

Getting ready for Horizon Europe: novelties you must know

In December 2020, the European Commission, the European Council and the Parliament agreed a total budget of €95.5 billion for Horizon Europe (current prices), the new research and innovation framework programme for the 2021-2027 period, which is higher compared to the previous Horizon 2020 programme (€ 86.6 billion in 2018 prices). This article summarizes main novelties of this programme compared to Horizon 2020, from proposal preparation to the evaluation phase, grant agreement and reporting phase.

1. Horizon Europe: structure and budget allocation

The new research and innovation's programme over the 2021-2027 period, Horizon Europe, will be officially launched in May 2021. The [structure](#) of this programme will be organised in **three main pillars and a cross-cutting part** on "Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area" (Figure 1), prevalently in line with the previous Horizon 2020.



Figure 1 Horizon Europe: structure and budget breakdown

More than half of Horizon Europe's budget will be distributed under Pillar 2 on "Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness". Pillar 2 will finance **6 thematic clusters**, non-nuclear direction actions of the European Joint Research Centre, the **Horizon Europe's missions**¹ (10% of Pillar 2's budget) and the **Partnerships** (50% of Pillar 2's budget). Across the clusters, the highest budget's allocation will go to "**digital, industry and space**" and "**climate, energy and mobility**" (Table 1).

Table 1. Horizon Europe's budget breakdown per cluster

Cluster	€ billion
Health	8.25
Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society	2.30
Civil Security for Society	1.60
Digital, Industry and Space	15.35
Climate, Energy and Mobility	15.12
Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment	8.95

¹ Read our article on the Missions [here](#).

2. What are the novelties in Horizon Europe?

Overall, Horizon Europe is not a “revolution” compared to the Horizon 2020’s programme, yet it presents few changes based on the Commission’s [interim evaluation](#) of the 2014-2020 research and innovation programme. The following paragraphs summarize these main novelties.

2.1 Intervention logic

Applicant organisations shall now carefully read not only the work programmes but also the four strategic orientations (Figure 2) and expected impacts set in the [2021-2024 strategic plan of Horizon Europe](#).



Figure 2 Horizon Europe's strategic orientations until 2024

In fact, according to the Horizon Europe’s **intervention logic** (Figure 3), applicants shall justify in their proposal how they contribute to deliver (Figure 3): a) the **expected outcomes**, as specified in the forthcoming Horizon Europe’s work programmes; b) as well as the **expected impacts** of the cluster they are applying to, outlined in the [2021-2024 strategic plan](#).

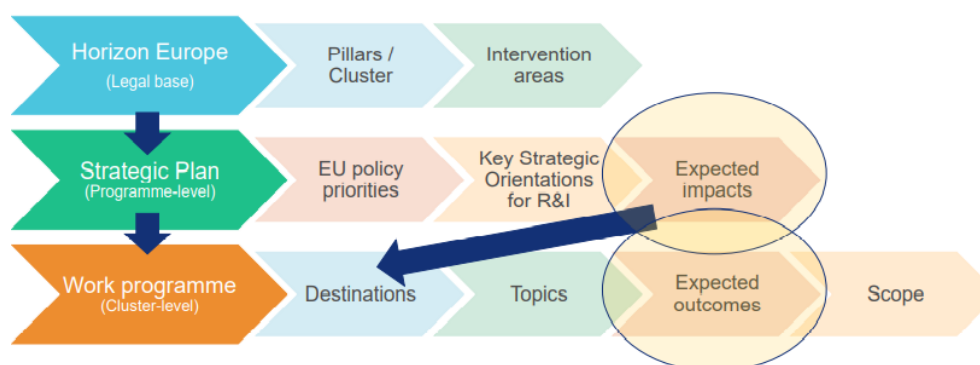


Figure 3 Horizon Europe's intervention logic

Moreover, all proposals submitted under Horizon Europe shall address a **number of key specific issues**, which are further outlined in the strategic plan. These areas: gender equality and inclusiveness; social sciences and humanities; dissemination and exploitation; ethics and integrity; open science practices; key enable technologies; social innovation; EU taxonomy.

