

# #EUInvestInKnowledge

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More than ever, the global Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the true value of excellent research, innovation and education. In the campaign “**Seize our common future**”, 15 associations representing more than 800 universities have called for an ambitious long-term EU budget for research, innovation and education to boost efforts to solve the manifold future challenges. Today, the same university associations unite and call on European leaders to step up investment in these areas, both in the Multiannual Financial Framework from 2021 to 2027 and Next Generation EU, and to commit to putting sufficient resources behind common ambitions.

Europe’s universities welcome the European Union’s approach to embark on a sustainable recovery path, supported by an ambitious and unprecedented effort to enhance the welfare and strengthen the economic base of the continent. At stake is our shared capacity to successfully tackle global challenges and become a frontrunner in addressing the green and digital transitions. Research, innovation and education are key building blocks to facilitate the European Union’s necessary progress towards sustainability and resilience. Errors made in the past should not be repeated: only long-term, holistic and collaborative approaches will help overcome multi-faceted challenges. Universities across Europe restate their full commitment to contribute to these goals.

Thus, Europe’s universities stand disappointed and concerned by the limited budget proposed for the EU’s flagship programmes Horizon Europe and Erasmus+. The current proposal for Horizon Europe falls far too short of the 120 billion euros that the European Parliament and the university community considered necessary even before Covid-19. A budget cut of more than 3% (compared to the 2018 Commission proposal) for vital instruments such as the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions and the European Research Council would hamper efforts towards strategic resilience. Under Horizon 2020, this pillar has been central in enabling Europe to move forward in tackling the current pandemic and must therefore be reinforced. For Erasmus+, plans to double (European Commission) or triple (European Parliament) funding for the programme have not been met with a lower proposal of 24.6 billion euros (2018 prices). This is clearly insufficient to meet the new and ambitious policy objectives for the next programme, including support to both physical and virtual mobility and education for all.

Both Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ are investments in our future and in our youth. They will reinforce Europe’s capacities to face today’s challenges, and those yet to come. Such challenges may take various forms and solutions will require mobilising various types of knowledge, citizens, and society.

To drive sustainability, Europe must invest in research and innovation. We urge the European institutions to (1) ensure that the funding programmes support science in all areas; (2) encourage and facilitate collaboration across disciplines and (3) foster timely association of interested non-EU countries to Horizon Europe. Finally, EU leaders must (4) recognise the long-term benefit of strengthening investigator-driven frontier research to achieve a proper balance of bottom-up and top-down approaches, throughout Horizon Europe. Europe’s universities recommend that the funds dedicated to research and innovation within Next Generation EU address holistically all challenges related to the coronavirus crisis through the same balanced approach.

Universities across Europe will contribute best to the common recovery and societal resilience if there are more synergies across research, innovation and education policies and funding programmes, and coordinated efforts between funders at European, national and regional levels.

It is now important to reach an agreement in time so that the European Union can move forward and deliver on its ambitious objectives in 2021. It is also the member states’ duty to intensify efforts in research, innovation and education, so that our societies and economies can benefit from an unprecedented momentum towards a sustainable recovery path. Therefore, we call for a commitment to new and reinforced targets for the proportion of GDP invested in research and innovation, both for public and private funding.

We, universities of Europe, urge European leaders to step up investment in research, innovation and education to foster long-term strategic resilience, enabling Europe to strongly reinforce its role as a global leader in this respect.

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