

# Paving the way for impactful European R&I

EUA's vision for FP10



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## Preface

The European Union's Framework Programme for Research & Innovation must be more than a funding mechanism. Rather, it should pave the way for Europe to be a forceful R&I agent - in excellence and impact, in cooperation and inclusion, and in addressing global challenges.

Guided by the expertise of the European University Association's Research and Innovation Strategy Group (RISG) and a dedicated task and finish group, this document outlines the Association's strategic vision for the next European Framework Programme, FP10, with the aim of contributing to the design of the programme on behalf of the university sector. This work also reflects EUA's overall vision for the future of the sector '[Universities without walls – A vision for 2030](#)', which provides a common ground for all of the Association's initiatives.

Through its recommendations, EUA's vision for FP10 addresses a number of key issues for R&I today. Europe needs a well-balanced mix of support for basic and applied research as well as innovation, an increased, stable and ring-fenced budget, and increased funding opportunities for collaborative research, strengthened synergies between funding instruments and programmes, and a reduced R&I divide between member states. In addition, FP10 must be simplified to allow beneficiaries to navigate the programme more smoothly, ensure responsible openness as default option for enhancing global cooperation, narrow the gap between science and society, and enhance stakeholder engagement. With these recommendations, the university sector commits to a co-designed FP10, which is so necessary for the future of the EU and the wider world.

As chair of the EUA task and finish group on the EU R&I Framework Programme which articulated this vision, it has been a privilege to share the dynamic discussions, the deep insights and broad competences of the group. I am also grateful to those who have provided invaluable input during the process; the EUA Expert Groups on Innovation and Open Science, as well as practitioners from EUA member universities. My sincere thanks to the members of RISG for their strategic advice along the way, as well as to the EUA Board and Council. Most of all, I would like to thank the EUA Secretariat for diligently taking all perspectives into account and turning them into a consistent strategic vision.

### **Prof. Astrid Söderbergh Widding**

EUA Board member

Chair of the EUA task and finish group on the EU R&I Framework Programme



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# Executive summary

As Europe enters a future marked by both unprecedented challenges and opportunities that extend beyond national boundaries, the European Union's tenth Research and Innovation Framework Programme (FP10) stands to become the continent's key commitment to placing research and innovation (R&I) at the forefront of societal and scientific progress. With adequate funding and structure, it can be more than a funding mechanism – it can be a catalyst for excellent, cooperative, inclusive and impactful R&I across Europe. Such a programme can position the continent as a leader in new knowledge and discoveries, empowering it to effectively tackle global challenges.

In this document, the European University Association (EUA) outlines its strategic vision for FP10, offering its contribution to shaping the programme. Informed by extensive feedback from its members, this vision has been articulated by an EUA task and finish group on the EU R&I Framework Programme. After describing current and emerging trends, this vision examines the current state of play and challenges of the ongoing Framework Programme (Horizon Europe) and the European R&I landscape within a broader context. It subsequently formulates recommendations, pinpointing what should be added, modified, or removed for the programme to reach its ambitious goals. This includes a particular focus on the programme's budget, structure, core principles and horizontal topics.

EUA's key recommendations for the design of FP10, addressed to the European Commission, EU member states and the European Parliament, are:

## **1. Provide a well-balanced mix of support for basic research, applied research and innovation**

The growing focus on applied research and innovation in public R&I spending must not come at the cost of investments in basic research. Investment in basic research is especially crucial as it provides the foundation for all breakthrough innovations and serves as a prerequisite for truly transformative solutions to societal challenges. As such, better balancing the mix of support is vital to ensuring that the EU will be able to tackle global challenges and emerging crises now and in the future.

## **2. Increase the budget to €200 billion**

European R&I funding holds the potential for significant returns for society as a whole, and therefore, must be prioritised with a correspondingly high budget allocation. For the EU to truly become a global leader and safeguard autonomy in strategic sectors, it is necessary to enhance Europe's position at the forefront of global R&I, notably by allocating an adequate budget for FP10. An increased budget will also help leverage private R&I investments, which are at the lowest level as a percentage of GDP when compared to the EU's main global competitors. Additionally, to guarantee the achievement of the programme's objectives, its budget must continue to be allocated based on excellence and impact criteria.

## **3. Ring-fence the budget**

European researchers and innovators need a stable FP10 budget. The programme's budget must not be diverted, without the introduction of new funding, to other priorities when funding is needed to address emerging challenges or shifting political landscapes. Given that the existing budget is not sufficient to fund all excellent proposals, it is even more vital to ensure that the programme's spending stays true to the intended focus.

## **4. Provide more funding opportunities for smaller, collaborative research projects**

Collaboration stands out as a fundamental strength of the programme, fostering cross-border, inter-sectoral partnerships and knowledge exchange, and thereby significantly increasing the programme's impact. Additional opportunities for projects at lower Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) that are smaller in scale, yet foster greater collaboration, will further enhance this. The programme should also enable interdisciplinary collaboration through better integration of the entire, diverse spectrum of Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts (SSHA) research.

### **5. Strengthen synergies between funding instruments and programmes**

The EU funding landscape requires greater consistency in its rules, with programmes adhering to a straightforward and similar set of guidelines. The initiation of synergies should begin at the programme design stage. Such a synergetic approach to building initiatives will allow the elimination of possible overlaps between funding instruments and programmes.

### **6. Enhance excellence across Europe to bridge the R&I divide among countries**

Despite the progress made in reducing the R&I gap between countries, significant discrepancies still exist. Together with the reinforcement of national investments in R&I, FP10 should continue to provide targeted support to countries with lower R&I capacity to improve their national R&I systems and foster their participation in collaborative research projects. Strengthening R&I capacity in EU member states and Framework Programme Associated Countries will also be strategic in the context of potential EU enlargement.

### **7. Simplify the programme and its rules for participation**

In recent years, the programme has grown and become more complex, introducing numerous new initiatives on top of existing ones. This expansion has led to a lack of cohesive alignment among the programme's various components. In addition, there is the need to further simplify the project application, implementation, and auditing phases to enhance success rates and access to the programme.

