# HORIZON EUROPE

## THE EU FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

### Questions and Answers

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This Q&A has been prepared by Central Denmark EU Office, Greater Copenhagen EU Office and Aalborg University's Brussels Office with advice and input from DANRO under the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education.

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# 1. STRUCTURE OF HORIZON EUROPE

## WHAT IS HORIZON EUROPE?

Horizon Europe is the European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation that covers 2021-2027 and is the successor of Horizon 2020. The general objective of the programme is to deliver scientific, technological, economic, and societal impact from EU investments in research and innovation to strengthen scientific and technological bases, innovation, and foster competitiveness in all Member States. Horizon Europe is guided by the European Commission's (Commission) policy priorities and contributes to delivering on EU strategic priorities and policies, e.g. the Sustainable Development Goals and the European Research Area.

Horizon Europe seeks to maximise the value of research cooperation by focusing on objectives and activities that cannot be realised by individual countries

See also: What is the European Research Area? (page 7)

## WHAT IS THE POLICY CONTEXT FOR HORIZON EUROPE AND HOW IS IT RELEVANT?

The political priorities of the Commission and the objectives for the European Research Area guide the implementation of Horizon Europe. The results and outcomes of projects funded through Horizon Europe are expected to contribute to delivering on the 6 priority objectives of the Commission for 2019-2024:

1) A European Green Deal that will make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050 and preserve the natural environment and biodiversity.

2) An economy that works for people to ensure a social market economy that goes hand in hand with social rights, climate-neutrality objectives, and a competitive industry by preparing for the technological future, steering innovation and uptake of technologies.

3) A Europe fit for the Digital Age to ensure technological sovereignty in critical technology areas by setting next generation standards and better coordinating European investments in breakthrough technologies.

4) Promoting our European Way of life to address security issues such as terrorism, disaster risk reduction and internal security within the EU and along its external borders.

5) A Stronger Europe in the World to pursue strategic partnerships with key partner countries and promote international scientific cooperation to tackle global challenges such as climate change, food and water security, environmental degradation, pollution, and global health.

6) European democracy to modernise democratic governance by developing policies,

innovations and institutions that expand political participation and civic engagement, enhance accountability and legitimacy, protect rights and the rule of law, and help restore trust in democratic institutions.

Unforeseen events can also play an important role in affecting objectives, such as major societal shocks (pandemics, migration, natural disasters, economic turmoil etc.) or current political issues.

## WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA?

The European Research Area (ERA) is a concept that seeks to establish a unified single area in which scientific knowledge, technology and researchers can circulate freely. ERA provides a framework for European research geared towards removing barriers of mobility and putting the necessary conditions in place for scientists to move more easily, have better access to funding and concentrate on their research.

An ERA Communication was published in September 2020. The four strategic objectives

- Prioritise investments and reforms in research and innovation
- Improve access to excellent facilities and infrastructures
- Transfer research results to the economy
- Strengthen the mobility of researchers and free flow of knowledge and technology

The ERA has launched specific actions to support these objectives. These actions address issues such as reforming research assessment, research infrastructures and empowering higher education.

Objectives and actions are implemented by the Commission in cooperation with or together with the EU if Member States support the actions.

## WHAT IS THE STRUCTURE OF HORIZON EUROPE?

Horizon Europe consists of three vertical pillars: 1) Excellent Science, 2) Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness, 3) Innovative Europe and one horizontal programme 4) Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area. Additionally, the programme includes initiatives such as partnerships, EU missions and the New European Bauhaus Facility which are all part of Pillar 2. The Partnerships account for approximately 40% of the Pillar 2 budget, which constitutes more than 50% of the total Horizon Europe budget. See table below.

**Horizon Europe 2021-27**

| Pillar 1<br>Excellent Science | Pillar 2<br>Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness | Pillar 3<br>Innovative Europe |
|---|---|---|
| European Research Council<br>Marie Sklodowska-Curie Actions<br>Research Infrastructures | Clusters:<br>Health<br>Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society<br>Civil Security for Society<br>Digital, Industry and Space<br>Climate, Energy and Mobility<br>Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Ressources, Agriculture and Environment<br>Joint Research Centre | European Innovation Council<br>European innovation ecosystems<br>European Institute of Innovation and Technology |
| **Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area** | | |
| Widening Participation and Spreading Excellence | | Reforming and Enhancing European R&I system |

**Table 1. Structure of Horizon Europe**

## WHAT IS EXCELLENT SCIENCE (PILLAR I)?

Pillar I 'Excellent Science' strengthens EU science and technology through increased investment in highly skilled people and cutting-edge research. It supports the search for breakthroughs in understanding and acquisition of knowledge at all levels; the world-class facilities needed to achieve this, including physical and knowledge infrastructures, and the means to disseminate and share knowledge, methodologies, and skills. The European Research Council (ERC) will support the best researchers with flexible, long-term funding to pursue ground-breaking, high-gain/high-risk research in Europe. The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) focus on excellent research that is fully bottom-up, open to any field of research and innovation, from basic research to market take-up and innovation services. It supports the mobility of researchers across borders, sectors and disciplines, excellent training of researchers, the strengthening of human resources and skills development and the creation of synergies with EU, national and regional programmes. Research Infrastructures will endow Europe with world-class sustainable research infrastructures, open and accessible to all researchers in Europe and beyond.

The key objectives of Pillar I 'Excellent Science' are to reduce research fragmentation, avoid duplication and better coordinate the design, development, accessibility, and use of research infrastructures.

## WHAT ARE GLOBAL CHALLENGES AND EUROPEAN INDUSTRIAL COMPETITIVENESS (PILLAR II)?

Pillar II 'Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness' delivers on the EU's strategic priorities, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Sustainable Development Goals. Pillar II will be aligned with actions taken in other countries and regions of the world to achieve greater impact. It is grouped into six integrated clusters of activities that aim to create systemic and sustainable changes for society and the economy. Pillar II includes six clusters:

- Health
- Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society
- Civil Security for Society
- Digital, Industry and Space
- Climate, Energy and Mobility
- Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment

Pillar II is implemented primarily by collaborative research and innovation projects that respond to pre-defined challenges and bring together private and public actors, end-users, scientists, technologists, producers, innovators, businesses, educators, policymakers, citizens, and civil society organisations. Pillar II also includes research and innovation missions and a range of partnerships with public and private partners and from 2025 a New European Bauhaus Facility.

See also: What are the EU missions? (page 14) and What are the different types of European partnerships in Horizon Europe? (page 16)

## WHAT IS INNOVATIVE EUROPE (PILLAR III)?

Pillar III seeks to enhance the EU's industrial competitiveness and innovation performance, notably by supporting the development and deployment of disruptive and market-creating innovations via the European Innovation Council (EIC), European Innovation Ecosystems, and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology.

See also: What is European Innovation Council? (page 19), What are European Innovation Ecosystems? (page 20) and What are the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs)? (page 20)

## WHAT IS WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND STRENGTHENING THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA?

The horizontal programme seeks to strengthen collaborative links across Europe and open European research and innovation networks, contribute to improved research management

capacities in the group of 'widening countries'[1], support national policy reforms, and exploit the potential of the EU talent pool.

There are two distinct programmes in this part of Horizon Europe.

The first part, "Widening Participation and Spreading Excellence", supports activities to reduce disparities in research and innovation performance among Member States by sharing knowledge and expertise to help widening countries and outermost regions attain a competitive position in global value chains. Activities include *teaming* to create new or upgrade existing centres of excellence, and *twinning* to significantly strengthen universities or research organisations in a specific research area by helping them to link up with internationally leading institutions in other Member States. *ERA Chairs* support universities or research organisations in attracting and maintaining high quality human resources under the direction of an outstanding researcher and research manager.

*COST* (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) provides scientific networking, capacity building, career development, and other activities to improve the quality of proposals from low research and innovation performing Member States as well as fostering circulation of researchers and knowledge.

The second part, "Strengthening the European Research Area", addresses research and innovation policy issues of a horizontal nature, such as Responsible Research and Innovation, ethics, gender, Open Science, etc. It also contributes to the development of the European Research Area through activities that are relevant for or support policy development.

## WHAT ARE THE CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES (SME PARTICIPATION, GENDER, SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES, THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS, AND THE GREEN DEAL)?

Cross-cutting issues are addressed in the implementation of Horizon Europe to maximise impact and added-value of European research and innovation investments. Cross-cutting issues include gender, social sciences and humanities, open science, ethics and research integrity, dissemination and exploitation of results, effective circulation of knowledge between research, industry, education and training, a balanced approach between research and innovation and key enabling technologies. In general, they are issues to be considered in all projects to the extent that they are of relevance.

## WHAT DOES TECHNOLOGY READINESS LEVEL MEAN?

Technology Readiness Levels 1-9 (TRLs) are used in some parts of Horizon Europe to define the different research and innovation steps from basic research to the commercialisation of a product.

