

HOPE Position on the European Research Area Act

The European Hospital and Healthcare Federation (HOPE), representing national hospital associations and healthcare providers across Europe, welcomes the European Commissions initiative to prepare a legislative proposal for an ERA Act. Hospitals, as key actors in Europe's research and innovation ecosystem, are directly concerned by this process.

Hospitals face a number of structural challenges in advancing research within the ERA. The first is fragmentation. Research efforts remain siloed across Member States, regions, and even between hospitals, resulting in duplication, inefficiencies, and missed opportunities for collaboration. This fragmentation is compounded by uneven levels of investment in research and innovation, which creates disparities between hospitals in different parts of Europe.

A second major challenge is the difficulty in mobilising and retaining talent. Hospitals depend on the contributions of clinicians, researchers, and allied professionals who face obstacles in mobility, recognition of qualifications, and career progression. Precarious contracts and inconsistent working conditions undermine the attractiveness of research careers in hospitals, especially for young professionals.

Thirdly, hospitals struggle with limited access to research infrastructures and data. While they generate vast amounts of clinical data, the absence of harmonised frameworks for data sharing and reuse hampers their ability to contribute fully to open science. Equally, hospital-based researchers often face administrative burdens and legal uncertainties that limit their ability to participate in cross-border projects.

Hospitals believe that the ERA Act must offer robust legislative solutions to these challenges if the ERA is to fulfil its promise in the health sector.

The ERA Act should create legal instruments that facilitate the free circulation of researchers and scientific knowledge. For hospitals, this means streamlined procedures for recognising clinical and academic qualifications, improved frameworks for researcher mobility, and harmonised employment standards that make hospital research careers more attractive and sustainable.

Another priority is the development of a coherent European framework for health data and research infrastructures. Hospitals call for legislative provisions that guarantee secure, ethical, and interoperable access to clinical and research data, aligned with the European Health Data Space. Such a framework would allow hospital-generated evidence to contribute meaningfully to cross-border studies and innovation projects, while ensuring patient trust and data protection.

Finally, hospitals believe the ERA Act must enshrine the principles of scientific freedom, integrity, and equality in research. This includes explicit safeguards that protect hospital-based researchers

from undue political or commercial pressures, as well as measures that promote gender equality and inclusiveness in all research programmes.

If these solutions are embedded in the ERA Act, hospitals anticipate significant positive impacts. Research within hospitals will become more integrated and collaborative, reducing fragmentation and ensuring more efficient use of resources. Hospitals will be better positioned to attract and retain research talent, creating a virtuous cycle of innovation and clinical excellence. Patients will benefit from faster translation of research into practice, as hospitals will be equipped to lead and participate in cutting-edge projects across Europe.

More broadly, a legislative framework that supports hospital research will strengthen the EU's strategic autonomy, improve competitiveness in medical innovation, and enhance Europe's resilience in the face of health crises. By aligning hospital research with broader EU objectives, the ERA Act will help make Europe a global leader in health science and technology, while reinforcing hospitals as engines of knowledge, care, and societal well-being.

HOPE, the European Hospital and Healthcare Federation, is a European non-profit organisation, created in 1966. HOPE represents national public and private hospitals associations and hospitals owners either federations of local and regional authorities or national health services. Today, HOPE is made up of 36 organisations coming from the 27 Member States of the European Union, as well as from the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Serbia as observer members. HOPE mission is to promote improvements in the health of citizens throughout Europe, high standard of hospital care and to foster efficiency with humanity in the organisation and operation of hospital and healthcare services.