

GERMAN U15-POSITION ON THE FUTURE EU FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (FP10)

As an association of 15 large, research-intensive universities in Germany, German U15 see Europe's Framework Programmes for research and innovation as key for economic prosperity, societal welfare and ecological sustainability. **To step up Europe's scientific leadership and technological sovereignty, the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10) should have the scale, quality, and reach to ensure Europe's pre-eminence in the global scientific arena.** Europe's sovereignty will be determined by remaining competitive with the United States and China in research and innovation.

We emphasise that research - both fundamental and applied - drives innovation. Basic scientific inquiry provides the essential foundation upon which transformative technologies and solutions are built. **In light of the enormous geopolitical, economic and ecological challenges we are currently facing, FP10 needs a robust budget of €200 billion upwards.** Such an investment is necessary to catalyse Europe's scientific potential, drive technological advancements, and address pressing societal challenges. With adequate funding, FP10 can serve as a driving force for transformative change, empowering researchers to tackle global issues and to propel Europe towards a more sustainable, sovereign future.

European Framework Programmes should be dedicated to civilian purposes, only. We advocate for a ring-fenced budget for civil research, with certain (limited) flexibility for unforeseen circumstances. This approach ensures that FP10 remains responsive to evolving research priorities and emerging opportunities while upholding the integrity and purpose of the Framework Programme to advance knowledge, promote innovation, and address societal challenges.

German U15 firmly believes that the European Research Council (ERC) is a vital instrument for supporting frontier research and scientific excellence. **The ERC's commitment to funding curiosity-driven projects empowers researchers to pursue ground-breaking ideas, thus driving innovation and pushing the boundaries of knowledge.** Therefore, any future Framework Programme must strengthen and expand the ERC's role within the European Research Area.

As representatives of leading research-intensive universities, we collaborate with policymakers, industry stakeholders, and fellow members of the scientific community to shape the future of European research and innovation. Together, we can ensure that FP10 embodies Europe's commitment to scientific excellence, fosters innovation, and strengthens its position as a global leader in research and technology. In our view, the following recommendations are key to further develop the research Framework Programme.

1. A FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF OUR TIMES WITH A ROBUST BUDGET

- Research, both fundamental and applied, is pivotal in driving innovation. It lays the basis for ground-breaking technologies and solutions. Given the enormous geopolitical, economic, and ecological challenges of our times, FP10 necessitates a robust budget of €200 billion upwards. With sufficient financial backing, FP10 can catalyse transformative change and empower researchers to address global challenges. Europe's scientific leadership and technological sovereignty hinges on its ability to maintain competitiveness in the global scientific arena.
- The European Commission is exploring several options for enhancing support for research and development of technologies with dual-use potential, including two that would enable these technologies to be funded by FP10. We strongly advocate for a ring-fenced budget for civil research, with certain (limited) flexibility for unforeseen developments ensuring that FP10 remains responsive to evolving research priorities and emerging opportunities while upholding the integrity and purpose of the Framework Programme to advance knowledge, promote innovation, and address societal challenges. Funding for military applications should continue to come from the European Defence Fund while leveraging synergies between various relevant programmes, including FP10.

2. A FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME FOCUSING ON EXCELLENCE AND COMPETITION

- Excellence in research is crucial for ensuring that European Research and Innovation (R&I) remains impactful across short, medium, and long-term goals, making it a fundamental requirement for fostering innovation. To build upon the core principles of previous EU Framework Programmes, funding decisions should continue to be based on quality and excellence, thus promoting fair competition and attractiveness of the programme for top researchers.
- Even though we consider the exploitation of scientific findings to be crucial, the ongoing shift towards fewer Research and Innovation Actions (RIA) and more Innovation Actions (IA) should be corrected to restore a balanced approach. Ensuring a greater emphasis on projects at lower Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) – which could be termed Research Actions (RA) – is essential to uphold the foundational role of basic and applied research as precondition for future innovation.

3. A FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME STIMULATING RESEARCH TALENT AND CURIOSITY-DRIVEN RESEARCH

- The ERC stands out with a significant influence on scientific discovery, and is a fundamental factor in contributing to the EU's reputation as a leader in research. The success of the Framework Programme also depends on consistently fostering young researchers and talent through Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA). Both programmes should persist and receive significantly higher

funding while remaining open and competitive to solidify their roles as primary instruments of the European Framework Programme.