[1] Hungary, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Greece plus overseas territories of France and Portugal.

| Technology Readiness Level | Definition |
|---|---|
| TRL 1 | Basic principles observed and reported |
| TRL 2 | Technology concept and/or application formulated |
| TRL 3 | Analytical and experimental critical function and/or characteristic proof-of-concept |
| TRL 4 | Component and/or subsystem validation in laboratory environment |
| TRL 5 | Component/subsystem/system validation in relevant environment |
| TRL 6 | Demonstration in relevant environment |
| TRL 7 | Prototyping demonstration in an operational environment |
| TRL 8 | Actual system completed and qualified through test and demonstration |
| TRL 9 | Actual system proven through successful operations |

**Table 2. Technology Readiness Levels**

## WHAT IS SOCIETAL READINESS ASSESSMENT?

The Societal Readiness Assessment (SRA) is being introduced as a pilot in selected 2025 Cluster 5 topics within Horizon Europe which focuses on energy, climate, and mobility solutions. This assessment aims to ensure that technological innovations align with societal needs and values. By evaluating how new technologies might impact society, the SRA helps in identifying potential societal challenges and opportunities early in the development process. SRA is an attempt to integrate the SSH disciplines into the cluster and enhance multidisciplinary research. While currently tested only in Cluster 5, there is potential for integrating the SRA concept into other clusters in the future, depending on the pilot's success and relevance.

## WHAT IS MEANT BY 'IMPACT' IN HORIZON EUROPE?

Each topic in a call for applications will define the specifically expected impact(s) that projects are expected to deliver. Impact is also one of the three criteria against which applications are evaluated. Annex V of the Horizon Europe regulation defines short-, medium- and long-term key impact pathways. Impact is grouped in three categories: scientific, societal, and technological/economic impact which Horizon Europe should contribute to achieving. The pathways provide a framework for monitoring and evaluating the performance of Horizon Europe.

- *Scientific impact* refers to high-quality new knowledge, strengthening human capital in research and innovation and fostering diffusion of knowledge and open science.
- *Societal impact* refers to the delivery of benefits that strengthen the uptake of innovation in society and contribute to people's wellbeing by addressing EU policy priorities such as United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris

Agreement on climate change. See also: What is the policy context for Horizon Europe and how is it relevant? (page 6)

- *Technological/economic impact* refers to the creation and growth of companies that create direct and indirect jobs. See also: What are the key impact pathways? (page 37)

Projects will have to deliver information in their reporting that supports this monitoring at programme level.

## WHAT IS THE BUDGET OF HORIZON EUROPE?

The total budget for Horizon Europe 2021-27 is €95,5 billion. The budget allocation for the different programme parts can be found in the table below.

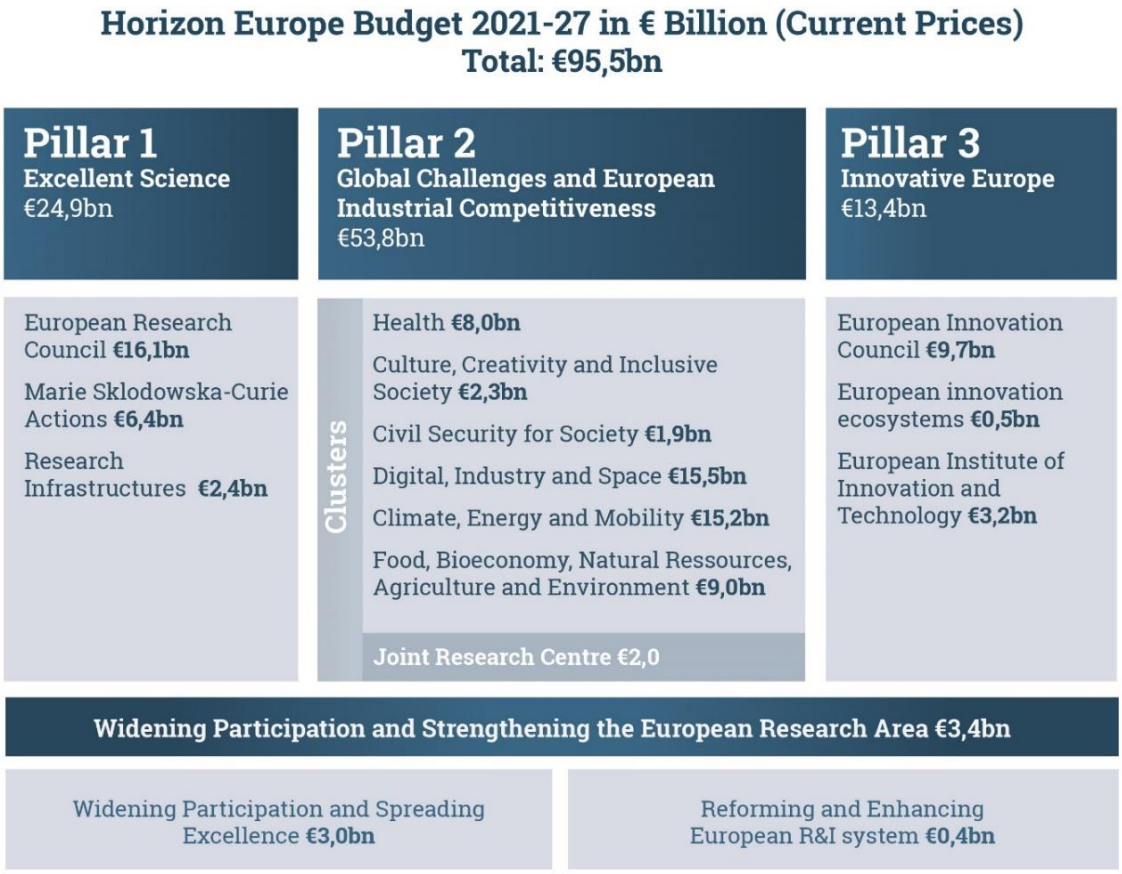


**Table 3. Budget of Horizon Europe**

# 2. THE THREE PILLARS OF HORIZON EUROPE

## WHAT ARE THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE EXCELLENT SCIENCE PILLAR (PILLAR I)?

The Excellent Science Pillar in Horizon Europe is designed to uphold the highest standards of research in the European Union by supporting frontier research and breakthrough scientific ideas. Key components include the European Research Council (ERC) and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action (MSCA).

The ERC is dedicated to fund bottom-up frontier research initiated by scientists and scholars without pre-defined priorities. Scientific excellence is the sole criterion for ERC frontier research grant evaluation. It awards grants through competitive calls to projects led by both early career and established researchers, across all academic disciplines. In 2024 the ERC introduced changes to the evaluation process, with a greater emphasis on project quality and the ideas behind a project than an applicant's CV and track record.

The (MSCAs) are the EU's flagship funding programme for doctoral education and postdoctoral training of researchers and are grouped under five intervention areas:

- Mobility of researchers
- Training of researchers
- Strengthening human capital across the ERA
- Facilitation synergies
- Promoting public outreach

The action titles are as follows:

**MSCA Doctoral Networks:**

- Up to 360 person-months (standard) with 180 additional (optional) person-months for joint or industrial doctorates
- Resubmission restrictions applying from 2022 for applications receiving a score below 80%

**MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships:**

- Fellows must hold PhD at the time of call deadline
- Fellows must have maximum eight years of research experience after PhD completion
- Secondments worldwide possible for up to 1/3 of the period
- Optional additional placement of up to six months in non-academic European organisations
- Resubmission restrictions applying from 2022 for applications receiving a score below 70%

**MSCA Staff Exchange:**

- Max 360 person-months

Interdisciplinary secondments in the same sector possible within Europe (max. 1/3 of a project's person-months)

**MSCA Cofund:**

- Co-finances new or existing doctoral and postdoctoral programs at national, regional, or international levels, enhancing their quality and scope
- Promotes international and cross-sectoral mobility, supporting researchers at all career stages to broaden their experience and skills
- Introduction of an MSCA COFUND Seal of Excellence

**MSCA and Citizens:**

- Aims to bring research and researchers closer to the public, increasing awareness of research and innovation activities, and enhancing public recognition of science and research education
- Demonstrates the significant role of researchers in society and the economy, and the direct impact of their work on everyday life

## WHAT ARE THE EU MISSIONS?

An EU Mission is a portfolio of research and innovation actions aimed at delivering high impact with clear societal value. An EU Mission should be bold, inspirational, and widely relevant to society, and be clearly framed, i.e., targeted, measurable and timebound. It should make it easier for citizens to understand the value of EU investments in research and innovation.

An EU Mission gathers multiple stakeholders such as researchers, entrepreneurs, and European citizens to work across disciplines and sectors on developing solutions to major challenges. The five selected EU-Missions are:

- Adaptation to Climate Change: support at least 150 European regions and communities to become climate resilient by 2030
- Cancer: working with Europe's Beating Cancer Plan to improve the lives of more than 3 million people by 2030 through prevention, cure and solutions to live longer and better
- Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030
- 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030
- A Soil Deal for Europe: 100 living labs and lighthouses to lead the transition towards healthy soils by 2030

The EU Missions are proposed by the five Mission Boards. A maximum of 10% of the annual budget of Pillar II in Horizon Europe will be allocated to fund the implementation of missions

during the first three years of Horizon Europe after which the missions were evaluated. On 19 July 2023, the European Commission published the study evaluating the EU Missions. The Commission affirmed that the Missions are on track to achieve their goals by 2030, but highlighted the need to address governance complexities and enhance coordination with national, regional, and local authorities. The latest Mission Work Programme 2023-2024 with calls can be found here.

