



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 11 March 2024
(OR. en)

7268/24

RECH 99
COMPET 260

NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
No. prev. doc.:	6600/24
No. Cion doc.:	5941/24 + ADD 1-4
Subject:	Draft Council conclusions on the ex-post evaluation of Horizon 2020 and future outlook - Presidency text

Delegations will find attached a Presidency text on the *draft Council conclusions on the ex-post evaluation of Horizon 2020* with a view to the Research Working Party meeting on 18 March 2024.

Changes in comparison to doc. 6600/24 are marked in **bold underline** for additions and in ~~strikethrough~~ for deletions.

**DRAFT COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON THE EX-POST EVALUATION OF
HORIZON 2020 AND FUTURE OUTLOOK**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING

- its Conclusions of 27 May 2016¹ on “FP7 and the Future Outlook: Research and innovation investments for growth, jobs and solutions to societal challenges”, which support the ambitious simplification efforts initiated by the Commission, recognise the importance of ensuring attractiveness and accessibility of the Framework Programme (FP), acknowledge the need to better align policy agendas, **acknowledge that most recent and sufficient high quality data is needed to assess the longer-term impacts of the EU R&D&I Framework Programmes, whilst taking into account the need to minimise the administrative burden for participants**, and invite the relevant national and regional authorities and the Commission to increase the leverage effect of public research and development (R&D) spending on other public and private funding of research and innovation (R&I) as well as to foster public-private cooperation;
- its Conclusions of 1 December 2017² “From Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020 towards the ninth Framework Programme”, which stress that EU added value must be the major driver for the design and implementation of the FP;

¹ 9527/16

² 15320/17

- its Recommendation of 19 November 2021³ on “a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe”, in which it proposes a common set of values and principles inherent to the European Research Area (ERA) and its R&I systems, such as the pursuit of excellence and inclusiveness as a principle to reach the full potential of the ERA; pointing as well to the importance of coordination and coherence between the European dimension and national and regional R&I policies, the overall responsibility to increase impact of knowledge on society; reaffirming the target of investing 3% of Union GDP in research and development;
 - its Conclusions of 13 October 2022⁴ on the **European Court of Auditors’** Special Report No 15/2022 on **“Measures to widen participation in Horizon 2020 were well designed but sustainable change will mostly depend on efforts by national authorities”** ~~widening the participation in Horizon 2020 of the European Court of Auditors~~ and its Conclusions of 9 March 2023⁵ on the **European Court of Auditors’** Special Report No 23/2022 on **“Synergies between Horizon 2020 and European Structural and Investment Funds - Not yet used to full potential”** ~~synergies between Horizon 2020 and European Structural and Investment Funds of the European Court of Auditors~~, which stress the importance of synergies between Union programmes, on the one hand, and between European, national and regional levels, on the other hand, in order to ensure coherent programming and implementation and to address the R&I divide.
1. WELCOMES the Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the “*Ex post* evaluation of Horizon 2020, the EU framework programme for research and innovation”⁶ and its accompanying Staff Working Documents⁷ published on 29 January 2024; NOTES that several of the recommendations of the ex post evaluation are being addressed in Horizon Europe, and therefore LOOKS FORWARD to the Commission’s **timely** reporting on the Horizon Europe Interim Evaluation. **REAFFIRMS the importance of a strong and rigorous evidence base to inform the design and implementation of Framework Programmes.**

