

Pre-draft proposal for a European Partnership under Horizon Europe

Pandemic Preparedness

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About this draft

In the course of 2021 Commission services asked potential partners to further elaborate proposals for the 2023/24 candidate European Partnerships identified during the strategic planning of Horizon Europe. These proposals have been developed by potential partners based on common guidance and template, taking into account the initial concepts developed by the Commission and feedback received from Member States during early consultation¹. The Commission Services have guided revisions during drafting to facilitate alignment with the overall EU political ambition and compliance with the criteria for Partnerships.

This document is a stable draft of the partnership proposal, released for the purpose of ensuring transparency of information on the current status of preparation (including on the process for developing the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda). As such, it aims to contribute to further collaboration, synergies and alignment between partnership candidates, as well as more broadly with related R&I stakeholders in the EU, and beyond where relevant.

This informal document does not reflect the final views of the Commission, nor pre-empt the formal decision-making (comitology or legislative procedure) on the establishment of European Partnerships.

In the next steps of preparations, the Commission Services will further assess these proposals against the selection criteria for European Partnerships. The final decision on launching a Partnership will depend on progress in their preparation (incl. compliance with selection criteria) and the formal decisions on European Partnerships (linked with the adoption of Strategic Plan, work programmes, and legislative procedures, depending on the form). Key precondition is the existence of an agreed Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda / Roadmap. The launch of a Partnership is also conditional to partners signing up to final, commonly agreed objectives and committing the resources and investments needed from their side to achieve them.

The remaining issues will be addressed in the context of the development of the Strategic Research and Innovation Agendas/ Roadmaps, and as part of the overall policy (notably in the respective legal frameworks). In particular, it is important that all Partnerships further develop their framework of objectives. All Partnerships need to have a well-developed logical framework with concrete objectives and targets and with a set of Key Performance Indicators to monitor achievement of objectives and the resources that are invested.

Aspects related to implementation, programme design, monitoring and evaluation system will be streamlined and harmonised at a later stage across initiatives to ensure compliance with the implementation criteria, comparability across initiatives and to simplify the overall landscape.

In case you would like to receive further information about this initiative, please contact:

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¹ https://www.era-learn.eu/documents/final_report_ms_partnerships.pdf

1. General information

1.1. Draft title of the partnership

Horizon Europe Partnership on pandemic preparedness: “Building a European strategic REsearch and innovation Area in Direct synergY with EU and international initiatives for Pandemic Preparedness”, Acronym: BE READY

1.2. Lead entity (main contact)

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1.4. Summary (max 500 characters)

This partnership aims to improve the EU’s preparedness to predict and respond to emerging infectious health threats by better coordinating funding for research and innovation at EU, national (and regional) level towards jointly agreed objectives and an agreed strategic research and innovation agenda (SRIA).

2. Context, objective, expected impacts

2.1. Context and problem definition

The COVID-19 pandemic illustrated the global lack of preparedness and how unilateral research initiatives may lead to a fragmented research landscape. There is substantial room for improvement, in terms of efficiency gains, in the development of the highly needed evidence to guide policy actions when facing an emergency. The first “ERAvsCORONA” action plan² agreed between Ministries responsible for Research and Innovation sets out key measures to which the Commission and Members States committed in order to coordinate, share and jointly increase support for research & innovation, in line with the objectives and tools of the European Research Area (ERA). Coordination is an important prerequisite for stepping up global cooperation, essential to tackle further health threats.

2.2. Common vision, objectives and expected impacts

The expected future European partnership for pandemic preparedness should aim to improve the EU’s preparedness to predict and respond to emerging infectious health threats by better coordinating

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/covid-firsteravscorona_actions.pdf

funding for research and innovation at EU, national (and regional) level towards common objectives and an agreed Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda. It will also contribute directly to EU priorities and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Such a partnership should contribute to building a coherent ERA, enabling Member States, Associated Countries and the European Commission to rapidly and jointly support research and innovation in pandemic preparedness. Aligned around a multi-annual Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda with common objectives for research and innovation in pandemic preparedness, the prospective partners – in close collaboration with ECDC, EMA and other relevant actors – will define research needs in the medium- to long-term. The Partnership is expected to build on existing pandemic preparedness networks, and work in synergy with the Health Emergency Response Authority (HERA). Collaboration with the private sector is anticipated.

