



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
RESEARCH DIRECTORATE-GENERAL



Frequently asked questions

What is the EU's Research Framework Programme (FP)?

The FP is the EU's main instrument for research funding in Europe. The FP is proposed by the European Commission and adopted by Council and the European Parliament following a co-decision procedure. FPs cover a period of five years with the last year of one FP and the first year of the following FP overlapping. FPs have been implemented since 1984. The Sixth FP (FP6) will be fully operational as of January 1, 2003.

What are the main objectives of FP6?

FP6 aims to contribute to the creation of a true "European Research Area" (ERA). ERA is a vision for the future of research in Europe, an internal market for science and technology. It fosters scientific excellence, competitiveness and innovation through the promotion of better co-operation and co-ordination between relevant actors at all levels. Economic growth increasingly depends on research, and many of the present and foreseeable challenges for industry and society can no longer be solved at national level alone. At their summit in Lisbon in March 2000, heads of state and governments called for better leveraging of European research efforts through the creation of ERA. The FP is the financial instrument that will help make the European Research Area a reality.

Who decides how research money should be spent, and on what basis?

Once Council and Parliament adopt the FP, the European Commission is responsible for its implementation. There are no "national quotas" for FP funds. Other key principles are:

- the EU will only fund projects which involve several partners from different countries;
- FP funds are allocated following competitive "calls for proposals" published by the Commission on a regular basis;
- projects will only be eligible for FP funding if their scope and objectives reflect priorities as outlined in "calls for proposals";
- quality and technological relevance of projects submitted for funding are assessed by external, independent experts, each proposal is evaluated, on average, by five experts;
- FP funds are not "subsidies" to research organisations or companies, and may only be used for carefully described work or research developments.

What is the main difference between FP6 and previous research framework programmes?

Past FPs have helped to develop a culture of scientific and technological co-operation between different EU countries and they have been instrumental in achieving good research results. They have not, however, created a lasting impact on greater coherence at European level. FP6 has therefore been re-defined and streamlined with the following objectives

- concentrating European efforts on fewer priorities - in particular on areas where co-operation at European level presents clear added value;
- moving towards progressive integration of activities of all relevant participants working at different levels;
- promoting research activities designed to have a lasting, “structuring” impact;
- supporting activities that will strengthen Europe’s general scientific and technological basis;
- using the scientific potential of candidate countries to prepare and assist their accession to the EU for the benefit of European science at large.

What is the overall budget, and how will it be allocated?

The budget for the Sixth FP will be €17.5 billion. This represents close to 4% of the EU’s overall budget (2001), and 5.4% of all public (non-military) research spending in Europe.

7% of this amount (€1 230 million) will be spent on nuclear research within EURATOM framework programme.

What are the FP’s main priorities?

The FP aims for more focussed and integrated research at EU level and at structuring ERA and strengthening its foundations.

The biggest part of FP budget will be spent on “**focussing and integrating**” future research activities on seven thematic priority areas. These priorities and their respective budget allocations are as follows.

Thematic priority	Budget in million euros
Life sciences, genomics and biotechnology for health	2 255
Information society technologies	3 625
Nanotechnologies, multifunctional materials and new production processes	1 300
Aeronautics and space	1 075
Food quality and safety	685
Sustainable development, global change and ecosystems (including energy and transport research)	2 120
Citizens and governance in a knowledge-based society	225
TOTAL	11 285

€555 million are earmarked for research in support of EU policies and as a means for anticipating scientific and technological needs; €430 million will be set aside for multi-sector research activities involving Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs); and €315 million are foreseen for international scientific co-operation.

In order to better “**Structure the European Research Area**” the following budgets have been allocated:

Activities	Budget in million euros
Research and innovation	290
Human resources and mobility	1 580
Research infrastructures	655
Science and society	80
TOTAL	2 605

A further amount of €320 million will be spent on measures to “**Strengthen the foundations of the European Research Area**”. Of this, €270 million are earmarked for the “Support for the co-ordination of activities” where the EU will fund the costs of co-ordination between national and regional research programmes or activities. €50 million are foreseen to support the coherent development of research and innovation policies.

What are the "new instruments"?

