



ERA CHAIRS PROJECTS IN CZECHIA WORKHOP

24 MARCH 2026, PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC

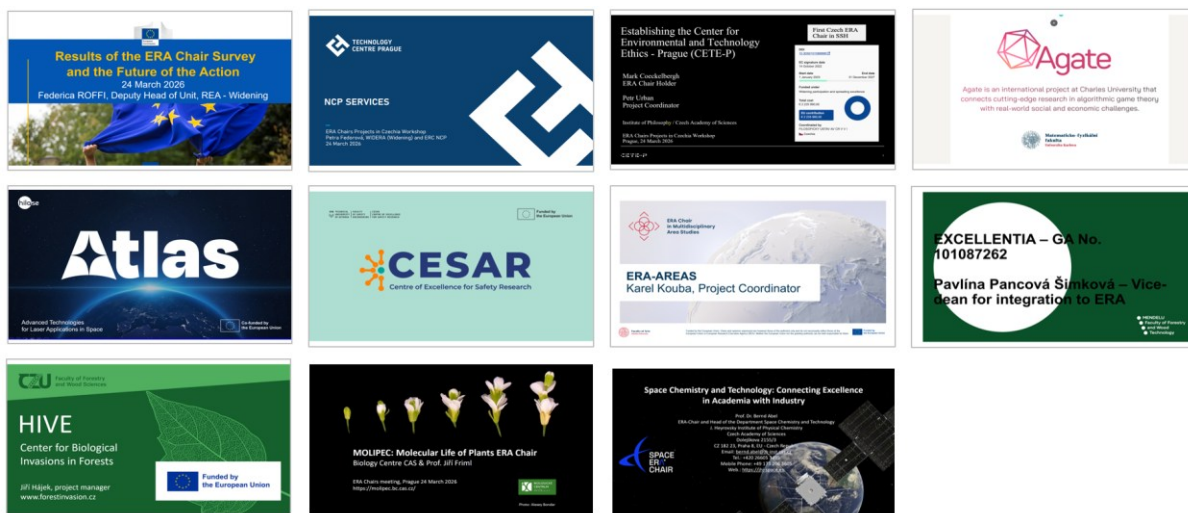
An afternoon workshop on **ERA Chairs Widening projects** was held on 24 March 2026 at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Organised by the [CETE-P](#) project team – led by the Coordination Team (Petr Urban and Marie Kolářová) – the workshop aimed to facilitate the exchange of best practices among the nine Horizon Europe ERA Chair projects within the Czech cluster. These included: **CETE-P, AGATE, ATLAS, CESAR, ERA-AREAS, EXCELLENTIA, HIVE, MOLIEP** and **SPACE**.

The workshop began with welcoming remarks from the CETE-P Coordinator Petr Urban and ERA Chair holder Mark Coeckelbergh, followed by an opening session led by Federica Roffi (REA), who outlined the key elements of FP10 in the context of Widening and discussed the future of the ERA Chairs Action. She also referred to the outcomes of the recent ERA Chairs surveys, which were administered to ERA Chairs coordinators and holders involved in ongoing projects (a presentation summarising the key results was made available to participants.)

Representatives from nine Czech ERA Chair projects under Horizon Europe then shared their experiences and best practices, marking an important milestone in harmonisation efforts. The key takeaways from the workshop are summarised below.

Additionally, Petra Fedorová (Czech National Contact Widening) presented the core services offered by the NCP and explained how projects could be supported in the most effective manner.

Link to the drive with presentations and photos from the event: [\[Here\]](#)



Presentation slides from the workshop



ERA Chairs Projects in Czechia workshop at the Institute of Philosophy CAS premises

Key messages from the ERA Chairs Projects in Czechia workshop

1. Structural & Institutional Impacts

Common Institutional Changes Across Projects

- **Grant Offices & Research Support Units:**
 - Most projects established dedicated grant offices (e.g., ATLAS, AGATE, CESAR, EXCELLENTIA, HIVE) to improve proposal writing, EU funding acquisition, and project management. (e.g., AGATE hired a grant specialist who helped secure a Staff Exchanges (SE) project with Princeton, Columbia, and NYU & EXCELLENTIA (Mendel University) introduced data management plans (DMPs) as standard for internal grants, aligning with Horizon Europe requirements).



