Swiss participation in EU Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation (Horizon 2020 / Horizon Europe)

Information update: 1 February 2021

The State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) provides regular updates on the state of Swiss participation in EU Framework Programmes for Research and innovation (FPRIIs; Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe):

- Switzerland has had full association in FPRI8 (Horizon 2020; 2014–2020) since early 2017.

- FPRI9 (Horizon Europe; 2021–2027) is currently in the preparatory phase. The EU institutions concerned are currently finalising the adoption of the legal basis for the programme. As a non-EU member state, Switzerland is not involved in these consultations.

- Switzerland and the EU share long-standing and successful cooperation ties in research and innovation. Switzerland’s participation in EU framework programmes for research and innovation forms part of the first series of bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the EU that came into effect in 2002, and which also includes the free movement of persons. Participation does not constitute a market access dossier and therefore does not form part of any institutional agreement. Switzerland thus expects also to be able to participate in ‘Horizon Europe’ and is committed to this objective.

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A. Horizon Europe (FPRI9) and further European R&I initiatives (2021–2027)

Developments at EU level

Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and Recovery Plan “NextGenerationEU”

On 21 July 2020 the European Union (EU) heads of state and government agreed on a global budget of EUR 1,824.3 billion for the multiannual financial framework and an extraordinary recovery package named “NextGenerationEU”, designed to help EU countries rebuild their economies following the COVID-19 pandemic and to boost digital transformation and push forward a green economy. At the European Council on 10-12 December, a compromise has been reached to unlock the last vetoes for its adoption. The multiannual financial framework will be adopted on time to start on 1st January 2021. The budget for Horizon Europe is EUR 95,517 billion (current prices), which includes additional funding from “NextGenerationEU” and from the top-up introduced thanks to the European Parliament.

Legal basis of Horizon Europe and other related programmes and initiatives

On 7 June 2018, the European Commission published its proposal for the next EU research framework programme, Horizon Europe, and for further European research and innovation initiatives (Digital Europe programme, Euratom programme, ITER). A political compromise on the legal basis has been reached on 11 December 2020 on the Horizon Europe between the EU institutions concerned (EU Council, European Parliament and European Commission). The adoption of this legislative framework is expected for early 2021. A retroactivity clause will allow an entry into force on 1st January 2021.

As a non-EU member state, Switzerland does not take part in these consultations, but closely monitors their progress. The conditions for the association of 3rd countries are now public, however, the specific conditions for the association agreement with Switzerland will be defined within an EU negotiation mandate. Clarification on the content of the mandate is expected in the first quarter of 2021. The exact conditions of Swiss participation will then be the subject of negotiations between Switzerland and the EU.

Switzerland’s participation

Switzerland and the EU share long-standing and successful cooperation ties in the area of research and innovation. Dating back to 1978, these are of interest to both parties. Switzerland is an active and reliable partner for the EU.

Swiss participation in the EU framework programmes is part of the first series of bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the EU that came into effect in 2002, and which also includes the free movement of persons. Participation does not constitute a market access dossier and therefore does not form part of any institutional agreement. Switzerland thus expects to be able to participate Horizon Europe and is committed to this objective.

So far, there has been initial contact of technical nature between Switzerland and the EU, but no official negotiations. The EU must first finalise the legal basis for the programme and prepare an official EU negotiating mandate. Once both is agreed on, official negotiations can be held with the EU on the conditions of Switzerland’s participation in Horizon Europe. This will presumably be the case in the first quarter of 2021.

On 20 May 2020, the Federal Council approved the funding dispatch involving the funds necessary to assure Switzerland’s participation in the 2021–2027 Horizon package. On 24 September, the Council of States (first Chamber) approved the dispatch. On 16 December, the National Council (second Chamber) has also agreed to the funding dispatch. This means that funding for Switzerland’s participation in the Horizon package is secured. Furthermore, a Swiss negotiating mandate has been created. Thus, the Federal Council can start to negotiate a renewal of the bilateral agreement between Switzerland and the EU regarding a participation in the Horizon package and thus ensure that Switzerland’s association continues uninterrupted. As no official negotiations have been held yet between Switzerland and the
EU, all three possible scenarios were presented in the funding dispatch (full association, partial association or participation as a third country) so that researchers in Switzerland can count on funding (either through the EU or through direct Swiss government funding) in all cases.

