IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY FOR HORIZON EUROPE

Version 1.0

Approved by : Anna Panagopoulou

Date: 29-04-2020

European Commission

Research and Innovation

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Research and
Innovation

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

The new European Union Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, Horizon Europe, will run from 2021 to 2027. Following a political agreement on large parts of the draft legislation in spring 2019, the Commission, together with Member States and all concerned stakeholders, launched a co-design process to prepare for the first work programmes and calls for proposals. Part of this preparation concerns the definition of the desired impacts and funding priorities, in pursuit of the programme's ambitious objectives, through the process of strategic planning. A second part concerns the **Implementation Strategy**. This Strategy focuses on how the new programme will achieve those objectives in practice. It will provide the framework for carefully designed rules and efficient processes, across the entire programme and project life cycle, allowing the programme to deliver its impacts in a way that is as efficient and user-friendly as possible.

Remark:

This document is the first draft of such a strategy. It is a living text that will evolve and grow as preparations and deployment unfold during 2020. It reflects the situation on 01/01/2020. A progress report will be published in the second semester 2020.
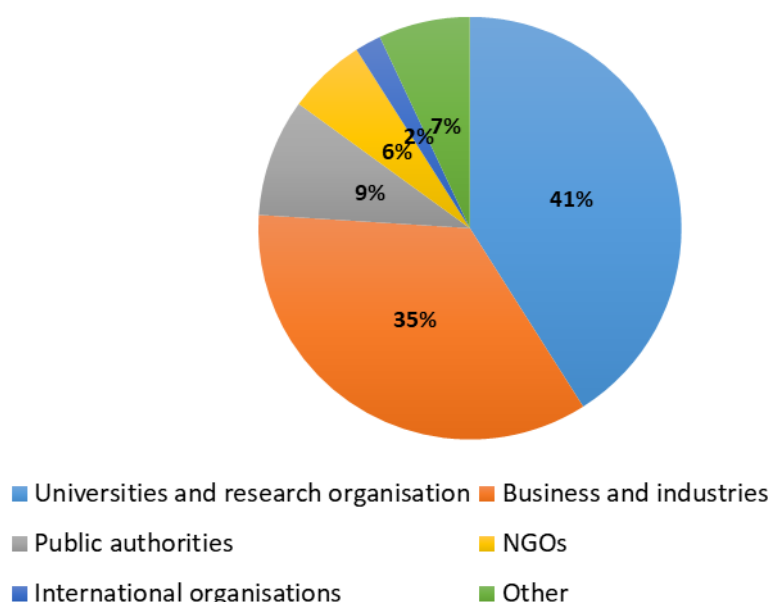
CO-DESIGN PROCESS

The rules and simplification measures put in place for Horizon 2020 were widely acknowledged as a big step towards a more attractive and easier to use programme. The Implementation Strategy for Horizon Europe therefore provides a **strong measure of continuity**, while introducing improvements based on lessons-learned, as well as accommodating features of Horizon Europe that are not present in the current programme, notably those associated with **missions**, and the fully-fledged **European Innovation Council** (EIC).
Based on existing stakeholder feedback, internal analysis of needs, and studies, the Commission drew up a series of draft orientations, which were then put out to a comprehensive consultation and co-design process:

- **An open on-line consultation via a questionnaire survey** containing a mix of structured and open questions, which opened in late July and closed on 4 October 2019. A total of 1549 answers were received from 64 countries. Answers were received from a diverse range of sectors:

Horizon Europe Implementation Strategy online consultation
Breakdown of answers per categories

- ■ Universities and research organisation ■ Business and industries
- ■ Public authorities ■ NGOs
- ■ International organisations ■ Other

- Meanwhile, since July 2019, key stakeholders in 27 Member States were consulted directly by way of **20 national events (**or events addressing more than one country), co-organised by the local National contact points. In each case the agenda was tailored to national interests and

concerns, with rich feedback, comments and questions on different aspects of implementation;

- The first **European R&I days on 24-26 September** 2019 further served to scrutinise and debate the initial Commission proposals, with five sessions directly related to the Implementation strategy, covering evaluation, simplification, use of results for better policy making, optimising innovation results, and the use of data and intelligence for better R&I policy.

This process was organised around a series of building blocks, corresponding to parts of the programme and project life cycle (work programme, submission & evaluation, model grant agreement, dissemination & exploitation, data & reporting, control strategy, extended use of simplified costs); specific cross-cutting considerations (European partnerships; international cooperation; synergies); and enabling aspects (outreach, digital transformation).