The timeframe of each EU Mission depends on the challenge of the mission. Although there is no specific timeframe a mission can last up to 10 years.

Each EU Mission has a mission manager from the European Commission, whose main tasks are to support the Mission Boards and secure the anchoring of the missions within the Commission.

## WHO IS A MISSION-TOPIC RELEVANT FOR AND WHAT CAN BE FUNDED?

An EU Mission topic is relevant for different stakeholders in both the public and private sector as well as for European citizens.

An EU Mission will potentially combine different funding instruments and policy actions and will be supported by a range of activities, engaging different actors such as the Member States, European citizens and the European Commission.

Each EU Mission may involve one or more of the following actions:

- Launch specific calls in Horizon Europe and other programmes. These calls will encourage creativity and bottom-up ideas from a proposal.
- Identify specific actions to change/improve policy contexts, which are critical for the success of EU Missions such as framework conditions.
- Make use of relevant partnerships.
- Mobilise structural funds to align these with mission goals.
- Establish appropriate links to national programmes and policy.
- Influence the international agenda, combining efforts with similar third country programmes.

## HOW WILL A MISSION-FUNDED PROJECT INTERACT WITH OTHER MISSION FUNDED PROJECTS OR HORIZON EUROPE?

Mission funded projects interlinks with other mission funded projects both within the same EU Mission area and potentially with other mission areas as well as projects funded in other parts of Horizon Europe. Furthermore, there is also potential to create synergy between the EU Missions and other EU programmes, including the European Cohesion Policy and Regional Funds, European Rural Development Funds, Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Internal Market Programme, Digital Europe Programme, and the LIFE Programme. Synergies should also be sought at a national and regional level. The Commission is encouraging Member States to

ensure national and local anchorage through national and regional funding schemes. Public ownership is facilitated via citizen involvement.

## WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIPS IN HORIZON EUROPE?

European Partnerships are established in sectoral areas and are based on challenges. They are used when challenges are of a scale that require a range of partners (public and private) to come together to deliver societal and economic impact through investments in research and innovation and where individual calls would not be able to achieve the same impact. Due to the size of challenges addressed through the European Partnerships, they normally last for three years or more. European Partnerships represent a significant investment (up to 40 % of the budget of Pillar II).

Three different forms of European Partnerships can be implemented depending on specific needs, types of activities and criteria:

- Co-programmed European Partnerships
- Co-funded European Partnerships
- Institutionalised European Partnerships

**Co-programmed European Partnerships** are based on memoranda of understanding (MoU) and/or contractual arrangements between the Commission and private and/or public partners. They are expected to be best suited for the participation of industry and in some cases Member States, foundations, international partners etc. They are jointly implemented by the Commission and partners. The co-programmed calls are integrated in the Horizon Europe work programmes.

**Co-funded European Partnerships** are implemented by partners who receive a substantial budget contribution from Horizon Europe (Grant Agreement) to co-fund their joint programme of activities. The Commission implements its part of the partnership through Horizon Europe Work Programmes with calls for proposals. The co-funded partnerships are expected to be best suited for partners from the Member States, research funding agencies and other public authorities. During the implementation, national rules apply by default to calls and projects launched by co-funded actions. The calls may only be open to funding of stakeholders located in participating countries.

**Institutionalised European Partnerships** are the most complex type of partnerships. They may be formalised partnerships between Member State funded programmes (Public-Public-Partnership –P2P), which the Commission joins, or Public-Private-Partnerships (PPP), where a private sector consortium on the one side and the Commission set up a Joint Undertaking. Member States do in rare cases also join the Joint Undertakings. Both types of institutionalised partnerships are adopted by Member States in the Council of the European Union and sometimes also in the European Parliament. They are used in cases where other forms of research and innovation partnerships would not generate the necessary impacts (due to e.g.,

long-term perspective, budget, or international visibility). They are expected to be best suited for long-term collaborations with stable partners and provide only limited flexibility for adaptation during their implementation. Compared to other forms of European Partnerships, they require a high degree of preparation, including the establishment of dedicated entities (funding bodies) to manage implementation. Institutionalised partnerships adopt their own strategic research agenda and award funding mainly based on open calls for proposals.

## WHAT IS THE FINAL LIST OF EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIPS UNDER HORIZON EUROPE?

In December 2019, the Commission published a final report based on a consultation about the partnerships, including a list of 49 future partnership candidates for the first half of Horizon Europe (see page 134 in final report). A 50th partnership on Pandemics preparedness is included. In its updated Strategic Plan for 2025-2027 (see page 22), the Commission has identified nine additional co-programmed and co-funded partnerships (highlighted in bold in the list below below).

The following co-programmed and co-funded European Partnerships have been identified and will appear in the Work Programmes of Horizon Europe.

**Co-funded European Partnerships:**

- European Partnership for Risk Assessment of Chemicals (DK)
- European Partnership for Fostering a European Research Area for Health Research (ERA for Health) (DK)
- European Partnership for Transformation of Health Care Systems (DK)
- European Partnership for Personalised Medicine
- European Partnership for Rare Diseases
- European Partnership for One Health / Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)
- European Partnership for Driving Urban Transitions to a Sustainable Future (DK)
- European Partnership for Clean Energy Transition (DK)
- European Partnership for Accelerating Farming Systems Transition: Agroecology living labs and research infrastructures
- European Partnership for Animal Health and Welfare
- European Partnership for Agriculture of Data
- European Partnership for Rescuing Biodiversity to Safeguard Life on Earth (DK)
- European Partnership for a Climate Neutral, Sustainable and Productive Blue Economy (DK)
- European Partnership for Safe and Sustainable Food Systems for People, Planet and Climate
- European Partnership Water4all: Water security for the planet (DK)
- European Partnership for Innovative SMEs (DK)
- **Brain Health (*New*)**
- **Forests and Forestry for a Sustainable Future (*New*)**
- **Raw Materials for the Green and Digital Transition (*New*)**
- **Resilient Cultural Heritage (*New*)**

- **Social Transformations and Resilience (*New*)**

**Co-programmed European Partnerships:**

- European Partnership for Artificial Intelligence, Data and Robotics
- European Partnership for Photonics
- European Partnership Made in Europe
- European Partnership for Clean Steel – Low Carbon Steelmaking
- European Partnership Processes4Planet
- European Partnership for Globally Competitive Space Systems9
- European Partnership for Connected, Cooperative and Automated Mobility (CCAM)
- European Partnership for Batteries: Towards a competitive European industrial battery value chain
- European Partnership towards Zero-emission Road Transport (2ZERO)
- European Partnership for Zero-emission Waterborne Transport
- European Partnership for People-centric Sustainable Built Environment (Built4People)
- European Partnership for European Open Science Cloud (EOSC)
- European Partnership for Pandemic Preparedness
- **Innovative Materials for the EU (*New*)**
- **Solar Photovoltaics (*New*)**
- **Textiles of the Future (*New*)**
- **Virtual Worlds (*New*)**

Co-funded partnerships will only be implemented if they receive enough financial support from Member States.

See also: What is the Strategic Plan? (page 23)

## WHICH OF THE CO-FUNDED EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIPS CAN DANISH STAKEHOLDERS PARTICIPATE IN?

Danish stakeholders can participate in calls under co-funded European Partnerships but can only expect funding from partnerships that Danish funding agencies have committed funding to. Danish participation is typically funded by the Innovation Fund Denmark, one of the Development and Demonstration Programmes (UDPs) in energy, environment and agriculture or the Independent Research Fund Denmark. Co-funded partnerships and calls to which Danish funding agencies commit funding will in most cases be featured on their respective websites. The partnerships will be open for participants from all Member States active in the partnership.

In the first half of Horizon Europe, Danish funding agencies have given commitments to nine co-funded partnerships indicated in the list above with (DK).

## WHAT IS EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL?

The European Innovation Council (EIC) is part of Pillar III Innovative Europe and supports European innovators in all fields of disruptive, market-creating innovations. It supports both research-intensive transdisciplinary projects (Pathfinder) and close-to-market mono-beneficiary projects (Accelerator).

## WHAT IS PATHFINDER AND ACCELERATOR?

The EIC Pathfinder and Accelerator are the two main funding instruments under the EIC. The Pathfinder supports lower Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs), transdisciplinary research-intensive projects in breakthrough areas of science, through multi-beneficiary projects. The Accelerator supports SMEs (and in some cases midcaps with up to 500 employees) with higher TRL single-beneficiary projects that have the potential to create new markets or disrupt existing ones. Projects are typically based on scientific discovery (deep tech) and are characterised by a relatively long time to market readiness. The Accelerator offers both grants and blended finance.

