

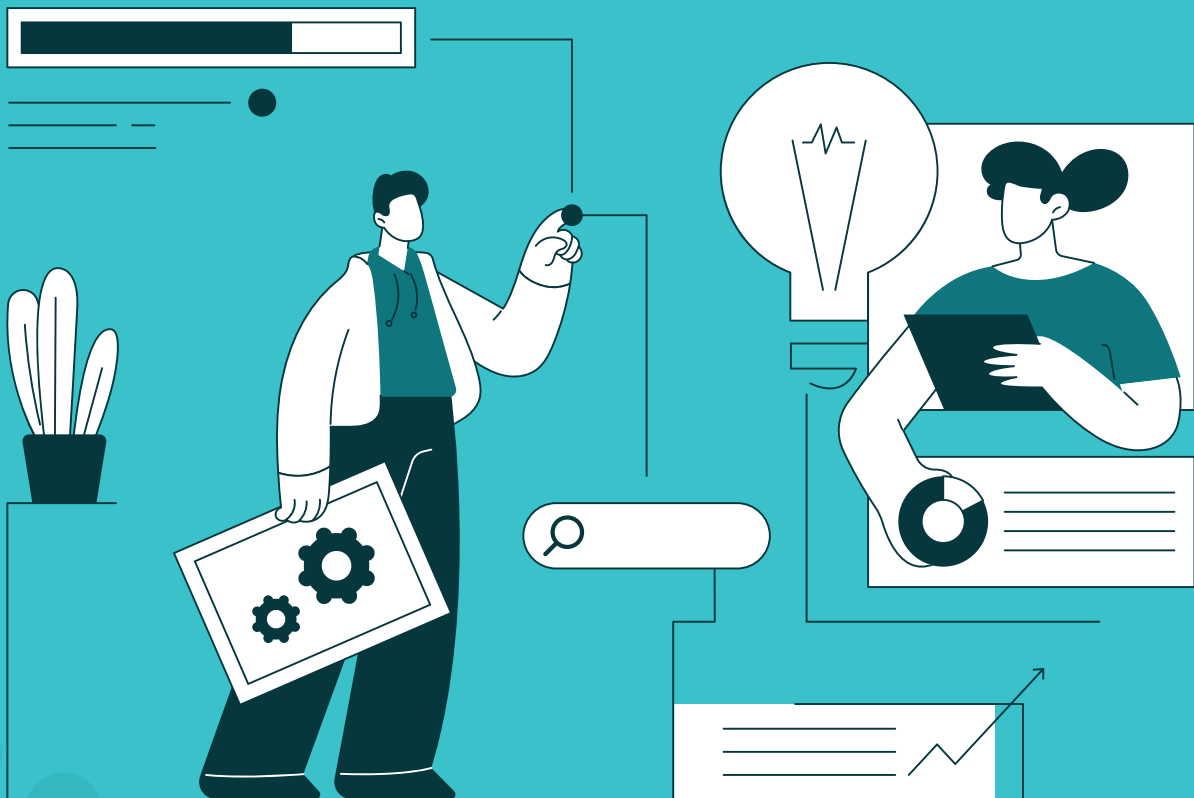


REINFORCING

Responsible tErritories and Institutions eNable and Foster Open
Research and inClusive Innovation for traNsitions Governance

