

FUND-RI Experts' Workshop

Research Infrastructure funding: needs, gaps and opportunities across Europe

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Workshop Report

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Executive summary

How Europe funds its Research Infrastructures is under renewed scrutiny. The European Research Area Policy Agenda 2025–2027 and the European Strategy on Research and Technology Infrastructures call for more sustainable, accessible and resilient infrastructures, and the European Commission has proposed that the next Framework Programme (2028–2034) cover up to 20% of the construction costs of critical new capacities. Against this backdrop, the FUND-RI Experts' Workshop, held in Porto on 25 August 2026 under the Chatham House Rule, brought together more than 30 experts from across Europe, spanning funders, policymakers and Research Infrastructure (RI) operators, to take stock of current funding models, identify gaps and explore opportunities for improvement.

The discussions confirmed that RI funding models vary widely with infrastructure type, lifecycle stage and national context. National funding remains the backbone of RI financing, with EU funding playing a complementary role. Across models, participants identified a consistent set of challenges: limited predictability of funding, fragmented funding streams, high administrative burden, and persistent difficulty in financing operations, maintenance, upgrades, staff and international access over the long term. These pressures are particularly acute for distributed RIs, where funding responsibilities are shared across central hubs, national nodes and host institutions.

Participants highlighted the need for more multiannual and lifecycle-based funding, clearer allocation of responsibilities across the EU, national and regional levels, and better alignment between funding instruments and RI needs. There was no consensus on whether RI funding should become more centralised or remain diversified. Participants broadly supported, however, stronger coordination, better synergies between funding sources and a greater focus on consolidating and upgrading existing infrastructures.

The workshop provided key evidence and cases to guide the next phase of FUND-RI's analysis of funding gaps and sustainable funding approaches. This work will draw on more than 130 interviews, further workshops and in-depth case studies across Europe, and will feed into the project's strategic recommendations and Green Paper.

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Background and purpose

Research Infrastructures depend on coordinated funding across their lifecycle, yet the way this funding is organised varies considerably across Europe. Funding sources operate under different objectives, eligibility conditions, timelines, and decision-making processes, making it difficult to assess how they interact, which functions and costs they cover, and where recurrent gaps arise. These challenges are particularly significant for distributed infrastructures, where responsibilities and funding are shared across central hubs, national nodes, and host institutions.

These questions are especially timely in the current EU policy context. The European Research Area (ERA) Policy Agenda 2025-2027 and the European Strategy on Research and Technology Infrastructures place renewed emphasis on the sustainability, accessibility and resilience of infrastructures, the long-term support of critical capacities, and a more integrated ecosystem approach. Relevant actions include mapping funding sources at national, regional and EU levels, promoting synergies among complementary instruments, and mobilising public and private investment. Looking ahead to Horizon Europe 2028-2034, the European Commission has proposed covering up to 20% of the construction costs of critical new capacities.

It is against this background that FUND-RI (Funding and Investment Strategies for Research Infrastructures), a Coordination and Support Action funded under Horizon Europe, is building a comparative evidence base on how Research Infrastructures are funded across Europe. The Experts' Workshop was an early milestone in this work, designed to test the project's analytical approach against the experience of those who fund, govern and operate infrastructures.

Objectives

The workshop aimed to:

- take stock of the diversity of Research Infrastructure (RI) funding models and funding streams across Europe;
- examine how current arrangements respond to different RI missions, functions, scales and lifecycle stages;
- identify structural challenges, funding gaps and sources of complexity;
- compare the perspectives of RI managers, funders and policymakers; and
- explore opportunities to improve predictability, complementarity and coordination of funding.

Building on these objectives, the workshop also provided an opportunity to validate the FUND-RI methodology, identify relevant cases for further analysis, and inform the next stages of work within the project.

Structure

The FUND-RI Experts' Workshop brought together a select group of RI funders, policymakers and infrastructure representatives in Porto on 25 August 2026. Conceived as an interactive, peer-to-peer exchange, it combined short expert contributions based on concrete cases with World Café discussions, giving participants the opportunity to share experiences, perspectives and examples in smaller groups.

