



European
Commission

Opinion of the Partnership Knowledge Hub on European Partnerships under the future EU Framework Programme ('FP10')



Research and
Innovation

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European Commission
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Manuscript completed in September 2024

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PDF ISBN 978-92-68-22259-1 doi:10.2777/7976452 KI-01-24-086-EN-N

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2025

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PREFACE

Research and innovation (R&I) partnerships have been part of the EU's framework programmes for research and innovation for more than 20 years. The EU has set out an ambition to create a European Research Area (ERA) which will function as a single, borderless market for research, innovation and technology across the EU. The goal of the ERA is to 'mobilise knowledge for a better future', and R&I partnerships can help achieve this goal by pooling Europe's R&I resources to serve common objectives.

There has been a substantial increase in R&I partnerships and pooled funding over the course of the last two framework programmes, Horizon 2020 (which ran from 2014-2020) and Horizon Europe (which started in 2020 and will run until 2028). There will be a total pooled budget of EUR 50-60 billion and 59 partnerships under Horizon Europe. The recent recommendations made in three expert reports (from former Italian prime minister Enrico Letta, former Italian prime minister and former president of the European Central Bank Mario Draghi, and Portugal's former science minister Manuel Heitor) all stress the importance of pooling the EU's R&I resources to achieve common objectives. For this reason it is likely that R&I partnerships will become an increasingly important part of the EU's future R&I policy.

Our opinion at the Partnership Knowledge Hub (PKH) is that the new policy approach on R&I partnerships of Horizon Europe continues to remain relevant. However, we believe that the implementation of this approach has yielded mixed results, and we therefore present below a number of concrete suggestions and recommendations on how to improve R&I partnerships along their life cycle and make them even more attractive for all sides of the partnership. For reasons of readability, we focus more on the improvements we can make to partnerships and less on the impressive achievements of partnerships in making the ERA a reality.

Partnerships can only achieve their objectives and meet the objectives of society, if they: (i) are attractive for the best researchers and innovators; (ii) create value added for all sides of the partnership; and (iii) are built on trust and mutual understanding. The key ingredient for the third point of trust and mutual understanding is sufficient time. The time needed to set up often rather large R&I partnerships and make them work efficiently and effectively is often underestimated.

For this reason, in this opinion document, we stress the importance of allocating sufficient of time to building future partnerships. If we want to have an even better-functioning partnership portfolio at the start of the new 7-year budget cycle, we should start now to work towards the vision we present in the pages below. The PKH was established for this task and is ready to work with the EU, Member States, interested Associated Countries and the partnerships themselves.

We expect that the Commission will use this opinion when preparing its proposal for the next Framework Programme and consequently that the co-legislators in Parliament and Council will use this opinion as benchmark when negotiating the future partnership portfolio.

This opinion has been drawn up in a trustful and collaborative partnership. I want to thank the PKH working group, notably Guillermo Alvarez (ES), Pjotr Elshout (NL), Dolf Grasveld (NL), Elisabeth Hedstrom (SE), Just van den Hoek (NL), Kroseberg Jürgen (DE), Ewa Kocinska-Lange (PL), Lucie N  nez Tayupanta (CZ), Nadine Schweizer (SE), Dan Seker (IL), Michal Vavra (CZ), Petra  agar (SI) and the ERA-LEARN team, and the PKH secretariat at DG RTD of the European Commission.

Alexander Grablowitz, PKH Co-chair

1. Introduction/background

Since the turn of the millennium, R&I partnerships have been an integral part of both: (i) the EU framework programmes for research and innovation; and (ii) the ERA policies at national and EU levels. Horizon Europe (HE), the 9th framework programme (which started in 2020 and will run until 2028), introduced a revised policy approach that was more strategic than the policy approach in the previous framework programmes. Under this revised approach, Horizon Europe sought to encourage European partnerships to streamline and concentrate their R&I activities towards key strategic objectives to create a critical mass of research effort. It encouraged European partnerships to do this by: (i) pooling resources; (ii) aligning national and/or private-sector R&I agendas; and (iii) combining EU, national and private-sector R&I funding. This revised approach also aims to have structural effects by feeding and supporting innovation ecosystems and fostering integrated value chains through more systematic and extended engagement with stakeholders. The goal of this systematic and extended engagement is to ensure that overall innovation capacities – measured by the number of researchers and the skills of those researchers – are strengthened across the ERA. The more strategic policy approach is supported by a revised overall governance of the partnership portfolio.

Article 10 of the Horizon Europe Regulation sets out: (i) the typology of partnerships it seeks to support under the framework programme; (ii) the implementation arrangements for these partnerships¹; and (iii) the overall purpose and rationale of the Regulation itself. The criteria for selecting, implementing, monitoring, evaluating and phasing-out these partnerships are set out in Annex III of the Horizon Europe Regulation. The implementation of the Horizon Europe specific programme is facilitated through a multiannual strategic planning process (SPP). For European partnerships, this strategic planning process is complemented by a strategic coordinating process (SCP) in which Member States, interested Associated Countries and the Commission participate on an equal footing (Horizon Europe specific programme, Article 6).

The SCP and therein the Partnership Knowledge Hub (PKH), together with the “Expert Group” in support of the SCP which delivers the Biennial Monitoring Report (BMR), play a key role for foresight, analysis and advice on the partnership portfolio development.

