



EMPOWERING EUROPE THROUGH STRONGER, AMBITIOUS RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

THE ANRT-ERA WORKING GROUP'S
STRATEGIC VISION FOR THE FUTURE
FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

Introduction

The ERA* Working Group of the [ANRT \(Association Nationale de la Recherche et Technologie\)](#) is made up of 44 French public and private organisations representing the most active participants in the Framework Programme (FP). With their extensive, diverse experience and strong commitment to European research and innovation, the ERA Working Group has been actively engaged in discussions about the future of the FP since its creation in 2000.

The ERA working group is firmly convinced that the fundamental role of the Framework Programme must be further strengthened so that Europe can tackle multiple challenges.

In a current global context characterised by significant geopolitical, environmental, social, and economic challenges coupled with intense competition, the next Framework Programme (FP10) should be designed as a crucial instrument to address these challenges and boost Europe's competitiveness and resilience. To serve Europe effectively, FP10 must be aligned with strategic European priorities, ensuring that investments in R&I contribute effectively to EU policies, such as the green and digital transitions and strategic autonomy.

In addition, at a time when democratic systems are facing significant threats, it is essential to bring European research closer to citizens. European citizens must be made aware of how Europe's scientific efforts contribute to their protection through science-based solutions. The significant lack of awareness of EU-funded research calls for better communication on research opportunities to make them accessible and understandable to the general public and highlight the academic and industrial successes made possible by European funding.

The EU needs to radically improve its attractiveness as a hub for R&I investment by making the 10th Framework Programme a key instrument to boost the competitiveness of the European economy.

* European Research Area

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Executive Summary

Firstly, FP10 needs an **ambitious budget** to tackle global challenges and ensure Europe's competitiveness.

The ERA Working Group believes that the Framework Programme should **pursue a continuous approach** to offer **ample, balanced opportunities for R&I**: covering **low and high TRLs, small- and large-scale projects, bottom-up and top-down approaches, interdisciplinary and inter-sectorial collaboration**.

As a general principle, the next Framework Programme must **ensure continuity and stability** to encourage participation, **implement the necessary developments** to improve clarity and accessibility, avoid administrative burdens and promote transparency. This applies firstly to the **structure of the programme**, whose **funding instruments need to be streamlined to avoid overlaps and simplify procedures**. Secondly, it concerns the **funding rules**, which need **further simplification to ensure wider access and reduce errors**.

The **flexibility of the Tenth Framework Programme** is another crucial aspect that needs to be strengthened. This flexibility is essential in order to design a programme that can be adapted and retargeted in response to emerging priorities, particularly due to interconnected crises.

In addition, it is important that the next Framework Programme remain open to the world by maintaining a **balanced approach to third countries**, and building responsible, strategic partnerships.

Finally, the European Union should **facilitate all possible synergies between programmes, and connections between Framework Programme actions** to support the transition from research to innovation.

1/ Programme structure

The structure of the programme is crucial, both in terms of strategic design and clarity, and accessibility for participants.

The four-pillar structure of Horizon Europe is quite clear to participants, who are now able to explore and find the most suitable opportunities for their projects. Specifically, Pillar 1 is relatively easy to understand, although some difficulties remain with research infrastructures, which are insufficiently used by other Pillars; for Pillars 2 and 3 there is mainly a need for evolution.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Maintain the four-pillar structure but simplify the funding system:

- Continuity and relative stability over time mean that researchers can become more familiar with the issues and challenges involved, and encourages participation.
- The current funding system is too complex due to the high number of instruments available. Simplifying and restructuring the instruments within these pillars is essential.

B. Enhance Pillar 2:

Revise the clusters to integrate new EU initiatives (such as strategic autonomy, critical technologies and new European Commission priorities). Ensuring clarity and simplicity remains an essential priority.

C. Improve Pillar 3:

- This pillar needs to be clearer and more accessible, in particular the various instruments need clarification.
- Open EIC funding opportunities for high TRL projects to all innovation actors, including large companies that cannot progress further in the EIC chain. The accelerator is an excellent instrument for funding high TRLs, but access is limited.

D. Take a new approach to research infrastructures:

Maximise impact while ensuring efficient use of resources by taking a new approach. A recentralisation of research infrastructures seems beneficial, promoting them across the four pillars to enhance access and synergies for different types of actors.

