

Towards Horizon Europe

APRE Position Paper in view of the Strategic Plan

17 September 2019

Research and Innovation (R&I) are key factors of economic growth and job creation, and powerful drivers to build the European society and economy of the future. The European Union has fully the potential to become the world leading global centre for science, technology and innovation in the 21st century.

Now is the time to further highlight the vital role that R&I plays for the EU's growth and competitiveness: investing public resources in R&I means strengthening the scientific and technological bases of our continent, and ultimately promoting its competitiveness at global level. Therefore, APRE calls on the European institutions to put the action on research and innovation at the core of the next EU's institutional cycle agenda and to make R&I a political top priority for the next decade.

Horizon Europe, the European Union's Research and Innovation Framework Programme for the years from 2021 to 2027 is expected to support the generation of new knowledge and technologies, while promoting excellent scientific research. It will stimulate innovation and the up-take of research results, while strengthening value chains. The new programme will leverage investments and finally generate a significant social and environmental impact, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals set by the 2030 United Nations Agenda.

The transnational and collaborative approach to R&I promoted by the Framework Programme is the only possible way to establish the scientific and innovation leadership of the Union. If its crosscutting nature allows to positively support a wide range of policies, it also fosters a better mutual understanding and a shared responsibility between science, politics and citizenship, with significant repercussions on the society as a whole.

This paper represents APRE's contribution to Strategic Planning process of Horizon Europe which will put forward the R&I priorities for the years from 2021 to 2024 and set the targeted impacts for the investment in research and innovation. APRE, the Italian Agency for the Promotion of European Research, participates in this process by presenting its position on the relevant issues outlined in the [Horizon Europe provisional legislative text](#) and in the [Orientations document](#) of the European Commission.

1. A BUDGET TO DEFEND AND COMPLETE

The expected constraints and competitive pressures on the overall EU budget for the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 - particularly due to Brexit and Member States' conflicting budgetary priorities - reinforce the need to adequately explain to European citizens any request for increasing R&I public funding.

The European Commission's proposal of 94.1 billion euros for Horizon Europe represents a significant increase (+22%) compared to Horizon 2020, yet the figure - corresponding to about 7% of the overall 2021-2027 EU budget - will be hardly able to fulfil the scientific and technological objectives and the economic and social challenges set by the new programme.

Horizon Europe needs to have adequate resources that match the Union's ambitions: this is also the key to strengthen Europe's ability to lead the ongoing technological revolution - marked by an increasingly competitive international scenario - and to be at the forefront in developing innovations and technologies that will have an enormous impact on the society and economy in the 21st century.

In this context, within the negotiations on the MFF 2021-2027, it is crucial to support a budget for Horizon Europe of at least 120 billion euros, in line with the position already expressed by the European Parliament. Moreover, the internal division of Horizon Europe budget - to be addressed in the second phase of negotiations - is worthy of a specific analysis that carefully considers the priorities of the European R&I system and the comparison with Horizon 2020 budget breakdown, also paying appropriate attention to the management costs of the Programme.

2. A FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME FOR A COMPETITIVE AND SUSTAINABLE EUROPE

An ambitious and inclusive Framework Programme should be built on an updated and improved Research and Innovation policy strategy, rooted in the threefold Treaty objectives of «strengthening [Europe's] scientific and technological bases by achieving a European research area» of free circulation, of helping the Union «become more competitive, including in its industry», and of «promoting all the research activities deemed necessary» to support other EU policies.

There is, therefore, a need to adapt Horizon Europe to a new paradigm, looking beyond Europe 2020 - which conceived the Framework Programme as the financial tool to implement the European innovation policy (i.e. Europe 2020 Strategy and Innovation Union flagships) - towards a comprehensive and flexible 2030 political strategy. This strategy shall be able to identify EU political priorities in the global context - taking into account and reflecting the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - to harness international world-class scientific collective intelligence in order to address and effectively tackle major societal challenges, while fostering the projection of European values beyond EU boundaries, towards the rest of the world.

