



**European Committee  
of the Regions**

**SEDEC-VII/043**

**162nd plenary session, 7-9 October 2024**

## **OPINION**

### **Recommendations for the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10)**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR)

- insists that a place-based approach to innovation guide the strategic programming of the next FP. Further notes that such a place-based approach would allow for better synergies between the future FP and the future cohesion policy;
- asserts that Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3-S4) could be a powerful driver of excellence for regional and local innovation ecosystems and that the strategic programming of the next FP should link up more effectively with such strategies;
- recommends that the European Committee of the Regions be effectively involved in the strategic programming of the FP;
- proposes that the next FP adopt multi-fund programming to deploy and scale-up RIVs, through closer involvement with the I3 programme as well as other funding;
- notes that the main objective of the FP is to support the EU's RDI excellence by reinforcing a European Research Area, improving its global competitiveness, supporting acceleration of RDI investments for industrial transformation to meet climate neutral objectives, and boosting its impact in terms of job creation, while ensuring inclusivity and sustainability;
- suggests that FP10 activities at EU level strengthen and leverage universities' regional links. Suggests, furthermore, that universities extend the role of science beyond academic achievements, through their active participation in regional innovation ecosystems;
- suggests using the same benchmark (RIS) to implement measures for widening participation at local and regional level while better reflecting the specific needs and innovation capacities of different regions;
- points out that the Member States have agreed to the Barcelona objective, which states that they should spend a total of 3% of GDP on research and development; in this regard, calls for Europe to insist on the importance of this objective and the FP budget to be ringfenced and better articulated with the funds of the future cohesion policy.



**Rapporteur:**

Anne Besnier (FR/PES), Vice-president of the Centre-Val de Loire region

**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions –  
Recommendations for the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10)**

**I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR)

A) **The role of regional innovation ecosystems in the implementation of the 10th Framework Programme**

1. reiterates that regional and local innovation systems send essential bloodflow to the pumping heart of innovation in the EU, applying a regional approach that helps future Framework Programme (FP) participants to emerge and contribute to its strategic objectives;
2. points out that, to this end and given their concentration and geographical proximity, the CoR has continuously advocated for the role of cities and regions in achieving the European competitiveness, climate neutrality and innovation objectives to be fully recognised, particularly in the governance and programming of the FP<sup>1</sup>;
3. reaffirms the key role played by cities and regions in the EU's scientific and technological excellence, through both cohesion policy and their participation in projects under different FPs, by creating fertile ground for the elaboration, research, development, production and dissemination of knowledge, knowledge valorisation and future innovations beneficial to society and the environment. This key role also extends to training, skills and jobs, access to (co-financing, the establishment and growth of new technology-based firms (NTBFs) and to sustainably improving competitiveness and social well-being;
4. highlights the impact of artificial intelligence on the whole RDI system and the next FP. Once it is operated under ethical guidelines and a robust regulatory framework, AI can help with knowledge extraction, knowledge sharing and analysis of best practices, thus fostering trust among ecosystem participants, while acting as a catalyst for European leadership in the global market. Utilising responsible AI can effectively streamline co-creating new ideas and innovations;
5. insists, for all these reasons, that a place-based approach to innovation guide the strategic programming of the next FP, incorporating the recommendations of this opinion. Further notes that, with due regard for the respective independent goals of, and thinking behind, the various EU support programmes, such a place-based approach would allow for better synergies between the future FP and the future cohesion policy, thus strengthening scientific excellence on the one hand and, on the other, less-developed NUTS 2 regions as well as regions with specific geographical characteristics in their efforts to build their regional innovation ecosystems;

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<sup>1</sup> COR 2017/854, COR 2018/3891, COR 2023/3934.