A third EIC funding instrument, EIC Transition, supports single beneficiaries or small consortia with grants to validate new technology and develop market readiness. Projects must build on results developed in the Future and Emerging Technologies programme in Horizon 2020, Pathfinder or ERC Proof of Concept projects (list may be revised), and as such serves as a bridge to the EIC Accelerator.

See also: What does Technology Readiness Level mean? (page 10)

## IS THE EIC ONLY FOR COMPANIES?

The EIC target group is innovators from private companies, universities, and other types of institutions. However, the EIC Accelerator is only open to SMEs including start-ups and spin-outs, and to natural and legal persons intending to establish or invest in an SME before the signature of the grant agreement. Small midcaps (up to 500 employees) may also be eligible for the investment component (TRL9+). The EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition, on the other hand, are also open to researchers at universities and innovators from other sectors.

## WHICH COMPANIES CAN GET FUNDING FROM THE EIC ACCELERATOR?

Only SMEs, including start-ups and spin-outs, and in limited circumstances mid-caps (up to 500 employees), are eligible for support from the EIC Accelerator. The instrument targets highly innovative, high-risk, high-reward projects usually with a strong technology component.

## WHAT IS BLENDED FINANCE?

Blended finance is a mix of grant support with financing or equity investments. The EIC Accelerator offers ‘grant only’, ‘grant first’ (followed by potential equity offer during project)

or grant combined with equity/financing. Applicants can choose which option they prefer at the time of application. 'Grant only' applicants need to justify the availability of sufficient financial means to finance deployment and scale-up, as all projects will be evaluated against the same criteria, including the potential to scale-up the innovation.

## WHAT ARE THE INVESTMENT TERMS UNDER THE EQUITY PART OF THE EIC ACCELERATOR, THE EIC FUND?

The EIC Fund invests in the form of equity or quasi-equity (e.g., convertible loans). The terms will be set out on a case-by-case basis. The EIC Fund will generally seek 10-20% of the voting rights when it invests in companies. Exit is expected after 7-10 years on average with a maximum of 15 years. There are no predefined levels of returns. The objective is 'impact investment' rather than 'return on investment'. See the EIC Investment Guidelines.

## WILL COMPANIES SUPPORTED BY THE EIC ACCELERATOR BE ABLE TO SEEK INVESTMENTS OUTSIDE THE EU?

Companies having obtained grant only support from the EIC are not limited in their search for investors.

If the company has received equity investment, the exit (sale of the EIC Fund's shares) needs to be approved by the EIC Fund Board, which will assess whether the exit is in the EU's interest.

Under circumstances where a project is deemed of strategic interest to the EU, the EIC Fund will condition its initial support on a blocking minority and may seek to ensure European ownership of IP and of the company. Strategic interest will be decided on a case-by-case basis but can for example relate to security/defence or key enabling technologies where the EU is aiming for European sovereignty (e.g., artificial intelligence). The terms of the investment by the EIC Fund are subject to negotiation between the Fund and the recipient company.

There are also certain restrictions in the transfer and use of IPR outside of the Union or the involved associated countries which would have to be respected in such a situation.

## WHAT ARE EUROPEAN INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS?

The European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) is part of Pillar III Innovative Europe. The aim is to create more connected and efficient innovation ecosystems that support innovation and the scaling up of companies in Europe. EIE will interconnect regional and national innovation actors at the EU level by supporting joint transnational and inter-regional innovation programmes in Member States, regions, and associated countries.

## WHAT ARE THE KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION COMMUNITIES (KICS)?

Through the European Institute of Innovation and Investment (EIT), the EU finances the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) that each cover a specific sector/challenge.

Through the KICs, the EIT seeks to reinforce the innovation capacity of all EU Member States by promoting synergies, integration and cooperation in higher education, research, and innovation to foster entrepreneurship and strengthen innovation ecosystems. KICs undertake innovation activities and investments with European added value, innovation-driven research, experimentation, prototyping and demonstration, education, and training activities, as well as outreach activities and dissemination of best practices in the field of innovation.

Nine KICs currently exist: EIT Climate-KIC, EIT Digital, EIT Food, EIT Health, EIT InnoEnergy, EIT Manufacturing, EIT Raw Materials and EIT Urban Mobility. A new KIC aimed at the cultural and creative sector was designated in 2022: Culture and Creative Sectors and Industries (KIC CCSI). One new KIC on water, marine and maritime sectors and ecosystems is planned to be launched in 2026.

The Strategic Innovation Agenda (SIA) defines the priority areas and strategy for the EIT for the period 2021-27 in line with the objectives and priorities of Horizon Europe.

# 3. HORIZON EUROPE PROCESS

## HOW OFTEN WILL CALLS BE PUBLISHED UNDER HORIZON EUROPE?

The Work Programmes including calls are published on a biannual basis, but with annual deadlines for call for proposals. The actual call publication date and deadlines may differ from one programme part to the other. Minor changes to the calls in the second year of the Work Programme may occur after the publication.

Work Programmes have covered 2021-2022 and 2023-2024. A separate Work Programme is launched for 2025 due to a new European Commission in 2024, and the last Work Programme of Horizon Europe will cover 2026-2027.

## HOW ARE THE WORK PROGRAMMES BEING PREPARED UNDER HORIZON EUROPE?

The European Commission's (Commission) Directorate-General for Research & Innovation (DG RTD) is responsible for the coordination of the Work Programme preparation. Other Directorate Generals take part in the preparation alongside DG RTD, e.g., DG Connect in relation to Cluster 4: Digital, industry and Space. The Work Programmes build on the orientations of the Strategic Plan and are the result of several formal and informal consultations with various stakeholders. The collaboration between DG RTD and so-called policy DGs (e.g., responsible for health, climate, environment, and digital) is more structured than previously and working groups have been established to coordinate internally. This internal preparation process is referred to as co-creation. DGs not closely involved in the preparation can give their input to the Work Programme in the interservice consultation.

The Commission also consults Member States in the Programme Committees during the preparations and seek their approval (positive opinion) before adopting the Work Programme. In addition, several external stakeholder groups are consulted more or less informally. It includes the European Technology Platforms, inputs from conferences, workshops and public consultations, ad hoc expert groups and informal dialogue with stakeholders. As a novelty, the Commission has initiated the annual conference Research and Innovation Days to engage with stakeholders on shaping the future of the EU's research and innovation priorities.

## WHAT IS THE SPECIFIC PROGRAMME?

The Specific Programme is part of the legislative package that establishes Horizon Europe. It defines the implementation of Horizon Europe. The Specific Programme includes in broad terms the issues and activities to be covered during the seven years of Horizon Europe. The Specific Programme describes activities and objectives of the programmes under the different pillars. The Specific Programme is implemented through an overarching Strategic Plan and subsequently the biannual Work Programmes with announcement of calls for proposals. The Specific Programme also covers the instruments that implement the Framework Programme.

## WHAT IS THE STRATEGIC PLAN?

The implementation of the Specific Programme is facilitated by a multiannual Strategic Plan of research and innovation activities, promoting consistency between Work Programmes, EU priorities, and national priorities. The Strategic Plan is adopted by the Commission after a strategic planning process where Member States are consulted and give their formal approval. The European Parliament is involved through extensive exchanges of view. Stakeholders are consulted at large in the so-called co-design process. The strategic planning process focuses mainly on Pillar II 'Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness'. It also covers relevant activities in the other two pillars and the 'Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area' programme. The initial Strategic Plan covered the period 2021-2024 and the second Strategic Plan covers the final three years of Horizon Europe, 2025-2027.

The original Strategic Plan 2021-2024 contained the following elements related to the period covered:

- Four key strategic orientations (KSOs) for research and innovation which are further expanded into impact areas and their link to the six thematic clusters in pillar II.
- Identification of European Partnerships.
- Identification of Missions.
- Principles for international cooperation.
- Links between the three pillars in Horizon Europe.
- Specific cross-cutting issues which will be taken into account in the implementation of Horizon Europe 2021-24 such as gender equality and inclusiveness, ethics and integrity, integration of Social Sciences and Humanities, the role of Key Enabling Technologies and strategic value chains, Open Science, dissemination and exploitation, and social innovation and EU taxonomy[2].

The subsequent Strategic Plan 2025-2027 is similar to the original Strategic Plan but introduced some novelties such as:

- Simplified the KSOs into three overarching, interlinked and less prescriptive orientations that encapsulate the main EU policy priorities: green transition, digital transition, and a more resilient, competitive, democratic and inclusive Europe.
- Removed the impact areas to reduce complexity and focus on the expected impacts.
- The New European Bauhaus Facility is now integrated as a cross-cluster component across all six of the clusters.
- The introduction of nine new European co-funded and co-programmed partnerships, covering areas from Brain Health to Virtual Worlds.
- Global Approach Communication introduced and updated to the current geopolitical context.

[2] A clear and common classification system defining under which conditions economic activities in a given sector can be considered as environmentally sustainable.