So far FPs have mainly been implemented through co-operative research projects that – while appropriate at the time of their creation - had two weaknesses:

- in most cases the end of a given research project meant the end of the consortium of research partners as well;
- in many cases projects did not reach the necessary “critical mass” to have real impact – neither in scientific nor in industrial or economic terms.

To help solve these problems and to work towards creating ERA two new instruments have been designed and will be implemented in the Sixth FP: Networks of Excellence and Integrated Projects.

The philosophy of both instruments is to move from multiple project funding to the funding of coherent programmes of research activities, leaving the highest degree possible of autonomy and flexibility to European research consortia.

Networks of excellence aims at progressively integrating activities of network partners thereby creating “virtual” centres of excellence. **Integrated Projects** will be projects of substantial size, designed to help build up the “critical mass” in objective-driven research with clearly defined scientific and technological ambitions and aims.

It is furthermore foreseen to start using an instrument which has been in principle available for quite some time, but has so far been unused: the EU’s participation in research programmes undertaken by several Member States. This instrument is explicitly foreseen in Article 169 of Amsterdam Treaty.

What are rules for participation?

The “Rules for participation” are the rules that govern the practical implementation of all EU research activities under the FP. These “Rules” set out detailed provisions in relation to issues such as:

- the type and country of origin of organisations that may apply for EU funding;
- the minimum number of partners that need to be involved in a project proposal, for the project to be eligible for EU support;
- the type of instruments that will be used in the FP;
- the type of funding that might be foreseen for any selected project;
- principles for the evaluation of submitted proposals
- rules governing the contracts that the Commission will offer to successful applicants
- rules for the dissemination and use of research results obtained in EU funded research projects etc.

Like the FP, the rules for participation are decided by Council and Parliament in co-decision.

What are "calls for expression of interest"?

The Commission published on 20 March a “call for expression of interest” in order to receive as much feedback as possible, from the scientific and industrial community ideas for cutting-edge research in line with the priorities and new instruments in FP6.

More precisely: the call for expression of interest invited research teams and consortia to submit to the Commission outlines for projects they may intend to submit for funding once the formal “calls for proposals” are published later this year. This initiative is meant to make sure the policy objectives of the European Commission and the commitment of the scientific and industrial community finally match.

It is the first time that this new approach has been taken.

The reaction to this unique “call” confirmed that the Commission opted for the right approach: more than 15.000 proposals were submitted. These will be analysed over the summer; the results will feed into the definition of the calls for proposals.

What are calls for proposals?

Since the FP budget represents taxpayer’s money, the implementation of the FP must be carried out in an open and transparent way, ensuring equal access and fair treatment to all applicants. This is ensured through “calls for proposals” which are published in the EU’s “Official Journal” and on the Commission’s relevant Internet pages. Research teams and consortia wanting to submit a proposal in response to such a “call” would normally have a minimum of three months to elaborate and submit their proposal.

Following receipt of proposals, these will as a first step be checked against the relevant eligibility criteria such as:

- has the proposal been submitted before the deadline?
- are proposing partners eligible for EU funding?
- are proposing partners established in one of the eligible countries?
- is the subject of the proposed research eligible?
- are ethical aspects of the proposed research been taken into due consideration?

Thereafter external experts will proceed with the evaluation of the scientific and technological quality of the proposed project. External experts will then submit to the Commission a shortlist of projects that they recommend for funding.

How much money can I expect to receive once my proposal has been selected for funding?

This can vary substantially, depending on the type of project, the number of project partners and the ambition and scope of the research to be carried out. Generally speaking it can be said that the Commission’s aim to concentrate efforts and to build up the necessary critical mass through co-operative efforts will lead to bigger projects, bigger consortia and therefore also to more substantial funding for each of the project partners. The Commission will nevertheless still devote appropriate support to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and smaller projects, but also in a more consistent and co-ordinated way.

Who can apply for EU research support? Who stands a realistic chance to get it?

Any legal entity, i.e. any natural or legal person established under national, international or EU law can apply and receive support.

In practical terms this means that universities, research institutes, SMEs and big companies are equally eligible – as are potential users of technologies and technological applications. Of course all of them have to meet the essential requirements of the rules for participation. The FP is definitely not reserved for academia, nor for big national or international companies.

Is there any kind of assistance or support provided by the Commission or national authorities to help applicants who have no experience with “Brussels” or who feel lost in all the new rules and regulations?

