

ISE main recommendations on Horizon Europe and towards FP10

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Shield Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and the European Research Council

Two programmes, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) and the European Research Council (ERC), each with different yet complementary objectives and criteria, have demonstrated their exceptional ability to **identify excellence in Europe**.

They are the only programmes currently available for conducting bottom-up, curiosity-driven, and ground-breaking research at the frontier of knowledge. Both **produce new knowledge and have yielded useable outcomes and unexpected benefits to economic and social welfare**.

Both programmes provide funding opportunities for the best projects, the best researchers, and the best teams across the entire European Research Area. Moreover, they attract researchers from all over the world promoting the visibility of European excellence worldwide.

An illustration of their impact is the fact that most EU innovation grant winners in 2022 were ERC grantees. Consequently, the roles played by the ERC and MSCA within the framework programmes are of utmost importance for European progress.

Regrettably, both programmes are **underfunded, as shown by** the significant number of submitted proposals which pass the threshold of excellence that go unfunded.

ISE recommends that the Pillar 1 budget be **shielded from any cut** during the remaining years of Horizon Europe **and be increased in the upcoming framework programme**.

Boost collaborative basic research to complete the Research & Innovation cycle in Pillar 2

Throughout Horizon 2020 and currently in Horizon Europe, collaborative basic research has been marginalised, resulting in a gap in the Research and Innovation cycle.

In Horizon Europe and in the upcoming FP10, **Pillar 2** must be designed to achieve a **balanced participation from basic and applied research in addition to demonstration and innovation actions**. This would strengthen the effectiveness of the R&I cycle of the European research and innovation ecosystem by promoting a continuous exchange between advancement of knowledge and applications at different TRLs. Ultimately, this strategy will meet the needs of the industrial sector and private companies.

To help overcome the gap of collaborative basic research and complete the research and innovation cycle, ISE recommends **making collaborative basic research an intrinsic component of R&I Actions and introducing Research Actions** focussed on basic and applied research. This is particularly necessary to address Global Challenges. In this way an upward spiral would be created that is adding new knowledge in each round, elevating the innovation to the next higher level.

The Widening challenge - facilitate access to the three Pillars in HE

Across successive framework programmes, the disparities in performance among EU member states has not been significantly reduced. The European Research Area can only be achieved if national R&I systems are competitive and mutually compatible and by creating effective synergies within and between European programmes.

Increasing the connectivity of the so-called Widening countries is crucial to narrow the R&I gap between these countries and the other EU Member States and of key importance for the socio-economic and political viability and success of Europe as a whole.

The “Widening Participation and Spreading Excellence” actions as a transversal pillar of

Horizon Europe target primarily Widening countries. Their aim is to strengthen their R&I systems, **promote trans-European networking** of R&I stakeholders and **counteract** the intra-European **brain drain** from EU15 countries.

However, these programmes are very complex and have a limited budget. Moreover, access to other programmes has not been facilitated. ISE suggests simplifying and adapting these schemes to the needs of researchers from EU15 countries by **converting them into simple mechanisms integrated in each of the three pillars**. This will facilitate **EU15 researchers to access** the ERC, MCSA, Clusters and the Innovation **programmes** for the remaining years HE and most importantly in the upcoming FP10.

Without Researchers no Research

The unsatisfactory situation of early career researchers in the EU must be changed. To achieve the goal of making Europe the most advanced knowledge-based society, decisive progress in that direction must be made urgently.

ISE recommends that in the upcoming **European Framework for Research Careers** and Charter & Code, the **research activity** must remain **central**. Adequate **work conditions** and **research careers** must be guaranteed, as they are essential to retain talents within Europe and to attract talents to Europe.

The announcement of a **European Research & Innovation Careers Observatory** is a positive stepped. However, has been announced, the appropriate indicators allowing accurate **monitoring** of research career paths and the methods to providing **factual data** allowing for evidence-based decisions are necessary.

ISE recommends **the establishment of a new programme dedicated to researchers' careers**, building on the pilot outcomes and lessons learned. It should be given a dedicated and substantial own budget **in FP10**, involving Member States engagement and stakeholders' commitment, to complement the ERC and MSCA, without any risk of jeopardising these successful programmes.

Why consulting European academic associations can help policy makers

European academic associations have broad scientific expertise and geographical representation across Europe and beyond. They collaborate with a range of stakeholders including companies. They work on science support and increasingly on science strategy and can **provide well balanced science-based advice to policymakers**.

Other priorities of ISE

- Facilitate interdisciplinarity & emerging fields in research projects.
- Social sciences and humanities should as necessary become the focus of projects.
- Increase trust and flexibility for beneficiaries under the rules of participation.
- Policy makers should define the goals but leave the pathways to reach them open.
- Science diplomacy and Academic freedom are important stakes of Europe's soft power.

About ISE The Initiative for Science in Europe (ISE) is an independent platform of European Learned Societies and Research Organizations supporting all fields of science at a European level to engage in European science strategies and policies. <http://initiative-se.eu>

Links: [ISE position Horizon Europe consultation](#) & [Press Release](#) 20.2.&3.3.2023; updated October 2023.
[ISE position on Horizon Europe](#), 12.7.2021

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