

The European Union is the world's largest economic entity, yet its ability to design and implement effective economic policies is not commensurate with its size. It is lagging, for example, in terms of policies promoting productivity, growth, scientific research and technological innovation. The Eurozone debt crisis has provided a sharp and painful reminder that the European Union must adopt a new approach to designing its economic policies and coordinating them with the policies of its Member States.

At the same time, while the field of economics in Europe has seen impressive growth in terms of global impact, the number of researchers and funding, Europe still lags behind the U.S. in terms of research productivity (as measured by the numbers of articles published in the top field journals), and European research remains fragmented across its Member States. According to recent research the share of articles in economics published by European researchers represents 34% of the total production of articles in this field in the world, while the US amounts to 53.5%. The contrast is sharper when the citation impact of these publications is taken into account. In terms of share of citations, the US represents 70.8% while the EU share is 28.4%, which illustrates the higher impact of the US research in economics.

Developing a competitive and open European research area (ERA) is essential for growth and to the process of European integration. However, different languages, a diversity of academic traditions and a variety of informal barriers often inhibit the free flow of research funding, the mobility of academic talent and, as a result, the efficient allocation of R&D funding. In times of financial restraint the latter becomes particularly important. In this context, research grants, in particular if they are allocated across national borders (e.g., by the European Research Council; ERC), can provide a viable tool to circumvent limits to integration and consequently to enhance the exchange of ideas. In fact, the relationship between openness and successful research funding is reciprocal and internationalization can benefit national and regional funding, e.g. by permitting the inflow of foreign resources. However, if not designed correctly, research funding can also aggravate the initial problem, for example by conditioning grants on nationalities and/ or local use or by failing to retain and attract the most able researchers.

A group of academic institutions with the support of the European Economic Association (EAA) created the COEURE (COoperation for EUropean Research in Economics) network, which brought together the key stakeholders in the European economic research space – scientists from the different strands of economic research in Europe, users of research in the policy community and the private sector, and funders of research. COEURE will launch a process of stocktaking, consultation and stakeholder engagement that will lead to the formulation of an “Agenda for Research Funding for Economics in Europe” (ARFEE).

The COEURE network results from an initiative of the European Economic Association (EEA) whose role, given its aims as set out by its statutes, are:

- to contribute to the development and application of economics as a science in Europe;
- to improve communication and exchange between teachers, researchers and students in economics in the different European countries;

- to develop and sponsor co-operation between teaching institutions of university level and research institutions in Europe.

In practice, Fondation Jean-Jacques Laffont / Toulouse School of Economics will effectively lead the network assembling a group of academic institutions, with the support of EEA.

The process had three work packages. The first work package (“Advances in Economic Research: Foundations for European Policies”) involved taking stock of the current state of research in key sub-fields in economics. The subfields covered the entire spectrum of mainstream economic research while addressing the thematic issues identified in the call. The stock-taking exercise was centred on a survey of each subfield by a team of scholars. Each survey mapped out the policy issues that Europe is now dealing with, the research frontier in the sub-field and the activities of European researchers working at the frontier. It went on to identify the key open research questions in the sub-field, and suggest ways in which research on these issues should evolve over the medium term, notably to better address the policy challenges that Europe will be facing in the future.

The second work package of the project (“Evaluating Mechanisms for Funding Economic Research in Europe”) involved assessing the efficiency of economic research funding sources and systems across European countries and the extent to which mechanisms for funding economic research in Europe have supported research at the frontier in the past, and suggest ways in which they might evolve in the future to support it more effectively, in terms of the scope, productivity and the dissemination of this research. It will require both surveys and the construction of databases. The task was undertaken by collecting primary data on three elements of the elements of the research production process: the global standing of research in economics undertaken in Europe, the mechanisms employed to fund this research, and the experience of researchers with utilizing these mechanisms in support of their research.

The third work package of the work (“Setting an Agenda for Research Funding for Economics in Europe”) was to formulate the Agenda for Research Funding for Economics in Europe and to propose measures to ensure that Europe has the appropriate funding mechanisms, and the coordination among them, needed to deliver this research agenda. The Agenda was renamed “The Manifesto for Economic Research in Europe”.

The fourth work package deals with the Management issues involved in the project, including budget and partner relations and the organization of the Opening and the Final conferences.

The fifth Work Package comprises the Dissemination of COEURE’s results through the workshops organized in the framework of WP1 and WP2, the projects’ website, online debates, publications, as well as the coeure manifesto (final report).