***Role of smart specialisation in structuring regional innovation ecosystems and in implementing the FP***

6. asserts that Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3-S4) could be a powerful driver of excellence for regional and local innovation ecosystems by focusing investments on future sustainable innovations and by fostering the emergence of value chains that contribute sustainably to the economic growth of cities and regions, and that the strategic programming of the next FP should link up more effectively with smart specialisation strategies;
7. considers that the implementation of S3 and S4 in the context of the implementation of cohesion policy has allowed local and regional authorities to provide scientific actors and businesses with resources that create value for regions and citizens, and that they make a valuable contribution to the FP objectives by fostering intra-regional partnerships and inter-regional cooperation, as well as the involvement of local authorities, in the field of Research and Innovation (R&I);
8. recommends, in this respect, that regions adopt this approach as much as possible by increasing the degree of specialisation of their strategies, involving large municipalities – which have a large number of innovation actors – more actively in the process;
9. in light of the above, recommends that the European Committee of the Regions be effectively involved in the strategic programming of the FP, for example by being consulted during its strategic planning, while synergies between the FP and cohesion policy should be facilitated;

***Cities, regions and their innovation ecosystems as key players for the success of European research and innovation partnerships***

10. points out that regions represent an extremely important level of partnership for this purpose, and that they have demonstrated their ability to form alliances of high levels of excellence thanks in particular to the approach led by smart specialisations;
11. stresses that, given the active involvement of regions, including financial involvement, in European partnerships under Horizon Europe, such opportunities should be further developed. The CoR insists that planning for future partnerships take due account of possible involvement for regions and cities, for example through the creation of co-funded partnerships;
12. for this reason, supports the approach proposed by European R&I partnerships implemented in the FP, also to boost the scientific and technological excellence shared by several pockets of excellence across EU cities and regions;
13. regrets, however, that halfway through Horizon Europe, these partnerships are still considered as lacking in transparency, that there are too many of them and that they are not user friendly; highlights the difficulties for cities and regions to integrate or use this tool, which nevertheless is essential for avoiding the fragmentation of investments in R&I in the regions;

14. proposes increased technical assistance and the possibility of preparatory actions allowing regional and local innovation ecosystems to suggest partnerships between regions, with the involvement of local authorities, sharing common excellence in R&I, or to integrate existing ones, such as the Hop-on facility which has already been tested in Horizon Europe. To this end, strengthening the interregional strand of European territorial cooperation in the next programming period could be valuable. Calls for the creation of dedicated technical assistance within the FP for capacity building, partnership development and integration into European R&I networks for regions less developed in these fields;
15. welcomes, with this in mind, the implementation of the Interregional Innovation Investments programme (I3) and the initiatives of the New European Innovation Agenda such as the preliminary work for Regional Innovation Valleys (RIVs), supported by the Partnerships for Regional Innovation (PRIs) pilot, which reinforces the need to back a place-based approach to innovation;
16. notes, however, that the deployment of these new initiatives still needs to be assessed and can already see that many regions have been unable to submit their application to participate due to a lack of capacity or technical assistance, and proposes that large municipalities be more included;
17. proposes that the next FP adopt multi-fund programming to deploy and scale-up RIVs, through closer involvement with the I3 programme as well as other funding such as EU, national and private funds (e.g. for scaling up investments in critical sciences and technologies) or European Investment Funds;

**B) Structure of the framework programme**

*Thematic priorities*

18. notes that the main objective of the FP is to support the EU's RDI excellence by reinforcing a European Research Area, improving its global competitiveness, supporting acceleration of RDI investments for industrial transformation to meet climate neutral objectives, and boosting its impact in terms of job creation, while ensuring inclusivity and sustainability; calls for the FP to be fully aligned with the goals and priorities of the European Green Deal, ensuring that all funded innovations contribute to a sustainable and climate-neutral Europe;
19. insists, in this regard, that the FP must effectively contribute to the EU's security and strategic autonomy in its capacity to maintain its economic and scientific competitiveness, and that, even if some R&I can be financed exceptionally under the FP (dual-use civil and military), funding should continue outside of the FP for R&I of a military nature;

*A structure to be maintained, connections to be optimised*

20. notes that, over the last 40 years, successive FPs have significantly altered their scope of action, shifting from supporting collaborative R&I to a more industrial and societal approach; calls for the right balance to be maintained between support for fundamental research and for applied research, particularly in relation to disruptive technologies;

