

The DFG's Strategy for Europe

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Research cooperation in Europe

Cross-border cooperation is a cornerstone of research in Europe. Due to the fact that the European Union (EU) and the EU member states share responsibility for research, science policy and research funding are shaped at both national and EU level. EU institutions, the national governments of the EU member states and associated European countries, as well as research organisations, have joined forces in realising a „European Research Area“ (ERA). The ERA includes the regular adoption of joint funding programmes, the EU Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation, the joint establishment of consistent frameworks and standards for research, such as under the Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe, and the coordination of relevant national initiatives. The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) as the central self-governing research funding organisation in Germany engages at European level based on the needs of the German research community. The DFG's Strategy for Europe outlines its engagement in the coming years.

The DFG's commitment to research in Europe

The DFG's three main areas of responsibility are as follows:

- ▶ The DFG selects and funds incoming research proposals, enabling fair, science-led competition.
- ▶ The DFG adopts strategic funding initiatives, either to support specific research fields or else in response to acute research needs or to suggestions for expanding collaborative ventures in certain cases.
- ▶ The DFG helps ensure that the appropriate conditions and standards are established for academic research.

These areas of responsibility also apply in principle to the DFG's international activities beyond the German research system. An additional factor to be addressed in Europe is the interplay between the national and EU levels of the research system. The Strategy for Europe therefore defines guiding principles and objectives for the DFG's activities in the coming years within each area of responsibility.

I. National and EU funding

The DFG strives for a European Research Area in which collaborative ventures between researchers in Germany and partners in other European countries can be funded as efficiently and flexibly as possible. This is a shared task undertaken by both the DFG and the national funding organisations on a bilateral level as well as by the EU, not least under its Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation. The European Research Area is particularly powerful when strong and autonomous national research and funding systems, each with its own priorities, funding approaches and cooperation opportunities, go hand in hand with additional funding opportunities through the EU Framework Programmes. The aim is for funding opportunities and research collaborations to cover all types of research, ranging from basic research and thematic research through to applied research and experimental development. This requires sufficient investment at both national and EU level.

1 Expanding Research Collaboration in Europe

The DFG will seek to further expand its bilateral and multilateral funding opportunities in collaboration with funding organisations in Europe. Together with its partner organisations, the DFG will identify the most suitable format for each cooperation, which may differ depending on the degree to which calls are thematically restricted, the review procedures involved and the budgets available. When it comes to expanding cooperation with less research-intensive European countries, the DFG may consider additional measures to provide direct support national funding organisations (*see Objective 5*).

2 Active Involvement in Weave Initiative

The DFG will continue to contribute actively to the Weave Initiative. Weave currently enables researchers from Germany to submit a collaborative research proposal with one or two European partners to any of the participating funders (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Poland, Switzerland), which is then reviewed by only one of the funders. This "lead agency procedure" considerably simplifies cross-border cooperation between researchers in Europe while at the same time reducing the burden on reviewers. The DFG will negotiate with other funding organisations that have signed the Weave Agreement in order

to expand the funding opportunities available to German researchers. It will also constructively support membership talks with other interested funding organisations.

3 **Joint Principles for Research Cooperation with Non-European Partners**

In consultation with national funding organisations at the European level, such as within the framework of Science Europe, the DFG will advocate joint value-based principles in research cooperation with non-European partners, particularly regarding risk management. The DFG will advocate an approach that focuses on de-risking rather than de-coupling and that is based on a comprehensive assessment of the risks versus the expected benefits of each cooperation on a case-by-case basis, in line with the recommendations set out in "Dealing with Risks in International Research Cooperation"¹. The ultimate responsibility for whether or not to engage in international research cooperation should remain with the research organisations themselves.

4 **Better Funding Opportunities for Basic Research Collaborations under FP10**

In the negotiations for the next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10, 2028–2034), the DFG will advocate better funding opportunities for basic research collaborations while at the same time ensuring that such funding is designed not to incentivize the reduction of potential national funding. There is a particular need at EU level for a new instrument that allows researchers to work on topics they choose themselves in a bottom-up manner in transnational research consortia without being bound to specific requirements.

II. Strategic funding activities in Europe

The DFG strives for a European Research Area that is resilient to crises and can swiftly respond to additional strategic needs in research funding. Europe's funding organisations should contribute to this both through their own strategic funding initiatives and by participat-

ing in strategic funding initiatives such as the "European Partnerships" under the EU Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation. In addition, there is a need for some strategic leeway within the EU Framework Programmes so as to be able to respond to future strategic needs that cannot yet be anticipated.

