

Input note

Topic:	Input to Commission's High Level Expert Group on the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe and towards FP10
Date:	26 April 2024
To:	Manuel Heitor (Chair of European Commission's High Level Expert Group on the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe and towards FP10)
From:	Mattias Björnmalm (Secretary General of CESAER)

Source material

CESAER published its input on the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe in February 2023 and a dedicated input to FP10 in December 2023:

- December 2023: [Input note](#) 'Towards FP10: the next framework programme for research & innovation' with accompanying [opinion article](#)
- February 2023: [Papers](#) submitted to public consultation

After the publication of the input note, CESAER also published an additional [position paper](#) 'EU missions and the way forward for mission-oriented research & innovation'.

Below, for convenience, we provide a summary of selected parts from these papers.

For full details, please consult the public links above.

1. What major challenges (scientific, social, economic, technological) should still be attempted to be addressed in the second half of HE (2025-27) and further addressed by a future FP (FP10)?

Excellence, predictable & stable conditions

We stress the importance of providing researchers with stable and predictable conditions to foster excellence in research and innovation. Instability within the current program, including budget cuts, poses significant challenges. We advocate for ring-fencing the budget of the framework program to ensure continuity and stability. Moreover, a balance that consider the full spectrum of Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) is essential for fostering a diverse and robust research and innovation ecosystem.

Widening participation and structural issues

Widening participation cannot be solely solved by research funds. Structural challenges in widening countries, including labour and fiscal policies, must be comprehensively addressed. Structural funds should play a pivotal role in promoting inclusivity within the European Research Area (ERA).

Budget and funding sources

We call for doubling the budget for the framework programme for research & innovation. In addition, we propose diversifying funding sources. Engaging with other policy areas is essential to enhance research and innovation impact, and to 'crowd in' funding for research & innovation activities from new sources.

Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) and innovation

We support a holistic approach to research and innovation that encompasses the entire knowledge value chain, across all types of research and innovation. We underline the importance and value of initiatives such as the European Innovation Council (EIC) and the European Research Council (ERC). We caution against over-reliance on TRLs in analysis and awarding of funding.

Quality of research jobs and career development

We highlight the importance of addressing the quality of research jobs and career development within the European research and innovation landscape. Despite an increase in the number of researchers, there are concerns about the quality and precarity of research careers. We call for a comprehensive approach to address these issues, including ensuring a balance between research funding and structural support, as well as promoting quality and stability in research careers.

2. Which are the major successes of the current HE (2021-2023) and which are the major “roadblock”/threats for success?

We acknowledge the achievements of Horizon Europe in fostering collaboration among researchers and innovators across Europe, supporting frontier research through the European Research Council (ERC), and addressing societal challenges through collaborative projects. However, bureaucratic complexity, lengthy administrative procedures, and rigid funding mechanisms hinder the efficient implementation of the framework programme for research & innovation. We stress the importance of simplifying administrative processes for the beneficiary, increasing funding flexibility, reducing the administrative burden on applicants, and enhancing the synergies between Horizon Europe and other EU funding programs to maximize the impact of research and innovation investments.

Participating in Horizon Europe offers several benefits compared to national and/or regional R&I programs in EU member states or associated countries, including improved excellence in research and innovation, strengthened critical mass to address pan-European challenges, and the possibility to finance projects that may not be supported at the national and/or regional level.

However, several reasons may have prevented potential beneficiaries from participating in Horizon Europe, including the cumbersome application process, complex project implementation rules, and low success rates. Additionally, concerns exist regarding the clarity of participation rules, the mix of calls for proposals (both top-down and bottom-up), and the unbalanced share of funding for different TRLs within the Horizon Europe clusters under the second pillar. Addressing these concerns and streamlining administrative procedures are critical to improving the attractiveness and effectiveness of Horizon Europe.

3. Which sub programmes of HE should be to be preserved and strengthened in a future FP (i.e., FP10) and which should be altered? How far a future FP (i.e., FP10) should keep/alter the current basic three-pillar architecture of HE

(i.e., Pillar 1: Excellent Science; Pillar 2: Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness; Pillar 3: Innovative Europe)?