E. Support to technology infrastructures:

Dedicated funding for technology infrastructures should be introduced under the second pillar. Europe's innovation capacity and industrial productivity depend on technology infrastructures, which provide expertise and essential equipment for technology development, testing and up-scaling, and reduce investment risks for companies.

2/ Programme budget

To compete globally in strategic sectors, the 10th Framework Programme budget will need to respond to current and future global challenges, while ensuring Europe's sovereignty and autonomy.

For the period 2021-2027, the budget allocated to Horizon Europe is insufficient to meet the programme's ambitions. According to the European Commission's 2024 report on the evaluation of EU R&I activities, between 2021 and 2023, two thirds (67.2%) of high quality proposals were not funded, and required an additional €54.4 billion. Furthermore, the very low success rate discourages participation and drives potential applicants towards national funding sources.

As a last point, the budget allocated to projects does not always match the objectives and expected impact, for both enterprises and research organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Set an ambitious budget for FP10:

It is crucial to establish an ambitious budget for FP10 that matches the European Union's current and future challenges and will achieve higher success rates. The ERA Working Group supports the European Parliament's proposal for a budget of at least €200 billion for the next Framework Programme.

B. Better allocate budgets between calls:

Consider a more effective allocation of the programme budget between the different actions and devise calls to ensure that they meet the objectives of the programme.

C. Ensure programme flexibility:

A reserve of 3% of the total budget should be retained to address potential priorities and emergency situations that might arise during implementation of the programme. If this reserve is not used, it should be redistributed between the programme's calls for proposals.

3/ International cooperation

In research and innovation, Europe must collaborate with researchers and innovators from other regions of the world to better address global challenges. The ERA Working Group shares the ambitions of Horizon Europe, which extends beyond European borders while ensuring the protection of internal interests. The introduction of articles 22.5 and 22.6 of the Regulation establishing Horizon Europe has allowed the programme to maintain flexibility, aligning with the principle «as open as possible, as closed as necessary».

However, there are difficulties implementing collaborations with some countries, and a lack of support from the European Commission, even when such collaborations are recommended in the call.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Maintain a balanced approach towards third countries:

The 10th Framework Programme should continue to ensure a good balance between openness and restriction towards third countries. Reciprocity remains an essential condition for opening up to these countries, highlighting the importance of equitable partnerships.

B. Introduce a similar instrument to Articles 22.5 and 22.6:

- In order to adapt the programme to specific thematic issues and the geopolitical context, it is appropriate to introduce a mechanism similar to Articles 22.5 and 22.6 of the Horizon Europe Regulation.
- To better ensure the protection of the EU's technological sovereignty, a less open approach is appropriate in the area of critical technologies identified by the EU.

C. Ensure first industrial exploitation in the EU:

- To stop European innovations from going abroad, they must be exploited in the European Union first, at least for the most sensitive and strategic topics. This approach aims at maintaining excellence in Europe while ensuring strong, competitive European industrialisation.
- The European Commission should also regularly monitor the exploitation of intellectual property resulting from the Framework Programme, both inside and outside the EU.

D. Support cooperation with less-developed R&I ecosystems:

In order to facilitate collaborations with third countries that do not have sufficiently developed R&I ecosystems, the European Commission could implement support measures, such as the pre-identification of potential actors for consortia when a collaboration is recommended within the call.

4/ Strategic planning and work programmes

The planning of the Framework Programme (via the strategic plan) is an interesting exercise for working on anticipating calls better and developing more strategic positioning over time, but the ERA Working Group underline that understanding the different levels of programming can sometimes be difficult for researchers and innovators.

The Horizon Europe planning system has demonstrated its flexibility in responding to global challenges. It has also demonstrated its capacity to respond effectively to the emergence of new priorities, thus ensuring the necessary adaptability to current challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Maintain strategic planning and biennial programming of calls:

The system of strategic planning and biennial programming of calls for proposals should be maintained, with a greater focus on the scheduling of calls for proposals, in particular the first calls to be launched after the publication of the work programme.

B. Strike a balance between programming and flexibility:

The 10th Framework Programme must ensure a balance between programming and flexibility, in order to adapt and quickly launch calls for proposals as new priorities emerge.

