



UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES ARE REFORMING EUROPE

Arene's objectives for
the European election 2024



Universities of applied sciences are reforming Europe

Bolder investments are needed in research, innovation, and education

Applied RDI activities at universities of applied sciences produce fresh solutions to the societal challenges faced in Europe

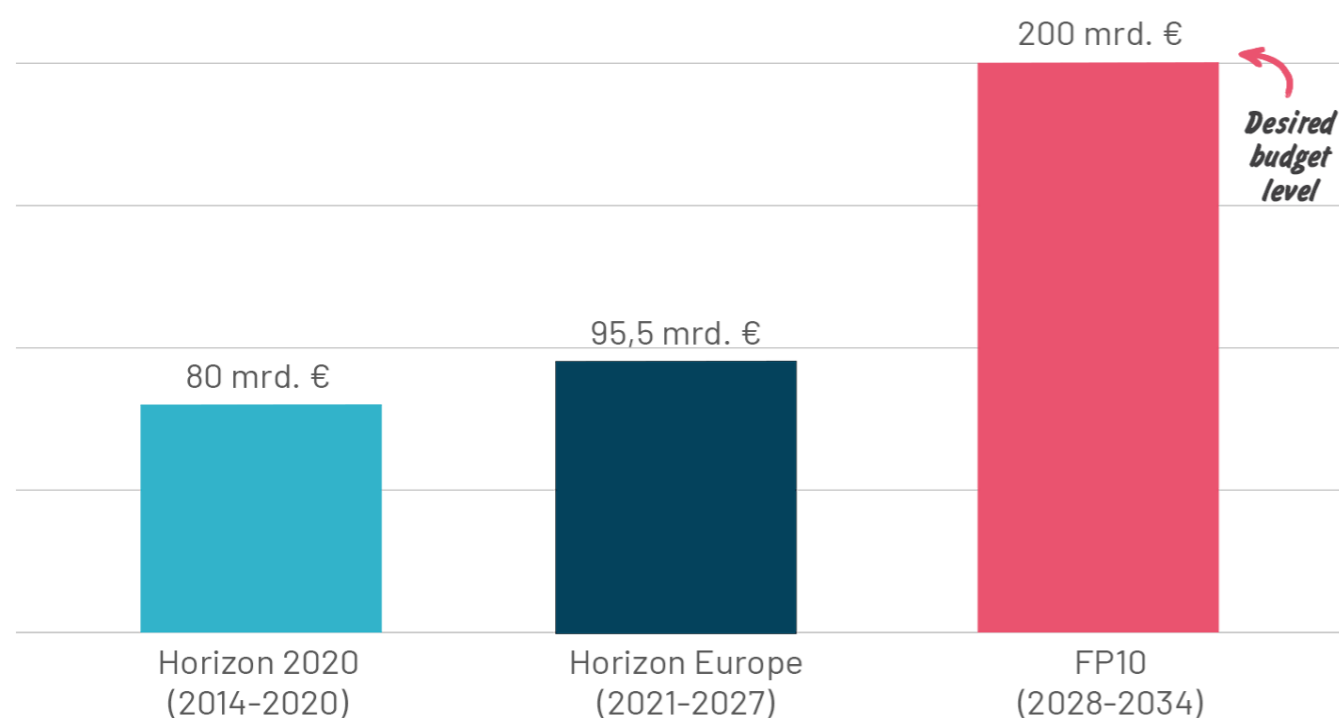
Europe's strategic competitiveness, technological leadership, and ability to cope with the twin transition depend on the EU's contribution to RDI activities.

The funding of the next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10) for the 2028-2034 period must be doubled to EUR 200 billion. Achieving Finland's national RDI target requires multiplying the amount of competitive funding received by Finnish universities of applied sciences.

The next EU Framework Programme should reaffirm the value of high-quality, multidisciplinary, and applied RDI activities. Impact is a key indicator for assessing the excellence of applied research, creating conditions for the economic growth and new jobs in the short and medium term.



The desired budget of the next EU framework Programme for R&I



The education provided by universities of applied sciences fosters future-oriented skills and strengthens the competitiveness of Europe

The development of the European higher education cooperation must recognise each Member States' dual systems in higher education and thus take into account the special features of the universities of applied sciences.

