying that the ERA uses “science” in the sense of the German *Wissenschaft* that also includes the Humanities, Arts, and the Social Sciences.

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1 European Commission: The new European Research Area (2021), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/2736>

2 European Commission: European Research Area Policy Agenda – Overview of actions for the period 2022-2024 (2021), [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research\\_and\\_innovation/strategy\\_on\\_research\\_and\\_innovation/documents/ec\\_rtd\\_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research_and_innovation/strategy_on_research_and_innovation/documents/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf)

3 See, for instance, ALLEA’s Comments on the European Commission’s Communication “A Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth” (2012), <https://allea.org/portfolio-item/comments-on-the-european-commissions-communication-on-era/> or ALLEA’s Position on the Future of the European Research Area (2020), [https://allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ALLEA\\_Statement\\_Future\\_ERA.pdf](https://allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ALLEA_Statement_Future_ERA.pdf)

## Vision and Priorities

Participating in the development of the new ERA Policy Agenda is an opportunity to emphasise ALLEA's core priorities and our vision of borderless and universal science as a global public good that transcends national and disciplinary boundaries and is driven by research needs and researchers. The urgent need for tackling climate change and challenges facing democracy across the world, as well as divisive (geo)political developments, show how relevant, and necessary, the promotion of shared values through scientific cooperation is. Such cooperation should aim to facilitate, strengthen, and defend good research practices based on academic freedom, integrity and ethics, excellence, trustworthiness, inclusiveness, openness, sustainability, collaboration, mobility, equality, diversity, equity, as well as thinking and acting globally.

## Academic Freedom


ALLEA reiterates that academic freedom and institutional autonomy are of fundamental importance and value. They are essential for creative research and necessary for innovation, and thus a benefit to society on a global level.<sup>4</sup> Scholars and students must be allowed to exercise the rights that constitute academic freedom, including freedom of expression, opinion, access to data and information, movement and assembly, as well as institutional freedom to determine and deliver processes of education, curricula, and teaching.

ALLEA welcomes the commitments within ERA Policy Action 6 – Deepening the ERA through protecting academic freedom – to facilitate the development of a policy approach to safeguarding academic freedom in Europe. It is the view of ALLEA that this Action must:

- I. Safeguard the autonomy of higher education and research institutions, shielding them from national and international political and economic interference and ensuring the self-governance of the scientific community. This includes advocating clear and unanimous support for Higher Education Institutions and Research Performing Organisations facing threats to academic freedom through political circumstances, such as internal or external oppression, or war.
- II. Protect the autonomy of individual funding decisions by research councils and funding bodies.
- III. Guarantee the diversity of the research that is funded. While funding can be prioritised, no discipline should be excluded for political reasons. A necessary condition of this is that researchers must be allowed to freely define their research questions, theories, and methods. The ERA must guarantee space for knowledge to be explored for its own sake without any immediate application in mind. Finding a careful balance between curiosity-driven and agenda-driven research is essential.
- IV. Strengthen external and independent assessment of academic freedom across member states. Assessing academic freedom with only the support of local and national authorities and stakeholders might not be adequate for a robust evaluation. Local decision-makers and national authorities may be too heavily involved in local structures to recognise problems

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<sup>4</sup> See joint statement by ALLEA, EUA and Science Europe: Academic freedom and institutional autonomy - Commitments must be followed by action (April 2019), <http://allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/academic-freedom-statement-april-2019.pdf>



with academic freedom affecting individual researchers. ALLEA is therefore supportive of ERA proposals to develop external monitoring mechanisms. This would also provide researchers with a safe space to freely share their experiences and problems without fear of sanction. At the same time, it is important that the ERA does not start from scratch, but rather builds on, coordinates, and supports those monitoring mechanisms that are already in place.

- V. Fund independent research on academic freedom, as well as independent European organisations, networks, and initiatives with a clear agenda of strengthening academic freedom in all aspects.

## Excellence

ALLEA supports the notion of scientific excellence as a core principle to sustain an advanced knowledge base across Europe and globally, and to feed into current EU higher education and industrial policies. Open competition and international peer review in assessing and funding research proposals are therefore *sine qua non* elements to promote top-level research in Europe and to safeguard public confidence in science and research. Equally, ALLEA welcomes further investment in EU instruments intended to close the resource and innovation divide between different institutions, such as Cohesion policy, COST, and others.

Excellence should remain the main selection criterion for both curiosity- and agenda-driven proposals – though for agenda-driven research, excellence must include a clear justification in terms of research ecosystem and the intended societal impact. In the pursuit of excellent science, ALLEA wishes to stress the importance of space for knowledge to be explored for its own sake without any immediate application in mind; that is, the importance of supporting, incentivising, and funding ‘blue sky thinking’. We advocate the need for fundamental research to sustain a genuinely world class science base in Europe in the long term.

