

An Attractive, Impactful and Inclusive Framework Programme to Align, Act and Accelerate

Following the launch event of the [high-level report from the expert group on the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe, chaired by Professor Manuel Heitor](#), YERUN provides some reflections on the main recommendations and showcases support for a number of proposals.

The European R&I community applauds the extensive consultations and co-creative process the group had implemented with stakeholders in the run-up to launching the report, including [our contribution to the consultation](#).

The report, which the European Commission appointed an independent high level expert group to write, provides recommendations to help Horizon Europe adapt to emerging challenges, enhance its appeal to researchers and innovators as well as maximise the programme's value throughout the remainder of its implementation. Another objective is to provide orientations for the future of the Programme. Against the backdrop of rising uncertainties on the form of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the continuation of a separate programme for R&I, that is Framework Programme 10 (FP10), **the expert group report provides a clear call for evolution rather than revolution**, and to double down on FP10 with a similar pillar structure on 4 interconnected spheres, along with an increased budget.

The focus of the expert group for the future FP10 rests on the European added value of R&I which comes from collaboration between countries, within and beyond Europe. According to the expert group these are **competitive excellence, industrial competitiveness, societal challenges and strong R&I ecosystems**.

Three key messages at the report's launch event expressed by the chair of the group, Manuel Heitor:

- We need a strong framework programme to drive Europe's competitiveness,
- We need an adequate budget, and,
- We need radical simplification together with some radical innovations in new instruments.

Some novel recommendations proposed in the expert group report include a "European Technology and Industrial Competitiveness Council" – not surprising given the political focus on boosting European competitiveness from the highest – a "Societal Challenges Council" – looking at engaging more directly practitioners in the design and implementation of the programme – and an enhanced Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) instrument "Choose Europe" to really invest in Europe's talent and give opportunities to the excellent researchers Europe has.

Key proposals supported by YERUN

The Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN) **strongly supports many of the recommendations made by the expert group** in its report, aligning closely with the network's own policy positions and advocacy for transformative research and innovation (R&I) within Europe.

YERUN is particularly encouraged by the report's emphasis on creating a robust, inclusive, and effective European research landscape, underpinned by strategic policy actions and adequate funding.

YERUN backs the move towards **open, non-prescriptive calls**, which would provide more space for creativity, as the bottom nature of the FP is what makes it successful.

The expert group also calls for a **whole-of-government** approach, advocating for stronger connections between R&I policies and the broader EU strategic agenda. This aligns with YERUN's view that research and innovation should be central to Europe's economy and long-term development. The proposal to integrate these policies with high-level EU recommendations, including promoting a "Research and Innovation Union" in line with Draghi and the "Fifth Freedom" as proposed by Letta, resonates strongly with YERUN's vision of fostering a more cohesive and impactful R&I ecosystem.

YERUN has long advocated for a substantial increase in the **budget** of the framework programme, and we strongly support the expert group's recommendation for an FP10 budget of €220 billion, in line with YERUN's call for over €200 billion. As previously positioned, we also agree with the need to rethink certain instruments that have demonstrated limited added value, such as the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT). Furthermore, YERUN strongly supports the recommendation to find ways to ensure that all proposals evaluated as excellent receive funding, a position YERUN has consistently highlighted.

The **prominence** given to the **European Research Council (ERC)**, **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)**, and the **European Innovation Council (EIC)** is strongly supported by YERUN. We specifically appreciate the open calls approach run by the ERC and EIC, that provide strategic flexibility and resilience by allowing proposals to address emerging priorities more effectively than more prescriptive calls. Additionally, YERUN welcomes the proposed improvements in synergies to guarantee funding runs smoothly through the whole R&I continuum, ensuring a more integrated and impactful R&I system.

YERUN fully endorses the recommendation to give the **Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH)** a more prominent role in addressing societal challenges, as these disciplines are crucial in understanding and developing solutions to Europe's pressing issues. Additionally, YERUN strongly supports efforts to tackle **brain drain** and recognises the critical role that universities and university alliances play in fostering strong, inclusive R&I ecosystems across Europe. The proposal to establish synergies between the FP and other European structural funds is essential for bridging the gap between research and its societal impact.

Administrative complexity remains a significant barrier for applicants, and YERUN wholeheartedly supports the expert group's call for radical simplification of Horizon Europe's procedures. The expert group recommends adopting a "trust first, evaluate later" model. This could greatly help to reduce the reliance on external consultants and associated costs, which YERUN has cautioned against.

We strongly support the call to modernise assessment and better aligning it with the principles of the **Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)** – aligned with our call to incentivise

structural changes without adding burden on applicants and beneficiaries – including research assessment, careers, open science, valorisation of knowledge. As the expert group recommends, we also need to ensure that national investments support these transformations.

Additionally, we are pleased that the expert group echoes our recommendation to **reform Missions** in FP10 by focusing on their R&I dimension exclusively. To reach the full potential of Missions, they should be upgraded to a broader EU policy initiative beyond the FP – potentially directed by the new College of European Commissioners as the expert group proposes – to allow the use of other synergistic funding mechanisms and the development of related policy initiatives through additional instruments.

YERUN also welcomes the expert group's recommendations on **Generative AI (GenAI)** calling for responsible experimentation and appropriate safeguards in its use within the FP. In our policy paper, we advocated for clear guidelines to ensure ethical use of generative AI, viewing it as a valuable tool for researchers and reviewers alike, provided it is used responsibly.

YERUN is also optimistic about the expert group's new paradigm to promote a **more inclusive European R&I ecosystem**, by shifting from widening participation of the "Advancing Europe" approach. However, more details are needed to understand how this can be implemented in practice. An important enabler for this are effective synergies between the FP and other EU, national, and regional funding instruments, as these are crucial for building R&I capacity and ensuring a seamless continuum from research to impact.

Finally, the expert group provides a nuanced approach to **dual-use research**, which recognises that these technologies emerge naturally due to the prevalence of modern advancements like AI, alongside the military's broad needs. YERUN had previously called for more dialogue on this topic, and it welcomes the recommendation that dual-use should not require additional contractual conditions, ensuring a more flexible and innovation-friendly environment.

YERUN stands firmly behind many of the expert group's recommendations for the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe. The network is particularly aligned with the calls for increased investment, simplification of procedures, support for open calls, and the need for better synergies between European funding instruments. **YERUN believes that these recommendations will help create a more attractive, impactful and inclusive European research and innovation landscape, contributing to Europe's global competitiveness and societal well-being.**

Links to relevant YERUN materials on the topic:

- [YERUN Policy input to the expert group on the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe](#)
- [FP10: Attractive, impactful and inclusive](#)
- [YERUN FP10 video series: Amplifying research voices across Europe](#)
- [We need much more MSCA](#)
- [Navigating the future of EU Competitiveness: Insights from Mario Draghi's report](#)
- [More dialogue needed on dual-use](#)

- About YERUN -

YERUN - Young European Research Universities Network - founded in 2015 and based in Brussels, brings together excellence and value-driven young research universities. The network's objective is to strategically represent its members in the decision-making process at EU level, thus shaping their future and promoting their role in European societies. Further to its policy advocacy activity, the network also strengthens cooperation opportunities among its members in areas of mutual interest and raises their visibility via a dedicated communication strategy.

- YERUN Members -



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