




Summary Results of the 1st European Partnership Stakeholder Forum

28/11/2022



The first Partnership Stakeholder Forum, organised by ERA-LEARN in collaboration with the European Commission brought together more than 250 on site participants, while more than 250 watched the web-streaming of the plenary and parallel sessions. This was the first get-together of the partnership community (including partnerships, Commission services, ministries national/regional funding agencies and research and innovation actors) after an interruption of 2.5 years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The structure of the workshop consisted of

- an opening plenary discussion,
- parallel sessions addressing the main theme of the forum, “synergies”, across different thematic areas representing the major EU goals (A sessions),
- parallel sessions addressing important cross-cutting topics (B sessions) and
- the concluding plenary where the key messages were highlighted as well as considerations for the future.

Below follows a summary presentation of the key messages. A detailed Forum Report will be published on the ERA-LEARN website in January 2023.

Setting the scene

European Partnerships are based on a solid basis of predecessors that have come a long way in contributing to EU goals. Drawing upon the evidence analysed in the [first Biennial Monitoring Report 2022](#) and the [ERA-LEARN Annual Report 2021](#), it is clear that the commitments to the new Horizon Europe European Partnerships are even stronger and more impressive. Member States and Associated Countries have committed EUR 9 billion to the first public partnerships launched under Horizon Europe, i.e. as much as they spent on partnerships since their launch in 2006. Industry has committed EUR 22.4 billion i.e. EUR 4.9 billion more than the required amount to match the EU's contribution for the co-programmed partnerships and joint undertakings.

The new European Partnerships are designed to improve the shortcomings of the past by paying particular attention to openness and new transparency. Significant steps are planned to promote the involvement of newcomers and secure transparent processes for consultation and engagement with end-users including NGOs, societal actors, and citizens. The European Partnerships are geared towards delivering the Green and Digital transitions and bringing Resilience to European societies. This requires systemic change and transformation. Amidst the current challenges we are facing, the Ukrainian war, the energy crises, the aftermath of the pandemic and its socio-economic consequences, this path becomes even more important and needs to be accelerated.

The first European Partnership Stakeholder Forum in 2022 brought together the partnership community not only to take stock of the first year of existence of the new partnerships but also to plan the next wave under the second Strategic Plan 2025-2027 that will host a process of wide consultations inviting all relevant stakeholders as well as European citizens through a variety of communication channels.

Synergies: an aspect to address at multiple levels

Establishing synergies is of paramount importance to achieve the EU wider goals of green and digital transitions and increase the EU's resilience in view of current and future crises.

Synergies are meant between partnerships within the same cluster as well as across thematic clusters as the challenges we are facing are not only cutting across national borders but also sectors and scientific disciplines. Whereas there is valuable experience in launching joint calls among partnerships or with international organisations, synergies also need to be established in the other types of activities as well as across the partnerships' governance structures through cross-participation in steering boards, stakeholder boards, or organising consultations and thematic networks.

Synergies are also relevant to the path towards market deployment in the form of links to industrial strategies through careful consideration of industrial/technological road mapping. The challenge is to better address the links between research and innovation, bringing all relevant stakeholders together including the public and private sectors, with special attention to SMEs, as well as start-ups, and maintaining a "new-comer" friendly environment. This is relevant in the pursuit of both the Digital and Green Transitions and the Industrial Transition. Industry needs to realise that transition offers multiple opportunities and partnerships are the right means to facilitate this understanding. The different types of partnerships, however, might pose difficulties in collaboration and there needs to be support available to enable such interactions and identification of opportunities. The EC has a vital role to play here.

In the health area, synergies need to contribute to resilience, a concept largely absent from the policy discourse before the COVID-19 pandemic. This means having the capacity to foresee, absorb and adapt to the system's shock. Partnerships are operating in these areas and their common denominator is learning; learning to face shock to the system through a collaborative approach (fostering cohesion) and increase capacity through a process of collaborative R&I actions not just limited to the narrow areas of health. Resilience also means innovating and creating a cross-sectoral ecosystem where the generated knowledge can be exploited and implemented to create additionality (synergies).