### **8. Ensure responsible openness as the default option for global cooperation**

The global challenges that FP10 will aim to tackle require global solutions. Therefore, the programme should keep its door open for international cooperation with R&I partners and promote the active involvement of Associated Countries. Openness in international cooperation should be applied responsibly and in a way that ensures reciprocity. In this context, strategic autonomy needs to be a specific exception to the rule, taking precedence over collaboration with global partners in carefully identified areas and sectors.

### **9. Improve the communication, dissemination and exploitation of research results**

This will narrow the gap between science and society, a key step in combating misinformation and disinformation, especially in a context of growing mistrust in science. Enhanced exploitation of research results will also contribute to more effective knowledge valorisation. FP10 should also provide more opportunities for the engagement of citizens and society as a whole in the research process, fostering the emergence of a dialogue that is accessible, inclusive and relatable, thereby demystifying science and reinforcing its integral role in societal progress.

### **10. Enhance R&I stakeholder engagement during all stages of programme planning**

Engaging in regular dialogue with stakeholders is essential, not only in the strategic planning process, but also in the planning of the implementation phases. This may be conducted through a dedicated body, allowing the gathering of valuable feedback throughout the programme's rollout process. There are already good EU-level cooperation mechanisms with stakeholders, such as the Dialogue with Common Provision Regulation partners, or the European Research Area (ERA) Forum, which could be replicated in the design and implementation of FP10.

## Introduction

### European R&I in the global context

Europe is operating in a highly competitive global environment, which changes its research and innovation paradigm. The rising dominance of China in cutting-edge technologies, notably through large investments in R&I, has marked the beginning of an era characterised by increased global competition and emerging security concerns. Although Europe has intensified its public and private R&I investments over the past two decades, its R&I intensity is still below that of South Korea, the United States and Japan, which continue to increase their R&I investments at a proportionally higher rate than Europe. China has experienced steady growth in its R&I intensity, [surpassing the EU's level in 2013](#). Meanwhile, there are other emerging global actors that are likely to play a role in shaping global R&I dynamics in the near future. For instance, Africa, with its growing work force, is becoming an important player on the global stage and is positioned to significantly influence Europe's R&I landscape.

The recent emergence of interconnected crises has also transformed Europe's paradigm. The Covid-19 pandemic, escalating geopolitical tensions - including the Russian invasion of Ukraine and conflicts in the Middle East, the increased frequency of extreme climate-related events, the energy crisis and consequent high inflation have all resulted in greater uncertainties. That said, in some cases they have also opened doors to new opportunities for R&I. Additionally, the geopolitical tensions, particularly the Russian invasion of Ukraine, have provided new impetus for EU enlargement, as part of a broader strategy to strengthen European security in its immediate neighbourhood.

The complex interdependencies between increasing global competition and recent disruptions have shifted European political discourse towards the need to enhance the EU's strategic autonomy and resilience. This new direction particularly focuses on the necessity of reducing dependencies in defence, as well as advancing green and digital transitions.

### The Framework Programme's value for R&I systems in Europe

The EU R&I Framework Programme is the cornerstone of the European R&I landscape. It encourages and facilitates collaboration between member states, universities, industries, and other stakeholders to advance the frontiers of science, technology and innovation and tackle pressing societal challenges. It is also a crucial instrument in shaping the direction and priorities of R&I across the continent, providing essential support to the



European Research Area (ERA), and driving significant public and private investments. The contribution of the programme in catalysing changes in national R&I systems, through its emphasis on various critical aspects such as excellence, Open Science, data management, and gender equality, is substantial.

Thanks to its strategic positioning, the Framework Programme contributes to raising Europe's global R&I profile. It does so through its unique role in enabling international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration by excellent researchers and innovators. This collaboration is essential for addressing global challenges and R&I priorities across the continent.

However, the results of the Horizon 2020 final evaluation, the public consultation on the interim review of Horizon Europe and the Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2025-2027 analysis reveal numerous challenges that impede the programme's ability to drive transformative change in European R&I. These challenges notably include insufficient budget, the growing complexity of the programme, ineffectiveness of widening measures, and a lack of sufficient synergies with other European and national programmes and initiatives.

### **Universities as key drivers of the R&I continuum**

Universities serve as the backbone of Europe's R&I, driving forward its ambitious goals in sustainable development and global leadership. As hubs of knowledge and expertise, universities foster collaboration across disciplines and sectors, as well as among member states and their regions. They play a pivotal role in building the capacities and competencies needed to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances.

Moreover, universities are at the core of R&I ecosystems. They are spaces for testing new ideas, promoting lateral thinking, and creating knowledge that still lies outside of mainstream awareness. Knowledge creation and valorisation can also benefit from mutual learning and dialogue with society, actively involving citizens and non-academic partners such as business, non-governmental organisations, public authorities and others with shared objectives. Both areas are fundamental for universities' service to society.

Universities also offer spaces where students and lifelong learners can develop awareness of the link between education and R&I, and reflect and experience it first-hand together with R&I leaders.

Participation in the Framework Programme enables universities to infuse cutting-edge research into the programme and contributes to building a knowledge-driven European economy. The programme offers unique support to universities, enhancing their international reach, forging valuable partnerships beyond the limitations of national or regional funding, and contributing to deepening the European Research Area, where knowledge, expertise, and resources are seamlessly shared across borders. To fully capitalise on the unique role of universities in bringing together education and R&I for societal benefit and to maximise the capacities of universities as catalysts of innovation, it is vital to equip the Framework Programme with well-designed tools and adequate resources.

# Pathways to success: key considerations for FP10

## 1. A budget at scale with the EU's needs and ambitions

### State of play and challenges

EU spending on R&I greatly pays off and has an important scientific, societal, and economic impact, as indicated in the recently published [Horizon 2020 final evaluation](#). However, as the report also indicates, the programme's potential was greater, as it lacked the support needed to award all excellent proposals. This shows that the funding commitment of the Framework Programme does not truly match Europe's scientific capacity.

The current level of EU investment in R&I is also not ambitious enough to keep up with demands from increasingly knowledge-dependent economies, nor the scale of challenges that need to be addressed. Due to underfunding, the overall efficiency of the programme and the entire EU R&I funding landscape are at risk. This shortfall is also underscored by the first evaluation of the ongoing Horizon Europe programme, which indicates that to fund all high-quality proposals, [an additional €34 billion would have been needed just in 2021-2022](#). This implies that the total budget of the programme needs to be doubled.