2.3. Necessity for a European Partnership

The COVID-19 pandemic has confirmed and further highlighted the importance of planning and investing in research and innovation before a health crisis occurs. In response to the political priorities and recovery plan of the Union, “Creating a more resilient, inclusive and democratic European Society” is one of the key strategic orientations for EU research and innovation for the period 2021-2024. Dialogue and collaboration between Member States, relevant organisations and stakeholders before an outbreak are key to support international and national research plans and infrastructures. In this view, the preparation of the expected future European Partnership for pandemic preparedness should contribute to build an European Research and Innovation Area (ERA) to rapidly and jointly support research and innovation in pandemic preparedness.

For this purpose, the main goal of BE READY is to establish a consolidated research and innovation framework to improve the EU’s preparedness to predict and respond to emerging infectious health threats by better coordinating funding for research and innovation at EU, national (and regional) level towards common objectives and an agreed Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda.

2.4. Partner composition and target groups

The activities of BE READY will be conducted by a group of organisations of public domain from different countries with complementary expertise and policy area ranging from Public Health Organisations, Ministries of Science and Health, Innovation to organisations for Environmental matters. All partners have a key role in their respective countries in preparedness and response activities. A larger community of stakeholders, EU and International initiatives related to Pandemic Preparedness will be closely linked to the initiative.

3. Planned implementation

3.1. Activities

In order to fully deliver its objectives and achieve its expected outcomes, the partnership will cover four major activities:

1. Agree and deliver on the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for pandemic preparedness;

- This research should lead to innovations, by developing new preventive, diagnostic, and therapeutic counter measures, ensuring competitiveness of the European Union, joint development and industrial transfers, and the potential creation of innovative companies with high-added-value to create value for the results of this world-class research, on a European level. The Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for pandemic preparedness should focus on two main axes. The first one will focus on Research and Health whereas the second one will take into account Health&Bio-Tech Research and Innovation.
- Concerning the Research and Health part, the priority objectives will be to develop a plan to prevent or to achieve efficient and integrated control of EID, both on an individual and global level. It aims to develop actions through a One Health approach that will contribute to shedding light on the basic molecular processes involved in infections by pathogenic microorganisms and their transmission from one individual to another, to predict, prevent, or control emerging phenomena at the global level, and thus directly or indirectly making our communities more resilient to emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases. The proposed approach is structured around two timeframes: a) response during the acute crisis phase (emerging or re-emerging event, epidemic or, indeed, pandemic); b) basic science and applied research in between epidemics, in order to prepare a response to future crises, and to analyse the determining factors of the development and spread of emerging events.
- Regarding the Health&Bio-Tech Research and Innovation, it is needed to identify key emerging Health Technologies and Biotechnologies that enables innovative solutions to tackle the main challenges of pandemic preparedness. These enabling technologies for translational research and accelerated, effective and efficient innovation pathways, mainly focus on:
 - Designing and developing countermeasures, such as preventive measures, vaccines, fast and reliable diagnostics, new or repurposed therapeutics or prophylactics, monitoring tools at population level, digital pharma, personal protective equipment & digital solutions to increase Europe's strategic autonomy, etc. and their acceptability and uptake;
 - New solutions to increase Europe's autonomy of supplies, e.g. pharmaceuticals and medical equipment;
 - New R&I strategies to create a more agile public health and healthcare response in public health emergency situations, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), machine learning and robotics;
 - Better dissemination and uptake of evidence across the broader public to tackle misinformation, which in itself undermines policy responses (e.g. anti-vax communities);
 - Data analytics, AI, Robotics for Smart & Phygital solutions to assist understanding, tracking, monitoring and management of pandemics in synergy with EU Health Data Space;
 - Public health measures (including modelling) and their impact on social resilience, mental health and vulnerable groups;
 - Applying a cross-cutting, interdisciplinary One Health innovation approach;