The result of SPP, the HE multiannual strategic plan, further identifies the co-funded and co-programmed European Partnership calls which appear in the successive work programmes of Horizon Europe, whereas Institutionalised Partnerships based on art. 185 and / or 187 TFEU follow the respective procedures for legislative acts and, for the current financial programming cycle, are established together in the Single Basic Act for Art. 187-based Partnerships (SBA - Council Regulation 2021/2085) and in the respective Art. 185 Acts for the Metrology (Decision 2021/2084 of the European Parliament and the Council) and PRIMA Partnerships (Decision 2024/1167 of the European Parliament and of the Council)².

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) knowledge and innovation communities (KICs) are large-scale autonomous European partnerships, the creation of which was laid down under the EIT Regulation³. The EIT-KICs include a range of partners

¹ Memoranda of understanding/contractual agreements; financial contribution to a programme of R&I activities; participation to an R&I programme undertaken by Member States in line with art. 185 TFEU, Joint Undertakings established under art.187 TFEU, or EIT KICs in accordance with EIT Regulation

² 49 partnerships were identified during the first strategic planning period of Horizon Europe, and an additional 9 under the second. With the Art. 185 initiative PRIMA’s legal base being extended until 2027 with further Horizon Europe funding, the total number of European Partnerships under Horizon Europe will be 59. To date, 44 out of these 59 partnerships have been officially launched.

³ [REGULATION \(EU\) 2021/819 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 20 May 2021 on the European Institute of Innovation and Technology](#)

from businesses, research organisations, higher education institutions and other stakeholders. The EIT-KICs are selected and designated by the EIT: following a competitive, open and transparent procedure according to the priority fields and timetable set out in the Strategic Innovation Agenda of the EIT⁴; and taking into account the priorities set out in the then-valid Horizon Europe strategic planning. The primary role of EIT-KICs is to develop EU-wide innovation ecosystems that support and promote innovation, entrepreneurship and education using an integrated approach in a number of thematic areas.

This opinion from the PKH is set against this background as well as against the current ERA policy framework, namely the Pact for R&I and the ERA policy agenda and broader EU policy objectives, notably competitiveness and the twin transition. In addition, this opinion builds on: the work of ERAC and its opinion on FP10 (in particular Part 2.5); It is also based on available evidence, in particular, the BMR, the Horizon 2020 final evaluation, and the recent set of expert reports published in 2024 (from former Italian prime minister Enrico Letta⁵, former Italian prime minister and former president of the European Central Bank Mario Draghi⁶ and Portugal's former science minister Manuel Heitor)⁷

This opinion from the PKH intends to take stock of the experiences with the current Horizon Europe policy approach on R&I partnerships and presents a concrete vision and practical recommendations on how to make full use of R&I partnerships' potential to contribute to the EU's policy objectives.

The opinion is structured around a number of questions, some of which are set out in the bullet points below.

- Does the current partnership set-up have the necessary strategic orientation and selectivity for today's challenges and priorities?
- Can the partnership selection process be improved?
- Can the implementation of partnerships be improved and simplified and how?
- What governance/coordination mechanism would best serve the policy objectives?
- Are the existing instruments ready to deliver on the policy objectives?

While acknowledging the diversity of objectives and histories of the different European partnerships, the opinion addresses common issues that apply to all types of partnerships.

⁴ [Decision \(EU\) 2021/820 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 on the Strategic Innovation Agenda of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology \(EIT\) 2021-2027.](#)

⁵ Letta, E. (2024). Much More Than a Market, [Enrico Letta's Report on the Future of the Single Market - European Commission](#)

⁶ Draghi, M. (2024). The future of European competitiveness, [EU competitiveness: Looking ahead - European Commission](#)

⁷ European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Align, act, accelerate – Research, technology and innovation to boost European competitiveness, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/9106236>

2. Key lessons so far

This chapter outlines the key insights gained into the European partnerships under Horizon Europe so far. It draws on a variety of available sources (see list in annex) and is structured according to the main elements of the opinion as outlined in the scoping note, including: the policy approach (Section 2.1); the selection process (Section 2.2); governance (Section 2.3) implementation (Section 2.4); the simplification of the partnership landscape (Section 2.5) and instruments (Section 2.6).

2.1. Relevance of the Strategic Policy approach

The new policy approach on partnerships adopted under Horizon Europe proved to be relevant for – and appreciated by – the EU-Commission, participating states, the private sector and stakeholders. This can be seen in the fact that **all partners substantially increased their financial commitments between Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe**. The contributions to Horizon Europe partnerships made by Member States and Associated Countries has now reached EUR 15 billion. This is almost three times the EUR 5.5 billion committed to joint calls under Horizon 2020 partnerships. The private sector has committed about EUR 23 billion in in-kind contributions to the European partnerships.

