

4. Action 4: Promote attractive research careers, talent circulation and mobility

1.1. Purpose of the Action and expected outcomes

This action aims at strengthening research careers in Europe and at making them more attractive for EU and international research talents. It seeks to provide researchers with enhanced working conditions and with the necessary instruments to undertake excellent research. The action also tackles the challenges posed by current skills mismatches, which can negatively affect inter-sectoral and inter-disciplinary mobility as well as the whole cycle of knowledge production, circulation and valorisation.¹

On the basis of the expected outcomes defined by the Council, the Commission has identified 3 strands of activities to be implemented in the context of the action:²

- The development of a European framework for research careers, to address in a comprehensive way all challenges related to research careers in Europe;
- The exchange of best practices and mutual learning to foster inter-sectoral mobility, more balanced talent circulation, and researchers' skills;
- Developing or improving tools in support of research careers. This includes existing instruments such as EURAXESS, RESAVER, or the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R, the implementation mechanism for the Charter and Code for Researchers), as well as the development of new ones, such as a European Competence Framework for Researchers (ResearchComp), the ERA Talent Platform as a one-stop-shop for researchers, and a Research and Innovation Careers Observatory.

1.2. Implementation of the Action

ERA Action 4 is in line with the **Commission Communication 'A New ERA for Research and Innovation'**⁸⁴, and with recommendations issued by the Council of the European Union in 2021. The **Council Conclusions of 28 May 2021 on 'Deepening the European Research Area: providing researchers with attractive and sustainable careers and working conditions and making brain circulation a reality'**³ called for a development of an 'internal market for research', which is able to provide better framework conditions for research careers.⁴

The Council also referred to the revision of the 2005 **Charter and Code for Researchers**, which constitutes the basis for the **Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)**⁵. The need to promote the attractiveness of research careers and mobility was also outlined in the **2021 Council recommendation on a 'Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe'**, which underlined the need to equip Europe's researchers '*with the training and skills required to meet the changing needs of the researcher role across the Union*'.⁶ The **Council Recommendation on a European framework for research careers**, proposed by the Commission in July 2023,

¹ European Commission (2021), European Research Area Policy Agenda – Overview of actions for the period 2022-2024, p.7.

² Information provided by DG RTD.

³ Council of the European Union (2021), Deepening the European Research Area: Providing researchers with attractive and sustainable careers and working conditions and making brain circulation a reality - Council conclusions (adopted on 28/05/2021), available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9138-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

⁴ Council of the European Union (2021), Improving conditions for research careers in Europe: Council adopts conclusions, Press release, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/05/28/improving-conditions-for-research-careers-in-europe-council-adopts-conclusions>.

⁵ Over 1,400 organisations currently endorse the Charter and Code for Researchers, and over 700 have received the HRS4R award.

⁶ Council of the European Union, Council Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe, p.13, available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13701-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

responds to these calls. It also includes a **new Charter for Researchers**, developed following the guidance received from a dedicated report issued by the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC).⁷

Implementation modalities of Action 4 rely on close cooperation between the Commission, Portugal and the Coimbra Group, which offered to sponsor this action. *Ad hoc* workshops take place with the participation of Member States, Associated Countries, stakeholders and experts to discuss relevant topics. A synergetic approach with other ERA Actions is ensured. In this regard, in a first meeting of the ERA Forum Action 4 delegates hosted by the European Commission on 1 February 2023, synergies of this Action with Actions 3, 5, 6, 13 and 17 were highlighted.⁸

In particular, the European framework for research careers will cover aspects related to Open Science (Action 1), researchers' assessment (Action 3), gender equality (Action 5), freedom of scientific research (Action 6), and will support research careers in Higher Education Institutions (Action 13) and in research management (Action 17).⁹

Regarding the first key strand of activities towards the development of a European framework for research careers, effective interaction with Member States, Associated Countries and stakeholders committed to Action 4 has allowed for a swift start of the implementation phase¹⁰. This includes the adoption of the **Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a 'European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe'**.¹¹ The framework includes recommendations on:

- The recognition of research professions, and interoperability and comparability of research careers;
- Recruitment and working conditions;
- Researchers' skills for inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary careers and for entrepreneurship and innovation;
- Career development and progression;
- Balanced circulation of talents and making the Union an attractive destination;
- Support actions for research careers;
- Monitoring of research careers.

The proposal also includes in the annex the new Charter for Researchers.