2.2 Eligibility of beneficiaries

Under the Horizon Europe programme, the minimum number of required applicants for submitting an applicant remains equal to 3 organisations from 3 different Member States or associated countries. In addition to the Horizon 2020 programme’s eligibility criteria, **at least one of the applicant organisations** shall be **from one European Member States**. **Additional conditions for eligibility of beneficiaries can be detailed** in the work programme and by specific programmes, and pertain: a) exclusion of some countries, b) financing rate, c) use of different financing sources.

The **United Kingdom participates to the programme as an associated country**, as such UK organisations are eligible for funding for the first Horizon Europe’s calls.



Applicants can participate to the proposal in different roles, leading to different duties and responsibilities in the case of a granted project (Table 2).

Table 2. Alternative roles to participate in a Horizon Europe's proposal

Role	Responsibilities
Beneficiary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signs the project Has all rights and obligations
Associated Partner	Does work but cannot declare costs
Affiliated entity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With a legal or capital link with the beneficiary Does work and may declare costs
Third party providing contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not work just give in kind contributions The beneficiary lay declare the costs of the contributions
Subcontractor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does work and invoices the beneficiary The beneficiary must declare the invoice

2.3 Funding rates

Funding rates for applicant organisations do not vary compared to Horizon 2020. Therefore, 100% funding rates applies for a) all applicants under Research and Innovation Actions, Coordination and Support Actions, and b) not-for-profit entities applying to Innovation Actions. A 70% funding rate applied to for-profit entities submitting an Innovation Action (it remains at 100% for Non-for-Profit organisations)

2.4 Proposal preparation

The new Horizon Europe's [proposal templates](#) have been published. The template will continue to be divided in part A (application forms) and part B (technical description). The following changes will occur:

Novelties in part A of the proposal text:

- **A new table listed all researchers involved in the proposal shall be completed by all applicants:** the consolidated information by all funded projects will be used by the Commission to calculate how the Horizon Europe's funds affect researchers' careers;
- **New section on the role of participating organisations in the project:** to be chosen based on the options (e.g. communication and dissemination, project management, technology providers);
- **A Self-declaration confirming that applicants have a gender equality plan:** is mandatory for public bodies, higher education establishments and research organisations. Only if the proposal is granted, these types of organisations will have to submit their gender equality plan. This plan shall go beyond gender distribution of project staff, and also address how gender is relevant to the proposal topic. Gender will have a broader dimension than just female-male dichotomy to also intersect with other socio-economic inequalities (e.g. LGTBIQ, disability, ethnicity).
- **Ethics and Security self-declaration** (previously in part B) shall be completed by all proposals. Further details might be required to proposals related to sensitive topics (e.g. security, artificial intelligence);
- A **validated PIC is no more a prerequisite** for the submission of the proposal but is required if the proposal receive funding. Organisations that already have a PIC number can continue to use the current one.

Novelties in part B of the proposal text:

- **The pages' limit is reduced** to 45 pages for Research and Innovation Actions, and Innovation Actions; 30 pages for Coordination and Support Actions. The limit for first-stage applications remains 10 pages;



- **The “Excellence” section:**
 - **Will be organised in only two chapters**, “Objectives and ambition”, and “Methodology” for RIA and IA proposals and “Objective e Coordination and/or support measures” and “methodology” for CSA proposals. The concept shall be included in the methodology section;
 - When relevant, **proposals shall justify how they comply to the “do not significant harm” principle** (Article 17 of EU Taxonomy Regulation) in the methodology section;
 - **Data management plan shall now be addressed in the Excellence** rather than the impact section;
- **In the “Impact section”:**
 - The new subsection is renamed **“Project’s pathways towards impact”**;
 - **A canvas** is now introduced in a new “summary” subsection to summarize the proposal’s impact pathways and the measures to maximize the impact. The template of the canvas is available in the template.
- **In the “Implementation section”:**
 - **the management structure is removed** from the application template;
 - **A description on the “Capacity of participants” shall be included in all proposals** when addressing the “consortium as a whole: the applicants must justify the relevance of each applicant to the topic call and for the proposal implementation.

