

FP10: ATTRACTIVE, IMPACTFUL AND INCLUSIVE

10 April 2024



The European Union (EU) strives to be a science powerhouse. It faces great societal, economic and environmental challenges which require the advanced scientific knowledge that only strong, well-funded European Research and Innovation (R&I) ecosystems can deliver. **The 10th EU Framework Programme for R&I, FP10**, must increase and deepen the collaborations required to push boundaries in frontier R&I for the common good. It should also act as enabler for talent to grow in all its dimensions – a key mission of the **Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN)**.

The preconditions for an attractive, impactful and inclusive FP10

High-quality research undeniably lies at the basis of innovation. This is why FP10 must have a focus on facilitating excellent research, both in terms of adequate funding as in the shaping of adequate framework conditions. This requires lowering the target technology readiness levels (TRLs) to consider a broader range of different research ideas, reinforcing Pillar 1 and especially Pillar 2. **Balancing the TRLs in collaborative research projects** will make the programme more attractive to all researchers while increasing its long-term impact. At the same time, **stronger coherence with EU policy objectives is needed**, in particular those included in the European Research Area (ERA) policy agenda, such as career attractiveness, improving research assessment and open science practices. Synergies should also be facilitated by better aligning the rules for EU and national/regional funding programmes. There is still room to **implement more targeted strategies for synergies**; in particular, by leveraging cohesion policy funding to improve structural conditions on our R&I systems, the programme can ensure that its benefits are shared more equitably.

Furthermore, it is crucial to invest in FP10 to secure the wellbeing of Europe's current and future generations. The existential risks related to climate change and biodiversity loss, the increase in violent conflicts, the pressures and tensions created by social inequality and polarisation in Europe and globally, call for much greater investment in science. Strengthening our R&I systems is the only way to deliver the technological and social innovation that we need. The preservation of global commons and the programme's alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals should continue to inspire the best research talent to find bottom-up solutions. If we fail to invest in the short term, the long-term consequences will come with a much higher price tag. For this reason, **the budget of FP10 should be more ambitious than the current programme and be above €200 billion**.

YERUN's key overarching priorities for the design of FP10

Geared towards empowering the world's largest R&I funding programme, **YERUN's vision for FP10** is to foster collaborative efforts for excellent science (**research-first**), addressing global challenges, and ensuring a better future (**coherence for impact**), while promoting equal opportunities for participation (**inclusive-by-design**).

1. An attractive programme that puts research first

- FP10 should be a comprehensive and well-funded global initiative at the forefront of supporting cutting-edge research – an essential precursor to unlock the full potential of valorisation, innovation and impact. To attract a wide range of talent, **a variety of research opportunities need to be provided in FP10**, spanning from individual endeavours to teams collaborating within both small and large consortia. It is imperative to **recognise the full value of research** against rising trends towards directionality and prescriptiveness which restrict scientific freedom and paradoxically constrain innovation. Our long-term needs can only be addressed if foundations in our knowledge base and capacities are strengthened. To ensure fuel for innovation and impact is available for years to come, research must come first.
- FP10 should prioritise a research-oriented approach aimed at making the programme attractive to all researchers without leaving excellent ideas behind due to lack of funding and sudden budget cuts or reallocations. The focus should be on strengthening and **ring-fencing the budget for Pillar 1 initiatives**, namely the European Research Council and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions, and on **intensifying collaborative and interdisciplinary low-TRL research in Pillar 2**. These research outputs will in turn reinforce the innovation pillar.
- Elevating Europe as a global leader in R&I calls for an unwavering commitment to advancing both fundamental and challenge-oriented research. Both types of research unmistakably fuel innovation and impact. However, **earmarked and prescriptive calls should be limited** – researchers should be trusted to recognise and address current and future challenges. This goes beyond simply ensuring competitiveness and strategic autonomy – it is a crucial step towards tackling global challenges.

2. Coherence for impact

- For projects to deliver real impact, the contribution of researchers should predominate in proposals. Currently, the requirements of the impact sections often lead to the hiring of external parties to draft project proposals, something which is unnecessarily costly. This also results in impact sections that are artificial, overambitious, and detached from the actual research. To avoid this, the **impact section should be integrated** into the excellence and implementation sections of the proposal. This would not only promote coherence and simplify proposals, but also allow researchers themselves to set more realistic expectations and targets as to their research's impact.

- An under-utilised lever for increasing the impact of collaborative projects is to fully exploit the outreach potential of clusters within Pillar 2. They could collectively reach a much wider audience than individual projects but are currently under-coordinated and under-funded. Rather than fragmenting the efforts of individual projects to capitalise on results and to reach stakeholders, **improved cluster coordination should be facilitated to enhance the collective impact of projects.**
- To ensure that R&I efforts lead to tangible outcomes, FP10 should prioritise a coordinated and streamlined continuum that goes from idea to impact. This requires carrying out research for longer periods of time than FP9 projects allow. In addition, project mentality may distort approaches to tackling long-term needs in addressing global challenges. FP10 should provide **more opportunities for continuity and follow-up funding beyond the initial duration of the project** to better address the non-linear aspect of R&I, thus boosting impact. Besides the aforementioned resources needed to improve coordination within clusters, synergies with other funding mechanisms are paramount to ensure a strong continuum from R&I to impact.

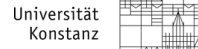
3. Inclusive-by-design

- Designing inclusivity into the backbone of FP10 would ensure that the programme is reachable and beneficial to more stakeholders. To reduce barriers to entry, make participation more accessible, and minimise the use of external parties, it is necessary to **simplify processes**, from topic description to application template, as well as to **streamline the flow of information** in an understandable and user-friendly way. Moreover, there are too many initiatives and funding instruments within FP9, many of which without the resources required to fulfil their objectives; this creates an immense complexity that in turn hinders access to funding, especially from applicants affiliated to small and underfunded organisations. As such, the programme should focus on the most relevant funding instruments. By taking these actions, FP10 can better fulfil its purpose and effectively contribute to the promotion of inclusive societal wellbeing.
- Excessive focus on technological development overlooks the essential dimension of social acceptance and integration into daily life. FP10 should provide a more holistic assessment framework that considers societal needs and society's readiness to adopt a particular technological advance, beyond the use of TRLs. The introduction of societal readiness levels or similar tools can encourage cross-sector collaboration and stimulate interdisciplinary projects that consider both technological feasibility and societal desirability. It can also better target **Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH)** fields, which are too often neglected. Additionally, evaluation panels should include more evaluators with SSH backgrounds.

- FP10 should also provide support for more universities across Europe to emerge as robust R&I actors, **addressing the varying levels of support for research management**, knowledge transfer capacities, infrastructure and other resources and services for R&I. The approach needs to evolve beyond a mere focus on widening participation through capacity building (without compromising it) to encompass a comprehensive strategy for fostering inclusion. Equitable opportunities for participation should be provided across all universities with converging starting positions of established and newcomer organisations.

Finally, the relevance of R&I for the wellbeing of all Europeans by boosting strategic security and autonomy should be seen as a balancing factor, but one that should not tip the scale too far inward. Global scientific collaboration must remain a key priority for FP10. YERUN members remain committed to continue collaborating with policymakers and stakeholders, in the spirit of co-creation, to design concrete measures that will make FP10 an attractive, impactful and inclusive programme.

- YERUN Members -



YERUN, Young European Research Universities Network, April 2024

For questions about this document please contact Ms Silvia Gomez Recio: secretarygeneral@yerun.eu