A full report of the online consultation and R&I Days is available here.

As a result of this exercise, the Commission was able to validate, refine and develop its proposed ideas,[1] and to finally define a series of concrete measures for implementation.

The next section shows how the main orientations and key measures within these components come together in contributing to common objectives.

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[1] Co-design also served to encourage strong stakeholder engagement, which should in itself foster a smooth launch of the new programme.

THE STRATEGY

I. IMPLEMENTATION OBJECTIVES

The strategy is designed so that the implementation measures - in different ways and at different parts of the project life-cycle - reinforce and enable the main objectives of the programme itself[2]. In particular, the strategy will be focussed on:

a) Maximising impacts, because more has to be done to boost and focus the impact of European R&I spending, and Horizon Europe has been conceived with this in mind. The programme has high level objectives that cut across the programme, pathways to impact addressed at every level, and special arrangements envisaged to implement the new high-impact schemes such as missions and the EIC;

b) Ensuring greater transparency and further simplification, by maintaining and building on the substantial improvements made under Horizon 2020, while capitalising on lessons learned, and taking advantage of modern and innovative approaches;

c) Fostering synergies with other EU spending programmes, to ensure that we can implement in practice the legal provisions built into Horizon Europe and the reciprocal arrangements in sister programmes across the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), capitalising also on the Commission-wide priority-setting established through strategic planning;

d) Easing access through digital transformation and outreach, to ensure that the whole implementation is designed in a joined-up and holistic way, supported by modern outreach channels and practices and robust electronic platforms and tools for engaging stakeholders along the programme life-cycle, increasing communication on data and results, and exploiting new approaches as these mature, including Artificial Intelligence (AI).

II. MAIN ORIENTATIONS

a) Maximising impacts

Starting with the way the **work programme** is conceived, there will be a **clearer specification of the expected impacts**. Unlike Horizon 2020, these

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[2] As described in Annex V of the draft Regulation, and in pursuit of the programme objectives of Article 3.

targeted impacts will be given at the level of a call, or group of topics, while expected outcomes will be set out for each topic. These provisions will guide applicants and experts alike, and will ensure that, from the off, projects are lined up along impact pathways. Importantly, while expected impacts will be precise, topics will be **open to a range of different pathways** to achieve those impacts. These targeted impacts will further enable to define the expected feedback to policy at call or groups of topics level.

In turn, the **proposal evaluation impact criterion**, and the way applicants are guided by the **proposal template**, will refer to the work programme targeted impacts, and require the applicants to specify how their proposal could contribute to these targeted impacts. A project-specific **dissemination and exploitation plan** will be required and evaluated at proposal stage.[3]

Where indicated in the work programme, and in particular under **missions** and the **EIC pathfinder**, evaluation modalities will be designed to ensure the selection of **a coherent portfolio of projects**[4], capitalising on the experience of the ongoing EIC pilot. The process will entail two phases: firstly, an evaluation of the intrinsic quality of each proposal submitted; and secondly, the identification of high-quality proposals that go together in a way that maximises the expected **impact of the portfolio as a whole**. The aspects to be considered will have to be spelled out in the work programme, and will include the avoidance of gaps and undesirable overlaps, in relation to the work needed to achieve the mission.

As for **monitoring and reporting**, work will be undertaken to identify appropriate indicators, methodologies and baseline values to implement the **Key Impact Pathways** (KIP) to better measure scientific, societal and economic impacts of projects (including their contributions in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals), while minimising any additional burden on beneficiaries. Meanwhile new indicators will be set up to measure the nearly 30 items that require **monitoring and reporting across the programme**[5], in areas such as monitoring of collaborative links or the level of TRLs in collaborative research. Importantly, **monitoring and reporting on European Partnerships**, including those based on Article 185 and 187, will conform to the general provisions for the 'mainstream' parts of the programme, as well as measures for the exploitation and valorisation of results.

The impact of data and information gleaned from projects and the programme as a whole will be enhanced by **enriching it with R&I and other data from external sources**, while more generally, plans will be developed for sharing EU-level data with those from Member States in **a European R&I Data Hub**. This

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[3] Required under Article 35.6.
[4] Taking advantage of the provisions available under Article 26.1 & 2.
[5] Article 45

can represent an important contribution to revitalising the **European Research Area**, as well as for supporting national, regional and local policies.