Furthermore, the Framework Programme's budget is frequently redirected to new priorities when funds are required to address new challenges, without introducing additional budget to the programme. Such budget shifts have wide-ranging, long-term negative impacts on Europe's scientific, societal, and economic landscape. With the EU's emerging ambitions, including enlargement, important as they are to Europe, there is a risk that the budget might shift even further towards new priorities.

In parallel, the programme is increasingly providing funding opportunities for projects focusing on achieving quick and marketable results and becoming an instrument to realise other EU political ambitions, such as re-industrialisation. This shift causes [excessive focus on applied research and innovation](#) to the detriment of bottom-up, curiosity-driven research. This imbalance weakens Europe's ability to address new and unforeseen challenges, particularly in the medium to long term. Insufficient investments in basic research will further diminish Europe's capacity to undertake applied research and innovation, ultimately hindering progress in the rapidly evolving R&I environment.

### Recommendations

- ❖ **Provide a well-balanced mix of support for basic research, applied research and innovation.** The growing focus on applied research and innovation in public R&I spending must not come at the cost of investments in basic research. Investment in basic research is especially crucial as it provides the foundation for all breakthrough innovations and serves as a prerequisite for truly transformative solutions to societal challenges. As such, better balancing the mix of support is vital to ensuring that the EU will be able to tackle global challenges and emerging crises now and in the future.
- ❖ **Increase the budget to €200 billion.** European R&I funding holds the potential for significant returns for society as a whole, and therefore, must be prioritised with a correspondingly high budget allocation. For the EU to truly become a global leader and safeguard autonomy in strategic sectors, it is necessary to enhance Europe's position at the forefront of global R&I, notably by allocating an adequate budget for FP10. An increased budget will also help leverage private R&I investments, which are at the [lowest level](#) as a percentage of GDP when compared to the EU's main global competitors. Additionally, to guarantee the achievement of the programme's objectives, its budget must continue to be allocated based on excellence and impact criteria.

- ❖ **Ring-fence the budget.** European researchers and innovators need a stable FP10 budget. The programme's budget must not be diverted, without the introduction of new funding, to other priorities when funding is needed to address emerging challenges or shifting political landscapes. Given that the existing budget is not sufficient to fund all excellent proposals, it is even more vital to ensure that the programme's spending stays true to the intended focus.
- ❖ **Ensure sustained investments in R&I at both EU and national levels.** The added value of EU R&I funding, alongside national and regional funding, is evident. Not only does it bolster collaborative R&I efforts across member states, but it also leverages shared resources, expertise, and infrastructures. As it surpasses the capabilities of individual member states, it allows researchers to address challenges that are increasingly transnational in nature. Therefore, sustained investments by member states in the EU budget are essential. While increasing the programme budget is a priority, it is equally important to ensure adequate national investments in R&I, aiming to reach the target of investing 3% of GDP in R&I as set in the Lisbon Treaty.

## 2. Programme structure

The three-pillar structure of Horizon Europe, with a horizontal pillar covering widening participation and the European Research Area, is considered as appropriate by the programme's beneficiaries. The pillars are adequately designed to collectively represent the whole R&I continuum, spanning from basic research to tackling global challenges and fostering innovation. FP10 should therefore maintain the three-pillar structure to facilitate and support beneficiaries in navigating through its different funding opportunities.

Nevertheless, improvements will be needed to address specific challenges, such as the high competitiveness of Pillar 1, the complexity of Pillar 2, and the need for better coordination of Pillar 3's instruments. Furthermore, the creation of numerous new initiatives and instruments has increasingly led to a lack of cohesive alignment among the programme's various components, for example between the European Research Council (ERC) and the European Innovation Council (EIC), the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and the EIC, and among different clusters and missions. This lack of cohesion can deter potential beneficiaries from participation, limit the impact of funded projects, and ultimately dilute the programme's overall effectiveness. This situation also fosters the perception among beneficiaries that some components of the Framework Programme are "closed clubs", only accessible to well-established partnerships and networks.

### Pillar 1: Excellent Science

#### State of play and challenges

Pillar 1 provides key support to reinforce excellent science in Europe, funding basic, curiosity-driven research through the European Research Council (ERC), fostering the mobility of researchers through the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), and building integrated and interconnected world-class infrastructure through the Research Infrastructures work programme. Excellent research funded in Pillar 1 also enables the development of new scientific knowledge, feeding into the activities

performed in other pillars and contributing to the strategic direction of European R&I in the medium to long term.

Since its creation in 2007, the ERC has greatly contributed to training the next generation of European scientists and has employed [over 100,000 researchers](#), including doctoral candidates and postdocs, in the research teams it has funded. By funding projects across all fields of science and promoting high-risk, high-reward research, the ERC strengthens Europe's role as a global hub for scientific talent. Results from ERC-funded projects also contribute to technological developments, create new job opportunities, and foster the economic competitiveness and growth of the EU.

MSCAs are a vital instrument for universities. They allow future researchers to build strong international, intersectoral and interdisciplinary networks and provide unparalleled opportunities for professional development and cross-border cooperation, promoting the exchange of ideas and best practices, and contributing to Europe's competitiveness on the world stage.

Universities are currently the biggest beneficiaries of these instruments,<sup>1</sup> which have been pivotal in fostering curiosity-driven research activities, increasing cross-institutional collaboration, and developing an impressive human capital of highly talented researchers.

However, as a result of the growing attention to applied research and innovation, the Framework Programme is losing its focus on basic research. This is not solely reflected in a reduction of opportunities for basic research in Pillar 2, but also in a lower share of Horizon Europe's total budget<sup>2</sup> allocated for Pillar 1, when compared with Horizon 2020. Furthermore, beneficiaries find it increasingly challenging to access ERC calls and MSCA grants, due to the limited number of projects selected for funding.

<sup>1</sup> Higher and secondary education establishments currently receive 4.82B out of 7.36B (65.5%) in terms of Net EU contribution (total EU funding granted to the participants of the selected projects). [Horizon Dashboard](#) data (accessed on 21 December 2023).

<sup>2</sup> H2020: 24.4B out of 80B (30.5%); HE: 25B out of 95.5B (26.17%). European Commission, [Horizon Dashboard](#) data (accessed on 21 December 2023).