21. hopes that rules for participating in the FP remain stable in the long-term in order to maintain or improve the capacity of potential participants to benefit from the programme;
22. recommends that, in order to better reach the primary beneficiaries, the training of small consortia of projects should be promoted where this could foster their participation; use of cascade funding for parts of the programme where success rates remain discouraging should also be promoted;
23. supports the three-pillar structure of the FP that has been established since Horizon 2020, but recommends that more facilities be implemented to ensure that the results of the funded projects are used across all pillars of the FP, particularly pillars 2 and 3;
24. welcomes, in this regard, the implementation of actions such as the European Innovation Council's (EIC) Transition facility or the Horizon Results Booster, and calls for them to be supplemented with other forms of action that fall within the same category, in order to improve ownership by beneficiaries, and to programme them with the support of other European, national or regional programmes. The development of several complementary approaches such as setting up project portfolios or processes for using results should be examined;
25. welcomes the implementation of the first pillar, which generates a significant proportion of the patents from FP projects, and calls for more bridges to be built with the rest of the programme, while involving cities and regions more in the dissemination of research results in this pillar, so that they can be spread among society;
26. points out the specific case of the outermost regions, which, given their particular circumstances, have a number of unique strengths and advantages, allowing them to become testing laboratories and to provide innovative solutions, for the benefit of the whole Union. Stresses the need for EU support, especially in terms of capacity building and connecting to European networks, in order to be able to fully exploit the potential of these regions;
27. regrets that mid-way through Horizon Europe, its 2nd pillar was used as an adjustment variable to fund new initiatives, without being offset by sufficiently robust synergies with such initiatives;
28. welcomes the establishment in the 3rd pillar of the EIC, which constitutes a powerful lever of support for the best innovators to accelerate and deploy their disruptive solutions, and calls for resources to be increased, particularly non-grant-based resources, to halt the worrying decline in the success rates of this programme;
29. welcomes the networking role of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) in order to create world-class European innovation ecosystems; recalls the objective of the financial autonomy of Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) and calls for more financial synergies with other programmes such as Erasmus+, including in particular European universities alliances;

30. regrets that the European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) programme has such a low budget and that it involves leaders of local and regional innovation ecosystems in the EU such as academic hubs, clusters or cities and regions to such little extent;
31. proposes that the next FP enrich the third pillar of action by promoting strong collaborations between local and regional innovation ecosystems by drawing on smart specialisations and seeking the best synergies with other programmes such as I3. Furthermore, points out the potential of municipalities in the context of the new European Innovation Agenda, and in particular the implementation of Flagship Initiative 2 ‘Enabling deep tech innovation through experimentation spaces and public procurement’;
32. highlights the key role of modern universities in translating scientific research into actionable policies through their involvement in the Science for Policy (S4P) ecosystems. Calls to this effect for close cooperation between universities and policy makers at all levels to ensure that scientific findings are effectively used in public policy, enhancing the societal impact of high-quality scientific knowledge. Proposes, in this regard, that regions and local authorities work closely with universities to develop pilot projects for public policies;
33. suggests in this respect that FP10 activities at EU level strengthen and leverage universities’ regional links and, consequently, their contribution to local and regional development, while ensuring that they increase their global competitiveness and effectively translate global innovations into local benefits. Suggests, furthermore, that universities extend the role of science beyond academic achievements, through their active participation in regional innovation ecosystems;

#### ***Bolstering the deployment of European missions***

34. acknowledges the added value that European missions can bring by focusing on clearly identified challenges, for which tangible solutions have to be supported, by favouring a more cross-cutting and multi-programme approach;
35. suggests that no new missions be deployed until a full assessment of current missions has been carried out;
36. regrets, however, that their implementation and the structures in place lack coordination between the different levels of governance, as well as incentives for the essential involvement of the private sector and citizens; regrets the lack of strategic vision in the mobilisation of EU programmes to finance the successful outcome of these missions;
37. regrets, in this regard, that cities and regions are not more involved in the governance of these missions, as they are an indispensable level of action for individuals and civil society at large to be involved in implementing them; real opportunities should therefore be created for the participation of local and regional authorities;