C. Improve the clarity of strategic planning:

Clearer strategic planning is crucial to make it easier to understand for R&I actors and to align this strategic exercise more closely with the project design.

D. Conduct and publish regular gap analysis:

Gap analysis of call topics by the Commission is essential for effective funding planning. This analysis should be carried out more frequently to remain relevant.

5/ Funding instruments and calls for proposals

It is essential that the European R&I funding system be clear, understandable and accessible to both newcomers and more experienced organisations.

In the pillars, the funding system is currently considered as over complex, making it difficult to access and find the right opportunity, and making complementarities hard to identify.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Introduce «Research Actions»:

Introduce the Research Actions (RA) instrument in both Pillar 2 and the infrastructure programme, relating to low TRL topics with non-prescriptive calls on a targeted topic (similar to the Pathfinder challenge model), with the aim of developing knowledge in support of other clusters' actions. This new instrument would facilitate upstream collaborative research involving consortia of a reasonable size (maximum 10 participants).

B. Diversify project size and budget:

Create more variation in project size and budget to meet the different needs of topics and consortia and encourage broader participation. Specifically, within Pillar 2, the ERA Working Group identifies two needs: i) introduce calls for projects involving small consortia (fewer than 10 beneficiaries) for low TRL topics to ensure more agility and encourage coordination; ii) increase the budget for demonstration projects for higher TRL to better support the transition from innovative ideas to practical and industrial implementation.

C. Make instruments more complementary:

Improve complementarity between different instruments and help researchers move from one stage to the next along the research-to-innovation pathway.

D. Increase accessibility for newcomers:

Make the European research funding system more understandable and accessible, especially for newcomers. This includes providing clearer guidance and support tools.

6/ Balance between TRLs

The Framework Programme should promote a comprehensive, coherent approach to research and innovation to support scientific advances and their translation into practical and industrial applications. In Horizon Europe, the ERA Working Group observes an imbalance in the coverage of TRLs despite the legal provisions outlined.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Cover the entire TRL chain:

The future Framework Programme must ensure a good balance between all levels of TRL throughout the chain, covering both low and high TRLs equally and adjusting the size and budget of projects accordingly.

B. Support the transition from research to industrialisation:

Implement measures and dedicated fundings to support the transition of research results to innovation and industrialisation, including by creating bridges between different programme actions. This would strengthen Europe by preventing the development of technologies elsewhere.

7/ Missions

Missions offer a new, stimulating and promising approach to addressing current challenges. The ERA Working Group does not question the actual concept of missions, but rather their implementation and coherence with other instruments in Pillar 2.

Few organisations are able to position themselves within “mission” projects. Several difficulties have been identified: i) the complexity and opacity of the topics; ii) the insufficient space left for research and innovation in mission projects, so that it is difficult for researchers to find a place; iii) a persistent lack of understanding of how to participate in these actions; and iv) difficulties related to the need to involve different actors who are often not part of the R&I ecosystem.

In addition, the governance mechanism of the missions seems complicated, while the way that priorities are identified and the workings of the monitoring and evaluation process are insufficiently straightforward.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Promote missions as “EU missions”:

- The ERA working group proposes removing missions from the Framework Programme and instead promoting them as «European Union missions», in order to give them greater scope and impact. Following this approach, missions could be funded by other EU and national programmes, with overall coordination at European level and FP10 supporting only the R&I part of missions.
- «Programme managers» (based on the EIC model) could be introduced to better manage and integrate project results for stronger impacts.

B. Enhance synergies and complementarities within the FP:

Within the Framework Programme, it will be necessary to improve and strengthen the synergies and complementarities between the missions and other instruments in order to avoid overlaps and ensure that actions are consistent. This will help to streamline efforts and maximise the impact of research and innovation initiatives.

8/ Partnerships

Partnerships are a key instrument in public-private cooperation that can mobilise significant resources for strategic political priorities and make the European industrial system more competitive.

However, no one type of partnership can be singled out, since their success depends on several factors. On one hand, co-financed partnerships are the most complex to implement, mainly due to the mix of European and national rules. On the other hand, Joint Undertakings are very attractive from the point of view of the actors and the challenges addressed, as they foster richer exchanges involving the entire ecosystem. From an implementation point of view, they work efficiently when management is centralised in the Joint Undertaking.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Ensure standardised, simple rules:

- Aim for greater uniformity in the rules, while keeping simplicity as an essential goal to ensure effective implementation.
- Avoid mixed models (combination of institutionalised and co-financed partnerships) as they complicate the process.