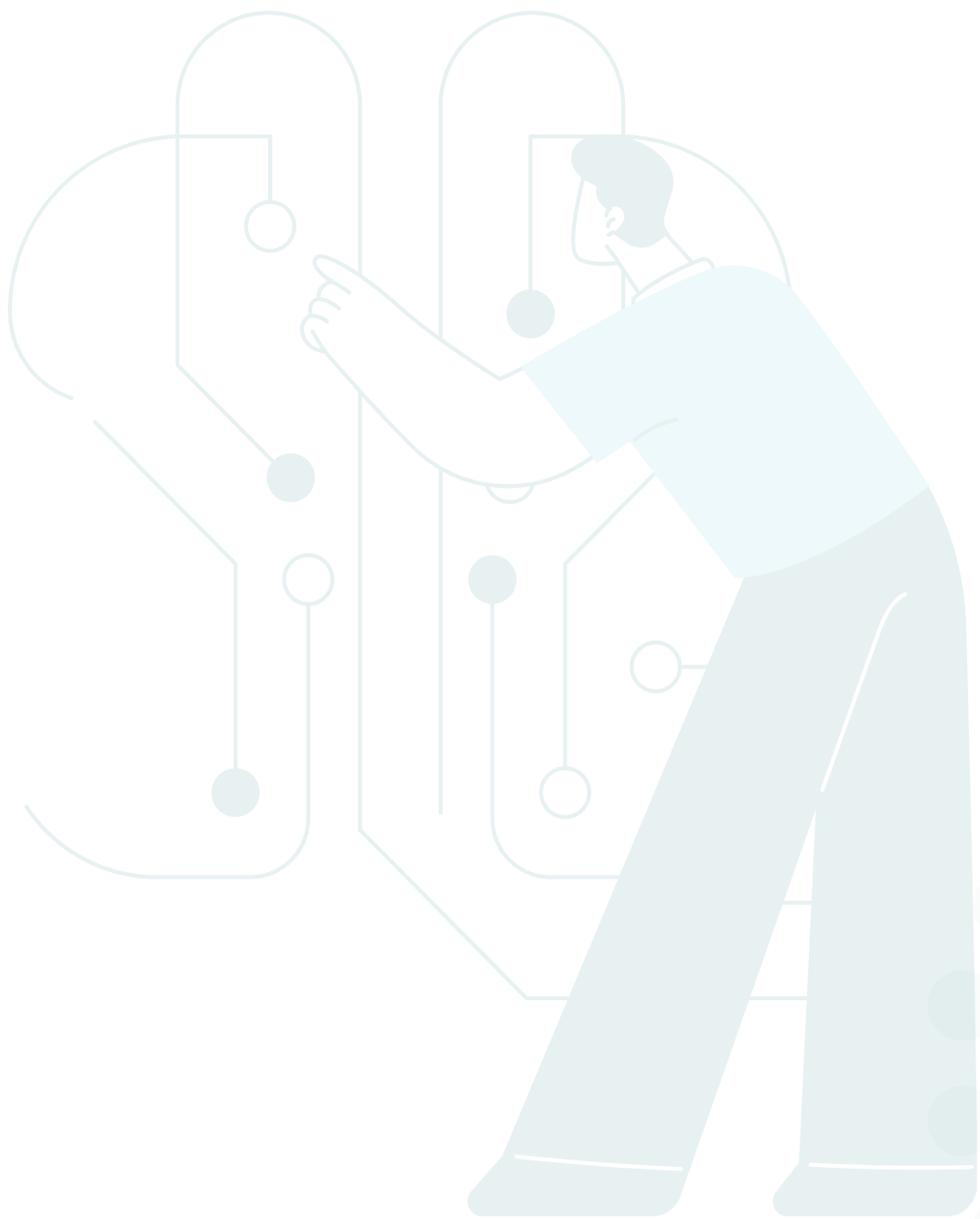


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EMBEDDING OPENNESS AND RESPONSIBILITY
IN THE NEXT EU FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME
FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (FP10)

2025



INTRODUCTION

In July 2025, the European Commission (EC) presented its proposal for the 10th Framework Programme for research and innovation, Horizon Europe (2028-2034) or FP10. It is expected that the negotiations on FP10 between the European Parliament, the Council, and the EC will be finalised in the course of 2027, while the preceding discussion on the Multiannual Financial Framework will decide on the available budget. In view of the high significance of the framework programmes for Europe's science and innovation systems, the economy and society, FP10's contours and funding priorities will have a significant impact on Europe's future. The current discussions on the next framework programme – as European strategic policy debates in general – are strongly defined by a renewed emphasis on technological and economic competitiveness, as reflected by the Letta (2024) and Draghi (2024) reports, as well as by the political guidelines for the current EC. In addition and partially intertwined with the quest for competitiveness, European policy needs to convincingly respond to mounting geopolitical instabilities, strengthen security and resilience, achieve its sustainability goals, and contest antidemocratic, authoritarian developments. A strong Europe will only be achieved by defending public values, increasing scientific and technological sovereignty, and promoting a future where technology and science can successfully tackle societal challenges at the science, economy, and society interface.

This policy brief aims to contribute to the current discussions on FP10. It underlines the importance of driving research and innovation (R&I) towards socially desirable ends as well as fostering innovativeness and competitiveness. In view of the EC's proposal and the related debate, this policy brief aims to ensure that FP10 addresses all key dimensions of cutting-edge research and innovation and avoids blind spots or follows a too-narrow approach.

