



**EUA**

European University Association

# Where the **EU** should **invest** in the future

EUA recommendations for  
the **post-2020 Multiannual  
Financial Framework** and  
related funding programmes

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## EUA recommendations for the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework and related funding programmes

### Context

The mid-term reviews of the current EU funding programmes (2014-2020) have just ended and the discussion on the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the EU's long-term financial planning, is already taking off. The European Commission has launched various public consultations on the priorities with a view to prepare its proposal by May of this year.

Addressing Europe's key challenges and ensuring sustainable development requires the EU to have a well-functioning budget and to revisit its investment priorities. Cooperation in research and education is a key facilitator in achieving these goals and should therefore be a top investment priority for the Union in the future. The Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP), the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and Erasmus+ (E+) are important tools in channelling such investment, make it available to beneficiaries and provide a framework for cooperation. Universities, including their students and staff, through their participation in these and other programmes, contribute considerably to the achievement of common EU policy objectives, such as competitive innovation, regional development, social cohesion and integration, as well as job creation.

The European University Association (EUA) represents more than 800 universities in 47 countries and 33 national rectors' conferences. The present paper outlines the view of the Association on the next MFF and outlines key priorities for the future EU funding programmes from the point of view of Europe's universities. It is based on EUA's work with its members and partners including various working groups, consultations and projects and builds on the longstanding expertise and experience with EU funding programmes.

### Guiding principles for the future MFF

The following five principles should guide the preparation of the future MFF and thus ensure that European-level investment is efficient and effective in contributing to addressing the major challenges Europe is facing and in achieving common political goals.

- 1. European added value and additionality:** Investment should be directed at those areas and activities where it can have real European added value and make a difference. This applies first and foremost to cross-border cooperation and exchange in areas where common European challenges need long-term public investment.
- 2. Stability and predictability:** When deciding on the period covered by the next MFF, the period for the mid-term review, and related procedures, policy makers should bear in mind the need for financial stability and predictability for beneficiaries, as well as the time and resources needed to implement the new programmes.

3. **Sustainability:** Sustainability both in terms of policy objectives and funding mechanisms should be a cross-cutting feature for the next MFF. As the EU has committed to align its policies to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), EU-level investment should focus on areas that support them. Research, innovation and education are key facilitators in achieving the SDGs and should thus be on top of the investment priorities. Funding mechanisms should privilege grants to ensure financial sustainability and equitable access for beneficiaries.
4. **Synergies and simplification:** Future programmes, notably for research, innovation, education and cohesion, should follow the same set of financial rules to lower the burden on beneficiaries, such as universities dealing with a variety of different EU programmes. This would also allow for an easier combination of different funds. Better alignment of programme rules should go hand-in-hand with offering beneficiaries different options for cost accounting. A higher level of trust should be achieved through a wider acceptance of nationally-recognised and institutional accounting and management practice.
5. **Openness:** Future EU programmes supporting research, innovation and education should be open to association of non-EU member countries as international cooperation in all these areas is vital to achieve the EU's political ambitions. EU programmes provide a framework for multilateral collaboration that is unique in the world and represents a strong asset of the EU.

## **Boost investment in research and innovation to meet political ambitions**

If Europe wants to become a world leader in research and innovation, there is a need to significantly increase funding for research and innovation under the next FP to solve the problem of underfunding and low success rates of the current programme. A success rate of only 12% is discouraging for applicants and represents a waste of talent and resources, since many excellent projects go unfunded.

- R&I is a European public good. Spending at this level creates synergies, economies of scale and high value for money for EU tax payers, e.g. every €1 invested in R&I generates on average €13 in value added for business (source: EC).
- EU investment in R&I supports all European policies and priorities, e.g. competitive innovation, societal growth, job creation, climate change and social inclusion.
- EU investment in R&I is complementary to national efforts. Pan-EU research competition identifies and empowers excellent project ideas with EU-wide and global impact, evidenced in the higher field-weighted citation index of European research. Approximately 83% of projects would not have gone ahead without H2020 funding.
- The focus of the FP should be on excellent basic and collaborative research as this is the indispensable basis for future innovation. It creates cross-border frameworks and networks for professionals and academics, thus, reinforcing European awareness and identity.

- It supports the next generation of European researchers and innovators, e.g. through MSCA grants for young researchers and ERC grants creating on average six new research positions per grantee (source: EC).
- Finally, the FP should remain the most open research programme in the world, tackling global challenges and fostering stronger ties with other countries. Beyond academic exchanges, it provides a long-term reliable framework for EU science diplomacy.

Therefore, EU R&I investment must be stepped up to fully unleash Europe's potential.

### **Use cohesion funds efficiently and effectively to close the innovation gap**

There is clear evidence that the EU cohesion policy and related funds have an important impact on competitiveness and performance of members states and their regions. Combined with sufficient national and regional investment, it can contribute to the development of regions that are not yet as advanced as others on the development curve.

