

**SUPPORTING THE COOPERATION AND
COORDINATION OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES
CARRIED OUT AT NATIONAL OR REGIONAL
LEVEL
(THE “ERA-NET” SCHEME)**

Working document

This document is being widely circulated in order to generate an open discussion on the provisions for improving the cooperation and coordination of research activities carried out at national or regional level in the Sixth Framework Programme.

It is available on the DG Research web-site:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/fp6/era-net.html>

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Standard Disclaimer

This document expresses solely the current views of unit RTD-B.1 of the European Commission's services. Readers should not regard these views as a statement of the official position of the European Commission nor indeed of its Directorate-General for Research.

This document is a practical guide to the "ERA-NET" scheme of the Sixth Framework Programme. It should be noted, however, that the principles underpinning the implementation of this scheme may still be modified in the light of the ongoing legislative process concerning the Sixth Framework Programme and its Rules for Participation. This document will therefore be regularly updated.

The “ERA-NET” Scheme

The purpose of this note is to provide information on the ERA-NET scheme, which will be the principal means for the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6) to support the cooperation and coordination of research activities carried out at national or regional level. The scheme will be financed through part II of the specific programme “Integrating and strengthening the European Research Area”. It is expected that about [160] M€ will be available to support the scheme.

1 GENERAL ASPECTS

1.1 Objective

The objective of the ERA-NET scheme is to step up the cooperation and coordination of research activities carried out at national or regional level in the Member States and Associated States through:

- the networking of research activities conducted at national or regional level,
- the mutual opening of national and regional research programmes.

The scheme will contribute to making a reality of the European Research Area by improving the coherence and coordination across Europe of such research programmes. It will also promote closer interaction between research performers located in different countries.

Both networking and mutual opening require a progressive approach. The ERA-NET scheme therefore has a long term perspective that must also allow for the different way that research is organised in different Member States.

1.2 Definition of research activities carried out at national or regional level

"Research activities" carried out at national or regional level should be understood either as full research and innovation programmes, or parts of such programmes or similar initiatives. Such activities should have the following characteristics:

- a) strategically planned and executed at national or regional level;
- b) financed or managed by national or regional public bodies or structures closely related to or mandated by public authorities.

Certain research programmes or activities supported by charities and other private organisations will also qualify when only the first of these criteria is met.

1.3 Definition of “networking” and “mutual opening ”

For the purposes of the ERA-NET scheme, the terms “networking” and “mutual opening” are defined as follow:

- By “**networking**” is meant cooperation and coordination activities that take place between programmes in different countries without transnational flows of national funding. In “networking”, each national/regional authority pays the costs of its own participation and of its own research.
- By “**mutual opening**” is meant cooperation and coordination activities between programmes in different countries or regions of different countries implemented with transnational flows of national funding. In this case, there may be a pooling of national funds to pay for joint actions or one programme may finance research in another country under a reciprocal agreement.

1.4 Fields of research

ERA-NET activities may be carried out in the whole field of science and technology¹. The ERA-NET scheme will be implemented using a bottom-up approach, giving no preference to one research topic over another.

2 PARTICIPANTS

2.1 Typology

The participants in ERA-NETs will principally be:

- public bodies responsible for financing or managing research activities carried out at national or regional level;
- other national bodies, such as research associations, private research and innovation organisations, charities, that finance or manage such research activities;
- bodies operating at European level that include the pan-European coordination of nationally-funded research as part of their mission.

¹ The Council’s Common Position concerning the Sixth Framework Programme gives the following examples of topics that could be supported:

- health: health of key population groups; major diseases and disorders (e.g. cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, hepatitis, visual impairment), rare diseases and major diseases linked to poverty in developing countries; activities involved will be implemented, for instance, through coordination of research and comparative studies, development of European databases and interdisciplinary networks, exchange of clinical practice and coordination of clinical trials;
- biotechnology: non-health and non-food applications;
- environment: urban environment (including urban development and cultural heritage); marine environment and land/soil management; seismic risk;
- energy: new generation power plants ("near-zero-emission"), energy storage, transport and distribution.

