

Why Europe needs more investment in research and education

A global leader invests in talent: unlock the EU's future

- In the aftermath of the European elections, and as a new EU Commission is installed, national governments must agree on the European-level investment plan for the next seven years. Widespread consensus will be necessary to tackle the issues that are of most concern to voters and where EU action is possible. We argue that investment in research and education is the most effective, sustainable, and future-oriented commitment that the EU can make towards its citizens.
- The enhanced polarisation of the European political scene makes it even more crucial to ensure that decision-making is based on scientific evidence. Issues that have weighed on voters' choices are complex and large in scale, especially climate and energy, as well as social protection and migration. Research funding for such topics requires urgent upgrading to address these challenges in a smart and sustainable way.
- The EU and the member states have great expectations for research and education. They have tasked the future Horizon Europe programme with ambitious goals and grand missions addressing global challenges. The programme is also expected to boost innovation in an unprecedented way through the creation of a dedicated funding body. The EU has also reasserted its interest and trust in the added value of the Erasmus programme, proposing to considerably widen its outreach.
- Universities welcome this support. Indeed, investing in education as well as research and innovation at the European level means first and foremost investing in people – in particular, in Europe's youth – and developing human talent and capital. This is the *sine qua non* condition to fulfil any ambition of turning the European Union into a world leader in innovation-driven growth and competitiveness.
- The scale of the funding must match the ambitions: fulfilling goals to establish Europe as a world technological leader and to tackle unparalleled challenges at the global level would require doubling the amount previously dedicated to Horizon 2020. Only then can we ensure European independence in science and technology.
- It is also about the efficient use of public funds. Research and innovation are a European public good. Investing at this level creates synergies, economies of scale and high value for money for EU taxpayers: Every 1€ invested in R&I generates on average 13€ in value added for business. Pan-EU research competition empowers excellent project ideas with EU-wide and global impact.
- Supporting transnational collaboration and mobility in research and education creates cross-border frameworks and networks for professionals and academics to work together concretely, thus reinforcing European awareness and identity. The EU's Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+ programmes are unique in scale in this respect.
- Public funding to universities is stagnating or indeed receding in many parts of Europe, and the gap is growing with those few countries that have kept investing but are themselves under strong demographic pressure. Overall, Europe needs to seriously re-invest in its universities.
- For all these reasons, it is time that our governments significantly step up their commitment to European research and education, both at home and collectively at European level. Universities call on them to unlock EU's future by investing in talent, matching ambitions with proper funding to achieve real leverage and value for money. There is neither time, nor money, to waste if we are to overcome our common challenges.