Europe has established itself as a global leader in Open and Responsible Research and Innovation (ORRI) through substantial investments in Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe. FP10 must build on these investments and bridge the gaps between science, society and the economy.

WHY OPEN AND RESPONSIBLE RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (ORRI) IN FP10

The common aim of the EC's proposal for FP10 and the broader policy debate is to increase European innovativeness in order to achieve greater competitiveness. An essential element of this ambition is to put science, technology and innovation at the centre of the EU's economy. Such a strong commitment to support research and innovation – reflected by the EC's proposal to increase the budget for FP10 to €175 billion – is clearly to be welcomed. In addition, there is a broad consensus that the next FP needs reforms in terms of structure, rules and governance if its goals are to be reached.

Viewed from the challenges European societies are facing, FP10 will have to effectively address three overarching objectives: (1) scientific excellence, (2) technological and economic competitiveness and technological sovereignty and (3) promotion of the public good, such as sustainability and well-being. A key task for the negotiations on FP10 will be to define the right balance between these three aims and ensure that respective policy measures are mutually reinforcing. The systematic integration of Openness and Responsibility, understood as a commitment to societal needs by research and innovation, will have significant leverage effects in achieving the three policy objectives.

From the perspective of Openness and Responsibility, the FP10 proposal includes several positive aspects. In addition to the proposed budget increase and the continuation of FP10 as a stand-alone programme, addressing societal challenges remains a high priority, as reflected in the continuation of missions. Also, the emphasis on multidisciplinary and SSH integration across all components of the programme is clearly to be welcomed. Likewise, the focus on generating impact is an important feature of the proposal. However, FP10 will need to provide support and incentives if economic and societal impacts are to be achieved. Regarding Openness, the current proposal supports aspects of open science (e.g., data accessibility) but remains rather silent regarding international openness and processes open to civil society actors and citizens. Clearly, in view of new geopolitical realities, naively pursuing openness would not be in the European interest. However, as knowledge exchange is an essential prerequisite for excellence, creativity and innovativeness,

keeping R&I as open as possible (and as closed as necessary) should continue to be an imperative of FP10. While scientific cooperation with some countries will need to be put under scrutiny, it is even more important to foster knowledge exchange and cooperation both with like-minded countries and within a strengthened European Research Area (cf. Letta's "Fifth freedom"). Clearly, the proposal's intention to simplify application procedures and grant administration is eagerly awaited. This is not only important regarding efficient use of applicants' resources, but also in terms of lowering barriers for participation, particularly for smaller, less resourceful actors such as SMEs and CSOs. On a more general note, policies aiming to facilitate innovation are often based on a linear and, thereby, far too simplistic understanding of innovation processes. In innovation research, it is well established that key factors driving innovation are processes of interactive, mutual learning, the re-combination of different types of knowledge, and close relationships between diverse actors and domains.

Diving deeper into the requirements and implications of the next FP and its objectives and how Openness and Responsibility can contribute, the following interrelated themes and policy aspects have been identified as particularly relevant by the experts involved in REINFORCING's policy discussions:

Competitiveness

In many ways, Openness and Responsibility are enablers of competitiveness, as they contribute to better collaboration and cross-sectoral/cross-domain knowledge exchange. Innovation cycles can be accelerated by improving the accessibility of research results and data, and collaboration between diverse actors and application areas is facilitated, thereby building dynamic partnerships. Here, engagement of stakeholders and citizens, a cornerstone of Openness and Responsibility, carries lots of potential to identify innovative solutions and support knowledge valorisation (cf. the EU's Code of Practice on citizen engagement for knowledge valorisation). Or phrased differently, it is a false contradiction between Openness and Responsibility and innovativeness. In fact, the opposite is true: more open and engaging R&I will spur innovation and thereby strengthen competitiveness. Innovations that are co-created with future users

citizens have a higher chance of being adopted. Thus, co-creation saves precious time and money. Furthermore, co-created innovations reach the market faster while reducing acceptability risks.

Openness

Openness has a number of qualities that are closely related to the requirements of innovation and competitiveness. In general and broadly acknowledged, knowledge needs to be made accessible for different actors if the knowledge is to be further developed, applied and turned into marketable assets that meet demands. Openness is thus important to allow for interconnected research, knowledge and technology transfer. The quality of science is also served by increasing openness, as transparency will contribute to better reproducibility of research results and thereby help to increase scientific accountability. Turning to the public, making research easily accessible and understandable is likely to reduce mistrust in science.