It is crucial to recognise excellence in teams and larger collaborations, research ecosystems and hubs, especially in the context of interdisciplinary and international collaborations. Such collaborations depend on advanced infrastructure. The EU already provides good instruments with the European Research Infrastructure Consortium and the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) mechanism, but these are often not replicated at the national level where the larger part of research funding still resides. Funding for curiosity-driven and agenda-driven research can only be sustainable when it is accompanied by long-term funding for shared infrastructure.

EU funding for excellent research has been of utmost importance for strengthening research across Europe and for attracting researchers to Europe. Continued EU-funding of European excellent and researcher-driven research, and the securing of good and integral procedures for allocating these resources, may also serve as a template for the member states and national research funding mechanisms.

ALLEA supports ERA Policy Actions that prioritise further development of existing, highly successful instruments that enjoy a high degree of global recognition as markers of excellence, such as the European Research Council and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions.

## Transparency and Trustworthiness

In order to preserve the trustworthiness of researchers and their outputs, the principles and practices of ethics and integrity must be included in the design, as well as the conduct, of research, its interpretation, dissemination and communication, as described in the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.<sup>5</sup> Transparency about assumptions, values, and the robustness of the evidence, including remaining uncertainties and knowledge gaps, should be one of the central principles to gain and maintain trustworthiness.

ALLEA reiterates the importance of transparent communication and dissemination of research results to all societal actors across all regions of the ERA, from the Research and Innovation (R&I) community and R&I stakeholders to policymakers and citizens. ERA policies must enable scholars to maintain the good research practices and high ethical standards needed to build a relationship of trust with the public.

The new ERA needs to ensure the independent voice of science in relation to policymaking. Transparent science advice, and the communication of scientific processes and results to citizens demonstrating how science can contribute to societal challenges, will be of crucial and increasing importance in establishing and maintaining public trust in science and in evidence-based policies. The ERA must foster the virtues of honest and transparent research communication, and of intellectual humility when communicating scientific evidence.

Science relies heavily on trust and trustworthiness. The rise of social media and the 'platformization' of public discourse have led to specific trends that are challenging long-established trust-building mechanisms.<sup>6</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic has taught us that the modes of dialogue with policymakers and the public can have significant consequences and implications; scientists need to interact more with science communicators, policymakers, and citizens. Moreover, the role of science communication has become increasingly important and should be supported more substantively and sustainably.

Good trustworthy expertise from scientists is important, but it can also be disruptive, and often unwelcome, especially in the short term. Science needs to be able to offer information and analyses to policymakers, welcome or unwelcome, in order that the common good is achieved. The ERA must endeavour to nourish a culture that welcomes expertise and is tolerant of the disruption this brings.

## Inclusiveness


As a federation representing members from across the Council of Europe region, geographical, disciplinary, and cross-sectoral inclusiveness is very close to ALLEA's heart. We therefore very much appreciate the proposed actions strengthening inclusiveness in the ERA.

However, despite longstanding attempts to increase the participation rate of EU-13 countries, significant disparities remain when it comes to these countries' success rates in EU research

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<sup>5</sup> See ALLEA's European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2017), <https://allea.org/code-of-conduct/>.

<sup>6</sup> See ALLEA Discussion Paper Trust in Science and Changing Landscapes of Communication (2019), <https://allea.org/portfolio-item/trust-in-science-and-changing-landscapes-of-communication/>.



funding programmes. The ERA should improve the accessibility to existing research infrastructure and intensify the building of research capacity at scientific institutions in the EU-13 countries, but also in other EU countries that could benefit from stronger institutions to enable them to participate in the competition for EU funding on an equal footing.

In order to jointly take up current and emerging challenges posed by the twin green and digital transitions, we need an emphasis on establishing truly interdisciplinary partnerships. A flaw in the existing framework programmes is the continuing lack of interdisciplinarity, especially the inclusion of social sciences and humanities in EU-funded research projects. Tackling challenges requires us to start thinking about problems in a holistic fashion from the very beginning, necessitating an inclusive approach in terms of research disciplines, covering Science, Technology, Engineering, Medicine, and Mathematics, as well as Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences equally.


ALLEA also welcomes actions to ensure greater synergies between education and research. Thus far, education and research have been divided institutionally within the EU. There appear to be clear benefits of bringing them more closely together. Europe should strive for a combined and dovetailed Research and Education Area. However, it still needs to be clarified in more detail how this can be achieved.

