

ERRIN INPUT PAPER ON THE INTERIM EVALUATION OF HORIZON EUROPE AND PROPOSALS FOR FP10, May 2024

To the attention of the Expert group on the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe

Building an effective European R&I policy and optimising the impact of the Framework Programmes depends on strong interconnected R&I ecosystems embedded in regions and cities across EU. **Place-based regional dimension** is key for bringing out maximum added value of R&I on the ground.

The principle of excellence is essential for the Framework Programme to ensure its competitive nature. At the same time, emphasis should be placed on increasing its accessibility for stakeholders. Moreover, retaining the current **three-pillar architecture** of the programme would guarantee continuity and stability, building confidence and facilitating access for prospective applicants. At the same time, coherence and links between the three pillars should be strengthened to facilitate the engagement of researchers across pillars and not only under pillar I.

Furthermore, looking at the second half of Horizon Europe and the FP10, links and coherence between Framework Programme and other EU policies need to be thoroughly examined, while keeping in mind the different policy objectives. This should serve as a **catalyst** to overcome the current roadblocks identified linked to funding synergies and strengthening support to research and innovation.

Widening programme and bridging the innovation divide

Bridging the innovation gap to unlock the full R&I potential of Europe as a whole remains one of the **major challenges** that should be tackled. The Widening Participation and Spreading Excellence sub-programme of Horizon Europe directly addresses the innovation divide in a dedicated way, hence it **should be preserved in FP10**, however its structure would **benefit from a change**. The “widening participation” and “strengthening the ERA” should be divided into two sub-programmes, which would allow discussing the necessary support measures separately. Whilst there is a clear need to strengthen national level widening measures, developing of these two parts of the sub-programme is hard to merge under the same programming committee due to their distinct priorities.

Moreover, the Widening sub-programme **needs revamping** and the proposed measures should be **reworked** by paying closer attention to the place-based perspective and further engaging the R&I community in the widening territories to co-design the proposed measures and calls. Potential refocusing of the eligibility for the widening measures at regional level instead of country level could also be considered, but it would require a thorough assessment and development of appropriate criteria.

Widening and tackling innovation divide should also be **extended** beyond a dedicated sub-programme and addressed through other instruments as well to encourage more research and innovation-oriented activities beyond capacity building offered by the Widening sub-programme. Examples of Regional Innovation Valleys under EIE action and EU Missions calls show how cooperation between regions and their R&I ecosystems with higher and lower innovation performance levels can be fostered through consortium eligibility criteria and call requirements, such as involving demonstrators from territories lagging behind in innovation. If well-designed, inclusion of such elements would not hinder excellence as the guiding principle for FP10.

EU Missions as a flagship for societal impact

EU Missions are one of the **key successes** of Horizon Europe, strongly supporting the objectives of green transition and providing directionality to R&I funding. EU Missions have already demonstrated their ability to inspire cities and regions across Europe to adopt Mission-like approaches and integrate Mission objectives into their policies and strategies. They have fostered greater collaboration among various stakeholders at local and regional level as well as encouraged further collaboration across governance levels. The Missions have also

brought closer together the policy makers and other stakeholders of sectoral policies and the research community.

At the same time, there are also some **roadblocks** that should be addressed to realise the full potential of the EU Missions. ERRIN calls for a stronger joint ownership of the EU Missions at all governance levels. There is a need for establishing a new governance framework at the European level for EU Missions, backed by strong political support e.g. through the appointment of a dedicated EC Vice-President to oversee and guide the Mission implementation. Moreover, achieving the ambitious goals of the Missions will necessitate their **integration** into various EU funding programmes, extending beyond the strong support from FP10. Finally, more focus should be put in FP10 on societal impact apart from technological solutions and EU Missions are an opportunity for pursuing this objective. Efforts should be made to move from “theory to practice”, for example, when it comes to knowledge valorisation, as involving quadruple helix stakeholders in the projects is an essential step for valorisation existing knowledge and scaling up solutions/innovations.

Stronger support to the ecosystem approach

A thriving European innovation ecosystem requires strong and well-connected place-based innovation ecosystems. Better connected European innovation ecosystem is essential for enhancing the competitiveness of Europe, its resilience and strategic autonomy. Horizon Europe has a dedicated European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) action that currently has a very limited budget. However, it has potential to become a much **stronger** sub-programme as different types of "valleys" are booming under various programmes and policies, and the Regional Innovation Valleys initiative has raised unprecedented interest among regional stakeholders. To anchor a strong place-based ecosystem approach requires a clear framework in the European R&I policy.

FP10 would also benefit from **embedding** an ecosystem approach across the programme, facilitating more extensive collaboration between various R&I stakeholders and further enhancing connectivity of ecosystems on common challenges and along value chains.

The above and broader ERRIN points with regard to Horizon Europe and first recommendations towards FP10 are elaborated in more detail in the following documents and pages:

- [ERRIN input to Horizon 2014-2027 consultation](#), February 2023
- [ERRIN recommendations on the EIC going forward](#), March 2024
- [ERRIN contribution to the call for evidence for the New European Innovation Agenda](#), May 2022
- [ERRIN webpages on EU Missions](#)

[ERRIN](#) (European Regions Research and Innovation Network) is a Brussels-based platform that gathers around 120 regional organisations in more than 20 European countries. ERRIN aims to strengthen the regional and local dimension in EU R&I policy and programmes.

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