

Türkiye's Preliminary Position Paper on The Tenth EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation



EU Framework Programmes National Coordination Office

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The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK) EU Framework Programmes National Coordination Office developed an online survey to assess the current status and expectations of stakeholders within the Turkish Research Area regarding the Framework Programmes. The results of this consultation process have been incorporated to inform this Position Paper, with a detailed analysis of the survey available [here](#).

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The European Union Framework Programmes (EU FPs) provide invaluable opportunities for collaboration among research and innovation actors across Europe, granting access to cutting-edge technologies, infrastructures, and services. By pooling public and private resources, EU FPs support multinational projects that enhance capacity building, knowledge sharing, and scientific cooperation. For Türkiye, participation in the EU FPs extends beyond immediate benefits, fostering new market opportunities and enhancing the Turkish Research Area's integration with the European Research Area (ERA). Accordingly, Türkiye has been associated to the EU FPs consistently since 2003 and aims to continue its participation in the forthcoming 10th EU Framework Programme (FP10).

It is a fact that a clear, dedicated, and stable budget is essential for fostering innovation and ensuring success in research and innovation. Budgetary limitations pose a significant threat to the goal of supporting ambitious ideas and projects. Many highly ranked proposals remain unfunded due to insufficient resources. For FP10, an adequate budget is required to address future challenges and strike a balance between policy-driven research and curiosity-driven research and innovation. This is particularly evident in Pillar I, specifically within the ERC and MSCA calls. These programmes are essential for researchers, and an increased budget allocation would be highly valued.

In addition to an increased budget, several key aspects of the current Framework Programmes are crucial to be sustained in the next FP. As a general principle, the three-pillar structure of the Programme enhances its familiarity, simplicity, predictability, and accessibility. Supporting both bottom-up and top down approaches proportionately is another important aspect of the Programme. The emphasis on excellence-based, transparent evaluation, the spirit of co-creation, and the efforts to simplify the administrative process are highly commendable and appreciated. However, we would like to highlight that further simplifications remain possible, particularly in relation to Missions and Partnerships and with different sub-programs, calls and grant options.

Türkiye acknowledges and values the inclusive and transparent strategic planning process of Horizon Europe, particularly regarding the second pillar focused on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, Türkiye wishes to highlight that the calls under this pillar may be overly concentrated on higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs). A more balanced approach across the TRL spectrum would be greatly appreciated.

International Cooperation, Synergies and Association to FPs

International collaboration is a key catalyst for advancing cutting-edge research and innovation, especially in the current era of economic constraints. In this context, Türkiye acknowledges the European Commission's efforts to enhance international cooperation, including the inclusion of more Associated Countries. However, Türkiye would like to raise certain points for consideration. For EU Enlargement countries, such as Türkiye and the Western Balkans, it is crucial to co-create the association process in a more flexible and inclusive manner. This includes involving these countries in decision-making processes, strengthening synergies with Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG-NEAR) and adopting a more flexible financial contribution model for the Candidate Countries. For the restricted calls, Türkiye proposes collaborating with the Commission to establish a security scrutiny mechanism, allowing for case-by-case evaluation of applicants rather than outright exclusion based on a general questionnaire.

Horizon Europe places strong emphasis on synergies with various EU funding instruments, both for project implementation and scaling up research and innovation outcomes. While the intent to maximize the impact of public funds through increased synergies is understandable, it poses challenges for Associated Countries, which are increasingly excluded from participation in such calls. Particularly for Enlargement Countries, synergies between DG-NEAR and Directorate-General Research and Innovation (DG-RTD) under Horizon Europe could be strengthened through the development of a document similar to the “Commission Notice on Synergies between Horizon Europe and ERDF Programmes”.

In light of the aforementioned circumstances, Türkiye proposes that future Framework Programmes strike a balance between the financial contribution model, participation in restricted calls, and the role of synergies to ensure fairness and inclusivity for Associated Countries.

Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area

Horizon Europe’s Widening actions are commendable for their positive impact on low R&I performing countries. These targeted actions seek to address the R&I divide, fostering a more cohesive European research and innovation ecosystem. We welcome the increased budget for Widening Participation and the development of new instruments in Horizon Europe, alongside the strengthening of existing ones. As the innovation gap continues and the tendency for consortias to form around established networks persists, Widening measures remain strategically important for increasing participation from underperforming countries, particularly in the context of the New European Innovation Agenda and ERA. Instruments such as Twinning, Hop On Facility and Excellence Hubs remain crucial in addressing these challenges. While the full potential and impact of some of the Widening measures are yet to be fully assessed, we support the continuation of Widening actions in the next Framework Programme.

