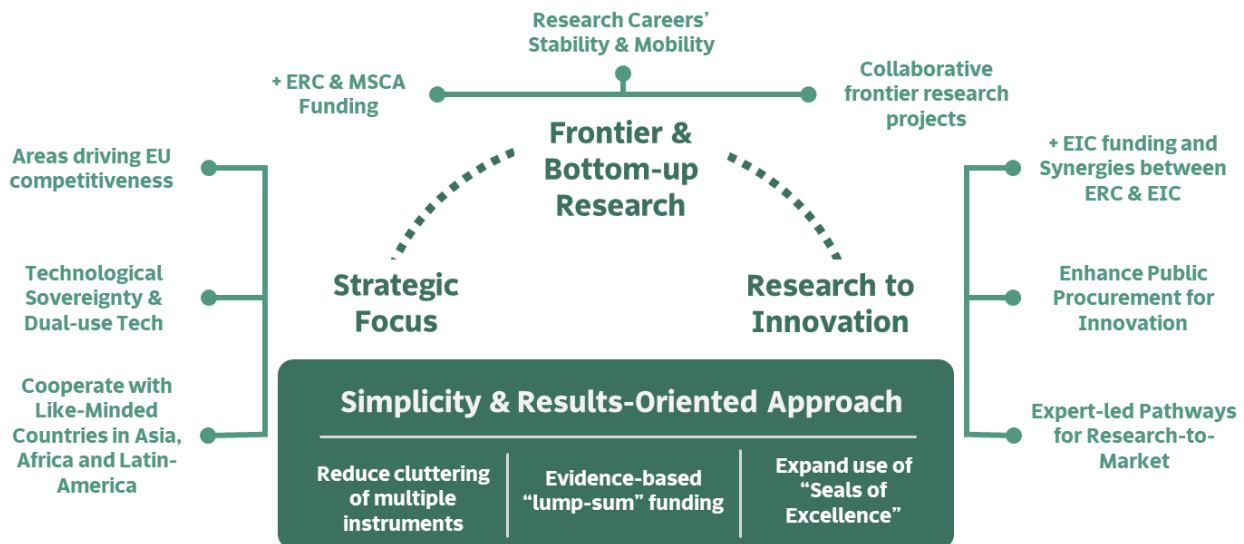


SHAPING THE 10th EU FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Portuguese Position Paper | 29 November 2024

The next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10) must go beyond traditional formulas. Otherwise, **the same approach will inevitably lead to the same results**.



The Letta¹, Draghi², and Heitor³ reports highlight the urgent need for Europe to strengthen research and innovation through increased FP10 funding, better coordination and streamlined implementation. FP10 must effectively translate research into economic growth and societal solutions, **guided by the following principles**:

Excellence, Openness and Curiosity-driven

Research & Innovation: Maintain open, competitive calls, high-standard evaluations, and rigorous impact monitoring. Ensure equal access, prioritising newcomers like SMEs and start-ups, and streamline funding processes. Foster collaboration and transparency. Aim for curiosity-driven research with less prescriptive call topics, balancing with strategic focus areas.

Societal and Global Challenges: When selecting focus areas, follow strategic priorities that address socio-economic and global challenges. Balance EU competitiveness with societal needs, combining top-down and curiosity-driven calls. Address R&I challenges with diverse knowledge in Maths, Sciences, Arts, Humanities, Technology and Engineering, through multi-disciplinary collaborations.

Stable and Attractive Research Careers: Focus on career stability, sustainability and growth, making careers attractive for all researchers, including young professionals. International collaborative efforts should strengthen the EU's capacity to attract and retain their best talents, elevating competitiveness at global level

Widening Participation: Uphold the EU target of investing 3% of EU GDP in research and development, ensuring the successful realisation of the European Research Area. Dedicate funding to instruments that genuinely spread excellence and innovation, ensuring overall participation of all Member States in all pillars of the FP10. Promote excellence as a driver of innovation and to attract and retain top talent in Europe.

Synergies & Infrastructure Optimization: Align EU and Member States' investments at national and regional levels while addressing green, digital, and health transitions. Strengthen Research and Technology Infrastructures as pillars of growth, fostering synergies and avoiding duplication and fragmentation.

¹E. Letta, "Much more than a market", April 2024.

²M. Draghi, "The future of European competitiveness", October 2024.

³M. Heitor, "Align, Act, Accelerate", November 2024.

This document aims at guiding FP10's preparation, without pre-empting Portugal's contribution to further negotiations. It is based on inputs from agencies, consultation bodies, and a diverse range of stakeholders. Stakeholder engagement will continue, and updates may follow.

