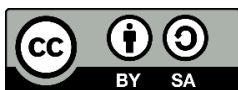


**The DFG's proposals for a future  
EU Framework Programme for  
Research & Innovation that meets  
Europe's needs and ambitions**

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Europe is at a turning point. Externally, its geopolitical situation has become more fragile following the outbreak of violent conflict on the European continent. Internally, the rise of illiberal and anti-democratic populist movements is challenging the European project. Research has been a constitutive part of the European vision, a prerequisite for European societies to thrive, and an indispensable component of Europe's strength vis-à-vis its competitors. Only recently did the corona pandemic illustrate the significance of excellent research in providing solutions. What is more, it showed that basic research can help provide answers to questions and challenges that have not yet appeared on the horizon. Research can and will continue to contribute to these answers. In order to ensure this happens, however, adequate funding, programmes and framework conditions are needed in Europe. The negotiations for the next EU Framework Programme for Research & Innovation (FP10) are crucial in this regard, as are the parallel negotiations on the future EU Multiannual Financial Framework. In terms of ensuring a successful programme that can deliver on expectations as to its impact and benefits for the EU as a whole, researchers' needs should be both the starting point and the point of reference. As the central self-governing research funding organisation in Germany, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) proposes the following ideas and recommendations for FP10:

### **A more ambitious and ring-fenced budget for FP10**

Research is the key to Europe's competitiveness. The ex-post evaluation of Horizon 2020 shows that every euro invested in the programme will yield about five euros of benefit for EU citizens in the mid-term. Yet this significance is not reflected in either the Horizon Europe budget or the research budgets of many European countries. On the contrary, funding has been repeatedly withdrawn from the programme budget and redirected to new, unrelated policy priorities. If the EU and its member states aim for a strong and impactful framework programme, they need to provide a budget that adequately reflects the value and importance of research and innovation (R&I).

- ▶ A **significantly increased financial envelope** is necessary to ensure that world-class research can be conducted under excellent conditions. The oversubscription rate of 74% in Horizon 2020 proves how massively the EU's R&I budget needs to be expanded to ensure that proposals that have passed the quality threshold receive funding and do not fall victim to a budget shortage.
- ▶ **The FP10 budget needs to be ring-fenced** in order to make it stable and predictable for the research community. New policy priorities should be addressed by means of fresh additional money from the EU budget instead of redeployments from the budget of framework programmes. A dedicated budget reserve could be set up within FP10 to be able to respond quickly to such needs.

- ▶ **Research commitments** should be made **available to the benefit of the programme again**, as provided for in Art. 15 of the Financial Regulation, and not be returned to member states. The nature of research requires a certain degree of flexibility with regard to the absorption of funds. In addition, this absorption could be enhanced by adopting the FP10 regulation and the subsequent working programmes in due time so as to allow for a timely start of the actual implementation of the programme.
- ▶ **Researchers at risk** should be able to access their own **special intervention fund** under FP10 which can quickly provide them with support irrespective of specific conflict situations.
- ▶ **Indirect costs** should be eligible for funding in an amount of **up to 30% of direct eligible costs** in order to account for the inflation of recent years and ease the financial burden for beneficiaries.
- ▶ A budget top-up for FP10 must not absolve member states from their obligations to do their part in strengthening R&I in the EU in line with the subsidiarity principle. They need to ensure **strong investments in their national research systems of at least 3% of their GDP**, as this provides the basis for successful participation in R&I at EU level.

### **Strong support for basic research and research infrastructures**

FP10 needs to be attractive for all researchers, no matter if they engage in curiosity-driven or thematic research, applied research or experimental development. For years now, the research community has been calling for improvements in the support of basic research in addition to the instruments in Pillar I, in particular an instrument that allows researchers to choose their topics and their collaborating partners as freely as possible. Policymakers should listen to their demands. Sufficient funding and adequate programmes for basic research provide the foundation for excellent research that will keep Europe at the forefront of global innovation.

- ▶ **The enlarged budget of FP10 should especially benefit Pillar I** so as to attract the world's top researchers with attractive funding conditions. Multiple projects funded by the European Research Council (ERC) achieve groundbreaking scientific results and contribute to major advances. However, both ERC and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) suffer from an enormous shortage of funding, with MSCA being the part of the framework programme that would require the highest proportional budget increase to be able to fund all proposals above the quality threshold.

- ▶ **Excellence should remain the sole selection criterion** for all proposals submitted under Pillar I and should be the guiding criterion for all parts of the programme. The current governance structure of the ERC should be kept to ensure an independent and merit-based assessment of submitted proposals.
- ▶ **The budget for research infrastructures should be increased** as they are a prerequisite for excellent research. In order to enable world-class research, research infrastructures should be supported across the scientific disciplines, including the social sciences, humanities and interdisciplinary research infrastructures. Transnational access to research infrastructures should be improved, as this allows for research mobility and the use of research infrastructures by researchers from all member states and associated countries, including those from countries with a less competitive research system.

### **New possibilities for cooperation under FP10**

Funding excellent research groups across national boundaries provides the real added value of the EU Framework Programmes. Excellent researchers must be as free as possible to collaborate with the best partners of their choice for their projects – also from countries outside the EU. However, the funding programmes in Horizon Europe are often not flexible enough and are subject to too many restrictions as regards topic, eligible participants and the envisaged Technology Readiness Level (TRL). FP10 must provide for better and more flexible possibilities for cooperation in the area of curiosity-driven research. This would also strengthen the role of the social sciences and the humanities under FP10.

