

Boost synergies in research and innovation funding

Position dated 13 October 2022

The leading universities of Science and Technology (S&T) united in [CESAER](#) welcome the renewed efforts on the European level for boosting synergies in Research and Innovation (R&I) funding programmes. We particularly welcome the [guidance](#) 'Synergies between Horizon Europe and ERDF programmes' published by the European Commission, and the [Prague Declaration](#) published under the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU. We underline that synergies (i) between the different EU funding programmes – e.g. Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, European Structural & Investment Funds (ESIF) – on one hand, and (ii) between programmes at the regional, national and European levels on the other, are key to help tackle local and global challenges.

Universities of S&T are at the forefront of the delivery of S&T for achieving the digital and green transitions, including through S&T for the [net-zero transition](#) and to advance the development and deployment of [key technologies shaping the future](#). Achieving the twin transitions cannot be done effectively through a siloed approach, but demand a comprehensive and cross-cutting strategy, across disciplines, sectors and communities.

Recalling our [position](#) 'Sustainable Funding for Universities of the Future in Europe', we underline that ensuring synergies is vital to unlock the full potential of S&T – currently often restricted by barriers raised by incompatible and poorly aligned (e.g. siloed) approaches, programmes and schemes and between regional, national and European levels - to enable universities to fully assume their societal responsibilities. We underline that boosting synergies should be a system-wide endeavour, which should be pursued concomitantly with ensuring balance between (i) [competitive and non-competitive funding streams](#) on one hand, and (ii) [investigator-driven frontier research](#) and other approaches on the other.

Boost synergies today by bolstering ongoing efforts

We welcome the harmonisation efforts concerning the exchange of information and reporting requirements for different instruments. For example, in the financial regulation review, this included ensuring common rules and definitions to enhance interactions between instruments and facilitate joint funding operations.

- We encourage the Council to adopt boldest ambitions in boosting synergies along the actions agreed in the [Prague Declaration](#).
- We urge policy-makers and funders at all levels to advance alignment and harmonisation of policy-making frameworks, implementation instruments, as well as financial and administrative rules between programmes.
- We [reiterate our call](#) on the EU institutions to associate as many excellent and like-minded third countries as possible with the EU funding programmes for research, education and innovation.
- We urge member states to transfer parts of ESIF to Horizon Europe.

- We urge all member states to implement the '[Seal of Excellence](#)' scheme.
- We invite policy-makers and funders to provide for more and better guidance along for example the [vademecum](#) by [UnLiON](#) as a source of inspiration.
- We urge the European Commission to pursue streamlined and lean governance structures of the EU missions and partnerships.

Shape EU missions as synergy boosters

The [EU missions](#) are intended to enable ambitious and cross-cutting approaches in R&I to bring concrete solutions to local and global challenges. They are therefore perfectly placed to act as 'synergy boosters' for exploring and piloting new ways to create synergies. EU missions could leverage the relatively small budget allocated at EU level to coordinate and be an umbrella and 'single-pot' for much larger amounts coming from other sources on the national and regional levels creating a common approach towards beneficiaries.

- We encourage the EU institutions to shape the EU missions as thematic 'synergy boosters' funded through different sources with a small EU budget used to coordinate larger allocations from the regional and national levels.

Put synergies at heart of design of new EU funding programmes

There is a growing consensus around the importance and urgency of boosting the role of R&I across all our societal endeavours. Synergies between funding programmes are enablers to boost R&I activities. An all-of-society approach towards R&I, in which R&I activities are fully integrated into all sectors, from agri and food, to energy, transportation, communication and infrastructures, is needed. For example, the ambitious [European Green Deal](#) is contingent on continued developments in S&T. We particularly underline the important role of synergies for boosting science diplomacy and advancing long-standing S&T cooperation with global partners.

- We call on the EU institutions to adopt an all-of-society approach towards research, education and innovation to help tackle local and global challenges through societal transformations especially by considering new ways for leveraging key knowledge-focused and future-oriented programmes such as Horizon Europe and Erasmus.
- We urge the Commission to put synergies at the heart of the design of the EU funding programmes 2028-2035 before offering its proposals to Council and Parliament.
- We call on the EU institutions to agree upon and apply a 3% funding target dedicated to R&I activities in all areas of the EU budget 2028-2035 and in all EU funding programmes 2028-2035.

We offer our commitment, expertise and experience for boosting synergies of R&I funding, in the implementation of current programmes and the design of new ones.

For more information, please [contact](#) our Deputy Secretary General Mattias Björnmalm.

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