

Fostering Research Integrity in Europe: Bringing Together EU-projects Working on Research Integrity and Research Ethics



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Context, Objectives and Methods

Capitalizing on the momentum created by the last ENRIO congress in September 2023, the French Office for Research Integrity (Ofis) supported by the European Network for Research Integrity Offices (ENRIO) organized a pre-congress session to foster collaboration and cross-pollination between EU-funded projects working on research integrity (RI) and research ethics (RE). This event aimed to encourage attendees' reflexivity on ways to improve the sharing of results between projects and to create a space for dialogue on RI/RE in the European context.

The session (2023, September 6th) brought together around 45 ENRIO members and representatives from 22 key past and current EU-projects on RI/RE. In four workshops groups (8 to 12 participants each), a specific topic was suggested for discussion:

- How to better foster collaboration between EU-projects & ENRIO;
- How to better foster compliance with the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ECoC);
- How EU-projects could better supplement the ECoC;
- Main priorities for research integrity in Europe.

The first part of the workshops was dedicated to the identification of challenges and/or blind spots. The second part was devoted to the formulation of recommendations.

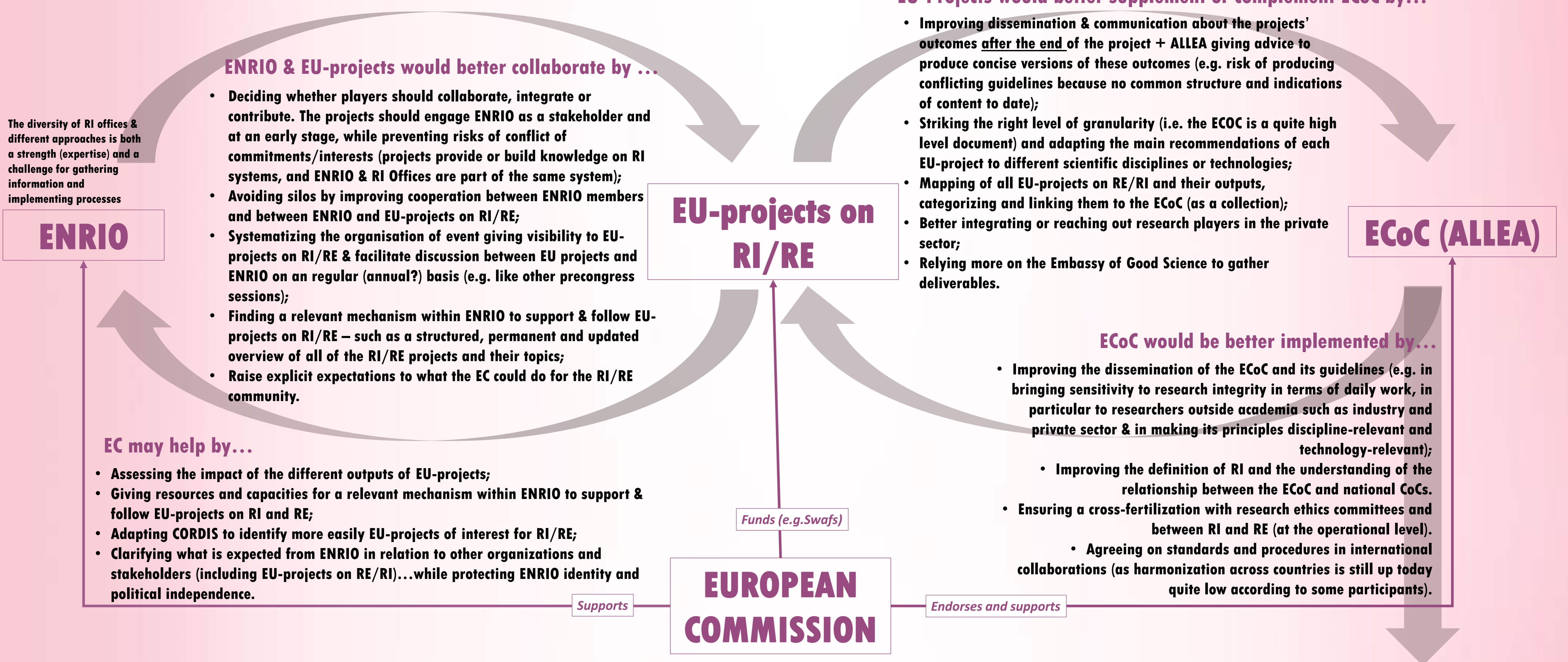
All discussions were recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed using the *Trint* software. Verbatim were analysed and synthesized, allowing to highlight Challenges and Recommendations. They fall into two main categories: structural challenges and recommendations (i.e. relating to the organization of collaboration and management of EU-projects and key institutional structures) or thematic challenges and recommendations (i.e. relating to broader issues and blind spots to address, allowing to draw up some priorities for RI & RE in Europe).

