

Re-orient Horizon Europe missions to support cutting-edge research

Horizon Europe's missions represent one of the programme's most visible novelties and they have been met with strong political support. The Guild first presented its [recommendations for missions in 2017](#), and highlighted that in order to be successful, the missions should build on European research excellence and adopt a long-term approach to achieving societal impact by funding collaborations covering a wide range of disciplines. After the preparatory stage of the missions, first experiences are unfolding on the types of projects that have been funded under the missions work programmes.

Having observed very low application rates in many calls across all the R&I missions, The Guild universities express their concern over their implementation. Several call topics have received only a couple of applications, resulting in unusually high success rates. The experiences from the first rounds of calls should lead to careful analysis of the reasons why these calls failed to attract a better response, and to a re-orientation of their scope in future calls.

One of the reasons that the mission calls have not been able to convince research communities to participate is the lack of opportunities for collaborative research activities. Categorizing the missions as "public policy programmes" has raised questions as to why the missions are funded in Horizon Europe, if the focus is not on funding research and innovation activities leading to the completion of their objectives. The Guild recommends that restoring a strong research focus of all missions should be addressed in the assessment of the mission approach planned for 2023, as stated in the Horizon Europe regulation¹. The Guild also recommends that the budget allocation of the missions should not exceed 10% of the budget of Pillar 2.

In order to attract contributions from the leading scientists and in this way ensure the success of the missions, The Guild makes the following recommendations:

- Only fund actions focused on research and innovation under Horizon Europe, in order not to dilute its focus or duplicate the tasks of other EU programmes. Funding for regional cooperation or other activities related to policy development should be funded from the European Regional Development Fund or other thematic programmes relevant for the topic of the mission (such as the EU4Health Programme or the LIFE Programme for climate related cooperation projects).
- Highlight universities, research institutions and researchers more broadly as key target groups for the missions and demonstrate why their contribution is essential to their success.

¹ Art. 8(5) of the REGULATION (EU) 2021/695 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination.

- Introduce call topics that invite projects at low TRLs (1-3) to contribute to the missions. Scientific advancements and breakthroughs should be acknowledged as important contributors to the achievement of the missions.
- Allow more bottom-up approaches in the calls for proposals. This would entail less descriptiveness and more flexibility in the planning of the project.
- Allow opportunities for smaller projects whose consortia are easier to build and manage in public institutions.
- Include the mission calls in the relevant work programmes of the thematic clusters, as opposed to having their own work programme. This would bring them more visibility and prevent them from being forgotten.
- Provide more information on the synergies and prevent duplication between the missions and partnerships that might touch upon similar themes.

In light of these recommendations, The Guild calls for the Commission to review the implementation of the missions soon, in order to be able to re-orient their focus and ensure an improved implementation in the coming years. **The Guild universities are also committed to take part in the further development of the missions, to ensure that they will successfully reach their goals through high-quality research and innovation activities.**

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