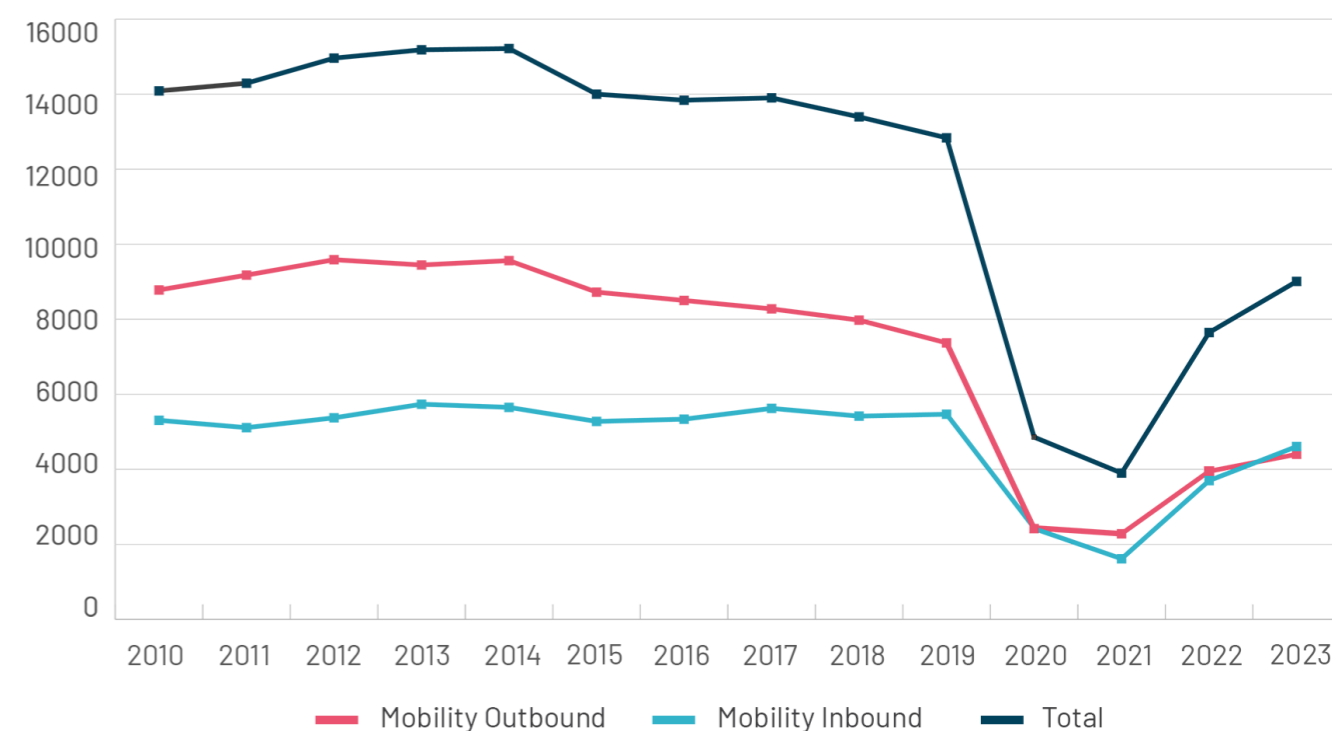
Education is the strongest investment in the future of Europe. Increased efforts will be needed to develop and implement the European Education Area.

The budget for the Erasmus+ programme should be doubled for the next funding period 2028-2034. The programme plays a key role in supporting both students' and staff's international aspirations at the universities of applied sciences. In addition, sufficient funding must be secured for the long-term development and success of the "European Universities" alliances.

The number of Erasmus+ mobility periods must be increased to reach the EU's 2030 mobility target for higher education: the share of students participating in mobility needs to be increased to 25% of the higher education level graduates. The mobility figures of the Finnish UAS have deteriorated in recent years, and they must now be restored to around 8,000 outbound student mobility exchanges annually.



The development of the student mobility exchanges at the universities of applied sciences in 2010-2022



The seamless connection between education and RDI activities within the universities of applied sciences strengthens Europe's resilience

All new EU policies and regulations should foster an environment where education, research, and innovation activities can prosper.

The silos between the EU's RDI policy and EU's education policy must be overcome and dismantled. Both policy areas should remain in the portfolio of a single EU Commissioner.

