

YERUN's feedback to the public consultation on Horizon Europe implementation



Introduction

This document aims to provide additional feedback to the European Commission (EC)'s recent online consultation on the implementation of Horizon Europe (2021-2027). As such, its structure mirrors the main points highlighted in the online consultation, namely: Submission and Evaluation; Dissemination and Exploitation; and the Use of lump sums. The following contribution also builds on previous input provided by our members through:

- YERUN Position Paper on the H2020 mid-term review (27 May 2017);
- YERUN Position Paper on FP9-Horizon Europe (8 November 2017); and
- YERUN's participation to the Stakeholder Workshop "Shaping how Horizon Europe is implemented", held by the EC on 30 January 2019.

1. Submission and evaluation

Overall, YERUN is in favour of less prescriptive calls and minimally formulated pathways to impact. Applicants should be allowed to define themselves the expected impact of their project, keeping in mind that **research can generate impact well beyond the end of the project.**

Less complex calls

YERUN strongly recommends **simplifying and reducing the complexity of topics.** The interpretation of topics and underlying requirements is increasingly considered a separate discipline, requiring informal knowledge in order to fully understand what is desired by the call. This might require specialised in-house resources or outsourcing to external consultants, which increases the entry barrier to the framework programme, especially for less established research groups and small companies.

A more consistent evaluation process

YERUN suggests **revisions in the submission and evaluation processes** in a way that they become less onerous for both evaluators and applicants, and thus overall **more efficient, transparent and robust.**

More **consistency** across the review process is recommended, as applicants experience significant differences in terms of individual scores allocated by evaluators. While training sessions for evaluators should be improved, it is also important to ensure that the effort required for high quality evaluations is better acknowledged by providing evaluators with more adequate compensation.

Furthermore, YERUN believes that, while maintaining the focus on excellence as the cornerstone of Horizon Europe is crucial, **interdisciplinarity and diversity** should be appropriately taken into account both in calls for proposals and evaluation panels. Training for evaluators should also include interdisciplinary projects, which are frequently penalised as reviewers may not have the adequate expertise.

It is also suggested to adjust the weighting of scores in the evaluation, which should be based on the **excellence of a proposal and the impact it can generate.** Any weighting of project management structures in the proposal stage should not be overrated. These sections are commonly based on standard models or are even written by consultants. Any change to project management needs to strike a balance between simplification and ensuring that project management has been appropriately considered (resources included) so that the project can actually be delivered.

Stronger societal impact: possible ways forward

YERUN also advocates for better consideration of how Horizon Europe impacts society at large and, more specifically, how it could serve its needs and those of its citizens. A number of possible approaches are listed here:

1. Mainstream use of co-design of calls and topics involving groups of experts with a wide range of expertise and disciplinary backgrounds, and more evaluators with SSH background. **Co-creation, openness and citizens' science** are instrumental to achieve societal impact. A more sophisticated approach to impact is required (including definition and metrics), whereby it is clear that in many disciplines and domains impact is evidenced through qualitative rather than quantitative means.

2. Measurement of impact should address a meta-level (e.g. a mission) rather than the project level. Major breakthroughs (and impact) are in fact, in most cases, the result of a multitude of efforts that require time and investments. Thus, a broader spectrum of research - including early stage collaborative research - should be facilitated in order to drive the innovation process. Emphasizing long-term impact (on a meta-level) provides the opportunity to design comprehensive impact criteria pertaining to science, society, technology and economy alike.

3. Inclusion and wide application of societal impact indicators. The call definition, the evaluation and the measurement of impact of projects should include elements of broader societal, policy, environmental and public engagement. A wider use of societal impact indicators will enable to take into consideration not only citizens' needs, but

also the societal impact of e.g. new technologies, and will help regain trust of European citizens in the R&I system. This would also lead to a bigger participation of social groups, civil society and end-users in technological proposals, and would reward collaboration of interdisciplinary consortia.

4. The expectations of impact outlined in calls should clearly acknowledge that single projects, over their lifetime, have a limited ability to generate change. The text of calls - and subsequent evaluation of applications assessment - should distinguish **between short-term outputs** (deliverables from projects), **medium-term outcomes** and **long-term impacts**. Projects should be expected to focus on high quality outputs, and explain how their dissemination and exploitation pathways will lay the foundations for medium-term outcomes and long-term impact.

Societal and economic impact should be given as much importance as the technological one: projects with social or economic goals should be encouraged to include staff dedicated to developing resources and material to achieving these goals, just as innovation impact in the economy-focused projects are encouraged to include specialist exploitation staff to create viable business models.