Societal challenges and Missions

Societal challenges related to climate change, sustainability, digital transformation, demographic change or resilience are increasingly pressing and need to be addressed alongside the renewed emphasis on competitiveness. Again, if FP10 intends to make significant contributions to addressing these challenges, greater integration of research efforts across disciplines and sectors is needed.

Missions are among the few directional policy instruments that hold the promise of tackling complex societal problems in shorter time frames. However, experience thus far indicates that too often missions are confined to the domain of science, technology and innovation (the so-called “STI trap”), thus limiting the missions’ full potential to generate real transformative impact. With its strong emphasis on including societal needs in the design of R&I policies and its rich experience in stakeholder engagement and co-design, ORRI has lots to offer in supporting effective mission design and implementation.

European values

European values such as democracy, the rule of law or human rights are often referred to in high-level policy statements, including the EC’s proposal for FP10. While these references are extremely

important, the next FP should increase concrete efforts to ensure that R&I funding and R&I practices underpin the desired ways of economic and social value creation, ultimately reflecting the European social model.

Also, considering the current economic pressures and the multiple crises the EU is facing, there is a real danger that dialogue and democratic participation are perceived as less important or even neglected. The contrary is true, as democratically generated feedback to R&I will not weaken but rather unlock Europe's innovation potential. In this respect, there is much debate on decreasing levels of trust in science among the European publics. As a response to this development, approaches are important that help ensure the trustworthy conduct of science. Even more importantly, citizens' perspectives, knowledge, and needs, as pursued in the ORRI approach, have to be included in decisions on R&I that are likely to affect their daily lives. Making R&I more democratic is the best way to reconcile science and society.

Governance of R&I

The current political and economic situation is characterised by high degrees of uncertainty. Against this background, it is important to equip our R&I systems with the ability to quickly adapt to rapidly changing context conditions and new challenges. To this end, the rich work related to Openness and Responsibility over the past decade, made available a broad range of tools and approaches helping to anticipate and increase responsiveness and preparedness, all of which can be seen as elements of “anticipatory governance”.

Another important feature of current uncertainty is related to the interrelatedness of contemporary societal challenges. Thus, systems thinking, which ensures that the perspectives of all relevant actor groups and their interactions and interdependencies are taken into consideration, is a requirement to be able to better understand and adequately respond to complex challenges in a more agile way.

RECOMMENDATIONS

STRENGTHENING THE COMPETITIVENESS AGENDA

Enhancing Europe's technological and economic competitiveness is an important objective of the next framework programme and deserves dedicated efforts. While pursuing this objective with determination, mistakes of the past should not be repeated. Policies and mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that the demand side of new solutions and innovation is sufficiently included, be it high- or low-tech solutions. Otherwise, the likelihood of innovation failures and lost investments increases. The suggested tight connections between FP10 and the new European Competitiveness Fund in the EC's proposal are likely to support the flow from research to market. However, the societal dimension of innovation and market success should not be overlooked. A lack of societal robustness will not only render new technologies and solutions less likely to be taken up by markets but also carries the risk of overlooking potential rejection of consumers, or of worsening existing societal issues (environmental crises, public health crises, inequalities etc.).

Recommendations

- Ensure that FP10 requires and supports Open and Responsible approaches across all programme components. In this regard, the emphasis on SSH integration in the EC's proposal on FP10 is a promising signal. Yet, the promotion of participatory approaches, the inclusion of ethical dimensions in R&I governance and the integration of open innovation practices and particularly co-creation, should receive more concrete support, considering that SSH integration is by itself no guarantee for the engagement of citizens and stakeholders.
- Missions have impressive potential to simultaneously address elements of the competitiveness agenda and steer R&I efforts towards socially desired goals. To realise this potential, mission design should ensure that R&I funding is closely linked to and coordinated with the respective sector policies (thereby avoiding the STI trap). To this end, multistakeholder partnerships, composed of actors from research, industry,

civil society and government, are an important element of mission governance to ensure transformative impact. Existing frameworks and methodologies exist to ensure such approaches. However, they require time and human resources: it is necessary to ensure that structuring consortia and animating partnerships is an eligible element of project budgets.