Recommendations

1 Fostering research careers and bottom-up frontier research

- The European Research Council (ERC) funding must reflect their flagship status of the FP, enabling researchers and entrepreneurs to pursue groundbreaking discoveries through an open, bottom-up approach. ERC support in FP10 must expand to fund more researchers while maintaining excellence, addressing previous underfunding that limited opportunities for top talent and hindered EU competitiveness.
- The ERC should enhance international cooperation to access global talent and ideas, supported by high-standard evaluations and innovative post-award monitoring focused on scientific excellence over administrative tasks.
- Collaborative frontier research projects that often explore hypotheses, theories and breakthroughs that may not have immediate applications, yet potentially set the ground for significant innovation, should be introduced in FP10 to complement existing ERC instruments.
- Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) should continue supporting international, interdisciplinary mobility, career development, and curiosity-driven research, reinforcing the link between higher education and early research careers while advancing research assessment reforms. MSCA in FP10 should improve researcher employability and career mobility by increasing placements in industry and non-academic sectors.

2 From research to innovation

- Ensure a seamless continuum between frontier research and disruptive innovation through synergies between ERC and EIC. For instance, bridge ERC Proof of Concept and EIC Transition and align European Investment Fund (EIF) activities with EIC for a cohesive, long-term-focused innovation ecosystem.
- Enhance public procurement for innovative solutions, especially in sectors with significant public clients, through dedicated budgets or sub-programmes, with EU institutions setting an example.
- Expand EIC support for disruptive innovation, prioritising transformational change (e.g. through research-driven processes) over incremental advances. Increase focus on deep-tech to boost European competitiveness, support less-developed ecosystems, and improve access to investment.
- Redesign the innovation governance framework to be outcome-driven, involving proven innovators and top experts and entrepreneurs in project selection, ensuring focus on impact and excellence.
- Foster breakthroughs with structured pathways for high-potential research to reach market applications, increasing patents and innovation outcomes. Address challenges in integrating collaborative research and lower Technology Readiness Levels, with complementary, alternative financing mechanisms for productization, including branding, marketing, and market access.
- Support joint investment in research and technological large-scale infrastructures, encouraging the establishment and operation of European Research Infrastructure Consortia (ERICs), aligning with EU funds to drive innovation and attract talent. Maintain links between Research and Technology Infrastructures, reinforcing physical and virtual access for research organisations, public institutions, and companies. Further promote their services in FP10 and related programmes.

3 Simplicity, efficiency and results-oriented approach

- Dramatically reduce the cluttering of multiple instruments in FP10.
- Establish a unified “one-stop shop” platform, through the “Funding and Tenders Portal”, to align EIC, EIF, and Invest EU, offering stakeholders tailored support for funding needs. Promote digital tools to enhance participation, particularly for SMEs, start-ups, and non-academic sectors.
- Reduce the size and complexity of proposals, streamline grant agreements, and focus project monitoring on scientific merit and impact. The transition to “lump sum” funding should be evidence-based and adaptable to sectoral needs, recognizing that no single model fits all.
- Promote excellence and accountability by rewarding high-performing projects, through a results-oriented approach.
- Harmonise legislation, regulations, and evaluation processes across EU, national, and regional levels. Simplify rules to motivate synergy implementation without adding administrative burdens, strengthening complementarities between funding sources and R&I programmes.
- Extend the eligibility of the Seal of Excellence to trigger national and regional actions when FP funding is unavailable and simplify synergies between FP and national regulations.
- Implement Agile and Objective Key Results-based models of project management, preventing unnecessary administrative burden. Also, integrate risk management strategies to adapt projects to uncertainties, while maintaining scientific quality.

4 Prioritising focus areas and addressing global challenges

- Focus in areas driving EU competitiveness, sovereignty, security and health including the green and digital transitions, supported by policies such as the European Green Deal, EU Chips Act, AI Act, Net-Zero Industry Act, Clean Industrial Deal.
- Invest in European-level value, avoiding duplication of efforts achievable by Member States. Research should target areas where Europe lags behind or faces high stakes, such as i) AI, data, computing infrastructures, advanced materials, semiconductors, communications, and quantum technologies; ii) Clinical studies, med-tech, and biotechnologies; iii) Clean-tech and energy technologies; iv) Space and dual-use (civil-defence) technologies; v) Technological sovereignty in AI, cybersecurity, energy, and food security; vi) Cultural innovation, social cohesion, and identity building; vii) Sustainable use of water and ocean resources, while preserving biodiversity.
- Intensify efforts to develop dual-use technologies, leveraging diverse European innovation ecosystems, emphasising R&D in Defence and Resilience through cooperation with the European Defence Fund.
- Revise public-private partnerships to focus on key priorities in line with proposed new Joint Undertakings promoting competitiveness and reducing overlaps. Limit partnerships to proven models consistent with European Research Area goals, ensuring EU added value and adequate funding for open calls.
- European Missions, while effective, require thorough review. A top-down approach, with pooled funding beyond FP10 alongside better coordination within the European Commission and with Member States, is essential for successful implementation and roll-out.
- Foster international cooperation, building on strategic partnerships with like-minded countries and regions in Asia, Africa, the Mediterranean, and South America, namely Latin America, and the Caribbean. Capitalise in established frameworks such as those with the Union for the Mediterranean Roadmaps, the African Union-EU High Level Policy Dialogue on Science, Technology and Innovation or the EU Global Gateway.