



# Informal meeting of the EU ministers responsible for research

Warsaw, 10-11 March 2025

## **Strategic role of the future EU R&I framework programme for Europe's competitiveness and beyond**

Introduction to the policy debate



## **How to build on the 40-year legacy of the EU framework programmes? Strategic role of the next framework programme for Europe's competitiveness and beyond**

The recent reports of Mario Draghi ('The future of European Competitiveness'), Enrico Letta ('Much more than a market') and the high-level expert group led by Manuel Heitor ('Align, Act, Accelerate') clearly indicate that research and innovation policy plays – and will play in the future - a critical role in boosting global competitiveness of the European Union and strengthening its Single Market, while improving Union's security, resilience, technological sovereignty and people's prosperity.

Increased R&I performance can position the EU as a leader in solving pressing global issues. By constantly innovating, European businesses can improve their efficiency, reduce costs, and stay ahead of competitors. Moreover, research-driven sectors have the capacity to create high-value, skilled jobs.

Throughout its 40-year history, the R&I Framework Programmes have proven to be the Union main instrument to deliver in these fields, fostering **excellent science, technological development and innovation**, and enhancing **transnational R&I cooperation networks**.

In 2024, the Council has unanimously endorsed that the Framework Programme is instrumental for the Union's political and policy priorities, including the development of the European Research Area, strongly contributing to the Union's competitiveness and resilience.

The ex-post evaluation of previous EU R&I Framework Programme Horizon 2020 and available data of Horizon Europe, prove that **research and innovation, when acting hand in hand, boost creation of new science and work in support of economies of the Member States, and the EU at large.**



For example, Horizon 2020 is estimated to contribute an **average annual increase of EUR 15.9 billion to EU GDP**, totalling EUR 429 billion over the period 2014-2040. It is also expected to have had a notable impact on job creation, with a net gain in employment levels reaching around 220 000 jobs at its peak. The programme was particularly effective in leveraging co-investment from private companies. For every euro of Horizon 2020 funding companies received, they invested an additional EUR 0.57 in the project <sup>1</sup>.

We shall not forget that the development of new science is a root of all innovations and a condition for evidence-based policy making. Substantial scientific impact that framework programmes generate, amplify the EU's position as the global scientific powerhouse. Horizon 2020 ex-post evaluation points out the instrumental role of the framework programme in driving scientific breakthroughs, disruptive innovation and pioneering advancements in new domains of science and technology. An in-depth analysis of projects funded by the ERC ("Mapping ERC frontier research"<sup>2</sup>) corroborates the powerful contribution that **frontier research** has made to tackling global challenges. Therefore, the call from the Draghi report to significantly increase the support for frontier research cannot be overlooked when reflecting on how to boost EU competitiveness. Moreover, a **cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary approach remain vital for frontier research**, unlocking new areas of exploration that remain inaccessible within single disciplines.

Without prejudging the future Multiannual Financial Framework and its architecture, we need therefore to reflect on **how to build on 40 years of legacy of the EU framework programmes** and how to maximise the overall impact of the EU R&I policy.

The recently announced **Competitiveness Compass**, presented by the European Commission as 'a new roadmap to restore Europe's dynamism and boost our economic growth', will broadly involve research and innovation in order to close the innovation gap, boost decarbonisation, reduce dependencies, increase resilience and security.

At the same time, **several new strategies and regulations crucial for R&I have been announced or are already in the pipeline**, including a Strategy for European Startups and

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<sup>1</sup> Ex-post evaluation of Horizon 2020, the EU Framework Programme for research and innovation [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52024DC0049](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52024DC0049)

<sup>2</sup> <https://erc.europa.eu/projects-statistics/mapping-erc-frontier-research>; <https://erc.europa.eu/news-events/news/erc-reveals-mapping-its-funded-research>



Scaleups, a Strategy for Research and Technology Infrastructures, European Strategy for Life Sciences, Innovation Act and ERA Act, and foreseen expansion of the European Research Council and the European Innovation Council. The question of how to strategically align the future framework programme with the European Research Area policy additionally merits our attention in view of forward-looking discussions.

While awaiting details of these proposals, which may exert impact on the general architecture of support for R&I at the European level, the time is now to discuss the ideas and the expectations of the Member States, Associated Countries and the stakeholders across Europe as to the strategic role of EU's R&I policy in the years to come.

**In light of the above, Ministers are invited to address the following questions:**

1. How do you see the role of future EU R&I policy and its instruments in fostering long-term competitiveness of the EU? How to ensure effective synergies between the Framework Programme and other key policies and instruments at EU and national level equally relevant for boosting EU competitiveness?
2. How to ensure balanced support for frontier research and innovation in the next EU R&I Framework Programme? The European Commission has announced the expansion of the ERC and EIC, what would be your expectations in this regard? How can collaborative research best support EU competitiveness and other EU Policies?
3. How to ensure that the next Framework Programme significantly contributes to closing the research and innovation gap between the EU and the key global players?