## Recommendations

- ❖ **Equip Pillar 1 with an adequate share of the budget, amounting to at least 30% of the total programme's budget, in line with the allocation in Horizon 2020.** Enhancing the impact of basic research and maximising the potential of researchers' multifaceted talents and skills requires more investment. The future Pillar 1 budget should also respect a balanced allocation across its instruments and duly consider economic shifts, such as inflation and the rising cost of living, which have an impact on researchers' mobility. Opportunities to perform basic research in collaborative projects should also be maintained and expanded in other pillars, including Pillar 2, Pillar 3, and the widening instruments.
- ❖ **Ensure more equitable access to Pillar 1, while safeguarding the principle of excellence.** National Contact Points (NCPs) should be empowered to strengthen the capacities of beneficiaries in accessing the pillar, in particular in countries with lower R&I capacity. Raising the overall budget allocated for Pillar 1 and developing secondary mechanisms, such as fellowships under the widening instruments and synergies with other EU programmes and national funding schemes will also have a positive impact on improving the pillar's comparatively low success rates.

## Pillar 2: Global challenges & European industrial competitiveness

### State of play and challenges

Pillar 2 accounts for more than half of the programme's total budget. It is the central pillar which supports collaborative research projects, fostering cross-border, intersectoral partnerships and knowledge exchange, and thereby significantly increases the programme's impact. However, its structure has become exceedingly complex, which hinders the capacity of beneficiaries to participate in the programme.

The progressive shift of Pillar 2 towards supporting projects at higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) also undermines its potential. This causes an unbalanced share of funding for research projects within the pillar, in comparison to projects further along in their development and implementation phases.

The inclusion of missions in Pillar 2 also weakens its impact. Although some missions have been more successful than others, they have not fully delivered on their commitments. General disappointment stems from their inability to mobilise

sufficient funds outside of the programme and to engage other policy instruments and programmes, particularly at national and regional levels. A further reason for this disappointment is that the missions are not intended to engage the research community, despite being part of the Framework Programme. Consequently, their agendas extend beyond the R&I scope of the programme, frequently placing undue emphasis on executing specific, concrete measures unrelated to research.

## Recommendations

- ❖ **Provide balanced support to projects at various TRLs.** It is especially important that clusters provide more opportunities for collaborative research at lower TRLs (1-4 TRLs). Higher TRLs calls cannot be funded at the expense of lower TRLs calls, therefore the budget of the programme needs to be increased to address this need. This will contribute to effectively addressing global challenges and emerging crises.
- ❖ **Offer more research-related actions (at lower TRLs).** This will provide opportunities for more frequent cluster calls to support smaller and shorter projects. Such actions can collaboratively map out more exploratory research that could lead to subsequent calls that are more directional and/or at higher TRLs. This approach would also allow more partners from countries with lower R&I capacity to participate in the programme, as calls at higher TRLs typically result in larger and longer projects, thereby limiting the opportunities for potential beneficiaries to apply.
- ❖ **Move beyond the outdated, linear understanding of innovation promoted by the TRL concept.** While addressing the issue of unbalanced funding in Pillar 2 is essential, it is equally important to explore and pilot more modern and sophisticated methods that comprehensively consider the various facets of innovation and their interconnections, for example, Innovation Readiness Levels, Societal Readiness Levels, and Impact Readiness Levels.
- ❖ **Ensure sufficient budget for traditionally well-functioning open, collaborative cluster calls.** At the same time, the funding cap of budget for Partnerships in FP10 should remain below 50% of the total budget for Pillar 2, as in the ongoing programme.
- ❖ **Further rationalise the partnership landscape by reducing the number of topics.** This could be done by merging Partnerships on similar or closely related topics. The fulfilment of the sunset-clause of the old Partnerships should be followed-up. In addition, the Partnerships must provide balanced priorities and funding throughout the whole R&I continuum, including opportunities for collaborative research projects at lower TRLs.
- ❖ **Provide only seed-funding for the missions.** The support offered by the programme must focus exclusively on the R&I activities of the missions. Therefore, additional funding outside FP10 must be mobilised to support their implementation. In this context, European Structural and Investment Funds are ideally positioned to assume a greater responsibility for mission implementation at EU level, in addition to the need for mobilisation of national funding. As such, ensuring the synergetic use of different funds for mission implementation is vital.
- ❖ **Strengthen the science communication role of the missions.** This will bring research results closer to society and help address the challenge of mistrust in R&I, while simultaneously helping gain societal approval for public investments in R&I.
- ❖ **Conduct a thorough evaluation of the missions.** This must take place before new missions are introduced or existing ones are continued in FP10. A potential increase in the number of missions might compromise the effectiveness of already-implemented initiatives.

## Pillar 3: Innovative Europe

### State of play and challenges

The instruments in Pillar 3 play an important role in fostering a dynamic and flourishing European innovation ecosystem. Nonetheless, several challenges hinder their effectiveness, notably their complexity and lack of sufficient alignment. While consolidating all innovation components of the programme within a single pillar was a positive step, the links between various instruments, particularly between

the European Innovation Council (EIC) and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), were not sufficiently examined. This leads to undue complexity and navigation difficulties for beneficiaries.

Another significant limitation of Pillar 3 is its current inadequacy in supporting innovation in a broader context, which notably includes social innovation. Effective innovation processes that tackle major societal challenges require a systemic and multidisciplinary approach. They must encompass perspectives from all disciplines, including Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts, and foster synergies between research, innovation and education.

Furthermore, the capacity to innovate is another key challenge in accessing support from the pillar. Universities are instrumental in creating the conditions for disruptive innovation and in transforming scientific results into radical innovations. However, some of them struggle to effectively engage in Pillar 3 activities due to limited innovation capacity. While various factors contribute to this issue, the primary obstacle is the lack of essential innovation skills needed to participate in innovation projects.

