

ITALY'S POSITION PAPER

**ON THE 10TH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME
FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION**



**Ministero
dell'Università
e della Ricerca**

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on the 10th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (10th FP)

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Introduction

The 10th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (10th FP) constitutes a unique opportunity for Europe to consolidate its scientific and technological leadership in an increasingly competitive global context. In an era marked by systemic challenges - from the ecological transition to the digital revolution, from energy security to geopolitical tensions - the European Union must adopt an ambitious Framework Programme capable of supporting scientific advancement while steering it toward European competitiveness. Italy, drawing on its national experience and the national survey on the future FP, advocates for a stand-alone programme that introduces targeted innovations to address emerging needs, while ensuring stability and continuity for applicants. In the context of the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework, the FP must remain autonomous, even though it is included within the Competitiveness Fund, which should be solid and stable over time. We are now in a new phase, and the strengthening of the FP is part of a Union-wide strategy for research and innovation aimed at advanced objectives.

The 10th FP must be:

- the implementation and funding instrument for EU research and innovation policies;
- **a driver of inclusion and growth**, fostering transnational collaborations, reducing national and regional disparities, and supporting talents;
- **an accelerator of the green and digital transitions**, aligning research and innovation with the objectives of the European Commission's Agenda;
- **a tool to ensure technological sovereignty and strategic autonomy**, reducing dependencies in critical sectors such as semiconductors, renewable energies, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and biotechnologies.

This document outlines Italy's vision for an effective 10th FP, structured around four guiding principles: scientific excellence, administrative simplification, balanced international cooperation, and measurable socioeconomic impact. Regarding funding, Italy supports a budget strengthened beyond Horizon Europe and commensurate with the Programme's ambitions.

Guiding Principles

Scientific Excellence as the guiding Principle of European Research

Excellence must remain the non-negotiable guiding principle of European research, while addressing the growing socioeconomic impact needs. To this end, Italy advocates the following imperatives.

- **Balance between curiosity-driven and policy-driven research:** a significant share of the budget must be allocated to fundamental research projects, both individual and collaborative, as the foundation for groundbreaking discoveries. Resources should also be directed toward challenge-oriented, collaborative fundamental research. Balancing bottom-up and top-down research ensures a constant flow of knowledge transfer to society, supports competitiveness, and translates ecosystem needs into new research questions. The FP must also cover all phases of research, from fundamental to applied and incremental research. Enhancing research as the ability to transform its results into concrete applications is crucial. In line with what has been done during the Recovery Fund period, collaborative research between the research system and businesses, as well as among businesses themselves, is therefore also essential.

- **Research Infrastructures as strategic assets:** Italy proposes to position the Research Infrastructures (RIs) Programme outside the first pillar, making it transversal across the whole Framework Programme to benefit all its components. Italy supports strengthening the entire RI ecosystem, including future technological infrastructures, while valorising existing European and multilateral entities (*e.g.*, CERN).

By leveraging cohesion policies, Italy advocates for a specific plan to develop new RIs and technological infrastructures, modernise equipment, and fund transnational access to existing RIs. Ensuring accessibility to researchers and innovators across Europe - promoting mobility and transnational collaboration - is essential. Italy calls for increased funding for RI access measures, particularly in less-developed regions, and efficient management of RIs with clear, transparent rules for access and usage. Long-term operational sustainability should be ensured through co-funding from the new Framework Programme.

- **Proposal evaluation:** Italy firmly believe in maintaining a transparent and efficient evaluation system, ensuring qualified evaluators free from conflicts of interest and geographical balance.
- **Strategic independence of the European Research Council (ERC) and support for MSCA:** the autonomy of the ERC must be preserved, and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) should be strengthened to promote blue-sky, single-beneficiary research - key to Europe's global leadership in scientific excellence and patents - and to ensure free circulation of researchers and knowledge within the European Research Area (ERA).
- **Proactive role of the 10th FP and co-creation of thematic priorities:** the FP must proactively shape future EU agenda revisions, incorporating structural research needs of national systems and fostering socioeconomic and competitiveness impacts. Member States' needs must be integral to the research agenda-setting process, ensuring it is not predominantly driven by short-term political

objectives. Comitology should be strengthened as a tool to balance European strategic vision and national specificities.

- **Strengthening the European Research Area (ERA):** Italy supports concrete actions to boost national research ecosystems and promote balanced growth across Member States within the ERA.

Simplification and Accessibility

Italy emphasises the need to reduce bureaucracy and administrative complexity, which often discourages participation by smaller entities.

The 10th FP must prioritise maximum simplification and accessibility, lowering administrative burdens for participants, especially SMEs and start-ups. Italy proposes revising participation rules to expand the implementation of lump-sum funding for entities not classified as medium or large enterprises (based on capital and workforce size).

Italy advocates reducing evaluation timelines **to 6 months for SMEs** and start-ups, aligning funding timelines with innovation, production, socio-environmental impact, and market competitiveness needs.

