

## Successful ERA requires maintaining focus on Europe's ability to create world class new knowledge

**The Guild reissues its call for the European Research Area (ERA) to focus on strengthening the production of new knowledge through academic research.**

The Guild first published its comprehensive [recommendations for a renewed ERA in March 2020](#), highlighting the key priorities, values and governance aspects for the strategy. Since then, the coronavirus pandemic has brought the indispensable role of science into the public debate and has heightened the need for European and national research systems to work together towards common goals. As the EU institutions prepare their new priorities for ERA, The Guild calls for decision makers to use this momentum to reinforce the core objective of ERA, which is to build on Europe's capacities for excellence in research.

The pandemic has shown the need for ERA to raise the profile of research policy in high-level policy-making, to build stronger ties and dialogue with other policy areas, and to address the attractiveness and working conditions of researchers in Europe. However, **an acknowledgement of the role of fundamental research has been missing in recent R&I policy developments at the EU level, despite the growing need for investments in frontier-led research demonstrated by the Covid-19 pandemic.**

Furthermore, the economic crisis following the pandemic has increased insecurity over public investments for universities and fundamental research in the coming years. **For Europe to build its resilience against future crises that science can help us prevent, pre-empt and manage, a long-term perspective in R&I investment is more important than ever.** This includes the need for continued investment in scientific areas that are not necessarily seen as urgent priorities from a policy-making perspective. The scale of the consequences stemming from underfunding or interrupting investments in specific fields of research is demonstrated by the current crisis. Therefore, **we call on European governments to increase their investment in publicly-funded research and institutional funding of universities as part of their commitments to the renewed ERA.**

Recent years have seen a growing emphasis on supporting industrial development and innovation in the EU's R&I policy. **Whilst the valorisation of knowledge is important, universities need investment and support from the EU and national governments in order to maximise their potential for the development of the European knowledge base.** This is a precondition for the development of the evidence-based policies and research-based innovations that drive our economies. Here, ERA has an irreplaceable role in bringing together national governments and the EU to develop joint ambition, alignment and complementarity in European knowledge production where academic research plays a leading role.

When it comes to budget cuts to public research funding, some countries are more vulnerable than others. Here, the risk that the R&I divide in Europe might deepen as a result of the crisis should be taken seriously. Many countries rely heavily on their structural funds (ESIF) as a way to fund national

and regional R&I capacities, which is why establishing links between ERA priorities and regional R&I strategies is crucial. However, a key concern for universities is the growing tendency of ESIF to limit their support to innovation-oriented activities and actors in the private sector. **The Guild calls for decision makers in regional policy to urgently address those measures preventing the use of ESIF to support universities and their research activities and ensure prominent support for them as funding priorities.**

Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic has put scientists centre stage in providing advice on societal development and there is now significant momentum to establish a more effective dialogue between scientists and decision makers, as well as for building on the trust that citizens have in science. **At the same time, academic freedom and the institutional autonomy of universities urgently need protection in Europe** against political interference and the spread of misinformation. While it must proactively protect these values, ERA should also act as a forum for ensuring that science does not become increasingly politically controlled as a result of the crisis. In order to engage with its main target group effectively, **ERA should establish structures where scientists and the academic community are prominently represented in its priority-setting at regional, national and EU levels.**

7 July 2020