European Animal
Research Association

EARA study on EU-based websites 2024

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EARA study of EU-based websites to assess institutional openness in animal research (2024)

(A report to the European Commission)

Contents

About EARA

The European Animal Research Association (EARA) was set up in 2014 to improve the openness and transparency of communication about the use of animals in research in the biomedical sector in Europe. EARA now has more than 170 member institutions, including universities, learned societies and associations, research bodies, pharmaceutical companies, as well as breeders and suppliers to the sector, both in Europe (143 in the EU) and worldwide.

Among EARA's strategies is our work with national networks of the life sciences, to help set up and co-ordinate Transparency Agreements where the signatory institutions, both public and private, commit to being open and consistent with the public on their communication about the scientific and ethical justifications for animal research.

Introduction

As a communications and advocacy organisation, representing the biomedical and life sciences sector across Europe, the central mission of EARA is to create an environment where the public is aware of the continued need for, and benefits of, the humane use of animals in scientific research.

An important part of the strategy to achieve this is to encourage institutions that carry out, or are associated with animal research, to be open and transparent to the public about their research activities.

Among other forms of communication, institutional websites are a valuable tool for informing members of the public, media, decision makers and regulators about the use of animals in research and the contribution of animal research to biomedical science. Websites can also highlight the importance that the life sciences place on animal welfare, as well as the significance of the 3Rs principles (Replacement, Reduction and Refinement) and progress towards using non-animal methods.

This is now the third edition of the *EARA study of EU-based websites* – the first EARA study was in 2018 and was repeated in 2020 – and this has proved an effective way to encourage greater transparency in animal research, in line with the recommendations made in Section 3 of the 2017 Review of Directive 2010/63/EU on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes, as well as a useful benchmark to evaluate the progress of openness and transparency on animal research within each EU Member State.

Using six different assessment categories, that we believe are the basis of good website content on animal research, the study also identifies areas of good practice, and those which need improvement, while highlighting exemplary case studies for other institutions to follow. It also helps EARA to provide guidance on best practice to its own member organisations (which cover 24 countries across Europe – 19 countries in the EU) and the wider biomedical sector worldwide. The findings of the study, conducted on EU websites in 2023, are now presented in this report.

There are some significant differences in the present EARA study compared to the two previous editions. Following the departure of the UK from the EU, this is the first time that assessments for UK institutions are not included in the study. Additionally, stricter criteria have now been introduced into the assessment categories. This is because, when EARA first began assessing websites, back in 2017, the presence of good quality institutional website content on animal research was scarce, but since then significant improvements have meant that it is possible to raise the benchmark for all six categories (see also the individual category assessments for more details). EARA is now confident that, if an institution can reach the required standard in all categories, they will be providing the public with the comprehensive information they need to make informed opinions on the use of animals in biomedical research. We also intend to continue using these new criteria in our future website studies so as to make meaningful comparisons.

As with the previous studies, the present study was completed with the support of the EU Commission, which agreed to circulate an EARA online survey to all EU Competent Authorities, requesting that this be distributed to all relevant institutions. The online survey asked detailed

questions on the content of any websites run by an institution involved with animal research; each response subsequently provided invaluable additional information to the EARA study, and we would like to thank the Commission for its support. These replies complemented the work of the EARA researchers, who visited the websites of every individual institution, that conducts or supports biomedical research using animals within the sector, to evaluate their levels of openness,

Assessment criteria

As discussed in the introduction, while the six categories for assessment remain the same – as an indicator of a website's level of openness towards animal research – this study now has stricter criteria for each category. These categories are in order of importance, with the most essential information that should be available listed first.

1. Statement on animal research – Does the website have a recognisable statement on animal research?
2. More information – Does the website provide 'more information' on the research that is conducted - The name of all the species used and/or statistics on the number of animals used?
3. Prominence – How prominently is animal research content displayed on the website? Can the information be reached within three clicks of the institution's website homepage, or directly via the search engine?
4. Images/video – Does the website feature images/videos of animals or facilities used in biomedical research?
5. Case studies – Does the website provide a research case study that highlights the use of animals?
6. Extensive information – Does the website provide 'extensive information' on animal research - (such as Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), a high volume of content on animal use, or links to websites with further information)?

Using these criteria, the websites were given a 'Yes' or 'No' evaluation. Further information on these criteria can be found in the respective results sections below. See Table 1 below for a statistical summary of the findings from the 908 EU websites assessed in this study.

Executive summary of findings

As discussed in the Introduction, this edition of the EARA website study includes stricter criteria in each category. Inevitably, this has led to a decrease in the overall assessment statistics in some categories, if it is compared to the previous study (even accounting for the non-inclusion of 159 UK institutions in this edition, which generally performed well in the last study), but we are confident now that any EU institution that meets these criteria is certainly on the right path to greater openness about its use of animals in research.

Although the 2020 study should not be directly compared with these new figures, we have shown them here in brackets for reference and also without the UK figures included. For instance, the figure for satisfactory Statements has now dropped to 45% (from 54% for the EU27 – without the UK – in 2020), and for Prominence to 36% (from 55% in 2020), while the More Information category has dropped to 25% (from 70% in 2020), however it was encouraging to see that there was a real improvement in the Case Studies category up to 39% (from 16% in 2020), Extensive Information category up to 41% (from 26% in 2020), while the Images/Video category remained stable at 37% (40% in 2020).

The contribution of Transparency Agreements (TA) on animal research in six EU countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain) has also been a major factor in helping guide institutions on how to communicate with the public. The study found that institutions that are in TAs in these countries have performed far better than those EU countries with no TA. Three-quarters (78%) of TA signatory institutions display a recognisable statement compared to just a quarter (25%) of non-TA EU countries, which consequently has dragged down the overall results for the EU27 countries (see the section *Moving Forward* below).

