

The Guild's proposals for a successful implementation of Horizon Europe and its Strategic Planning process

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Introduction

This statement presents The Guild's recommendations for the implementation of Horizon Europe. For the success of the programme, it's crucial that a sound legislative framework is coupled with guiding principles for its implementation that build on experiences from previous framework programmes and take stock of the feedback received for the Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020. The Guild warmly welcomes the Commission's initiative to launch a Strategic Planning process that will foster co-design with stakeholders and Member States to set priorities for the first years of Horizon Europe. This process holds great promise for a transparent approach that will enable the creation of a strategic framework combining scientific and societal needs in relation to global challenges.

This statement touches upon important areas that will have horizontal relevance for the future programme: the role of scientific advice, fostering a balanced approach between research and innovation, implementing high-quality R&I missions, finding new approaches to citizen engagement and adopting effective measures for the integration of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH).

1. Introduce improved structures for scientific advice in the priority-setting of Horizon Europe

The voice of the scientific community has to be heard in the implementation of Horizon Europe in a structured and sustained manner. This is a precondition for the quality and impact of Horizon Europe as well as the quality of the programming. Including the voice of researchers in the agenda-setting processes will improve the legitimacy of Horizon Europe and foster trust between beneficiaries and the governance of the programme, which is essential for its reputation and performance.

Horizon Europe should pioneer renewed structures for dialogue between researchers and decision-makers in its agenda-setting processes that could be taken up in other policy sectors at European and national levels. The Guild asks the Commission to lead by example when it comes to reinforcing the relationship between science and policymaking.

The Commission's plan to establish Mission Boards consisting of stakeholder representatives should be accompanied by Expert Groups advising on the content of each of the thematic clusters. Whilst the continued engagement of the Member States in the Programme Committees is essential, The Guild advocates for the priorities within these clusters to

be co-designed through a process that engages stakeholders as well, by consolidating policy priorities with the latest developments in research and innovation.

The Guild proposes that each thematic cluster includes sustained Expert Groups for each topic that has its own Programme Committee. These groups would consist of representatives from academia, industry and civil society. A balanced composition of different stakeholders in these Expert Groups is essential, to enable dialogue between different R&I actors and foster interdisciplinarity within and between the thematic clusters.

In order to gather more specialised contributions on interdisciplinary topics, separate ‘task forces’ could be established as needed to advise on themes that cut across clusters. Strengthening the role of researchers in the planning of Work Programmes of Horizon Europe would enable ensuring a balanced approach between research and innovation in the calls for proposals.

In order to avoid dynamics where members of these groups only advocate for their own organisations’ interest, it is important to highlight the wider responsibility of the representatives to consult their sector. The representatives of the Expert Groups should have the duty to regularly consult European associations working in their sector to gather and consolidate views from a broad range of actors from all over Europe.

These Expert Groups should start to engage with the Commission and contribute to the preparation of the Work Programmes before the Commission prepares their first drafts. It’s important that the co-creation between the group and the Commission is continuous and fosters genuine dialogue based on scientific developments in the area covered by the group.

The joint position of the Expert Group representing the views of different disciplines and stakeholders would therefore guide the Commission’s drafting

process, which would then be finalised by the contributions of the Programme Committees that play an important role in consolidating national priorities of the Member States.

2. Introduce a balance between research and innovation

The Global Challenges and Industrial Leadership pillar of Horizon Europe holds great promise for leading researchers to collaborate on topics related to the pressing societal challenges of our time. This pillar provides unique opportunities for European and international researchers to channel the contribution of science to the achievement of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to the EU’s Multi-Stakeholder Platform on the SDGs “collaborative science, research and innovation into societal, economic and environmental challenges generate significant added value and will play an increasingly important role in identifying and delivering solutions for a more sustainable Europe.”¹

However, opportunities for high-quality collaborative research, and fundamental research in particular, have been limited in Horizon 2020 and require more attention in the upcoming programme. As stated by the report of the Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020, there has been an increased focus on higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) and product demonstration in the Societal Challenges and Industrial Leadership pillars of the current programme.² This has led to a wide-ranging call for a more balanced approach between research and innovation in the collaborative parts of Horizon Europe, which is shared by academia, the European Parliament as well as the Council of the EU.³

The question of striking a balance between research and innovation is closely linked to the notion of impact, and the time frame foreseen for its achievement. A narrow approach emphasising economic impact as the main expected outcome of research and innovation projects in pillar 2 has

¹ Contribution of the SDG Multi-Stakeholder Platform to the Reflection Paper, “Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030,” p. 36.

² Commission Staff Working Document, “In-Depth Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020.” Version updated on 13 June 2017: p. 148 box; also, pp. 170-171 and 192.