Horizon Europe research and innovation investments should play a fundamental role in addressing the challenge of a future prosperity and sustainable growth, while considering «climate action and environment preservation» and «security and well-being of European citizens» as complementary challenges. In this sense, the future Programme, as identified in the "Orientations" document, should particularly support the objectives of a competitive and sustainable Europe, with a particular attention to social sustainability, and primarily reflect the related Sustainable Development Goals.

3. THE ADEQUATE BALANCE BETWEEN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

There are persistent concerns among academia and research organisations about the progressive shift of the Framework Programme focus towards innovation and higher TRLs. APRE considers the new Horizon Europe three-pillar structure as overall adequate to balance EU funding over the R&I ecosystem, reflecting well the whole R&I chain, from fundamental to applied research, to close-to-market actions. This also shall include keeping a strong focus on research-based and industry-driven innovation, while strengthening research on enabling technologies and maintaining an appropriate balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches.

The new programme should also contribute to reinforcing European innovation eco-systems by supporting all forms of innovation applicable to all sectors that can qualify for support, from breakthrough and 'deep tech' to new business models, including 'traditional' sectors that innovate incrementally. For this reason it is of outmost importance that Horizon Europe continue to put a special emphasis on the role of Small and medium-sized enterprises, to foster the competitiveness and modernisation of Europe.

The notion of innovation within the future European Innovation Council could be expanded, including both technological and non-technological, knowledge intensive, social, cultural and design-driven innovation. Indeed, although technological innovation has proved to be a driver for economic growth, it cannot guarantee competitiveness at the global scale if considered in isolation. This wider approach to innovation, in order to be effectively reflected into real solutions, shall find proper support and evidence at the level of topic formulation and evaluation requests for reflecting case-by-case innovation nuances and counterbalancing the traditional outweigh given to technological innovation, as quality and evaluation criterion.

Furthermore, the new Programme should properly valorise and continue supporting low-TRL collaborative and interdisciplinary research. In this context, the risk that the shift of Future Emerging Technologies scheme from the science-oriented pillar (Horizon 2020 'Excellent Science') to the new EIC might distort the nature of the support, could be mitigated by preserving the collaborative nature of projects within the EIC Pathfinder.

Moreover, Research Infrastructures activities are crucial to strengthen research and innovation capabilities in Europe, as well as to contribute to the knowledge advancement and circulation, and to enable researchers to participate in cross-border research activities. APRE would encourage further involvement of the consolidated RI ecosystem in the programming and decision-taking phase of EU Programmes, in order to incentivise the use of excellent RI within the new Programme. At the same time, it is important to highlight the strategic importance of Technology Infrastructures for EU industry competitiveness: the EU should enact a comprehensive framework to accelerate and facilitate the access to such infrastructures, in order to incentivise a more efficient networking and reduce the of private investments in proprietary infrastructures.

4. MISSIONS AS R&I TESTIMONIALS FOR EUROPEAN CITIZENS

APRE broadly shares the European Commission approach to R&I Missions, considered as an instrument aiming at increasing the impact of the EU invested money in Research and Innovation, with the purpose of maximising the relevance of R&I public funding and finally better liaising R&I with citizens' expectations and concerns.

An important effort should be oriented on promoting cross-pillar interaction by fostering realistic project uplinks within the three pillars. In this regard, the mission-oriented approach proposed for Horizon Europe could represent an effective response to the need of ensuring a continuum from fundamental to applied research,

to close-to-market actions, supporting a broad range of research and innovation activities in all areas of the programme. This would allow the new missions to cover the whole spectrum of TRL scale, while contributing to aligning missions' activities with actions carried out under the first and third pillars.

Furthermore, in order to concretely maximise the societal and economic impact and relevance of R&I public funding, it is essential that both the European Commission and Member States interpret missions as guiding lights to drive Member States' R&I policies and focus national investments in R&D, aiming at finally creating critical mass in strategically important areas. In this regard, United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should act as the preferred reference framework within which featuring the specific missions: the UN policy framework is comprehensive, of global strategic importance and could facilitate EU added value to complement the national plans for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Additionally, a coherent governance for missions should consider to strengthen and adapt the role of Mission Boards. Those boards should ensure a continuous and effective supervision of all the different activities (projects) concurring to the mission, and assure the coherence of the projects results with the mission targets. In line with this on-going monitoring and vetting activity, Horizon Europe could also foresee the implementation of funding schemes providing further financing for projects that will have demonstrated their effective contribution to the mission goal and the need for additional investment.