The workshop was structured around three thematic sessions:

- Session 1 took stock of the diversity of the RI funding landscape and the different funding configurations currently operating in practice.
- Session 2 examined the main complexities and gaps affecting RI funding from both infrastructure and funder perspectives.
- Session 3 focused on identifying opportunities to strengthen RI funding models, foster synergies and reduce complexity.

This report mirrors the structure of the workshop. In each session, expert contributions provided a starting point for World Café discussions guided by a set of targeted questions.

Participants

The workshop brought together more than 30 experts: funders, policymakers and RI operators from across Europe, covering a wide range of infrastructures, from large single-site facilities to the hubs and nodes of distributed infrastructures. This mix of backgrounds allowed the discussion to reflect the diversity of RI models and funding arrangements across European, national and institutional levels, while identifying structural gaps and areas for further investigation.

Chatham House Rule

The workshop was held under the Chatham House Rule to encourage participants to speak openly about their practical experiences, including funding constraints, institutional challenges and approaches. This helped generate candid insights into how Research Infrastructure funding arrangements operate in practice and provided evidence to inform the next stages of the FUND-RI project. In accordance with the Rule, this report does not reveal the identity or affiliation of those providing information: contributions are presented thematically and without attribution, and discussion summaries reflect the range of views expressed rather than a consensus position of participants or of the FUND-RI consortium.

Session 1. Status Quo: Diversity of the Research Infrastructure Funding Landscape

Insights from the presentations

Session 1 examined the diversity of current RI funding arrangements through two contrasting cases. The first concerned a very large, single-site European Research Infrastructure, whose funding model requires participating countries to share substantial construction and operating costs. The second focused on a distributed European Research Infrastructure, where funding and responsibilities are divided among the central legal entity, central facilities and nationally funded facilities.

The first case illustrates the complexity of agreeing and sustaining cost-sharing arrangements for a very large, single-site European Research Infrastructure across different phases of its lifecycle.

The infrastructure represents a total investment of approximately €3.3 billion, with annual operations expected to cost around €200 million. The host countries financed approximately half of the construction costs, while other participating countries contributed the remaining share, with around 70% of those contributions provided in kind. The funding balance changes significantly between construction and operation: the host countries covered around 50% of construction costs, while their expected operational contribution falls to around 15%, with other members expected to cover most of the operating budget.

Negotiating these shares proved demanding: although the infrastructure's statutes envisage operational contributions proportional to scientific use, negotiations over construction and operational costs took several years, contributing to delays and reduced research capacity.

The case showed that slow and uncertain funding decisions can lead to underfunding, construction delays and reduced scientific output, with consequences for Europe's competitiveness. It also raised the question of whether more general and transparent principles for sharing capital and operating costs could shorten negotiations.

The contribution stressed that funding should cover the full lifecycle rather than treating construction and operation separately. Multiannual commitments could provide greater predictability, combined with periodic performance reviews to retain flexibility. Clearer and more equitable burden-sharing models were also advocated, with European funding focused particularly on activities that generate European added value.

The second case concerned a distributed RI whose financial model operates across three levels: a central legal entity, central facilities and national facilities. Its implementation phase, representing an investment of approximately €700 million, was financed entirely by hosting countries. For operations, around 30% of the budget of the central entity and central facilities is covered through membership contributions, while approximately 70% is provided by the countries hosting those activities. Membership contributions are collected centrally and redistributed across more than 60 units and sub-units. National facilities, by contrast, are operated entirely through national funding.

The case highlighted both benefits and challenges of a distributed financial model. Project funding, particularly from the European Commission, supports further infrastructure development and plays an increasing role in financing physical access. Distributing core activities across several research-performing organisations reduces dependence on individual institutions, while making financial management more complex, as payment delays can affect central facilities. Very small units may also face long-term sustainability and recruitment challenges. While initial implementation was fully financed by hosting countries, future major upgrades and enlargement could not rely on the same approach.

Main messages emerging from participants

Participants mapped the funding models and configurations currently supporting RIs across Europe, drawing on their own infrastructures as illustrative cases.

A wide diversity of funding models coexists

The models discussed range from top-down, single-sited constructions to bottom-up, distributed infrastructures built around national or regional contributions, membership fees and EU project funding. Membership-fee-based ERIC models are common, with infrastructures spanning several countries and local nodes: national contributions typically cover the ERIC secretariat and networking, while EU funding covers access and related activities. Structural funds support RIs both nationally and across borders; one example cited was a beamline hosted in one country yet funded through another Member State's EU structural funds allocation.

