



POSITION STATEMENT BY THE V4 ACADEMIES OF SCIENCES ON FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME 9

The Academies of Sciences, as representatives of the academia communities in the Visegrad Group (V4) countries, are committed to increasing their participation in the EU framework programmes for research, development and innovation, and acknowledge the fundamental role of European funding for research and development as a key driver for societal advancement and economic growth all over Europe.

The V4 countries, like most of the new member states (EU13), nevertheless continue to achieve poor results compared to the old members states (EU15), in terms of both quantitative and qualitative indicators of their participation in the framework programmes. This situation has not shown significant improvement in Horizon 2020 (H2020), either, despite dedicated actions initiated on both European and national levels and despite the fact that the EU13 states produce high quality research in many disciplines. Data for the years 2014-2017 indicate that the V4 countries were among the least active, both per capita and per number of researchers, in submitting proposals to the EU in this period.

Participation in EU research programmes affects national science systems in ways that extend beyond direct financial benefits. Involvement in Europe-wide collaborations helps the expansion of professional networks and promotes scientific excellence on individual and institutional levels alike. Lack of engagement, on the other hand, increases imbalances within the European Research Area (ERA).

While lower participation levels and success rates can be primarily attributed to lower levels of national R&D spending, various elements of the design of the current EU framework programme, including evaluation procedures, thematic focuses, eligibility of costs, and excessive administrative limitations, certainly contribute to a growing European divide in science and technology.

We believe that there are two key reasons that stand out among these elements: the low level of eligible salaries in funded projects and very low success rates throughout the programme that discourage a healthier application rate.

We have identified a number of areas where steps should be taken to bring about significant improvement in this regard. We are convinced that these changes would, in turn, result in closing the innovation gap within the ERA and strengthen the support of low-performing member states' governments in favour of an increased budget for the next framework programme (FP9).

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO CHANGE THIS SITUATION? PROPOSALS FROM V4 ACADEMIES FOR FP9

To make FP9 not only accessible but also attainable for a wider community of researchers in V4 countries, national and European efforts are equally needed. We hereby express our support for the national position statements of the V4 countries, which have formulated a number of proposals towards increasing participation. These proposals are of either a financial, structural or management nature.

1. Financial

a. Increased budget for FP9 compared to Horizon 2020

Funding for research, development and innovation must enjoy priority among EU policies as a precondition for European technological innovation, social development and economic growth.

b. New regulation that guarantees a minimum salary for researchers participating in EU projects

Current H2020 regulation prevents the convergence of researchers' remuneration in the ERA, and is often not in line with national remuneration practices, thereby making multiple salary components and salary increases ineligible for funding. These limitations discourage researchers to apply for EU grants and create a disadvantageous situation for scientific institutions in EU13 countries in their attempts to attract researchers from abroad.

c. Research grants must enjoy priority over financial instruments in FP9

Research grants have been the most popular and best understood tools among the instruments offered by H2020 to researchers, so their priority over other financial instruments must be preserved. However, we welcome the introduction of new instruments, including those of a financial nature, as a supplement to well-funded grant schemes.

2. Structural

a. More of smaller-scale collaborative projects

There is a need to provide better funding opportunities for smaller-scale research collaborations in contrast to the dominance of only a few huge consortia in H2020, which has proved to favour almost exclusively the largest and best established research institutions.

b. Right balance between basic and applied research

Only the right balance of "blue-sky" scientific research and close-to-market activities can deliver both scientific breakthroughs and innovation that are capable of creating new products and markets for the European economy.

c. More "widening" actions

We support the continuation and strengthening of "Spreading excellence and widening participation" actions, but believe that only by the introduction of "Widening" as a horizontal aspect in all actions aiming to achieve wider societal and economic impact can we achieve a significant improvement in this regard.

d. More of excellent science

We are committed to supporting the actions under the “Excellence” pillar of Horizon 2020, including the grants of the European Research Council, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and Future and Emerging Technologies actions. We encourage the introduction of a funding scheme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions that would aim to counteract the “brain drain” within Europe and would provide a dedicated instrument for low-performing member states by means of which they would be able to attract researchers from all over Europe.

e. Stronger involvement of social sciences and humanities

Despite the many urgent challenges the EU is faced with, the role of the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) has been underestimated in Horizon 2020. Also, the SSH play an important role in disruptive innovation and social acceptance of science and technology. Therefore, stronger involvement of researchers from the entire range of SSH disciplines in the next Framework Programme should be encouraged and more calls for proposals for SSH are necessary.

3. Management and implementation

a. Simplification for synergies

We encourage further simplification in the implementation of the programme that provides more flexibility to exploit synergies between the EU framework programmes, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and the national RDI programmes.

b. More support for coordinated use of existing research infrastructure

We support the key role of the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) in the strategic planning and coordination of research infrastructures in Europe and encourage actions to improve transnational access to research infrastructures.