- **HR Reforms & Talent Management:**

- New HR policies: Revised evaluation/promotion criteria (e.g., CETE-P introduced a new attestation system for researchers and facilitated collaboration between HR departments across Czech Academy of Sciences).
- Talent retention programmes: ATLAS (Highlight Centre) launched a “Middle Management Academy” and high-potential employee programmes. MOLIPPEC (Biology Centre) introduced tenure-track positions with regular assessments (every 2 years) by an International Advisory Board (IAB).
- Gender balance efforts: AGATE (algorithmic game theory) reported a higher number of female than male students in seminars (unusual for maths/CS). EXCELLENTIA noted more female PhD students than male, though core teams remained male-dominated (common in STEM fields like laser physics/forestry).

- **Open Science & Data Stewardship:**

- Mandatory open-access policies (e.g., CETE-P struggled with EU-compatible journals in the field of philosophy, but adopted Zenodo repositories).
- Dedicated data stewards: EXCELLENTIA hired a data steward to manage forest ecosystem data (critical after a 2024 storm destroyed 50% of annual wood growth). HIVE (Forest Invasion Synthesis Centre) included a data steward to comply with EU open-science rules.

- **Internationalisation & Language Policies:** Several projects made efforts to internationalise their teams and to make further use of the English language

- English as the working language: EXCELLENTIA made internal grant applications English-only (despite resistance). Deans’ notes/presentations were translated into English (e.g., Mendel University).
- Onboarding for international hires: CESAR (Technical University Ostrava) created tax/legal support for foreign researchers (e.g., Italian employees). MOLIPPEC used on-site consultations at top EU institutions (e.g., Austria, Germany) to improve HR practices.

- **New Departments/Centres:** ERA-AREAS (Charles University) established a Centre for Multidisciplinary Area Studies (approved by Academic Senate in 2026). ATLAS (space lasers) built on a prior Teaming project to create a Space Laser Technologies Team. HIVE adopted the synthesis centre model (rare in Europe; only 5 similar centres exist, mostly in the US).



- Efforts were also made to increase collaboration with **Industry & Public Sector:**
 - AGATE collaborated with the Czech Police (logistics optimisation). ATLAS partnered with ESA and Czech/Slovak space companies for satellite laser tech. EXCELLENTIA worked with MEPs on forest policy and UNESCO on sustainability debates.

2. Research Group Leader (RGL) Contracts & Permanency

Challenges & Solutions

- **Legal Barriers:**
 - Czech law typically limits permanent contracts to associate professors (3-year renewable terms).
 - Exceptions made: CESAR: RGL hired on a permanent contract after negotiations with university management (required financial guarantees). EXCELLENTIA: RGL granted Czech professorship (bypassing habilitation via rector's exemption). MOLIPPEC: Tenure-track with IAB assessments (no full permanency; performance-based extensions). CETE-P: hired on a permanent contract as the CAS is not limited by the Czech legislation for universities.
- **Institutional Resistance:**
 - Fairness concerns: Local researchers resent special contracts for ERA Chairs and RGLs (e.g., "Why do they get permanency when we don't?").
 - Workarounds: ATLAS: RGL on 12-year contract (standard for CAS, but rare for new hires). AGATE: 3 permanent positions planned (competition in Year 3; requires adjusting university rules).
 - Mobility & Part-Time Roles: HIVE: Half the team based in the US (part-time contracts; flexible arrangements for travel). ERA-AREAS: RGL commutes between Leipzig and Prague (dual affiliation).

3. Societal & Regional Impacts

- **Public Engagement:** EXCELLENTIA: "Science Caravan" (mobile lab) and post-calamity forest research (media coverage). ERA-AREAS: Expert commentary in Czech media (e.g., Latin America, Middle East crises). CETE-P: Art-science collaborations (e.g., water-use installation for AI ethics).