# 4. ADVOCACY AND KEY PLAYERS

## WHAT ARE THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEES?

The Programme Committees (PCs) are the EU Member States' forum for giving input to the Commission on the content of the Work Programmes. The PCs formally approve the final version of the Work Programme before the calls are published. All Member States and countries associated with Horizon Europe are represented. The PCs are also a link between the EU and national research systems. The Danish representatives in the PCs are usually officials from the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, the relevant sector ministry (environment, food, etc.) and assisted by an expert (scientist or industry representative).

## WHAT ARE THE REFERENCE GROUPS?

The Reference Groups is a Danish concept. These groups are established by the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education in order to structure the dialogue between the Danish Programme Committee members and Danish stakeholders e.g., universities, industry and interest organisations. Members of the Reference Groups represent their organisation/institution.

For Horizon Europe, five Reference Groups were established in Denmark in March 2020, covering the areas:

- Strategic configuration (providing input on e.g., strategic matters and questions of overall implementation).

Four thematic configurations:

- Health
- Digital, industry and space
- Climate, energy and mobility
- Food, bioeconomy, natural resources, agriculture and environment

## HOW CAN ONE PROVIDE INPUT TO THE WORK PROGRAMMES?

In general, contact with the Commission (DG RTD and relevant policy DGs) is important, often on an informal basis. Contacts can be established through meetings, thematic workshops or through participation in stakeholder events organised by the Commission. Such activities are often useful for putting forward scientific, innovative and impact related issues. Contacts to members of Expert Groups and Programme Committees (PCs) as well as active participation in relevant European Technology Platforms or European Partnerships are other possible channels to provide inputs. For some areas, the Commission may organise public consultations where all stakeholders can suggest future topics. Participation and involvement in science policy active networks, expert groups and/or scientific societies are platforms that allow you to

attract the attention of Commission staff, and other players involved in preparing the Work Programmes, to certain issues, challenges, or needs.

Input can also be provided through the Danish PC delegates who receive their input mainly from formal reference groups.

See also: What are the Reference Groups? (page 24)

## WHAT ARE THE EUROPEAN TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS?

Most European Technology Platforms (ETPs) were established during FP6 and continued under FP7 and Horizon 2020. The ETPs are industry-driven and aim at uniting stakeholders from a specific sector. The members are from industry, research and technology organisations, academia and in some cases the Member States. The technology platforms prepare strategic research agendas, which define research priorities for the sector and draw up plans for implementation which may serve as input to the biannual Work Programmes.

## HOW CAN ONE BECOME AN ADVISORY TO THE COMMISSION?

From time to time, the Commission launches calls for experts to become members of ad hoc expert groups or committees related to the development of Horizon Europe. The role of such groups is to assist the Commission with advice on a given topic. This could for example concern the development of new funding instruments, strategies for new topical research areas or the mid-term evaluation of the framework programme. Being an advisory expert offers an opportunity to take part in shaping developments of the topic or issue in question. It also offers an opportunity to acquire knowledge of the plans of the Commission at an early stage.
The call for experts will specify the profile needed and the conditions related to the appointment. Experts are chosen and serve in their individual capacities. To apply to become an expert in the Commission advisory bodies one must be registered in the Commission expert database.

See also: How to sign up as an expert evaluator? (page 39)

# 5. RULES FOR PARTICIPATION, FUNDING AND APPLICATION

## WHAT ARE THE RULES FOR PARTICIPATION?

The rules for participation are part of the Horizon Europe legal framework. They specify who the potential participants are and relevant conditions such as time to grant, funding rates, award and selection criteria, evaluation design, evaluation review, enquiries and complaints, ethics, security issues, ownership and protection of project results, exploitation and dissemination of results, including open access, and appointment of independent external experts.

**Single set of rules:** There is one single set of rules for participation that covers all parts of Horizon Europe to reduce the administrative burden for participants. In specific and duly justified cases, funding bodies that are set up based on a separate legal act may depart from the rules, except from eligibility of actions, ethical and security issues.

**Participants:** Any legal entity including international organisations and other entities established in third countries not associated to Horizon Europe may participate in Horizon Europe actions if they meet the legal conditions as well as conditions defined in the Work Programme or call. Legal entities established in a Member State or associated countries are eligible for funding. Entities in third countries should contribute the cost of their own participation. However, low to middle-income countries or other third countries, subject to exceptional circumstances, could be eligible for funding, e.g., if specified in the Work Programme or if their contribution is considered essential for the project.

The participation of at least three independent legal entities established in different Member States or associated countries is required for projects that are implemented by a consortium of partners. A least one entity must be established in a Member State. Projects funded by the European Research Council, European Innovation Council, and training and mobility actions, Coordination- and Support Actions or co-fund actions may be implemented by one or more legal entities of which at least one must be established in an EU Member State or associated country, unless clearly specified in the Work Programme. In certain cases, the Work Programme might lay out additional criteria according to specific policy requirements or the nature and objective of the action. This could be related to e.g., the number, type and place of legal entities.

**Time to grant:** All applicants should be informed about the outcome of the evaluation of the application within a period of maximum five months after the submission deadline for the complete proposal. Grant agreements should be signed with applicants within a maximum of eight months after the submission deadline of the complete proposal. In some cases, the Work Programme may establish a short time to grant periods.

**Funding:** Horizon Europe reimburses up to 100 % of total eligible costs. Exceptions are innovation actions (IAs) where 70% of eligible costs are reimbursed (however non-profit legal entities may get 100% reimbursement of eligible costs) and co-fund actions where 30-70% of eligible costs are reimbursed. The same funding rates apply in cases where a flat rate, unit or lump sum financing are fixed for the whole project or parts of it. Indirect eligible costs are 25% of the total direct eligible costs excluding direct eligible costs for subcontracting, financial support to third parties and any unit costs or lump sums which include indirect costs.

## WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF ACTIONS TO BE APPLIED IN HORIZON EUROPE?

The different types of actions in Horizon Europe are listed in the General Annexes to the Work Programme. Horizon Europe includes the following types of actions:

**Research and innovation actions (RIA)** Actions aiming primarily at establishing new knowledge and/or exploring the feasibility of a new or improved technology, product, process, service, or solution. This may include basic and applied research, technology development and integration, testing, demonstration, and validation on a small-scale prototype in a laboratory or simulated environment.

**Innovation actions (IA)** Actions directly aimed at producing plans, arrangements or designs for new, altered, or improved products, processes or services, possibly including prototyping, testing, demonstrating, piloting, large-scale product validation and market replication.

**Coordination and support actions (CSA)** Actions contributing to the objectives of the Horizon Europe Programme, excluding research and innovation activities. Networks with the aim to establish and develop strategic plans/roadmaps, and/or act as coordinating bodies of a research and innovation area.

**Programme co-fund actions (CoFund)** A programme of actions established and/or implemented by entities managing and/or funding research and innovation programmes other than EU funding bodies. The programme of activities may support networking and coordination, research, innovation, pilot actions, innovation and market deployment actions, training and mobility actions, awareness raising and communication, dissemination and exploitation, any relevant financial support e.g., grants, prizes, procurement, as well as Horizon Europe blended finance or a combination thereof. The Programme co-fund action may be implemented by the beneficiaries directly or by providing financial support to third parties.

**Innovation and market deployment actions (IMDA)** Actions embedding innovation activities necessary to deploy an innovation in the market, including the scaling-up of companies and Horizon Europe blended finance (a mix of grant-type funding and private finance).

**Training and mobility actions (TMA)** Actions geared towards the improvement of skills, knowledge and career prospects of researchers based on mobility between countries, and if relevant, between sectors or disciplines.

**Pre-commercial procurement actions (PCP)** Actions aiming to enable a transnational buyers' group to reinforce the public procurement of research, development, validation and possibly the first deployment of new solutions that can bring significant quality and efficiency improvements in areas of public interest, whilst opening market opportunities for industry and researchers active in Europe. Eligible activities include the preparation, management and follow-up, under the coordination of a lead procurer, of one joint PCP and additional activities to embed the PCP into a wider set of demand-side activities.

**Public procurement of innovative solutions actions (PPI)** Actions aiming to enable a transnational buyers' group to reinforce the early deployment of innovative solutions. This is done by enabling a transnational buyers' group to overcome the fragmentation of demand for innovative solutions and to share the risks and costs of acting as early adopters of innovative solutions, whilst opening market opportunities for industry. Eligible activities include the preparation and implementation of one joint or several coordinated public procurements of innovative solutions activities by the buyers' group. Additional activities can be funded to embed the PPI into a wider set of demand-side activities.

## CAN PROJECT PARTICIPANTS BE LIABLE TO PAY BACK FUNDING TO THE EU IF A PROJECT DOES NOT REACH ITS GOALS?

As a rule of thumb, the answer is no. If the project carries out the work and produces the deliverables that have been agreed upon in the Grant Agreement with the European Commission (e.g., reports, technical specifications, a prototype, a test period, etc.) there will be no demands for repayment. If, however, the non-attainment was due to non-compliance with the grant agreement, repayments can be expected. Also, when funding is *performance-based lump sums or inducement prizes,* the funding is given on the condition that agreed upon outputs are delivered and milestones are reached. In such cases, repayments of any pre-financing given is a possibility.