³ 13701/21
⁴ 13426/22
⁵ 7258/23
⁶ 5941/24
⁷ 5941/24 ADD 2 - 4

I. Core Principles

2. EMPHASISES that, driven by the pursuit of excellence ~~with the aim~~ to deliver impact for the benefit of ~~the~~ EU citizens, the overarching goals of the Framework Programme are to strengthen the EU's scientific and technological bases ~~and~~ **while promoting all the research activities deemed necessary** to contribute to the design and implementation of relevant Union policies; NOTES that the Framework Programme is thereby instrumental for the **Union's political priorities** ~~green transition, digital transformation~~ and for other cross-sectoral policy goals, including the development of the ERA in which researchers, scientific knowledge and technology circulate freely, strongly contributing to the Union's competitiveness and resilience.
3. UNDERLINES the pivotal role of the Framework Programme as the central instrument **at EU level** to support R&I ~~in the EU~~ and AFFIRMS the added value of the Framework Programme in enabling R&I activities, in particular collaborative research, that would not have been possible through other means or funding sources.
4. ~~NOTES~~ **RECOGNISES** that to achieve these goals and to ~~safeguard~~ **boost** the Union's competitiveness, its attractiveness ~~for research~~ **R&I** talent, and **its capacity to leverage** ~~for~~ public and private investments, not only an ambitious but also a stable budget for the Framework Programme is necessary; **in that regard NOTES that an additional EUR 159 billion would have been needed to fund all the high-quality proposals submitted in Horizon 2020.** ~~I~~in addition STRESSES that this requires a strong **and interconnected** European R&I system ~~both at the EU, and at the national and regional levels~~ and REMINDS **RECALLS** that the EU **Member States** remains far from achieving ~~its headline~~ **the EU-level** target of investing 3% of GDP per year in R&D – with an investment of 2.22% of ~~its~~ GDP in 2022.

II. Scientific impact

5. WELCOMES the substantial scientific impact Horizon 2020 generated, ~~outperforming FP7~~, driving scientific breakthroughs and pioneering advancements in science and technology, thereby considerably contributing to the Union's position as a global scientific powerhouse. RECOGNISES the European Research Council (ERC) and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) as flagship instruments **and WELCOMES the positive structuring effect of the MSCA programme, which improved the host organisations' quality of training, career development, human resources practices and working conditions.** CALLS ON the Commission to explore ways to extend the leveraging effect of these instruments towards scientific excellence and improved researchers' skills and careers on all the Framework Programme's participating organisations.
6. TAKES NOTE that Horizon 2020 covered the entire R&I value chain, but CALLS on the Commission to ~~achieve~~ **aim for** a better balanced **approach** in ~~offering~~ **the** funding opportunities between fundamental research and the final stages of economic or societal valorisation **of research results**, including ~~exploring~~ **providing** more opportunities for collaborative research at lower Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs). STRESSES the importance of investing in a strong and broad knowledge base, ensuring a wide range of ~~innovations~~ **R&I outputs** on the longer term, ~~and thereby~~ reinforcing the Union's ability to respond fast and effectively to unforeseen crises.

III. Societal impact

7. TAKES NOTE of the significant contributions of Horizon 2020 to addressing key societal challenges in alignment with Union priorities and linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); WELCOMES the evolution, **after the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020**, to a more strategic, interdisciplinary and directional approach of the programme, aimed at promoting R&I activities that have the potential to transform social, economic, and environmental systems **and increase the Union's resilience.** **NOTES that Horizon 2020 has not reached its budgetary target for climate-specific topics.**

8. EMPHASISES that in order to be successful engage the full potential of investments into R&I at all levels, this approach requires the coordinated engagement and the early inclusion involvement of Member States and of all stakeholders; industry, academia and citizens in setting the R&I thematic priorities. STRESSES the value of a bottom-up approach within the thematic priorities, tapping into the full potential of researchers' creativity to address these. INVITES the Commission to ~~combine~~ continue combining relevant contributions from all programme parts to enable the pursuit of common objectives and increase impact in key areas, as was initiated by the Focus Areas approach. RECALLS the important role ~~and impact~~ of R&I outcomes in the policy-making process and ENCOURAGES the Commission to optimise feedback to policy from Framework Programme projects.
9. ACKNOWLEDGES that the integration of social sciences and humanities (SSH) increased over the lifetime of the programme and the quality of the integration of SSH in projects improved, although unevenly between programme parts and disciplines; UNDERLINES the importance of including a societal perspective on research activities and technology development, where relevant, and leading to better opportunities for industrial and societal value creation. NOTES however an uneven uptake of SSH across work programmes as well as in their qualitative integration in projects, and CALLS ON the Commission to improve the adequacy of societal considerations already at the drafting stage of all work programmes; INVITES the Commission to strengthen the integration of the SSH dimension in all relevant research including by evaluating it more rigorously in project proposals.
- IV. Economic impact
10. ACKNOWLEDGES the wider economic impact of the programme, not only by stimulating employment and economic growth as a result of investments in R&I and the transfer of knowledge to society and to the market, but also by leveraging public and private investment and raising the productivity of companies involved; EMPHASISES the need to further promote and support private investments in the future; NOTES the estimate that every euro invested in Horizon 2020 will yield five euro of benefits for EU citizens by 2040. WELCOMES the enhanced efforts ~~and the new instruments~~ to strengthen the R&I innovation ~~potential~~ performance of the Union.