5. STREAMLINING THE NEW GENERATION OF EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIPS

There is a common view on the excessive complexity characterizing the landscape of European Partnerships

(Article 185 Initiatives, Joint Undertakings based on Article 187, ERA-NET and EJP co-fund, contractual Public-Private Partnerships). In this context, APRE welcomes the approach proposed by the European Commission for Horizon Europe, aimed at creating a new generation of European Partnerships and increasing their effectiveness and impact, by regrouping the current landscape into three new types of partnerships (co-funded, co-programmed, institutionalised) and rationalising the overall number of initiatives. Also, it is appreciated the intention to operate European R&I Partnerships following the principles of openness, transparency and inclusion and in complementarity with other Framework Programme actions.

At the same time, it is important to emphasise that EU partnerships with industries have demonstrated their added value in the last decade: the European Commission should continue enabling and stimulating Public-Private Partnerships as unique platforms fostering cooperation and creating the critical mass for breakthrough innovations. In this sense, the current process of rationalisation should ensure a strong continuity of existing public-private partnerships: by avoiding artificial regrouping that would lead to mergers of different industrial cultures; by promoting greater integration between research and industry; by guaranteeing transparency in access procedures and flexibility in the contribution request from the industrial component.

At the same time, in line with Horizon Europe cross-sectoral approach, R&I Partnerships should be oriented towards achieving a final objective and developing innovative solutions easily replicable in different areas, without focussing on a single segment or thematic sector. In this sense, thematic complementarity and funding synergies between different types of FP instruments - including R&I missions - in common areas of investment should be identified.

Moreover, co-funding mechanisms remain a significant instrument to streamline national and European research:

fragmentation and duplication could be reduced not only by fostering these EU Partnerships, but also by improving the level of coordination and integration between EU and national funds, as well as encouraging the harmonization of the rules.

Finally, within the ongoing transition to the new Programme, current CSA Preparatory Actions for future FET Flagships might be considered for continuation in the form of partnerships, selecting the specific typology accordingly to the nature of the consortia. This is crucial to guarantee a follow-up for the emerging technological trends and topics, currently supported under the FET programme. Indeed, being the result of a wide consultation process at Member States level, those CSA topics have already undergone a strong selection process and reflect real research priorities for EU.

6. PROMOTING STI INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND SCIENCE DIPLOMACY TO FOSTER EUROPEAN VALUES

Participation from EU Partner Countries has considerably declined in Horizon 2020 compared to FP7, mainly due to the different status and rules of participation assigned to emerging economies (e.g. India, China, Brazil, Russia).

Horizon Europe needs to strengthen and further incentivise international STI cooperation: open collaboration based on common scientific, cultural and technological expertise eventually reinforces research and innovation in Europe as a whole. At the same time, the EU should safeguard its interests and ensure a level playing field for European actors at international level. Collaborations with industrialised countries and emerging economies shall consider competition-related aspects and safeguard Europe's independence, while incentivising the international dimension of Open Innovation and using science diplomacy to address global challenges and

open new markets. In particular, the future European R&I International Cooperation strategy shall strengthen its focus on the Mediterranean Neighbourhood, with the aim to connect cultures and develop strong bases for collaboration and development.

Additionally, APRE strongly appreciates the European Commission proposal to overcome the criterion of geographical proximity for Associated Countries and calls on the co-legislators to confirm such approach in the final text. Indeed, this provision would open up the association to the Programme to Third Countries with a good STI capacity and a rule-based open market economy backed by democratic institutions, which actively promote policies to improve the economic and social well-being of citizens. Those conditions could be fundamental to foster the projection of European values towards the rest of the world, while strengthening the EU's sphere of influence and reaffirming the European leadership in STI among the major global competitors. In this regard, for instance, APRE also highlights the strategic importance of directly and fully involving in the EU R&I programme the key players of top-class scientific excellence- thus either international European research organisations or the international scientific organisations.