- Promoting EU-wide infrastructures, such as EU wide vaccine trials, pan European cohorts and data portals, improved data collection, methodology and tools, data sharing and harmonization across sectors, etc.
- 2. Build and maintain the collaboration framework among the partners of the Partnership, ensuring the early involvement of Member States and stakeholders in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and eventual phasing out of R&I partnerships;
- 3. Establish coordination and collaboration with HERA:
 - HERA will be the authority tasked with ensuring the development, manufacturing, procurement, and equitable distribution of key medical countermeasures, which include vaccines, antibiotics, medical equipment, chemical antidotes, therapeutics, diagnostic tests and personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves and masks. Its main missions will be to strengthen coordination between the EU and member states in both preparedness and crisis response, as well as addressing vulnerabilities and strategic dependencies within the EU related to the development, production, procurement, stockpiling and distribution of medical countermeasures.
 - To achieve the goals of HERA, access to information will be essential. To be prepared for any future pandemic, a coherent overview of what measures and initiatives have been launched in response to the current pandemic across Europe and beyond is needed. To create and keep such an overview, the Pandemic Response Observatory established by the CSA in preparation to the partnership will be maintained, providing an overview of the reported intervention plans during the current pandemic.
 - The observatory will develop a database that addresses various aspects including an inventory of reviews (evaluations, intra and after actions reviews), projects, networks and initiatives taken in EU Member States (MS) and Associated Countries (AC), European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) with respect to pandemic preparedness and response (preparedness, prediction, treatment, prevention, response, diagnostics, surveillance, modelling, generating new scientific knowledge, evidence for policy advice ...). In addition, an inventory of available infrastructures across Europe with respect to pandemic preparedness and response will be established including future capacities developed in member states funded by HERA incubator grants.
- 4. Actively engage with relevant stakeholders and initiatives in the area of pandemic preparedness at EU and International level.
 - Approaching other European and international level research and innovation initiatives, such as e.g. G20 and G7 initiatives, UN SDGs actions, GloPID-R, WHO R&D blueprint, ACT-Accelerator, EU Health Data Space, Innovative Health Initiative, EU Research Infrastructures, the expected future European partnerships on Transforming Health and Care Systems, One Health antimicrobial resistance, ERA for Health research and Animal Health and Welfare, or other relevant projects funded under Horizon 2020 or Horizon Europe, will be crucial.
 - For this purpose, building on the experience of consortium partners who participate in, and in some instances coordinate, manifold European and International initiatives and instruments across the health&bio science and technology, a database of relevant EU-level and international projects and activities, objectives and contacts will be created by the CSA preparing the partnership, and constantly updated. For each EU/international initiative

identified, an analysis of potential synergies and collaborations with them will be performed in order to ensure a targeted cross-talk aimed at providing inputs on (1) what kind of common activities can be developed, (2) how can the different action plans can be aligned and (3) how a sustainable cooperation can be reached.

3.2. Resources

To be developed

3.3. Governance

To be developed

3.4. Openness and transparency

The Partnership will maximise its impacts by involving all relevant partners and stakeholders beyond the narrow composition of core partners and by remaining open during its lifetime. In this view, establishing a dialogue and promoting networking and synergies with all relevant actors in the area of pandemic preparedness will be crucial to foster transparent communication, increase mutual awareness and trust for the benefit of the EU Partnership on Pandemic Preparedness. The identification, contact and dialogue with potential national and funding organisations will be explored firstly from countries already involved in the preparatory CSA but also from those that are not yet partners of the project. The CSA will target its attention to organisations within the EU, as well as in other parts of the world. Collaboration with the latter will be pursued, not only because they may face similar challenges, but most importantly because they may have developed solutions of potential value to Europe, and vice versa.

Different means of communication and dissemination strategies adapted to the different stakeholders and players will be developed. Furthermore, a dedicated partnership website and social media will allow to maintain an information channel and share information about the work plans, protocols, data, results, strategic developments and other outcomes.