38. proposes that common aspects of governance be implemented in each mission that are capable of improving regions' participation in the execution of such missions (for example through mirror groups made up of cities and regions) as well as providing strong political leadership for carrying them out, for example by placing them under the aegis of members of the European Commission who are able to drive forward this holistic approach;
39. insists that European missions should be subject to more ambitious multiannual and multi-programme programming, so as to fund R&I that has a genuinely useful impact on achieving their objectives;

#### ***A more citizen-oriented approach***

40. maintains that the success of the FP depends on its ability to involve citizens in its implementation, so as to facilitate the uptake of its results among civil society, an objective for which cities and regions are key partners; emphasises the importance of gender equality and the inclusion of women and underrepresented groups in all aspects of research and innovation;
41. regrets that R&I in the public sector constitutes a very limited area of research in the FP, despite the fact that innovation in public policies is an undeniable factor of success for developing and deploying the best knowledge and innovation in the EU, and therefore calls for strategic programming to set more objectives in this area, in particular as regards the digitalisation of public services, environmental and climate challenges (including those relating to energy and mobility) and health;
42. recommends that the concept of citizen science be disseminated as widely as possible in the next FP by including this approach in the implementation phase as well as the operating phase of projects;
43. proposes giving greater impetus to public innovation instruments such as innovation-based public procurement and experimentation spaces, especially at municipal level, since they are capable of dynamising the whole R&I system around challenges of shared interest;
44. calls, in this context, for new forms of action to be tested together with cities and regions, along similar lines to the New European Bauhaus lab Voucher Scheme, for example, promoted by the CoR;

#### ***Widening participation in the FP by prioritising a place-based approach***

45. considers that the FP allocates a very limited part of its budget to a specific programme which seeks to increase participation in countries that are performing less well, despite the fact that 'widening participation' ultimately contributes to 'strengthening the ERA';
46. notes that this programme does not reflect reality when it comes to research excellence at regional level, something which would help to better target innovation ecosystems that need more support;

47. notes that the European Innovation Ecosystems programme successfully uses the European Regional Innovation Scoreboard (RIS) as a useful benchmark for improving the participation of regions that are less advanced in R&I, and considers the continuation of the programme to be highly positive; the role of cities in the programme, which has so far not been large enough, needs to be strengthened;
48. in light of the above, suggests using the same benchmark (RIS) to implement measures for widening participation at local and regional level while better reflecting the specific needs and innovation capacities of different regions;

***The Framework Programme as an accelerator for academic careers and training for skills of the future***

49. points out that the EU fully integrates excellence in higher education as one of the measures of its policy agenda to achieve this, and that it is a key vehicle for developing academic careers and building skills that will be needed in the future to master emerging technologies;
50. considers that the FP can play a role in helping to prevent brain drain by maintaining the appropriate resources for collaborative research funding tools as well as individual funding schemes (such as the ERC and EIC);
51. proposes that the next FP include in its strategic programming investment efforts in training and skills and the actions of other programmes such as Erasmus+ so as to make optimal use of the results generated by the FP through the adequate development of human capital in the regions;
52. calls for more synergies between the FP and European universities alliances;

**C) Resources and synergies with other European programmes**

***An ambitious allocation of the Framework Programme to ensure the EU remains a leader in innovation***

53. notes that the FP budget is becoming increasingly and alarmingly small, along the same lines of Horizon 2020 where an additional EUR 159 billion was missing to finance all project proposals meeting the programme's quality criteria;
54. points out that the Member States have agreed to the Barcelona objective, which states that they should spend a total of 3% of GDP on research and development, by mobilising both private and public funds<sup>2</sup>; in this regard, calls for Europe to insist on the importance of this objective and the FP budget be ringfenced, i.e. protected from adjustments made for the benefit of other strategic European programmes and initiatives, and better articulated with the funds of the future cohesion policy;

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<sup>2</sup>

Presidency Conclusions from the Barcelona European Council, 15 and 16 March 2002.