From 2022 Horizon Europe funding applications will only be considered if they have a Gender Equality Plan (GEP).

See also: What are the requirements on Gender Equality in Horizon Europe? (page 31)

## HOW WILL SMEs BE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN HORIZON EUROPE?

The involvement of industry–SMEs and large companies in Horizon Europe will be essential to deliver on the programme's objectives, relating for example to the creation of sustainable jobs and growth. For this reason, SMEs are eligible and encouraged to participate across almost all parts of Horizon Europe. The European Innovation Council under the Innovative Europe Pillar 3 is specifically aimed at supporting breakthrough innovation and scaling-up companies, but SMEs also have an important role to play in solving the global challenges under Pillar II across clusters, missions, and partnerships.

To identify and evaluate possibilities, Danish SMEs are encouraged to seek guidance from the regional EU offices and/or EuroCenter. Industry participation in Horizon Europe is expected to reach at least the same level as in Horizon 2020 (where around 25% of the budget for industrial leadership and societal challenges went to SMEs). More than 600 Danish SMEs have participated in Horizon 2020.

An SME is defined as a private enterprise with up to 250 employees and an annual turnover of up to €50 million and/or annual balance sheet of up to €43 million.

## WHICH COUNTRIES CAN RECEIVE FUNDING IN HORIZON EUROPE?

To be eligible for funding, the applicants must be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:

- The 27 Member States (MS) of the European Union (EU) including their outermost regions
- The Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) linked to the Member States
- Eligible non-EU countries
- Countries associated to Horizon Europe[3]

## WHICH COUNTRIES OUTSIDE THE EU ARE ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING IN HORIZON EUROPE (OR PARTS THEREOF)?

Horizon Europe is open to the world. This means that participants from all over the world, regardless of their place of establishment or residence, will be able to participate in most of the programme.

### Low and middle-income countries

The EU will in most cases fund the participation in Horizon Europe actions of legal entities established in low and middle-income countries to support the development of their research and innovation capacities.

### Industrialised countries

Legal entities in industrialised countries and BRIC countries will be eligible for funding when provided for in the specific call conditions, or if their participation is considered essential for implementing the action by the granting authority or if the country is associated to Horizon Europe. If none of these conditions are met, an entity can participate, but will have to provide its own funding.

[3] A complete list of associated countries can be found in the European Commission's guidance document: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-euratom_en.pdf

### Associated countries

As an expression of the EU's commitment to international openness, Horizon Europe now offers the possibility of association to all countries, which share European values and have a strong science, technology, and innovation profile.

The association of non-EU countries to Horizon Europe allows their citizens and organisations to participate in the activities of the programme in the same way as those from EU Member States. Association to Horizon Europe enables the EU and its partners to align research and innovation policy goals, pool resources, share costs and gain reciprocal access to knowledge and know-how, talents, and expertise, to research infrastructure and to new markets for innovators.

As of January 1, 2024, the **United Kingdom** re-joined Horizon Europe as an associated country. This means that UK entities can participate on equal terms as with researchers and organisations from EU Member States. Additionally, recent associations include **South Korea, New Zealand** and **Canada**, which can participate in the global and industrial challenges under Pillar II of Horizon Europe. **Switzerland** is also on track to re-join Horizon Europe, with full participation expected from 2025, pending formal agreement approval. For detailed information on all associated countries and their specific participation scope, please refer to the Commission's overview.

In rare and duly justified cases, the Commission can limit the participation to EU Member States. In this case, the restriction will figure in the call condition text.

## HOW CAN ONE COMBINE HORIZON EUROPE AND OTHER EU FUNDS?

It is possible to blend different EU funds for the same project or for its complimentary projects/activities if full compliance with the rules of each fund is ensured. Key principles for combining funds are: (i) Non-cumulative principle, i.e., no two sources of EU funding are to be allocated to the same expenditure item. (ii) Co-financing principle, i.e., the EU funding is not to replace the minimum co-financing from the beneficiary (own public or private funds). The latter principle is still under negotiation.

Ensuring full compliance with EU grant rules include: (i) A cost item is a specific expenditure incurred and eligible in a project, (ii) In the same project, some expenditure may be co-funded under Horizon Europe and other expenditures under programmes such as European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF) or any other EU fund, (iii) Parts of 'Personnel costs' can be funded under Horizon Europe and other parts under the ESF, (iv) It is important to ensure that the accountancy of a project's costs does not include double funding for an expenditure.

The political agreement between the Council and the Parliament lists possible and sought-after synergies with Horizon Europe.

## WHAT KIND OF FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS ARE AVAILABLE IN HORIZON EUROPE?

Grants are the primary funding model under Horizon Europe; however, the programme will allocate both grants and equity or guarantee-based financial products in the Accelerator instrument. In comparison to Horizon 2020, the use of loans and other financial instruments will be expanded. Horizon Europe includes a bigger use of awards and prizes.

## WHICH ETHICAL RULES ARE APPLICABLE IN HORIZON EUROPE?

Projects must comply with ethical principles (including the highest standards of research integrity) and applicable EU, international and national law. Applicants must have completed the ethics self-assessment as part of their application.

Projects involving ethical issues will have to undergo an ethics review to authorise funding and may be made subject to specific ethics requirements. These requirements become part of the grant agreement as ethics deliverables, e.g., ethics committee opinions/authorisations required under national or EU law.

For more information, see How to complete your ethics self-assessment.

## WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS ON GENDER EQUALITY IN HORIZON EUROPE?

There are three main ways in which gender equality is accounted for in Horizon Europe:

1. For the first time with Horizon Europe, having a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) in place becomes an eligibility criterion for certain categories of legal entities from EU countries and associated countries. This will apply to public bodies, universities, and research organisations from 2022.
2. The integration of the gender dimension into research and innovation content is a requirement by default. Gender is an award criterion evaluated under the excellence criterion unless the topic description explicitly specifies otherwise.
3. Increasing the gender balance throughout the programme is another objective with a target of 50% women in Horizon Europe related boards, expert groups, and evaluation committees. For proposals with the same score, having a gender balance in the research team is a ranking criterion.

More details on the Gender Equality Plans can be found in the general annexes to the Work Programmes.

# 6. PROPOSAL

## HOW CAN ONE PREPARE FOR HORIZON EUROPE?

To prepare for the call for proposals in Horizon Europe, it is important to start as early as possible. You may wish to try to get early access to draft Work Programmes which can give an indication of what the call will include i.e., the content of the call, requirements, timing of the call and deadlines. Be aware though, that drafts are subject to change, only the published version of the call text is “official”.

Preparation activities vary and can include:

- Establish a relevant network
- Seek information and/or provide input from/to members of the Reference Groups
- Make early warnings among your core partners as soon as you see an interesting call text
- Establish or consider cooperation with private enterprises and/or end-users.
- Consider the impact of the project and pathways to impact
- Consider how to include different disciplines
- Contact research support staff and relevant peers as early as possible to get advice.

Please also see Where can I seek advice? (page 43)

## HOW DO I SUBMIT MY PROPOSAL, FIND CALLS AND SEARCH FOR KEYWORDS ETC.?

Proposals must be submitted electronically using the electronic submission system of the Funding & Tenders Portal. Select your topic and go to the Submission Service section of the topic page. Make sure that you select the correct type of action before you start drafting a proposal. The link to the submission system is available if the status of the call is 'open'.

Each user should have an EU Login account to log in to the Portal. If you already have such an account, you can use it for any interactions supported on this site from proposal submission to reporting. If you do not have an account, you need to create it by clicking on the REGISTER button. Otherwise, you get access only to the public tools of the site (e.g., searching funding opportunities, reading guidance, etc.).

If you want to participate in a project proposal, your organisation needs to be registered and have a 9-digit Participant Identification Code (PIC). This unique identifier will be used as a reference by the European Commission (Commission) in any interactions. The Participant Register is the Commission’s online tool to register and manage the data of the organisations participating in EU programmes. It allows consistent handling of the participants’ official data and avoids multiple requests to enter the same information. Check if your organisation is already registered or register it here.

## HOW LONG WILL THE PERIOD BE FROM PUBLICATION OF A CALL FOR PROPOSAL TO THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF A PROPOSAL?

- As Work Programmes are published for a period of normally two years the time from publication to deadline varies.

- The period from when the call for proposal opens to the deadline for submitting a proposal is, as a rule of thumb, a minimum of three months.

## HOW TO START THE APPLICATION PROCESS AND FIND PROJECT PARTNERS?

### Find a call

As a researcher, it is recommended to make your core research competencies as visible as possible within your institution and within your research network at national and international level. The Research Support Office at your institution will be able to direct relevant calls to you and your department. Your research network might be aware of relevant calls that they will share with you. You may also start your call search from the Commission page by entering different keywords that characterise your research field of interest and then refine the results with the help of further filters.

Calls are divided into topics, implemented by different types of actions. Select a topic to read more about the identified opportunity. The topic-related documents, guidance and other instructions are available on a topic page.