Synergies between EU funding programmes should be further simplified, and these possibilities should be communicated more clearly to the applicants.

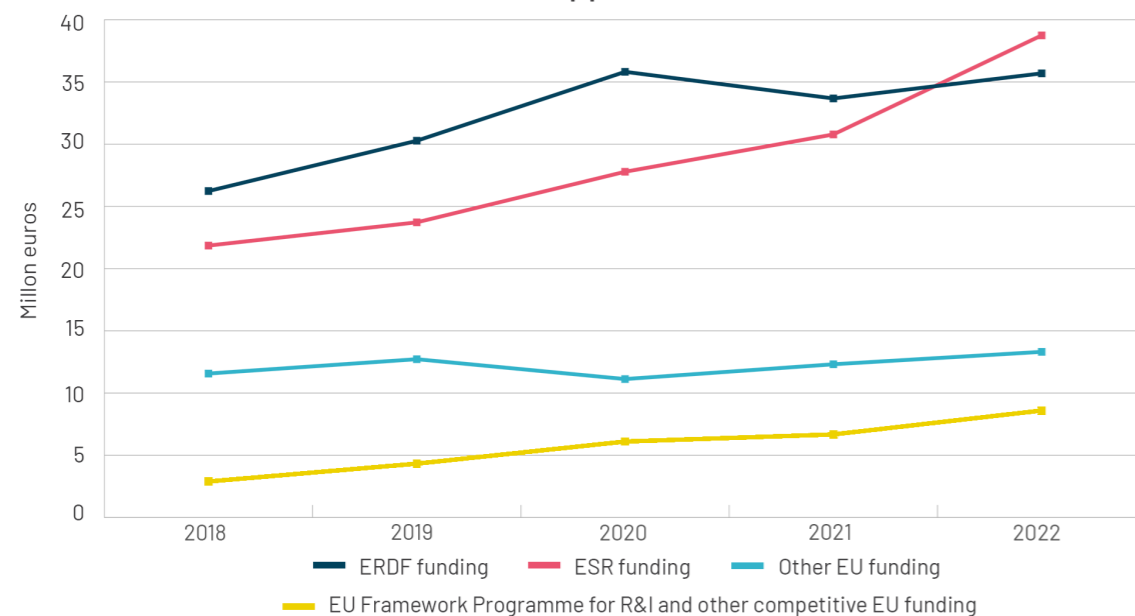
The smooth unification of research, development, innovation and learning activities is a typical operating model among the Finnish universities of applied sciences. The model strengthens the students' critical problem-solving abilities, the employability of students and the societal impact of RDI activities.



The European structural and investment funds should continue to provide funding opportunities for the regional RDI activities of the Finnish universities of applied sciences throughout the next EU funding cycle (MFF 2028-2034).

The new Finnish MEPs should become active members in the Committees of the European Parliament that concern the future of EU's research & innovation policy and EU's education policy (i.e. ITRE and CULT committees).

The development of the amount of EU R&I funding received by the Finnish universities of applied sciences in 2018-2022



Detailed objectives:

Europe's success is dependent on high-quality and impactful RDI activities

- 1) European research and innovation policy must be placed high in the priority list of the forthcoming European Commission's strategic agenda (2024-2029). Without sufficient investments in the EU's RDI policy, Europe's strategic competitiveness and technological leadership will be under threat. Sufficient EU level investment in RDI policy will enhance Europe's capacity to both anticipate and adapt to current and future crises.
- 2) Sufficient budgetary resources must be secured for the next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10) between 2028 and 2034. Its total funding must be increased to EUR 200 billion. Currently, around 70% of high-quality project applications have been left without funding under the Horizon Europe programme. In addition, a sufficient budget envelope will enhance our strategic foresight into unexpected crises.
- 3) Applied research is well placed to meet the strict quality criteria for RDI activities and promote excellence in the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. The funding under the next Framework Programme must place a great emphasis on high-quality, multidisciplinary, and applied RDI activities. Universities of applied sciences have a lot to offer for the development and piloting of concrete solutions to the societal challenges posed by the green and digital transitions. Applied research creates favourable opportunities for collaboration with the corporate world, which in turn enhances the societal impact of research.
- 4) Universities of applied sciences are committed to the development of the European Research Area, which promotes high-quality and reliable operating conditions for cross-border research and innovation collaboration between different EU Member States. The measures that are of high interest for the universities of applied sciences include the development of qualitative criteria for research assessment (CoARA), the support for the more efficient valorisation of RDI results, and the promotion of career path opportunities for researchers.
- 5) The structural silos between the EU's RDI and education policies must be overcome and dismantled. The link between RDI activities and the development of higher education could be made more seamless. To support the policy environment for higher education at the EU level, it is vital to foster close cooperation and coordination between various Directorates-General of the European Commission during the planning phase of any new initiatives (DG RTD, DG EAC, DG EMPL, DG REGIO, DG EMPL). The EU's RDI policy and EU's education policy should continue to remain in the portfolio of a single EU Commissioner.