The overall impression of the study is that while website content in the biomedical sector has a long way to go to give a clear and comprehensive explanation of why animals are used in research and the importance of this work, there are clear signs that an increasing number of institutions are now meeting all the category objectives that have been set. While there are still institutions that make no mention of their use of animals, many institutions are producing meaningful and clear statements, addressed to the public, while the variety of information and its presentation – in ways that are understandable to a general audience – has noticeably improved since 2020.

Under half the institutions assessed have a clearly recognisable public-facing statement acknowledging their use of animals.	**45%**
One in four of the websites provide 'more information' – the species of research animal used and/or statistics on animal use at the institution.	**25%**
Just over a third of the websites include animal research content as a prominent feature, e.g. via the search engine of the website, or easy navigation from the homepage.	**36%**
Just over a third of the websites assessed display at least one image, or video, of an animal or animal facilities used in research at the institution.	**37%**
Around two fifths of the websites contain an example of research using animals conducted at that institution, such as a case study or press release.	**39%**
Around two fifths of websites contain 'extensive information', such as frequently asked questions, a high volume of public-facing information, or useful external links.	**41%**

Table 1: Summary of basic findings

Interactive map

EARA has produced an [interactive map] with a breakdown of the results in each category for each EU member state. The map, illustrated below, colour codes each country based on the percentage of institutions that have a statement on animal research on their website.

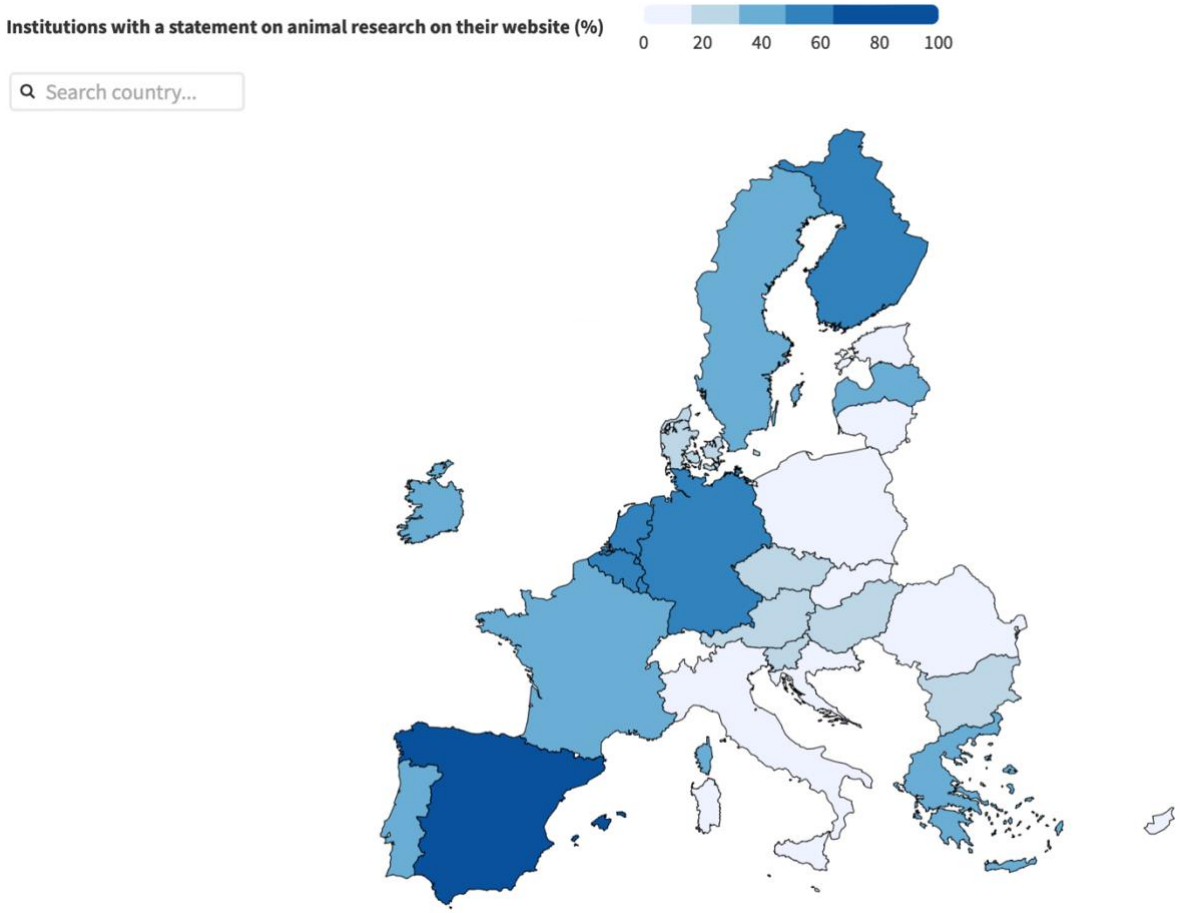


Figure 1. Interactive map showing the spread of recognisable statements on institutional websites

About the data and results

All data was collected between January 2023 and December 2023, by EARA. A total of 908 websites (906 websites in 2020, excluding the UK) were assessed – see Appendix 1 for a country-by-country breakdown. Below we present the results and summary for each assessment criteria – see also Appendix 2 for a full breakdown of the results, for each category, by country.

When looking at the results from individual countries, we have chosen those with high (or low) percentages of websites achieving the category requirements in countries with a larger number of institutional websites such as Spain (175), France (133), Germany (166), Netherlands (62), Italy (52), Portugal (46), and Belgium (42), and occasionally notable results in other countries.