Most of the Horizon Europe partnerships mobilised further private and public investment at the national level to exploit or scale-up project results or follow up on projects with additional EU/national/regional funding. The ‘leverage effect’ of European partnerships (i.e. the amount of private-sector funding attracted to co-invest in a partnership for every euro of public money invested in that partnership) has been analysed for each of the partnership types, and the full leverage factor varies between 1.64 and 5.60, with the EIT-KICs achieving the highest leverage. **The average factor of 2.83 means that every euro invested from the EU budget in the European partnerships attracts an additional EUR 2.83 from other sources.** In addition to the financial and leverage relevance of partnerships, partnerships have a substantial level of **policy relevance**, as the topics of many partnerships correspond to national/regional policy priorities, expressed in national R&I strategies, smart specialisation strategies and RIS3.

And in addition to further strengthening the ERA, the partnerships have also made significant contributions to EU-level policy priorities. In particular, they have aligned with and mobilised a substantial share of funding for EU priorities. For example, for Green Deal priorities, the partnerships have made a 75% contribution to Green Deal funding, followed by the EU’s digital transformation goal (38% contribution) and the EU’s goal of economic and social resilience (36% contribution). In the Horizon Europe interim evaluation, the partnerships were recognised for their role as bridging actors in multi-level coordination and across value chains, supporting increased coherence and alignment, scaling action, and expanding investment.

Another major aspect of the strategic relevance of partnerships is their **global outreach**. Partnerships are crucial for expanding collaboration in Horizon Europe beyond the EU, especially in energy, digital technologies, health, and natural resources. Common ethical standards and joint procedures have been agreed that are key for joint activities between Horizon Europe partners within the EU and Horizon Europe partners outside the EU. Partnerships currently adopt varied approaches to international cooperation, offering flexibility to address diverse needs and regional contexts. The share of partnership budgets dedicated to international collaboration with partners outside the EU varies greatly across the

partnerships. From available data, we estimate that an **average of about 12% of available Horizon Europe resources** are invested in activities with partners outside the EU.

In most partnerships, the **processes for devising strategic research and innovation agendas (SRIAs) were overall perceived as collaborative and responsive towards stakeholder needs**. However, there are significant differences in the breadth of stakeholder engagement and the levels of detail provided by different stakeholders engaged in SRIA creation. There are also significant differences in specific engagement approaches, milestones, and the outcomes of the different engagement approaches.

2.2. Identification and selection process

The application of the new policy approach for partnerships under Horizon Europe proved to be challenging, as about 120 existing partnerships under Horizon 2020 were anticipating that they would be continued under Horizon Europe. Consequently, the existing partnership portfolio can be seen as a compromise between embracing the new policy-driven and top-down process of Horizon Europe and acknowledging the value of partnerships that were developed in a rather bottom-up fashion under FP7 and/or Horizon 2020.

The overall key lesson from the process of identifying and selecting partnerships can be summarised as follows: **The lack of a transparent approach** to launching or altering partnerships was the main obstacle to a truly evidence-based selection process under Horizon Europe, in particular for partnerships adopted under the first strategic plan. A successful and transparent approach in this area should be evidence based and capable of supporting strategic decisions to launch, scale down, merge, expand or discontinue partnerships. Often, the rationale for using a partnership in a certain area was not well developed, and the application of the selection criteria set out in the Horizon Europe legal base was often too superficial.

As a consequence of this key lesson, a number of policy objectives, in particular the full integration of partnerships in the strategic programme planning has been only partly achieved. For example, there is poor coordination between missions and partnerships, and there has also been a failure to fully exploit synergies between related partnerships and between the partnerships and the rest of the programme clusters.

2.3. Governance of partnerships

Here we need to distinguish between: (i) the governance of the overall partnership portfolio in general; (ii) the governance of a partnership portfolio in specific cluster; and (iii) the governance of the partnerships themselves.

On the governance of the overall portfolio, the agreement to deal with – and decide on – the partnership portfolio in the SPC is now well accepted among participating states and this has contributed to greater coherence. **However, the role of the SCP in the overall strategic planning process (SPP) proved to be not sufficiently clear**. The role of the SCP in the overall SPP also lacked sufficient support from the Commission, the participating states and the stakeholders. In particular, the integration of the EIT-KICs as part of the partnership portfolio needs more attention.

On the governance of a partnership portfolio in specific clusters and pillars, co-funded partnerships are often prominent in both the SPC and the cluster programme committees (PCs). However, co-programmed and institutionalised partnerships (joint undertakings, EIT-KICs and Art. 185 initiatives) are dealt with less prominently in both the SPC and the cluster PCs, reducing the opportunity for a better coherence of all activities in a certain cluster.

Given the very substantial amounts invested from Horizon Europe in these types of partnerships, there is obviously an imbalance here.

Given the policy objective to better align national/regional and EU-level R&I policies and programmes, participating states are often **not satisfied with their advisory function in certain joint undertakings/ co-programmed partnerships**. In addition, there is little transparency as to what happens with the co-programmed partnership's input on topics. Here again, the potential of the SCP and the PKH to strengthen alignment between the co-programmed partnerships within the ERA – as laid down in the legal base – has not been exploited so far.

On the governance of the partnerships themselves, some partnerships have devised multi-level governance frameworks to engage a wide range of actors. However, there is limited evidence of important key lessons from the governance of the partnerships themselves, besides the overall complaint that administrative burden is too high (see also Section 2.4 on implementation of partnerships below).

2.4. Implementation of partnerships

This section looks at the available evidence on: (i) synergies between partnerships and other EU-level activities; (ii) openness and transparency as main requirements from the legal base; (iii) administration and monitoring; and (iv) phasing-out programme funding as a new requirement of the legal base to implement the life-cycle approach.

