

2025/26 Activity Overview

Reflections on an Evolving European Partnership Landscape

Strengthening the Partnership Community

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Introduction

The activities carried out by ERA-LEARN during 2025 and early 2026 have provided a valuable opportunity to reflect on how the European Partnership landscape is evolving under Horizon Europe, and what this may mean for the future development of partnerships within the European research and innovation system.


Across stakeholder discussions, analytical activities, workshops, guidance documents and country-level analysis, a number of common themes have emerged. Taken together, these point to a partnership landscape that is becoming more established and strategically important, but also more complex and increasingly demanding to coordinate and manage.

European Partnerships as a Permanent Part of the R&I Landscape

One of the clearest observations emerging from ERA-LEARN activities is that European Partnerships are now widely recognised as a central component of EU research and innovation policy. Discussions throughout 2025 confirmed strong support for partnerships as mechanisms for aligning European, national and regional priorities, pooling resources and building long-term collaboration around major societal, industrial and technological challenges.

In many areas, partnerships are no longer viewed as experimental or complementary instruments, but as part of the core infrastructure of the European research and innovation landscape. At the same time, there is growing recognition that the partnership system has entered a new phase of development.





The focus is increasingly shifting away from the creation of new initiatives towards questions of coherence, strategic positioning, implementation and long-term sustainability.

This transition is becoming particularly visible in discussions linked to FP10, where attention is turning towards the overall structure and manageability of the partnership portfolio rather than individual partnerships in isolation.

A More Complex and Interconnected System

The updated [ERA-LEARN partnership timeline](#) illustrates this shift clearly. Partnerships are now operating across overlapping programme periods and at different stages of maturity, with many expected to continue into the next framework programme period. This creates a more continuous and interconnected system than in previous framework programmes, but also one that is more difficult to navigate and coordinate.

Increasingly, partnerships must interact not only with each other, but also with a broader set of European, national and regional instruments, including cohesion policy, Missions, industrial alliances and EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities. As this landscape has expanded, concerns around complexity and fragmentation have become more prominent.

Across multiple ERA-LEARN activities, stakeholders pointed to overlapping structures, varying implementation models and growing administrative requirements as persistent challenges. While simplification is widely supported in principle, discussions also demonstrated that simplification is not simply about reducing rules or reporting obligations. It is equally about improving clarity, predictability and coherence across the system as a whole.

Implementation Remains a Shared Challenge

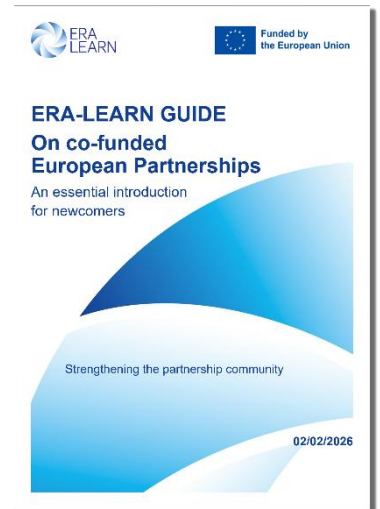
Many of the practical challenges identified through ERA-LEARN activities relate to implementation. [Country reports](#), [newcomer training activities](#) and workshops on [data transfer](#) and [partnership management](#) all highlighted the complexity involved in coordinating activities across different national systems, funding arrangements and governance structures.

Although partnerships are intended to strengthen alignment between European and national priorities, implementation often depends on highly diverse administrative and financial

frameworks. As a result, many operational challenges stem not only from European requirements, but also from differences in national procedures and capacities.

At the same time, ERA-LEARN's work showed growing interest within the partnership community in practical exchange and peer learning around these issues. Across workshops and training activities, participants consistently highlighted the value of learning from the experience of other partnerships facing similar operational or strategic challenges.

This reflects a broader shift towards seeing partnerships not only as individual initiatives, but as part of a wider community with shared concerns and opportunities for mutual learning.



Sustainability, Continuity and Lifecycle Thinking

Another important reflection emerging from ERA-LEARN activities relates to sustainability and lifecycle management. Discussions during workshops on [phasing-out strategies](#) and [financial sustainability](#) demonstrated that many partnerships are only beginning to consider what continuity beyond Horizon Europe funding might look like in practice.

Increasingly, sustainability is being understood not simply as a financial issue, but as a broader strategic question linked to governance, stakeholder ownership, long-term relevance and positioning within wider innovation ecosystems.

This has also contributed to wider reflection on the lifecycle of partnerships and the need for clearer approaches to continuation, transition and closure. Stakeholders broadly recognised that not all partnerships are expected to continue indefinitely, and that future portfolio discussions will likely require more explicit consideration of where partnerships add strategic value, where consolidation may be needed, and how legacy and long-term impact should be managed.

From Research Collaboration to Strategic Impact

Increasing attention is also being given to how partnerships contribute to innovation and deployment pathways beyond research collaboration alone. ERA-LEARN's ongoing impact assessment work and recent policy analysis highlighted growing expectations that partnerships should support wider industrial and societal objectives, including competitiveness, resilience and technological sovereignty.

In this context, there is increasing interest in how partnerships interact with infrastructure, industrial ecosystems, regional investment and other instruments across different stages of development. The [policy brief on technological sovereignty and global competition](#) further illustrated how partnerships are increasingly operating within wider geopolitical and industrial contexts.


The analysis highlighted the importance of coordination across different instruments and stages of the innovation cycle, particularly in areas where Europe faces growing international competition and strategic dependencies. This reflects a broader trend in EU research and innovation policy, where partnerships are increasingly expected to contribute not only to scientific excellence, but also to Europe's longer-term strategic positioning.

Looking Ahead

The work carried out during 2025 and early 2026 suggests that the next phase of development for European Partnerships will be shaped less by expansion and more by consolidation, coordination and strategic focus. Questions around portfolio coherence, simplification, sustainability and impact are likely to become increasingly central as discussions on FP10 continue.

At the same time, ERA-LEARN activities also point to the importance of maintaining flexibility and openness within the system. Emerging work on future-proofing and foresight reflects growing recognition that partnerships must remain adaptable in the face of technological, societal and geopolitical change.

Supporting this adaptability will require not only analytical work and strategic reflection, but also continued opportunities for exchange, networking and peer learning across the partnership community.



Taken together, these reflections suggest that European Partnerships are entering a more mature phase within the European research and innovation system. The challenge ahead is no longer simply to establish partnerships, but to ensure that the overall system remains coherent, accessible and capable of delivering long-term value in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing environment.

All documents, workshop outputs, policy briefs, and more can be found on the [ERA-LEARN website](#).

Imprint

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