- **Policy Influence:** AGATE: Police logistics optimisation (national rollout planned). EXCELLENTIA: Forest management policies (post-2024 storm reforms). CESAR: Hydrogen safety standards (aligned with the EU Green Deal).
- **Networking & Knowledge Transfer:** CETE-P: Visegrad Summer School in Environmental Philosophy (rotating SSH event). Synthesis Centre Consortium (HIVE's cost-sharing model for working groups). MOLIPPEC advisory board (7 international experts; paid roles).

4. Key Challenges Highlighted

- **Recruitment:** Difficulty hiring women (e.g., ATLAS has 1 female in a 6-person team).
- **EU Compliance:** Open-access journals: Some top-tier journals incompatible with Horizon Europe rules (e.g., philosophy/SSH). Data management: New requirement for DMPs in all proposals (e.g., EXCELLENTIA trained faculty).
- **Sustainability Post-Funding:** Grant dependency: Newly established research units rely on follow-up EU/ESA grants to retain staff. Institutional absorption: Permanent positions require long-term budget commitments (rare in Czech academia).
- **Cultural Shifts:** Open science: Resistance to preprint culture (e.g., biology/forestry). Interdisciplinarity: ERA-AREAS struggled to merge linguistics and social sciences.





Conclusions and follow-ups

The workshop produced key recommendations to enhance ERA Chairs projects and maximise their institutional impact. Host institutions were encouraged to implement flexible HR policies, including waiving habilitation requirements for ERA Chair holders and Research Group Leaders, and to establish shared grant offices to streamline administrative processes. The adoption of tenure-track models with rigorous performance reviews was also identified as a best practice to ensure long-term academic excellence.

At the EU and REA level, participants urged greater clarity on permanency rules to align with national laws, while proposing an expansion of the Seal of Excellence to bolster post-project sustainability. Additionally, there was strong support for fostering synthesis centres in widening countries to strengthen research collaboration and innovation.

Overall, the ERA Chairs workshop proved to be a valuable platform for the ERA Chairs community, harmonising practices, and providing actionable feedback to refine Widening-related policies and programmes.



ERA Chairs Projects in Czechia Workshop

Date: 24 March 2026
Time: 14:30–17:00
Venue: Academic Conference Center, Husova 4a, Prague 1

Time	Duration	Topic	Responsible
14:30	10'	Welcome, opening remarks and participants' introductions	Petr URBAN, CETE-P Coordinator All
14:40	10'	REA presentation: "Results of the ERA Chairs Survey and the future of the action"	Federica ROFFI, REA Deputy Head of Unit
14:50	10'	Czech NCP presentation: "NCP Services"	Petra FEDOROVÁ, CZ NCP
15:00	10' + 5'	CETE-P presentation + Q&A	Mark COECKELBERGH, ERA Chair Holder
15:15	10' + 5'	AGATE presentation + Q&A	Martin LOEBL, Project Coordinator
15:30	10' + 5'	ATLAS presentation + Q&A	Lukáš MASOPUST, Project Coordinator
15:45	10' + 5'	CESAR presentation + Q&A	Vojtěch JANKŮL, Project Coordinator
16:00	10' + 5'	ERA-AREAS presentation + Q&A	Karel KOUBA, Project Coordinator
16:15	10' + 5'	EXCELLENTIA presentation + Q&A	Pavlna PANCOVÁ ŠIMKOVÁ, Project Manager
16:30	10' + 5'	HIVE presentation + Q&A	Jiří HÁJEK, Project Manager
16:45	10' + 5'	MOLPEEC presentation + Q&A	Tomáš MOZGA, Project Manager
17:00	10' + 5'	SPACE presentation + Q&A	Bernd ABEL, ERA Chair Holder
17:15	15'	Closing session	All
17:30		Networking and informal discussions	All

This project receives funding from the Horizon EU Framework Programme under Grant Agreement No. 101086898. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



Funded by
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and Technology Ethics - Prague