Analysis of the individual categories

Statement on animal research

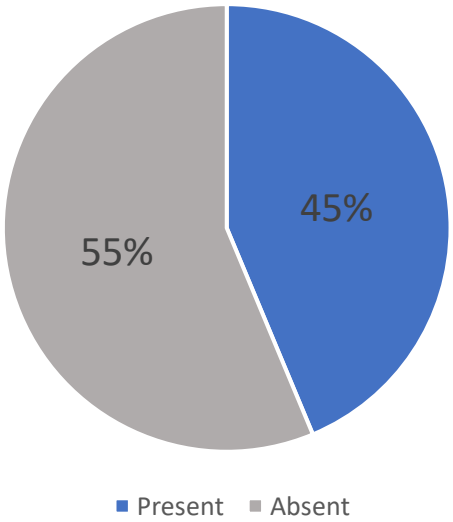
A statement on animal research is defined as a statement in which an institution acknowledges its own involvement in research using animals, recognises their necessity as a research model and explains that animals are only used when there are no alternative methods of research available.

Previously we also accepted statements that merely stated that animal research is conducted at the institution and that it complies with various national and EU regulations, but without the statement being clear about an institution's support for this research, or providing any context for why the research is being carried out.

Overall, 45% of the websites assessed have a recognisable statement acknowledging the use of animals (see Figure 2). The countries with institutions with the highest proportion of recognisable statements were Spain (78%), Belgium (57%) and the Netherlands (55%). Whereas Cyprus, Estonia, Lithuania, and Malta had no websites meeting this requirement – Italy had a very disappointing percentage (13%).

Looked at another way, it means that 502 institutions across the EU, that are involved in animal research, still need to include an open and meaningful statement on their website. Nevertheless, when a recognisable statement is present the quality is generally very good and has improved since the last study in 2020.

Figure 2. Statement on animal research



Good practice example:

Agenda Life Sciences, Germany

Agenda Life Sciences is a private company with a comprehensive webpage stating its position on animal research and putting this into context. It then links to biomedical case studies where animals

were used, a video explaining the daily work of an animal technologist, plus useful links to further information.

Hasselt University, **Belgium**
UHasselt provides a good example of a detailed statement, not only providing its institutional commitment to animal welfare, but going further in explaining how the 3Rs are applied, while also giving examples of ground-breaking therapies attained through animal research. The page also has an excellent Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section.

NOVA Medical School, Portugal
A comprehensive statement covering not only the compliance with national and European legislation, its commitment to animal welfare and the application of the 3Rs, but also offering a good explanation on why animals are used in biomedical research, giving examples of improvements in specific areas of human health made possible with the use of animals.

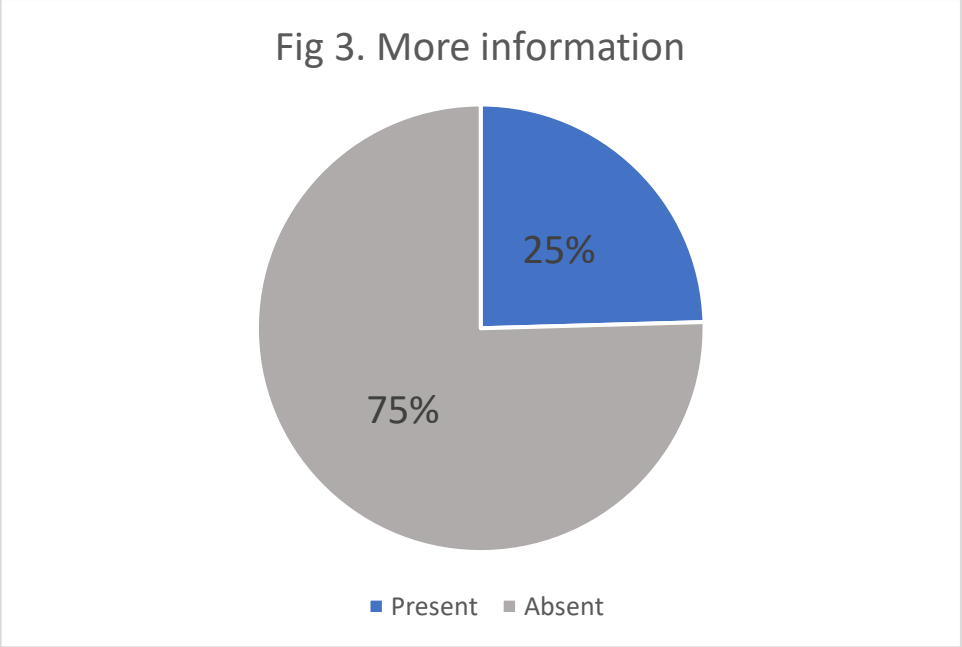
Andalusion Center for Developmental Biology, Spain
While this is a short statement it contains very firm support for research using animals – 'We are convinced that animal experimentation plays a fundamental role in the discovery of the underlying biological mechanisms of disease, and in the developing of medical treatments.'

More information

This category now requires that there is an identifiable section of a website that names every species of animal that is used in research and ideally statistics on the numbers of animals used each year – at the *institution*, not just the national or EU total figures of animals used. The best websites also stipulate the type of research that animals are used in, such as Alzheimer's research, and the severity of the experiments the animals are exposed to.

As the requirement for this category has been much more strictly defined, it means that overall just a quarter of EU websites currently include this information (see Figure 3). This is definitely a category that needs more attention from EU institutions, such as Italy (12%) and Spain (16%) and only one country (Denmark, 54%) had more than half of its websites with this information, followed by Belgium (45%), Portugal (37%) and the Netherlands (35%). In seven countries information on the number and species of animals used in research was not present at all.

In general, only the institutions with the best website content achieved this category, even though including statistics on animal use should be one of the easiest forms of content that any institution could include on its website.



Good practice examples:

KU Leuven, Belgium
KU Leuven has a comprehensive page dedicated to animal research, including highly detailed reports on the percentages of animals used per species annually. The page additionally contains an explanation of the numbers reported, while includes graphs including one to illustrate the severity of the animal experiments.

Novo Nordisk, Denmark Novo Nordisk is a company with a dedicated animal page on its website with information such as its view on ethics, and the use of non-human primates. Also included is a thorough report on the total number of animals used by the company in the last decade, in a graph format.