Enhanced coordination between relevant DGs and executive agencies is essential, alongside effective valorisation of project outcomes and impacts. It would also be important to enhance tools more oriented towards results (as was the case in the context of the Recovery Fund) and less towards expenditure, allowing for clear evidence of concrete outcomes.

International Collaboration - open to the World, Protected in Interests

Openness is inherent to European research, but requires stronger safeguards.

Italy proposes identifying priority third-country groups or target regions (*e.g.*, the Mediterranean macro-region and Africa) and sectors for cooperation, prioritised over generalised international collaboration.

Reciprocity principles must be clear: Associated third countries must guarantee equal access to their national research programmes and comply with EU intellectual property laws. Detailed risk-assessment guidelines should be established for third-country partners involved in sensitive projects (*e.g.*, quantum, AI, biotechnologies).

Socioeconomic Impact - from Research to Market

The 10th FP must deliver concrete benefits for citizens and businesses. A funding share should be allocated to Proof-of-Concept programmes (beyond ERC grants and collaborative projects) and University incubators that facilitate structured matchmaking between researchers and investors. Proof-of-Concept programs could be open to all companies, including SMEs, and not just start-ups.

Italy believes the 10th FP should leverage Next Generation EU investments made through Member States' National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) and ensure effective linkages between the FP and national/regional initiatives.

A priority for Italy is establishing a dedicated 10th FP funding line focused on **synergies between higher education and research**, empowering **European University Alliances** to conduct research projects and build the European Knowledge Area while expanding Europe's talent pool.

Global Challenges

A limited number of policy-driven priority challenges should guide this Pillar, addressed through collaborative projects (TRL 2-6) and institutionalised partnerships (Arts. 185 and 187 TFEU), enhancing synergies among actors, programmes, and funding. Proposed thematic clusters could be:

- 1. Climate neutrality and adaptation;**
- 2. Energy and mobility;**
- 3. Digital transition;**
- 4. Health and life sciences;**
- 5. Natural resources, agriculture, food security, bioeconomy, and circular economy;**
- 6. Culture, creativity, and art.**

Innovation

The global context calls for increased support for European start-ups to enhance EU innovation capacity, scale up high-potential ventures, and achieve unicorn status.

Italy advocates creating regional-transnational **Technology Hubs - interdisciplinary hubs** across Europe, fostering collaboration among Universities, research centres, businesses, and local financial Institutions to accelerate market entry of innovative products.

Pathfinder and Accelerator

The European Innovation Council (EIC) must adopt an approach that recognises the high-risk nature of innovation and accepts failure as an integral part of the process. Data shows that about 90% of European start-ups fail (similar to the U.S.). Thus, robust support for innovative entrepreneurial ideas, considering survival and growth rates, is essential.

The dichotomy between incremental and disruptive innovation must be overcome. Approximately 70% of innovation is incremental, driven by experienced entrepreneurs, while disruptive innovation is rarer and often originates from outsiders. Both forms must be supported, as they significantly contribute to economic and technological progress.

The EIC's governance must enhance transparency, align investment tools (Accelerator, Pathfinder) with EU industrial strategies, and **strengthen coordination with national innovation programmes** to avoid duplication and foster synergies beyond the “Plug-in” mechanism.

Innovative Financial Instruments

To boost innovative enterprises and start-ups, Italy proposes:

- a dedicated guarantee fund covering 50% of bank loan risks for innovative start-ups, with simplified access criteria;
- a mechanism linking ERC and EIC, allocating a budget share to projects translating basic discoveries into industrial applications;
- pre-commercial procurement of strategic technologies (*e.g.*, low-energy chips) via pilot contracts with adequate value.

Support for Participants in Critical Conditions

Reflecting EU founding values, the FP must establish a Fund for Researchers at Risk, providing emergency grants to researchers threatened by conflict or persecution via fast-track procedures. The “Choose Europe” initiative should attract researchers valuing Europe's shared values and cutting-edge infrastructure.

Instruments and Implementation

Partnerships: Italy supports rationalising Partnerships (thematically and numerically), strengthening institutionalised ones with adequate financial and political commitments. Clear selection and governance criteria are essential.

Missions: as outlined in Horizon Europe, Missions need to be rethought and addressed at a higher EU policy level. Integration with regional smart specialisation strategies (RIS3) is relevant at the national level.

Open Science and Scientific Communication: Italy promotes Open Science principles, emphasising data sharing and scientific communication. Research outcomes must be accessible and comprehensible to the public while safeguarding scientific output.

Synergies with Other EU Programmes, Monitoring, and Evaluation: maximising synergies with other EU funds and programmes is a key expectation for the 10th FP.

Through InvestEU, European guarantees could attract private R&I investments, focusing on technologies critical to EU technological sovereignty. A portion of structural funds should be allocated to innovation projects, bridging incremental and disruptive innovation and fostering growth pathways for start-ups.

A mid-term review of the 10th FP must assess programme effectiveness, allowing reallocation of up to 10% of the budget based on results.