B. Transparency and accessibility:

Make the process of setting up and running partnerships, and their roadmaps, transparent and accessible to all interested actors. This transparency will encourage wider participation and increase the effectiveness of partnerships.

C. Avoid multiple partnerships and overlaps:

Continue to streamline the landscape to avoid a proliferation of partnerships and overlaps with other instruments, which create clarity issues. However, it is essential to maintain the three current categories in order to better respond to different needs. Finally, it is essential to ensure that each partnership has adequate resources to achieve its objectives effectively.

9/ Rules for participation and project implementation

To ensure a high level of European stakeholders participation, maintaining the continuity and stability of the FP participation rules is essential. While the ERA Working Group highly appreciates the European Commission's simplification strategy, there is still some work to be done to further simplify and avoid administrative burdens.

Some aspects need to be improved and clarified, in particular regarding the implementation of the lump sum model. This includes some clauses in the Annotated Model Grant Agreement and the use of the dashboard, which is not representative.

The blind evaluation pilot does not seem to be the right instrument to ensure greater transparency and equal opportunities, and risks resulting in lower-quality proposals.

Note that the new financial rules introduced with Horizon Europe are not always appreciated as they can sometimes create additional administrative burdens because they are not aligned with internal practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Maintain a stable, reliable system:

- Ensure continuity with the existing system. It is essential to maintain a stable, reliable framework in order to encourage participation and guarantee attractiveness.
- Consolidate the rules for participation (especially the Annotated Model Grant Agreement) right from the beginning of the Programme, and ensure that they are applied in the same way by all European Commission agencies and services.

B. Continue simplification:

- Continue the ongoing simplification of the rules and procedures, not only to encourage the participation of newcomers and experienced participants, but also to motivate organisations to coordinate collaborative projects.
- Continue the rule harmonisation process for the FP and all European programmes.
- Before implementing major changes, introduce pilot actions to assess and refine each development. This will ensure smoother transitions and better results.

C. Improve lump sum implementation:

Ensure the simplicity and clarity of lump sum implementation, to foster transparency and assess the concrete advantage provided by this new system.

D. Discontinue the blind evaluation pilot:

- The blind evaluation pilot should be discontinued. It is not the appropriate instrument for ensuring equal opportunities, and may compromise the quality of proposals.
- Ensure more transparency in the evaluation process to improve access to the Programme and guarantee equal opportunities.

E. Enhance the redress procedure

The redress procedure should address not only the process but also the content of the evaluations.

10/ Synergies

The ERA Working Group outlines the importance of synergies as an essential instrument that should be encouraged and simplified. Synergies can enhance the impact of EU funding in R&I and contribute to efficient, intelligent governance of public funds. At present, synergies are well conceived at the political level but often fail in practice.

Nowadays, the regulatory framework is highly complex, leading to various difficulties in achieving synergies. For example, the implementation of the Seal of Excellence is problematic for several reasons: i) non-harmonised funding rules; ii) different funding rates; and iii) lack of coherence between programmes, making it difficult to achieve synergies from the outset. The implementation of projects funded from different sources proves complex, which can discourage potential beneficiaries.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Harmonise rules and objectives between programmes:

- To reduce complexity, it is essential to harmonise rules between programmes.
- Policy objectives and orientations should be established from the outset within a defined timeframe and be common to all EU programmes. This can be achieved through comprehensive, coherent strategic planning across the different EU programmes.

B. Establish EU-level working groups:

The creation of EU-level working groups, involving experts and the European Commission, would coordinate the design of calls and funding mechanisms across different programmes and avoid overlaps (e.g. Horizon Europe and EU4Health).

C. Promote programme coherence:

Promote coherence between European programmes by creating new links and bridges, or reinforcing existing ones.

D. Develop the Seal of Excellence:

Continue to develop the Seal of Excellence under the 10th Framework Programme so that highly rated but unfunded projects can find alternative funding at national/regional level. In parallel, it is important to continue work on simplifying the rules and ensuring coherence between the different processes (European, national and regional).

ANRT and the members of its ERA Working Group
remain ready to provide additional input
on the topics mentioned above and are available
for further discussions.



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