On synergies, despite the increasing efforts made to use different funding resources (e.g. the European Structural and Investment Funds), there are still issues. For example, it remains difficult to use the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) to promote synergies between partnerships in joint calls. Overall, it seems that the identification and use of potential synergies between different funding sources at regional/national and EU levels require substantial resources. This work of identification and use of funding synergies appears to be not very attractive for partners as it leads to additional administrative burden without sufficient added value.

Compared with Horizon 2020, partnerships in Horizon Europe have made some progress in increasing transparency and openness. Most partnerships have fostered: **(i) specific measures targeting greater participation** of end-users and/or the private sector; and (ii) activities strengthening the participation of less-represented countries. The result of this is that some countries, most of them from the **Widening group, have increased their shares of participation** in partnerships. Meanwhile, the Horizon Europe interim evaluation highlighted how partnerships have managed to foster ecosystem-building and the strengthening of collaborations in specific thematic domains.

On the administration of partnerships, more than 90% of respondents to an ERA-Learn survey on administrative burden experienced an increase in administrative burden between Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, in particular for co-funded partnerships. A one-size-fits-all approach does not seem to work here. **A reliable framework for partnerships in which changes are possible is therefore needed. There is an expectation that partnerships should be agile enough to change focus in order to tackle emerging challenges.** However, agility of this sort is contrary to the very strict rules and permissions that need to be sought from the funding authority at every step. The life-cycle approach for partnerships is considered a key element to maintain the character of the framework programme as a competitive project-funding programme. At the same time, partnerships should be distinct from R&I projects (as co-funded partnerships are currently treated) but they require a longer-term vision and more effort in preparation and implementation than 'normal' R&I projects. For this reason, the design and implementation of 'transition strategies' to continue the partnerships while decreasing their dependence on programme funding was – and continues to be – extremely challenging.

In general, the implementation of co-programmed and institutionalised partnerships features very little in the respective programme committees, so that knowledge concerning implementation issues is less available as for co-funded partnerships.

2.5. Simplification of the European Partnership landscape

While acknowledging the achieved level of rationalisation and simplification of the partnership portfolio between Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, there are still many calls to further simplify and sharpen the focus of the partnership landscape (see also the ERAC opinion). Often calls for simplification have as their goal that the partnership landscape **should be simplified by reducing overlap and avoiding duplication in order to make the overall portfolio easier to handle and make the partnerships more attractive for the R&I community and policy makers.**

Portfolio management can be a helpful approach to apply when analysing the partnership landscape. It can be used as a strategic tool to refine and rationalise the partnership portfolio rather than as an attempt to simplify the portfolio. A pilot implementation of the proposed methodology suggested by the expert group⁸ showed that the missions and partnerships are rather complementary in the areas they address and that the institutionalised partnerships might be well positioned to address emerging issues and connected technology areas.

Evidence suggests that the **streamlining of the partnership landscape** between Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe **enabled the Widening countries in particular** to increase their participation by focusing their limited resources in a more targeted and effective way.

2.6. The Right instruments

In general, given the substantially increased commitments to partnerships from all partners between Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, partnerships continue to be attractive for the research community at large. There is therefore no evidence of a need to fully revise the partnership instruments. Nevertheless, there are a number of issues in the current set of partnership instruments that need to be addressed.

One issue concerns the portfolio of activities implemented by a partnership. Ultimately, the partnership portfolio should be managed in such a way that the full cycle (from basic research to large demonstration projects and beyond to market uptake and policy uptake) is appropriately represented in order to improve both results and ultimate impacts. Other issues appearing in the available evidence include: (i) the need for clearer legal frameworks and better rationales for the use of partnerships (see also section on selection); (ii) the possibility for joint activities both between partnerships themselves and between partnerships and other R&I initiatives at EU level (such as research infrastructures or missions); and (iii) the potential function of partnerships to act as catalysts for regional/local/national innovation ecosystems. This last point of partnerships potentially functioning as catalysts in innovation ecosystems is particularly relevant when looking at the future role of the EIT-KICs. This is because the evidence proves that the place-based approach of partnerships through regional EIT Hubs and bridging mechanisms across local, regional, national and European dimensions of innovation work well and create conditions for smart specialisation to scale. The on-the-ground presence of partnerships is further strengthened in the Widening countries through the EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (EIT RIS). The place-based and bottom-up approach of EIT-KICs also helps to better align the policy and innovation needs between regional, national and European levels. Nevertheless, there remains room to improve coherence and clarity between the EIT-KICs and other partnerships sharing the same portfolios. To this end,

⁸ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/073421f5-327a-11ee-83b8-01aa75ed71a1>

an additional analysis of the added value of various types of partnerships in valorisation efforts is needed to assess complementarity and synergies between the different innovation.

3. A vision for partnerships under FP10

This chapter provides a snapshot of what we at the PKH would like to see in the legal instrument for FP10. It is a vision from the perspective of 1 January 2028, when FP10 enters into force. The next chapter will dive further into this vision and how to achieve it.

