

UNIFI's key messages for the preparation of the next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10)

Finnish universities have long-term experience of European cooperation in the fields of science and RDI. The universities are strongly integrated with EU Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation and have successfully secured more than 40% of the funding received by Finland under the ongoing Framework Programme. The Council of Rectors of Finnish Universities, UNIFI, key messages for the preparation of the next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10) are:

1. Increasing RDI investments is in the interest of the EU and Finland

The future Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10) must have an ambitious budget. UNIFI supports doubling Framework Programme funding to EUR 200 billion and turning the programme into an international lodestar of RDI. Framework Programme funding should remain grant based as well as be fully targeted at R&D and protected from transfers to different programme parts and new priorities. A research and innovation funding programme with a larger scale and long-term approach is essential in order to respond to the growing shortage of highly skilled experts in Europe and to strengthen the Union's global competitiveness and ability to respond to societal challenges.

2. Excellence in R&I and competitive calls should be a cross-cutting priority

The common denominator of all actions under the forthcoming Framework Programme should be excellence. The evaluation of proposals and implementation of funded projects must be transparent and responsible. Promoting open science as well as respecting the research integrity, ethics and freedom of scientific research should remain the cross-cutting principles of the Framework Programme.

3. Prerequisites for scientific leadership and groundbreaking research should be strengthened

The EU's public R&D investments must be targeted at groundbreaking and innovative research with broad positive externalities. The preconditions for scientific excellence, attractiveness of researchers' careers, and breakthroughs in research and technology must be promoted with funding designated for these purposes. Funding for successful ERC, MSCA, EIC Pathfinder and research infrastructure activities intended for this should be strengthened in FP10. In addition, the autonomous role of the Scientific Council governing the ERC must be safeguarded also in the future.

High-quality scientific research and applying it in order to create new and radical innovations should be more prominent across all pillars of the FP10, not only in Pillar 1. In addition to politically guided top-down priorities, all pillars of the Framework Programme should include bottom-up calls that enable identifying new opportunities. In the forthcoming Framework Programme, attention should be focused on ensuring that the programme will support European collaborative projects in a balanced manner at all technology readiness levels (TRL), including the lower levels of 1 to 4 TRL.

4. Continuity of programme structures and more streamlined instruments must be promoted

Ensuring continuity in the Framework Programme's structure and streamlining financial instruments are key objectives for developing FP10. UNIFI finds the three-pillar structure of the current Horizon Europe programme a good starting point for planning the forthcoming programme. The Framework Programme must provide balanced support for the entire RDI continuum. Rather than being separate

entities, basic research, applied research, development and innovation activities are part of continuous and interlinked processes.

In FP10, the range of financial instruments must be simplified and developed, ensuring that they will serve high-quality R&I and are applicant-friendly. Particular attention should be paid to:

European partnerships

UNIFI supports the basic principle of strengthening strategic-level thematic cooperation and leveraging funding of the Horizon Europe Pillar 2 public-private/public-public partnerships (European Partnerships). However, the landscape of partnerships and their varying implementation models should be simplified further. The necessity of several different partnership models should be evaluated critically, and the rules for participation harmonised and made more transparent. In particular, the regulation of the co-financed partnerships is considered unclear. Under the current Framework Programme, the number of partnerships has been reduced by merging thematic areas. While this is effective in boosting synergies and cooperation, it has increased the administrative burden.

Missions

Missions are a policy instrument, above all. With lacking the R&I element, universities have found the instrument difficult to grasp. The implementation of the missions has diverted from the original concept. Their implementation in its current form should be reviewed, and the part funded under the Framework Programme should be redirected to support solely R&I cooperation. In order to achieve the objectives, synergies between the missions and other EU programmes are needed. In the future, actions related to the missions which do not have a clear R&I focus should be funded under other EU programmes better suited for this purpose.

Widening

Widening actions in their current form should not be extended under the Framework Programme, as they have not effectively increased R&I capacity. Instead of focusing on capacity building, these measures should prioritize R&I cooperation between widening and non-widening countries. Additionally, synergies with other EU programmes available in widening countries need further development to promote essential R&I structures, reduce disparities, and enhance overall European competitiveness.

5. The programme should enable international cooperation

The EU must continue working at the international level in order to solve European and global challenges. The forthcoming Framework Programme should be kept open to global cooperation, and participation should only be limited for particularly weighty reasons. In research-led collaborative projects, calls for proposals should continue to be open to cooperation with third countries, taking the perspectives of research security into account. Association agreements aiming to streamline participation in the programme with non-EU countries which share common principles are an effective way of increasing international cooperation. An attempt should be made to diversify them and to bring them into force without undue delay from the very start of the programming period.

6. The same criteria of excellence should be applied to dual-use research

UNIFI stresses that the different options and their impacts on RDI support and funding for dual-use purposes should be assessed carefully. Dual-use research must not lower the excellence criteria for the Framework Programme funding or unnecessarily restrict the freedom of science and research or

international cooperation. Dual-use opportunities should be seen a consequence of high-quality research rather than a strategic pre-selection or an evaluation criterion.

UNIFI welcomes increasing funding for defence RDI in a programme earmarked for this purpose along the lines of the current European Defence Fund or other similar arrangement. While it is important to strengthen synergies between the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation and the Defence Fund, their allocations in the EU's multiannual financial framework must be kept separate due to the different objectives of civil and defence research.

7. Synergies between programmes that support research and innovation should be strengthened

Knowledge and skills are crucial for the EU's success. UNIFI supports increasing future EU funding to enhance Europe's competitiveness. UNIFI emphasizes that the various programmes supporting the competitiveness should not be merged into a single large entity. Instead, synergies between these programmes should be strengthened. Programmes like Digital Europe, Health4Europe, and the European Defence Fund should be adjusted to focus more on RDI. Additionally, the quality criteria for EU programme funding should be harmonized, following the example of the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. This approach will facilitate the seamless development and commercialization of research-driven technologies and solutions funded by the Framework Programme through appropriate programmes and instruments.

The Council of Rectors of Finnish Universities UNIFI promotes cooperation between universities and secures their operating conditions. UNIFI prepares the universities' shared positions on key issues related to research and education policy as well as decision-making. UNIFI members include all 13 universities referred to in the Universities Act and the National Defence University.