

EUA welcomes European Research and Innovation Area Committee's recommendations for FP10

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On 26 June 2024, the European Research and Innovation Area Committee (ERAC) adopted an [Opinion on 'Guidance for the next Framework Programme for R&I'](#). The European University Association (EUA) welcomes this document, which echoes many recommendations from the Association's own [vision for the tenth Framework Programme \(FP10\)](#). EUA is therefore pleased to see that member states are aligned with the position of universities.

ERAC's calls for more predictability and stability in the FP10 budget and a well-balanced mix of support for basic research, applied research and innovation are especially welcome. The introduction of research actions to Pillar 2 (Global Challenges & European Industrial Competitiveness), as proposed by ERAC, could help rebalance support within the pillar. The [progressive shift](#) of Pillar 2 in Horizon Europe towards supporting a larger proportion of projects at higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) undermines its potential. This causes an unbalanced share of funding for research projects within the pillar, in comparison with projects further along in their development and implementation phases.

However, in the current climate, where future R&I investments are under significant pressure, it is disappointing that ERAC did not take a stance on the overall budget for FP10. The fact that R&I ministries do not advocate for a larger budget does not bode well for the negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework. Therefore, EUA strongly encourages ERAC to leverage its unique role in actively contributing to future budget discussions.

Regarding specific elements of the Opinion:

Co-creation process

- EUA very much welcomes the call for the Commission to improve the consultation process with member states and stakeholders. The Association is concerned that stakeholders, including universities, are not consulted enough during all stages of programme planning. Engaging in regular dialogue with stakeholders is essential, not only in the strategic planning process but also in the planning of the implementation phases. That said, it is essential that these consultations take place early enough to prevent any delays in the programme's implementation.

Programme structure

- The ERAC document acknowledges that the introduction of new instruments and requirements has increased the complexity of the Framework Programme over the years. EUA has raised the same concerns in its vision for FP10, highlighting how the growing complexity of the programme is hindering the capacity of beneficiaries to participate in its funding opportunities. The Association therefore agrees with the need to maximise the potential of existing instruments and carefully evaluate the introduction

of new measures to maintain the efficiency, stability and predictability of the programme.

- EUA is also pleased to see that the document mentions the role of the programme in attracting and retaining new talent and skills, as one of the six overarching principles for FP10. To this end, the instruments provided in Pillar 1 (Excellent Science) are crucial, as they have contributed to developing an impressive human capital of highly talented researchers in Europe. However, to fully capitalise on this success, FP10 should ensure that Pillar 1 is equipped with an adequate share of the funding, amounting to at least 30% of the total programme's budget. A larger share of the budget would also allow for improving the success rates of the European Research Council, as recommended by ERAC.
- The Association also appreciates the call for FP10 to be exclusively dedicated to financing R&I. This is especially relevant for the programme's missions. EUA believes that the support offered by the programme must focus exclusively on the R&I activities of the missions. Therefore, additional funding outside FP10 must be mobilised to support their implementation. The Association is also fully aligned with ERAC's view that the responsibility for missions should be shared partly outside the Framework Programme. In its vision for FP10, EUA proposed that the European Structural and Investment Funds are ideally positioned to assume greater responsibility for mission implementation at the EU level. However, the Association prefers that the missions remain part of the Framework Programme. By strengthening their science communication role, they have the potential to bring research results closer to society, help address the challenge of mistrust in R&I, and gain societal approval for public investments in R&I.
- EUA also support ERAC's call to reflect on the future role of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and its links with other instruments. To fully realise the potential of the Framework Programme in boosting Europe's innovation performance, a thorough revision of Pillar 3 (Innovative Europe) and its instruments, especially the EIT, is needed. This revision should aim at simplifying the structure and enhancing alignment and complementarity among the pillar's instruments.

Core principles to guide FP10

- The need for more synergies is prominently highlighted in the Opinion. EUA especially appreciates the suggestion to make synergies a priority in the design of various programmes. In its vision for FP10, EUA recommended applying the synergies-by-design approach to build alignment between different initiatives and eliminate fragmentation and potential overlaps. This approach will also offer potential programme beneficiaries capacity-building opportunities and follow-up activities from other sources, through sequential funding. Synergies with national funding programmes and initiatives should also be ensured.
- EUA welcomes ERAC's position on the widening objectives, recognising the need to renew national R&I investments and reform, evaluate the impact of widening instruments, reinforce synergies with EU and national funds, and strengthen the

National Contact Points (NCPs) system. Maintaining such a balanced approach to widening will also allow member states to avoid potential bottlenecks during the negotiations for FP10. At the same time, the Association wishes to reiterate the important role that widening instruments, especially Teaming and Twinning, have played in improving the access of countries with lower R&I capacity in Horizon Europe and previous programmes.

- ERAC recognises the need for inclusive, diverse, open and strategic international cooperation in addressing today's societal and technological challenges, which are global by nature. This is in line with EUA's advocacy on ensuring responsible openness as the default option for global cooperation. As highlighted in EUA's vision for FP10, strategic autonomy needs to be a specific exception to the rule, taking precedence over open international cooperation only in carefully identified areas and sectors. The Association also appreciates the call for faster association of third countries to the Framework Programme, as this is crucial for enabling many collaborative projects. It is particularly important not to delay the association process with countries that traditionally participate in the programme and are strongly connected to EU R&I networks.

Horizontal topics

- EUA welcomes ERAC's recommendations on horizontal topics, especially its call to achieve greater simplification for the applicant. Simplification of the project application, implementation and auditing phases, with the focus on the applicant, will play a key role in enhancing success rates and access to the programme.
- The Association is also pleased to see the call for greater efforts to embed knowledge valorisation across EU R&I ecosystems. However, EUA wishes to express its caution regarding the proposal to examine whether the results of projects funded by FP10 should have an obligatory knowledge valorisation component. This approach might limit the development and impact of low TRL projects, which focus on curiosity-driven, bottom-up research. Rather than introducing new requirements, we believe that FP10 should develop a systematic and central approach, specifically dedicated to evaluating project results and exploring how they could be valorised and transformed into new solutions that positively impact society.
- The proposal set out in the Opinion to include an evaluation of the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) dimension is an important step in promoting interdisciplinarity in FP10. However, this might not be enough. Despite the progress made, the full potential of interdisciplinary research is inefficiently explored within the programme and the integration of SSH disciplines remains a 'box-ticking exercise. To unleash the full potential of interdisciplinary research, FP10 should instead promote the entire, diverse spectrum of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (SSHA) research. This can be achieved by providing dedicated opportunities (e.g. cluster calls) for SSHA research and involving SSHA researchers in all phases of the programme's development process.

Finally, EUA appreciates the inclusive process involved in developing the Opinion, which included stakeholder consultations. The Association remains committed to ongoing dialogue with member states to develop a robust and impactful FP10, ensuring that our collective efforts continue to strengthen the European research and innovation landscape.