

FP10 Readiness Brief #1

Why universities should prepare before the calls are launched

**From funding awareness to strategic positioning in Horizon Europe
2028-2034**

FP10 Readiness Series | Victoria Folea

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Why FP10 matters now

The next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, widely referred to as FP10 and proposed under the continued name Horizon Europe for the period 2028-2034, is not only the next funding cycle. It is part of a broader strategic shift in the European Union.

On 16 July 2025, the European Commission put forward its proposal for the next Horizon Europe programme, with a proposed budget of €175 billion for 2028-2034. The Commission presents the future programme as larger, simpler, faster and more focused on impact.¹

The Commission also states that Horizon Europe 2028-2034 will remain the EU's main research and innovation framework, while being closely connected to the new European Competitiveness Fund.²

This matters for universities because FP10 will be shaped by a policy environment very different from the one in which Horizon Europe 2021-2027 started. The EU agenda is now increasingly defined by competitiveness, open strategic autonomy, industrial capacity, technology sovereignty, security, resilience, simplification and faster deployment of innovation.

The strategic context: research and innovation as European capacity

In the current EU policy landscape, research and innovation are increasingly linked to Europe's capacity to remain competitive, resilient and technologically independent.

The European Commission's priorities for 2024-2029 include sustainable prosperity and competitiveness, defence and security, democracy and social fairness, and Europe's role in the world.³ The Political Guidelines for the 2024-2029 European Commission also emphasise implementation, competitiveness, security, industrial strength and Europe's capacity to act in a more unstable geopolitical environment.⁴

The 2026 Commission Work Programme, presented under the title "Europe's independence moment", reinforces this direction. It highlights simplification, competitiveness, resilience, security and the need to reduce administrative burdens. The Commission refers to targets to reduce administrative burdens by at least 25%, and by at least 35% for SMEs, without undermining policy objectives.⁵

This does not mean that fundamental research becomes less important. On the contrary, excellent science remains central to Europe's long-term competitiveness. However, the language around EU research funding is becoming more strategic and more connected to economic security, industrial transformation, defence preparedness, digital leadership, health, biotech, climate resilience, space and advanced technologies.

Universities should therefore read FP10 not only as a funding programme, but as a signal of where Europe wants to build capacity.

¹ European Commission, "Horizon Europe 2028-2034: twice bigger, simpler, faster and more impactful", 16 July 2025. https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/horizon-europe-2028-2034-twice-bigger-simpler-faster-and-more-impactful-2025-07-16_en

² European Commission, "Horizon Europe - Funding programme overview". https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en

³ European Commission, "Priorities 2024-2029". https://commission.europa.eu/priorities-2024-2029_en

⁴ European Commission, "Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029". https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63fb2cf648_en

⁵ European Commission, "Questions and answers on the 2026 Commission Work Programme", 20 October 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_25_2415

FP10 after the Heitor Report: evolution, impact and scale

The policy debate on FP10 was strongly influenced by the independent expert report “Align, Act, Accelerate”, chaired by Manuel Heitor and published in 2024. The report provides strategic recommendations on how to maximise the impact of EU research and innovation programmes in the future.⁶

The report recommended a budget of at least €220 billion for FP10, arguing that a stronger investment level would be needed to support breakthrough research, innovation, start-up scaling, industrial productivity and responses to societal challenges.⁷

The Commission proposal of €175 billion is therefore significantly higher than the Horizon Europe 2021–2027 budget, but below the level advocated by the expert group. This difference is important because budget size, ring-fencing and allocation between excellence, competitiveness, innovation and widening participation are likely to remain central issues during negotiations.

Readiness starts before the call text

Many researchers and institutions begin preparing when a call is already open. At that stage, however, many strategic choices may already be constrained: the consortium may already exist, the coordinator may already be selected, the concept may already be shaped, and the strongest partners may already be aligned.

It means building the internal capacity to understand future priorities, map institutional strengths, identify researchers with European potential, support partner profiling, and create a culture of early positioning.

- Where do we have research strengths that could become visible at European level?
- Which researchers are already connected to international networks?
- Which Horizon Europe experiences can be transformed into FP10 advantages?
- Which departments or research groups need targeted support?

What universities should monitor

FP10 will not emerge in isolation. It is connected to wider EU debates on competitiveness, open strategic autonomy, simplification, excellence, widening participation, technology sovereignty, industrial transformation and the role of research and innovation in Europe’s future.

First, they should follow the formal policy process, i.e. the European Commission proposal, the European Parliament position, the Council discussions and the final adopted legal acts. The Commission states that interinstitutional negotiations between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission will take place on the Horizon Europe 2028-2034 proposal.⁸

⁶ Publications Office of the European Union, “Align, Act, Accelerate: Research, Technology and Innovation to boost European competitiveness”, 2024. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2f9fc221-86bb-11ef-a67d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

⁷ Manuel Heitor et al., “Align, Act, Accelerate”, report PDF, recommendation for an FP10 budget of at least EUR 220 billion. https://www.horizontevropa.cz/files_public/elfinder/6357/align%20act%20accelerate-KI0124014ENN.pdf

⁸ European Commission, “Horizon Europe — Funding programme overview”. https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en

Second, they should monitor the emerging architecture of the programme. The Commission proposal presents Horizon Europe 2028-2034 as a framework structured around excellence, competitiveness and society, innovation, and the European Research Area. For universities, this structure matters because it indicates where different types of research and institutional capacity may be positioned.⁹