## Recommendations

- ❖ **Foster greater synergies between pillars to enhance knowledge valorisation.** By designing effective synergies between Pillar 3 and the other pillars, the programme can ensure that knowledge resulting from research projects is transformed into tangible applications that benefit society.
- ❖ **Strengthen alignment between the EIC and the EIT.** As a new addition to the innovation landscape, the EIC was introduced without well-designed synergies with existing instruments, in particular the EIT. To fully realise the potential of Pillar 3 in boosting Europe's innovation performance, a thorough revision is needed. This revision should aim at simplifying the structure and enhancing alignment and complementarity among the pillar's instruments.
- ❖ **Expand Pillar 3 support to cover different facets of innovation, including social innovation.** This is notably relevant to strengthen synergies between the ERC and the EIC. As it currently stands, there is no established follow-up mechanism for ERC projects in SSHA that aim to advance towards social innovation, as this type of innovation is not yet well supported by the EIC.

- ❖ **Provide support to develop innovation skills.** This will enhance universities' ability to participate in Pillar 3 calls and improve the uptake of research output stemming from the programme.



### *A suggestion for FP10*

This could be accomplished by creating a new instrument within the pillar dedicated to developing talent for innovation. Such an instrument could be built and expand on the experience of the EIT in boosting innovation talent and capacity.

- ❖ **Strengthen the EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition.** These instruments are essential in addressing the gap between research excellence and the transformation of findings into innovative solutions, a significant challenge currently faced by the European R&I ecosystem. They can be further enhanced in FP10 by offering more open calls supporting bottom-up projects. Additionally, the EIC Transition should be open to all beneficiaries, and not only to those who have received funding from other instruments of the programme.
- ❖ **Reconsider the current EIC intellectual property rules.** Although some concerns have already been addressed by empowering Technology Transfer Offices in exploiting the results of EIC projects, it is important that EIC inventors exercise their access rights on the basis of institutional, regional and national rules and procedures on the handling and management of IP.
- ❖ **Recognise the vital role of universities as drivers of cohesive and effective innovation ecosystems.** Currently, the European Innovation Ecosystems funding scheme overlooks the role of universities, thereby limiting the opportunities available to them.
- ❖ **Modernise the EIT and the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs).** It is especially important to simplify their administrative procedures, structure, and governance, as well as improve access for a wider range of participants. Currently, the KICs are not considered sufficiently open for new members, notably due to high membership fees. In that regard, the issue of the financial sustainability of the KICs and university participation should also be addressed. Since universities depend on public funding, their ability to participate in KICs that become independent is limited.

## 3. Core principles to guide FP10

To guarantee the successful realisation of its objectives, the Framework Programme must continue to promote excellence and impact as its key criteria. It must also firmly anchor itself in several principles: (1) fostering the synergetic use of funds; (2) widening participation and maximising excellence; (3) simplifying rules and the programme structure; and (4) embracing openness in international cooperation.

### Synergetic use of funds

#### State of play and challenges

Vast, untapped potential lies in ensuring synergies between the Framework Programme and other EU policy instruments and funding programmes, as well as coordinating with similar initiatives at the national and regional levels. These synergies can substantially reinforce the impact of EU funding in R&I and contribute to the efficient and smart governance of public funds.

Some efforts have already been made to facilitate these synergies, notably through the introduction of the Seal of Excellence scheme and the possibility to transfer funds to the Framework Programme. However, there are still some obstacles that need to be overcome to fully unlock the potential of synergies. Today, synergies with other EU programmes are in many cases well-conceived at the political level, but from a practical standpoint, they often falter. This is notably due to the diversity of funding cycles, funding rules and documentation requirements. The implementation of projects funded from different sources proves to be complex, which discourages potential beneficiaries.

#### Recommendations

- ❖ **Ensure greater consistency in the rules of the EU funding landscape.** All programmes should adhere to a straightforward and similar set of guidelines, closely mirroring those of the Framework Programme. The Guidance on Synergies

introduced in 2022 serves as a good starting point, but further efforts are essential.



#### **A suggestion for FP10**

The Guidance, which currently addresses only programmes under the European Regional Development Fund, could be expanded to other EU funding instruments.

- ❖ **Initiate synergies at the programme design stage (synergies-by-design approach).** A synergetic approach to building initiatives will allow the elimination of possible overlaps between funding instruments and programmes. It will also offer programme beneficiaries possible follow-up activities for projects funded from other EU programmes and initiatives (sequential funding).
- ❖ **Ensure alignment with the Erasmus+ programme.** Building synergies between R&I and education is vital to tackling the major challenges our societies face. Activities arising from these synergies should be accessible to all universities. While supporting strategic research collaboration among universities, e.g. through the European Universities Initiative (EUI), would be beneficial, this should not undermine the competitive character of FP10. Keeping this approach is essential to unleashing the full potential of university collaboration in R&I and preventing universities that are currently not part of a European Universities alliance from being put at a disadvantage.
- ❖ **Further explore the Seal of Excellence scheme.** This scheme aims to increase synergies among EU-funded programmes by financing excellent yet previously unsuccessful proposals. However, it can only be efficient with better coordination and increased awareness of the opportunity it presents. Similarly, the possibility to transfer funds to the Framework Programme should be maintained in the next programme.
- ❖ **Strengthen synergies within the programme itself.** Although some efforts have already been made, synergies between the European Innovation Council (EIC) and the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) require investigation. The links between the European Research Council (ERC) and the EIC should also be further strengthened.

## Widening participation and maximising excellence

### State of play and challenges

Widening instruments, part of the Framework Programme's horizontal pillar, provide opportunities to reduce disparities in R&I performance across EU member states. They do so by promoting broader access to the programme and maximising the capacity to engage in research excellence. Beneficiaries have identified [numerous benefits](#) from their participation in widening measures (notably in Teaming, Twinning, ERA Chairs and COST Actions). These include increasing the mobility of researchers at different career stages, fostering their interest in participating in international projects and providing more opportunities for institutional training and support. Widening measures were also identified as being potentially conducive to systemic change at institutional level, creating avenues for the development of new institutional practices and representing an important driver to address institutional capacity-building needs.

[Data shows](#) that the access of countries with lower R&I capacity to the Framework Programme has improved in recent years. In total, they received an 8% share of the total EU contribution in Horizon 2020, marking a moderate step forward from its predecessor programme. This has further improved in Horizon Europe, where they have thus far received a share of approximately 13.5% of the total EU contribution. Despite this improvement, [a significant R&I divide](#) still exists across member states. While institutions in countries with lower R&I capacity often demonstrate their capacity to engage in excellent research, they lack the means needed to access European funding in terms of institutional capacity and support staff. These factors, combined with insufficient national R&I investments, ultimately lower their prospects of participating in the programme.