Topics covered by the priority thematic areas of part I of the Specific Programme “Integrating and strengthening the European Research Area” are not excluded.

2.2 Number of participants

The minimum number of participants has been set in the FP6 rules for participation at [two] independent legal entities established in different Member States or Associated States, of which at least one shall be a Member State or Associated candidate country. However, in order to obtain a significant structuring effect at European level, each ERA-NET should involve research activities undertaken in at least five different Member States or Associated States.

In addition, a single participant such as an EEIG or any legal entity established in a Member State or Associated State that is made up of independent legal entities from at least two different Member States or Associated States, of which at least one shall be a Member State or Associated candidate country, may be the sole participant in an ERA-NET.

Participants' location	Participation	Funding
European Union	Rightfully	Rightfully
Associated Candidate Countries	Rightfully	Rightfully
Other Associated States	Rightfully	Rightfully
International organisations of European interest	Rightfully	Rightfully
Russia, New Independent States, Mediterranean countries, developing countries (with or without a co-operation agreement)	Rightfully over and above the minimum threshold	Within the limits of the budget available for specific international co-operation activities
Third countries having a co-operation agreement (other than those referred to above)	Rightfully over and above the minimum threshold	If Community contribution is necessary and foreseen by the Work Programme
Other third Countries	If participation is foreseen or if it is necessary for carrying out the project	If Community contribution is foreseen or if it is essential for carrying out the project
Other international organisations	Rightfully over and above the minimum threshold	If Community contribution is foreseen in the work programme or if it is essential for carrying out the project

3 ACTIVITIES TO BE SUPPORTED WITHIN AN ERA-NET

To advance the process of better European cooperation between research activities carried out at national or regional level, each ERA-NET will probably foresee an evolving set of activities in which the coordination element gradually deepens. Starting by increasing mutual knowledge through information exchange among policy makers and managers of similar scientific areas, the ERA-NET would be expected to lead step-wise to stronger forms of cooperation and coordination.

Given the long-term nature of this process, there may well be a need for each ERA-NET to establish a “unified management structure”.

3.1 Networking of research activities carried out at national and regional level

Networking activities may involve many levels of cooperation and coordination. Under a step by step perspective and depending on the degree of maturity of the network, some or all of the following activities could be envisaged in an ERA-NET:

3.1.1 Systematic exchange of information and best practice

The goal of this activity is to improve communication, to develop better mutual knowledge and trust-building through a mutual learning process, systematic exchange of information and best practice among programme makers and among managers of similar scientific and technological areas.

“Information” should be understood as information on national and regional research and innovation activities such as national and regional programmes, funded projects, research priorities, evaluation practices, organisation and management.

Possible mechanisms for promoting the exchange of information are:

- fora of research programme makers and programme managers;
- short-term exchanges of programme managers;
- benchmarking and dissemination of good practice.

The use of electronic communication tools, including the use of common portals, is also envisaged.

3.1.2 Strategic activities

The following types of strategic activities could be developed by programme makers and managers of national or regional research activities:

- development of mutual complementarities between the programmes of the ERA-NET partners;
- identification and analysis of research activities carried out by different programmes that have similar goals and that could lead to the design of future multinational schemes;

- identification and analysis of practical and concrete networking activities and mutual opening mechanisms;
- identification and analysis of barriers that hinder transnational cooperation activities such as, for example, administrative and legal barriers;
- identification of new opportunities and gaps in research and stimulation of new interdisciplinary work on the basis of technology assessment and foresight analysis carried out at regional, national and European level;
- design of common evaluation systems.

3.1.3 Implementation of joint activities

Based on the strategic activities, ERA-NETs could support the following joint activities:

- A posteriori clustering of nationally or regionally funded research projects.

In order to cluster a posteriori national or regional research projects, programme managers will define activities to achieve this purpose. This could involve the identification and the selection of projects and the organisation of activities such as workshops and working groups among scientists involved in the nationally funded research projects. Such activities should have programmatic objectives that go beyond a simple exchange of scientific information between researchers.

- The systematic use of multinational evaluation procedures.

