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

Information update: 23 October 2020

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

- Switzerland has had full association in FP8 (Horizon 2020; 2014–2020) since early 2017.
- FP9 (Horizon Europe; 2021–2027) is currently in the preparatory phase. The EU institutions concerned are currently engaged in discussions to determine the legal basis and the concrete form of 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.

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

General information

The 8th generation of the EU framework programmes for research and innovation (Horizon 2020) lasts from 2014 to the end of 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.

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
B. Horizon Europe (FP9) and further European R&I initiatives (2021–2027)

Developments at EU level
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).

On 21 July 2020 the EU heads of state and government agreed a global budget of EUR 1,824.3 billion for the multiannual financial framework (MFF) and an extraordinary recovery package named Next Generation EU, designed to help EU countries rebuild their economies following the COVID-19 pandemic and to boost digital transformation and push forward a green economy. The budget proposal must still be approved by the European Parliament. The proposed budget for Horizon Europe is around EUR 91 billion, which includes payments for Next Generation EU.

The EU institutions concerned (European Commission, EU Council, European Parliament) are currently in negotiating the final details of the MFF as well as the legal basis for the EU research and innovation programmes and the actual shape that they will take.

As a non-EU member state, Switzerland does not take part in these consultations, but closely monitors their progress. A decision regarding how exactly associated countries will be able to participate is not expected before the end of the year.

The exact conditions of Swiss participation will 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.

There has so far been initial contact of a technical nature between Switzerland and the EU, but no official negotiations. The EU must first agree the legal basis for the programme and the exact nature of third-country association.

Once these are agreed, official negotiations can be held with the European Union on the conditions of Switzerland’s participation in Horizon Europe. This will presumably be the case at the end of 2020 or early 2021. SERI will provide information on future developments nearer the time.

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 approved the dispatch, which will now be debated by the National Council in the coming winter session. Provided the funding is approved by Parliament, the Federal Council can negotiate a renewal of the bilateral agreement between Switzerland and the EU on participation in the Horizon package and thus ensure that Switzerland’s association continues uninterrupted. As no official negotiations have as yet been held 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 EU or Swiss government funding) in all cases.
C. Information for researchers in Switzerland
As soon as Parliament has approved the required funding and negotiations with the EU over Horizon Europe are concluded, researchers in Switzerland will be able to see the actual scope of opportunities to take part in the programme (full association, partial association or participation as a third country).

NB: Researchers in Switzerland can already take part in the first calls for proposals in Horizon Europe.

It was also the case in the last two programme generations (FP7 and Horizon 2020) that an association agreement was only signed after the initial calls for proposals had already been launched. The agreements came into force retroactively, meaning that individual and joint projects could be funded from the very beginning of the new programme generation. The funding dispatch for the Horizon Europe package also allows SERI to finance individual researchers and research organisations participating in joint projects, even if Switzerland participates in Horizon Europe as a third country. In this case, researchers would submit their documents directly to SERI (as they did under partial association between 2014 and 2016).

The information network Euresearch, which is commissioned and funded by the Confederation, will continue to inform and advise researchers in Switzerland on submitting research applications in the 2021–2027 period.

Further information
• Latest version of the EC’s Implementation Strategy for Horizon Europe

D. Impact of the UK's withdrawal from the EU on research and innovation cooperation
The United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU does not detract from the importance of the EU framework programmes for research and innovation in the global context. Switzerland is therefore committed to participating in Horizon Europe.

Switzerland is monitoring how the United Kingdom intends to position itself in the future and will explore the possibility of more intensive cooperation in due course.

The UK will pay its compulsory contributions until the Horizon 2020 programme ends. Its withdrawal from the EU therefore has no impact on the ongoing Horizon 2020 projects in which UK researchers are involved. British project partners and coordinators in Horizon 2020 projects can remain in the projects without incurring any restriction or financial problems. Furthermore, researchers and companies from the UK can continue to apply for Horizon 2020 projects in the current year, and, if the evaluation is successful, can continue to participate or coordinate the project as before. This also applies in cases where the projects run beyond 2020.

Like Switzerland, the UK will also have to negotiate its association to Horizon Europe with the EU.

E. Contact
For questions about direct federal funding of Swiss participation in EU projects:
State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation SERI,
EU Framework Programmes Section, Tel. +41 58 463 50 50, europrogram@sbfi.admin.ch

Media enquiries:
State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation SERI
Communications, Tel. +41 58 462 45 60, medien@sbfi.admin.ch

For questions about submission of research applications:
Euresearch, Tel. +41 31 380 60 00 (9.00 am to 12.00 pm and 2.00 pm to 5.00 pm), info@euresearch.ch