New RIs currently focus their efforts on Horizon Europe to gain a foothold, and the ESFRI process was identified as having a positive impact on national funding decisions. A recurring distinction was drawn between the construction phase, generally the more heavily funded and negotiated stage, and the operating phase, where funding logic and incentives shift substantially once a facility exists.

National, regional and EU funding play distinct, complementary roles

National funding was widely described as the backbone of RI financing, yet one largely locked into fixed costs relating to personnel, energy and premises. It typically does not extend to international access, and offers only limited support for development, training and education. EU funding was described as playing a balancing role across several dimensions: supporting researchers from countries that cannot otherwise fund international access, facilitating participation by lower-R&D-intensity countries, avoiding duplication between states, and providing a common platform for cross-border utilisation. Legal and organisational conditions, particularly State aid rules, were also highlighted, with calls for greater clarity, for adaptation in some cases, and for adequate dedicated vehicles for commercial service provision.

On regional funding, participants noted that it is often nominally structural while in practice flowing through individual projects rather than dedicated regional budgets.

Industry and private contributions vary enormously by RI type

Reported industry cost-shares ranged widely, from 30–50% of operating costs at some specialised facilities to around 3% at large-scale infrastructures more broadly; in some cases, industry involvement is capped at 20% for State aid reasons. Where industry revenue is kept low, this was described as a potential strategic choice rather than a shortcoming: it allows infrastructures to stay proactive on innovation and maintain long-term relationships with industry, rather than maximising short-term income. Other private sources mentioned included regional and philanthropic foundations, which tend to prefer purely regional investment, and lottery-type mechanisms distributing smaller, ad hoc amounts for innovative proposals.

Loans were raised as an existing yet still marginal instrument. A small number of large infrastructures have secured loans from the European Investment Bank to help fund construction, and participants agreed that lending institutions have capital available and are actively looking for suitable use cases, though views differed on how promising this avenue is (see Session 3).

Cost models and governance arrangements differ sharply by infrastructure type

Tiered charging models were described, for example distinguishing internal or domestic users, charged at internal cost; external users from partner countries, charged cost plus an overhead; and users from outside the funding partnership, charged full cost. Contrasting philosophies were noted for computing infrastructure: some models charge users a share of capital costs, while others provide free, peer-reviewed access with no direct charge, reflecting different views on how computing access should be allocated. Full-cost accounting, including depreciation, is used by some infrastructures, though participants noted it is administratively demanding: tracking every flow of money in effect

requires a dedicated financial function, and even where staff time is meant to be recorded against activities for costing purposes, in practice only a small share of staff does so consistently.

Distributed infrastructures face distinct structural dynamics

Distributed RIs often serve a broader community than the member states funding them, which was repeatedly cited as a source of tension over what the money is meant to cover. A related case was raised in the environmental domain, where infrastructures that opened free access to their data saw private companies build commercially successful applications on that data without the originating infrastructures capturing any of the value, a gap participants saw as worth addressing. Several participants questioned whether a single lifecycle framing, from design through construction and operation to decommissioning, fits distributed infrastructures at all, since they typically lack an equivalent construction phase and evolve differently from single-sited facilities. Views differed on flexibility: some argued that being bottom-up makes it easier for distributed infrastructures to change direction when needed, while others noted that single-sited infrastructures can and do change course as well.

Session 2. Complexities and Gaps: Challenges from RI and Funder Perspectives

Insights from the presentations

Session 2 examined the practical complexities and gaps affecting Research Infrastructure (RI) funding through the experiences of different infrastructures and institutional settings. The presentations focused in particular on the predictability and continuity of funding, the financing of operational and lifecycle costs, and the difficulties created by differences in national funding arrangements.

