

Eurodoc Open Letter to European Parliament on Horizon Europe

Dear Members of the European Parliament,

We, representatives of early-career researchers in Europe, hereby respectfully respond to [proposals by the Committee on Industry, Research, and Energy \(ITRE\)](#) towards a regulation of the European Parliament and the Council establishing a Framework Programme for Research and Innovation in Europe (Horizon Europe) for 2021-2027 [File 2018/0224(COD)].

The [European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers \(Eurodoc\)](#) is a grassroots federation of national associations representing doctoral candidates and junior researchers in 28 countries across Europe. We are a non-profit organisation based in Brussels and are the main stakeholder for the 1+ million early-career researchers in Europe.

Increase the Budgets for MSCA and ERC Funding Programmes

We have [previously offered recommendations on Horizon Europe](#) and welcome proposals to increase the total budget for Horizon Europe from €97.6 to €120 billion. An increase for Pillar 1 on Open Science from €25.8 to €35.6 billion is, however, still not ambitious enough. Increases for the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) from €6.8 to €11.3 billion and for the European Research Council (ERC) from €16.6 to €20.4 billion are not sufficient in our opinion to adequately support early-career researchers and foster excellence in Europe. These two programmes are true success stories of the framework programme and have greatly contributed to European leadership in global research and innovation. We thus reiterate our call to double the budget compared to Horizon 2020 for MSCA from €6.2 to €12.4 billion and for ERC from €13.1 to €26.2 billion in Horizon Europe. We also welcome an increase for the Research Infrastructures from €2.4 to €3.9 billion, but note a lack of clarity in proposals on the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC), and call for explicit reference to the role and budget of EOSC in Horizon Europe. The regulation should similarly include explicit mention of a relationship between EOSC in Horizon Europe and EOSC in the Digital Europe Programme. The budget for Pillar 1 should be minimally extended to €42.5 billion.

Keep Excellence as Core Criterion and Strengthen Open Science

Eurodoc fully supports Open Science. We applaud calls for Open Science to be cross-cutting in the framework programme, although we note that this is not stated explicitly in proposals, and thus call for Open Science to be an explicit cross-cutting issue in Horizon Europe. The name change of Pillar 1 from 'Excellent Science' to 'Open Science' is confusing, given that Open Science is indeed supposed to be a cross-cutting theme. The name implies that the focus in Pillar 1 has shifted from excellence to open and that only Pillar 1 seriously aims to be open. We believe in excellence as a core criterion for Pillar 1 and that excellent science involves open access to research. We thus agree with the [call by the European University Association \(EUA\)](#) to rename Pillar 1 to 'Open and Excellent Science'. We note hereby that all projects in Horizon Europe should equally follow the regulation guidelines for Open Science and that more active measures need to be taken to entrench Open Science. We therefore call for targeted funding programmes to promote and innovate Open Science practices, for application evaluations to incorporate Open Science practices by researchers, and for adequate training and support of researchers for Open Science in Horizon Europe.

Impose Fewer Legal Barriers and Put Science (Not Business) First

The cultural shift towards Open Science supported by the European Commission seems to stand in contrast to proposals to strengthen Intellectual Property Rights and give priority to projects which plan to commercialise research outputs in Horizon Europe. Eurodoc has [previously commented on proposals for a directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market](#) and on the alarming consequences of restricting text-and-data mining, giving ancillary copyrights to press publishers, and overburdening online content sharing service providers. While we support content creators receiving due credit for their work, we are nevertheless against overly restrictive copyrights and strongly prioritising the commercial viability of research and innovation, which often run counter to open and fundamental research. We therefore call for a framework programme which puts scientific advancement first and imposes as few legal restrictions as possible on research and innovation in Europe.

Reduce Application Barriers and Improve Access to Funding

Eurodoc welcomes proposals to reduce application barriers and improve access to funding. Both the simplification and harmonisation of rules for all research and innovation activities across European funding programmes will simplify the application process for researchers. Extending the Seal of Excellence to the whole framework programme, and awarding the seal to all projects above the excellence threshold, will reduce resource-consuming repeat applications and increase the funding opportunities for excellent researchers. We support spreading excellence and widening participation, but request that such measures be funded solely from the related budget of €6 billion, and not from other funding programmes in Horizon Europe. We unfortunately note a lack of reference to the humanities and social sciences in proposals and thus support the [call of the Humanities in the European Research Area \(HERA\)](#) to create targeted funding programmes for these disciplines and make human and societal factors of research and innovation a cross-cutting issue in Horizon Europe.

Strengthen Equality and Ensure Fair Compensation for Work

Proposals to promote and strengthen equality in research and innovation are very welcome. We are critical, however, of simply imposing gender quotas to achieve gender balance. We agree with the [call of the Gender Action consortium](#) to create targeted funding programmes for gender equality and make gender explicitly cross-cutting in the framework programme. We propose to go yet one step further and make equality a cross-cutting issue, which not only includes gender but also other diverse groups such as minorities and people with special needs, in Horizon Europe. We also request changing ‘young researchers’, a term which is too restrictive in our opinion, to ‘early-career researchers’ in the regulation. We fully agree with proposals that researchers should receive fair compensation for work, but do not agree with the proposal of ‘equal pay for equal work’, given the variety in the cost of living across Europe. We instead call for a system similar to the MSCA salary arrangement, where researchers receive a basic salary which is then adjusted for country-specific correction coefficients, and which is scaled according to researcher level in Horizon Europe.

We remain at your disposal to clarify any comments or answer any questions on our letter!

Kind regards,

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