5 **Support for Less Research-intensive European Countries**

Even though several programmes at EU and national level have addressed the problem in recent years, the research and investment gap within Europe is still too large. The DFG will assess how it can better support national funding organisations in less research-intensive European countries through its own initiatives in the future. Following a science diplomacy approach, this will include cooperation with countries which are significant for Germany and the EU not just from the point of scientific research itself put also in terms of science policy.

6 **Enhancing EU Co-Financing Opportunities**

In the negotiations for the next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10, 2028–2034), the DFG will advocate better opportunities for EU co-financing of transnational calls issued by national funding organisations. Although Horizon Europe allows for co-funding joint calls through Co-funded Partnerships, the broad range of partners and activities has reduced their appeal for national research funders. A new instrument for joint calls could encourage national funders to engage in "European Partnerships" in order to promote specific research fields.

7 **Establishing a Budget Reserve and a Specific Intervention Fund for Researchers at Risk under FP10**

The DFG will advocate a general and sufficient budget reserve to cover unforeseen expenses within FP10 as well as a specific intervention fund to support researchers at risk. The latter will enable swift and independent support for researchers at risk, regardless of specific conflict situations. The DFG will also continue to actively support the rebuilding of Ukraine's research system and work towards coordinating the necessary measures.

¹ Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (2023): Dealing with Risks in International Research Cooperation. Recommendations from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, September 2023 [www.dfg.de/resource/blob/289704/585cb3b48bb8e9f5b6e57e0e0a0d700e/risiken-int-kooperationen-en-data.pdf].

III. Shaping sound framework conditions for research at EU level

The DFG strives for a European Research Area which offers the world's best framework conditions for research, not least by adequately involving the research community. Since research-related framework conditions are mainly set at both national and EU level, this requires sensible integration of national and EU legislation and a commitment on the part of the DFG and other research organisations to engage directly at EU level. Further development of the European Research Area should be based on science-backed initiatives undertaken by the European Commission and member states as well as on the activities of the research community and the research organisations themselves.

8 Contributing to the ERA Policy Agenda

The DFG will engage in designing and implementing specific measures of the 2nd ERA Policy Agenda (2025–2027), primarily at the European level through Science Europe, and nationally in cooperation with the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). In developing these measures, the DFG will advocate closer involvement of the research community, improved coordination of the ERA Policy Agenda with existing research initiatives, and comprehensive inclusion of research-related framework conditions.

9 Stronger Commitment to Engage at EU Level

The DFG will engage more actively in shaping research-related framework conditions directly at EU level and create appropriate structures to do so. Within the Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany, it will also advocate a stronger stance on EU science policy issues. The DFG will ensure that the European dimension is taken into account in predominantly national issues, while the national dimension should also be considered in topics which are primarily dealt with at EU level.

10 Shaping EU Legislation Relevant to Research

The DFG will contribute increasingly to EU legislative processes which are relevant to research but initiated outside the research sector so as to ensure that the voice of the research community is heard more clearly in these areas as well.

This includes legislation on topics such as animal welfare, the use of new breeding techniques and regulation in the digital sector – in particular in connection with legislation for which the exclusive competence lies with the EU. The DFG will continue to ensure that science-based arguments are incorporated into these areas.

About us

The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) is the central self-governing research funding organisation in Germany. The DFG serves the sciences and humanities and promotes research of the highest quality in all its forms and disciplines at universities and non-university research institutions. The focus is on funding projects developed by the academic community itself in the area of knowledge-driven research. The DFG funds research projects, creates competitive opportunities and conducts procedures for review, evaluation, selection and decision-making in connection with research proposals, thereby helping to shape the overall conditions and standards of academic research. The DFG maintains close dialogue with society, politics and business and supports the transfer of knowledge. It advises state institutions and institutions working in the public interest on issues relating to academic research and research policy. Moreover, the DFG takes particular care to promote international cooperation, early-career researchers, gender equality and diversity in the sciences and humanities.



Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)

German Research Foundation

Kennedyallee 40 • 53175 Bonn

Postal address: 53170 Bonn

Phone: +49 228 885-1

postmaster@dfg.de

www.dfg.de/en