

Position of the Leibniz Association on the Proposal for the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation 2021-2027 Horizon Europe

Europe's economy and its knowledge-based societies depend on excellent research and future-oriented innovation that need to be secured through a strong Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (EU FP). The EU FP is an important financial and strategic tool to foster competitiveness, and growth. Furthermore, it provides opportunities to connect and cooperate for stakeholder groups from many different sectors in Europe and beyond. To meet the EU's societal, ecological, economic and political challenges, **the EU FP requires a significant share of the future EU budget.**

With great interest the Leibniz Association took note of the Commission's draft for the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation 2021-2027 Horizon Europe and appreciates, in particular, the efforts undertaken to maintain the established structure and successful funding instruments. The Leibniz Association is convinced that the **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide the adequate policy framework for research conducted under Horizon Europe**, which will be the engine of progress at a European and global level.

Ongoing efforts to strengthen international cooperation and the principles of Open Science need to remain a clear priority. The European Commission, the Member States, policy makers and researchers all over Europe have been elaborating research-driven Open Science concepts, which shape research processes and funding requirements. In this context, the Leibniz Association welcomes **the European Commission's Open Access Policy to Publications and Research Data**, but maintains that the implementation of this policy **must respect the specificities of different research fields and disciplines**. The possibility to opt-out is therefore an important element and should not have a negative impact on funding decisions. Finally, Open Science as a major European Commission's policy priority should be implemented throughout the entire EU FP. Consequently, and to avoid ambiguity of meaning, the title of the first pillar should remain, as in Horizon 2020, "Excellent Science".

A Framework Programme which strengthens the European Research Area

Horizon Europe must continue to reflect the basic concepts of the European Research Area (ERA). It must provide a framework for excellent research integrating all relevant ERA actors and continue to support European and international cooperation where the European added value will be the highest. Over the last decade, the ERA has become increasingly attractive to scholars and entrepreneurs. To build on this success, **research freedom, good scientific practice and the excellence principle have to remain at the heart of Horizon Europe**. The Leibniz Association reiterates that **excellence must remain the main criterion for research support throughout the EU FP**. This needs to be guaranteed through a transparent and independent evaluation process corresponding to the highest international standards.

One of the most important drivers for the ERA is the first pillar of the EU FP with its bottom-up approach of funding excellent science and training for researchers.

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) are crucial for further development of the ERA as they promote transnational mobility and training of a future highly skilled European work force in the academic and non-academic sectors. **An increased MSCA budget surpassing the funds foreseen in the European Commission's proposal for Horizon Europe, is therefore paramount for the consolidation of the ERA.**

Over the last ten years, **the European Research Council (ERC)** has become a global benchmark for ground-breaking science. It is, therefore, **paramount to maintain its established principles of excellence and bottom-up approach. The ERC should, by no means, be constrained by policy requirements and should continue to support researchers at all career stages.**

European research infrastructures constitute an essential building block of the ERA. Good progress has been made towards integrating and opening national research facilities as well as in the strategic monitoring and planning processes. With Horizon Europe these activities must be pursued in close cooperation with Member States, with the aim to ensure long-term sustainability of European research infrastructures. **Strong support for networking activities and transnational access must be secured.**

Collaborative research must remain at the core of Horizon Europe. Especially **the percentage of small to medium sized fundamental collaborative research projects at lower Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) has to be increased throughout the entire EU FP,** including the thematic clusters and the planned missions as well as the new European Innovation Council (EIC). Fundamental research builds the basis for future innovation and technological development and its impact goes far beyond the short-term economic stimulus. Along this line, the current approach favouring large consortia has to be revised as the **coordination and management of smaller consortia is generally more efficient and allows a much stronger focus on research activities** instead of management and administration.

