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European Strategy Forum
on Research Infrastructures

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Panel Monitoring Report for LifeWatch ERIC

October 2024

PART A – SUMMARY AND RESULT OF THE ANALYSIS

LifeWatch ERIC stands out as Europe's only e-Science Infrastructure offering FAIR-compliant data and analytical services dedicated to biodiversity *and* ecosystem research. It effectively addresses critical biodiversity challenges through Virtual Research Environments, enhancing visibility and fostering collaboration with global institutions. As a distributed infrastructure, LifeWatch federates resources from multiple national nodes and connects to socioeconomic data sources like EMODnet. Collaborations with the SSHOC Science Cluster aim to develop interoperability standards and integrate socioeconomic variables into research. The organization also emphasizes training the next generation of scientists and strengthening ties with institutions like IPBES, thereby bolstering its socioeconomic impact.

Nevertheless, despite securing significant EU funding, LifeWatch faces challenges in translating research into actionable policy. While it boasts 88 partner institutions and a user base that includes 30% scientists, there is a need for improvements in platform usability for policy relevance. The Data Management Plan (DMP) aligns with FAIR principles but requires a more structured approach to the data lifecycle. Although LifeWatch participates in ENVRI and EOSC projects for secure data management, the financial sustainability is complicated by the current funding structure, with 15% cash and 85% in-kind contributions lacking inflation adjustments. The annual cash contribution of €2 million is insufficient without EU grants, and detailed budget figures for in-kind contributions are lacking. Furthermore, despite securing 28 EU grants, contributing to the RI's development, each brings new obligations, highlighting the necessity for improved technology transfer.

On the positive side, LifeWatch has a strong management team of 46 staff members across Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands, with established HR policies, though the team lacks gender diversity despite having a Gender Equality Plan in place. The organization regularly connects its strategic objectives to tasks through comprehensive reporting and has a robust risk management system that is regularly updated. LifeWatch is also committed to reducing its carbon footprint through remote work and energy-efficient technologies, with plans for an Environmental, Social, and Governance strategy.

Overall, LifeWatch demonstrates strong operations and receives positive feedback on its KPIs, many of which exceed targets. However, to fully realize its biodiversity research goals, the organization must enhance financial sustainability and collaboration while continuing to track trends effectively to identify challenges early.