



EU programmes

Overview

The EU provides funding for a series of programmes in research, innovation, education, vocational education and training, youth, sport, culture and several other areas. Non-EU member states such as Switzerland can also participate in these programmes under certain conditions.

Negotiations on an institutional agreement (InstA) having come to an end in 2021, Switzerland was denied association to major cooperation programmes in the areas of education, research and innovation (2021–2027 Horizon package and Erasmus+). Now Switzerland will again gain full association to these EU programmes. As part of the package entitled ‘Stabilisation and further development of relations between Switzerland and the EU (Bilaterals III)’, Switzerland can once again associate to EU programmes on the basis of the negotiated EU Programmes Agreement (EUPA).

Key elements

The EUPA forms the legal basis for Switzerland’s participation in EU programmes. It currently includes protocols on participation in the following programmes: Horizon Europe, Euratom, Digital Europe and the ITER research infrastructure (referred to collectively as the Horizon 2021–2027 package), as well as Erasmus+ and EU4Health. The EUPA also paves the way for potential future participation in other EU programmes. With each new programme generation, Switzerland is free to decide which EU programmes open to third countries it wishes to join.

The EUPA is comprised of two parts: The main body of the agreement, which contains general provisions applicable to all Swiss participation in EU programmes. Protocols to the agreement contain specific provisions applicable to individual programmes. While no expiry date has been set for the main body of the agreement, protocols are handled differently. As has already been the case in the past, each programme generation requires renegotiation of the protocols. This may result in the addition of new protocols or in the non-renewal of protocols that reached their expiry date.

Implementation in Switzerland

The EUPA only comes into force once the overall Switzerland-EU package (Bilaterals III) has been ratified. However, it was already signed on 10 November 2025. As an earlier part of the Switzerland-EU package, the agreement will thus be provisionally applied retroactively from the beginning of 2025. Switzerland has therefore achieved associated country status for the Horizon Europe, Euratom and Digital Europe programmes and will be able to participate in ITER again from 2026. The agreement also paves the way for association with Erasmus+ and EU4Health. The Federal Council is requesting the necessary funding for Erasmus+ from Parliament as part of the Switzerland-EU package (Bilateral III). Participation in the EU4Health programme is linked to the entry into force of the health agreement in the Switzerland-EU package.

Researchers and innovators in Switzerland can fully participate in Horizon Europe, Euratom, ITER and Digital Europe calls for proposals, as well as lead and coordinate projects. Their project costs will be financed by the European Commission. Switzerland will pay an annual mandatory contribution to the EU for this purpose.

The association gives Switzerland a say in the shaping of the European Research Area and allows it to play an active role in the programme committees.

Importance for Switzerland

The EU funding programmes are among the most renowned programmes for education, research and innovation in the world. Switzerland's participation in EU research and innovation programmes has a long tradition and has played a key role in strengthening Europe's position in research and innovation for many decades. Researchers and innovators in Switzerland have regularly successfully applied for funding from EU programmes. Switzerland's funding policy in the area of mobility and cooperation in education has also involved many years of cooperation and coordination with EU education programmes. The outcome of the negotiations means that Switzerland can pursue and safeguard this cooperation, and so can benefit directly as a centre of education and research and indirectly as a business location.

Specifically

- **Horizon Europe:** Horizon Europe gives researchers and innovators in Switzerland the unique opportunity to join forces with the most brilliant minds, share their expertise and be at the forefront of cutting-edge research projects. Through collaborative projects, solutions to global challenges are being found in cooperation with many other countries, mainly in Europe. In individual projects such as those run by the European Research Council (ERC), researchers compete internationally, attracting high-quality research projects to Switzerland. For example, Sandrine, a professor of microbiology and team leader at a Swiss university, has been awarded a grant of one million francs from the ERC. The money will go towards a project to study microbial systems in domestic installations and develop devices to prevent pathogenic microorganisms from contaminating drinking water. Cutting-edge research projects such as this help to maintain Switzerland's appeal as a research and innovation hub. Collaboration within Horizon Europe keeps research in Switzerland at a world-class level. It is also important for ETH Zurich, EPFL and Swiss universities, ensuring they can remain among the best academic institutions in international rankings.
- **Erasmus+:**
 - **For students and apprentices:** Erasmus+ opens doors to international opportunities for Swiss students and apprentices, enabling them to immerse themselves in different cultures and return home with fresh ideas that will fuel and energise innovation in Switzerland. Take the example of a Swiss physics student. Thanks to the Erasmus+ programme, she had the opportunity to study for a semester in Lund, Sweden. During her stay, she formed strong connections with experts from all over Europe, which gave her career a significant boost. Erasmus+ also gave a 16-year-old apprentice baker from Giubasco the opportunity to complete a two-month internship at an artisan bakery in Lyon, where he honed his pastry-making techniques, discovered local recipes and improved his French. The Erasmus+ grant provided both students with financial support for their travel and accommodation costs, as well as help with their daily living expenses during their stay abroad.
 - **For educational institutions:** The University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland (HES-SO) participates in UNITA – Universitas Montium, a university alliance within the European Universities Initiative (EUI). These forward-looking collaborations lay the foundations for the European universities of the future and are of great strategic importance for Swiss universities. Thanks to its association with Erasmus+, HES-SO has been granted equal partner status within UNITA and in Erasmus+ in general. This gives it the opportunity to participate in international cooperation projects relating to education and to launch and coordinate these projects itself. As such, it can play a more active role in the European education area and benefit fully from the added value of educational cooperation.