Within the second pillar, **the cluster "Inclusive and Secure Society" should be divided into two independent clusters,** since there is neither an academic nor a policy reason for merging them: the two research fields being addressed under this cluster target entirely different research communities which rely on differing research methods and aim for divergent research goals. Issues that are becoming increasingly important for civil society such as migration, democracy, economic inequality or education need to be reflected in an **adequate budget for the dedicated research cluster on "Inclusive Societies."**

The Leibniz Association supports the new mission-oriented policy as it reflects the Leibniz Institutes' cooperative and interdisciplinary approach and its strong links to society. In the spirit of the ERA, the future missions have the potential to bring together the best competences in Europe regardless of their provenance. Whereas research must remain international and genuinely unrestrained, **the future missions should focus on priority areas with the highest possible European added value. The structure and scope of the missions and mission boards need to be clearly defined in close cooperation with the Member States and all relevant stakeholders.** The future missions must offer an added value with relation to the

thematic clusters and partnerships, and connect research and innovation activities across Horizon Europe. **The links between missions and projects need to be specified in detail.**

A **stronger alignment of different EU funding programmes** will help to avoid overlaps and duplication within the knowledge triangle of research, education and innovation. At the same time, their **different intervention logics should be respected**. Additionally, strong commitment from the European Commission's relevant Directorates-General and the Member States is required to facilitate synergies between Horizon Europe and Digital Europe, Life, Erasmus+, as well as the Cohesion Fund and CAP.

A Framework Programme which is straightforward, accessible and promotes fair and transparent participation

A sound programme for research funding needs to be transparent and offer easily accessible funding schemes. Therefore, the Leibniz Association welcomes the continuity of the majority of the Rules for Participation in Horizon Europe. The planned rationalisation of the diverse partnership instruments into three types of European Partnerships with a common set of rules and reporting tools, templates and requirements is the right measure against duplication and fragmentation.

The Leibniz Association supports further simplification and user-friendliness, especially with regard to the implementation phase of the projects. Along this line, **the proposed trust-based approach needs to be established**. This includes the acceptance of beneficiaries' accounting practices and cost categories as well as national cost reporting requirements. It will significantly lessen the administrative burden not only on beneficiaries, but also on the European Commission and the auditors and thus reduce accounting error rates. This will be especially effective if institutions can opt for an ex-ante audit procedure, as this gives beneficiaries certainty concerning their accounting practice early on in the project.

The Leibniz Association firmly opposes the expansion of loan-based financing as it would prevent the participation of numerous universities and research organisations, which cannot accept loans and exclusively have to rely on grant-based R&I funding. As regards the use of lump sum funding **a meticulous evaluation of the current lump sum pilots under Horizon 2020 must be carried out before this funding mode can be expanded to further projects**. It is not yet clear how the monitoring of projects funded in such a way and the corresponding payment of funds are to be implemented. The European Commission would have to set up a system that operates properly, before eventually introducing this new funding concept in further funding lines.

The use of unit costs should be scrutinized, especially if applied to personnel costs, as they do not reflect the real costs. Moreover, **the possibility of claiming reimbursement based on actual personnel costs should be re-introduced**.

The Rules for Participation of Horizon Europe have to be developed in close cooperation with Member States and all relevant stakeholders. They should provide a sound basis for the future Model Grant Agreement in order to avoid recurrent amendments and thus provide beneficiaries with the necessary legal certainty.



The Leibniz Association

The Leibniz Association connects 93 independent research institutions that range in focus from the natural, engineering and environmental sciences via economics, spatial and social sciences to the humanities. Leibniz institutes address issues of social, economic and ecological relevance. They conduct knowledge-driven and applied basic research, maintain scientific infrastructure and provide research-based services.

The Leibniz Association identifies focus areas for knowledge transfer to policy-makers, academia, business and the public. Due to the importance of the institutions for the country as a whole, they are funded jointly by the Federation and the Länder, employing some 18,700 individuals, including 9,500 researchers. The entire budget of all the institutes is approximately 1.8 billion Euro.

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