On 1 January 2028, the new partnerships portfolio and its arrangements for implementation have been thoroughly and broadly agreed and discussed between the European Commission, Member States and other partners. The new partnerships portfolio substantially strengthens the whole framework programme by focusing on impact. This is thanks to the strategic positioning of partnerships within the R&I ecosystem at regional, national, sectoral and EU levels. Players active in research, development and innovation across the EU – including the private sector – are eager to start implementing their ambitious SRIAs. These players perceive their participation in partnerships as attractive for achieving their scientific, economic and societal objectives. There is a high level of commitment to the objectives of the partnerships on the part of the EU Commission, EU Member States, FP10 Associated Countries, regions, Research Performing Organisations (RPOs), Research Funding Organisations (RFOs, SMEs, business actors, NGOs and others. Consequently, the leverage factor of partnerships in FP10 has increased even further, and an increasing share of EU-wide R&I investments from the EU, regional/national governments, and industry are effectively coordinated towards common objectives. Moreover, funding and participation rules at EU and national levels make it easy to participate in partnerships and make it possible to participate in them in flexible ways.

This positive starting point for partnerships under FP10 has been achieved through an intensive and inclusive SCP, in particular a PKH that was strengthened during the second half of Horizon Europe (this second half ran from 2024-2028). This provided a suitable platform to develop the necessary conditions for the partnerships to start efficient and effective implementation from 2028 onwards. This SCP process unfolded in parallel to, and was well coordinated with, the Council negotiations on FP10.

More precisely, the following 12 considerations proved to be essential for the successful and consensual establishment of the partnership portfolio.

1. **Not starting from scratch:** There was not a complete overhaul of the partnership instruments in FP10 compared with Horizon Europe. Instead, a strategic analysis was conducted, paying attention to newly emerging R&I challenges and possibilities for rationalisation and mergers in the portfolio. The distinction between co-funded, co-programmed and institutionalised partnerships has been continued, and legal and administrative adjustments have been made to tackle the issues raised by the partnerships under Horizon Europe. This has led to revised partnership types that are more flexible and better adapted to the needs of the involved stakeholders while providing sufficient clarity for all partners.
2. **Appreciating the established networks:** The new partnership portfolio responds effectively to the newly emerging R&I challenges while at the same time acknowledging the value of existing networks. Where possible, partnerships continuing from Horizon Europe have been further modified/adapted to respond to emerging challenges before establishing a completely new partnership.
3. **Looking at the big picture:** The SRIAs of the partnerships are fully integrated in the overall strategic planning process of FP10. The SRIAs of institutionalised partnerships have also been fully integrated into the FP10 strategic planning process, including the EIT-KICs where the *ex ante* Impact Assessments (IAs) of the

Single Basic Act (SBA) and the EIT Regulation provided policy options accordingly. The particular EU added value of partnerships in this area has been to: (i) help develop and valorise research knowledge; and (ii) develop innovation ecosystems in a place-based manner. This has substantially improved the complementarity between the partnerships and other parts of FP10.

4. **Clarifying Rationale:** The rationale for each instrument has been substantially clarified. It is now very transparent and clearly justified why certain R&I-related topics and challenges are tackled in the form of a partnership, and why a particular type of partnership has been chosen. Partnerships take a strategic, specific role in the framework programme and collaborate and complement other framework programme instruments and the regular calls. This serves to maximise impact and strengthen R&I ecosystems across Europe (strategic portfolio management).
5. **Addressing the overall portfolio:** The new partnership portfolio is the result of a careful review of the number of partnerships, their size and scope. The portfolio now has a much clearer focus and funding is concentrated – based on strategic choices informed by a long-term vision – on the most strategic research and technology topics. The portfolio takes into consideration the importance of scale (emphasising substantial budgets, a large number of participating countries and thematic coherence). The portfolio also strikes a clearer balance between knowledge creation (i.e. joint calls and transnational R&I projects) and knowledge-valorisation activities (i.e. dissemination and transfer activities).
6. **Life-cycle approach:** The number of partnerships, the type of instrument supporting each partnership, and the focus of each partnership are clear from the beginning. Each partnership has clearly defined goals, as well as clear starting and endpoints. Each partnership also has clearly defined management mechanisms throughout its lifetime and beyond. In preparing the partnership portfolio for FP10, all stakeholders contributed to the design and implementation of transition strategies, so that all relevant partnership communities could continue their collaboration.
7. **Streamlining the governance:** The partnerships portfolio is managed efficiently and in a coherent manner by Commission DGs with appropriate support structures. These support structures include a dedicated policy unit overlooking and supporting their performance and impact in coordination with Member States and Associated Countries. The SCP is well resourced by the Commission and partners other than the EU, so that synergies can be exploited. Flexibility is ensured and thus relevance improved.
8. **Implementation matters:** The well integrated planning of partnerships and the framework programme has led to tailor-made and clear arrangements for implementation. It has also led to a partnership-specific and flexible administrative framework that does not create additional entry barriers for the intended partners and beneficiaries.
9. **Underlining the ERA perspective:** Member States and Associated Countries acknowledge their responsibility to conduct collaborative research in partnerships: (i) in line with the objectives of their national research and innovation policies; and (ii) in close coherence with the ERA policy agenda and the Pact for R&I. To that end, national funding rules are adapted wherever possible to the needs of a simplified implementation of partnerships. Alignment between EU and national policies and programmes could be facilitated by national coordination structures.
10. **Making synergies a reality:** The balance between knowledge creation and knowledge valorisation calls for the flexible use of different funding sources (national, EU and private) and instruments to implement partnerships and individual project results. This need for flexibility is especially important when considering the potential of partnerships to contribute to place-based innovation ecosystem development and capacity building.