### Find project partners

It is important to establish collaboration with other partners as early as possible. It is important to have in mind that the Commission often requires that the project proposals are based on interdisciplinarity and cross-sectorial cooperation. The selection of partners should reflect that.

To find a partner you have several options, e.g.:

- You can present and pitch your research idea for potential partners at relevant conferences and brokerage events organised at European level.
- You can present your research idea to potential partners that you already know.
- The Research Support Office at your institution might from time to time be contacted by other institutions who are searching for partners and might be able to propose potential partners.
- It is possible to find new EU project partners through the Enterprise Europe Network or you can search for partners or find a project that needs your skills at Funding & Tenders Portal. To publish your partner search request or offer, select a topic on the Search Funding and Tenders page. Further help is available here. Use the Partner Search offered on this site to select an organisation based on their profile or their previous participation.
- If your institution is represented through a Brussels-based regional or university office, you might benefit from their network to search for partners.

## WHERE DO I FIND INFORMATION ON HOW TO SET UP A BUDGET?

The budget must be adequate in relation to the work to be performed, as this is part of the evaluation of applications. In general, there are two prevailing approaches for planning a budget:

1) A top-down approach where the overall project budget is divided between the partners (often evenly divided) a priori with individual partners instructed to create their own budget within the limits of the share that were allocated to each partner.

2) A bottom-up approach where the partners are requested to indicate their detailed budgetary needs. Once detailed, all budgets are consolidated to form the overall project budget.

University-based researchers should contact their Research Support Office to find information and advice on setting up a budget.

## WHERE CAN I SEEK ADVICE IF I WANT TO APPLY FOR HORIZON EUROPE FUNDING?

- If you are employed at a university, you can contact your local Research Support Office or similar office if relevant.
- You can contact the Danish National Contact Points (NCPs) in EuroCenter under the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education for advice and information to Danish companies, universities, research institutes and other stakeholders about Horizon Europe participation.
- You can also use the Danish platform EU-DK Support.
- You may contact your regional office and/or university representation in Brussels:
  - Aalborg University, AAU´s EU Office
  - Central Denmark EU Office
  - Greater Copenhagen EU Office
  - North Denmark EU Office
  - South Denmark European Office
- The European Commission's Research Enquiry Service can help with questions concerning Horizon Europe.

# 7. EVALUATION

## HOW IS THE EVALUATION PROCESS?

When a proposal is received by the Commission, the first step of the evaluation process is for the relevant directorate or executive agency to determine if the proposal is admissible and eligible. When this has been checked, all eligible proposals are sent to independent experts (minimum 3) who assess the proposal against predefined evaluation criteria.

### Score and success rates

Experts score each award criterion on a scale from 0 to 5 (half point scores may be given). Score 0 is the lowest score and means that the proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information. Score 5 means that the proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion and that any shortcomings are minor. The maximum overall score is thus 15 (3x5) unless a weighting is applied. If a Work Programme/call provides for a weighting factor, this will be used to determine the final ranking. To be considered for funding, the proposal must score above a certain threshold for each criterion and above an overall threshold.

### Threshold

Funding procedures are expected to have one or two stages. For the first stage of a two-stage proposal the overall threshold is dynamic, i.e., the number of proposals that are selected for the second stage request three times more funding than the total available budget for the call-in question. It means that proposals have a success rate around 30 % during the second stage.

Proposals with an inflated budget or partners, which have no real role in the consortium (alibi partners), are likely to receive a lower score. ERC applicants are also called for an in-person interview by the evaluation panel.

### Timeline for evaluation process

From the application deadline, the Commission has five months to evaluate and rank proposals. When the proposals selected for funding have been notified, another three months are foreseen for drawing up the grant agreement.

There is a different, faster evaluation process for applicants to the EIC accelerator.

## WHAT ARE THE EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR HORIZON EUROPE PROPOSALS?

The evaluation criteria are listed in the final annexes to Horizon Europe. However, the evaluators also advise the Commission concerning the operational capacity of the applicants with respect to their role and tasks in the proposed action. This assessment will be based on the competence and experience of the applicants, including operational resources (human, technical, others).

Horizon Europe proposals are evaluated and scored against the following 3 criteria:

- Excellence
- Impact
- Quality and efficiency of implementation

The above criteria are the standard evaluation criteria as they also appeared under Horizon 2020. A detailed description of their definitions can be found in Annex D in the Horizon Europe General Annexes.

For Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and the European Research Council, the evaluation criteria are set out under the relevant part of the main Work Programme.

ERC applications are, as an exception, only evaluated on the Excellence criteria. It should also be noted though that for Innovation Actions (IA) in pillar II to determine the ranking, the score for the criterion 'impact' will always be given a weight 1.5.

## IS THERE A RANKING SYSTEM FOR SECONDARY EVALUATION CRITERIA?

The Work Programme may provide additional criteria to be used in cases where two or more applications receive the same overall score (ex aequo) and individual scores for all three criteria.

For each group of proposals having obtained the same score, the proposals will be evaluated according to the following criteria in this order:

1) Proposals that address aspects of the call that have not otherwise been covered by more highly ranked proposals will be considered to have the highest priority.
2) The proposals identified under 1), if any, will themselves be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for 'Excellence'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on scores for 'Impact'. In the case of 'Innovation actions' priority will be given to the score for 'Impact' followed by that for 'Excellence'.
3) If necessary, the gender balance in the research team of the proposal who hold the primary responsibility for carrying out the research and/or innovation activities of the proposal, and who are listed in the researchers table of the proposal, will be used as a factor for prioritisation.
4) If necessary, any further prioritisation will be based on geographical diversity defined as the number of Member States or Associated Countries represented in the proposal and who have not otherwise received funds from projects placed further up on the ranking list (and if equal in number and then by budget).
5) If a distinction still cannot be made the panel may decide to further prioritise by considering other factors related to the objectives of the call or to Horizon Europe in general. These may include, for example, enhancing the quality of the project portfolio through synergies between projects or, where relevant and feasible, by involving SMEs. Such factors will be documented in the panel report.

6) The method described in 1), 2), 3) and 4) will then be applied to the remaining equally ranked proposals in the group.

## WHAT ARE THE KEY IMPACT PATHWAYS?

The Commission seeks to broaden and improve the impact delivered by Horizon Europe projects through the introduction of so-called key impact pathways. Three pathways are foreseen in the Horizon Europe regulation: scientific, societal, and economic. The figure below gives more detail.

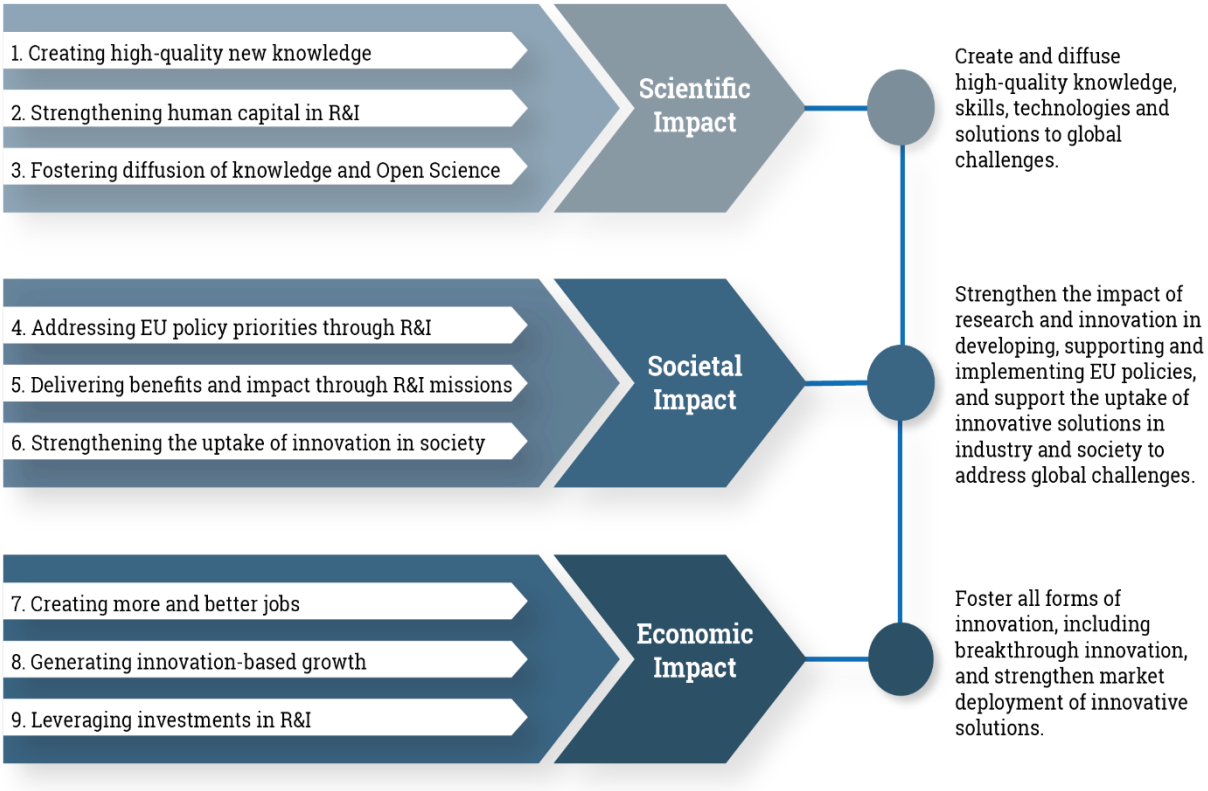


**Table 4. Key Impact Pathways**

Impact pathways and related key impact pathway indicators are made to capture complementary impacts and reflect the non-linear nature of research and innovation investment. Scientific impact is related to supporting the creation and diffusion of new high-quality knowledge, skills, technologies, and solutions to global challenges. Societal impact is related to strengthening the impact of research and innovation in developing, supporting and implementing Union policies and supporting the uptake of innovative solutions across industry and society to address global challenges. Economic impact is related to fostering all forms of innovation including breakthrough innovation and strengthening market deployment of innovative solutions.