- R&I capacity and performance are an important element of economic development, regional competitiveness and ultimately greater cohesion across Europe. Those regions that still lag behind in terms of development and innovation outputs also face challenges in their research systems such as fragmentation, a lack of institutional concentration, the difficulty to connect to the wider R&I community and retaining high-skilled labour.
- This has an impact on their participation and use of various resources aimed at boosting innovation performance and economic growth such as the FP.
- ESIF funds have an important role in reinforcing the investment in R&I by national, regional and local governments through Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3). Public commitment to R&I at the regional level, coming both from EU and national authorities, is paramount and should be mutually reinforcing investments.
- This points to the need for a better alignment of the future ESIF to the next FP. One way would be to dedicate a part of ESIF (e.g. parts of ERDF and the Cohesion Fund) to finance excellent collaborative R&I proposals with participation from countries or regions that are less represented in the FP. This would increase the added value of member states' investment and contribute to a simplified, more efficient and coherent European funding landscape.
- Investing in human talent and skills to ensure enduring innovation should be a priority for the next generation of ESIF. There is a need to focus more on human talent as it is indispensable for change to occur. Universities have a unique institutional profile that provides an essential link between education, research and innovation. Investing in stronger links between these three sides of the "knowledge triangle" will support the development of human talent, which is the key success factor for sustainable, long-term innovation.

Using ESIF more efficiently and effectively to enhance the R&I capacity of European regions still lagging behind in development can make a significant contribution to closing the innovation gap.

## **Invest in higher education exchange and cooperation to support reforms, stimulate innovation, enhance quality and foster inclusion**

There is broad agreement among member states and stakeholders that Erasmus+ is one of the programmes with the highest European added value. A general increase of the E+ budget is a smart and safe investment in the future of the Union and its citizens.

- In its 30 years of existence, the Erasmus programme alone has supported the mobility of nine million students and staff forming a truly European generation. It facilitates people-to-people contact and thus helps strengthen personal and cultural ties, which are invaluable for bringing Europe close to its citizens. There is ample evidence that learning or working abroad fosters not only personal development, but also employability. To allow even more people to benefit from a stay abroad a significant increase of funding is needed for the next Erasmus+ programme and possible linkages with the European Social Fund (ESF) should be explored to support the mobility of disadvantaged learners.
- Equally important is the contribution of E+ to university cooperation and the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The success and international recognition of the EHEA does not depend on a few iconic institutions, but the robust, resilient and highly-interconnected university networks that include diverse institutional profiles. Cooperation actions under E+ are an important tool to support such collaborations and exchange of good practices and advance reforms of higher education across Europe, both at the system and institutional levels. They thus contribute to implementing the objectives of the Bologna Process and the EU's own higher education agenda. The high absorption rate, coupled with high demand and low success rates under the cooperation actions of the current E+ (rejection rate of up to 95%), show that further investment is needed.
- Continued massification of higher education, digitalisation and changing skills needs combined with financial pressures in many systems across Europe require innovation in learning and teaching and stronger collaboration across sectors and educational levels. In line with the idea of establishing a European Education Area by 2025, including all educational levels, the future E+ programme should provide funding for the exchange and development of innovative practices across borders as well as between universities, schools, employers and other organisations. This is crucial for enhancing the quality of education and boosting its international recognition.
- International exchange and cooperation are crucial for higher education more than for any other level of education, as knowledge development and dissemination at that level are intrinsically linked with research which is international by nature. The future E+ programme should remain open to international participation as an important tool for people-to-people contact and fostering ties between Europe and its neighbours and partners worldwide. This openness significantly contributes to the attractiveness and international recognition of the EHEA.

- Education, including higher education, contributes to social inclusion and therefore access to it is an important means for the integration of refugees and migrants into our societies. This is a challenge that European countries can only face together and further European cooperation on this matter is highly needed. Universities across Europe already contribute significantly to addressing this important societal issue, largely through their own funding, but also through their involvement in dedicated European projects. EUA proposes to establish a specific support action under the future Erasmus+ programme that could provide grants for students and academics with international protection status. Taking part in European higher education through Erasmus+ would turn refugees into international students and academics, giving them better prospects for integration and careers in their country of origin, as well as in Europe. The funding should come from the financing linked to migration under the MFF, while E+ should be the programme structure for implementation.

## **Related EUA publications**

### **Research and Innovation**

- [Reasons to step up EU investment in research and innovation](#)
- [Ambitious funding for excellent research in Europe post 2020](#)
- [EUA proposals for the Next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation \(FP9\)](#)
- [Taking simplification of EU Funding to the next level - The university perspective](#)
- [EUA Core Messages and Recommendations for the Mid-Term Review of Horizon 2020 and Beyond](#)

### **Regional innovation**

- [Coherent policies for Europe beyond 2020: maximising the effectiveness of smart specialisation strategies for regional development – key messages](#)

### **Higher education**

- [Erasmus+ Mid-Term Review: EUA's Recommendations](#)
- [Complementary note to EUA's membership consultation and recommendations for the future of the Erasmus+ programme](#)

The European University Association (EUA) is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 47 European countries. EUA plays a crucial role in the Bologna Process and in influencing EU policies on higher education, research and innovation. Thanks to its interaction with a range of other European and international organisations EUA ensures that the independent voice of European universities is heard wherever decisions are being taken that will impact their activities.

The Association provides a unique expertise in higher education and research as well as a forum for exchange of ideas and good practice among universities. The results of EUA's work are made available to members and stakeholders through conferences, seminars, website and publications.



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