RECOGNISING THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS AS A KEY DETERMINANT OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

While re-focusing attention on competitiveness is to be welcomed in view of contemporary economic and geopolitical dynamics, following one-dimensional policy goals would be counterproductive. Other key policy goals, such as sustainability and the creation of public goods, should be integrated. Competitiveness without sustainability and social justice will backfire. Instead, acknowledging the interconnectedness of challenges means recognizing trade-offs between different objectives. Thus, the competitiveness Europe is seeking needs to be compatible with decarbonisation, socioeconomic sustainability, social justice, security and technological sovereignty — ideally initiating mutually reinforcing dynamics and unlocking synergies. Also, in view of the high degree of complex uncertainties our societies are facing, experimentation and learning should be encouraged and strongly supported.

Recommendations

- FP10 should strive to ensure a high degree of policy coherence across its different pillars and future work programmes. To this end, collaboration and joint deliberations among actors representing the quadruple helix should be an integral element of the concrete policy design and programme structure of the next FP.
- Foresight and other forward-looking, anticipatory approaches, with a strong focus on citizen participation, providing strategic intelligence, should be a regular and integrated feature of programme development.

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- Develop funding opportunities that better serve the needs of application areas/sectors and local communities. Various methodologies exist to ensure local communities can shape R&I projects themselves. It is necessary to ensure that such approaches and actors are eligible for funding.
 - FP10 should provide space for bottom-up experimentation and high-risk research, in science and technology development as well as in novel forms of communication and co-creation. Such approaches need to be accompanied by mechanisms that allow for learning from the experiments and iteratively feed back into programme governance.
 - Especially the Moonshot Projects addressing multi-faceted challenges should incorporate a plurality of perspectives from research and practice to develop workable and sustainable innovations.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR AND INSTITUTIONALISATION OF OPENNESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

The important role Open and Responsible approaches in R&I, such as co-creation, citizen engagement and open science at large, play with regard to the EU's policy priorities has been highlighted above. They aren't realised effortlessly. In essence, Europe needs to continue to work on nurturing sustainable science-society relationships and allow for a plurality of approaches. Yet, putting Openness and Responsibility into practice has a number of decisive prerequisites. Among these is ensuring that the relevant actors in the R&I system who want to conduct Open and Responsible Research and Innovation are knowledgeable of the approaches and methods at hand. Likewise, funders and evaluators of R&I need to be familiar with these approaches as well, to be able to competently support the R&I actors. In addition, to firmly establish the conduct of Open and Responsible R&I practices, measures supporting their institutionalisation in organisations of the R&I system are important.

Recommendations

- FP10 needs to ensure that information and training in Openness and Responsibility (principles and citizen engagement and

open science methods, etc.) are broadly available and easily accessible to all R&I actors, including financial support to participate in training, particularly for less resourceful actors such as SMEs or representatives of civil society.

- Training for Open and Responsible R&I should be mandatory for all project officers and evaluators involved in funding decisions and supporting researchers and project consortia, including NCPs (National Contact Point).
- FP10 needs to ensure that the further refinement and development of Open and Responsible concepts, methods and tools is adequately supported, thereby ensuring the continuation of knowledge generation and the spreading of expertise.
- The system of research assessment should be designed in such a way as to incentivise the inclusion of Open and Responsible practices. However, this should be done with caution to not overburden organisations, particularly smaller ones, as they might be unintentionally excluded from participating in the FP.
- FP10 should provide calls to fund research generating further evidence on the relationship between Openness and Responsibility and policy objectives such as innovativeness, competitiveness, technological sovereignty, resilience, and democracy.

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THE REINFORCING PROJECT

REINFORCING is a Horizon Europe-funded project. **REINFORCING** supports organizations and institutions in Europe to transition to a new paradigm where responsibility and openness drive research and innovation (R&I) processes. The green and digital transitions have become of paramount importance to address the societal challenges that European societies currently face. The twin transition will bring enormous benefits but also undesired externalities and implications. In this regard, EU institutions and territories need to shift to more open and transparent R&I practices, in which all actors share responsibility for developing services and products that are acceptable, sustainable, and bring social satisfaction.