B. Information for researchers in Switzerland

Negotiations between Switzerland and the EU are expected to start in the first quarter of 2021. An agreement on Switzerland’s participation can therefore not be concluded before the start of the programme. However, this delay between the start of the programme and the conclusion of the agreement was already the case for previous programme generations (e.g. FPRI7 and Horizon 2020). The rule was that the association agreements would enter into force retroactively and researchers in Switzerland could apply to the calls for proposals even before the association agreement was concluded. According to current information from the European Commission, this retroactive activation of the agreement is also to be applied to Horizon Europe, both for participation in collaborative projects and for individual projects.

IMPORTANT: For this reason, SERI recommends that researchers and innovators in Switzerland apply for the first calls of Horizon Europe and related programmes and initiatives as a participant from an associated country.

The adopted dispatch allows for the funding of Swiss researchers even if Switzerland can only participate in Horizon Europe as a partially associated country or in third-country mode. This applies in the event that there is a delayed, incomplete or no association agreement with the EU. Thus, the funding of Swiss participants in collaborative projects is secured regardless of Switzerland’s association status.

In case of a third country participation, participants from Switzerland in collaborative projects would receive their funding directly from SERI (as they did during the partial association between 2014 and 2016).

The information network Euresearch, which is commissioned and funded by the Confederation to support Swiss participation in EU research and innovation programmes, continues to inform and advise researchers in Switzerland on submitting research applications in the 2021–2027 period.

Further information
• Latest version of the European Commission’s Implementation Strategy for Horizon Europe
• Guidelines for Participation by Researchers in Switzerland

C. Horizon 2020 (FPRI8) and other EU research and innovation measures (2014–2020)

The 8th generation of the EU framework programmes for research and innovation (Horizon 2020) lasted from 2014 to the end of 2020. However, some projects might run beyond 2020. Switzerland has been fully associated to Horizon 2020 since early 2017. A corresponding agreement covers the entire duration of the programme. This agreement also covers Switzerland’s full association to the Euratom research and training programme and Swiss participation in ITER.

Swiss participation in Horizon 2020 projects that were directly funded by SERI during the period of partial Swiss association (2014–2016) will continue to receive national funding until the end of their term. The future association status of Horizon Europe does not affect Horizon 2020 projects.

Further information
• Switzerland’s status
• Facts and Figures: Report on Swiss participation in EU research framework programmes; SERI, 2018
• Impact of Swiss participation in the EU research framework programmes; SERI 2019
D. Impact of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU on research and innovation cooperation

Horizon Europe

On 24 December 2020, the EU and the United Kingdom (UK) agreed on the "Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community, of the one Part, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, of the other Part". As part of the agreement reached between the UK and the EU, the UK has announced that it will associate to Horizon Europe (except European Innovation Council EIC, although grants from the EIC Accelerator are not excluded), such as Euratom Research & Training (R&T) Programme 2021-2025 and ITER.

As CH-UK cooperation in the field of research and innovation is already now mainly carried out through EU programmes for research and innovation, collaboration between researchers in Switzerland and the UK will continue to take place mainly through these multilateral EU programmes.

Horizon 2020

The United Kingdom’s formal departure from the EU has no impact on the ongoing Horizon 2020 projects in which UK researchers are involved. This also applies in cases where the projects run beyond 2020. British project partners and coordinators in Horizon 2020 projects can remain in the projects without incurring any restriction or financial problems.

E. Contact

For questions about direct federal funding of Swiss participation in EU projects:
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