Research capacities and the many research models across the ERA must be strengthened to allow all researchers to participate in the high-level research community to which Europe aspires, and consequently to increase the scientific output of the ERA as a whole. To provide the funds for this undertaking, the definition of infrastructure funding would need to be expanded considerably to include higher education and research performing institutions. After all, when it comes to global competition, research and education have a similar importance to conventional infrastructure projects, which Europe already funds to a large extent.

The challenge of “brain drain” from the EU-13 and other Council of Europe countries must also be tackled using capacity-building initiatives, regional innovation funds, crisis recovery support, as well as closer academia-industry cooperation to re-attract and keep excellent researchers. The main way to prevent both brain drain and brain waste in resource-deficient and low-income countries is the international reinforcement of otherwise insufficient domestic funding and access to research infrastructure for local talented scientists who maintain their research careers in their homeland. Systematic efforts and long-term, specific mechanisms are required for the training and career development of individuals, for the research facilities within which research skills can be honed, and to encourage researchers across the career cycle and participants from EU-13 and Associated Countries to actively shape the Europe-wide networks across the ERA.

We believe that a focus on research resources may help deal with some of the well-known problems that motivate researchers to move. An emphasis on the availability of research resources to the whole research community, and the development of capacity *in situ*, may offer the kind of step change which the new ERA should herald. This approach would also allow for a more targeted thematic involvement of countries in institutions, meaning that even with limited funds, a country could become involved in such a project.

Given the importance of the openness of science and scientific collaboration to the world, and as specific institutions would, by and large, cover topics of global relevance, there is good reason to include countries beyond the Council of Europe as “share- or stakeholders” in such institutions. One might then consider the notion of some form of overhead payment by those countries which



would be included in, yet-to-be established, capacity-building funds for European countries with less successful research systems. All the more so because, if implemented correctly, successful capacity-building will lead not only to increased competition but also to the training of better scientists in those institutions, and, by extension, will benefit all scientific institutions across the continent.

## Openness

ALLEA generally supports the commitment to strengthen Open Science, including through increased use of the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC). We strongly support the aim to provide European researchers with an accessible, trusted and open environment where they can publish and exchange data, software, and protocols. However, “trusted” is easy to say, but what does it mean in this context? It is probably impossible to peer review every research output that goes into repositories, but some form of quality control and standardisation must be implemented, and must include the ability to retract materials that have been found to violate international standards for research integrity.

In addition, further clarification is needed regarding the protection of intellectual property rights of authors and the type of open licence to be used, and under which circumstances, ensuring an appropriate degree of choice for researchers and allowing for exceptional cases.<sup>7</sup> Open Science also poses specific challenges for researchers in the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, who largely publish in long-form monographs produced by commercial and non-profit publishers.

The transition towards open science should go hand in hand with a strong focus on quality and quality control. Reliable mechanisms need to be in place that ensure open science follows principles of excellence, research integrity and trustworthy science. These ambitions are therefore closely related to, and intertwined with, actions on academic freedom, diversity, equity, and inclusiveness.

ALLEA also agrees with the urgent need for reforming the systems for research evaluation and career progression to recognise the full range of research outputs and to appropriately reward open science practices. The suggested Actions are welcome because they are aligned with points that ALLEA has made over the years about the need for appropriately implementing and rewarding open science practices and the critical role played by peer review in assessing criteria focused on quality and impact.<sup>8</sup>

Such reforms will require substantial financial resources, as well as a fundamental re-evaluation of the responsibilities of all the different actors in the research ecosystem. Particular attention must be paid to the challenges for early- and mid-career researchers, those from disadvantaged institutions and communities, and those working in specialist disciplines.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See ALLEA Statement Towards Implementing the European Open Science Cloud – IPR and Other Strategic Considerations (2020), <https://allea.org/portfolio-item/towards-implementing-the-european-open-science-cloud-ipr-and-other-strategic-considerations/>

<sup>8</sup> See ALLEA Response to Council Conclusions on Research Assessment and Open Science (June 2022), <https://allea.org/portfolio-item/alleas-response-to-council-conclusions-on-research-assessment-and-open-science/>

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, ALLEA statement on Equity in Open Access (October 2021), <https://allea.org/portfolio-item/equity-in-open-access/>

## Sustainability

Science should adhere to the entire spectrum of the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations. For instance, tackling the climate crisis and protecting our environment are major global challenges and should permeate all ERA activity. Sustainability must not only be the object of research in Research Framework Programmes, but a dimension of all research activity. Environmental impact has implications for the kinds of facilities we build, and the materials used in research, for example, and should be a dimension in all research planning.<sup>10</sup>

## Mobility

Mobility of R&I careers between places and sectors is key to widening and deepening the ERA. As researchers are likely to undertake a variety of employment positions during their lifetime and to move between disciplines, public and private sector organisations, often in different countries within and outside the EU, ALLEA underlines the necessity for the portability of pension contributions across the ERA as an essential feature to encourage the best minds to participate in pan-European careers.

