



Proposals for Anti-Stigma Measures in the ERA Act

Addressing Reputational Stigma as a Structural Barrier to the Fifth Freedom

Purpose and context

This submission to the European Commission provides **concrete legislative recommendations** to mitigate **structural reputational stigma** within the proposed European Research Area (ERA Act). Such stigma operates as a **systemic barrier to the Fifth Freedom**, restricting high-risk/high-reward research, such as on Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena (UAP), and contributing to a market failure in European science. By enshrining these safeguards, the ERA Act will close the implementation gap of the **European Charter for Researchers**¹.

This document is a **follow-up** to feedback² submitted by UAP Coalition Netherlands in September 2025 in response to the Call for Evidence. In parallel, the organisation is also providing structured responses via the public consultation questionnaire on the ERA Act.

Summary of previous recommendations

Our earlier submission proposed that the EU should:

- Promote open-minded scientific inquiry as a guiding principle in EU research and innovation policy;
- Develop anti-stigma guidelines and best practices for evaluators and funding agencies;
- Support exploratory research in controversial or marginalised fields at both EU and national level;
- Foster inclusive and interdisciplinary research networks;
- Ensure access to research infrastructures for researchers working in emerging fields, regardless of topic perception.

This document **operationalizes** those recommendations through **specific, legally actionable measures** within the ERA Act.

¹ <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/hrexcellenceaward/european-charter-researchers#the-european-charter-for-researchers>

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14608-European-Research-Area-Act/F3714975_en Feedback sent on 10 Sep 2025, co-signed by 24 scientists and UAP organisations. Since then, this feedback has been co-signed by a total of 36 scientists and UAP organisations.



Strategic rationale: Why address stigma in the ERA Act?

Despite robust EU **soft-law instruments** (notably the European Charter for Researchers), researchers in unconventional or high-stigma fields—such as research into *unidentified anomalous phenomena*—remain exposed to informal exclusion, reputational risk, and career penalties.

Embedding explicit anti-stigma safeguards in the ERA Act would deliver:

- **Enforceability**
Transforming principles into binding rights, enabling researchers to challenge decisions based on bias rather than scientific merit.
- **Strategic competitiveness**
Making the EU a more attractive environment for frontier research, directly addressing the innovation gap highlighted in the 2024 Draghi Report³.
- **Harmonisation**
Ensuring a level playing field across Member States and reducing fragmentation caused by divergent institutional cultures and risk aversion.

Addressing stigma does **not** constitute special treatment for particular fields. It is a structural correction to ensure that **scientific merit, not reputational perception**, defines legitimate inquiry in the ERA.

Proposed actions and legislative measures⁴

1. Freedom of Scientific Research (Section 3.1.1)

Objective: Give legal effect to the European Charter for Researchers.

- **Anti-stigma safeguard**
The ERA Act should require research funding agencies, research institutions and scientific journals that topic selection, funding, recruitment, and access to infrastructure are assessed **exclusively on methodological and ethical grounds**, not reputational considerations. Researchers should have the freedom to research unconventional topics without fear of professional retaliation and ridicule.
- **Integrity standards**
Update the **European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity**⁵ to explicitly define the **unfounded dismissal of research topics due to stigma** as a breach of

³ https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/draghi-report/one-year-after_en

⁴ Aligned with the structure of the public consultation questionnaire on the ERA Act, https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14608-European-Research-Area-Act/F3714975_en

⁵ <https://allea.org/code-of-conduct/>



professional integrity, while maintaining full compliance with Good Research Practices.

- **Institutional accountability**

Require Research Ethics Committees and evaluation panels to provide **transparent, methodology-based justifications** when rejecting unconventional research proposals, preventing “brand safety” considerations from overriding scientific merit.

2. Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities (Section 3.1.2)

Objective: Protect cognitive diversity and prevent intellectual exclusion.

- **Intellectual non-discrimination**

Extend equal-opportunity principles to protect researchers from marginalisation based on engagement with unconventional or emerging research topics.

- **Talent attraction**

Address institutional bias that restricts diversity of thought and limits the EU’s capacity to attract global talent in frontier science.

3. Researchers’ Careers and Mobility (Section 3.1.3)

Objective: Prevent brain drain and strengthen EU competitiveness.