While the widening instruments aim at mitigating the challenges posed by the programme's high competitiveness, several bottlenecks are hindering their effectiveness. Although some of these instruments are successful, others, such as the Hop-On Facility, have proven to be less efficient due to their complex funding conditions, which impose additional administrative burdens on potential beneficiaries. Moreover, the calls within the widening instruments often lack funding for collaborative research-based activities. They instead focus on providing funding for mutual learning and networking activities through Coordination and Support Actions (CSA), which tend to be less attractive opportunities for beneficiaries.

Consequently, engaging in widening instruments has not yet been translated into a significant increase in the participation of countries with lower R&I capacity in the programme. This is also evident in the low participation rates in various components of the programme: 5% in the ERC, 9% in the EIT, 11% in both Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) and the EIC, 19% in Research Infrastructures, and an average of 23% across clusters, with variations between them.<sup>3</sup>

### Recommendations

- ❖ **Empower institutions from countries with lower R&I capacity to strengthen their role as R&I leaders.** FP10 should provide opportunities to reinforce institutional capacity building and support these countries to improve their National Contact Point (NCP) systems, as well as the functioning of research support offices. This approach will allow institutions from countries with lower R&I capacity to maximise their capability to perform excellent research and increasingly assume the role of project coordinator.
- ❖ **Provide more opportunities to perform collaborative research activities, as part of widening instruments.** This can be achieved through the introduction of more Research and Innovation Actions (RIAs) in widening instruments. Such an approach will enhance the programme's attractiveness among researchers from all countries, strengthening collaboration across borders and providing additional networking and knowledge exchange opportunities. It will also foster the role of widening institutions as R&I leaders.



#### A suggestion for FP10

A dedicated instrument could be developed with the aim of enabling institutions from widening countries to lead the development of ambitious research projects in small research teams comprising researchers from all EU countries.

- ❖ **Encourage national R&I reforms in countries with lower R&I capacity.** Such reforms should support the development of strategies to secure R&I funding and build institutional R&I capacity. While needs and framework conditions vary across European countries, national reforms should include, among others, the introduction of modern research career paths and the enhancement of

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, [Horizon Dashboard](#) data (accessed on 10 January 2024).



administrative capacity, including fostering the sustainability of professional research management staff at institutional level. The horizontal pillar should continue to provide avenues for R&I policy reforms by ensuring alignment with future ERA Policy Agendas. This approach will allow the identification of key R&I policies and leverage the programme's capacity to address new priorities. In parallel, national investments in R&I should be strengthened to reach the target of investing 3% of GDP in R&I. National support should also be provided to implement institutional policies aimed at addressing horizontal topics promoted by the programme, such as the development of policies on Open Science and gender equality.

- ❖ **Assess the impact of widening instruments to identify inefficiencies and propose improvement.** In particular, the evaluation of the Hop-on Facility is necessary to determine whether the instrument should be kept in FP10. This evaluation should provide insights into the number of beneficiaries from countries with lower R&I capacity that were able to join project proposals post-award, demonstrate evidence of their added value as full new members of consortia, and suggest solutions to address challenges with the implementation of the instrument. The European Commission should conduct a thorough evaluation of the widening instruments to determine their effectiveness in enhancing the capacity of beneficiaries to access the programme's other pillars.
- ❖ **Develop a strategic approach in the context of EU enlargement.** While discussions around potential enlargement of the EU unfold, it will be of key importance to empower the R&I systems of candidate countries through targeted mechanisms such as pre-accession funds prior to their formal participation in the Framework Programme as EU member states. Enhancing the R&I capabilities of candidate countries before their accession will allow them to better address the complexity and competitiveness of the programme, while preserving its focus on excellence.

## Simplification of the programme and its rules for participation

### State of play and challenges

While the Framework Programme has long established itself as a source of funding for excellent R&I activities in Europe, beneficiaries have increasingly observed challenges in accessing the programme. This results notably from the growing complexity of the programme and lack of alignment across its different components.

Furthermore, addressing the complexity of the programme becomes even more pressing when considering the rules for participation. Simplification of the project application, implementation, and auditing phases plays a key role in enhancing success rates and access to the programme. The current expansion of eligibility criteria, combined with potential additions or broader application across the entire programme (e.g. the Do No Significant Harm principle) imposes an additional administrative burden on beneficiaries in an already complex application procedure. Similarly, the introduction of lump sum funding, meant as a simplification measure, raises concerns about potential unintended consequences of its further expansion in the programme.

### Recommendations

- ❖ **Reduce the programme's complexity by streamlining its instruments.** FP10 should be made more straightforward, allowing beneficiaries to navigate opportunities more easily. The components of the programme should also be harmonised, and any overlaps eliminated.
- ❖ **Simplify the application procedure.** Researchers and other beneficiaries should be able to concentrate on detailing their projects and not on navigating intricate eligibility requirements, many of which pertain to their affiliated institutions.



#### **A suggestion for FP10**

A two-stage application process could be implemented in more components of the programme to facilitate access, particularly in areas with low success rates and a high number of unsuccessful project applications.

- ❖ **Accept beneficiaries' usual accounting practices.** This is a major step towards EU funding simplification. It will lead to more efficient use of project resources, decrease error rates, and bolster cross-reliance between national and EU audits.
- ❖ **Improve the EU control environment based on the principles of efficiency, effectiveness and value for money.** This means EU control must yield greater assurance for EU funders about beneficiaries' compliance with EU funding rules, while costing less money and effort to all parties.

- ❖ **Conduct an in-depth evaluation of lump sum funding prior to broadening it.** This will ensure that lump sum funding does not lead to unintended consequences, such as risk-averseness in the choice of partners, which in consequence may create a negative impact, notably in terms of widening participation and strengthening pan-European collaboration objectives.

## Openness in international cooperation

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### State of play and challenges

The Framework Programme stands as a key instrument in advancing the EU's global ambitions. Over the past 20 years, the programme's international openness has played a pivotal role in fostering collaboration in research and innovation beyond the EU borders. The programme's international openness, particularly the option for countries across the globe to associate to it, strengthens Europe's partnerships and has the capacity to make Europe a hub for international, collaborative research.

