The European Institute for Biomedical Imaging Research expresses concerns about significant budget cuts for EU health and research programmes

The European Institute for Biomedical Imaging Research (EIBIR) welcomes the implementation of the next European Commission's health and research programmes that will provide funding opportunities necessary to address current challenges in healthcare research and help to maintain Europe at the forefront of medical innovation.

On 21 July 2020, EU leaders reached an agreement on the budget for COVID-19 recovery and the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the seven-year framework programme regulating the European Union's annual budget. An agreement that resulted in a proposed reduction of EU health and research budgets. **The budget presented for Horizon Europe, the next Research and Innovation framework programme, has significantly decreased from €94.4bn to €80.9bn[1]**. Similarly, for the Digital Europe Programme, which aims to boost investments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and make the European Union a frontrunner in the sector, ambitions were lowered from €9.2bn to €6.8bn[1]. The new proposed EU4Health programme — intended to prepare for the next pandemic — was even brought down to €1.7bn instead of €9.4bn[2] by the European Council.

EIBIR regrets this decision as we believe that biomedical imaging research and the development and implementation of AI tools are major drivers for healthcare advancement and have a substantial impact on the wellbeing of European citizens.

A swift agreement was admittedly needed for a European Union recovery. Regrettably, the decision fails to acknowledge the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis that the investment in health research is imperative to promote and protect public health.

In its Strategic Research Agenda for Biomedical Imaging[3] EIBIR highlights current challenges in healthcare and calls for increased research in personalised disease prevention, non-invasive biomarkers for therapy prediction and monitoring and the use of AI and machine learning for disease prediction. The Strategic Research Agenda also stresses the need for appropriate funding mechanisms to stimulate integrated medical research and cross sector collaboration and to implement innovative approaches for the wellbeing of citizens and patients. Cutting research budgets at an EU-level will jeopardise the achievement of these important goals.

While EIBIR welcomes the European Parliament's vivid reaction to the political agreement on the 2021-2027 MFF and COVID-19 recovery fund, **we urge European institutions to collaborate closely with each other and to provide strong and ambitious health and research budgets for the safety and prosperity of Europe's society**.

[1] https://sciencebusiness.net/framework-programmes/news/parliament-hits-back-vowing-correct-cuts-horizon-europe
[2] https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/07/eu-leaders-slash-science-spending-18-trillion-deal
[3] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6352390/

EIBIR is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the coordination of research projects and aims to support the development of biomedical imaging technologies and the dissemination of knowledge. We want to improve cooperation within the European biomedical imaging community, with the goal of improving the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of diseases. We actively supports networking activities and common initiatives and interoperability in biomedical imaging research.