The European Commission is committed to open, transparent and accessible information and does handle general and specific enquiries. Most of the general information is now available via Internet; individual and more detailed enquiries are best sent in by fax or e-mail.

Enquirers who would prefer to use their own language when enquiring about the FP and European research at large can contact the “National Contact Points (NCP)” in their respective countries.

National authorities designate NCPs. The network of NCPs for the Sixth FP is currently under construction.

What has the “Science and society” activity in the FP to do with the other high level activities in the field of research and technological developments?

Industrialised societies are increasingly dependent on research activities and on highly sophisticated technologies. The omnipresence of science and technologies creates opportunities, but also risks. These risks are apparent – not least because of the public debate following the “mad cow disease” crisis, the debate about genetically modified organisms or the use of stem cells for medical research.

The aim of the FP is to support high level research and technological development with an informed public debate about the role of science in modern societies. This debate is planned to lead to a better understanding of scientific issues and of the scientific process by the general public, and also to a better understanding by scientists of the general public’s concern in relation to science and research. Developing a better understanding of the role of science in society and bringing science and scientific subjects closer to the citizen is also expected to help increasing young people’s interest in science and scientific careers.

Travelling scholars are an integral part of Europe’s scientific history. Why all of a sudden does the EU invest so heavily into the mobility of scientists?

Promoting the mobility of scientists (and thereby promoting their training) does not start with FP 6. Mobility programmes have been among the very successful activities of past FPs. The main weakness of these past activities was – similar to other actions of past FPs – that they were not part of an integral, ambitious overall concept. This is planned to change. The future scheme will not be limited to doctoral students or postdocs; it will be open to applicants from third countries; it will actively promote the return to Europe of European scientists working in a third country so as to counteract the “brain drain”; institutions will be able to apply for funds to host researchers from abroad as much as the individual scientist who wants to work in a laboratory outside his or her own country. Last, but not least: under the new scheme all structural problems which have been obstacles to researchers’ mobility will be addressed. This is true for social security and taxation as much as for career patterns and perspectives, where the respective national systems are essentially closed to applicants from other countries – including from other Member States.

This commitment to the promotion of human resources and their mobility is based on the idea that because of the increasing complexity and interdependence of modern science scientists will increasingly need a strong international component as part of their scientific pedigree. That there is no good reason to believe that such a high level scientific pedigree can only be obtained in the United States. Investing into the development of human resources in science and for science by promoting their mobility is insofar an essential contribution to the ERA objectives.

Can the EU really afford to invest heavily into the building and maintenance of research infrastructures?

The building and maintenance of the essential research infrastructures in Europe will remain the responsibility of national authorities and other investors. FP activities related to “research infrastructures” will serve a different purpose.

Research infrastructures are essential but also very costly. They are therefore not omnipresent. The FP money is planned to help research infrastructures become the essential “backbone” of the ERA. In this sense it is important to plan, build, maintain and use research infrastructures in a co-ordinated way for the benefit of a maximum number of researchers and teams from all parts of Europe. This is what the future FP action in this field is all about. This concept is based on a broad definition of what “research infrastructures” mean. Whereas in the past these were often associated with big installations and machines (in particular in the field of physics) a modern and more appropriate definition of research infrastructures would include big databases, major scientific collections and –

obviously – major communication networks which are essential instruments for the conducting of high level research involving individuals and teams in different locations.

The FP promises to promote scientific excellence. Who is going to establish the criteria for “excellence”?

First and most importantly: the FP will not promote scientific excellence in the sense of promoting “national champions”.

The assessment of the scientific excellence (in particular in the context of the planned “networks of excellence”) will be entrusted to internationally recognised scientists and experts in a given area; in other words: the quality of proposals will not be judged as part of a bureaucratic or political process, but will be the result of expert analysis and deliberations. Experts will assess the “excellence” and scientific profile of each individual member of a given network; they will look into the excellence of the network’s joint programme of activities, including whether the network is likely to achieve the necessary “critical mass”; they will evaluate the excellence and relevance of the proposed research activities of the network; and they will take a close look at the quality of the proposed network management.

All this will make sure that in the context of FP6 the word “excellence” will have a real meaning.

For further information please visit: http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/fp6/index_en.html

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