Drawing on the experience of a national node within a distributed RI, the first presentation highlighted the difficulty of sustaining operations where regular national operational funding is essentially absent beyond national contributions to ERICs. European and regional programmes can finance equipment, facility upgrades, service development, training and access, yet do not provide an equivalent predictable stream for continued operation, maintenance and scientific competitiveness. Maintenance contracts and technical support are among the first areas placed at risk when resources are insufficient, affecting service continuity and the ability to commit to future activities. In some cases, funds intended for other purposes have been redirected to keep the infrastructure functioning, a risky solution that can prevent planned activities and jeopardise future funding. Regular national operational funding, complemented by more predictable INFRASERV support for access, was identified as essential.

From the perspective of a distributed RI comprising facilities in several countries, the second presentation illustrated the challenges created by differing funding sources and funding horizons. Funding relies primarily on the organisations supporting the individual facilities, complemented by membership fees and, in some instances, contributions to running costs. European funding remains uncertain because it depends on the availability of suitable calls and therefore cannot provide a sustainable basis for long-term operations. Funding horizons also vary considerably across the

participating facilities: one has secured ten-year national funding, another negotiates its funding annually, and a third has at least seven years of guaranteed funding. Sustainable medium- to long-term funding adjusted for inflation was identified as a key need, alongside continued support for transnational access, particularly for users from developing countries.

Through the example of a large, single-site European facility, the third presentation examined the pressures associated with continuous operation and upgrading. Its model is relatively stable, with approximately €100 million in core contributions from members and associates and a further €30 million from external sources, including industry, European and national grants, and foundations. Rising personnel, energy and inflation-related costs place growing pressure on a broadly stable core budget. Because personnel and recurrent operations account for most expenditure, limited resources remain for continuous capital investment and instrument renewal, which may require exceptional one-off contributions. External funding plays an important complementary role, while differing timelines, eligibility rules and reporting requirements add complexity to long-term planning and investment.

Focusing on a university-managed portfolio of approximately 40 RIs, the final presentation highlighted the challenge of financial sustainability where revenue depends partly on utilisation while a substantial share of costs remains fixed. Detailed cost analyses are used to assess the financial balance of each infrastructure. When use declines, fee income falls while many operating costs remain unchanged, creating a larger gap that must be absorbed by the infrastructure or host institution. The case underlined the importance of aligning capacity with demand. It also identified maintenance as a significant long-term cost and noted that investment in new technologies, although necessary to sustain use and relevance, can be difficult to finance.

Main messages emerging from participants

Structural mismatches between needs and funding

Underfunding from the outset slows implementation and forces compromises on which technologies get built, leaving a persistent gap between what the scientific community wants and what an infrastructure delivers. Smaller facilities were said to lack intermediary functions, such as dedicated user-support staff, that larger infrastructures can afford, limiting their ability to translate funding into effective user access. Software development was also cited as a persistent user demand that RIs have struggled to meet within current funding.

Single-sited infrastructures generally have more freedom to choose which instruments to build during construction; many distributed infrastructures, by contrast, were not designed with access provision in mind and lack dedicated funding for it. Industry usage of RIs is politically constrained in ways that vary sharply by country: one national cap of 5% was cited, well below a European ambition figure of around 20%, pointing to a gap between EU-level ambition and what is permitted nationally. A tension was raised between an industry mindset of protecting proprietary work and the RI ethos of openness, which can limit industry uptake of RI services; this was itself contested, with some participants arguing that RIs may not be as open in practice as they present themselves to be.

Predictability and continuity as the dominant source of risk

The single most cited source of uncertainty was the need to reapply for support annually, rather than being able to plan around a secured multi-year commitment. Having to keep several funding streams alive simultaneously, rather than drawing on one central pool, was repeatedly named as a significant administrative and operational burden. Predictability concerns extend to operating costs: reliance on monopoly suppliers in niche service markets, and volatile costs such as energy, were flagged as risks that current instruments do not clearly address. Whether the EU should offer financial instruments such as insurance or contingency mechanisms for this kind of volatility, or whether it should remain a national responsibility, was left as an open question.

Participants also noted that the effort of writing a funding application is itself a real cost, independent of whether the application succeeds, an operational risk inherent to competitive, application-based funding. Grant-chasing can create mission drift, diverting staff time and attention from an infrastructure's original responsibilities. Some funders' expectations and performance indicators, such as jobs created or companies spun out, were criticised as unrealistic for this kind of infrastructure and poorly matched to how RIs generate value. The risk that a member country can withdraw from an infrastructure at any time without notice was also highlighted, with consequences potentially including halted training activities, layoffs, cuts to innovation support and, in some cases, gaps in shared datasets.