Furthermore, targeted calls and earmarked resources, to be specifically dedicated to international cooperation, could be modulated within the different areas based on relevance and common interest, by further promoting bilateral agreements between EU and industrialised countries, following-up the flagship initiatives launched for the last three years of Horizon 2020. In addition, EU-funded networks and platforms specifically aimed at fostering international cooperation and sustaining the participation of Partner Countries in the Framework Programme had demonstrated to be highly successful in FP7 and in the first years of Horizon 2020. The European Commission should reconsider to fund again such platforms to better identify R&I collaboration priorities and ensure a more effective exchange of knowledge.

7. THE REVIEW OF GBER AS A KEY ACTION TO ENHANCE EU FUNDING SYNERGIES

There is a broad acknowledgment on the need to enhance and strengthen synergies between Horizon Europe and other EU funding programmes (notably, regional development and cohesion programmes, InvestEU, Digital Europe Programme, European Space Programme, European Defence Fund and Connecting Europe Facility). In particular, Horizon Europe and future regional development and cohesion programmes should be conceived and designed with complementarity before being implemented, starting from the definition of the respective legislative regulations.

Therefore, APRE expresses its strong support for the position adopted by the European Parliament during the Horizon Europe legislative negotiations, notably regarding the request to seek maximal administrative simplification in the implementation of synergies between Horizon Europe and other EU funding programmes. Moreover, APRE agrees with the EP position to apply the Horizon Europe single set of rules for an RDI co-funded action and to allow that the proposals awarded the Seal of Excellence could receive support from national or regional funds, without requiring any further application and evaluation, applying the rules of the Fund providing support with the exception of state aid rule.

In this sense, APRE strongly endorses the targeted review of the General Block Exemption Regulation (“GBER”) as a key action to streamline EU funding complementarity. In this sense, It is essential that the legislative negotiate will confirm the European Commission proposal to extend the GBER to national funds in the following areas: (i) financing and investment operations supported by the InvestEU Fund; (ii) R&I projects having received a Seal of Excellence under the Framework Programme; (iii) European Territorial Cooperation projects (Interreg).

Furthermore, the regional development and cohesion

programmes legislation should be adapted accordingly in order to remove major regulatory features hampering synergistic funding at programme and project level, such as: differences in implementation timeframes and selection criteria, and the lack of specific provisions on transnational R&I projects (including demonstration and scale-up of Horizon 2020 projects and deployment of their outcomes) that deeply limit the possibilities for applicants to combine regional development and cohesion funds with FP funding.

8. SSH ROLE ACROSS PILLARS AND AS A TOOL TO SUPPORT MISSIONS

The role of Social Sciences and Humanities disciplines has been progressively and increasingly promoted throughout Horizon 2020 – a traditionally hard-science focused context – in order to properly understand and address complex societal problems, creating synergic research concepts, building a comprehension bridge between technology and society, and setting the founding conditions for scientific results to be relevant for, and positively find their place and settlement within society. However, a number of criticalities still have to be addressed in order to remove cultural, organizational and governance barriers and to enable the full potential of an SSH-STEM, silos-free dialogue – across Horizon Europe pillars and missions – to be translated into societal value. APRE believes that efforts aimed at a relevant SSH integration within Horizon Europe shall be even more explicitly emphasised. In particular, enhanced reflections and targeted supporting measures are needed at the following levels:

(1) Actions aimed at valorising the capacity of SSH-STEM dialogue of generating new knowledge through bringing a different and original epistemological value, and therefore competitive advantage and edge in the global arena. Such efforts may be implemented through the

design of topic that feature new disciplines combinations and accurate selection.

(2) Actions and support aimed at guaranteeing a more even and balanced reflection – within STEM-centred topics – of relevant SSH dimensions to be addressed. This passes through giving the right space and visibility to SSH specialist terminology, assumptions, viewpoints and models, up to taking into account different and more suitable ways to describe and measure impact in and for SSH disciplines. This will have the twofold objective of fostering a culture of interdisciplinary dialogue in STEM and SSH researchers, as well as of improving call identification from the SSH community point of view.

