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Key assets and critical challenges of  
Horizon Europe:  
EU-LIFE answer to the Public  
Consultation of EU R&I Programmes  
2014 - 2027

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## Key assets and critical challenges of Horizon Europe

### *EU-LIFE answer to the Public Consultation of EU R&I Programmes 2014 - 2027*

The European R&I programmes like H2020 and Horizon Europe are crucial to realise the European Union's priorities and deliver to our societies and the planet innovative solutions for global problems. They constitute one of the biggest funding packages for research & innovation worldwide and they represent a critical funding tool for researchers and innovators in Europe.

EU-LIFE welcomes the open debate about the past, present and future of the EU programmes of Research & Innovation 2024-2027 initiated by the European Commission with the current [consultation](#). We identify it as an important initial step towards the debate on Horizon Europe's successor, FP10; and we hope that its outcome will have a positive effect in the second half of Horizon Europe by helping continuing what is delivering well and correcting the route for what is not working.

Whereas the full reply of EU-LIFE to the consultation is public, we highlight key assets and critical challenges regarding the past, current and future R&I programmes.

#### On the identification of funding priorities

Horizon Europe's (HE) relevance is unquestionable. It provides funding for important research with a broad scope of topics/tools, from fundamental research to innovation. In addition, it funds areas which are not covered by national organizations.

A major caveat is its low budget comparative to what it aims to achieve. Opportunities for excellent, bottom-up, explorative research are very limited, reflected on low success rates, leaving many outstanding proposals without funding (ERC and MSCA).

One major asset is the ERC, enabling researchers with enough funding to pursue groundbreaking and impactful research.

Within Pillar 2, a shift towards TLR 2-4 is needed. Also, as the main Pillar for large collaborative approaches, there are very scarce collaborative opportunities for excellent explorative research. Both caveats must be addressed by:

- Shifting Pillar II from implementation to more disruptive innovation and discovery driven science; other parties to invest at higher TRLs which is initiated, developed and de-risked by EU funding
- Removing requirement to cover too many TRLs in a single project by introducing several stages for a research theme: the first stage starting at lower TRLs and if successful progressing to higher TRLs.
- Increasing nr of calls on understanding the mechanisms behind global challenges.

Small scale research infrastructures across Europe lack support, which calls for the inclusion of schemes in HE to set-up, renew and sustain them.

#### On the intervention modes and types of action

Bottom-up approaches are a strong asset of Horizon Europe. It is key that Pillar 1 is bottom up so that researchers can submit their research ideas in any topic.

The establishment of Pillar III as a flagship for innovation with an increased number of opportunities for bottom-up projects raised the interest of our scientific community for the opportunities under the EIC umbrella.

We support the promotion of synergies across Pillars to support projects at different stages of maturity with concrete actions (e.g. PoC transitioning to EIC Transition). This approach should be applied more extensively.

Too many topic calls are either not about research (e.g. in Cancer Mission, Health cluster), and/or aiming at high level stakeholders and are very political in nature (e.g. in Cancer mission, Widening) instead of focusing on scientific and innovation advances in global challenges (Cancer mission) or building the capacity of the R&I community itself and their institutions distributed across Europe (Widening, ERA). This should be readdressed with a shift towards research (Cancer Mission, WIDERA) and bottom-up initiative for building capacities across Europe (WIDERA).

The Widening package lacks scientific collaborative actions for Widening countries and incentive for non-widening partners to join.

Investing in effective knowledge transfer capacitation in research centres and universities should be a priority.

### On the implementation of the programme/projects and procedures

Horizon Europe is taking responsibility by providing overhead support, which is essential but ignored by most funding organizations.

Horizon Europe has a well designed and operating portal to manage proposals and grants.

HE's topic calls are too broad and therefore not realistic and very difficult to implement. The necessary effort combined with low success rates are not encouraging researchers to apply. Also, there are difficulties in implementing effective synergies among different funded projects.

Clarification about call descriptions in Work Programmes need improvement. Often, detailed questions posed to NCPs or to the EC through the F&T portal remain unanswered – they just cite what is written in the call description. This is a major challenge for applicants.

There are less opportunities of 2-stage proposal processes than expected.

Project coordination is still heavy and time-consuming. Too many reference documents to read through, ethics assessment are extensive, there are long audit process (change of auditors) and difficult project amendment procedures. Very little time is given for the preparation of interviews of submitted proposals (i.e., EIC Transition) and the quality of the interview panels of the EIC is sometimes questioned. After obtaining projects, there is a need to elaborate more on the documents before signing contracts.

### Towards FP10: recommendations for the present and the future

In a world of increasing complexity R&I showed to be the most reliable solution provider. This was the case of the COVID-19 pandemics, to mention but one of the most recent global crisis where evidence-based knowledge and scientific discoveries proved crucial to find a way out. Thus, the potential role of EU R&I programmes to address current and future challenges is

indisputable. However, to achieve this potential, a longer term, more ambitious and similarly more realistic vision of HE and its successor, FP10 is needed. We reinstate the following:

- Have more ambition: aim for long term, more impactful outcomes and less implementation-based approaches
- Be realistic about the whole scope of FP10 and its funding: stop increasing the scope of the R&I programme without ensuring that additional areas come with additional budgets.
- Safeguard R&I budget from annual reallocations to elsewhere
- Develop strongly the collaborative function of FP10 for excellent research irrespective of TRLs – raise collaborative opportunities for lower TRLs compared to current Horizon Europe schemes.
- Raise the significance and contribution of the ERC to R&I by allocating higher percentage of the budget to the ERC
- Invest in more bottom up, less politically driven topic calls across the whole programme
- Develop a coherent portfolio impact approach instead of aiming for too broad, too big individual projects that are unrealistic and/or too hard to implement.

## Relevant EU-LIFE position papers and statements

Horizon Europe strategy

[EU-LIFE wants a more balanced FP9](#)

Pillar II Health Cluster

[How to ensure health safety in Europe: the vision of EU-LIFE research institutes](#)

[EU-LIFE calls for impactful collaborative research in European Biomedicine](#)

Pillar II Cancer Mission

[Reaction of EU-LIFE: Cancer Mission work programme 2021-22](#)

[EU-LIFE recommendations to the Cancer Mission draft](#)

Research Infrastructures

[Call for action on small and medium research infrastructures in Europe](#)

Horizon Europe budget

[Reaction of EU-LIFE to the next framework programme budget agreement](#)

[Europe needs Research & Innovation to address the future: EU-LIFE reaction to the EU Council deal](#)

[Open letter to the EU Council and the European Parliament to prioritise R&I by committing an appropriate budget for Horizon Europe](#)



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