European Research Council
Scientific Council
Established by the European Commission

European Research Council
Scientific Council
105th plenary meeting
24-25-26 June 2026, Dublin, Ireland and Belfast, Northern Ireland

Minutes

Scientific Council members present on site (in alphabetical order): Conny Aerts, Harriet Bulkeley, Michel Campillo, Emmanuelle Charpentier, Tom Henzinger, Liselotte Højgaard, Dirk Inzé, Leszek Kaczmarek (Wednesday and Thursday), Maarit Karppinen, Kateřina Králová, Maria Leptin (President of the ERC), Sylvie Lorente, Susana Narotzky, Luke O'Neill, Björn Ottersten, Torsten Persson, Tomaž Prosen, Karin Roelofs (Wednesday and Thursday), Giovanni Sartor and Nicola Spaldin

ScC members present online: Leszek Kaczmarek (Friday), Karin Roelofs (Friday), Eleftheria Zeggini (Wednesday and Thursday)

ScC members excused: András Stipsicz

Advisors of the ERC Vice-Presidents present on site (in alphabetical order): Monica Åberg Yngwe, Elisabeth Corcelle Termeau and Patrick Finkelstein

ERC Executive Agency (ERCEA) staff present on site (in alphabetical order): Catherine Berens, Philippe Cupers, Madeleine Drielsma, Josefina Enfedaque, Raluca Ionescu, Gwennael Joliff-Botrel, Alban Kellerbauer, David Krasa, Katja Meinke, Laurence Moreau, Mike Mugabushaka, Lino Paula, Martin Penny, Pablo Perez-Illana, Laura Pontiggia, Laura Pontiggia, Sejla Sedic, Severina Shopova, Sabine Simmross, Wieland Staessens, Elena Toma, Ben Turner

ERC Executive Agency (ERCEA) staff attending remotely (in alphabetical order): Andrea Polyak

Chair of the meeting: Maria Leptin, President of the ERC

Rapporteur: Severina Shopova, ERC Executive Agency

Wednesday 24 June 2026

1. Welcome, Plans and Goals of the 105th Plenary Meeting

Maria Leptin welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined key discussion points for the plenary.

2. Adoption of the Agenda of the 105th Plenary Meeting

The Scientific Council adopted the Draft Agenda of the meeting.

3. Adoption of the minutes of the 103rd and 104th Plenary Meetings

The Scientific Council approved the Draft Minutes of the 103rd and 104th plenary meetings.

4. Action Points of the 104th Plenary Meeting and Board meeting of 26 May

The ERC Executive Agency (ERCEA) updated the Scientific Council on the status of action points from previous meetings, including completed and ongoing ones.

5. Update on Recent Meetings and Activities

Torsten Persson reported that, on 11 June 2026, he had attended a reception for new ERC grantees hosted by the Swedish Research Council, where he delivered a presentation outlining the current strategic position and future priorities of the ERC. In addition, Jessica Umegård, Deputy Director at the Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, contacted him to discuss regarding actions to improve participation from Widening countries in the forthcoming Framework Programme. Looking ahead to the 20th anniversary event of the ERC in Sweden, progress had been made through preliminary discussions with major stakeholders, including Stockholm University, the Swedish Research Council, the Wallenberg Foundation, and the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. Harriet Bulkeley suggested hosting national 20th-anniversary events, which the ERCEA would add to the decentralised local events across EU Member States. Maria Leptin asked the ERCEA to coordinate possible dates, noting the willingness of Scientific Council members to engage with national administrations for such events. The ERCEA cited open lab days, exhibitions, social media campaigns and podcasts etc., in addition to events, as examples of activities to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the ERC.