11. WELCOMES the introduction of the European Innovation Council (EIC) pilot in Horizon 2020, initiating the creation of a one-stop shop for innovation measures; RECOMMENDS that the Member States and the Commission continue supporting breakthrough innovation **and technology** potential ~~within~~ **across** Europe and the efforts to ~~create a~~ **strengthen the** European venture capital market that facilitates cross-border investments and increases the available risk capital **for innovation, including scaling up new technologies**. CALLS ON the Commission to further deepen synergies between relevant innovation instruments and programmes, such as to ~~safeguard~~ **enhance** complementarities ~~iesy~~ between the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and the EIC in support of innovation, ~~or to explore the integration of activities~~ **and to assess options to avoid overlap of instruments**.
 12. EMPHASISES that despite the vast amount of exploitable results of Horizon 2020 projects more effort is needed to enhance the effective uptake by end users, including policy makers. ACKNOWLEDGES the efforts of the Commission to put Union-wide exploitation **and dissemination** support services and tools in place to improve the visibility as well as the usability of results, but URGES the Commission to continue improving and extending these tools and services and to explore additional ways of supporting beneficiaries in improving their knowledge valorisation and communication capacities and skills.
 13. WELCOMES the increased number of newcomers attracted to Horizon 2020 from various sectors, scientific disciplines and countries, and CALLS ON the Commission to continue facilitating participation of **new** entities that can add value in reinforcing knowledge valorisation, in particular SMEs.
- V. Synergies
14. ~~WELCOMES~~ **ACKNOWLEDGES** the progress made in facilitating synergies between Horizon 2020 and other EU programmes **and funds**; NOTES that in Horizon 2020 upstream synergies and alternative funding ~~are working well~~ **have made progress in implementation** but that downstream synergies and complementary funding from EU, national, regional, and private sources showed a need for improvement. ACKNOWLEDGES that **Partnerships may encourage synergies between national and EU funding, and** ~~public-private partnerships can facilitate synergies that~~ reinforce knowledge valorisation; ENCOURAGES the **Commission and the** Member States to investigate ways to broaden the scope **and use** of the Seal of Excellence and to increase awareness of this opportunity.

15. INVITES the Commission ~~and Member States~~ to develop with Member States an overarching vision on the European, national and regional R&I funding landscape that leads to simplification and a more coordinated overall design of the programmes and better connection between all parts, thereby enhancing complementarity, coherence, reducing fragmentation and maximizing the further uptake of ~~research~~ R&I results. ENCOURAGES the Commission and Member States to strengthen the cooperation between bodies involved in the management of relevant R&I programmes at supporting EU, national, and regional level, including ~~and~~ cohesion policy programmes and the Framework Programme; INVITES the Commission to continue investing in creating awareness for funding bodies and applicants of the opportunities across programmes and at different stages of the ~~innovation~~ R&I pipeline.

VI. Supporting the ERA

16. WELCOMES the goals and achievements of the Science with and for Society (SwafS) part of Horizon 2020 and CALLS ON the Commission and the Member States to better articulate the interlinkage between the Framework Programme and the ~~political~~ framework of the ERA to improve their relevance in establishing a single, borderless market for R&I across Europe.
17. WELCOMES the improvements made towards gender balance in Horizon 2020, but NOTES CONSIDERS that ~~female~~ women's participation, including in project coordination, in the programme should be reinforced, and INVITES the Commission to further analyse the causes of imbalances and to explore stronger additional measures to support women researchers, evaluators, entrepreneurs and innovators and to support the mainstreaming of gender equality.
18. HIGHLIGHTS the development, upgrading and improved accessibility of research and technology infrastructures realised in Horizon 2020, enhancing research collaboration, enabling state of the art scientific advances, and ensuring the testing of innovations; RECOMMENDS that the Member States and the Commission facilitate access to research infrastructures, including for collaborative research, and create greater synergies between EU, national and regional funding programmes for research infrastructures, to ensure their operations are sustainable, in line with the work and recommendations of ESFRI.