Synergies are also needed between partnerships and other European instruments such as Clusters or Missions. Several concrete measures have already been implemented in this direction, while more efforts are pertinent. Partnerships are important instruments for the ERA. The forthcoming WIDERA call can be the right channel to support the necessary programme-level collaboration at the country level that is needed as a stepping stone to strengthen the

engagement of less involved countries and also to address more specific research topics. Better guidance and communication from the EC are important to set up a functioning and complementary process (top-down and bottom-up) for programme-level collaboration.

Allowing the use of Cohesion Policy Funds to increase the capacity of countries to take part in partnerships has been addressed in the guidance note published by the EC on 15th July 2022. The aspect of synergies with other EU funds is strengthened in the Horizon Europe regulation, as well as the other concerned Programmes of the Multi-annual Financial Framework 2021-2027. Cohesion Policy funds may support Horizon Europe projects to proceed towards market deployment and reach higher TRLs and may thus strengthen the potential of place-based innovation chains.

Addressing cross-cutting dimensions in partnerships:

Internationalisation; lifecycle approach; societal engagement

Internationalisation is important for addressing global challenges as well as establishing Europe's position in key areas of strategic interest. The strategies supporting internationalisation activities diversify across the different partnerships and reflect their particular goals, focus and scope considering also wider targets such as global health challenges or European technological sovereignty. Finding and integrating global partners is a challenging task, due to the time needed to build trust and the complex framework conditions imposed by the EC. The Commission intends to improve the formal aspects of global collaboration building on the past and current experiences of the partnerships' global outreach.

Besides monitoring and evaluating the impacts achieved at Union and national levels, European Partnerships need to identify the most effective format for any future action and possible renewal. Whilst a discussion about possible exit strategies may sound premature, the experiences of long-lasting networks showed that a trustful and well-functioning consortium is the backbone of any route towards sustainability, and this takes time to build. The deepening of collaboration among partnership members through the additional activities (alignment of programmes and strategies, institutional procedures, mechanisms, etc.) will help create the necessary conditions for the path towards self-sustainability. The time is ripe for such a discussion given the task of the Partnership Knowledge Hub to set up guidelines for the phasing out of partnerships by the end of 2023.

Societal engagement is an important element of the ERA and a specific ERA action engaging the EC and the Member States. Partnerships have been active in engaging society in their activities in the past. Yet, more is needed not only with regard to bringing science closer to society but in better addressing societal concerns and bringing society on board in finding solutions. There are some good practices already that can be exchanged among partnerships.

Overall conclusions/ conference statements

Synergies is an aspect with multiple dimensions and important to apply at various levels. Well-thought-out concerted actions are needed on all fronts. European Partnerships are important instruments to further advance the development of the ERA and help achieve the EU strategic goals of Green and Digital Transition, Resilience as well as Industrial Transition. The efforts need to continue to exploit their potential to the full. The challenges faced due to the pandemic made it inevitable to shift funds from certain topics to others especially in the health area to immediately respond to urgent needs. This led to disruption in parts of some partnerships' programming. Yet, it also showed that partnerships can be flexible to adapt and respond to crises. We must avoid European Partnerships becoming too big and complex to react and adapt to crises by, for instance, safeguarding parts of the budget for emergencies. To be effective, partnerships need to be embedded in the national and European policy contexts, and the strategic planning of their members, be they Member States/Associated Countries, European Institutions, and research and innovation actors. The lessons learnt in this first year amidst the pandemic that brought additional challenges for partnerships to tackle, are valuable for future situations. The Partnership Knowledge Hub together with the EC have a vital role to play in safeguarding the flexibility in the partnerships' design and in capitalising on the experience gained thus far in view of preparing the next wave of partnerships but also in setting the ground for discussions on their phasing out.

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