Needing a new project name and identity for each EU funding round was seen as undermining brand recognition among researchers and industry, and as contributing to a broader lack of awareness that a given infrastructure exists. Several participants also noted the burden of applying to three or four separate funding sources rather than a single, larger pool, and how including multiple infrastructures under one grant multiplies administrative layers.

Human resources emerged as a critical, cross-cutting vulnerability

Five-year funding cycles were widely seen as too short to support stable team retention; in some countries, restrictions on short-term contracts force periodic layoffs regardless of scientific need. Budgets were described as generally insufficient to cover human-resource needs, and partners often struggle to assemble the multidisciplinary teams that modern RI operations require. For distributed infrastructures specifically, staff retention was named as the single biggest problem in an informal prioritisation exercise: without continuity of staff, who may turn over roughly every two years, a distributed infrastructure can become non-functional. Long-term planning was named as the top problem overall, seen by many as the root cause underlying most of the others; operational continuity and innovation capacity, linked to scientific quality, were also raised.

Gaps in the evidence base

Questions were raised about whether communication between RIs and funders is currently sufficient to support good decisions. Some participants argued that investment decisions today are not sufficiently evidence-based and remain heavily shaped by national politics. Measured impact varies by country because political priorities differ: a technology may be a national priority in one country and not in a neighbouring one, making it harder to build a shared, evidence-based case across borders.

Demand assessment itself was flagged as needing more rigour: it should rely on careful cross-referencing between direct user feedback and national roadmap priorities to ensure the relevance of a project. Upstream consultation was raised in the same vein: users should be systematically consulted on their precise needs before facilities are built, to ensure effective targeting and avoid unnecessary overcapacity or duplication. RI experts were seen as best placed to say what research communities need, with national-level decision-makers often lacking that context. On evaluation, one case of using internal national experts to assess projects was raised as a practical model, with a suggestion to also involve external experts.

Some participants noted that regional funding can be more closely aligned with facility needs and more responsive than national funding. Others disagreed, underlining that proximity does not guarantee good decisions: a regional fund was cited as having backed a new infrastructure without realising that a similar organisation already existed nearby, money that could instead have strengthened the existing one.

Governance gaps compounding the above

Central coordinating hubs are not always aware of activity happening at node level, pointing to an information gap within some distributed infrastructures. ERICs are still administratively treated much like ordinary projects, with a reporting burden that participants felt was disproportionate to their long-term, standing nature. More engagement from national ministries, and less siloed national funding structures, were both identified as needed.

Session 3. Opportunities to Strengthen RI Funding Models, Foster Synergies and Reduce Complexity

Insights from the presentations

Session 3 explored opportunities to make Research Infrastructure funding more sustainable, better coordinated and less complex, with a focus on long-term planning, stronger links between funding sources and more adaptable funding models.

A contribution on European RI coordination presented ongoing work linked to the ERA Policy Agenda 2025–2027 and a forthcoming European infrastructure roadmap. It emphasised closer alignment between European infrastructure priorities and national funding strategies, particularly for distributed RIs whose nodes depend heavily on domestic support. Emerging orientations include reflecting node-level investments more clearly in national membership commitments and adopting a lifecycle approach that covers both capital and operational costs.

The contribution also emphasised combining long-term strategic planning with sufficient flexibility to respond to changing needs. In a context of constrained resources, stronger prioritisation and monitoring were considered necessary to direct investment towards strategically important infrastructures. Greater integration of European, national, regional and private funding instruments, together with rigorous selection criteria, was highlighted as important for avoiding unnecessary duplication. Available instruments, including the Framework Programme, cohesion funding, national investment and private resources, were said to require more integrated operation and more harmonised rules. Monitoring at European level was presented as useful both for supporting investment decisions and for identifying infrastructures experiencing structural difficulties at an early stage.

A national-infrastructure perspective highlighted the different funding logics of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Horizon Europe, which remain difficult to combine across the RI lifecycle. The former follows a territorial and regional-development logic, while the latter is based on European added value, excellence and impact.