A recommendation for the Horizon Europe WIDERA Programme concerns the two distinct instruments within WIDERA: Widening Participation and Strengthening the ERA. These subprogrammes differ significantly in their nature, yet they are currently combined under the same work programme. This creates challenges at both the stakeholder and Programme Committee/NCP levels. For FP10, priorities should be aligned with and supportive of the new EU political agenda within the ERA. The “Strengthening the ERA” component could be considered as a standalone section, separate from the “Widening Participation.” This segment of the programme requires greater focus to effectively support the ERA Policy Agenda.

Missions

Despite being one of the most significant innovations of the Horizon Europe Program, the success of the Missions remains a point of concern due to the application of Horizon Europe rules in practice and the use of the same funding mechanisms as the Horizon Europe Program. While the Missions have clearly defined and ambitious objectives, their success hinges on the active involvement of all stakeholders and, importantly, on the commitment of policymakers to embrace and support the Mission goals within and beyond the Horizon Europe including financial commitment of Member States and Associated Countries in order to create self-sufficient mechanisms.

Regrettably, policymakers responsible for decision-making regarding the Missions do not demonstrate the same level of interest and dedication to the Horizon Europe Program across all countries. As a result, the operation of the Missions does not differ substantially from that of the Clusters. Additionally, the program currently includes an excessive number of implementation mechanisms, and simplifying these could be of critical importance.

If the Missions are to continue in the same manner in the next Framework Program, it is recommended that they can be removed from the program and instead supported through a separate framework with distinct decision-making and implementation mechanisms.

European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)

Despite being a crucial element of the Horizon Europe, Türkiye's participation in the EIT remains limited due to high membership fees for SMEs, complex application processes, and the fragmented structure of EIT activities. The existence of nine distinct Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), each with separate calls and support mechanisms, has made the system difficult to navigate, with most funding favoring institutions in KIC-hosting countries, disadvantaging Widening Countries like Türkiye. Furthermore, the lack of accessible data on EIT applications and outcomes hinders potential participants from evaluating success opportunities, unlike the Horizon Dashboard.

Türkiye believes that the EIT is not yet fully aligned with the objectives of the Framework Programmes and therefore suggests reconsidering its current structure to better integrate it with these programmes. We recommend streamlining the membership processes across KICs, integration of all EIT activities onto a unified platform to provide more convenient support for stakeholders, reducing fees for entrepreneurs and students, and enhancing the navigability of EIT functions. Strengthening partnerships with national institutions, increasing collaboration between thematic KICs, and providing financial support for key sectors such as mobility, renewable energy, and food will encourage higher participation.

Partnerships

EU Partnerships play a crucial role in enhancing cooperation between public and private sectors, fostering innovation, and aligning strategic research agendas across Europe and should be continued in FP10. However, several areas require improvement to maximize their effectiveness.

In co-funded partnerships, administrative complexity arises from managing multiple grant agreements, which complicates management efforts. Streamlining this process by implementing a single grant agreement would reduce administrative burdens.

Moreover, the participation of SMEs, vital for driving innovation, is hindered by insufficient funding rates in co-programmed partnerships. Increasing these rates would incentivize SME involvement and enhance competitiveness in strategic sectors.

Additionally, the governance structure of the institutionalized partnerships needs to be considered to ensure that all participating countries have equal governance rights in decision-making processes to promote fairness and inclusivity. Furthermore, the funding mechanisms of institutionalized partnerships, particularly the triple funding model, should be expanded to encourage broader participation and leverage more resources, as demonstrated by Chips JU. The current general practice of funding only one large project per topic limits opportunities for organizations outside the partnerships and stifles diverse innovation; therefore, allowing multiple smaller projects would foster wider engagement.

Finally, to reduce fragmentation and duplication of resources, the selection of new partnerships should focus on ensuring complementarity with other areas of FP10.

European Innovation Council (EIC)

Despite the substantial budget allocated to the European Innovation Council (EIC), stakeholders from Widening Countries continue to encounter significant challenges in accessing its support due to the highly competitive nature of the program. As the EIC Accelerator Program sets higher expectations for investment and growth, opportunities for certain stakeholders to access international innovation funds are declining. Introducing dedicated calls and budgets for underrepresented countries, along with improved EIC training and outreach, is essential. Flexible funding processes and enhanced support services, such as mentoring and market access, would accelerate the growth of innovative enterprises and boost global competitiveness.

In recent years, the Framework Programme has faced budget reductions and reallocations, with a notable example being the establishment of the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP). This shift raises concerns, as it may create additional challenges for Associated and Widening Countries in accessing funding and opportunities.