

40 Years of Excellence: Strengthening Europe's Research Legacy and Advancing Competitiveness, Resilience, and Societal Progress

Over the past forty years, the EU Framework Programmes have substantially contributed to fostering collaboration, driving innovation, and advancing scientific excellence across Europe. This path must be continued. Therefore, the Leibniz Association strongly recommends the following:

- FP10 continues to embrace excellence as an overarching principle, whether in basic or applied research
- FP10 tackles societal challenges and ensures public trust in science
- FP10 stands for a strategic interdisciplinary portfolio approach and permeability of all pillars
- FP10 remains committed to the principles of Open Science
- FP10 must foster European R&D in order to promote sovereignty and innovation
- FP10 is equipped with an ambitious budget that is ringfenced exclusively for research and innovation

Since the founding of the very first universities in Europe, **mobility and exchange** have been central to European scientific culture across geographies and across disciplines. European academic life has since then been defined by exchanges between countries and regions. These remain key success factors for excellent science **today** and **tomorrow**. They stand at the heart of European societies and their self-conception. They form the core of Europe's success model for the well-being of society and for scientific advancement. European research culture values diversity, openness, and cooperation, distinguishing itself globally with borderless opportunities for research and innovation, fostering a dynamic and interconnected ecosystem that drives global progress and competitiveness.

Over the past forty years, the EU Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation have substantially contributed to deepen such practices whilst involving partners from industry, international organisations, civil society and other stakeholders. Europe must stand united in times of rising global insecurities and rapid technological changes to protect its values. It must invest in collaborative and multidisciplinary approaches to research whilst upholding scientific integrity, ethical standards, and social responsibility. When designing the Tenth Framework Programme for Research and Innovation 2028-2034 (FP10), core **European values** such as **democracy, the rule of law, fundamental rights, and peace** must remain paramount.

Tackling **societal challenges, garnering talent and connecting scientists** in the European Research Area and beyond should remain the **overarching objectives** of the Framework Programme. Like its predecessors, FP10 should adhere to **international norms** on sustainable development, which are intrinsic values for the European Union enshrined in the treaties.

Given how quickly the societal demands and global order can change, the ability to adequately address societal challenges also depends on the ability to react timely.

Therefore, the Leibniz Association proposes the establishment of a funding mechanism with an **earmarked budget for future crises or unexpected events**.

FP10 should continue to embrace **excellence** as an overarching principle, whether in basic or applied research, whether in individual research endeavours or collaborative efforts. Excellent research and innovation increase competition for the best minds, the best infrastructures and knowledge hubs and allow our scientists to adequately tackle societal challenges and embrace the opportunities of our time.

Especially in the light of ongoing societal changes, it is essential to actively **involve citizens without restricting scientific freedom**, ensure transparency in public spending on science, and emphasise the role of research in promoting societal well-being. Transparency and participation are key to safeguarding **public trust** in science.

Social sciences and humanities (SSH) play a fundamental role in our understanding of human behaviour and societal structures. Even more so in times of global social upheaval and change, the insights generated by SSH disciplines are **invaluable for tackling contemporary challenges** and **aligning policies** to address the diversity of societal needs. It is therefore vital to ensure their full and equal integration in FP10.

The EU's embrace of **Open Science** has sparked a transformative cultural shift in scientific practice across all disciplines. This has the potential to broaden the notion of excellence to include dimensions of accessibility, transparency as well as diversity in research outcomes. Given the ongoing transformation of scientific inquiry to become more data-driven and its impact on all disciplines, FP10 must foster the alignment, interoperability and sustainability of the related infrastructures, the necessary skills needed to comply with the Open Science principles, and the development of a supportive culture. FP10 should utilise the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) for the implementation of Open Science in the European Research Area.

At the same time, in the current global context, considerations of technological sovereignty and strategic autonomy must be addressed, requiring an unprecedented balancing act between preserving the core values of openness while ensuring European competitiveness, security, and autonomy. This applies particularly to **international cooperation**. International cooperation sharpens the EU's focus on global challenges and facilitates access to talent, broader networks and the integration into international value chains for both academia and industry. Nevertheless, it must pursue a **strategic approach** based on shared values with potential partner countries on the one hand, and the protection of **European interests** on the other hand. As open as possible, as closed as necessary should be the driving logic of cooperation with the wider world.