When these systems operate separately, infrastructure investments may not connect sufficiently with European roadmaps, ERICs or wider ERA priorities, and differing application and reporting systems can hinder transitions between funding sources.

Better synergies could allow Cohesion Policy investments to contribute more directly to European objectives and facilitate the participation of ERDF-funded RIs in European access schemes and networks. Proposed measures included limited transitional operating support after construction, stronger use of existing synergy mechanisms from the investment stage, RI representation in relevant implementation structures, fewer barriers to cross-border and transnational investment, and the possibility for Member States or regions to contribute ERDF funding to European RIs in return for multiannual access and capacity-building arrangements.

A further distributed RI case showed how financing can adapt to changing needs. The infrastructure traditionally relied strongly on in-kind contributions, with each participating country making a partner facility available to the consortium. Membership fees introduced in 2024 allocate 10% to coordination and make 90% available for reinvestment in partner facilities through projects approved collectively. Funding needs were shown to evolve with consortium enlargement, growing project volumes, staff career development, priorities such as FAIR data management and new access pathways, and external pressures including inflation and energy costs.

Main messages emerging from participants

The final session examined what a more sustainable RI funding architecture could look like, including a debate on centralisation versus diversification of funding and a discussion of which new or improved instruments participants saw as realistic.

An unresolved debate: centralise or diversify?

Some participants made a case for more centralisation of funding and more direct EU involvement, particularly in funding access. It was suggested that the EU could co-fund infrastructure access directly rather than funding intermediary services, on the grounds that ensuring EU-wide access is not something national governments are mandated, or well placed, to do alone. This was linked to a coverage gap: most infrastructures currently involve around ten Member States, leaving roughly half of EU countries outside a truly EU-wide user community.

Others argued against further centralisation, out of concern that it would cause more disruption than it solved. In their view, diverse funding streams are already a reality and consolidating them is unlikely to make life easier for RIs. A regional dimension was added to this argument: centralising into a single funding source risks erasing the regional cause altogether, potentially pushing regions to pursue their own separate policies rather than continuing to contribute to shared national or European ones. Participants observed that most regions do not yet think at the European RI-funding level and tend to be protective of what they see as their own money.

Both sides agreed that regional and national coordination, where it happens, takes a long time to mature: one example cited five regions taking ten years to align, and the same slow-maturation pattern was said to apply to national-to-European coordination on roadmaps. Aligning national strategies in practice was described as very difficult.

Instruments participants saw as realistic in the near term

The European Commission's envisaged instrument covering up to 20% of construction costs was discussed. It was clarified that the instrument would be designed to be deployed late, once most other funding is already committed, to close the remaining gap rather than to seed a project from the outset. How it would be allocated if uptake proves uneven across infrastructures was left as an open question. Participants noted that it could be useful in supporting the start of negotiations between parties coming together, with questions remaining on the impact of this EU stream on RI governance.

A Norwegian national fund was cited as a positive example of a targeted gap-closing instrument: it funds investment and upgrades, without covering operating costs, helping infrastructures stay current without requiring a full renegotiation of their operating model. Tentative suggestions included a roadmap-like instrument and national plans specified under a defined EU pillar, floated as possibilities rather than developed proposals.

Blended-funding models already in use, combining several EU programmes such as research, digital and cohesion funding streams with national contributions, were pointed to as a template worth

extending to other domains. On financing instruments more broadly, views diverged. Some saw loans, following examples such as European Investment Bank lending already used by a small number of large infrastructures, as an underused tool worth exploring further, including as a way to dilute the upfront cost of construction. Others were more cautious, seeing loans as a risky option for RIs under current inflation conditions, and noted that institutions which do borrow typically do so against real estate they own or through a company representing a defined user community.

Simplification and clarity as a parallel priority to new funding

A recurring principle was that RI funding should follow needs and ideas, rather than RIs having to go where the money is, reversing today's more common dynamic. Clarity on who funds what, and at which governance level, whether EU, national or regional, was repeatedly identified as a precondition for progress, in some views more important than the availability of additional money itself. Conflicting rules between funding bodies were raised as a particular frustration, for example regional structural funds requiring money to be spent strictly within a specific territory, which sits uneasily with the transnational nature of RIs.