2.5 Evaluation

The proposal evaluation will continue to be based always on three main criteria (excellence, impact and implementation). However, **sub-criteria changed and their number reduced** in order to avoid two-times assessment. The evaluation criteria for the Horizon Europe’s proposals will be soon published in the [dedicated section](#) of the Funding and Tender portal.

Blind evaluation will be piloted for first-stage proposals, to avoid any potential bias. This means that the name of the applicants cannot be disclosed in Part B of first-stage proposals. However, their names can be displayed in the second stage of proposal application.

2.6 Grant and Consortium Agreement

The Horizon Europe’s Grant Agreement will still be managed and processed entirely digitally via the [Funding and Tender Portal](#). The model used will be the [Corporate Grant Agreement](#). This model will be mandatory for all European funded programmes, with some additional details relevant for the Horizon Europe’s programme in **Annex 5** (e.g. ethics, intellectual property rights, security).

The core part of the Corporate Grant Agreement will be similar to the model used under Horizon 2020, with few novelties related to:

- **A new “Data Sheet”**: to collect the key data listed in the grant agreement (e.g. participants, grants, reporting and payments);
- **Explicit division between continuous and periodic reporting**;
- **Receipts demanded only to for-profit legal entities**.

The **Consortium Agreement** will also be mainly similar to the one used for Horizon 2020’s projects with a new mandatory section on Intellectual Property Rights. This section will require some mandatory information such as the list of result ownership, Open Science obligations, and a repository for meta data (in addition to the existing ones on ownership of results, access rights, protection of access rights, result exploitation, dissemination).



2.7 Open Science Policy

Beneficiaries have now the obligations to ensure the [open access](#) to all publications, in line with the Intellectual Property Rights, and to research data.

2.8 Financial rules and project reporting

The main relevant changes in terms of financial reporting relate to:

- **Changes in reporting the personnel costs:** a) Daily rate will be used across most of the 2021-2027 programmes; b) Use of the calendar year approach (January-December); c) The rule of “last closed financial year” is no more valid.
- For workers whose salary increases as they work for a project (**project-based remuneration**), there is **no more the obligation to have paid at least once a project-based remuneration** before the submission of a proposal in Horizon Europe;
- **Changes in Internally invoiced goods and services:** a) no application of the 25% flat-rate on top of the unit cost but instead possibility to accept actual indirect costs allocated via key drivers in the unit cost calculation. Further information will be disclosed with the publication of Horizon Europe’s manual.

3. Conclusions & next steps

The first calls of the Horizon Europe’s programme will be officially launched by the Commission in May 2021 and presented more in details during the [Research and Innovation Days](#) on June 23-24. Meanwhile the European Commission has organised a webinar on “[How to prepare a successful proposal in Horizon Europe](#)” (the recordings are available in the event’s page) and new ones will be announced in the [Funding and Tenders’ portal](#), under the News section. Another possibility for mountain actors to be involved in Horizon Europe’s programme is to become to [register as external expert](#) and support the Commission in evaluating project proposals. This opportunity can give you a further insight on how proposals are assessed under the EU’s research and innovation programme, to learn in particular on the “must do” and “must do not” to create a competitive proposal. The call for external experts is open until the end of the 2021-2027 programming period.

Next steps	Timeline
Webinar: A successful proposal for Horizon Europe: Scientific-technical excellence is key, but don’t forget the other aspects	21 April 2021
Launch of the first Horizon Europe’s calls on the Funding & Tenders’ portal	May 2021
Launch of Horizon Europe’s missions	May 2021, to be confirmed
Research and Innovation Days	23-24 June 2021
First deadline of the Horizon Europe’s calls	End of August/September

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