However, due to growing geopolitical tensions and rising global challenges, we are seeing a readjustment of international R&I cooperation. In particular, economic and security policy agendas are [increasingly converging](#), leading to the growing emphasis on the need for the EU to preserve its strategic autonomy and reduce dependencies on third countries in key strategic sectors. In parallel, it is important to recognise how global challenges are deeply interconnected and ultimately require global solutions. International cooperation therefore remains crucial in addressing threats such as climate change and health crises.

The [EU's Global Approach to Research and Innovation](#) aims to manage open research cooperation in a context that has changed over the last decade. It seeks to do this by reaffirming the EU's commitment to lead by example in the global sphere to preserve openness in international R&I cooperation, while also promoting a level playing field and preserving the EU's strategic autonomy in critical sectors. Geopolitical assertion by the EU and security concerns among its member states are rising in view of intensified global upheaval and economic uncertainty. Thus, while openness is still formally acknowledged in programmatic EU statements, it risks not fully matching how these policies are implemented in practice.

Within the context of the Framework Programme, the strategy has been implemented through an approach that emphasises greater competition, where the openness of the programme to international cooperation has been counterposed with the need to safeguard EU interests in strategic areas, promoting its technological leadership and competitiveness. In practice, this has led to the emergence of a complex landscape regulating the access of associated and third countries to the various components of the programme. In the absence of clear guidelines, European and international researchers therefore risk missing opportunities to collaborate when navigating such an intricate framework.

### Recommendations

- ❖ **Ensure responsible openness as the default option for global cooperation.** Globalisation and the quest for sustainability are key drivers for more, rather than less, global collaboration in R&I. FP10 should enhance responsible and reciprocal openness and international R&I collaboration. In this context, openness and responsibility are key concepts. While openness means that challenges need to be met in cooperation with diverse partners, it is a principle that needs to be applied responsibly, and with the expectation of reciprocal openness from partners. Responsibility entails a fundamentally open, but risk-aware approach to cooperation, where risk is assessed systematically and in various dimensions. This approach will also create conditions that strengthen the involvement of Associated Countries in the programme.
- ❖ **Assist beneficiaries in identifying security risks.** Risk assessment procedures should be put in place to identify potential threats, notably in cases where security should be favoured over international cooperation, with the aim to ensure the protection of key European strategic goals and knowledge infrastructures. Furthermore, providing beneficiaries with clear guidance on identifying these risks would be highly beneficial. The exclusion of countries from the programme should also be used only in exceptional cases of clearly definable and serious threats to the EU's strategic autonomy.

## 4. Horizontal topics

Horizontal topics aim to maximise the impact of the Framework Programme on society. This includes integrating interdisciplinarity and Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts (SSHA), providing drivers to mainstream open science practices, fostering gender equality, and supporting the communication, dissemination and exploitation of project results to ensure they can be scaled-up to meet the programme's objectives.

While the level of implementation and effectiveness of the horizontal topics varies across the different instruments and requirements, beneficiaries largely perceive them as a box-ticking exercise, without a sustainable impact on changing practices and culture at institutional and national levels in the long term. Furthermore, responsibilities related to the implementation of horizontal topics still largely fall on the individual researchers who develop project proposals, and thereby frequently face numerous requirements that should, instead, pertain to their institutions. This notably translates into an increased administrative burden in the pre-award phase.

### Interdisciplinarity and integrating Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts

#### State of play and challenges

Despite the progress made, the full potential of interdisciplinary research remains inefficiently explored within the Framework Programme. While calls may foresee collaboration with researchers in Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts (SSHA) disciplines, their active involvement remains limited. Several reasons lie behind this pitfall. Firstly, such calls tend to be broad and fail to provide a clear vision as to how collaboration between Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and SSHA researchers is conceived, or which SSHA disciplines are expected to be included. Secondly, while some social sciences disciplines are well integrated in call topics, humanities and the arts remain significantly underrepresented. Finally, many researchers express their frustration about the absence of clear guidance on how to develop interdisciplinary project consortia.

#### Recommendations

- ❖ **Unleash the full potential of interdisciplinarity.** FP10 should recognise the role of interdisciplinarity in addressing societal challenges. Harnessing the potential of interdisciplinary research will be essential in achieving the programme's goals and objectives, which, by nature, require interdisciplinary problem orientation and solutions and a deep understanding of human and societal aspects.
- ❖ **Promote the entire, diverse spectrum of SSHA research.** This means also recognising the potential of humanities and the arts in providing innovative solutions to address societal issues and challenges. FP10 should avoid privileging specific disciplines of social sciences that are already well represented in call topics.
- ❖ **Provide dedicated opportunities for SSHA research.** FP10 should support the alignment of research priorities on societal and human-centric issues by providing calls entirely dedicated to SSHA, notably in Pillar 2's clusters. Furthermore, the number of topics and calls that integrate SSHA into STEM research should be increased.
- ❖ **Involve SSHA researchers in all phases of the programme's development process.** Their expertise provides a valuable contribution to activities such as problem formulation, work programme drafting, topic design, and evaluation panels. To facilitate their engagement, a structural approach could be created to bring together European SSHA researchers to provide their input and feedback.

#### Open Science

##### State of play and challenges

The introduction of open science requirements in the programme has been a positive driver in bringing forward the mainstreaming of Open Science in Europe. Open science practices such as ensuring open access to publications and data, managing data according to the FAIR (Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, and Reusability) principles, following the "as open as possible, as closed as necessary" concept, and opening up the research process beyond traditional R&I actors deeply contribute to improving the quality, accessibility, visibility and efficiency of research results.

Nevertheless, Open Science is still far from being implemented as a common practice among universities in Europe. While providing a strong incentive to perform open science practices, the programme's requirements are still largely perceived to impose additional administrative burdens on researchers. Institutions that lack open science policies aligned with open access mandates, dedicated research data management professionals and data infrastructure might also be further disadvantaged in the development of project proposals.