In the long term, this measure could contribute to the integration of multinational evaluation in national or regional research systems (covering proposal, project and programme evaluation). This could involve the identification of common evaluation criteria and methods.

- Joint training activities².

Developing joint training schemes or activities such as co-supervised theses and international PhD schemes could be envisaged.

3.1.4 Transnational research activities

A stronger form of networking would consist of implementing a programme of transnational research activities with each country or region paying for the participation of its own researchers. This could imply setting up a common strategy, a joint work programme, common calls for proposals, a common multinational evaluation and a common plan for dissemination of results or experiences. In this case, projects submitted to a joint call for proposals should involve at least two teams from two different countries. A posteriori clustering of selected projects should also be done if possible.

² The articulation with the training activities foreseen in the specific programme "Structuring the European Research Area" is still to be further elaborated.

The EUROCORES scheme of the European Science Foundation is an example of such transnational research activities.

3.2 Mutual opening of national or regional research programmes

Under the definition adopted for the ERA-NET scheme, the mutual opening of research programmes implies transnational flows of national funds under a reciprocal agreement between participants.

Possible mechanisms for developing the mutual opening of research activities carried out at national or regional level include:

- cross-funding of individual researchers or research teams in one country by programmes in another;
- funding of multinational projects submitted in the framework of a call for proposals launched in one country;
- providing mutual access to facilities or laboratories in one country for scientists from another;
- pooling national funds in order to finance projects resulting from a joint call for proposals.

Mutual opening could be envisaged separately or within the framework of a networking of research activities carried out at national or regional level.

3.3 Management of an ERA-NET

Given the long-term nature of the cooperation inside an ERA-NET, the partners will be advised to establish a "unified management structure", with dedicated staff, to coordinate their activities and to ensure a continuity of operation. Management tasks could include:

- scientific and administrative management of the activities of the ERA-NET, including communication with the Commission and reporting;
- development of strategic activities;
- ensuring that high standards of scientific excellence are maintained throughout the activities of the ERA-NET;
- ensuring that gender equality is promoted within the ERA-NET;
- launching, implementing and following up joint research activities.

Costs related to management activities can be supported under the ERA-NET contract.

4 FINANCIAL ASPECTS

4.1 Community contribution

ERA-NETs will be implemented as "coordination actions", one of the funding instruments of FP6.

The financial support from the Community will be limited to the costs of the additional activities described above (see point 3) undertaken to implement the ERA-NET. The eligible costs defined in the model contract for coordination actions can be covered up to 100%. No support will be provided for the research activities themselves, for which the members of the ERA-NET will be expected to use their own resources.

Community funding for an ERA-NET could be as high as 2 M€ In exceptional cases, for example if several fields of research are covered by a single ERA-NET, a greater contribution could be envisaged.

4.2 Duration of Community support

Each ERA-NET should last sufficiently long to have a durable impact on the research programmes involved. Durations of up to 5 years may be envisaged.

5 THE PROPOSAL STAGE

5.1 Calls for proposals

An open call inviting proposals for ERA-NET activities on a bottom-up basis, will be published in the Official Journal at the start of the Sixth Framework Programme. The first deadline will be in early 2003 with a budget of about [40] M€ Thereafter there will be a deadline roughly every six months up to early 2006, each with a budget of about [20] M€

5.2 Content of a proposal

The proposals should include the following:

- clearly defined objectives of the ERA-NET;
- impact that the ERA-NET will have on the national and regional programmes involved and its potential impact in terms of helping to structure the European Research Area;
- description of the activities foreseen throughout the lifetime of the ERA-NET and their timetable;
- description of each partner, its role within its national/regional system and its role within the ERA-NET, with an indication of the budgets of the programmes involved;
- plans for the organisation, management and governance of the ERA-NET;
- justification for the Community support requested;
- means of assuring the scientific quality of the activities supported by the ERA-NET;
- means to ensure sustainability of the activities beyond the period covered by the proposal;
- plan to ensure that gender equality will be promoted within the ERA-NET;
- dissemination plan of results and/or experiences.