Pillar 1: Excellent Science

We strongly advocate for the preservation and reinforcement of Pillar 1, which focuses on promoting excellent science. This pillar is fundamental for maintaining Europe's position as a global leader in scientific advancement. To strengthen this pillar, FP10 should continue to support initiatives such as the ERC and MSCA. Moreover, efforts should be made to enhance collaboration across Europe to foster interdisciplinary research and address emerging scientific challenges.

Pillar 2: Global challenges and European industrial competitiveness

There should be a rebalancing of calls within this pillar to ensure a more equitable distribution between projects focusing on earlier stages and later stages of research & innovation. This will ensure that Europe remains at the forefront of innovation while also addressing pressing global challenges. Additionally, FP10 should explore mechanisms to streamline administrative procedures and enhance funding flexibility within Pillar 2 to facilitate collaboration between academia, industry, and other stakeholders.

Pillar 3: Innovative Europe

We recognise the importance of fostering entrepreneurship, supporting technology transfer, and promoting the uptake of research results by industry and broader society under Pillar 3. To further strengthen this pillar, FP10 should prioritise initiatives that facilitate the translation of research outcomes into tangible innovations with societal and economic impact.

We underline the vital importance of appropriate framework conditions and sustainable funding to level-up the culture of innovation and broaden the competence of innovation within and beyond universities by fostering a new mindset where innovators and creators are empowered to transfer tacit knowledge, scientific knowledge and technology into innovations, participate in the co-creation process with partners in industry and society at large, followed by the opportunity to successfully upscale their concepts towards products and services.

Promote investigator-led frontier research as foundational for innovation and ensure balance between (i) top-down strategies and bottom-up approaches empowering universities and their researchers & innovators (who are often the same people), and (ii) fundamental research and applied research to drive disruptive innovation.

Boost the European Innovation Council (EIC) and its role, including exploring support mechanisms for start-ups and scale-ups to operate cross border, across all of Europe and beyond.

Ensure a long-term approach to explore and pilot new options with a view of moving beyond the previous linear understanding of innovation (e.g. TRL) towards a more modern understanding based on the interconnectedness in innovation and its ecosystems.

Missions

We advocate for a re-evaluation of the current mission-oriented approach within Horizon Europe. While recognising the potential of mission-oriented policies, there is a need for

greater clarity and alignment with the original concept. We suggest separating missions from research funding to allow for bottom-up experimentation and greater stakeholder engagement. Moreover, there should be a more transparent and open process for selecting institutions to implement missions, ensuring alignment with the overarching objectives of Horizon Europe.

4. What would be a catalyst to overcome current roadblocks of HE and be implemented in a future FP (i.e., FP10)? What should be the most important innovations to be considered in a future FP (i.e., FP10)?

As the EU faces mounting pressures and considers the role of its funding schemes in addressing them, it's imperative that the next framework program, FP10, maintains a clear focus on areas where it can have the most significant impact: advancing cutting-edge science, technology, and research & innovation talent.

Against the backdrop of potential mission drift, where FP10 may be burdened with new and tangential objectives, our association has outlined in our [position](#) six key design considerations to guide FP10's development:

1. Engage the knowledge value chain along the full research continuum;
2. Put researchers and innovators in driving seat through open and competitive calls;
3. Ensure predictable and stable conditions;
4. Unleash synergies;
5. Reinforce excellence and prepare for cooperation in context of EU-30+;
6. Leverage a continent-wide approach to contribute to global research & innovation leadership.

Two potential issues that could divert funding away from research include a push towards a more elaborate EU industrial policy and the expansion of the EU-27 to EU-30+. While supporting industrial policy and cohesion in a post-enlargement EU are important, it is crucial to avoid diverting funding away from cutting-edge research and innovation, which is where the framework programme for research & innovation excels and where it has enormous value-add at European level.

We plead for maintaining open and competitive calls as the default for awarding funding across all pillars of FP10, emphasising non-prescriptive approaches and supporting pre-competitive research. This approach ensures that FP10 continues to leverage Europe's position as a global leader in science and technology while fostering collaboration and critical mass.