

European Commission prepares Horizon Europe: the future framework programme for research, development and innovation in the European Union



Horizon 2020 (H2020) is the programme for funding research and innovation projects in the European Union for the period 2014-2020.

Coinciding with the end of the H2020 programme and with the same aim (**to promote industrial leadership in Europe and drive scientific excellence**), the European Commission is now preparing its follow-up programme, Horizon Europe. This new programme will cover the period 2021-2027 and it promises to be the largest ever programme of funding for research, development and innovation.

What is Horizon Europe?

Horizon Europe is a funding programme aimed at **supporting research, development and innovation projects which advance a series of common objectives for the entire European Union**. These objectives are based on the three pillars of the Horizon Europe programme, which are

the following:

- **Excellent Science:** Firstly, the programme aims to promote “open science”, offering support to researchers through grants, and funding projects defined and driven by researchers through the European Research Council and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA).
- **Global challenges and European industrial competitiveness:** Secondly, the programme aims to support, through the Joint Research Centre (JRC), projects that develop technological solutions to challenges in critical areas such as health, climate change, mobility, food and natural resources, energy, civil security, digital, industry and space, etc. This means that projects will no longer be assessed solely in terms of excellence. The development projects put forward in the calls for proposals must have a clear social impact.
- **Innovative Europe:** Finally, it aims to foster and support innovation activities that bring together business, research and education through the European Innovation

Council (EIC) and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). These innovation activities will be exploited in connection with so-called “missions”, which are general global challenges (for example, cancer, soil health and food, climate-neutral and smart cities, healthy oceans, seas, coastal and inland waters, and adaptation to climate change). Funding will thus be provided for projects which could have an impact on some of these areas.

What are the new features of Horizon Europe with respect to H2020?

As we have seen, the pillars on which the Horizon Europe programme will be based have been redefined with respect to the structure of the existing H2020 programme. In addition to this change in the organisation of the programme, **widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area** has been set as one of the main challenges, in an effort to achieve a certain level of excellence across the Member States.

In this regard, the Horizon Europe project has some new features which, while they are yet to be defined, already give us an idea as to which aspects will change with respect to the current programme in order to achieve this specific aim.

- One of the key aspects of Horizon Europe is that it will facilitate greater mobility for researchers and innovators, seeking to **enable EU-wide exploitation of the resources of the Member States**, thereby creating new synergies to drive innovation. One of the measures to be implemented in order to achieve this objective is the creation of new centres of excellence through which partnerships may be established between scientific institutions and partner organisations. Moreover, there will be efforts to strengthen universities or other research organisations that are at the cutting edge in a given field, establishing links with world-leading research institutions from another Member State.
- These measures are closely linked to the openness that the programme is intended to foster in the field of research and which can be seen in two of the aforementioned pillars of Horizon Europe: open science and open innovation. Thus, the objectives pursued by Horizon Europe are to **shift the focus from administration to the content of the research activities**, guaranteeing access to scientific publications and making research data available, all in line with the FAIR principles, in accordance with which information must be “as open as possible, and as closed as necessary”. In fact, last month the European Commission set up a platform on which the beneficiaries of H2020 and Horizon Europe will be able to publish their research in open access and free of charge from January 2021, in keeping with the above-mentioned objectives of open science and open innovation.
- As we have mentioned, the aim, through this programme, is to foster co-creation and co-design between Member States and interested stakeholders, but also to **encourage the participation of civil society**, involving citizens in research

processes, with the objective that the results can be brought to market.

Finally, it is worth highlighting that the funds allocation proposed by the European Commission for the Horizon Europe programme has increased with respect to the previous programme, amounting to more than 100 billion euros, which will result in **increased opportunities** for R&D&I projects to access funding and other benefits of the programme.

How can Spanish companies prepare for the opportunities offered by Horizon Europe?

The European Commission is currently carrying out the strategic planning to prepare the first work programmes under Horizon Europe, so we will have to wait until the project is more defined and the first calls for proposals for the programme are published.

Based on the information we have, indications are that Horizon Europe **will not be set up simply as a funding programme** aimed at R&D&I projects. It will be regarded more as a tool for **defining the European innovation ecosystem**, which could provide very interesting opportunities for the innovation sector in Spain.

This change in the programme’s focus, together with the restructuring of the pillars on which it is based, could also bring new developments, with respect to the existing H2020, in terms of how calls for proposals are organised and the entities that manage them. **It is therefore essential that Spanish companies that invest in R&D&I are well informed and have expert advice** on procedures of this kind, thereby reducing the risk of missing out on this type of opportunity due to a lack of planning and preparation.

Based on our experience advising companies and institutions in relation to the H2020 programme, we know that calls for proposals of this kind are not without their complications. We shall therefore be carefully monitoring the news published regarding this new programme and, in particular, the information concerning the first calls for proposals launched in the framework of Horizon Europe.

Other information of interest:

- [Information published on the European Commission's website which includes the proposal for Horizon Europe and other news and related links.](#)
- [Information published on the European Commission's website regarding how the Commission's proposal for Horizon Europe was designed, the legal framework, factsheets and reports.](#)

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