- 6) Synergies between EU funding programmes should be further simplified. The Commission needs to communicate these possibilities for enhanced synergies more clearly to the applicants and higher education institutions. We place a particular emphasis on further synergies between the EU's framework programme for R&I and Erasmus+ programme. Yet, synergies with the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund plus should also be encouraged in alignment with the smart specialisation strategies.

The European structural and investment funds should continue to provide funding opportunities for the regional applied RDI activities of the Finnish universities of applied sciences throughout the next EU funding cycle (MFF 2028-2034). This would be needed to bolster vibrant regional innovation ecosystems and intensify the European cooperation between them.

- 7) The new Finnish MEPs should become active members in the European Parliament's Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) during the new parliamentary term (2024-2029). This would help ensure that the Finnish higher education sector gets its voice heard in the debates on the future of the EU's RDI policy in the European Parliament.

Future-proof skills and high-quality education form the basis of European competitiveness and innovation

- 1) The development of the European higher education cooperation must be based on the recognition of the Member States' dual higher education systems, thus taking into account the special features of their universities of applied sciences and the nature of the education they provide. While Member States are responsible for their national education systems in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the EU's complementary competences must be strengthened as far as deepening successful cooperation between European higher education institutions.

The universities of applied sciences in Finland are committed to the strategic priorities of the European Education Area and to the further development of the Education Area by 2030. At the same time, we will clarify and strengthen the position of universities of applied sciences as higher education institutions of equal merit to universities.

- 2) Education is the strongest investment in the future of Europe. The budget for the Erasmus+ programme must be doubled for the next funding period (2028-2034). The programme supports both the student and staff mobility, while also fostering fruitful collaboration between higher education institutions. At the same time, the size of the grants should be increased, and the administrative processes should be made less burdensome for the applicants.

- 3) Increasing the Erasmus+ programme's budget is particularly important for Finland. The covid pandemic as well as the increased social pressure to shorten the overall study duration have discouraged many young adults from engaging in international mobility and student exchanges. The Erasmus+ programme is a key instrument for universities of applied sciences to restore student mobility figures to the previous heights of the last decade (approx. 7,000-8,000 outbound exchange periods per year). This target is also in line with the new EU 2030 mobility target where the share of students participating in mobility should be increased to 25% of higher education-level graduates.

- 4) The next Commission must commit itself to the comprehensive and long-term development of the "European Universities" initiative. The Commission must promote dynamic dialogue and the exchanges of best practices between the forthcoming 60 European Universities alliances as well as with those European higher education institutions that will not be able to take part in these alliances. The Finnish universities of applied sciences should be given as many possibilities as possible to participate in the collaboration of these "European Universities" alliances and learn from their latest developments.

The long-term development prospects for these alliances are dependent on sufficient Erasmus+ funding and other complementary funding sources during the next multiannual financial framework (2028-2034). We support the Commission's plans to create a new investment path for these alliances, as it would increase the predictability of the alliances' long-term funding and enhance synergies between funding programmes.

- 5) In honour of the European Year of Skills 2023, we call for the EU's skills policy objectives to be placed high on the EU's strategic agenda (2024-2029). This is needed to achieve the EU 2030 social targets of at least 60% adults in training every year and at least 78% in employment. Universities of applied sciences should be offered diverse EU funding sources to support their efforts in continuous learning. At the same, skilled workers should be guaranteed opportunities for updating and recognising their competences across Europe.
- 6) The new Finnish MEPs should become active members in the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) during the new parliamentary term (2024-2029), especially as there were no Finnish MEPs in the CULT Committee during the current term. This would help ensure that the special features and interests of the Finnish higher education system are taken into consideration in the European debate.

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