



Ad Astra

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Ad Astra association's response to the "Call for Evidence" on the EU Life Sciences Strategy

Ad Astra www.ad-astra.ro is an association of Romanian researchers from around the world. While our main focus is on science policy in Romania, we respond to this consultation in the broader context of European research policy and from our experience as researchers embedded in the Romanian and international scientific environment.

We appreciate the recognition in your preamble that research itself is a key component of life sciences policy. However, this recognition is not clearly reflected in the stated objectives or target groups of the consultation.

We believe that for European life sciences to develop meaningfully in the future, research must be explicitly prioritized. It must be independently monitored and funded according to its true objective: the advancement of knowledge. Without such clarity, research risks being overshadowed by other activities, and researchers themselves may be attracted to more profitable but less fundamental roles. Infrastructure and innovation funding alone are not enough—there is no research without researchers.

Without sustained investment in real research, Europe risks becoming a second-tier player—relying on discoveries made elsewhere and imitating external innovation. This is a pattern we know well from Romania's past before 1989 and, to some extent, from its present. We need to protect researchers and the research ecosystem if we are to understand the real impact of new technologies and policies on health, biology and the environment.

In addition, research capacity must be distributed across all countries and regions. Otherwise, populations and broader systems will remain disconnected. This is particularly critical in the life sciences, which by their very nature deal with variability-of environments,

species, genetics, pathologies, and responses.

Countries like Romania need more effective support. Current EU instruments have failed to prevent the deterioration of the Romanian research system, including in the life sciences. This trend diverges sharply from the overall EU trajectory, as evidenced by the European Innovation Scoreboard and international academic rankings.

We therefore call for an independent, external evaluation of the Romanian research system—something that the national authorities have not been able to provide. This evaluation should be part of a broader review of European research ecosystems, carried out outside national administrative structures. It should assess the quality of scientific outputs, the mechanisms that led to them, and the broader social, economic and cultural context in which the system operates.

We also believe that Romania needs a more tailored set of EU actions, adapted to its specific societal conditions. Generic instruments such as the Widening Participation Programmes or Policy Support Facilities are often ineffective or inaccessible in practice.

A key problem undermining Romanian research is the systematic conflation of research with other activities—such as innovation, production, teaching or clinical care. These may be important in their own right, but they should not absorb funding and resources intended for actual research. When research is merged in name but ignored in substance, researchers are pushed into other, non-research roles.

We believe that your strategy should explicitly address this issue, both at EU and national level. One way forward is to call for the strict application of OECD and System of National Accounts (SNA) criteria in the accounting and monitoring of research activities, from high-level policy to institutional implementation.

We hope that this contribution will be taken into account in the elaboration of the EU Life Sciences Strategy. A robust and equitable approach to research—one that acknowledges regional disparities and supports fundamental science—is essential for the long-term resilience and competitiveness of the European Research Area.

Sincerely,

On behalf of the Ad Astra members.

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