



## YERUN POLICY INPUT TO THE EXPERT GROUP ON THE INTERIM EVALUATION OF HORIZON EUROPE

The **Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN)** welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the report of the Expert Group on the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe, led by Professor Manuel Heitor. We greatly appreciate the Expert Group's constructive and inclusive approach featuring multiple and direct consultations with stakeholders. Below is YERUN's summarised input to the Expert Group's questions.

### 1. What major challenges should still be attempted to be addressed in the second half of Horizon Europe (2025-7) and further addressed by a future FP (FP10)?

The key thematic challenges that YERUN members consider should be addressed by the FP are climate change (including its effects on vulnerable regions); energy transition; health research; social inequalities and social cohesion; misinformation, democratic decline and the effects of an ageing population; and innovative (quantum) technologies and Artificial Intelligence, including its impact on society; among others.

From a structural point of view, this could be facilitated by:

- **Promoting interdisciplinary R&I approaches** in addressing the programme objectives.
- **Make participation more accessible** by radically simplifying the programme. This includes establishing clear processes, streamlining the flow of information in an understandable and user-friendly way, and reducing the number of different instruments.
- **Creating effective synergies** within the FP and with other EU, national and regional funding instruments. Synergies with other funding mechanisms are needed to ensure a strong continuum from R&I to impact, as well as for improving R&I structural conditions and capacity building.

- **Promoting continuity of funding opportunities between pillars and instruments** can help tackle long-term needs in addressing global challenges. More opportunities for continuity and follow-up funding beyond the initial duration of projects can better address the non-linear aspect of R&I, thus boosting impact. However, accessibility to the EU calls for newcomers to the FP should still be ensured.
- **Balancing research security with open science, open innovation, and open collaboration** with the world – including the prospects of research with dual use application potential.
- **Leveraging the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)** to boost productivity of science.
- **Incentivising structural changes without adding burden** on applicants and beneficiaries – e.g., on research assessment, careers, open science, knowledge valorisation, etc – and ensuring national investments support these transformations.

## 2. Which are the major successes of the current HE (2021-2023) and which are the major “roadblocks”/threats for success?

YERUN members consider as major successes of the FP Pillar 1 initiatives, namely the European Research Council (ERC) and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA). In that line, the recent change of evaluation criteria for the ERC on weighing the project idea more heavily than the researchers’ career is a positive development that should be continued. What’s more, our members value the opportunities provided under Pillar 2 for collaborative research projects that are not necessarily attached to missions or partnerships calls. However, Pillar 2 has been confronted with other issues, many of those included below.

Major roadblocks include:

- **Excessive earmarked and prescriptive calls** that limit the space for creative ideation.
- **Complexity of instruments which lack transparency and clear added value**, particularly the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT).
- **Need for revisions in the operation methods of EU missions and partnerships.** In relation to EU missions, the FP should focus exclusively on their R&I dimension. For that, the concept of missions should be upgraded to a broader EU policy initiative beyond the FP, to allow the use of other synergistic funding mechanisms and the development of related policy initiatives through additional instruments.
- **Administrative burden**, especially for applicants with less experience, and high coordination costs to manage (sometimes unnecessary) large consortia.
- **Boosting strategic autonomy and competitiveness should respect** that global scientific collaboration must remain a key priority of the FP.
- The implementation of ERA priorities should have a specific and dedicated focus, in addition to **strengthening and better defining a new Widening instrument.**

## 3. Which sub-programmes of HE should be preserved and strengthened in FP10, and which should be altered? How far FP10 should keep/alter the current basic three-pillar architecture?

The current three-pillar FP structure should be preserved, but better synergies among pillars should be sought to facilitate flexible follow-up funding opportunities while reducing complexity.

Regarding sub-programmes within each pillar, YERUN proposes:

- **Pillar 1** should be reinforced by strengthening the ERC and MSCA programmes and ring-fencing their budget. Europe's long-term competitiveness and prosperity depend on today's fundamental research.
- **Pillar 2** should intensify collaborative and interdisciplinary research opportunities at lower technology readiness levels (TRL), better integrate and directly address societal considerations and improve coordination of projects within clusters to better exploit research results.
- **Pillar 3** should see continued support for the European Innovation Council (EIC) and for programmes that support researchers to bring about innovations throughout the entire R&I cycle, from discovery to delivery. However, instruments that have not proven their value should be removed or modified, namely the EIT.

#### **4. What would be a catalyst to overcome current roadblocks of HE and be implemented in FP10? What should be the most important innovations to be considered in FP10?**

Key catalysts for overcoming current roadblocks would entail i) a substantial increase in funding, especially in Pillar 1 and 2, to be able to fund all high-quality proposals; ii) providing more opportunities for collaborations in smaller consortia; iii) strengthening the tools and capacities to transform research into societal benefits (financial instruments, skills, better cluster coordination); and iv) simplifying funding call texts and application/implementation processes.

In line with the above, the key innovations YERUN proposes for the current and the next FP:

- **Integrating the impact section into excellence and implementation sections of proposals:** currently, the requirements of the impact sections often lead to the hiring of external parties to draft project proposals which can result in impact sections that are artificial, overambitious, and detached from the actual research. Better integration of impact in proposals will promote coherence.
- **Improving coordination of projects in Pillar 2 clusters to better exploit research results:** the outreach potential of clusters is under-exploited, as they could collectively reach a much wider audience than individual projects. Rather than fragmenting the efforts of individual projects to capitalise on results and to reach stakeholders, improved cluster coordination by the EC and agencies within Pillar 2 should be facilitated to enhance the collective impact of projects.
- **Testing models to intensify interdisciplinary low-TRL research within Pillar 2:** the FP should prioritise a research-oriented approach with fundamental collaborative research delivering broad research outputs which will in turn reinforce the innovation pillar.
- **Piloting the use of societal readiness levels or other approaches to embed social considerations in calls:** the FP should provide a more holistic assessment framework that considers societal impact, needs, and readiness to adopt a particular technological advance, beyond the use of TRLs. Inclusion of societal readiness or similar approaches can encourage cross-sector collaboration and stimulate interdisciplinary projects that consider both technological feasibility and societal desirability. Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) fields should also be better integrated but also directly addressed, which are too often neglected. Additionally, evaluation panels should include more evaluators with SSH backgrounds.
- **Providing guidelines and good practices for the ethical use of Gen AI in the FP:** Artificial Intelligence should be seen as a horizontal tool which should be responsibly used.

- **Make missions a separate, horizontal and more ambitious programme outside of the FP:** a separate fully fledged programme for missions is needed where the FP's role would be to exclusively fund the R&I dimension of missions, in synergy with Pillar 2 clusters.

YERUN members remain committed to continue collaborating with all stakeholders, in the spirit of co-creation, to design concrete measures that will make the current and next EU R&I Framework Programme more attractive, impactful and inclusive. For additional details kindly consult the April 2024 YERUN FP10 paper [at this link](#) and contact the YERUN Office at [secretarygeneral@yerun.eu](mailto:secretarygeneral@yerun.eu).

### - About YERUN -

YERUN - Young European Research Universities Network - founded in 2015 and based in Brussels, brings together excellence and value-driven young research universities. The network's objective is to strategically represent its members in the decision-making process at EU level, thus shaping their future and promoting their role in European societies. Further to its policy advocacy activity, the network also strengthens cooperation opportunities among its members in areas of mutual interest and raises their visibility via a dedicated communication strategy.

### - YERUN Members -



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