The Horizon Europe Strategic Plan is the result of an innovative co-design process, which is reflected in three key strategic orientations, supported by 32 expected impacts. These strategic orientations will provide the basis for building synergies with other EU programmes and funds, as well as investments in research and innovation at Member State level.

The Key Strategic Orientations (KSO´s) are based on expected impacts, which have been defined, largely bottom-up, during the co-design process. The impacts define the wider effects on society, the economy and science to be targeted by research and innovation activities, but not the way to achieve them. This is entirely up to the imagination and skills of the applicants. The impacts are structured by the six clusters that make up Horizon Europe's second Pillar, 'Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness', and are described, along with cross-cluster complementarities and intervention areas covered, in six cluster-specific impact summaries annexed to this document. As such, the Key Strategic Orientations and expected impacts set the scene for the research and innovation activities and outputs to be defined in the Work Programmes.

## HOW IS SEAL OF EXCELLENCE USED IN DENMARK?

The Seal of Excellence is a label that is awarded projects, which score above the defined thresholds, but cannot receive funding due to a lack of budget. It is currently only awarded to mono-beneficiary applications, i.e., ERC, EIC and MSCA. Its use may be expanded to other selected parts of Horizon Europe and potentially in other EU programmes. The objective of the Seal of Excellence is to facilitate better access to funding from national or regional funds for Seal of Excellence holders. Whether this is the case depends on each Member State or region. Currently, the Seal of Excellence does not offer prioritised access to public funds in Denmark. EIC applicants, who are rewarded a Seal of Excellence, may be given access to EIC Business Acceleration Services.

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF EXPERT EVALUATORS?

Independent expert evaluators perform the evaluation of proposals submitted in response to a call for proposals based on the Horizon Europe Work Programmes.

The Commission is continuously looking for expert evaluators. Interested experts can register here. This link also provides information on the type of expert evaluator, which the Commission is currently looking for. The time you need to invest as an expert evaluator and the number of potential travels to Brussels strongly depend on the nature of your role.

Travel costs, accommodation, and daily allowances will be paid for expert evaluators. The daily allowance under Horizon 2020 is €450 per full day. More information on contractual aspects for expert evaluators can be found here.

## HOW TO SIGN UP AS AN EXPERT EVALUATOR?

You can register as an expert evaluator through this link. To access the site, you firstly create an account whereupon you fill in the following information about yourself:

- Programme selection
- Personal details
- Languages
- Education
- Area of expertise
- Professional experience

Please note that panel members for the European Research Council (ERC) are appointed directly by the ERC Scientific Council and are typically not found through this database.

## WHAT IS THE HORIZON RESULTS PLATFORM?

The Horizon Results Platform is a platform where Horizon participants present their results so that interested parties can look them up and contact the project owners. The platform has been created to facilitate and enhance collaboration between stakeholders. The platform is accessible on the Funding and Tenders Portal. Projects and their results are highlighted in terms of (i) degree of innovation, (ii) exploitability and (iii) impact.

# 8. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

## WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS REGARDING PUBLICATION OF PROJECT RESULTS AND DATA MANAGEMENT PLANS IN HORIZON EUROPE?

Horizon Europe requires open access to publications and data. Opt-outs, which are exceptions to the obligation to share data, are only allowed if justified, taking into consideration the legitimate interests of the beneficiaries and any other constraints such as data protection rules, security rules or intellectual property rights. The mantra remains 'as open as possible, as closed as necessary'. The obligations extend for a predefined period beyond the project duration.

Data management plans must ensure responsible data management with a focus on 'FAIR' principles of 'Findability', 'Accessibility', 'Interoperability' and 'Reusability'.

For more information on open science and communication requirements see the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement article 17.

## WHAT WILL BE THE DOCUMENTATION AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PROJECT?

Horizon Europe beneficiaries must keep records and other supporting documents to prove proper implementation of their project (e.g., contracts, invoices). These must be originals (digital documents are considered original if relevant national law allows it). For personnel costs, time worked on the project must be documented by monthly declarations signed by the employee and their supervisor, if no other reliable system for time-recording is in place.
Reporting requirements are set out in the 'Data Sheet' in the Grant Agreement of the specific project. Beneficiaries must continually report on progress (e.g., deliverables, risks, milestones) using the online reporting tool. Periodic reporting consists of a technical and a financial part. The number of reporting periods depends on the duration of the project but will often be every 12-18 months.

## WHAT IS MEANT BY LUMP SUM FUNDING?

Lump sums are applied to simplify funding by basing the grant on estimated and pre-approved costs to eliminate actual cost reporting, timesheets, and financial audits. Lump-sums can only be applied where foreseen in the Work Programme. Two ways of setting the level of lump sums exist: 1) The call text specifies the size of the sum, which is deemed appropriate to solve the call challenge. 2) The applicants provide a detailed budget split on cost categories, work packages and participants. If the cost levels are pre-approved, there is no further need to provide detailed documentation of incurred expenses. The Commission intends to apply the lump sum model where appropriate in Horizon Europe.

## ARE GRANTS UNDER HORIZON EUROPE SUBJECT TO STATE AID RULES?

EU funding which is centrally managed by the Commission or its agencies, and therefore not under direct or indirect control of Member States, is not state aid. Some companies are concerned that Horizon Europe grants could count as so-called de minimis funding. Since Horizon Europe grants are not state aid, this is not the case. De minimis aid refers to small amounts of state aid given to companies, which Member States do not have to notify the Commission about. The maximum amount is €200.000 for each company over a 3-year period.

# 9. FURTHER INFORMATION

## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

You can find more information on the European Commission's Horizon Europe webpage. You can search for the EU institutions' staff contact details through the EU directory.

## FUNDING AND TENDER OPPORTUNITIES: WHAT IS THE MAIN ENTRANCE TO HORIZON EUROPE?

All information on Horizon Europe calls, topics and deadlines, guides for applicants, rules for participation, and proposal submission forms are gathered under the Funding and Tenders Portal. The Portal has different search options to help you navigate on the website.

## HORIZON EUROPE DASHBOARD

It is possible to view and analyse how your institution's participation and funding success compares across countries and institutions at both national and European levels through the Horizon Europe Dashboard. This tool provides valuable insights and comparisons, making it a significant resource for understanding performance and opportunities within Horizon Europe. You can access the Horizon Europe Dashboard here.

## WHICH OTHER EU PROGRAMMES CAN SUPPORT ASPECTS OF RD&I ACTIVITIES?

Funding for research and development is primarily provided through the Framework Programme, Horizon Europe. However, certain activities may also receive funding from the following programmes:

- Digital Europe Programme (invests in supercomputing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, advanced digital skills, and ensuring a wide use of digital technologies across the economy and society).
- LIFE (supports environmental, nature conservation and climate action projects throughout the EU).
- Erasmus+ (supports education, training, youth and sport in Europe).
- InvestEU (brings together the multitude of EU financial instruments currently available to support investments in the EU. The InvestEU Programme consists of the InvestEU Fund, the InvestEU Advisory Hub and the InvestEU Portal. InvestEU Fund supports four policy areas: sustainable infrastructure, research, innovation and digitisation, SMEs, and social investment and skills).
- European Defence Fund – Research Part (supports EU cooperation to foster breakthrough solutions and production of defence technology and equipment. It will provide funding to collaborative defence research projects and create incentives for companies and Member States to collaborate on joint development of defence products and technologies).

## WHERE CAN I SEEK ADVICE?

- You may contact your regional office and/or university representation in Brussels:

  - Aalborg University, AAU's EU Office
  - Central Denmark EU Office
  - Greater Copenhagen EU Office
  - North Denmark EU Office
  - South Denmark European Office

- EuroCenter under the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education gives advice and information to Danish companies, universities, research institutes and other stakeholders about Horizon Europe participation.
- If you are employed at a university, you can contact your local Research Support Office or similar office if relevant.
- The European Commission's Research Enquiry Service can help with questions about Horizon Europe.
- You can also use the Danish platform EU-DK Support.