5.3 Evaluation of proposals

The fundamental principles governing the evaluation process are:

- **transparency:** in order to provide a clear framework for managers of RTD programme/activities who are preparing funding proposals, the process by which funding decisions are reached, both the principles and the practice, must be clearly described and available to any interested party;
- **fair treatment:** all proposals should be treated alike, irrespective of where they originate or the identity of the proposers;
- **impartiality:** all eligible proposals are treated impartially on their merits, following an independent review;
- **efficiency and speed:** the procedures must be designed to be as rapid as possible, commensurate with maintaining the quality of the evaluation and respecting the legal framework and accountability within which the RTD programme is to be managed;
- **ethical considerations:** any proposal which contravenes fundamental ethical principles (particularly those set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union), or which does not fulfil the conditions set out in the work programme or in the call for proposals, may be excluded from the evaluation and selection process at any time.

The evaluation procedure will be further described in the Commission's evaluation manual and in the work programme of the Specific Programme.

5.3.1 Peer review

The Commission will arrange the evaluation of proposals received according to the principles of "peer review" by independent experts. The experts, meeting as a panel, may hold hearings of the applicants. Proposals may be sent to experts prior to the panel meeting.

5.3.2 Evaluation criteria

Evaluation of the proposals will focus on the potential impact of the ERA-NET to strengthen the foundations of the European Research Area and on the quality of the ERA-NET (partnership and resources, activities, and management). Evaluation criteria could include the following:

Potential impact on strengthening the foundations of ERA

- To what extent will the proposed ERA-NET contribute to making a reality of the European Research Area, namely from the perspective of increasing the coherence and coordination of national and regional research activities?
- Are the proposed objectives suitably ambitious to be financed at Community level, particularly in terms of the expected European added value?

- Could the ERA-NET activities lay the foundations for a durable cooperation between the partners involved?

Quality of the ERA-NET

Partnership and Resources

- Are the partners key actors within their national or regional research systems?
- Do the ERA-NET partners collectively mobilise a critical mass of resources in Europe on the topic of the ERA-NET?
- Are they well suited to the tasks assigned to them within the ERA-NET?
- Are the resources allocated commensurate with the deliverables and foreseen effects?

Activities

- Are the foreseen activities suitable to increase cooperation and coordination between the national or regional programmes involved?
- Are the foreseen activities sufficiently well designed to obtain the expected results?
- Are the mechanisms proposed for ensuring scientific excellence sufficiently robust?
- Is there an effective plan of dissemination and use of the knowledge (results/experiences) outside the ERA-NET?

Governance and management

- Will the management be supported by a suitable governance structure involving the participating organisations at an appropriate level?
- Is the management foreseen adequate for the activities envisaged and the expected results?
- Is there a well-considered plan for promoting gender equality in the ERA-NET?

6 CONTRACTUAL RELATIONSHIP

6.1 Content of the contract

The contract with the Commission will establish the rights and obligations of participants. It might include among others:

- the scope, duration, amount of the Community grant, reporting schedule and payment modalities, and the list of initial participants;
- a **technical annex** containing the objectives of the ERA-NET, a description of the joint activities; a description of the role of the participants, a description of the deliverables, ethical provisions, and a description of the management and governance structure;

- **general conditions** common to all FP 6 instruments, covering standard legal and administrative provisions, the IPR regime if necessary, and standard financial provisions among others;
- **conditions specific to the ERA-NET**, for example the definition of eligible costs.

The Community grant will not be broken down in the contract either by activity or by participant.

6.2 Responsibility and liability of the participants

Participants share joint and several technical responsibility and joint and several financial liability regarding the implementation of the ERA-NET. Subject to cases of *force majeure*, the participants are expected to use reasonable endeavours to achieve the objectives aimed at by the ERA-NET.

A detailed explanation on the implementation of joint and several financial liability is available at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/nfp/networks-ip.html>

6.3 Consortium agreement

The participants may wish to conclude a consortium agreement that may include:

- the decision-making processes they will use;
- the sharing out of tasks and resources among the participants;
- the management of the Community contribution;
- specific arrangements concerning intellectual property rights to be applied among the participants who will contribute to the generation of knowledge, in compliance with the general arrangements stipulated in the contract;
- any other provision necessary to ensure an effective governance and a sound management of ERA-NET.