- ▶ **A new instrument** should allow researchers to work on topics they choose themselves in a bottom-up manner in transnational research consortia without specific requirements. Such an instrument, which could be set up in Pillar II, is a necessary addition to the comprehensive top-down funding instruments dedicated to tackling global challenges, as curiosity-driven research can also make a substantial contribution to overcoming such challenges.
- ▶ The partnerships should include a **new, small and flexible instrument with a focus on the implementation of joint calls**. Although Horizon Europe allows for co-funding joint calls through Co-funded Partnerships, the broad range of partners and activities has reduced the incentive for national research funding organisations to set up transnational calls. At the same time, the Horizon 2020 ex-post evaluation demonstrated the positive impact of the ERA-NET Cofunds, which has strengthened the consistency between EU and national programmes. A revised version that allows for the flexible co-funding of one or several joint calls should be part of the new partnership structure under FP10.

- ▶ FP10 should be sufficiently **flexible to advance cooperation with participants from third countries** which share European values, the association of the United Kingdom and Switzerland under FP10 being a priority task in that area. The budget for the ERC Synergy Grants, which allow for the inclusion of excellent researchers from third states, should be expanded.
- ▶ FP10 needs to ensure that the **potential risks of cooperating with third countries are carefully reflected upon without discouraging international cooperation**. Risk assessments need to be country-agnostic and take place on a case-by-case-basis, duly balancing potential risks with the anticipated benefits of the project concerned. In line with academic freedom and institutional autonomy, the final decision about a project should be made by the researchers and research institutions themselves. If dual-use research is to be included in FP10, its funding should not be introduced at the cost of basic research.

### **Adequate framework conditions for research under FP10**

In order to shape a comprehensive research ecosystem that allows researchers to thrive, FP10 needs to develop a coherent approach in policy areas related to research culture such as career development, research assessment and open science. Policymakers also need to take greater care to ensure that other EU legislation does not counteract the framework conditions provided for under FP10. When new EU legislation is drafted outside the research sector, it is too frequently the case that the implications for researchers fail to be taken into account.

- ▶ FP10 should fully **embrace the research assessment reform promoted by the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)**, ensuring that research assessment is primarily based on qualitative judgement and recognising the diverse outputs, practices and activities that research involves. While the ERC has already adapted to these principles, they should also be anchored as objectives in the future FP10 regulation and integrated in other parts of FP10 as well. Open science should not be used as a quality-related evaluation criterion at the level of individual projects.
- ▶ **Open access should be further promoted** in FP10: Academic publications resulting from research funded under FP10 should in principle be published in open access. Authors should be required to retain their intellectual property rights. Article Processing Charges should only be funded partially (via lump sums to institutions). In addition, funding should be provided for the long-term preservation of open access publication and for the establishment of a Diamond Open Access regional hub in accordance with the Global Open Access Diamond Initiative.

- ▶ **Research data, source code and software should be “as open as possible, as closed as necessary”.** The FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable) principles should be mandated and data curation should be adequately funded under FP10. The European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) needs to be consolidated, ensuring that governance is driven by the research community, with improved links to national research data management structures and ESFRI.
- ▶ **FP10 applicants should be invited to reflect upon issues of sustainability** potentially raised by the research processes contained in their proposals, where relevant. These reflections must not become a criterion in the assessment process, however. A broader application of the “Do No Significant Harm” principle to all EU-funded research projects would hamper academic freedom, as researchers may struggle to undertake certain types of research.
- ▶ **Efforts to promote Equity, Diversity and Inclusion should be continued.** Applicants should be invited to reflect upon EDI issues and on the relevance of sex, gender and/or other dimensions of diversity in the content of research projects where relevant.
- ▶ FP10 participants should be required to **comply with the revised ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.**
- ▶ The **administrative governance of the programme needs to be simplified** under FP10. Researchers should be able to focus on the content of the proposals they submit and not have to deal with overly complex requirements for the individual calls.

### **Enhancing synergies with other programmes**

Enhancing synergies of FP10 with other EU programmes is not a one-way process. Targeted support for R&I actions under other EU programmes should be increased as well. As recommended by the European Court of Auditors, a dedicated part of the structural funds could be earmarked for strengthening R&I capacity and valorising R&I results. This would be particularly attractive for researchers in “Widening” countries since this can contribute to improving conditions and further enhancing their participation in FP10. By the same token, the focus of FP10 on supporting excellent research could be further strengthened.

A successful FP10 that delivers on its objectives depends on a preparation process that ensures meaningful and comprehensive involvement of all stakeholders. The DFG is committed to further engaging in this process.

## **About us**

The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) is the central self-governing research funding organisation in Germany. The DFG serves the sciences and humanities and promotes research of the highest quality in all its forms and disciplines at universities and non-university research institutions. The focus is on funding projects developed by the academic community itself in the area of knowledge-driven research. The DFG funds research projects, creates competitive opportunities and conducts procedures for review, evaluation, selection and decision-making in connection with research proposals, thereby helping to shape the overall conditions and standards of academic research. The DFG maintains close dialogue with society, politics and business and supports the transfer of knowledge. It advises state institutions and institutions working in the public interest on issues relating to academic research and research policy. Moreover, the DFG takes particular care to promote international cooperation, early-career researchers, gender equality and diversity in the sciences and humanities.





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