The Open and Responsible Research and Innovation (ORRI) approach promotes collaborative efforts, sharing research outputs as early as possible for engaging citizens in co-creation processes and opening R&I to the whole society. Implementing Open and Responsible Research and Innovation (ORRI) can seem a daunting task. Over the past decade, many resources and tools have been created, but an effort to systematize, curate, and create a single-entry point was still missing. **REINFORCING** is this much-needed European central hub for ORRI. The **REINFORCING** platform (<https://reinforcing.eu/oss-platform>) is the entry point to knowledge, training, ORRI skills matchmaking, and capacity building for organizations interested in starting or continuing their journey to creating an inclusive R&I ecosystem.

Furthermore, the project brokers unique networking opportunities for organizations, institutions, and territories interested in becoming part of the European ecosystem that is transforming the R&I system by bringing it closer to society and societal needs. To support this change, **REINFORCING** has ring-fenced funding to invite institutions from around Europe to develop projects aiming at implementing new modes of doing R&I that drive more just transitions. All the Calls have supported and will support territories and organizations experimenting with ORRI for the first time (ORRI Incubator Open Calls) as well as those scaling up their ORRI activities (ORRI Booster Open Calls).

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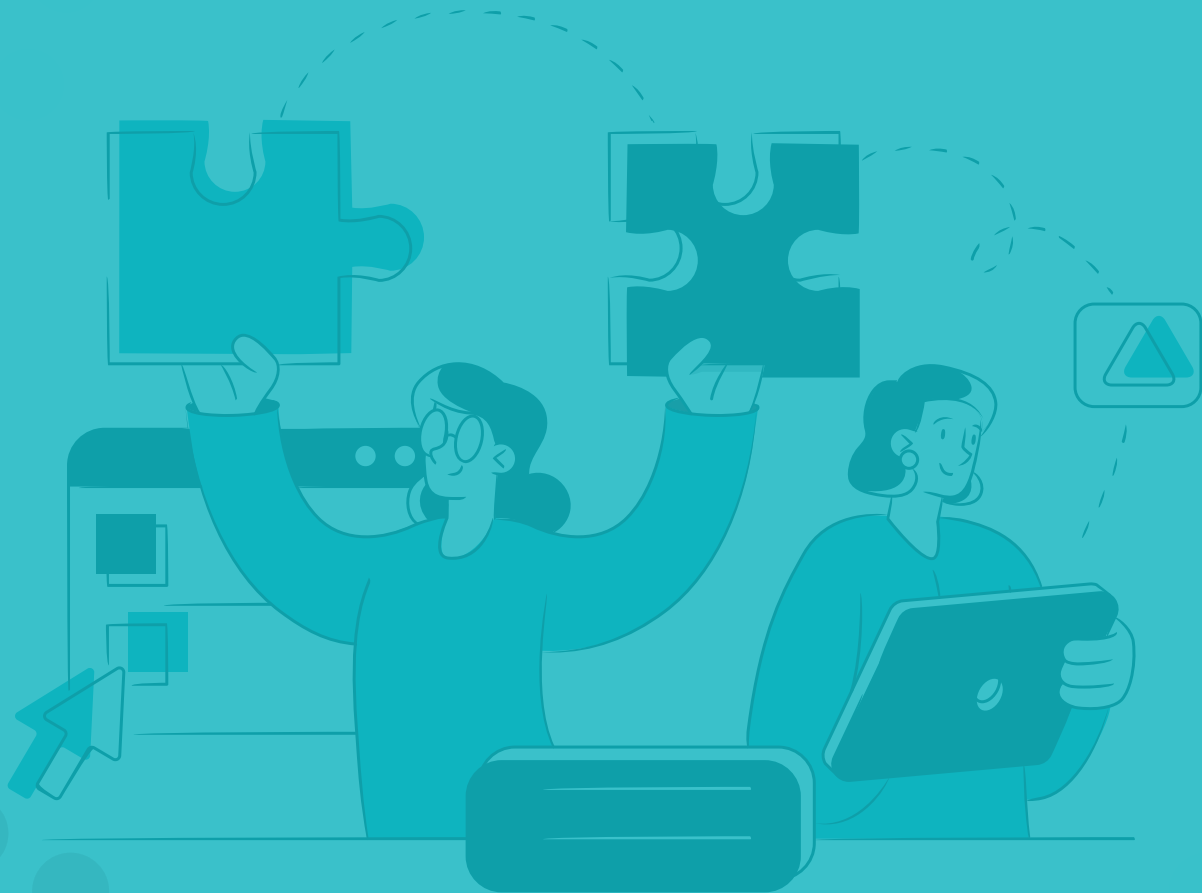
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