(3) Actions to reinforce the vertical presence of thematic-related SSH topics (i.e. within thematic WPs), to foster the exploration of the most pressing issues related to the complex relationship between science, technology, policy making and society, and support a deep comprehension of societal trends and transformations (e.g. in health it is crucial to understand trust-building mechanisms as related to medicine).

(4) Actions and support for SSH-STEM cooperation and co-design methodologies, related to: i) working together as of the projects' concept phase, building up hypotheses based on interdisciplinary and complementary theoretical assumptions and models; ii) supporting communities' cross-interactions and governance adaptation at the level of R&I institutions; iii) adapting research evaluation systems, which currently favour mono-disciplinary research.

Such a differently-tuned presence of SSH knowledge within sector-specific work programmes and at the topic level shall primarily aim at: I) providing insight to ensure awareness, anticipatory understanding and interpretation of societal trends, in order to identify the conditions under which technology can be sympathetic to human needs and realistically generate positive impacts on humans' lives, beyond a specific technological sectors;

ii) providing insight and approaches for a proper societal adaptation when major and disruptive technological changes are introduced, as well as to counterbalance possible technology-derived systemic critical effect; iii) the interpretation capacity ensured by SSH disciplines, finally, becomes fundamental in the process of trust creation, in a time of growing scepticism and legitimacy loss at detriment of institutions and science.

9. FOSTERING DIALOGUE ACROSS ALL PLAYERS

The ability to tackle nowadays complexity passes through the capacity to generate relevant concerted dialogues, and to capture value from varied and multifaceted sources. Stakeholder engagement methods and practices are called to a crucial role in Horizon Europe, that is to provide the right landscape and toolbox to bridge amongst different cultures, languages, and interests, or include knowledge communities within the R&I landscape. Stakeholder engagement shall be fostered in Horizon Europe bringing forwards in parallel two different levels:

(1) As a methodology to guide R&I actions. In this sense, efforts shall be addressed in creating an R&I methodological culture able to distinguish among the different concepts related to stakeholder engagement and dialogue (co-creation, co-design, multi-actor approach, etc) and properly selecting the most suitable approach.

(2) As an object of research itself. Research is still needed about the potential of stakeholder engagement, participatory methods, tools and processes, and on the actual impact of collective decisional and co-creation practices, as well as their enabling conditions. Likewise, the study of the potential limits, barriers and possible “dark sides” of stakeholder engagement and collective intelligence, in a context where the democratic discourse is undergoing sharp evolutions, is essential, in order

to grow as a society that is capable to meaningfully use collective intelligence and extract the best out of its richness and variety to create new and/or relevant knowledge.

10. INTEGRATING GENDER ASPECTS IN R&I CONTENT

The attention and visibility given by the European Commission to gender issues has generated over the years increased awareness in the R&I community regarding the existence of different viewpoints and needs, as well as of gender-biased social representations that may unconsciously drive R&I approaches, at all stages, from research question setting, to solution design.

The attention to gender also falls under a more general importance being given to the concept of openness in R&I, and to the need of representing different viewpoints and needs, across various social and demographic groups, including minorities. Actions related to gender could therefore be designed and brought forward as part of a more comprehensive framework in coherence with other cross-cutting priorities, aiming at transforming R&I methodological approach in a perspective of transdisciplinary and open way. In synergy with what concerns the integration of SSH methodologies and viewpoints, support actions are still needed to help researchers and innovators adapting their mindset and methodological frameworks; indeed, while theories, knowledge and methodologies about gender biases in research are now widely available, the capacity of researchers and innovators to apply them has not increased accordingly over years.

Therefore, a concrete and real attention shall be given, during the evaluation process, to the extent to which a gender-sensitive approach has been incorporated into the proposal's concept. Gender shall become a standard object of evaluation, especially for those

technologies (e.g., AI) capable to generate pervasive and transformational impact on the human relational sphere (e.g. behaviour, relationships, language, choices, cognitive sphere). Specific evaluation provisions shall be envisaged – cross-cuttingly to the evaluation process or in parallel – to ensure that specific gender advice and a proper gender analysis is incorporated into proposals' evaluations.