Max Delbrück Center (MDC), Germany
MDC is a good example of how to provide information on the use of animals in research, with graphs reflecting the total number of animals used by species and the number of procedures separated by severity. It has provided these numbers every year since 2015, shwoi changes in animal use through the years, showing a slight overall increase until 2022.

University of Groningen, Netherlands
The university's webpage combines an excellent statement with exceptional detail on the use of animals by its researchers and interesting case studies and good imagery. It includes a graph that shows which animals and the numbers used, as well as a graphic that the numbers of animals used in different types of research, such as basic or translational research.

Prominence of animal research

Prominence is defined as the ease of navigation from the homepage to meaningful content about animal research on an institution's webpages. In general, the minimum content needed is a recognisable statement that is easy for a general reader to find from the homepage i.e. three clicks or less, or prominently via the website's search function – using terms such as 'mouse', 'rat', 'animal research' or 'animal testing'.

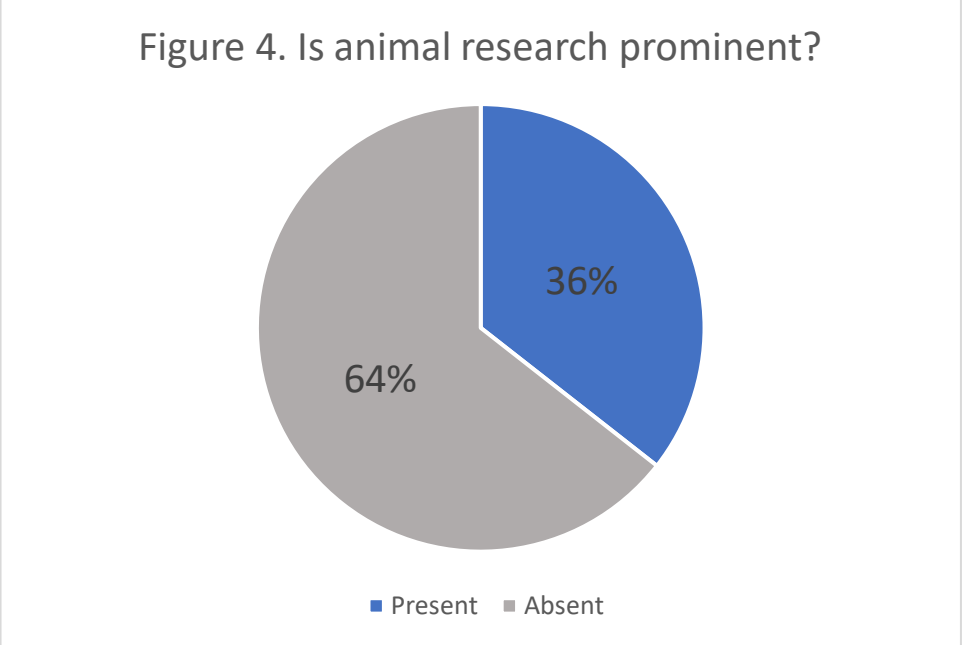
Good prominence is very important as (combined with a good statement) it really shows how committed an institution is to being open and transparent about its animal research information. In the previous study, institutional websites that only talked about compliance with regulations were accepted in this category.

Often there is a strong correlation between prominence and the presence of a statement on an institution's website. However, while Spain had the highest number of statements in the EU, only half of its institutions (50%) had their statement prominently displayed on the website. The impression is that overall, too often institutions will put information about animal research on their website, but neglect to make it accessible to the public.

Websites often fail in this category due to the lack of a search engine, or an absence of meaningful tabs that might lead you to information about animal research. There can also be difficulties finding information using search engines as sometimes these prioritise recent over relevant content, which can push public facing information further back into the results and make these harder to find.

The best solution for achieving prominence is to include 'animal research/experimentation/testing' as an option in the drop-down menus under a logical tab heading such as 'Research', or 'Ethics'. A member of the public is unlikely to realise that this content will be found, for example under the heading 'Governance' or 'Sustainability'. Furthermore, some statements exist solely on the website under the 'News' section and will become increasingly difficult to find as they become buried by later news stories.

Meaningful content about animal research can be reached quickly on about a third (36%) of EU websites. The best performing websites in this category were Belgium (55%) followed by Spain (50%), Germany (46%) and the Netherlands (42%). Of the other countries that conduct significant amounts of animal research, there is plenty of room for improvement, such as in Italy (12%), and in France where just under a third of institutions (31%) display images.



Good practice examples:

Spanish National Cancer Research Center (CNIO), Spain
CNIO firmly states its position on the use of animals in research and its homepage has a drop-down link from the 'Research & Innovation' tab directly to its 'Animal Research' pages. These begin with a video that makes clear its commitment to animal research and shows scientists at work in its laboratories. The language is clear and straightforward and leads on to sections about animal welfare regulations and its membership of the Spanish Transparency Agreement on Openness on Animal Research.

Lyon Neuroscience Research Center (CRNL), France
CRNL makes effective use of drop-down menus so that animal research features prominently with only two clicks. Its statement can be navigated straight from the homepage, selecting 'Research' then 'Our ethics' and then 'Animal research'.

Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), Netherlands
The homepage of the KNAW website takes advantage of the drop-down menu to list the various sections of the website and also highlights the main thematic lines of the institute, including a link directly to 'Animal experiments'.

Polytechnic Institute of Leiria (IPL), Portugal
IPL uses the drop-down menu from the homepage to lead the user to its animal research page with just two clicks. The institution has a clear statement and useful links.

