

POSITION PAPER

Interim evaluation of the Horizon Europe programme

Eötvös Loránd University Budapest
Faculty of Informatics



ELTE | FACULTY OF
INFORMATICS

Budapest, February 2023



The Faculty of Informatics of the Eötvös Loránd University Budapest (ELTE IK) plays a leading role in the research and education of computer science not only in Hungary but also in Central and Eastern Europe.

As a public university, our priority is to provide high-quality education and research, and to promote the involvement of our researchers in international collaborations. The Horizon Europe programme plays a prominent role in this endeavour.

ELTE IK welcomes the initiative of the European Commission to hold a public consultation on the interim evaluation of the Horizon Europe (HE) programme. We appreciate the continuous efforts of the Commission to improve the HE programme and consult stakeholders on various aspects of its implementation.

The following comments and suggestions are based on our long-term experience and are intended to contribute to the improvement of the programme.

Budapest, February 2023

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1. PUBLICATION OF DRAFT WORK PROGRAMMES

Getting to know the Work Programmes as soon as possible is a very important part for all stakeholders in the preparatory work. However, today there is no structured form of this, leaked versions circulate within the research community.

Recommendation:

- The Commission should consider to directly pre-publish the draft versions of the Work Programmes, avoiding any misunderstanding and ensuring equal opportunities for all stakeholders.

2. WORK PROGRAMME 2025-2027

We appreciate the opportunity provided by the Commission to consult on the HE 2025-2027 Work Programme. Experience so far with the 2021-2022 and 2023-2024 Work Programmes shows that many calls are launched with the expectation that only one proposal with a large consortium and a significant budget will be selected. This practice does not promote real competition and the spread of excellence. As a Faculty of Informatics we highly appreciate that the Commission and the Horizon Europe programme put digitalisation and digital technology into focus. However, our experience is that the previous work programmes neglected information technology as a scientific field and have concentrated on the importance of its daily use.

Recommendation:

- In the 2025-2027 work programmes the Commission should consider introducing a set of calls for proposals involving smaller consortia for more agile, explorative research on information technology as a scientific field. This approach would be beneficial for the future of technological development and thus for the creation of a more resilient European society.

3. TECHNOLOGY READINESS LEVEL (TRL)

We understand the importance of maximising the impact of a research project on society as a whole, which is why TRL values are often high in HE calls for proposals. However, we strongly believe that collaborative basic research should remain an intrinsic focus of Pillar II of the HE programme.

Recommendations:

- The Commission should envisage a broader portfolio approach with smaller projects, and smaller consortia focusing on basic collaborative research;
- More calls for proposals should be published within Pillar II with low TRL value.

4. MODEL GRANT AGREEMENT (MGA)

We welcome the process of harmonisation of all EU funding programmes and related documents and believe that this will contribute to consistent interpretation and simplified administration. However, it is worrying that two years after the commencement of the programme period we still do not have the final Annotated Model Grant Agreement (AMGA).

Recommendation:

- All guidance documents in their final format, including the AMGA, should be published in a timely manner, immediately after the first calls for proposals are published.

5. HOP ON FACILITY

As a HEI of a widening country we welcome the initiative, it raised high expectations in our research community. However, we have to point out that these expectations are not fully met based on the experiences and results of the 2021-2022 Work Programme. Eligible projects of the Hop On list are not always encouraged to participate in the Facility, as the requests could represent an administrative burden to the coordinator.

Recommendations:

- Update the Hop On Facility list more often and remove already successful projects from the list of eligible projects immediately;
- Additional assistance should be provided by the Commission to coordinators to handle administrative issues related to requests coming from widening partners to submit a proposal;
- Allow more than one project partner from the widening countries to join a proposal already selected;
- Allow additional funding from the Facility for all project partners (not only to the coordinator).

6. PROPOSAL EVALUATION

Evaluation is a key part of the whole application process. It is important that all applicants have confidence in the evaluations and the evaluators. We appreciate the Commission's efforts to strengthen the quality of these processes and to deliver high-quality Evaluation Summary Reports (ESR).

Recommendations:

- A more consistent and specific feedback is needed, especially when a proposal is not selected;
- The Commission should consider a new option in the evaluation process, to at least give the consortium the right to respond to the ESR, especially if a proposal is not selected;
- The evaluation process and evaluators should follow the new developments regarding the research assessment process and integrate the new principles of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment.

7. LUMP SUM/UNIT COSTS

The idea of a simplified form of funding is supported. We have significant experience with lump sum/unit costs funding not only with HE but with Erasmus+, CERV (Europe for Citizens) projects. It is important, however, that the final decision on the general introduction of a lump sum system is based on a further assessment of the situation and possible consequences. Scientific excellence should remain at the center of the evaluators' attention and discussions on the budget should not dominate the evaluation process.

Recommendations:

- Unit Costs should be indexed with every new Work Programme published;
- In MSCA projects a special management and indirect contribution item should be introduced for coordinators to cover their additional expenses to change the current system of reallocating sums from the project partners' budget;
- Special attention should be paid to ensure that as regards the salaries the gap between the EU-12 and the EU-15 does not widen and that lump sums are determined to the satisfaction of all parties;
- The Commission should try to attract as many people with expertise on lump sum projects as possible to register as evaluators and evaluators and auditors should be trained to assess/deal with lump sum proposals/projects.

8. EIT

Stakeholders welcomed the activities and initiatives of the EIT. Harmonisation between EIT and HE is an important and positive development. EIT KICs communication much improved and their calls are much more in line with HE calls.

Recommendations:

- the role and involvement of KICs should be further aligned with HE;
- the discrepancies between the internal organisational rules of the KICs should be reviewed;
- KICs project management (including reporting and requested documents) should be integrated into the SEDIA system.

9. AUDIT

An audit is an integral part of the process and can provide assurance to stakeholders that project funds are being used appropriately. It can provide valuable insights into a project's performance, and help to identify opportunities for possible improvements. In this regard we welcome the Commission's efforts to have a more transparent and effective process.

Recommendations:

- The Indicative Audit Programme for H2020 is a highly valued document, thus it should be published at the beginning of each programme period;
- Auditors should have deeper expertise in project management and implementation and pay special attention that the project is delivering value for money;
- Audit notifications should not be sent during holiday periods (August or December).

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