

Societal impact at risk in the next EU research programme

Civil society reaction to the European Parliament's position on Horizon Europe

12 DEC 2018: The Commission's original proposal to merge industrial competitiveness and societal challenges in the new Pillar 2 of Horizon Europe put societal impact at risk by blurring profit-oriented objectives with societal impact-oriented ones. Civil society called on the European Parliament to put in place adequate safeguards to prioritise needs driven research and ensure robust societal engagement. **We welcome some improvements within thematic clusters and, more broadly, the recognition of the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement, and the role of citizens and civil society.** However, **we find that the Parliament did not go far enough in ensuring public return on public investment in the programme, and has in some places weakened the existing proposal. In particular we note:**

1. While the **definition of societal impact improved, its link to sustainable development remains weak.** It must be made clear that the programme is expected to have societal impact by addressing global societal challenges *as embodied by the SDGs*, such as healthy lives, climate action and sustainable food and farming. Indicators for societal impact also remain weak: these must also be aligned to the SDGs, as economic and scientific impact is measured separately.
2. **There remains no guarantee for dedicated funding for projects focusing on addressing societal challenges in Pillar 2.** Given that competitiveness and sustainable development do not always align, it is crucial that a major part of Pillar 2's budget is reserved for independent, participatory projects whose objectives and priority setting focus solely on addressing societal challenges.
3. While we welcome the strengthening of some commitments on societal engagement, in particular to include civil society organisations on mission boards, **the parliament failed to address the barriers to societal engagement in R&I agenda-setting**, e.g. by not supporting structured engagement with CSOs in strategic planning, a successor programme to Science With and For Society with a significant budget, targets to improve levels of engagement and indicators to monitor CSO engagement.
4. **Open access principles have been undermined by the Parliament.** The extension of a sweepingly broad list of reasons to allow 'opting out' of open access requirements effectively undermines Open Science plans. Efficient access to research results and data is critical to ensuring societal impact and strict criteria should allow opt-outs only in exceptional circumstances.
5. **Explicit support for the Joint Undertakings should be balanced with commitments to reform them toward societal impact.** There have been very few evaluations of the societal impact of these major industry partnerships for which already scarce funding for societal challenges is diverted, and existing evaluations conclude they are not focused on achieving societal impact. In contrast, successful public-public partnerships with positive societal impact evaluations were not explicitly mentioned.

We also express concern about inclusion of the "**innovation principle**" and urge it to be removed: it is the role of R&I to serve the needs of society and sustainable development, and so only the EU's Precautionary Principle should guide the application of innovation. The negotiations on the next EU framework programme are a crucial moment to ensure that research and innovation is truly needs driven and focused on delivering tangible public benefits for citizens. **We urge Council, Parliament and Commission to maximise the societal impact of the programme through concrete commitments and safeguards in Horizon Europe.**

