

WHAT EUROPEAN RESEARCH NEEDS



As preparations for a new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10) are ongoing, three high-level reports by Enrico Letta, Mario Draghi, and the expert group on the Interim Evaluation of Horizon Europe provide concrete suggestions as to how research and innovation (R&I) in the EU can be further strengthened.

Science Europe welcomes the clear message in all the reports to put research and innovation at the heart of shaping Europe's future. The advancement of knowledge is proven to strengthen the EU's resilience and long-term competitiveness by fostering discoveries that lead to innovations in technologies, for the benefit of societies and the planet.

Following up on its July 2024 statement [‘10 Key Messages for FP10’](#) and the discussions on the MFF and FP10 since then, Science Europe would like to reiterate the following key conditions for research to advance knowledge creation and future competitiveness for the European Union:

- ◆ For the Framework Programme to succeed and attract the best researchers, it must have stability, transparency, and a substantial budget. Horizon Europe has faced sudden budget cuts in favour of other initiatives, such as defence research, and the Strategic Technologies for Europe platform. **A €200 billion investment for FP10 is required to leverage knowledge created through research and innovation in the next MFF.** The budget should be ringed-fenced and only allocated to programmes dedicated to research and innovation.
- ◆ It will be key to maintain a structure in FP10 that builds on the current structure of Horizon Europe, one that enables sufficient funding for excellent basic research, collaborative projects, innovation, and targeted widening activities as currently under the four-pillar structure of Horizon Europe. FP10 needs to ensure continuity to help applicants understand the Programme. **Highly successful instruments, such as the European Research Council (ERC) and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, should be preserved.** In addition, the ERC's independence is essential to its success and must be maintained.
- ◆ **For research and innovation to contribute to the EU's long-term competitiveness, it is essential to balance investment between low and high technology readiness levels (TRLs).** New ideas and knowledge that lead to disruptive innovation can arise at all levels of research, including at basic/fundamental research at lower TRLs. The Framework Programme needs a continued focus on bottom-up, basic/fundamental research and must secure sufficient funding for it to build competence and a basis for long-term benefits.

- ◆ **Building on previous initiatives to reduce the administrative complexity of the Programme, simplification should be further pursued, placing applicants' circumstances more at the centre of the application process.** The European Union should refrain from making the FPs more complex by adding additional criteria or goals that are not directly relevant to research, or which restrict the disruptive force within curiosity-driven research. Application forms and evaluation criteria should continue to recognise open science practices,
- ◆ FP10 should implement effective strategies to enhance European R&I capacity across its whole territory. The current widening schemes should be kept and complemented by dedicated initiatives in research management training and increased programmes to improve researchers' mobility, reduce brain drain, and promote diversity in research topics. FP10 should only retain the instruments that contribute to the sustainable reduction of the R&I divide. Moreover, it must aim to strengthen mobility schemes that support career development while addressing the underlying causes of brain drain.
- ◆ Research should continue to be an international endeavour, even amid geopolitical uncertainty and growing concerns about research security. **Framework Programmes must remain open, especially through ensuring that future programmes are structured in a way that does not exclude participation of like-minded partner countries.** International collaborations are essential for advancing knowledge and should be encouraged and supported while adhering to the values and principles outlined in the [Pact for Research and Innovation](#), which calls on the EU to "broaden and deepen collaboration with third countries and regional organisations." FP10 should promote responsible and reciprocal international research and innovation collaboration.

BACKGROUND ON THE THREE REPORTS

- ◆ The April 2024 report [‘Much More Than a Market’](#) by Enrico Letta proposes the establishment of a "Fifth Freedom" that encompasses research, innovation, data, skills, knowledge, and education.
- ◆ Mario Draghi's September 2024 [‘Future of European Competitiveness’](#) report positions research and innovation as vital components for enhancing European added value and competitiveness.
- ◆ The September 2024 report [‘Align, Act, Accelerate’](#) from the expert group on the Interim Evaluation of Horizon Europe calls for an investment of €220 billion in research and innovation. This report emphasises the importance of crucial programmes like the European Research Council and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, advocating research excellence as the primary criterion for funding.