Regarding the second and third key strands of activities, swift implementation also allowed for: the launch of the ResearchComp website¹² to foster researchers' transversal skills and support inter-sectoral mobility¹³; the launch of a Mutual Learning Exercise on Inter-sectoral mobility and knowledge valorisation, covering both Action 4 and Action 7; preparatory work for the development of the ERA Talent Platform¹⁴, of the Research and Innovation Careers Observatory, and of a Horizon Europe pilot in support of early-career researchers which will focus on an investment approach to support organisational change for attractive and interoperable research careers.¹⁵

⁷ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/preparatory-bodies/european-research-area-and-innovation-committee-erac>

⁸ Coimbra Group (2023), European Research Area (ERA) Forum launches work on research careers, available at: <https://www.coimbra-group.eu/european-research-area-era-forum-launches-work-on-research-careers>.

⁹ DG RTD, Promoting attractive research careers, talent circulation and mobility_explanatory document, p.9

¹⁰ Information provided by DG RTD.

¹¹ European Commission (2023), Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe, 2023/0285, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2023%3A0436%3AFIN>

¹² Information provided by DG RTD.

¹³ The European Competence Framework for Researchers (ResearchComp) identifies the transversal skills researchers should have for successful inter-sectoral careers, and through a new dedicated website launched in July 2023 and targeting researchers, universities, training providers, and employers, it promotes awareness and training.

¹⁴ The ERA Talent Platform to be developed under action 4 will act as a one-stop-shop for researchers and will include a revitalised EURAXESS. The EURAXESS' 'Researchers in Motion' can be used by researchers to get free tailored information and support to boost their careers through mobility. See: <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu>.

¹⁵ Information provided by DG RTD.

Action 4 is being deployed in synergy with other EU-level strategies, such as the **European Strategy for Universities**, which aims at developing a framework for attractive and sustainable careers in higher education 'in synergy with the research career framework developed under the ERA'.¹⁶ The Strategy additionally aims at ensuring that universities provide the right tools to achieve excellence in research, a dimension that plays an important role in the effort to offer better working conditions and opportunities to researchers across the ERA.

As regards funding and funding opportunities in relation to Action 4, the **Horizon Europe** programme part dedicated to *Widening Participation and Strengthening the ERA* includes a dimension on reforming and enhancing the EU R&I system, which comprises an element related to the 'attractiveness of research careers and the links with higher education'.¹⁷

The achievement of ambitions under Action 4 is supported by Horizon Europe calls, such as: those related to gender inclusiveness, which participate in improving career paths in research; ERA-Chairs¹⁸, which aim to attract high-level researchers to a university or research centre located in a Widening Country; ERA Talents¹⁹, which aim to boost the interoperability of careers and employability of R&I talents; and ERA Fellowships²⁰, which are provided to excellent researchers undertaking cross-border mobility. The European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST)²¹ actions are also worth mentioning, as they provide opportunities for researchers to boost their careers and contribute to promoting talent circulation.

In addition, as mentioned above, the **RESAVER Pension Fund**, created by a consortium of employers and initially supported by the European Commission through Horizon 2020, is closely related to also Action 4 as it offers a pan-European pension solution for research organisations and their employees. This initiative facilitates the mobility of researchers during their careers, enabling them to remain affiliated with the same pension arrangements when moving between countries and jobs.²² Under Action 4, RESAVER will be supported for wider uptake both in terms of geographical expansion and uptake in the countries where RESAVER is already operational, as well as the continuous improvement of its offerings.

The 2023 OECD STIP Survey provides information on policies and initiatives at EU and national levels on trends in science, technology and innovation policy. Its 2023 edition provides additional relevant insights into budget allocation for policies related to Action 4.²³

Figure below shows the **distribution of budget allocation** for policies related to Action 4 at EU level (27 Member States). It indicates that most Action 4-related policies tend to fall under the lower budget ranges, with the majority of policies being funded within a budget between EUR 1 million and EUR 5 million (205 policies) or of less than EUR 1 million (199 policies). Only 49 policies benefit from a funding range between EUR 100 and EUR 500 million. These policies are mostly related to EU funding (e.g., Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions)²⁴ or Government investment policies at national level (e.g., 'Pakt für Forschung und Innovation' in Germany²⁵). Examples of initiatives with budgets of more than EUR 500 million include German Research Foundation (DFG) grants²⁶ and

¹⁶ European Commission (2022), European Strategy for Universities, p. 26, available at: <https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-01/communication-european-strategy-for-universities-graphic-version.pdf>.

