



Access to research & innovation at risk in the next EU research programme

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

12 DEC. The European Commission's original proposal for Horizon Europe failed to include concrete measures that would help to maximise public return on investments for publicly funded R&I and address public health needs. Furthermore, it put societal impact at risk by blurring profit-oriented objectives with societal impact-oriented ones in the new Pillar 2. Civil society called on the European Parliament to put in place adequate commitments and safeguards, following its own recommendations in its report on [EU options for improving access to medicines](#) and its report on [Horizon 2020 and FP9](#), which stressed the "need for sufficient transparency, traceability and a fair level of public return on investment... in terms of affordability, availability and the suitability of end products, and particularly in some sensitive areas such as health, safeguarding the public interest and equitable social impact". While we welcome some improvements in the recognition of the link between societal impact and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), **the European Parliament has failed to champion its own recommendations to ensure public return on public investment in the programme, and has weakened some key commitments. We note in particular that:**

1. **Open access has been undermined by the European 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.
2. **Access principles will not be applied to biomedical R&I:** the Parliament declined to embed in the legislation of Horizon Europe a requirement for beneficiaries of EU biomedical R&I funding for treatment, prevention or diagnosis of seriously debilitating or life-threatening diseases to include an *Access Plan* in their proposals. The plan would detail how access principles such as effectiveness, affordability and availability could apply to project results and potential health products in order to maximise the public return and societal impact of EU biomedical R&I policies.
3. **Transparency and traceability of public funding have not been ensured:** to increase accountability and public scrutiny, policy makers and citizens must be able to identify and trace public support, in particular funding that goes into new medicines and health technologies. Traceability is especially threatened in Horizon Europe's Pillar 2 due to the merging competitiveness-oriented with societal-impact oriented objectives.
4. **Measures to encourage socially responsible licensing were not supported:** to foster R&I and ensure equitable access to health technologies, research institutes receiving public funding should be encouraged to make use of non-exclusive licensing in their technology transfer agreements.
5. **The link between the definition of societal impact and the SDGs remains weak:** the EU should make clear that societal impact is embodied by the SDGs, such as healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages, and that other policy priorities must not conflict with these commitments. It 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.

We also express concern about inclusion of the "innovation principle": it is the role of R&I to serve the needs of society, in particular in the area of innovative health technologies, and so the EU's Precautionary Principle should guide the application of innovation. Furthermore, the Parliament also did not go far enough in ensuring broader **safeguards to prioritise needs driven research** across the programme, for example through improved **engagement with civil society**. The negotiations are a crucial moment to ensure that R&I is truly needs driven and focused on delivering real benefits for citizens. **We urge each of the institutions to maximise the potential for societal impact in the programme through concrete commitments and safeguards in the legal base of Horizon Europe.**