55. suggests that the next FP fully integrate in its strategic programming synergies and the principle of pooling resources with other European (particularly those related to cohesion policy), national and local programmes on its future key priorities, in order to shift from a reactive approach to a proactive one when it comes to implementing major EU science and technology initiatives in the future;

***Placing the Framework Programme in a multi-fund and long-term programming context***

56. notes that, despite significant progress made in implementing inter-fund synergies, the combination of EU funds supporting R&I remains a real challenge for participants and the managing authorities of these programmes. Stresses, to this end, the need to recast and step up territorial cooperation programmes, in particular their interregional component, which are best placed to make the link between the FP and cohesion policy and to connect regional industrial value chains, in particular between the players in the most developed regions and those still in convergence;
57. regrets that there is no multi-annual programming for the R&I multi-programme, which could shed light on potential long-term synergies, nor is there sufficient technical assistance to achieve such synergies. Suggests the introduction of a dedicated multi-annual programming framework for less-developed regions. This framework would enhance long-term planning and facilitate the integration of these regions into broader EU innovation strategies, addressing the disparities in funding and support;
58. proposes establishing the necessary framework for this multiannual, multi-fund programme in the future Multiannual Financial Framework, in order to provide an operational framework conducive to the pooling of resources, from the outset of programme design and in the long-term; the possibility of using funds which can be connected, rather than a mix of funding from the various programmes, is to be viewed positively. This would ensure a better fit at local and regional level;
59. stresses in particular the need for the FP to interact more effectively with cohesion policy, using I3 and ensuring that the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) does not lead to a concentration of the targeted critical technologies in the same areas, in order to make significant investments in the EU's best value chains, supported by the smart specialisation of the regions hosting them;
60. proposes to use findings from data analysis and conclusions from the EU Industrial R&D Investment Scoreboard, the EU Regional Innovation Scoreboard and the ERA Industrial Technology Roadmaps in order to position the EU better in the 'global tech race' by better understanding the investment needs in view of accelerating public and private R&I investments of Europe in emerging climate neutral technologies;
61. proposes more flexibility in the application of implementation rules for various European programmes so that, where appropriate, uniform participation rules are applied to an entire project funded by several different programmes;

62. in order to facilitate the mix of funds, calls for the FP to provide a general possibility for candidates to give their consent to their National Contact Point (NCP) to be supported in their search for additional or alternative resources for their project, in cooperation with local partners, such as regions.

Brussels, 9 October 2024

*The President  
of the European Committee of the Regions*

Vasco Alves Cordeiro

*The Secretary-General  
of the European Committee of the Regions*

Petr Blížkovský

## II. PROCEDURE

<b>Title</b>	Recommendations for the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10)
<b>Reference(s)</b>	Not applicable
<b>Legal basis</b>	Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
<b>Procedural basis</b>	Own-initiative opinions – [Rule 41(b)(ii) of the Rules of Procedure]
<b>Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter</b>	Not applicable
<b>Date of Bureau/President’s decision</b>	4 July 2023
<b>Commission responsible</b>	Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture
<b>Rapporteur</b>	Anne Besnier (FR/PES)
<b>Discussed in commission</b>	27 June 2024
<b>Date adopted by commission</b>	27 June 2024
<b>Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)</b>	Majority
<b>Date adopted in plenary</b>	9 October 2024
<b>Previous Committee opinions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">A new European innovation agenda.</a></li><li>• <a href="#">A new European Research Area (ERA) for research and innovation.</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Horizon Europe: Framework Programme 9 for Research and Innovation.</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Local and Regional Dimension of the Horizon 2020 Programme and the New Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.</a></li><li>• <a href="#">A renewed European agenda for research and innovation – Europe’s chance to shape its future.</a></li></ul>
<b>Subsidiarity reference</b>	Not applicable