Images/videos of animals and research facilities

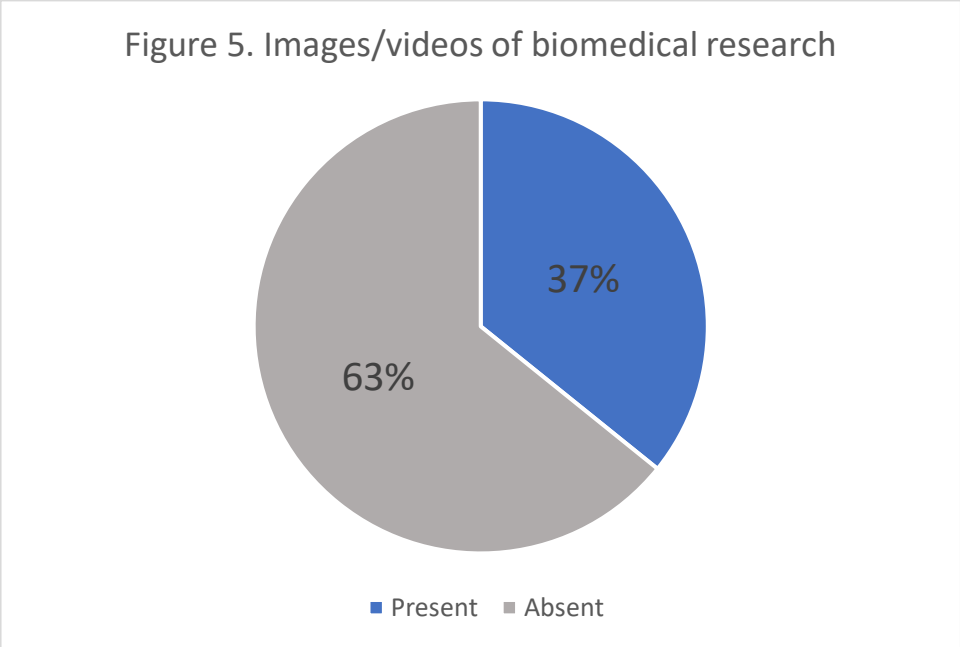
To meet this category, the website needed to present at least one image/video of animals, ideally with either a picture the animal in its housing, or being used in biomedical procedures in the lab. Original images are preferable to library images (of research animals) as they give a truer reflection of the facilities at an institution. Icons/infographics of animals are acceptable if they are used to specifically discuss the use of animals in research.

This continues to be a category where there is a notable absence of good quality website imagery showing the presence of animal research, it appears to be a low priority at many EU institutions. This only contributes to the arguments of critics who say that research using animals is not transparent, as it can appear to the public that institutions using animals in research have something to hide. It is also important to put any imagery alongside the main content about animal research, with a caption explaining what the viewer is looking at.

One improvement noticed, in this study, is that there were more institutions using their own photography – of housing or scientific procedures with animals – rather than library stock images. Where original images are used, they vary from images taken by staff to those professionally produced. These provide a valuable opportunity to show the actual conditions that animals are kept in and the standards of welfare that are being met during procedures.

Just over a third of institutional websites assessed (37%) display at least one image or video of animals in a research context (see Figure 5 below). However, even in the best performing countries, in this category, only just over half of the institutions manage to display images or videos, such as in Greece (59%) and Belgium (52%). Very few websites in Italy (15%) and Austria (21%) contained images or videos of animals used in research, and the figure for Spain (27%) was disappointing.

There were also signs that institutions are beginning to appreciate the value of using video to illustrate their use of animals in research. There was a small improvement in the number of videos present on institutional websites (14% up from 9%), while more than a quarter of websites in Belgium (29%) and Denmark (27%) included videos featuring animals in research. Nevertheless, there was no video content present on websites in 17 EU countries.



Good practice examples:

Images –

Max Planck Institute of Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics, Germany
As well as a strong statement, statistics on animal use and clear links to further information, MPI-CBG has images of the animal housing at its facilities.

University of Helsinki, Finland
The University has a well-structured page about its Laboratory Animal Center. There is information about legislation, welfare and training including many pictures of mice in the laboratory facilities.

Video –

German Rheumatism Research Centre Berlin (DRFZ), Germany
The main DRFZ webpage on animal research gives detailed information and has a good image of a researcher working with animals at the top of the page. A video explaining the 3R principles is an excellent example of transparency.

Biomedical Primate Research Centre (BPRC), Netherlands
The BPRC website has a dedicated video section for animal research, including informative videos not only on housing and welfare conditions of monkeys, but also excellent videos on the importance of these animals in the discovery of treatments for human disease.

BioSimia Research Group, France
This website has a lot of information about the use of monkeys in research with a page dedicated to

an explanation of the use of monkeys in Covid-19 research, containing a number of videos. On other pages there is a well laid out and easy-to-read FAQ on the importance of monkeys in health research – this is well signposted from the homepage under the title 'Misconceptions about research'.

University Pompeu Fabra, Spain
The university's page about animal research begins with a video that interviews lab staff and researchers about the use of animals and shows them working in the animal facilities.

Virtual lab tour –

German Primate Center (DPZ), Germany
DPZ provides a simple guided tour with photographs in its animal facilities of monkeys. Each step leads to further information on the reasons primates are used, with FAQs on animal welfare, the 3Rs, and details about each species used and how maintaining animal welfare is a priority for the caretakers.