11. THE OPEN SCIENCE APPROACH AT THE HEARTH OF EU R&I STRATEGY

Open Science has been a cornerstone in the current European Commission strategy, aimed at improving knowledge circulation and fostering innovation through a deeply new approach to the whole scientific process, based on cooperative work and enabled by digital technologies and collaborative tools. Open Science pushes the R&I community to reconsider and reframe the criteria and processes to evaluate high-quality research. It also challenges traditional boundaries between science and society, envisioning citizens' active role in research processes (citizen science), and re-defining the perimeter of scientific dissemination outside the academic community (open access; open data). The transformation envisioned entails adaptations on the entire research cycle – from early research stages to result publication – and at all levels – from the cultural to the governance, from the infrastructural to the organisational level. New processes are expected to be embedded in every aspect of the scientific endeavour, and openness not be perceived as a hindrance. We highlight here the aspects that, in our view, need special attention and consideration to create a mature and fertile environment for open science to take off.

(1) Specialist skills and competences are needed. In order to create a full culture of openness, the need to introduce specific skills and competences in R&I teams shall be recognized (e.g. professional data analyst and managers;

expert in data privacy). Such competences may relate to the capacity to approach data and information blending openness and privacy culture, or duly weighing appropriate intellectual property measures and security concerns, in line with the evolving regulations. Another set of competences regards researchers and their capacity to appropriately use existing tools and methodologies (including EOSC) or to appropriately embed citizen science actions within research processes. At the R&I community and institutional level this need calls for the creation of new research methodology trainings, specific education curricula, and the recruitment of different specialist profiles.

(2) A more coherent and “interoperable” evaluation environment shall be created across the EU. National evaluation systems and metrics in matter of scholarly publishing and communication often follow criteria that are different than those required by the EU framework. This generates reluctance, for researchers, in undertaking approaches and initiatives (e.g. citizen science actions) that do not find appropriate recognition in their systems of belonging.

(3) Citizen science shall be supported through addressing cultural, competence and infrastructural barriers. Firstly, the potential added value of citizen science in research practice is still not fully understood and recognized by researchers, who do not have enough awareness about either the set of possible activities to be conducted, or the precise scenarios and conditions where citizen science constitutes a pursuable option. Secondly, citizen science is based on different disciplines (e.g. informatics; sociology; public engagement...) and on new research methodologies. Such competences need to be offered to researchers for them to engage in citizen science, together with recognition. Finally, specific citizen science enabling technological infrastructures are not an acquired asset of the R&I community, and their cost may act as a disincentive.

A complete EU policy framework shall give appropriate

evidence to the importance of these preconditions and enabling factors. APRE believes that Horizon Europe shall foresee appropriate supporting activities to address these concerns. With specific regards to the technological and tool dimension of citizen science, actions aimed at creating basic open and free software easily usable or adaptable by researchers could be pursued; similarly, option toolkits could be created to show researchers the value and options of citizen science.

12. COMMUNICATING R&I TO TUNE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCIENCE AND SOCIETY

Horizon 2020 has established a set of rules concerning the exploitation and dissemination of project results, including their protection through Intellectual Property (IP), with the aim of better reaping societal and economic benefits from EU-funded R&I initiatives.

The market-oriented exploitation concept - i.e. any exploitation process of research outcome that has a commercial objective and contributes to gaining or increasing economic returns and competitiveness - provides a better view of market impact of R&I projects. Taking note of this emphasis on the concept of innovation, it would be useful to enhance a range of support services to allow individual scientists, RTOs, SMEs to become more entrepreneurial and better use the results of EU-funded R&I projects, e.g. providing such services (exploitation and dissemination booster, coaching, business acceleration for SMEs) on a voluntary basis and at single project level in order to avoid shortcomings linked to IP issues.

Dissemination and communication are to be intended not only as ways to maximize the possibility to achieve an economic exploitation, but also as means and ways to tune the relationship between science and society, by improving a better understanding by society of those science fields and orientations that more commonly

raise fears, scepticism or prejudices. For what concerns communication toward citizens, actions and efforts have to take into account the post-truth mediatic and informational context of our times. This means addressing science legitimacy issues, as well as interpretation issues connected to disinformation (e.g. cognitive aspect of disinformation, science and media literacy). Science communication that does not integrate this awareness in its practices will not reach its target audience in any meaningful way.