A guidance document or toolkit to help decision-makers navigate RI business models was proposed as a candidate output for the project's Green Paper. ESFRI's role was discussed from several angles: some participants felt its coordinating purpose is undermined when national considerations dominate, while others asked whether its remit is currently too broad and would benefit from being more concentrated. On a more positive note, the ESFRI roadmap process was credited with having already pushed national roadmaps towards more shared criteria over time, cited as evidence that convergence is achievable, even if slow.

Towards a consolidation-oriented approach within a wider R&I ecosystem

Across the session, a shift in framing was noticeable. An earlier, more expansionist approach focused on building new capacity, with capital costs largely nationally funded and infrastructures framed primarily around delivering excellent science. The current, more consolidation-oriented mindset acknowledges that funding is insufficient to sustain everything as before, calls for longer-term access funding that goes beyond individual projects, and reflects a broader move from a pure blue-sky-research framing towards a wider research-and-innovation ecosystem approach. Participants saw this shift as the backdrop against which any future funding architecture will need to be designed.

Conclusion & next steps

Open questions and evidence gaps

Participants identified several open questions and evidence gaps throughout the workshop:

- the respective responsibilities of EU, national and regional actors in funding different RI needs, including access, operations and responses to volatile operating costs;
- whether greater centralisation of RI funding would reduce complexity or whether diversified funding streams remain preferable;
- how a lifecycle approach to funding can be applied to distributed RIs, whose development and cost structures differ from those of single-sited infrastructures;
- how RI demand and impact can be assessed more systematically, including through stronger use of user feedback, national roadmap priorities and expert assessment;
- the potential role and suitability of loans and other financial instruments for RIs; and

- the design and implications of the proposed EU contribution towards the construction costs of critical new capacities, including how funding would be allocated and how it could affect RI governance.

Good practices to investigate

Several examples raised during the workshop could provide useful cases for further analysis:

- the Norwegian national funding instrument for RI investment and upgrades, which provides targeted support for infrastructure renewal without covering recurrent operating costs;
- lottery-type funding mechanisms used to distribute smaller amounts of funding to innovative proposals;
- blended-funding approaches combining different European programmes, including research, digital and cohesion funding, with national contributions;
- a distributed-RI model in which recently introduced membership fees are largely reinvested in partner facilities through projects agreed collectively;
- examples of longer-term national funding commitments, including multiannual arrangements supporting individual facilities within distributed infrastructures, which could provide evidence on the effects of greater funding predictability.

Next steps

The workshop findings will feed directly into the next stages of FUND-RI.

- Within WP2, the findings will help refine the methodological toolbox and guide the mapping and assessment of funding instruments, business models, challenges, gaps and good practices across Europe. This work will be supported by more than 130 interviews and 10 to 12 workshops with RI managers, funders, ministries and other stakeholders.
- Within WP3, the findings will support the selection of eight European case studies and three international benchmark cases to examine in greater depth. These will explore how RIs are funded in practice, including funding strategies, cost-sharing arrangements, long-term sustainability and the way different funding streams are designed and combined.

These activities will contribute to FUND-RI's wider outputs, including a systemic map of funding sources, a typology of funding streams and business models, a lifecycle cost-estimation methodology, strategic recommendations and a Green Paper. The FUND-RI consortium thanks all participants for their open and constructive contributions.

Annex 1: Agenda

Time	Agenda item
Tuesday, 25 August 2026	
08.30 – 09.00	Welcome coffee
09.00 – 09.45	Introduction, framing & project updates • Welcome & Introduction • Introduction to FUND-RI • Workshop agenda & objectives • Insights from EU policy • Roundtable of participants - short reflections about the project objectives and expected impact
09.45 – 10.45	Session 1. Status quo: taking stock of the diversity of the RI funding landscape through concrete cases • Presentations • World Café discussions
10.45 – 11.15	Coffee break
11.15 – 12.30	Session 2. Complexities and gaps: challenges from RI and funder perspectives • Presentations • World Café discussions
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch
13.30 – 14.45	Session 3. Opportunities to strengthen RI funding models, foster synergies and reduce complexity • Presentations • World Café discussions
14.45 – 15.00	Wrap-up, next steps & closing