On 12 June, Liselotte Højgaard attended a meeting at the Ministry of Science, Higher Education and Digital Affairs of Denmark. She mentioned the reappointment of Christina Egelund as Minister for Higher Education and Science. She reported on discussions on developing a common Life Sciences voice in the preparation of Framework Programme 10 (FP10) in line with recommendations from the 2025 Copenhagen Life Science Summit. From 21 to 23 June, in her capacities as clinician-scientist and ERC Vice-President for Life Sciences, she participated, at the invitation of Susan Gasser and Maria Leptin, in the workshop '2035: Anticipating the Future of Cancer' hosted by the Louis Jeantet Foundation in Geneva. In addition, she attended the annual research policy meeting of the Danish Academy, where a report on dual-use research in Denmark was presented.

Nicola Spaldin reported on the recent (June 2026) referendum in Switzerland, aimed at restricting the population of the country to 10 million permanent residents until 2050. Such a restriction would

have implications for agreements with the EU on the free movement of persons and for the association agreement with EU research programmes (such as Horizon Europe). She concluded with the news that the proposal of the referendum was rejected by Swiss voters.

Leszek Kaczmarek reported on the plans of Poland to adopt a national framework for increasing participation in ERC funding inspired by the approach of the Czech Republic to research funding. András Stipsicz reported on the development of such a scheme in Hungary, which will involve ERC panel members and grantees from Hungary. Leszek Kaczmarek attended the 'Engines of Inclusion and Innovation' widening conference in Brussels, where Manuel Heitor delivered a keynote address. The event reinforced the reputation of the ERC as a gold standard for scientific excellence, with Leszek Kaczmarek noting that his institution alone hosted 60 ERC grantees, a testament to its research strength. The following day, Maria Leptin and András Stipsicz took part in an online session that brought together a group of National Contact Points, who focus on increasing ERC engagement at the national level.

Giovanni Sartor reported on the Guild of EU Law Schools meeting in Cracow, held virtually, where he addressed concerns about perceived bias against the social sciences and humanities in ERC funding. His clarifications regarding panel topic preferences were well received, helping to guide applications from these disciplines.

Maria Leptin reported on her recent visits and strategic discussions. In Italy, she held meetings with the research minister, a strong advocate for the ERC. Maria Leptin also met Andrea Lenzi, the President of the National Research Council (CNR), to discuss the persistently low ERC success rates of Italy. In Romania, she engaged with the academy, the education minister, and the president. Looking ahead, the agenda of Maria Leptin includes a trip to the Netherlands in July 2026, a visit in Finland for high-level engagements in Helsinki, including a meeting with the minister responsible for EU affairs and a visit to Aalto University.

Michel Campillo reported from a PI event in Paris, where French institutional barriers, such as unpaid portions of grants and administrative hurdles, were identified as key factors behind the low ERC submission rates from France. He proposed a meeting with the French Director for Higher Education and Research to address these issues.

6. 10th EU framework programme for research and innovation (FP10)

The ERCEA gave an update on the negotiations on the next long-term EU budget and the FP10 legislation. Concerning the budget, for which the Commission had proposed an overall volume of around two trillion euro, two camps of Member States have emerged. A group of 16 'Friends of Cohesion' defend the agricultural and cohesion funding, while another group of nine 'Friends of Modernisation', all net contributing countries, want to reduce the overall budget. The Cypriot Presidency has proposed a slightly reduced draft budget. Concerning the FP10 proposal itself, the Member States agreed to a common position in the Council Research Working Party, to be endorsed at an upcoming Council meeting. The European Parliament has proposed hundreds of amendments to the reports of the FP10 rapporteurs. The text will be put to a vote in the ITRE committee in

September and in the plenary in October. During the trilogue negotiations thereafter, a compromise will have to be found.

The ERCEA reported on the state of play of secondary legislation that is being prepared in the context of FP10, such as the Delegation Act (a Commission decision), which transfers the specific tasks and powers required for the implementation of the ERC programme from the Commission to the Executive Agency and the Memorandum of understanding (signed between the ERCEA and DG RTD), which defines the interaction, monitoring and supervision arrangements between the Agency and the Commission, including the role of the Steering Committee.

