

Towards the Next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation 2028–2034 (FP10)

Recommendations from Helsinki-Uusimaa Region

As the EU prepares the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10) in midst of challenging times and increasing global competition, the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region offers the following key recommendations to ensure the Framework Programme's success and maximise its impact:

- **Ensure a strong budget and harness the entire R&I value chain**
- **Foster excellence and open competition in funding calls**
- **Promote place-based innovation ecosystems and collaboration**
- **Support the advancement and implementation of the green and digital transitions**
- **Invest in health and wellbeing**
- **Enhance synergies with other programmes**
- **Focus on successful implementation of the EU Missions**

Ensure a strong budget and harness the entire R&I value chain

More substantial R&I investments are required to address the evolving challenges and opportunities of the future while strengthening the EU's competitiveness. A robust financial commitment will enable ambitious R&I projects, foster cutting-edge research, and ensure the EU remains at the forefront of global innovation. Therefore, it is essential that the FP10 is supported by a strong budget. Equally important is the need to safeguard these funds, ensuring they are dedicated to research and innovation, and not diverted to other policy priorities.

To drive comprehensive progress and maximise its impact, the Framework Programme should seek to harness the full potential of the in the entire R&I value chain, providing opportunities for projects in all technology readiness levels (TRL), from basic research to applied research and close-to-market R&I activities. To fully realise the opportunities of the Framework Programme, it is essential to leverage all actors in the innovation ecosystem, including cities, regions, higher education institutions, research and technology institutes, companies, start-ups, innovation centres, and public organisations.

Foster excellence and open competition in funding calls

Ensuring that the most promising and high-impact projects receive necessary resources is critical to bolstering the EU's competitiveness. Accordingly, excellent and impactful projects with potential to achieve significant societal benefits must be prioritised for funding. Moreover, a larger share of R&I funding must be based on open competition, in order to attract the brightest talent and to encourage the development of the best knowledge and innovations. At the same time, it is imperative to keep funding and support opportunities accessible to all European R&I actors, without any discrimination or

barriers. Promoting a merit-based, competitive, and open environment is crucial for driving excellence in R&I while enabling diversity. By encouraging broad participation, open competition provides opportunities to a range of projects and ideas with the highest potential, helping to consolidate the EU's position as a global R&I leader.

Promote place-based innovation ecosystems and collaboration

Regions and municipalities are central R&I players, serving not only as recipients of research outcomes but also as active contributors in projects and enablers of the local innovation ecosystem and technology infrastructures. It is critical to empower regions to strengthen the connection between research, innovation and societal application, bridging the gap to practical implementation. To exploit its full potential, FP10 must embed a place-based innovation ecosystem approach across the programme, promote smart specialisation and fund collaborative projects among the various ecosystem actors, including cities, regions, higher education institutions, research institutes, companies, start-ups, innovation centres, and public organisations. Ideally, regions would have more flexibility to allocate funding according to region-specific needs. By fostering such place-based knowledge and innovation hubs, FP10 would also help attract and retain talent, addressing the issue of shortage of skilled professionals.

In particular, smaller companies should be encouraged more to participate in consortium projects and the path from small local initiatives towards larger and more impactful projects should be made easier. Additionally, there should be experimentation with private sector co-funding to leverage R&D investments from businesses and industries.

Overall, the framework programme would benefit from engaging more directly with citizens. For example, gathering public input, fostering participatory research, and communicating on R&I more clearly would help bring it closer to everyday society.

Support the advancement and implementation of the green and digital transitions

Climate change threatens Europe's security and growth, and digital solutions can help mitigate its impacts and adapt to the already changing climate. Therefore, FP10 must uphold a serious commitment to funding projects that propel the green and digital transitions forward. Substantial support is required for R&I ecosystems at local and regional level, notably for concrete and applied endeavours. Prioritising energy and resource efficiency, circular economy, sustainable food system, bioeconomy, hydrogen, artificial intelligence, and quantum technology initiatives is of particular importance to ensure the EU meets its climate and biodiversity goals and maintains its competitive edge in the digital age. At the same time, while advancing green and digital solutions, the EU should maintain high ethical standards and protect the fulfilment of European values.

To make sure local and regional actors can play an effective role in fostering green and digital R&I cooperation, dedicated funding is necessary for such R&I ecosystem endeavours in regions and cities. Cities are at different stages on the path to carbon neutrality, depending on the advancement of their climate plans and their capacity to act. A well-designed R&I program must accommodate diverse city profiles, helping them accelerate progress toward climate neutrality. Ideally, cities would have more freedom to suggest where funding is needed and they could flexibly pool different sources of investments together with various actors, for example when it comes to CCS technology.

Invest in health and wellbeing

Prioritising R&I in health and wellbeing is decisive in addressing pressing challenges the EU is facing, such as an aging population, sustainability challenges of the food system, the potential recurrence of pandemics, and the shortage of nurses and other healthcare professionals. Consequently, a substantial part of FP10 should be dedicated to R&I in health and wellbeing, with a larger emphasis on preventive health. In order to foster a healthy and resilient European society, more R&I investments are required especially in preventative healthcare, nursing science, mental health (especially related to youth), planetary health, as well as innovative health, medical and wellbeing solutions. Furthermore, the next framework programme must ensure a better coverage of applied research and higher TRL R&I activities in health and wellbeing, alongside fundamental research. Overall, the framework programme should take a broader perspective on health, addressing wider questions of societal and planetary health. For instance, issues like workforce mobility, immigration, food system sustainability and environmental degradation have health and wellbeing dimensions that deserve increasing R&I attention.

Enhance synergies with other programmes

The EU should avoid duplicated efforts across various funding programmes and instead strategically coordinate to leverage synergies and amplify the framework programme's impact, performance, and sustainability. **Regional and municipal funding is crucial for fostering collaborative initiatives and nurturing ecosystem development, and the framework programme needs to build more synergies in this area.** A further integrated approach would incorporate strategic components such as smart specialisation, alongside funding from the EU's structural funds, Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds, and national funding streams. By enhancing synergies with other programmes, FP10 can effectively address complex challenges and drive holistic progress towards the EU's R&I objectives.

Focus on successful implementation of the EU Missions

To make sure the Missions are implemented effectively, FP10 must provide clear goals and measurable metrics for their implementation and foster collaboration among the innovation ecosystem stakeholders, including businesses. Success hinges on collective recognition of meaningful objectives, and therefore continuous dialogue between the Commission, cities and regions is vital to ensure alignment. Of particular importance is securing the continuation and success of the Missions on Adaptation to Climate Change and Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, as well as reinforce their links with the relevant higher education partnerships. Additionally, the EU would benefit from the creation of a new mission focused on Circular Economy in Regions and Cities. This would be in line with the EU's commitment to sustainability and resource efficiency and allow tackling these challenges in a place-based manner, meeting local requirements as needed.