- **Recruitment safeguards**

Introduce binding measures ensuring that portfolios involving frontier or high-stigma research fields are evaluated on scientific quality, safeguarding career progression and tenure eligibility across Member States.

- **Talent retention**

Reduce incentives for researchers to relocate to jurisdictions perceived as more tolerant of exploratory research (e.g. the US, China).

- **Social security and mobility**

Advance binding measures on open-ended contracts, equal social security coverage, EU recruitment templates, automatic recognition of qualifications, streamlined visa procedures, and portability of researcher status across Member States.

4. Free Circulation of Knowledge and Communication (Section 3.2.2)

Objective: Counter the chilling effect of self-censorship.

- **Protected scientific communication**

Enforce the Charter’s public engagement principle by protecting researchers’ right to communicate findings on unconventional topics without institutional censorship or reputational sanction.

- **FAIR data implementation**

Ensure that stigma cannot justify data silos. Non-sensitive observational data (e.g. aerospace or sensor data) should be Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable, enabling cross-border scientific analysis in line with the Fifth Freedom.



5. Research Security and International Cooperation (Section 3.4)

Objective: Balance security concerns with openness.

- **Harmonisation of research security**
Reduce systemic risk created by divergent national security regimes.
- **Dual-use data framework**
Apply the principle “*as open as possible, as closed as necessary*” to allow civilian scientists to analyse sensitive sensor and operational data through:
 - Tiered secure access for trusted civilian researchers;
 - Data decoupling to allow analysis of signatures while redacting sensitive geospatial or defence-related context.
- **Security vs. stigma safeguard**
Ensure that reputational risk alone cannot justify blanket denial of access to funding, data, or research infrastructure.
- **Critical infrastructure reporting**
Harmonise reporting and security protocols for anomalous phenomena affecting critical infrastructure (e.g. nuclear energy).

6. Privacy and Witness Protection (GDPR)

Objective: Protect participants and professional safety.

- **Enhanced anonymity protocols**
Develop specific guidance for protecting witnesses and whistleblowers reporting anomalous phenomena, fully compliant with GDPR requirements on data use, reuse, storage, access, and deletion.
- **Protection from harassment**
Establish mechanisms to address professional harassment, including doxing and reputational targeting, disproportionately affecting researchers in controversial fields.

Conclusion

The ERA Act represents a critical opportunity to translate European scientific values into enforceable practice. By removing reputational bottlenecks that suppress frontier research, the EU can foster an environment of **protected curiosity**, strengthen strategic autonomy, and reinforce its position as a global leader in scientific innovation.



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This feedback on the European Research Area Act is supported and endorsed by the following scientists, civil society UAP organisations and others, who wish to underscore the importance of addressing the impact of stigma on research and innovation in Europe.



Researchers/scientists	Organisation	Country
<i>(Signed before 10 Sep)</i>		
Professor Michael Bohlander	Durham Law School, Chair in Global Law and SETI Policy	United Kingdom
Professor Marco Ciardi	Università di Firenze + CISU	Italy
Dr. Michael C. Cifone	Society for UAP Studies	USA/Germany
Dr. Francisco Mourão Corrêa	CTEC Transdisciplinary Center for Consciousness Studies ; Fernando Pessoa University	Portugal
Dr. Stavros Hatzopoulos	Faculty, Dept. of Neurosciences, Univesity of Ferrara	Italy
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Dr. Nikola Schmidt	Institute of International Relations, Charles University	Czechia
Dr. Massimo Teodorani	Ph.D. - Astrophysicist, Society for UAP Studies (USA), Scientific Coalition for UAP Studies (USA)	Italy
Dr. Beatriz Villarroel	Stockholm University, Nordic Institute of Theoretical Physics	Sweden
<i>(Signed after 10 Sep)</i>		
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Prof. Dr. Michael Schetsche	Institut für Soziologie. Universität Freiburg	Germany
Professor David Delgado Shorter	University of California Los Angeles	United States
Dr. Gerrit J. Gerwig	Utrecht University / Groningen University	The Netherlands
Douwe Bosga MA	Parapsychology Institute	The Netherlands
Professor Anders Warell	Lund University	Sweden



Others (e.g. civil society UAP organisations)	Organisation	Country
<i>(Signed before 10 Sep)</i>		
Lee Dines	Scientific Coalition for UAP Studies (SCU)	United Kingdom
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