7. Strategic topics: overview and discussion

Maria Leptin gave an overview of the status of the new strategic topics the Scientific Council decided to explore at its April 2026 plenary meeting. Each of the topics is dealt with by a dedicated Scientific Council task force, assisted by an Agency support group. The topics will be discussed in depth at the October 2026 plenary meeting in Madrid so decisions can be made towards the end of the year. Four strategic topics (ERC portfolio, ERC evaluation, budget allocation and AI in evaluation) would be discussed at the present meeting, whereas the fifth (panel structure and dynamic panels) would be on the agenda of the Committee on Panels meeting ahead of the October plenary. Liselotte Højgaard announced that Luke O'Neill would join the task force on the ERC portfolio as the representative of the LS domain.

8. Strategic topics: ERC portfolio

Maria Leptin presented the state of play of the strategic topic 'ERC portfolio'. The aim of the task force is to analyse whether the current ERC portfolio achieves the policy objectives of the Scientific Council. Since the budget of the ERC for FP10 will not be known until 2027, the task force will have to prepare a broad plan and work with contingency plans.

9. Operational issues reporting

The ERCEA presented the outcome of the Advanced grant 2025 call. Out of 3329 proposals received (an increase of 31% from 2024), 319 will be funded, resulting in a success rate of 9.8%. The average grant size is EUR 2.63 M. There was a four-fold increase in applications from outside the EU and Associated Countries. Scientific Council members expressed concern about the small proportion of women applying (25%). The increasing number of applicants relocating to Europe was welcomed.

Thursday 25 June 2026

10. Strategic topic: ERC evaluation

Maria Leptin gave an update on the strategic topic 'ERC evaluation'. The background for this topic is the steep rise in the number of applications, a challenge that other funders also face. The Scientific Council has already adopted mitigation measures, but some (the tightening of resubmission restrictions) were readjusted following feedback from the research community. The objectives of the task force are to identify structural mechanisms to reduce the workload for reviewers (panel

members, remote reviewers and referees) and improve the evaluation efficiency to allow evaluation of larger numbers of proposals.

11. Strategic topic: Budget allocation

Maria Leptin introduced the strategic topic 'Budget allocation' and explained that while the task force had the mandate to also consider the allocation of funding to grant schemes, so far it had only looked at the demand-driven budget allocation to panels and possible alternatives. She presented the historical development of budget allocation to domains, which initially was fixed annually and varied only slightly. From 2015 on, the current demand-driven model by panel was applied. In the time since then, the demand (and budget allocated) by panel developed differently. She pointed out that the evolution had been non-uniform by groups of panels and had been influenced by the introduction of new panels.

12. Strategic topic: AI in ERC evaluation

The point began with a presentation by Steve Wesselingh, CEO of the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and representative of Australia in the Heads of International Research Organisations (HIROs). Steve Wesselingh reported on the discussions of HIROs on artificial intelligence (AI) in research assessment, followed by an exchange with the Scientific Council.

Nicola Spaldin gave an update on the work of the task force on AI in evaluation. She reported that the Commission had published guidelines on the use of AI in evaluation that mirrored those the Scientific Council had published in March, with two small differences.

As a third agenda point, the task force reported on potential experiments to assess where AI could support research evaluation. The Scientific Council decided to pursue experiments on how AI can support evaluation and to contract external experts for that purpose. The Scientific Council also decided to build up internal capacity on AI in the Agency and to engage with other funding organisations on that topic.

13. Follow up from morning discussions and presentations

The Scientific Council continued its discussion on the strategic topic of Budget allocation. The Scientific Council agreed that the issues had to be considered carefully, that the risks should be weighed, that the problem should be articulated meticulously and that different solutions should be considered. The Scientific Council decided that the task force should spell out the problems with the current demand-driven budget allocation model and the uneven participation in the current panel structure. The problem statement of the task force should then be reworked.

14. Closed session

The Scientific Council held a closed session.

Friday 26 June 2026

15. Update from the Standing Committees, Working Groups and Strategic Topics

- ***Standing Committee on Programme Impact Monitoring and Evaluation (PRIME)***

Torsten Persson reminded the Scientific Council that PRIME is recruiting a group of external advisers to provide technical guidance to its work Two initial online meetings between the external experts, Torsten Persson and Agency staff have taken place. The experts are also expected to meet in person with PRIME by the Spring 2027 plenary at the latest.