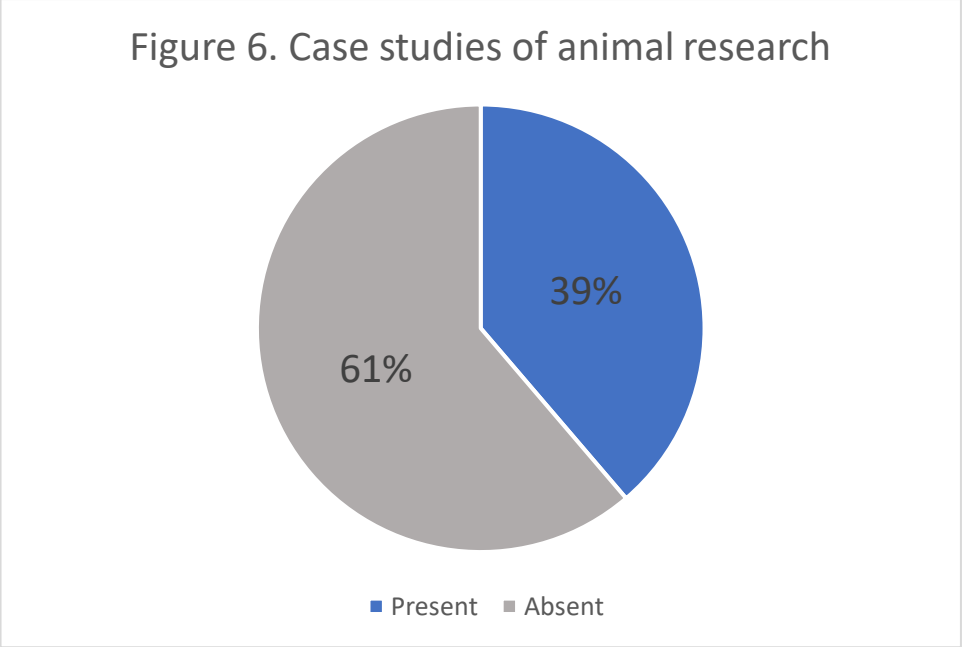
Institute for Research in Biomedicine Barcelona (IRB), Spain
IRB has produced a clear and engaging interactive virtual tour of its research labs, where it discusses its use of animals and interviews researchers.

Case studies

Our definition of a case study is that it should be a clear explanation of a specific piece of research, conducted at an institution, aimed at a non-technical audience, such as a press release or a standalone piece of content, where animals are clearly identified as being used as experimental models – previously, we allowed scientific journal reports on research, however these are usually very technical and the mentions of the animal models used are not usually very prominent.

This was the category where many countries performed best, even when they did less well overall in the overall study, for instance, Austria, Czechia, Estonia, and Sweden. While it is good to see that more institutions are mentioning animals in their press releases – and their use in important progress in biomedical research – there is a problem if this information sits within the news section of a website, as it can then become easily 'lost' if it is not linked to the main website content pages about animal research.

While this category has become stricter, there have still been improvements since the 2020 report. The overall figure for the EU is now 39% (Figure 6), whereas in 2020, just 16% of websites had this style of case study. It was also good to see that at least half the websites in the Netherlands (61%), Denmark (58%) and Germany (51%) have achieved this, as well as smaller countries such as Estonia and Luxembourg.



Good practice examples:

Max Planck Society (MPS), Germany
MPS is one of Germany's largest research organisations and the Society's main website pages have a wealth of information on animal research. This includes a page that puts into context the research done with animals at its research facilities, and readers can scroll through a list of case studies that show the breadth of research conducted.

University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg
The University has a clearly labelled tab for 'Case studies' in its Animal Research section of the website, and there are case study links under separate headings for zebrafish, mice and also alternative research.

KU Leuven, Belgium
We have mentioned EARA member KU Leuven previously (See Statements), but its dedicated page of case studies, detailing – in individual and easy-to-read pages - all the areas of the human health research at the university where animals are used and why, is an excellent example.

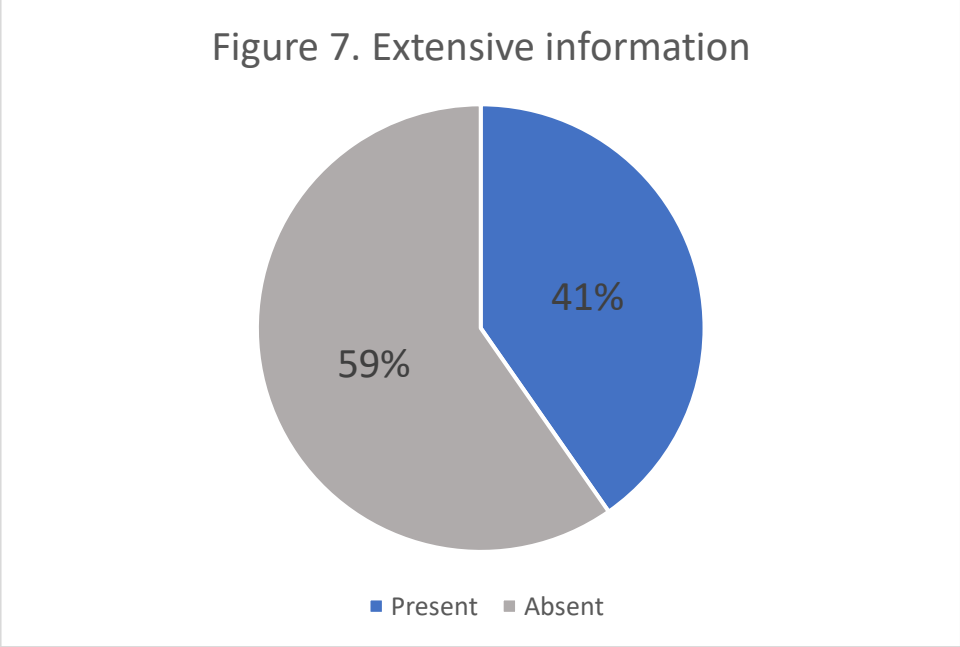
Extensive information

This criterion was met if the website provided additional information beyond what was required to meet any of the assessment criteria mentioned above. In general, if the website included any one of the following items listed this criterion was met:

- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on animal research
- A generally high volume of public facing information directly about animal research
- Links to more information on animal research
  – e.g. links for instance to EARA, AnimalResearch.info, or Understanding Animal Research
- Detail about the 3Rs principles (replace, reduce, refine), animal welfare and alternative non-animal methods.

