

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002334/24
to the Commission
Christian Ehler (PPE), Ondřej Krutílek (ECR), Ivars Ijabs (Renew)
(30 October 2024)**

Subject: Horizon Europe: frontloading bureaucracy

Horizon Europe has ambitious secondary objectives, e.g. with regard to gender equality and spending to address climate change. The implementation of these objectives can undermine efforts to simplify the programme.

1. Does the Commission have evidence that the inclusion of the gender balance requirement as a ranking criterion for proposals with the same evaluation scores is effective, given that the research teams actually implementing the action often differ significantly from the teams presented in the proposal?
2. Beneficiaries report that the introduction of lump sum funding has added complexity to the proposal development phase. This drives up the cost of applying for Horizon funding. Given the low success rates, it means that more resources are lost within the European research and innovation system. How does the Commission factor in these lost resources when it decides to launch a call with lump sum funding?
3. The Horizon programme guide explicitly states that evaluators will not score applications in relation to their compliance with the principle of doing no significant harm (DNSH). However, the DNSH principle is included in the proposal template. Can the Commission consider alternative means of raising awareness of the environmental impact of projects which would avoid this unnecessary administrative burden?

Submitted: 30.10.2024

**Answer given by Ms Zaharieva on behalf of the European Commission
(14 February 2025)**

1. Despite being only one of five ranking criteria for ex aequo scored proposals ⁽¹⁾ and used only in 3% of cases in 2021-2023, the gender balance ranking criterion is effective and led to an increase from 37% of women researchers in Horizon 2020 to 38% in Horizon Europe, above the 34% average share of women among EU researchers. There is no evidence that the share of women researchers decreases between proposal and project stage, as it is 1.1 percentage points higher in projects. The share of women in work package leaders has also grown from 23% in Horizon 2020 to 31% in Horizon Europe.
2. The Commission is of the opinion that lump sum proposals are not more complex, but is aware of the concern raised by some beneficiaries. The Horizon Europe application form is the same for all types of grants ⁽²⁾. All applicants must use detailed cost estimations and keep them on file ⁽³⁾. For certain lump sum grants, the cost estimations are submitted as part of the proposal. Most applicants confirmed that completing the Excel template provided for this purpose does not take a significant amount of time ⁽⁴⁾. To improve user-friendliness, the lump sum budget will be integrated in the electronic submission system ⁽⁵⁾.
3. Implementation of the EU budget, including for Research and Innovation, may not harm the environment ⁽⁶⁾, and the Commission screens all Horizon Europe topics to ensure this principle. Surveys suggest that applicants appreciate the clear instructions ⁽⁷⁾.

The Commission has revised the approach to this screening for the second part of Horizon Europe ⁽⁸⁾. From 2025 on, the environmental dimension in the ethics appraisal will be improved, to avoid duplication of information in proposals and to better manage the risks of possible negative environmental effects.

⁽¹⁾ provided for in the General Annexes of the Horizon Europe Work Programme.

⁽²⁾ irrespective of the costs options that apply.

⁽³⁾ Get prepared — Online Manual — Funding Tenders Opportunities <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/funding-tenders-opportunities/display/OM/Get+prepared> (section 'Budget').

⁽⁴⁾ Assessment of Lump Sum Funding in Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/other/comm/ls-assessment-report-2024_en.pdf (section 'Proposal submission and evaluation', pp. 25-31)

⁽⁵⁾ Submit a proposal — Electronic Submission System — Online Manual — Funding Tenders Opportunities <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/funding-tenders-opportunities/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=1867927>

⁽⁶⁾ As set out in the Interinstitutional accompanying the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 of 16 December 2020, Point16 (OJ L 433, 22/12/2020) and in the financial rules (Financial Regulation, Article 33(2d)) — https://commission.europa.eu/publications/eu-financial-regulation_en

⁽⁷⁾ Horizon Europe and the Green Transition — Publications Office of the EU <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c9383687-6420-11ef-a8ba-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>, figure 63.

⁽⁸⁾ As set out in the Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2025-2027 <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6abcc8e7-e685-11ee-8b2b-01aa75ed71a1>, page 45.