2. Dissemination and Exploitation

Outreach is key

YERUN believes that outreach is essential to demonstrate the value of research and innovation to the wider community. YERUN would support more funding initiatives to promote and foster a broad range of knowledge exchange activities such as: post-grant knowledge exchange funding (for activities taking place 18-24

months after a grant ends); funding to allow collaboration between completed, ongoing and new projects to reduce duplication and overlap (including projects on topics which fall outside the Missions themes). Furthermore, previously funded projects in related or complementary areas are to be easily traced when launching a new call.

Projects should be encouraged to gather a **range of evidence** of their dissemination and exploitation activities, for example: information about range, volume and depth of interaction with external partners, including that which is cross-disciplinary or cross-sector; use of exit/entry (pre/post) user surveys to assess learning/satisfaction; gathering feedback of testimonials or end-user; evidence of application of research (e.g. commercialisation activities, or practice change) and attribution of project activities to policy or legislative activities.

In addition, the EC should make available **impact funding to projects**, or groups of projects, to generate medium and long-term outcomes and impact after the project ends and should also provide funding for groups of projects to collaborate. EU-funded resources to support research, such as RRI Tools (Responsible Research and Innovation), could be expanded to provide beneficiaries with guidance on writing policy papers, or reaching out to civil society. YERUN members consider outreach and dissemination training for researchers extremely important.

Horizon Europe should make every possible effort to encourage all types of EU funded projects to communicate the impact of their research to the public and to make the knowledge resulting from their work available to citizens. This also includes information and training on Open Science skills (open access, FAIR data, citizens' science, etc.).

For an effective implementation of these aspects in EU-funded research projects, YERUN encourages the EC to **increase the funding for training actions** focusing on guiding and supporting scientists **in knowledge dissemination, citizens' engagement** and overall **Open Science skills**.

It cannot be ignored, however, that the standard indicators that are currently used to evaluate researchers, research teams and research institutions, do not necessarily foster a culture of openness, collaboration and sharing among scientists and innovators.

Therefore, YERUN encourages to work toward a Horizon Europe that radically works to change this approach and introduces **recognition and rewards to the efforts made in Open Science** by individual researchers, institutions and consortia (e.g. prizes, etc.).

3. Use of lump sums

A wider use of lump sum funding is to be considered with caution, as the concept is difficult to conciliate with the performance of scientific research, which forms and should continue to form the DNA of the EU's framework programme for R&I. These are our main concerns about lump sum funding:

1. It might be better suited for applied research and innovation projects. As such they might favour Horizon Europe programmes and instruments with agendas predominantly driven by companies;

2. It may affect research quality as it may induce lower risk research. This is a result of the fact that funding depends on the completion of a set of defined deliverables on work-package level. Moreover, work-packages will be smaller,

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3. It requires more negotiation (burden) between partners during the application and probably also during the grant management phases. It does not favour simplification.

4. It discourages the participation of smaller entities (e.g. universities) and of less established research teams participating in the funding programme for the first time. It also discourages the participation of entities that are less solvent, or smaller companies as they may experience difficulties in covering rejected research costs.

5. It might give rise to consortia of 'trusted' partners that have collaborated before, considering the (understandable) drive of parties to avoid risks in opening consortia for newcomers.

Overall, lump sum funding may instigate conservatism and concentration of mature players and might result in risk-averse research. A wide use of this scheme should be evaluated in further detail as it could be detrimental for the participation potential of newcomers and for the innovation potential of the programme itself.

Conclusions

To conclude, YERUN members point out that the level of work required to develop a competitive proposal versus the success rates is a great disincentive for applicants. Furthermore, for most of the programmes (in particular the societal challenges) there is no possibility to re-submit a proposal. Sometimes an applicant can miss the opportunity to be funded by 0.5 points, yet another similar call is not forthcoming. By consequence, an application that has addressed all the reviewers' comments can never be re-submitted.

Further simplification and less administrative burden for participants are essential for a smooth implementation of Horizon Europe. The funding and tender portal should be the instrument to achieve further simplification. Any innovation that could be developed to redress this balance would be welcomed.

Finally, YERUN would like to stress that, in order to redress this unbalance, it is fundamental that Horizon Europe is given **enough resources and funding**, so that all excellent proposals are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of our European Research and Innovation capacity. To this end, YERUN, together with other 14 organizations, has joined the call for an ambitious Horizon Europe budget.

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