This category can be directly compared with the previous study and rose from 26% across the EU in 2020 to 41% in 2023 (Figure 7). In Belgium, the figure rose from 47% to 62% and more than half the websites met this criterion in the Netherlands (up from 26% to 55%), followed by Spain (up from 28% to 53%) and Germany (up from 30% to 52%). However, there was a notable absence of any in-depth information on animal research on websites, including information about the 3Rs, in Austria (11%) and Italy (17%).

A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section is probably the most concise way to communicate about animal research and often provides the broadest information, covering topics such as animal welfare practices, or what species are used and why. The very best examples of FAQs ask the sort of questions that members of the public might ask, rather than just the ones that an institution would prefer to answer – the University of Hasselt, Belgium, referenced earlier in this report, covers many of these types of questions. Also, ideally, any extensive information included should link to the webpage with the institution's statement.



Good practice examples:

Leiden University Medical Center, Netherlands
As part of its animal research pages LUMC examines the 3Rs principles (replace, reduce, refine) in detail, including information on animal welfare, with links to further information on these subjects.

Charles River Laboratories, France
Charles River is a company that provides animal models for use in treatments for human disease. The webpages highlight its commitment to animal welfare and the '4Rs' – where they add 'Responsibility' to the traditional 3Rs – with numerous links to information on different aspects of other non-animal methods of research, including case studies.

University of Bremen, Germany
Monkeys are used in research at Bremen and the Cognitive Neurophysiology Research Group has

put together a page answering questions about the work they do with these animals, in clear language, plus links to the studies.

Conclusions

The valuable contribution of Transparency Agreements

Transparency agreements (TAs) on animal research now exist in the EU Member States of Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain (plus Switzerland and the UK outside the EU in Europe), in total representing 323 institutions (at the time of our study). Our research shows that, in all the assessment categories, TAs have a significantly higher proportion of institutions with open and transparent content about their use of animals in biomedical research on their websites (see Table 2).

The gap between the signatories of TAs and those institutions not in TAs has become stark. Signatory institutions are now three times more likely to have a recognisable statement on animal research (79% compared to 26%). Overall, the three best performing countries for statements in the EU (Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands) all have an established TA in place. In addition, TA signatories have significantly more overall website content for the public, including extensive information (62% compared to 28%).

All the Transparency Agreements contain commitments for institutions to provide more information about animal research. These commitments call for institutions to speak with clarity on their use of animals for research and provide adequate information for both the public and the media. In addition, they ask the institutions to work towards developing initiatives that generate greater knowledge and understanding of animal research.

TAs have been a successful launchpad for greater efforts to produce useful information for the public about research at individual institutions and have led to a greater commitment by institutions to be more open and also enabled the sector to speak clearly, and with one voice, on ethical issues.

Working in collaboration with national bodies for the life sciences, one of EARA's strategic priorities is to continue to develop these national agreements. There are now plans in place to develop TAs in Ireland and Poland, as well as outside Europe.

Assessment category (2023)	**EU institutions within transparency agreements (323)**	**EU institutions not in a transparency agreement (585)**
Statement on animal research	79%	26%
More information	31%	21%
Prominence of animal research	60%	22%
Images/videos of animal research	48%	30%
Case studies	51%	32%
Extensive information	63%	28%

Table 2: Comparison of institutions achieving the criteria for each assessment category.

Final analysis

The overall impression is that while website content in the biomedical sector has a long way to go to give a clear and comprehensive explanation of why animals are used in research and the importance of this work for society, there are signs that it is now on the right path. While there are still institutions that make no mention of their use of animals, there are now many institutions producing meaningful statements, addressed to the public, while the variety of information and its presentation, in ways that are understandable to a general audience, has noticeably improved.

Despite this, there does appear to be a noticeable gap between those institutions that are steadily improving their website content and those that are not fully aware of the need to be transparent about animal research. The picture in Italy is of particular concern, where there were poor results across all categories (see Appendix 2).

Looking in more detail at the results, a meaningful statement on behalf of an institution about its use of animals remains the overriding priority. When a statement is present the quality of content generally is very good and has improved since the last study in 2020. Yet a statement is still absent from 502 institutions that we assessed, and in general, only the institutions with the best website content included statistics on animal use, even though this should be one of the easiest forms of content that any institution could include on its website.

More encouragingly, there are definite signs that the general standard of content is improving, in countries with a larger biomedical sector such as Belgium, Germany, Netherlands and Spain. Yet, even in these countries, the results can still be patchy in some of the categories assessed.

While there is a strong correlation between prominence and the presence of a statement on an institution's website in Spain, which had the highest number of statements in the EU (78%), only half its institutions (50%) had their statement prominently displayed on the website. The impression is that overall, too often institutions will put information about animal research on their website, but neglect to make it accessible to the public.

Websites often fail in the prominence category, due to the lack of a search bar and an absence of meaningful tabs that might lead you to information about animal research. The best solution for achieving prominence is to include 'animal research/experimentation/testing' as an option in the drop-down menus under a logical heading such as 'research' or 'ethics'.

While the scientific evidence of the need for animal research is strong, without open and transparent explanations of the reasons why animal research is needed, the biomedical sector will struggle to maintain its licence to operate in the eyes of the public. That applies both to universities and public research bodies as well as the private sector. Indeed, it was noticeable that while a number of private research companies assessed did not hide the fact they use animals, they offered no explanation of why it continues to be necessary to use them in research. Some also preferred to talk about the non-animal methods they used and 'responsible research', without mentioning that they also used animals. Institutions should also avoid the phrase *in vivo* when what they mean is that they use animals in research.

Thankfully, for many institutions there are some straightforward solutions to some of the problems with their content, such as including a search engine or providing a dedicated page on animal research, rather than scattering the content across their webpages. On some websites, we found some very good videos, case studies or news stories, but an absence of an overarching explanation

of why animals are used. There were also examples of an institution's statement on animal research being confined to its news pages, rather given a dedicated section on the website.