At the same time, there is some friction between the ease of mobility and amplifying access to R&I across Europe. While increasing the ease and attractiveness of mobile careers, the ERA must also take care to avoid further exacerbating the “brain drain” from lower performing European regions. It should therefore increase investment and reform in those regions to increase their attractiveness to talents at home and abroad.

Researchers based in the ERA should benefit from the freedom of movement and the ability to undertake their research across the ERA, even if they happen to be third country nationals. The ERA must thus guarantee movement and settlement, and access to research funds, research infrastructure and materials for non-EU members of the ERA without barriers based on nationality, institutional or national origin.

R&I careers in the ERA require measures to support young researchers’ ability to innovate. The ERA must better interlock existing measures for young scientists to encourage entrepreneurial endeavours at the European level. Such measures should be backed up financially to the extent that an entrepreneurial culture is created, allowing young people to fast-track their inventions to innovative products without facing intimidating bureaucratic or financial hurdles.

Careers in R&I in the ERA must be flexible enough to permit all staff to undertake caring responsibilities in a sensible work-life balance. Structural arrangements for careers – recognition of experience and qualifications abroad, as well as the portability of pensions and social insurance credits – need to be priority agenda issues.

In order to encourage truly European careers, entrepreneurial endeavours and cross-sector careers, among other things, the ERA should support pan-European standards for the career reward systems of R&I organisations. These must recognise the value of a breadth of R&I-related activity as criteria, qualifying individuals for positions in a national hierarchy or research and university roles, including (1) activity in other ERA states, (2) activity in other organisations, and (3) contributions not just to

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<sup>10</sup> See ALLEA Report Towards Climate Sustainability of the Academic System in Europe and Beyond (2022), <https://allea.org/portfolio-item/towards-climate-sustainability-of-the-academic-system-in-europe-and-beyond/>



scholarship, but to wider society, including open access publishing and data sharing, enterprise and innovation outputs, citizen engagement, and policy engagement.

## Equality, Diversity, Equity

ALLEA supports the drive to improve gender equality in research and innovation, and decision-making. It is crucial to embrace diversity and equality in the broader sense of freedom from discrimination on account of intersections with other diversity categories such as ethnic origin, religion or belief, (dis)ability, age or sexual orientation (i.e. intersectionality) as key assets of global society. This not only applies to researchers, but equally to research participants, who often predominantly represent specific groups regarding gender, ethnicity, and age, for instance.

We similarly support the assertion that the potential of all regions of the ERA must be harnessed equitably in order to achieve the full R&I potential of the ERA, and welcome the ERA action dedicated to gender equality and inclusiveness on the geographical level by promoting the development of less performing Member States and regions. This action should also foster equity, i.e. fair access to, inclusion in, and acknowledgment of the contribution of researchers and countries in less prosperous areas. ALLEA therefore strongly welcomes ERA Policy Action 9 on the global approach aimed at promoting a positive environment and level playing field for international cooperation based on reciprocity.

Complementarily, we would like to see the ERA Policy Agenda committing to the importance of linguistic diversity in R&I. Language is not just a tool of communication, but the key that unlocks many treasures of European heritage and is part of the European heritage in its own right. Certain common languages exist for communication in Europe. Scholarly analysis and communication will, and should continue to, take place in a variety of languages, including less frequently used languages. This is pivotal also for the effective communication of research to citizens and policymakers at the regional level, and thus a necessary precondition to foster the research-society link. ERA funding mechanisms should therefore strongly support this practice.

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### About ALLEA

ALLEA is the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities, representing more than 50 academies from 39 countries in Europe. Since its foundation in 1994, ALLEA speaks out on behalf of its members on the European and international stages, promotes science as a global public good, and facilitates scientific collaboration across borders and disciplines. Learn more: <https://www.allea.org>

### About this Statement

This statement has been prepared by ALLEA's Working Group ERA as a response to the ERA Policy Agenda Action Points developed in the consultations of the ERA Transition Forum, in which ALLEA participated as a stakeholder organisation representing the Academies of Sciences and Humanities. It draws on a variety of previous statements, reports, and position papers published by ALLEA. The ALLEA Working Group ERA aims to contribute to the further development of the ERA, its political framework, implementation, and monitoring. The breadth of expertise and geographical representation of the group's membership aptly reflects the heterogeneity of the ERA itself. The working group engages with European institutions, particularly the European Commission, and collaborates with like-minded umbrella organisations from the European research and innovation landscape. Learn more: [www.allea.org/european-research-area](http://www.allea.org/european-research-area)