

Prospects on the future Framework Programme for Research and Innovation

The Leibniz Association's early position paper on the future European Union Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (EU FP) reflects the experiences of its member research institutes in the first years of the current EU FP and its predecessor. The Leibniz Association hereby contributes to the ongoing discussions on the future EU FP and sets a particular focus on fostering and funding excellent research in Europe.

Sustaining the European Added Value

Over the last decade, EU FP have become central instruments for the implementation of focused specific objectives on the European level as well as for the consolidation and further development of the European Research Area (ERA). The future EU FP should continue this trend, even though it is being developed in a recently rather weakened political European context where common European interests are likely to be traded for national preoccupations. In line with this, it is essential that the European added value is maintained as one of the key priorities within the future EU FP. Therefore, the design and objectives of the future EU FP have to recall and mirror the basic concepts of ERA: the next EU FP must provide a framework for excellent research integrating all relevant ERA actors to allow for true European cooperation, it must sustain an open labour market and propel international cooperation.

Given the vulnerable economic and financial situations of the EU and many Member States, negotiating the budget for the future EU FP will be a difficult task – especially with regard to the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 and the agreement with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland setting out the arrangements for its withdrawal from the EU. Nonetheless, scattering the resources to satisfy and content all involved must be avoided as European funding cannot and must not substitute national funding. Hence, synergies and alignment with national research strategies and research funding schemes need to be further enhanced. The resources allocated to the new programme's policy-driven part should be steered towards a limited number of priorities, which need to be defined in close cooperation with the scientific communities and policy makers of the Member States and Associated Countries and should focus on where the European added value is deemed highest.

However, not only the main priority areas, but also the work programmes should be developed in close cooperation with the Member States, Associated Countries and other relevant stakeholders. This drafting process needs to be transparent and comprehensible, and must involve Programme Committees early on in the process, particularly concerning the strategic agenda setting and definition of calls.

Good governance for research

The structure of the new EU FP should be clear and avoid fragmentation and duplication through the inclusion of too many diverse instruments. Instead, some of these instruments (JTI, JPI, Era-Nets, Art.185 etc.) should be assessed with regard to their efficiency, objective and strategic fit into the overall structure of the EU FP. Many of these instruments have the reputation of

being “closed shops” of long-time consortia which lack transparency and are difficult to access. In addition, the introduction of new funding instruments or funding models (e.g. inducement prices) should only be considered after thorough assessment and if they are meant to replace or supplement existing instruments.

The future EU FP should rely on grant-based research funding, whereas the use of financial instruments such as loans should play a minor role and be employed only where appropriate or necessary. As for mono-beneficiary instruments their use should be very limited, thus respecting the principle of subsidiarity and European added value.

In contrast, collaborative research has a long and ongoing tradition of fostering transnational cooperation and of creating networks throughout Europe and beyond. The EU FP is unique in this regard, as there is no other funding programme which provides a real common funding pot for transnational collaborative research projects independent of national interests and priorities. These collaborative projects must continue to address the entire research and innovation process, however, with a stronger focus on knowledge-oriented research (with TRL levels below 5) as it is the basis for and secures long-term technological innovation. Furthermore, the future EU FP should re-visit the size of such projects. Smaller collaborative research projects are less burdensome in terms of administration and management but more efficient and effective with regard to their research performance.

Simplification and usability

The continuity of the current Horizon 2020 structure with its three pillars and most of its funding instruments as well as its rules of procedure and participation is expedient. However, further efforts are needed to maintain this progression towards user-friendly and efficient funding programmes with a special focus on the implementation phase.

Moreover, in the spirit of further simplification, the European Commission should adopt a trust-based approach towards beneficiaries. Standard accounting practices of the organizations as well as national regulations should be acknowledged to a larger extent – especially concerning personnel costs.

The topic texts should be more comprehensible and clearly state the concrete scope and expected impact of the topic and avoid a surfeit of objectives, thus allowing for well-targeted proposals and inhibiting oversubscription. Where two-stage evaluation schemes are fit for purpose a rigorous filter needs to be applied to the first stage, reducing the number of proposals accepted to the second stage. Only in this way can second-stage proposals have an adequate chance of obtaining funding. In general, the evaluation process and criteria should be more transparent. The feedback given in the ESR needs to be more specific and describe the proposal’s strengths as well as shortcomings in more detail, allowing the researchers to reconsider their approach. Concurrently, important aspects such as gender equality, ethics or the integration of the humanities should be an integral part of the reviewers’ training.

Alternatively, abolishing the work programmes all together would offer researchers the chance to plan their research activities with a long-term perspective, while also allowing funding



projects with a longer duration. Instead, the programme could provide a range of diverse funding instruments in the framework of a mission-oriented approach. This would allow for thematically open funding on a broad spectrum across the whole research and innovation chain within the set priority areas.

The Leibniz Association

The Leibniz Association connects 91 independent research institutions that range in focus from the natural, engineering and environmental sciences via economics, spatial and social sciences to the humanities. Leibniz institutes address issues of social, economic and ecological relevance. They conduct knowledge-driven and applied basic research, maintain scientific infrastructure and provide research-based services.

The Leibniz Association identifies focus areas for knowledge transfer to policy-makers, academia, business and the public. Due to the importance of the institutions for the country as a whole, they are funded jointly by the Federation and the Länder, employing some 18,600 individuals, including 9,500 researchers. The entire budget of all the institutes is approximately 1.7 billion Euro.

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