To date, there have been few opportunities to maximize efforts and mutualize knowledge from projects working on RI/RE funded by the European Commission (EC) – e.g. through the program Science with and for society (Swafs)/Widera under the umbrella of Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe. The main outcomes of this event were to bring together for the first time many of the RE/RI European players, and especially EU-projects, to think about how optimize effort, avoid *silos* and to collectively identify some of the key challenges for RI/RE in Europe.

Moreover, the event was intended to help draw up common recommendations and guidelines to be disseminated and used in the medium- and long-term to improve collaboration between:

- EU-projects on RI/RE;
- Reference European organizations such as ENRIO, All European Academies (ALLEA), or European Network of Research Ethics Committees (EUREC); and
- Institutional players (national offices, EC).

Structural Challenges and Recommendations



Some Priorities for RI/RE in Europe

Foster a broad research ethics culture – which should focus on the research culture and environment (e.g. with appropriate or alternative research assessment, reward and incentive systems conducive for RI), promote "preventing rather than only curing", and think about integrity in terms of good practices instead of just avoiding misconduct. In part, this means developing capacity building and training for all the relevant players in the research ecosystem, even those who are less targeted at the moment (research staff other than researchers, citizen scientists, researchers in industry, etc.) and assessing on the impact of these trainings.

Ensure policy relevance while being cautious about hype – keeping policies up to date by taking account of current and emerging challenges (see below); preventing the effect of "hype" (just because a subject is no longer being discussed does not mean it has been resolved, some less 'sexy' subjects could be forgotten or more difficult to identify, etc.); align political priorities with research realities.

Enhance cross-institutional, cross-cultural & cross-country collaboration – by improving communication on RI/RE standards (which may be different, especially for non-EU countries) and on misconduct cases (by clarifying the role of the different institutions involved: who handles the case, what information to share, etc.); by ensuring fairness of sanctions (which differ from one institution to another, within the same country or in different countries). Foster sensitive harmonization and convergence of guidelines (i.e. not a "one size fits all" but taking into account legitimate particularities, and including usually marginalized actors).

Engage stakeholders (from different disciplines) – in the co-construction of shared policies through a dialogue on RI/RE to promote a common culture of integrity and commonly accepted operating procedures. Standards must stem from the research community itself, involving (moral) deliberation and "getting all disciplines on board".

Make RI/RE more (positively) visible – rise public attention and awareness (not only with misconduct scandals, and with more transparency on cases management) and improve communication with policy makers and people outside the RI/RE community – this would encourage institutional, national and financial support, especially for RI/RE committees.

"There are blind spots for everybody outside this environment. So people, even in the ministries, they do not know the intricate details of what research integrity is. They equate it with misconduct. Automatically. And then, it's all bad publicity and they're afraid and they don't want to touch it unless there's a scandal. So for me, the blind spot is how the research integrity, ethics and open science community can actually bring this discussion higher up so they can get support." – one participant

"So all this needs money to be established. Some institutions and countries have to realize that integrity and ethics is not something that comes for free. It does not have to be expensive, but they need to allocate support to the Ethics and Integrity committees because they work most of the times after their morning job. Right? It's an additional task that sometimes is not recognized and also that we have research managers in most of our institutions or people that run the committees and they need to be supported." – one participant

"A general gap, at least in my view, seems to be to really spell out the research integrity implications and good practices, especially in humanities and social sciences [...] with a risk being that approaches that do make a lot of sense for the sciences are used in fields where that don't apply to the same extent. [...] You have to work with these communities to find out what the practical operational implications of open science and reproducibility in these disciplines are, otherwise you impose something on them that they will neither like nor endorse, and that will fail to have an impact." – one participant

Ex. of Identified Current and Emerging Challenges:

- Addressing the implications of artificial intelligence for RI/RE (clarifying how to use it responsibly and what constitutes misconduct);
- Ensuring the security of research while preserving open science and international collaboration;
- Better considering the environmental impact of research;
- Avoiding gender or racial bias in research planning and protecting research sovereignty of low- and middle-income countries.

