

A new era of 3R resources and networking: the European 3R Centres

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Publication in 1959 of Russell and Burch's book, which described their concept of Replacement, Reduction and Refinement, did not initially result in a significant increase in interest in the topic. For the following 20 years, there were few centres in existence that specifically addressed the 3Rs. Early pioneers include UFAW (who commissioned their work) and FRAME (1969) in the UK, ZEBET in Germany (1989), and ECVAM at the EU's Joint Research Centre in Italy (1993).

By the early 1980s, an increasing number of research and testing facilities were experiencing attacks, often violent in nature, from animal rights groups. There was a clear need for more transparency, better communication, and clear articulation of the 3R principle in legislation.

In 1986, the first version of the EU Directive on the protection of animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes (86/609/EEC), and its counterpart from the Council of Europe (ETS 123), paved the way by including 3R-related text, and the current EU Directive (2010/63/EU) from 2013 mentions them specifically. Its requirement that all Member States should create a National Committee has also acted as a catalyst.

All these events helped stimulate the foundation of more 3R centres throughout Europe. Some were spin-offs from existing activities at an institution, with varying degrees of funding, while others were created specifically to promote the three Rs. Some 3R centres have very close relationships with their National Committee. For example, the Board members of the Danish 3R-Center also function as the Danish National Committee.

The aggression against animal facilities also prompted the development of a European umbrella organisation which would support National Consensus Platforms (NCPs) whose governing body contained representatives of all the major stakeholders in animal research: regulators, industry, academia and animal welfare. After a series of workshops, *ecopa* (European Consensus Platform on Alternatives) was founded in 2001. Although there have always been a limited number of NCPs that satisfy *ecopa's* criteria (currently there are seven), the value of quadripartite representation should not be underestimated.

A formal network of 3R Centres, EUR3Rnet, has been established, now with over 30 members. EUR3Rnet does not yet have its own website, but the Norwegian NCP, Norecopa, has created an interactive map of global 3R centres, with descriptions and links to their websites: <https://norecopa.no/global3R>

A consensus statement from EU3Rnet, signed by 25 members, was published recently¹. The network is in the process of writing papers describing the activity of its members, and is applying for a COST Action. The network has defined the following areas as priority issues: Dissemination, Education, Implementation, Scientific Quality/Translatability and Ethics.

¹ <https://www.altex.org/index.php/altex/article/view/2143>