11. **Going international:** Partnerships play an important role in transnational cooperation, not only across the ERA and with associated countries, but also with other non-EU third countries. Partnerships also play a role in upholding a level playing field and introducing tools to increase research security in the whole framework Programme.
12. **Openness and Transparency:** Partnerships are open to all actors that want to join the partnership and better transparency in decision making and budget allocation strengthened trust in and recognition of the partnerships.

4. How to achieve the vision

4.1. Relevance of the Strategic policy approach

The main novelties of the policy approach introduced with Horizon Europe, remain valid – notably a reduction in the number of instruments, a life-cycle approach, and better consideration in the overall programme planning processes. In order to reach true co-ownership of the partnerships, Member States and Associated Countries need to co-lead the process of identifying, selecting partnerships. This will increase alignment between relevant strategies and investments at both European and national level, as recommended by various expert reports, in particular the Letta, Draghi and Heitor reports. Building on the existing policy approach, the following issues require more attention for the design of FP10 in order to increase the impact and relevance of partnerships:

- There needs to be an *ex ante* agreement between the EU Commission and non-EU partners (notably Member States, Associated Countries, and the private sector) on strategic priorities where new and/or revamped partnerships are needed to achieve overall EU policy objectives beyond solely scientific objectives (i.e. there needs to be a stronger top-down element in the approach to strategic policy).
- There needs to be a more precise definition of the boundary between European partnerships and other instruments. European partnerships should build on existing cooperation with clear EU added value, but they should not replace other large-scale instruments across the board.
- The partnerships should focus more clearly on the knowledge-valorisation side of R&I policy. This means that fostering the uptake of R&I results should be a core task of partnerships beyond the ‘classic’ call preparations and implementation. There also needs to be a better distinction between ‘classic’ FP calls and partnership activities, including in topics such as technology transfer, standardisation, policy uptake, or skills development.
- There needs to be a clear *ex ante* agreement on the ‘transition’ phase of existing partnerships that assesses whether or not to continue existing programme funding, in what form and to what extent. A life-cycle approach is useful to determine whether a partnership has reached its goals and new forms of support to the ecosystem are needed to advance the sector further.
- The role and position of partnerships in global cooperation should be clarified. In particular, this role needs to be clarified for topics related to global challenges, where partnerships should be seen as important cooperation platforms between Member States, Associated Countries and third countries. Partnerships can play an important role in implementing national and EU-level bilateral R&I agreements. The European Commission, Member States and Associated Countries should foster the role of partnerships for international cooperation while acknowledging the diversity of third countries’ needs and challenges in this context.
- The PKH should be the coordination body for the above-mentioned additional elements of the strategic policy approach. The European Commission, Member

States, Associated Countries and partnerships should provide additional resources, both financial and human, for implementing the work of the PKH and the SCP, to ensure continuity and quality in the work.

4.2. Improvement of the Selection process

On the subject of overall governance, the decisive role of the SPC should be continued in FP10. This would ensure continued involvement by Member States and Associated Countries in the final decision. However, the current process under Horizon Europe for selecting proposals for new partnerships needs to be revised in order to: (i) meet the needs of the expanded strategic policy approach described above; and (ii) ensure that decisions on partnerships are taken in a more strategic way. Four specific recommendations for selecting new partnerships are set out below.

- Although proposals for new partnerships should continue to be developed using a bottom-up process, new partnerships should only be considered in specific areas previously identified and agreed-on as FP10-wide thematic priorities. Any such new partnerships should have a significant EU added value and help to promote the emergence of a truly EU-wide innovation ecosystem. It must also be shown that other, simpler instruments would not suffice. Moreover, industry and existing R&I networks and communities must be clearly committed to align/join with sufficient resources, so the success of this new partnership becomes more likely.
- While not being involved in the decision-making process itself, more – and more transparent – dialogue between the partnerships and decision makers at national and EU levels is needed throughout the lifetime of the partnerships. This will help to ensure that stakeholder knowledge is better integrated in the decision-making process. Member States and participating associated countries should set up corresponding dialogue structures at national level.
- When considering a proposed partnership, all available relevant information, instruments and activities across the entire FP10 need to be taken into account to ensure real added value would be created, in particular on knowledge valorisation and other joint activities beyond transnational R&I projects. This also has implications for the coordination and governance of the selection process, which will be discussed below.
- Although synergies are a useful concept, there is still the need for more actionable recommendations in this area. General statements about theoretical synergies that might emerge from the new partnership should be avoided in application requests. Instead, the decision as to what synergies should be implemented by a candidate partnership should be made during the drafting process and clearly put down in the request for applications. This will ensure that the expected synergies are well integrated in the partnership's SRIA and work plan. It will also facilitate the prioritisation process.