19. WELCOMES the progress made on the integration of the open access principles and requirements in Horizon 2020, **the development of the open access publishing platform Open Research Europe (ORE)** and the establishment of the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC), contributing to enhanced knowledge circulation; ~~and~~ RECOMMENDS further and incentivising findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable (FAIR) data management across disciplines and programme parts.
20. RECALLS that Horizon 2020's openness to international R&I cooperation is instrumental to strengthen the EU's excellence and attractiveness, to tackle global challenges and to support the Union's external and development policy objectives; ~~but NOTES that the level of international collaboration in Horizon 2020 remained similar to FP7, and therefore~~ CALLS on the Commission to strengthen international collaboration **in line with the principles and values for international cooperation in R&I as well as the open strategic autonomy of the EU** ~~and in light of the key global challenges,~~ taking into account the changing geopolitical context **and the need to enhance research security.**

VII. Widening Participation

21. ~~APPRECIATES~~ **NOTES** the moderate increase of the participation rate and of the EU contribution share of widening countries in Horizon 2020, **and the persisting disparities between widening and non-widening countries; INVITES the Commission to present and assess the impact of the implemented widening measures, taking account of different root causes and present options and measures aiming to close the R&I divide.** ~~but~~ **NOTES ACKNOWLEDGES** that there were fewer newcomers amongst the beneficiaries in Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation as compared to the other programme parts; HIGHLIGHTS at the same time considerable disparities among widening countries both in participation as well as in success rates and INVITES the Commission to present and assess the impact of various options towards a more differentiated approach.

22. **HIGHLIGHTS that partnering with high-performing institutions decisively contributed to the quality of the research in widening countries, and** ~~RECALLS that the Commission should assess the need for more tailor-made actions and targeted networking activities, taking into account the different national systems and the reforms already undertaken by the Member States, and that genuine sustainable change requires continuous national investments and reforms in national R&I systems. HIGHLIGHTS in that respect the leveraging effect of Teaming actions in attracting new funding and their potential to stimulate reforms in the national R&I systems in widening countries and CALLS ON the Commission to explore a wider use of co-funding approaches for capacity building, as well as to extend support measures hereto. INVITES the Commission to strengthen coordination between instruments that support opening up researchers' networks and providing networking opportunities, especially for early career researchers, such as COST.~~ **CALLS ON the Commission to explore a wider use of synergetic approaches for capacity building, as well as to extend collaboration and support measures hereto. RECALLS that genuine sustainable change requires continuous national investments and reforms in national R&I systems.**

VIII. Implementation

23. NOTES with regret that several parts of the programme suffered from significant oversubscription and hence resulted in a serious loss of effort and resources for applicants; CALLS ON the Commission to continue exploring new approaches to address **oversubscription as well as** the low success rates, ~~and~~ to continue **simplification** efforts ~~and~~ to reduce complexity and administrative costs for applicants and beneficiaries; WELCOMES the piloting of measures aimed at enhancing the efficiency or reducing the complexity of the programme, ~~such as lump sums~~; EMPHASISES that a transparent **and timely** evaluation **of pilots**, including adequate **taking into account** feedback from **beneficiaries and** stakeholders, is needed before changes are rolled out more broadly; STRESSES at the same time the importance of the rules for participation remaining as stable as possible **and the need of guidance documents for applicants and beneficiaries.**

24. NOTES that in general the large **excessive** number of instruments in the programme, including the complex Partnerships landscape, hampers navigability and accessibility for applicants despite considerable improvements made, such as the Funding and Tenders Portal. CALLS ON the Commission to investigate the added value of each separate instrument and to discontinue or reorient those that underperform or overlap. **ACKNOWLEDGES the vital role of the National Contact Points and** INVITES the Member States and the Commission to ~~streamline~~ **further strengthen** their roles and practices ~~of National Contact Points~~ and to **additionally** ~~invest in~~ **support** organisational research management and ~~support~~ capacity.

IX. Monitoring

25. WELCOMES the enhanced attention to assessing the results and impacts of Horizon 2020, but NOTES with regret that the monitoring arrangements in Horizon 2020 were too narrow in scope mainly when considering economic and societal impacts, cross-cutting issues – notably SSH and gender –, policy priorities – such as ~~the green and digital transition~~ **climate action** – and in assessing leveraging effects on organisational R&I change of its beneficiaries. Therefore, ENCOURAGES the Commission to ~~keep on doing~~ **continue assessing** long term **impacts** ~~assessments~~ of the programme in future evaluations, **improve data collection covering the entire programme,** and to further develop innovative methods, relevant indicators and realistic targets to optimise monitoring.