7 POSSIBLE EVOLUTION OF AN ERA-NET

The work plan and the composition of the consortium can be modified under the responsibility of the consortium through appropriately defined modalities among partners. Two possibilities are envisaged :

7.1 Evolution of ERA-NETs without modification of financial allocation

7.1.1 Modification of the workplan

The execution plan for the remaining life of ERA-NETs may be modified, notably following the mid-term review, with the agreement of the Commission, taking into consideration:

- progress achieved by the consortium in its various activities;
- global scientific and technological developments in the field;

- the need for re-orienting foreseen activities or introducing new ones as a consequence of any evolution of the ERA-NET;
- other relevant factors.

7.1.2 Changes in consortium membership

The consortium may itself decide to take in new members, though without additional financing. The contract will specify the procedures to be followed. All modifications will require the agreement of the Commission and, may require a contract amendment.

7.2 Evolution of ERA-NETs with increase of financial allocation

The Commission may decide to launch dedicated calls for proposals aimed at extending the activities and/or the participants in existing ERA-NETs, with additional financing.

In addition to the elements requested from regular proposals (see point 5.2), the proposals should include:

- description of new activities and their relevance to the objective of the ERA-NET and/or description of new partners and their role within the ERA-NET;
- identification of the added value of the enlargement of the ERA-NET, including cost/efficiency factors.

8 INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ASPECTS

The rules relating to intellectual property proposed for the Sixth Framework Programme are intended to apply to all FP6 activities, including the ERA-NET actions.

As an illustration, the IPR rules for FP6 would apply to any documents, software or databases created in the context of a networking or a mutual opening of research activities.

The IPR rules for FP6 will not apply to the results of the national or regional programmes being coordinated or networked. These results will be governed by the respective applicable national or regional rules.

9 FOLLOW UP AND MONITORING

The Commission services will monitor the project so as to ensure proper execution of the work according to the terms of the contract, to protect the Community's financial interests and to ensure maximum synergy and coherence with other actions within the Sixth Framework Programme.

A project officer will be assigned to follow-up each ERA-NET. Persons with the appropriate expertise may assist the project officer.

The project officer will also organise a mid-term review for each ERA-NET of a duration of three years or more. The review should consist in a strategic analysis examining in particular what is the European added value of the ERA-NET in terms of its strengthening effect on ERA and what are the "strengths and weaknesses" of the ERA-NET. When applicable, the mid-term review would lead to the modification, if necessary, of the initial workplan. Any ERA-NET that is found not to be performing satisfactorily at the mid-term review may have its contract terminated.

10 AUDITS

The model contract will specify an audit regime to enable the Commission to proceed to audits:

- Activity audits may be launched at any point during the implementation of the ERA-NET in order to verify that the network has been carrying out its tasks in accordance with the contract.
- Financial audits may be launched at any time, and may deal with any financial aspect of the contract.
- Ethical audits may be launched at any point during the implementation of the ERA-NET in order to verify that the network has been carrying out its tasks with respect of fundamental ethical principles and national regulations.
- Audits dealing with the use and dissemination of results and/or experiences may be launched at the end of the contract, but may also be carried out earlier, if considered necessary by the Commission.

Various audits may be undertaken simultaneously. The Commission itself will conduct them or entitle another entity to do so.

11 PREPARATORY ACTIONS

In order to help stimulate ERA-NET proposals for the networking or mutual opening of research activities carried out at national or regional level, preparatory actions will be supported. They should aim at testing the feasibility and designing future networking or mutual opening initiatives.

They will be supported as "Specific support actions", another of the instruments of the Sixth Framework Programme. Specific support actions may involve conferences, seminars, studies and analyses, working groups and expert groups, operational support and dissemination, information and communication activities, or a combination of these, as appropriate in each case.

Preparatory actions should have a limited scope and a duration of no more than one year. Community funding will exceed 200,000 € only in exceptional cases.