For any institution seeking to instantly improve its website content there are many excellent good practice examples of websites from across the EU available to follow, as identified both in this report and previous EARA website studies, and the EARA Communications Handbook.

Assistance from EARA and next steps

Informative and easily accessible website content on the use of animals in research must be an important part of any initiative by biomedical institutions to be more open and transparent about their research.

EARA is in a unique position to assist institutions, in the EU and worldwide, with the process of improving the content of their websites. Membership of EARA also allows individual institutions, both private and public, to receive free guidance and assistance on the production of materials and online content and we have been involved in projects with EARA members in France, Germany, and with other non-EARA members in New Zealand, Israel and the USA to improve their websites.

EARA is experienced and proactive in providing an advisory role in the development of images and videos and we can also assist in arranging the production of laboratory virtual tour videos and other web content. In addition, the *EARA Communications Handbook* is free to EARA members (and for a fee to non-members) and includes further advice on website good practice, crisis communications, as well as on developing and expanding a communications strategy, particularly with regards to an organisation's online presence.

Another aspect of EARA's drive to improve openness in Europe has been to hold openness events and training workshops about effective science communication on animal research, supported by the Federation of European Neuroscience Societies (FENS) and the Society for Neuroscience (SfN). In addition, the EARA Patient Discovery Project, aims to improve the awareness of patients about the part animal research plays in the development of new treatments and drugs and foster closer collaboration between researchers and patients, including tours of lab facilities.

Each year EARA also produces a large amount of online content to publicise the EU Commission's statistical annual reports on the use of animals in research. The positive public reaction to this information has shown that this type of statistical information is a useful way to introduce the public to the continued importance of animal research.

As part of the follow-up to this website study, each EARA member will receive a detailed assessment of their institution's website. We will also give feedback to those respondents to the EARA online survey who asked for further assistance with developing their online content. As part of our outreach work, we will continue to deliver presentations and training across Europe, presenting data from this report and commenting on the progress being made, or lack of it.

EARA will also continue to work with the Commission and national authorities to discuss ways, at the very least, to encourage institutions to add a recognisable statement about animal research to their website as a priority and for each institution to publish its own annual statistics on animal use.

Methodology

Identifying websites

It is our understanding that all institutions featured in the study either conduct animal research, or support its use, for example through funding, breeding of animals, providing equipment to keep animals, or advocacy. However, there are no official public lists of all the institutions in Europe which are associated with research using animals, hence this study is not yet an exhaustive list of all relevant institutions that conduct animal research in Europe, or those who may fund research using animals.

As with the previous editions of the *EARA study of EU-based websites*, the EU Commission made a valuable contribution by circulating an EARA online survey to all EU Competent Authorities and requesting that this be distributed to all relevant institutions involved with animal research. The survey contained the assessment criteria detailed below and helped identify additional institutions for assessment.

EARA will continue to produce these reports, to assess the quality of content provided by institutions and we hope to continue our collaboration with the European Commission and the National Contact Points in this task in the future.

Website search technique

The website search technique applied was done to mimic a curious member of the public trying to find out about that particular institution's involvement with animal research. The following steps were followed:

1. Start from the institution's homepage.
2. Search through the website without using a search bar to attempt to navigate to information on animal research.
3. If a search bar is present, search for the following terms in both English and the national language, where appropriate, of that institution's country of residence:
   - Animal
   - Animal testing
   - Animal research
   - Animal experimentation
   - Animal Welfare
   - 3Rs
   - *In vivo*
   - Mice, mouse, murine, rats, primate, monkey, zebrafish
4. Finish search after 10 minutes
   - Note that this means that even if information on animal research is present, if it cannot be found in this time period it is marked as absent.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Number of websites assessed, for the 2024 study, for each EU country

Country	Number of Institutions
Austria	28
Belgium	42
Bulgaria	4
Croatia	13
Cyprus	3
Czechia	18
Denmark	26
Estonia	2
Finland	10
France	133
Germany	166
Greece	17
Hungary	8
Ireland	9
Italy	52
Latvia	6
Lithuania	2
Luxembourg	2
Malta	2
Netherlands	62
Poland	29
Portugal	46
Romania	11
Slovakia	10
Slovenia	11
Spain	175
Sweden	21
TOTAL	908

Appendix 2: Country-by-country results for the assessment criteria.

Country	Statement (%)	More information (%)	Prominence (%)	Images & Videos (%)	Case studies (%)	Extensive information (%)
Austria	29%	18%	32%	21%	36%	11%
Belgium	57%	45%	55%	52%	45%	62%
Bulgaria	25%	0%	25%	0%	0%	0%
Croatia	8%	8%	15%	15%	23%	31%
Cyprus	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Czechia	28%	17%	22%	33%	44%	22%
Denmark	31%	54%	35%	50%	58%	50%
Estonia	0%	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%
Finland	50%	20%	40%	40%	40%	40%
France	34%	26%	31%	40%	38%	34%
Germany	50%	30%	46%	49%	51%	52%
Greece	41%	24%	29%	59%	12%	35%
Hungary	25%	0%	0%	13%	25%	13%
Ireland	33%	0%	33%	11%	44%	33%
Italy	13%	12%	12%	15%	19%	17%
Latvia	33%	0%	0%	33%	17%	0%
Lithuania	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Luxembourg	50%	50%	50%	50%	100%	50%
Malta	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%	50%
Netherlands	55%	35%	42%	50%	61%	55%
Poland	14%	21%	10%	31%	14%	21%
Portugal	37%	37%	37%	48%	30%	41%
Romania	9%	9%	0%	0%	18%	27%
Slovakia	10%	20%	0%	0%	10%	10%
Slovenia	18%	9%	18%	27%	27%	0%
Spain	78%	16%	50%	27%	36%	53%
Sweden	43%	29%	29%	33%	43%	38%