Continuing the **3-pillar structure in FP10** offers clarity and simplicity, but it is essential to improve **permeability** and links between the pillars and funding instruments. Synergies, in particular with other EU programmes, are crucial, and should include Missions and Partnerships. **Simplification** and **streamlining processes** as well as **clear guidelines** must remain priorities in FP10, whilst responding to the needs of applicants and project participants.

FP10 should ensure a **balance between basic research and applied research** (also at higher Technological Readiness Levels) in order to achieve the necessary medium and short-term objectives and to develop a future-oriented knowledge base. Collaborative **basic research is the key to the innovation cycle** and therefore requires sustained funding. Fostering interdisciplinary collaboration is crucial to address the societal challenges we face. **However, few funding programmes currently facilitate cross-border collaborative basic research, making it imperative to prioritise this aspect in FP10.**

Industry funding has been an integral part of the Framework Programmes since their inception. **Cooperation between science and industry** is necessary to ensure the efficient transfer of research results into practice and to promote innovation. It is also an essential means of securing the technological sovereignty and strategic autonomy of the EU. FP10 should therefore pay particular attention to key sectors and niches.

The **European Research Council (ERC)** is the flagship for **excellent basic research** in Europe. By nurturing top talent, it enhances Europe's visibility and consolidates its position as a leading global research hub. Part of the ERC's success lies in its **autonomy**, which must be safeguarded in the future. The ERC should be provided with **a budget that meets the requirements of an unparalleled funding programme**, allowing it to support additional excellent projects and to attract a larger number of talented researchers.

As part of the ERA policy agenda, **European Research Infrastructures (RIs)** play an essential role in the European Research Area (ERA). It is therefore essential that **RI funding is sustained and increased in FP10**, including funding to facilitate **access to RIs** in Europe, and that the RI funding instrument as such becomes more visible to beneficiaries of other funding instruments within FP10. Also, funding priorities for ESFRI projects and ERICs should be realistically assessed by the Member States and the EU and mechanisms for sustainable RI funding should be established.

As originally foreseen and in order to be successful, the **Missions** need to follow a truly systemic **portfolio approach** which supports the whole value chain and addresses all forms of innovation. This requires permeability of the pillars and stronger links between their funding lines.

European Partnerships are key to fostering synergies between EU and Member State funding programmes and in aligning national research agendas. They provide an opportunity for stakeholders to help shape strategic research agendas and to work together in transnational collaborations. However, the efforts to increase transparency and simplification envisaged by Horizon Europe should be intensified. Similar to the missions, partnerships should be integrated into a systemic **portfolio approach**.

National and regional disparities in R&I investment and research performance continue to hamper the development of a robust and cohesive European Research Area capable of being a resilient global partner on an equal footing with competing actors. This requires the continuation of **integration and support measures** through the **Widening Programme**, the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions** and the **COST Programme** in FP10. Networking activities and best-practice exchange should continue to support the institutional structures in the target countries and, in conjunction with the Structural Funds, promote the development and expansion of research infrastructures.

Ultimately, we need to bear in mind that **research and science are at the centre of progress** and key enabler for development and innovation, for peaceful collaboration and exchange. Europe's scientific culture, if not its self-understanding per se, is based on exchange and openness yesterday, today and tomorrow. Research is a fundamental pillar for steady progress in an ever-changing world. We must therefore remain as open as possible at European level and with likeminded partners, while preserving our autonomy and sovereignty which allows us to progress according to our own values. FP10 requires an **ambitious budget of 200 billion euros ringfenced exclusively for research and innovation** in order to meet these requirements.

The Leibniz Association connects 96 independent research institutions that range in focus from natural, engineering and environmental sciences to economics, spatial and social sciences and the humanities. Leibniz Institutes address issues of social, economic and ecological relevance. They conduct basic and applied research, maintain scientific infrastructure, and provide research-based services. It advises and informs policymakers, science, industry and the general public. The Leibniz Institutes employ around 20,500 people, including 11,500 researchers. The financial volume amounts to 2 billion euros.

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