³ As agreed by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU in the common understanding confirmed on 27 March 2019: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/38902/st07942-en19.pdf>, p. 16.

resulted in limited opportunities for collaborative research on better understanding societal challenges and their possible solutions and consequences. It is important to avoid a framework that considers impact as exclusively linked to high TRLs. The Guild calls for the Commission to adopt a broad notion of impact in the implementation of Horizon Europe, that would complement the use of TRLs with indicators related to societal notions of impact. This should be coupled with a more flexible time frame for the realisation of the impact that can often develop in unexpected directions.

The Guild calls for the Commission to address this shared concern and empower the full potential of academic collaboration towards the production of new knowledge in the areas of the thematic clusters. It is crucial that the call for strengthening the role of collaborative fundamental research is properly implemented in the Strategic Planning process as well as in the design of the annual Work Programmes.

3. Ensure the effective implementation of high-quality R&I missions

In December 2017, The Guild [published a position](#) on the upcoming framework for R&I missions for Horizon Europe. As the mission areas are being decided upon by EU institutions, The Guild reiterates its call for the missions to build on Europe's research excellence and have a wide-ranging societal and scientific impact. The impact indicators of each mission should be expressed clearly, to facilitate the portfolio approach and clarify the objectives to potential participants.

To maximise the quality of the public investment on missions, they should offer increased support for collaborative fundamental research and create links between research and innovation. They should also support collaboration between academia, industry and civil society, and provide flexibility for participants to define the instrument and budget suitable for their project. Enough room for smaller projects should also be guaranteed.

To ensure the quality of the governance of the missions, the Mission Boards should consist of a balanced composition of academic experts and other stakeholders. The focus of missions on projects based on excellence⁴ should therefore be reflected in the composition of the Mission Boards through the appointment of academics with a high standing in the research community. To ensure the wide societal relevance and impact of the missions, academic experts from Social Sciences and Humanities should be included in the Mission Boards, as appropriate.

4. Engage citizens with research and innovation

As the recent political and cultural developments in Europe and beyond have shown, the role of science and expertise is often challenged in today's world. Horizon Europe has the potential of introducing new ways of fostering the relationship between science, citizens and decision-makers. The objective would be to increase the dialogue between them, so that challenge-based research could reflect the concerns of the citizens even better and political decision-makers could use the knowledge created by researchers even more effectively.

Building on the legacy of the Science With and For Society (SWAFS) actions in Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe should continue developing the relationship between citizens and science and experimenting with different methods that are produced as the result of research into the topic.

The Guild encourages the Commission to foster an open discussion between academic institutions and civil society organisations on how citizen engagement could be implemented in the programme, whilst taking into account the specific opportunities related to different areas of R&I. It is also important to differentiate between user and citizen engagement when a holistic approach for the programme is being considered.

⁴ Ibid, p. 19.

The Guild proposes that activities and practices serving the goal of strengthened citizen engagement should reflect the principles of responsible research and innovation as introduced in Horizon 2020⁵: aligning research and innovation processes and outcomes with the values, needs and expectations of society and developing solutions for increased public engagement, science education and the facilitation of access to scientific results.

The resources, expertise and timeframe allocated to projects don't always enable an opportunity for wider public engagement activities. To achieve a mainstreamed approach for strengthening the role of citizen engagement, it could be further incentivised in projects funded by Horizon Europe through dedicated top-up funding for successful projects. Similarly, the public engagement of a portfolio of projects could be facilitated in a coordinated and professional manner, which would also contribute to synergies between projects concentrating on similar topics.

5. Ensure the genuine embedding of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) in all stages of the implementation of Horizon Europe

The Guild warmly welcomes the joint call of the EU institutions to continue the integration of Social Sciences and Humanities in Horizon Europe.

A strengthened framework to SSH integration requires measures that cover all stages of the programme's preparation and implementation. Embedding SSH should be a structural part of the preparation of the calls for proposals. To achieve this, the Commission could complement its internal SSH expertise with external advisors and Expert Groups that would bring their interdisciplinary contributions to the preparation of the Work Programmes.

The objective should be to co-create calls for proposals where the 'SSH flagged calls' would have more prominent descriptions of opportunities for SSH contributions. As a result, the selection of projects that answer to these calls would not be possible without a clear contribution of SSH in the funding application. A reduction of the number of SSH flagged calls is not a solution for a more successful SSH integration and interdisciplinarity in Horizon Europe.

Subsequently, the evaluation of the proposals for the SSH flagged calls should systematically take into consideration the SSH elements of the call. This would be supported by the inclusion of academic expertise with relevant SSH competences in each evaluation panel that works on the SSH flagged calls.

Finally, a dedicated expert group should advise on the implementation of SSH integration in Horizon Europe. The Guild believes that these measures are necessary to ensure the high-quality SSH-integration in Horizon Europe.

⁵ Description of Responsible Research and Innovation on the Horizon 2020 website: <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/responsible-research-innovation>.