- There is an abundance of highly rated projects and proposals, yet many of these deserving initiatives go unfunded due to budget constraints. We welcome the prospect of higher success rates in these programmes and thus a decrease in the number of worthy projects left unsupported.
- Furthermore, the current funding levels do not adequately account for inflation, thus do not reflect real funding needs. This situation is particularly challenging, as infrastructure and personnel costs need to be covered. The ERC, for instance, has been operating with the same funding levels since 2007, thus there is a pressing need for substantial increases in funding. This would ensure that worthy research initiatives receive the financial support they require.
- In designing FP10 it is important to note that ambitious research funding includes an appropriate level of indirect costs.

4. A FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME EXPLOITING THE STRENGTHS OF ARTS, SOCIAL SCIENCES, AND THE HUMANITIES

- Interdisciplinary funding programmes play a crucial role in supporting research projects that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries. By establishing dedicated funding streams explicitly aimed at integrating social sciences, humanities, life and natural sciences, FP10 can incite collaboration across disciplines. These programmes would provide researchers with the resources and support needed to tackle multifaceted issues from multiple perspectives. Moreover, they could foster a culture of interdisciplinary teamwork, encouraging researchers to exchange ideas, methodologies, and best practice across disciplines.
- In addition to interdisciplinarity, FP10 should provide funding for research in arts, social sciences and humanities in a dedicated cluster. This would contribute significantly to societal and cultural innovation, which is essential for tackling present and future societal challenges. Democracy, climate change, migration, and many other topics cannot be addressed solely through technical solutions; they require a deep understanding of human behaviour, cultural dynamics, and historical context.

5. A FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

- International academic collaboration remains vital for tackling global challenges and is crucial for enhancing the European Union's R&I leadership and competitiveness. Changes in geopolitics and strategic autonomy underscore the importance of opening FP10 for international collaboration wisely. Addressing threats requires a nuanced approach of evaluating risks and determining the extent of non-EU participation, guided by the principle “as open as possible, as closed as necessary”. While recognizing the importance of safeguarding

intellectual property and sensitive information, it is essential to maintain an open and collaborative research environment that fosters innovation and knowledge exchange.

- We welcome efforts to include more associated countries, namely long-standing partners such as the UK, Switzerland and Israel and to promote collaboration with like-minded countries such as Canada, South Korea and New Zealand. Collaboration with associated countries enriches Europe's research landscape by bringing together diverse perspectives, expertise, and resources from around the world. By forging strategic alliances with renowned institutions outside the EU, we can leverage complementary strengths, access new research networks, and amplify the impact of our collective efforts.

6. A FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME OFFERING CLEAR STRUCTURES AND STREAMLINED REGULATIONS

- While acknowledging the importance of addressing missions within Horizon Europe, we note that they currently lack the desired visibility and impact. Therefore, we advocate for a comprehensive assessment of both the accomplishments and deficiencies. If missions are to remain integral to the Framework Programme, they must incorporate more clear-cut Research and Innovation (R&I) elements and add value, integrating policy objectives and funding allocations across all Directorate-Generals. This strategic re-alignment will not only amplify the impact of missions but also foster a more cohesive and impactful approach towards addressing societal challenges within the Framework Programme.
- In our pursuit of scientific excellence and innovation, we advocate a paradigm shift towards less prescriptive and predefined calls. While specificity in funding calls can help guide research towards predefined objectives, overly prescriptive requirements may stifle creativity, limit exploration of novel ideas, and hinder the emergence of breakthrough discoveries. Less predefined funding calls can facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration by allowing researchers from diverse backgrounds to come together and tackle complex problems from multiple perspectives.
- Partnerships are hugely heterogenous and complex funding instruments, thus difficult to access and to implement. Fewer but stronger and thematically focused partnerships of broad EU interest would increase the transparency and attractiveness of the Framework Programme. At the same time, this would reduce the resources needed to coordinate national involvement. Moreover, a significantly reduced number of partnerships would free up funds for additional Research and Innovation Actions (RIA), Innovation Actions (IA) and possible Research Actions (RA).
- The number of consortium participants should remain flexible and allow for small and medium-sized projects in which scientific exchange is efficient.
- We consider it imperative to continue efforts to minimise remaining bureaucratic obstacles. These include simplifying reporting and expenditure

justifications, clarifying grant application criteria, and optimising monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Embracing further simplification measures will ensure that researchers can dedicate maximum time and energy to advancing knowledge, ultimately maximising the impact of FP10 investments.