- ***Standing Committee on Conflict of Interest, Scientific Misconduct and Ethical Issues (CoIME)***

Nicola Spaldin informed the Scientific Council that there had been no new cases for the committee since the last plenary meeting.

- ***Working Group on Innovation***

Sylvie Lorente reported that a meeting of the working group had taken place on 19 June, during which the ERCEA secretary provided the group members with a recap of the activities of the working group. Concerning the joint working group with the European Innovation Council (EIC), most members of the EIC Board have changed, therefore the cooperation must be rekindled.

- ***Working Group on Gender and Diversity***

Liselotte Højgaard informed Scientific Council members on the status of an addition to the Information for Applicants declaring care costs as eligible costs that can be reimbursed from an ERC grant if they are consistent with the rules of the host institution. She also reported on gender data for Proof of Concept and eligibility extensions for Starting Grants and Consolidator Grants, as well as the elaboration of an LGBTQIA+ inclusivity implementation plan by the working group.

- ***Open Science***

Nicola Spaldin noted that there were no developments to report.

- ***Standing Committee on Panels (CoP)***

Maria Leptin reported on the status of the preparations for the ERC Plus call. The call was opened on 2 June. A webinar on ERC Plus grants with the ERC President was held on the same day as the opening of the call and attracted many attendees online.

16. Update on ERC archives

Laurence Moreau (Agency Director) informed the Scientific Council about the ERC Archive and outlined future developments. She reminded participants that the ERC Archive had been put in place to store data for historical, scientific research and statistical purposes, in alignment with the opinion of the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS). Depending on the purpose, data can be kept for extended periods (plagiarism and misconduct: 15 years; statistical purposes and scientific research: 25 years; historical purposes: indefinite).

17. Update on communication activities

The ERCEA updated the Scientific Council on recent communication activities. The ERC has been mentioned in more than 3500 media articles covering topics such as FP10, resubmission rules, ERC Plus, Choose Europe, widening participation and gender and diversity. News about the ERC President and the Scientific Council members were mainly about visits to Romania, Poland and the US. The tightened resubmission restrictions and their readjustment in April were covered widely in the specialised press and in social media. These also highlighted the need for additional budget for the ERC to address an increase in demand.

The recent announcement of the outcomes of the 2025 Advanced Grant call resulted in a massive media response, with more than 650 articles in major media, a significantly higher number than in previous years. Commissioner Ekaterina Zaharieva posted news on her social media channels of the first ERC grant in the natural and life sciences in Bulgaria.

The second webinar on ERC Plus grants with the President received ca. 2000 views. The new 'ERC classes' videos on grant management received more than 6000 views in the first two months.

18. Update on Agency activities and housing

Laurence Moreau informed the Scientific Council on Agency activities and housing. The Office for Infrastructure and Logistics (OIB) is working on future housing for the ERC. More concrete information should be available by September/October.

As part of the 'large-scale review' of the Commission, a first report of the workstreams will be presented to Commission staff on 13 July, including the one on the future of executive agencies under FP10. Recommendations from the Commission are expected to be issued in July.

19. Strategic topics summary and outlook

Maria Leptin summarised the discussions from the meeting on the new strategic topics.

20. Any other business

The Scientific Council discussed possible venues for the October 2027 plenary meeting.

The Vice-Presidents whose terms as Scientific Council members will end at the end of 2026 presented their successors. Luke O'Neill was appointed as next Vice-President for the LS domain and Tom Henzinger for the PE domain. Maria Leptin announced that Conny Aerts would take over as Scientific Council representative in the Steering Committee for Dirk Inzé, whose term as Scientific Council member also ends at the end of 2026.

Maria Leptin thanked Gwennael Joliff-Botrel, Head of the legal Unit of the ERCEA, who was now retiring, for her dedicated work and her passion and commitment over the years.

21. Closed session

The Scientific Council held a closed session.