4.3. Improvement of governance

Making improvements to the governance of the partnerships means targeting issues related to the overall governance of the portfolio, governance within a thematic area, and the governance of individual partnerships. The common policy objective here is to contribute to a more efficient and effective use of available resources through better coordination of resources by the EU Commission, the private sector and regional/national R&I investments. Additional coordination efforts should result in better outcomes and impacts and not result in greater administrative burden. The attractiveness of partnerships – in particular for industry – should not be undermined. Five specific recommendations for improving governance are set out below.

- SCP and the PKH should have strengthened roles in the overall governance of the partnership portfolio, including through support by the BMR expert group and ERA-LEARN. Partnership proposals (also stemming from the thematic Programme Committees) should be assessed by the PKH. The PKH would then give an opinion/recommendation as to which partnerships should be selected according to the expanded strategic policy approach described above. This decision must be based on – and supported by – evidence collected by the European Commission.
- More focus on the advancement of a thematic area in a portfolio approach is needed. In particular, the respective Programme Committee needs to be involved early in the process and provided with all relevant information from all parts of FP10, including already existing activities at both the European and national levels. This will make it possible to better align the planned partnership and related initiatives and programmes at national/regional levels.
- On the governance of individual partnerships, more effort is needed to better align the different policy agendas of the partners so that available resources are invested more effectively. More specifically, the Member States and Associated Countries must be more involved in the implementation of the partnerships, especially the co-programmed ones and non-tripartite joint undertakings. The role of the State Representative Groups (SRGs) needs to be strengthened.
- Appropriate support for partnerships from the Commission is pivotal. Partnerships require more support structures at Commission level, and in particular more flexible and coherent support structures. These support structures should be steered by a dedicated, appropriately staffed service working in close coordination with the respective thematically competent Commission service.
- Basic, well-structured information about all the partnerships (e.g. thematic scope, calls, governance, contact persons, Member State representatives etc.) should be available on a single dedicated website and be regularly updated. All partnerships' calls and results should be included in the Funding and Tenders portal and in the ECORDA Dashboard.

4.4. Improvement and simplification of the implementation of partnerships

Partnerships are ambitious endeavours, and their success is highly dependent on timely action in a constantly changing R&I environment and a constantly changing international context. Partnerships require substantially more effort in preparation than 'normal' collaborative R&I projects as they have to involve many more actors and networks. Moreover, partnerships are complex initiatives that comprise very different activities carried out by very different types of actors, in particular on the valorisation side of the respective innovation ecosystems. The implementation of the partnerships must therefore be flexible enough so all these tasks can be accomplished. However, flexibility should not lead to a lack of clarity. Simplifications must be made primarily for the benefit of the involved stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Partnerships involve a level of responsibility and commitment that differ significantly from regular R&I projects. Thus, the legal and administrative procedures and frameworks used to manage the relations of partnership members cannot be the same as those for regular R&I projects. Consequently, the partnerships need a dedicated set of 'rules for participation' that are attractive for partners and allow partnerships to achieve their objectives in a tailor-made and flexible manner without compromising their accountability.

The seven bullet points below contain more specific recommendation for the implementation of partnerships.

- Actors from the stakeholder as well as from the regional/national policy who set up and run partnerships should allow for sufficient preparatory time to build the partnerships, while accelerating the decision-making process and implementation process within partnerships once they have been set up. This will help increase the overall relevance and attractiveness of the partnership. Consortium members of a partnership should be provided with clear, attractive and readily available information on rules and regulations, templates and guidance for implementing the partnership. This will help to reduce the time from planning the partnership to launching it.
- The administrative framework to support partnerships, including templates and guidance, needs to be in place before any new partnership is implemented. Reasonable reporting intervals, where possible in line with national reporting cycles, need to be negotiated beforehand.
- Rules for participation in partnerships should ensure better and easier involvement in partnerships of research-performing organisations (RPOs). It is only with the involvement of public RPOs and the private sector that national and EU-level investments and priorities can be aligned in a broad and integrated manner. Consequently, the administrative framework of the EU Commission needs to facilitate the involvement of RPOs. In particular, the recognition of RPOs' in-kind contributions must become more simple and flexible. This should also include improved arrangements for (industrial) partners to provide in-kind contributions.
- In addition to the EU-level administrative framework, national-level frameworks also need to better respond to the needs of the partnerships and in particular to the needs of the beneficiaries of partnerships. This could include national-level frameworks exploring the desirability and possibilities of the central management of financial contributions.
- A general risk assessment and future scenarios should be employed to gauge potential uncertainties before the partnership begins work. A clear plan should also be drawn up before the partnership begins work on how necessary adaptations can be made. This process should be co-designed by the Commission and the partnership.
- Due to the additional focus of partnerships on knowledge valorisation activities, the issue of synergies between framework programme funding and other funding sources at national/regional and EU levels is more relevant for partnerships than for 'classic' collaborative projects. Consequently, more efforts are needed to allow for a flexible and simple blending of different funding sources during the implementation of partnerships.
- Finally, in terms of openness, the data the partnerships generate must comply with the FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable) principles and be made available through the European Open Science Cloud.