Third, universities should pay particular attention to the relationship between Horizon Europe 2028-2034 and the European Competitiveness Fund. The Commission presents the future Horizon Europe programme as closely connected to the European Competitiveness Fund, including for large projects moving from research to demonstration and deployment.¹⁰

Fourth, they should monitor simplification measures, including possible changes in application procedures, partnerships, evaluation logic and funding instruments. Simplification is a central theme of the Commission's 2026 Work Programme and of the wider EU agenda.¹¹

Fifth, universities should follow the future of European Partnerships. ERA-LEARN notes that European Partnerships will remain an important element of Horizon Europe 2028-2034, but are expected to face changes compared with Horizon Europe 2021-2027.¹²

Sixth, universities should follow stakeholder debates. University associations, research organisations, national contact points, regional bodies and research management networks are already discussing issues such as protecting the R&I budget, safeguarding excellence, supporting widening participation, integrating Social Sciences and Humanities, preserving space for low-TRL research and avoiding an excessive shift toward short-term industrial objectives.

For example, the European University Association argues that Horizon Europe 2028-2034 should remain focused on excellent research, including collaborative research, rather than being repurposed mainly as a tool for short-term political or industrial objectives.¹³ Science Europe also provides an FP10 advocacy hub tracking developments, positions and stakeholder engagement around the future framework programme.¹⁴

What researchers can do now

They can start by building or updating a clear European partner profile. This should explain their expertise, methods, infrastructure, previous projects, publications, datasets, networks and potential contribution to collaborative proposals.

Researchers should also become more attentive to the language of strategic relevance. In FP10, it may become increasingly important to explain not only the scientific quality of an idea, but also its contribution to European resilience, competitiveness, sustainability, inclusion, security, knowledge circulation or innovation capacity.

⁹ European Commission, "Horizon Europe 2028-2034: twice bigger, simpler, faster and more impactful", 16 July 2025. https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/horizon-europe-2028-2034-twice-bigger-simpler-faster-and-more-impactful-2025-07-16_en

¹⁰ European Commission, "EU budget 2028-2034". https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/eu-budget-2028-2034_en

¹¹ European Commission, "Questions and answers on the 2026 Commission Work Programme", 20 October 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_25_2415

¹² ERA-LEARN, "Legislative proposal for FP10 published". <https://www.era-learn.eu/news-events/news/legislative-proposal-for-fp10>

¹³ European University Association, "Horizon Europe 2028-2034". <https://www.eua.eu/publications/policy-input/horizon-europe-2028-2034.html>

¹⁴ Science Europe, "FP10 Advocacy". <https://www.scienceeurope.org/our-priorities/eu-framework-programmes/fp10-advocacy/>

The Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2025-2027 already points in this direction by identifying strategic orientations linked to the green transition, the digital transition, and a more resilient, competitive, inclusive and democratic Europe.¹⁵

What universities can do now

Universities can start with a simple internal mapping exercise: research strengths, existing European networks, Horizon Europe participation, successful and unsuccessful proposals, available infrastructure, potential coordinators, early-career researchers and administrative support capacity.

They can also organise practical training focused not only on proposal writing, but on strategic preparation: how to read EU priorities, how to identify a good call fit, how to develop a partner profile, how to approach consortia, and how to build a concept note before a call is published.

Universities should also prepare to support researchers in areas that may become more visible in FP10, such as interdisciplinary collaboration, innovation pathways, research security, dual-use sensitivity, responsible international cooperation, data and knowledge circulation, impact narratives and partnerships with non-academic actors.

The increasing relevance of competitiveness, security, strategic technologies and Europe's capacity to act is visible both in the Commission's 2024-2029 priorities and in the future Horizon Europe proposal.¹⁶

From participation to positioning

Positioning means understanding the future programme early, identifying where the institution can be credible, building relationships before consortia are fixed, and helping researchers become visible as potential partners.

This is especially important for universities that are not yet among the most frequent coordinators of large Horizon Europe projects. For them, FP10 readiness can become a structured opportunity to improve visibility, build confidence and enter European networks earlier.

A short FP10 readiness checklist

Universities may begin with the following questions:

- Do we have an internal overview of our Horizon Europe participation and lessons learned?
- Do we know which researchers or groups are most likely to engage with FP10?
- Do we have updated partner profiles for our strongest research areas?
- Are we monitoring FP10 policy developments in a structured way?
- Are we following the relationship between Horizon Europe and the European Competitiveness Fund?

¹⁵ European Commission, "Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2025-2027". https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/strategic-plan_en

¹⁶ European Commission, "Priorities 2024-2029"; European Commission, "Horizon Europe - Funding programme overview". https://commission.europa.eu/priorities-2024-2029_en; https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en

- Do we have internal capacity to translate EU-level developments into practical guidance?
- Are our researchers connected to relevant European networks?
- Do we have a process for identifying project ideas before calls are published?
- Are we prepared to discuss strategic relevance without weakening academic quality?
- Do we have training formats adapted to different levels of experience?
- Are we treating FP10 as a strategic institutional opportunity, rather than only as a future list of calls?

Final reflection

FP10 readiness is not about predicting every detail of the future programme. It is about preparing the institution to respond intelligently when the details become available.

For universities, the real question is not only “What will FP10 fund?” but also “**Will we be ready to participate when the opportunity appears?**”

Early preparation can make the difference between reacting to calls and shaping a credible European research presence.

This brief is part of an exploratory FP10 Readiness Series for researchers, universities and research support professionals preparing for the next EU Framework Programme.