## Recommendations

- ❖ **Reinforce capacity building for Open Science.** FP10 should devise additional support measures aimed at empowering R&I actors to develop policies, build new - or update existing - infrastructure, incentivising training across different disciplines, capacity building and good practices that address all open science practices, [as defined by UNESCO](#). These actions should be taken while duly recognising and respecting the specific needs of the different research fields.
- ❖ **Renew the programme's commitment to a just scholarly publishing ecosystem.** This includes ensuring alignment with the ambitions of [Plan S](#) and its [Rights Retention Strategy](#), by supporting authors to systematically retain their rights when publishing research results funded by the programme.
- ❖ **Explore and promote new pathways for open access publishing.** This includes supporting not-for-profit, community-led open institutional publishing initiatives (often referred to as Diamond Open Access). To this end, FP10 should provide opportunities to build capacity, skills and infrastructure for the uptake and sustainability of new publishing models and venues, including, but not limited to, improving the delivery of Open Research Europe (ORE).
- ❖ **Support the uptake of FAIR research data skills and practices.** This will contribute to realising the strategic objectives of the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) and giving Europe a global lead in research data management. FP10 should further support actions to foster the uptake of FAIR data skills, practices and standards, in various disciplines and at different levels.
- ❖ **Recognise diverse outputs and practices in the assessment of researchers.** To maximise the quality and impact of researcher's work, and as a signatory of the [Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment](#), the European Commission

should foster the emergence of responsible, transparent and sustainable research assessment practices through FP10. This approach will be crucial to further supporting and incentivising Open Science at European, national and institutional levels, but will also provide support to the implementation of other horizontal topics, including gender equality, interdisciplinarity and the integration of SSHA research. The ten commitments of the Agreement should therefore be considered whenever possible and relevant.

## Gender equality and inclusiveness

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### State of play and challenges

While attention to gender equality has significantly increased in iterations of the Framework Programme over the years, it was Horizon 2020 (2014-2020) that first set gender equality as a horizontal issue. The [final evaluation of Horizon 2020](#) found that, although the programme enhanced gender equality, women remained significantly underrepresented. Specifically, women comprised only 37% of research teams and 23% of project coordination roles. The measures introduced in the successor programme, Horizon Europe, notably Gender Equality Plans (GEPs), forged a pivotal pathway towards the implementation and improvement of gender equality policies at an institutional level. While the introduction of GEPs represents a positive development, there is room for improvement in FP10.

One of the key challenges is that, in some cases, GEPs are perceived as a box-ticking exercise, lacking substantial impact. For example, some projects may demonstrate gender balance within the research team at the proposal stage, yet the actual implementation team may differ in composition.

Moreover, there is an emerging need for the programme to promote a more inclusive and diverse R&I environment. Currently, the focus is predominantly on gender equality, overlooking a broader, more holistic approach to equality, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (EDIB). Addressing this gap would ensure a richer and more varied contribution to R&I.

## Recommendations

- ❖ **Transform Gender Equality Plans into a committed pursuit of progress in gender equality efforts.** This includes implementing more robust monitoring of gender equality across the full lifecycle of projects, while ensuring it does not impose undue administrative burdens on beneficiaries.
- ❖ **Promote equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging throughout the programme.** Beneficiaries hold positive views about strengthening the focus on gender equality in R&I through the Framework Programme. However, to elevate the societal relevance of R&I, it is essential to foster broader inclusion of diverse talent in FP10.

- ❖ **Enhance the transferability and use of project results.** FP10 should acknowledge that responsibilities associated with communicating and facilitating the uptake of research results should not only fall on individual projects and researchers but are to be shared with their institutions, which should provide the necessary support and resources. The programme should therefore ensure such support at institutional, national, and European levels.

## Communication, dissemination and exploitation

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### State of play and challenges

The Framework Programme requires beneficiaries to devise activities to enhance the communication, dissemination and exploitation of their projects. This includes promoting research results, making them publicly available and exploring avenues for their practical application for societal and commercial purposes. However, the programme currently lacks a systematic and central approach specifically dedicated to evaluating project results and exploring how they could be valorised and transformed into new solutions that positively impact society.

### Recommendations

- ❖ **Leverage the programme's capacity to strengthen society's trust in science.** FP10 should provide more opportunities for the engagement of citizens and society as a whole, raising awareness of the role they can play in contributing to research activities.
- ❖ **Improve the exploitation of project results.** This will enhance Europe's ability to translate scientific discoveries into societal and market solutions. Moreover, strengthening synergies between the programme's pillars, as well as with other funding initiatives, will allow better exploitation of project results.

## 5. Broader stakeholder engagement in design and implementation planning

### State of play and challenges

The strategic planning process introduced in Horizon Europe is a tool intended to guide the work programmes and topics for the Framework Programme in the coming years. It is meant as a tool for co-design with citizens and stakeholders, and is organised twice within the span of the 7-year programme. Although this represents a very positive change in terms of stakeholder involvement compared to previous programmes, there is a need for more frequent consultations, as political processes through which the programme is developed do not sufficiently include those R&I actors that will be its beneficiaries.

### Recommendations

- ❖ **Enhance R&I stakeholder engagement during all stages of programme planning.** Engaging in regular dialogue with stakeholders is essential, not only in the strategic planning process, but also in the planning of the implementation phases.



#### ***A suggestion for FP10***

This may be conducted through a dedicated body, allowing the gathering of valuable feedback throughout the programme's rollout process. There are already good EU-level cooperation mechanisms with stakeholders, such as the Dialogue with Common Provision Regulation partners, or the European Research Area (ERA) Forum, which could be replicated in the design and implementation of FP10.

## Conclusions

EUA's strategic vision for the next EU R&I Framework Programme, as outlined in this document, offers a comprehensive and forward-thinking approach to strengthening Europe's role in global R&I, fostering its resilience and enabling a more effective response to societal challenges.

By addressing key areas such as a well-balanced mix of support for basic research, applied research and innovation, a significantly increased and stable budget, robust structure, and simpler rules, FP10 will become the successful instrument Europe urgently needs. Additionally, the implementation of recommendations to foster collaborative projects, strengthen synergies, enhance excellence by bridging the R&I divide among member states, and improve accessibility will be crucial in fostering excellent, collaborative, inclusive, and impactful R&I throughout Europe. As such, FP10 will significantly contribute to positioning Europe at the forefront of new knowledge and discoveries, empowering it to effectively address global challenges and drive scientific and societal progress.

EUA remains committed to co-designing the programme through the expertise of the university sector. Only through collaborative efforts can Europe achieve the ambitious goals set for the programme, to the benefit of our shared future.

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