



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Regulatory Scrutiny Board

Brussels,
Ares(2017)

Opinion

Title: Interim evaluation of Horizon 2020

Overall opinion: POSITIVE

(A) Context

Horizon 2020 (H2020) is the eighth EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation and covers the period 2014-2020. With a budget of nearly EUR 80 billion, it brings together EU level research and innovation (R&I) funding into a single programme. It is structured around three pillars: "excellent science", "industrial leadership" and "societal challenges". It has the objective "to contribute to building a society and economy based on knowledge and innovation across the Union (...)".

This interim evaluation is conducted in line with the Better Regulation requirements and those expressed in Art. 32 of the Horizon 2020 regulation. Three years into the programme, this evaluation assesses the initial achievements of H2020.

(B) Main considerations

The Board commends the major exercise of collecting, compiling and reviewing a vast body of evidence on the status of the Horizon 2020 research programme.

The Board gives a positive opinion, but considers that the report should be improved with respect to the following aspects:

- (1) The report does not make enough use of the available evidence to benchmark and compare results with what was anticipated;**
- (2) The conclusions do not always clearly stem from the analysis;**
- (3) The report does not fully explain how activities were given priority within and between the three pillars;**
- (4) The structure and presentation of the report do not convey a clear overview of key messages.**

(C) Further considerations and recommendations for improvement

(1) Expected vs actual results - key evaluation questions

The introduction should elaborate on the presentation of the programme. It should highlight the differences with its predecessor, FP7. On that basis, the report should clearly set out the initial expectations of the programme. It should link these to a strengthened analysis of the results obtained so far and the reasons for possible deviations. A clear intervention logic should describe how the programme aims to achieve its intended effects, what were the projections made and how those compare with the results achieved so far. Since this is an interim evaluation, the report should focus on the key channels of the intervention logic which can be checked at this stage. It should formulate key questions around the five evaluation criteria. The report should select the relevant data that answer these questions and explain how the programme is performing. This is for instance the case for the efficiency criteria where the evaluation could benchmark the efficiency gains against the forecasts of the cost-benefits study on the externalisation of the management of EU funds. In terms of coherence, the report should provide a critical picture of how Horizon 2020 and some of its parts (such as the financial instruments) fit with other programmes in a complementary manner.

(2) From key questions to key conclusions

The report should more systematically qualify its key findings in terms of positive and negative developments. It would clarify what issues will be addressed at different stages. It should put more emphasis on possible areas for improvements in the remaining three years of the programme. This would for examples include adapting the SME instrument to support the most disruptive innovations, increasing the participation of third countries and reconciling its focus on excellence with capacity building in some countries. The report should also better identify the remaining areas for further simplification. As mentioned under point 1), for each of these, it should start from the intention of the programme, the actual results and suggest possible solutions.

(3) Prioritisation

The report should more clearly explain how specific topics are prioritised under Horizon 2020. In particular the report should clarify whether the programme properly addresses current challenges identified by stakeholders. Generally, it should break down stakeholders' views and distinguish between beneficiaries and other parties. It could supplement those views with case studies, illustrating both good practices and challenges encountered. In addition, the report should provide further explanations on the implementation of priorities that are both pillar-specific and cross-cutting (such as excellence or innovation).

(4) Synthesis

The extended summary could serve as a basis for a more synthetic Staff Working Document. The report should in a balanced manner take stock of the achievements and difficulties encountered so far. This would correspond to the evaluation's objective to inform the College and feed into the impact assessment for a future research programme. It would also pave the way for future general orientations on issues like innovation, basic research or support to SMEs.

Some more technical comments have been transmitted directly to the author DG.

(D) RSB scrutiny process

The lead DG is advised to ensure that these recommendations are duly taken into account in the report prior to launching the interservice consultation.

Full title	Interim evaluation of Horizon 2020
Reference number	2015/RTD/005
Date of RSB meeting	29/03/2017