4.5. Appropriateness of instruments to achieve the vision

The choice of the right and most appropriate instrument for a selected theme remains the key challenge (see also Section 2.2 on the identification and selection process). The specific intervention logics and rationales for the use of a specific instrument need substantial clarification. This clarification is also needed in relation to the two main functions of the partnership – knowledge creation and knowledge valorisation. The choice of the most appropriate instrument depends not only on EU legal frameworks but also on the corresponding national legal frameworks, which need to allow for seamless cooperation within the ERA, partly in view of the drive to achieve Article 179 TFEU and the 'fifth freedom' of free movement of research, innovation, knowledge and education. In addition to research infrastructures, partnerships are the most visible 'lighthouses' of the ERA (at least for the

main ERA 'customers', the public and private researchers). For this reason, support from FP10 to the partnerships refers to FP10 not only as a funding programme but also to FP10 as a policy instrument to further support – and, if possible, catalyse – the ERA across the EU Member States and Associated Countries.

Consequently, the partnership instruments should be designed and implemented in such a way that they can address a variety of policy objectives depending on the specific needs of the thematic focus. Three further recommendations are set out in the bullet points below.

- More efforts are needed to allow partnerships to serve more broader policy objectives, in particular with regard to knowledge valorisation, the completion of the ERA, and the 'fifth freedom'.
- In this respect, partnerships should catalyse coordinated joint activities of the partners beyond collaborative R&I and address downstream and upstream activities (from the development of an ERA-wide R&I community on a specific theme/topic to knowledge dissemination and transfer activities after R&I projects are finished).
- On co-funding rates of the different partnership instruments through FP10, it is recommended to have a broader spectrum of co-funding rates available in order to respond to the different needs of the underlying R&I communities in the partnerships. Again, a one-size-fits-all approach will not work for a broad portfolio of partnerships that are in different phases of their life cycle and display a broad spectrum of specific EU added value.

ANNEX: List of sources

Reports, Evaluations and other sources

- European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Performance of European Partnerships – Biennial Monitoring Report (BMR) 2022 on partnerships in Horizon Europe, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/144363>
- European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Performance of European partnerships – Biennial monitoring report 2024 on partnerships in Horizon Europe, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/991766>
- REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL Ex post evaluation of Horizon 2020, the EU Framework Programme for research and innovation, COM/2024/49 final, [Final Evaluation of Horizon 2020](#).
- [HE Interim Evaluation 2024 in the Green Transition Area](#) (Evaluation study on the European Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation for addressing Global Challenges and Industrial Competitiveness: Focus on activities related to the Green Transition)
- Expert Group report on portfolio management: [Assessing European Partnerships against European policy priorities](#). (July 2023)
- Berger et al., The transformative potential of Horizon Europe R&I Partnerships in the areas of climate, energy and mobility, in J. Edler, M. Matt, W. Polt, M. Weber (Eds.), Transformative Mission Oriented Policies, Revisiting the Role of Science, Technology and Innovation in Society. Elgar (to be published April 2025).

ERA-LEARN reports

- ERA-LEARN Annual Report [2022](#)
- ERA-LEARN Annual Report [2023](#)
- ERA-LEARN Report “[Challenges of Widening countries in the Creation and Implementation of the European Partnerships](#)” (2023)
- ERA-LEARN reports on impact analysis:
 - o [ERA-LEARN Report Translating Research into Innovation 2023](#)
 - o [ERA-LEARN Policy brief on impacts from three bioeconomy Partnerships \(2020\)](#)
 - o All ERA-LEARN reports on impact analysis are available at <https://www.era-learn.eu/support-for-partnerships/governance-administration-legal-base/monitoring-and-assessment>
- Policy Brief on [Synergies between R&I partnerships & European Structural and Investment Funds \(ESIF\) 2021](#) ERA-LEARN “[Guidance on international cooperation for European Partnerships](#)” (2024)
- ERA-LEARN “[Toolbox and guidance on mechanisms for synergy creation for European Partnerships](#)” (2024)

ERA-LEARN/ European Commission events and workshops

- [Report Partnerships Stakeholder Forum 2023](#)
 - o Overall report
 - o WS Synergies, Openness and Transparency, Partnerships in FP10, Additionality and Directionality, Missions and Partnerships
- Workshop on [Implementing Additional Activities 2024](#)
- Workshop [Phasing out Strategy 2023](#)
- Workshop [Synergies with Cohesion Policy funds 202](#)
- [Exploring Synergies between European Partnerships and EU Missions - Mutual Learning Event — ERA-LEARN](#)

Stakeholder Feedback

- Feedback PKH and PKH observers (Partnerships) on Scoping paper 2024
- Feedback PKH and Partnerships on survey administrative burden 2024
- Feedback stakeholders from national events/ workshops 2023 and 2024 and own experiences in Partnerships (input ERA-LEARN partners)

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For access to legal information from the EU, including all EU law since 1951 in all the official language versions, go to EUR-Lex (eur-lex.europa.eu).

EU open data

The portal data.europa.eu provides access to open datasets from the EU institutions, bodies and agencies. These can be downloaded and reused for free, for both commercial and non-commercial purposes. The portal also provides access to a wealth of datasets from European countries.

The opinion of the Partnership Knowledge Hub on European Partnerships under the future EU Framework Programme ('FP10') aims to advise the European Commission when preparing its proposal for the next Framework Programme and consequently that the co-legislators in Parliament and Council will use this opinion as a benchmark when negotiating the future partnership portfolio.

Research and Innovation policy