¹⁷ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/widening-participation-and-spreading-excellence_en

¹⁸ See https://rea.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-grants/horizon-europe-widening-participation-and-spreading-excellence/era-chairs_en

¹⁹ https://rea.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-grants/horizon-europe-widening-participation-and-spreading-excellence/era-talents_en

²⁰ See https://rea.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-grants/horizon-europe-widening-participation-and-spreading-excellence/era-fellowships_en

²¹ See: <https://www.cost.eu>

²² Euraxess (2017), Flexibility of the Future – A pension that travels with your researchers, wherever they go... - RESAVER, Giving you the facts, p.2, available at https://www.euraxess.it/sites/default/files/policy_library/resaver_pension_factsheet-2017q1.pdf. See also: <https://www.resaver.eu>.

²³ The corresponding STIP Survey Themes for Action 4 are: Theme 24 'research and technology infrastructures', Theme 25 'internationalisation in public research', Theme 34 'Commercialization of public research results', Theme 51 'STEM skills', Theme 52 'Doctoral and postdoctoral researchers', Theme 53 'research careers', and Theme 55 'International mobility of human resources'. A wide range of initiatives are covered by these themes among the different Member States (e.g. policies, projects, funds, programmes).

²⁴ Data from the 2023 OECD STIP Survey.

²⁵ 'Pakt für Forschung und Innovation', Joint Science Conference – GWK website, available at: <https://www.gwk-bonn.de/themen/foerderung-von-ausseruniversitaeren-wissenschaftseinrichtungen/pakt-fuer-forschung-und-innovation>

²⁶ 'Individual Research Grants, the German Research Foundation (DFG) website, available at: www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/programmes/individual/research_grants

the Polish Operational Programme for Smart Growth, particularly the priority axis IV on 'Increasing the Research Potential'²⁷.

Figure also shows the distribution of policy instruments related to Action 4 at EU level (27 Member States). The major policy instrument related to Action 4 is direct financial support (402 policy instruments), followed by governance instruments (142 policy instruments). Indirect financial support is the policy instrument used in a minority of cases (53 policy instruments). Overall, governance tools include strategies, plans, reforms, regulatory tools, consultations of relevant stakeholders, the development of standards and certification, or public awareness campaigns.

Direct financial support can include institutional funding, various types of grants, procurement programmes dedicated to R&D&I, loans, credit and scholarships, equity financing or innovation vouchers. Indirect financial support includes social contributions reliefs to foster corporate or private investment in R&D, as well as risk sharing schemes (i.e. to cover part of the losses that can be faced by lenders).

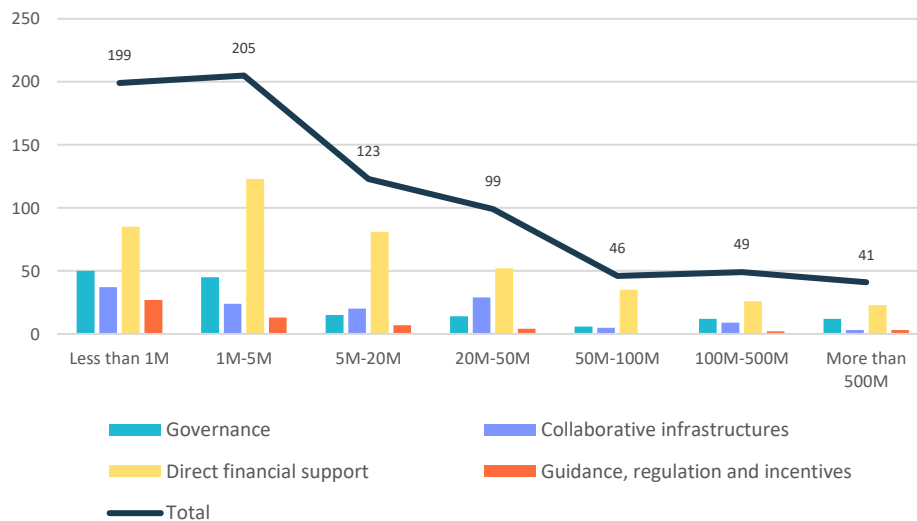


Figure 17: Action 4: Distribution of budget per policy instrument

²⁷ 'Operational Programme for Smart Growth', Smart Growth programme website, available at: <https://www.poir.gov.pl/en/site/about-the-programme>