Given the capacity of dissemination and communication activities to create and shape a correct understanding of science, and in order to tackle the above-mentioned issues, the EC commitment toward a better communication of results shall draw the attention towards, and call for, the embedding of communication-specific knowledge and professionalism, as essential competences in EU-funded research and innovation. In practical terms, this might mean inserting specific recommendation at the topic writing or template level (requirement at the proposal stages).

The last hint concerns a smoother and more realistic dealing of dissemination and communication at the level of proposal's template. While a proper distinction shall be maintained at the conceptual level to reflect and stress two very different final purposes, it is important to reduce the high level of redundancy and overlaps that the current template structure generates. The proximity and continuity between the two concepts from the strategic, organisational and implementation point of view shall be somehow recognised and taken into account, facilitating the proposal's writing stage as well as evaluators' work.

13. IMPROVING PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT BY PROPERLY ADDRESSING L&F ISSUES

Administrative simplification is necessary to enhance the efficiency of the Framework Programme as well as to open the participation to a potentially wider range of applicants, while encouraging and promoting the access of newcomers. In this respect, Horizon Europe should follow the significant improvements already brought by Horizon 2020, increasing the user-friendliness and reducing administrative burdens for applicants and project participants. For instance, the Funding & Tenders Portal should become even more the one-stop shop for all the project-cycle steps from application to final reporting, covering and centralising all R&I initiatives across the EU budget (including the whole range of EU R&I Partnership actions), also by replacing the remaining paper-based procedures (e.g. LEAR appointment and linked third parties financial reporting).

Furthermore, APRE supports the need to streamline the current landscape of Model Grant Agreements, by regrouping MGAs in three types only (i.e. a general model and two derived models based respectively on unit costs and on lump sum) and adopting a corporate approach that should follow-up the Horizon 2020 model based on a fully electronic project lifecycle management. Additionally, in order to comply with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the European Commission should provide a full set of rules for effectively addressing proposal writing and daily project management issues. In this sense, the future MGA shall include specific provisions about the data protection.

An in-depth evaluation of the current Horizon 2020 lump-sum pilot should be performed before any possible large adoption of this form of grant in Horizon Europe. While more provisions on the lump-sum scheme are however needed in the new MGA, an overall reflection on the

effective simplification in terms of project implementation and audit procedures provided by lump-sum based projects should be carefully considered.

Another key aspect is represented by the evaluation process that should be improved by: ensuring full correspondence between evaluation criteria, objectives, deliverables and expected impacts; diversifying criteria according to the different types of funding actions and thematic areas; striving for an enhanced matching between evaluators' skills and proposals' content; and by providing proposers with high-quality substantial

feedback on each project proposal section, so as to better orient their future proposal preparation efforts and improve their success prospects.

Additionally, a consistent two-stage evaluation procedure should be maintained and further strengthened - where appropriate - in Horizon Europe, to make the selection process more efficient and address the issue of oversubscription: the first stage should be made more selective, thus reducing the burden on proposers and leading to a higher success rate in the second stage.

APRE intends to highlight its full commitment and endeavour to serve the challenge of multi-stakeholder dialogue in relation to the complex strategic planning process bringing to the definition of Horizon Europe Work Programmes. In relation to this challenge, APRE wants to interpret at the best its role of engager, translator and mediator within the Italian R&I actors' landscape, with the ambition to facilitate the exchange among the varied landscape constituted by its associates, different in nature, culture, mission and interests. Our ambition is to contribute at the best to the creation of a coherent, inclusive and united elaboration and vision, able to reflect the needs and complexity of the Italian R&I community, while serving at the best the Italian Ministry of Research.



Agenzia per la Promozione della Ricerca Europea
Via Cavour, 71 00184 Roma - Tel.: +39 06 489 399 93 - Email: segreteria@apre.it
APRE EU Liaison Office, Rue du Trône, 98 1050 Bruxelles - Email: bruxelles@apre.it

www.apre.it

