

Council supports sustainable development, but more needed to ensure EU R&I delivers benefits for citizens

Civil society reaction to the Council's position on the Regulation for Horizon Europe

Civil society organisations expressed strong concerns over the Commission's original proposal for Horizon Europe which sought to merge industrial competitiveness and societal challenges in the new Pillar 2. All publicly-funded Research and Innovation (R&I) should be focused on delivering societal impact, and industry is a key partner in this. However, a future pillar that has to address the two priorities risks diluting the objective of societal impact and limiting the already-scarce funding available for addressing societal challenges - especially those that suffer from limited private sector R&I investments. Civil society urged the Council to put in place adequate safeguards for societal impact, and to ensure balanced representation in R&I agenda-setting by supporting robust societal engagement.

We are encouraged to note that the Council has improved the proposal in several key areas, including by linking the **definition and indicators for societal impact** and the Programme objectives to **Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement**, as well as linking **missions and partnerships** to societal needs. Also encouraging, recalling the Council Conclusions of Nov 2017, were improved commitments to **engage citizens** in strategic planning and missions, as well as support for the Commission's **open access** plans.

At the same time, we note that gaps remain in terms of safeguarding societal impact, and the following areas could be strengthened:

- **The definition of societal impact:** by making clear that societal impact is *embodied* by the SDGs, such as healthy lives, climate action and sustainable food and farming, and that other policy priorities must not conflict with these commitments. The definition should affirm that public funds must respond to citizens' needs and deliver affordable and accessible R&I solutions to improve people's well-being. Other policy concerns are covered under economic or scientific impact.
- **Dedicated funding for societal impact in Pillar 2:** given the risk that competitiveness and sustainable development do not always align, it is crucial that there are guaranteed funding lines in Pillar 2 for independent, participatory research projects whose objectives and priority setting focus solely on addressing societal challenges. Democratic and robust procedures should be set up to define a portion of the priorities, ensuring engagement with under-represented actors.
- **Societal engagement commitments:** a clear roadmap on how Horizon Europe will address barriers to citizen and civil society organisations (CSO) engagement in agenda-setting is still lacking, along with commitments for structured engagement with CSOs in the strategic planning process and in the governance bodies of mission and partnerships, and other future bodies that will advise on implementation. To ensure that societal engagement is properly mainstreamed, monitored and reported on across the programme, a successor to Science With and For Society with a significant budget should be restored. Indicators that properly classify and monitor CSO engagement are also urgently needed.

With negotiations ongoing, and the Specific Programme of Horizon Europe still to be discussed, **we urge the Council to continue to be a leader on societal impact by reinforcing their support for a sustainable needs-driven agenda in the next framework programme.**