In addition to the usual obligation to report on dissemination and exploitation (D&E), efforts will be made to incentivise beneficiaries to continue the reporting on D&E activities **beyond the life of the project itself**[6]**.** These incentives will include the new **Horizon Results Platform**, helping beneficiaries show-case the outcomes and impacts in an appealing way, as well as the continuation of the **Horizon Impact Award and Innovation Radar**, creating opportunities for networking and attracting potential users. The D&E boosters will keep delivering customized services to beneficiaries to enhance their D&E activities and unveil the potential of their results

Particular attention will be given to exploiting results and information that can be used as an **input to EU policy-making** by the Commission Services and national administrations. This will entail better connections between implementing bodies and policy-makers, and includes R&I supported under institutionalised partnerships.

Maximising impact: *Summary of key measures*	Indicative timing
1. *Specify the expected outcomes in the work programme topics, and their link to the wider targeted impacts, in line with the Strategic Research and Innovation Plan. Topics will therefore be open to a range of different pathways to achieve them*	Q4 2020, depending on political process
2. *Refine the wording of the proposal evaluation criteria, especially the 'impact' evaluation criterion in order to refer to the targeted impacts and credible pathways to reach them*	Q2 2020
3. *Design new evaluation modalities to maximise the impact of portfolio-based calls (esp. missions), using provisions of Art.26 (e.g. evaluate first intrinsic quality, then invoke portfolio considerations, to be spelled out in Work Programme)*	Q2 2020, approach and criteria spelled out in work programme
4. *Develop an integrated approach to support beneficiaries in disseminating and exploiting their research and innovation results:*	
– *Making available the Horizon Results Platform, to showcase the outcomes and impacts of their projects in an appealing way*	Q4 2019

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[6] Such an obligation exists under Horizon 2020.

– *Giving beneficiaries access to new services to help them better exploit their results under the D&E boosters*	from Q1 2020 to Q4 2024
5. *Create incentives for beneficiaries to continue reporting on the progress of their results, even after the end of their projects, with minimal additional administrative burden, for example via the Horizon Results Platform, and the celebration of high impact results through a series of annual Horizon Impact Awards*	Q3 2020 (annual award)
6. *Implement a framework for informing evidence-based policy - across the policy cycle – based on relevant results and data generated by Framework Programme (FP) funded projects, focusing on timeliness, and stakeholder involvement:*	Q2 2020
– *Enrich data captured through the FP reporting templates with external data sources*	from Q4 2019 to Q2 2021
– *Add value to Horizon Europe data by creating a R&I data hub, for sharing high-quality pan-European data, thereby supporting European Research Area priorities, as well as national, regional and local policies*	Q3 2021
– *Define better guidelines for beneficiaries to identify and report policy relevant results*	Q2 2020
– *Better engagement with policy makers and citizens*	Continuous

b) Ensuring greater transparency and further simplification

Generally, efforts will be made to **screen documents for readability and user-friendliness** before publication. The **work programme text will be concise and clear**, while **instructions to applicants** in guidance documents and in the proposal template will be as simple as possible. Given that applicants feel they are obliged to write as much as allowed in proposals, **the page limits will be cut substantially** (with justified exceptions), requiring greater focus on the key elements of the proposed work, and more efficient and effective evaluation. This reduction will go hand-in hand with a **reduction in the elements to be included in a proposal**, including with capture of information from external sources wherever possible (including unique identifiers of organisations, researchers, publications, patents, data sets etc. and links to the respective external databases).

Arrangements for **two-stage calls** will be simplified. The first stage proposal will be even shorter, perhaps focusing solely on Excellence, and a pilot using **anonymous stage one proposals** will be organised.

With a view to further opening up the evaluation process, opportunities allowing an **interaction between experts and applicants will be sought**. This may be by way of **interviews,** building in the experience of the ERC, EIC[7], and of hearings under FP7.

Where interviews are not feasible or proportionate, a '**right to react' (or 'rebuttal')** scheme may be used. Here, individual evaluation reports will be posted on the Funding and Tenders portal, giving applicants a limited window to comment on statements made. The experts will then be required to take into account this input before finalising the Evaluation Summary Reports. Such a scheme should also **increase the level of detail in the feedback given to applicants**[8]. A pilot will be run in an early call, or calls, of the new programme.

The **Model Grant Agreement** (MGA) will come with many simplifications for applicants, among which will be a **single formula for calculating personnel costs**, the abolition of the obligation to have time sheets and the inclusion of a **quick-glance data sheet** for a given project, summarising payment schedules, reporting etc. An **on-line Annotated Model Grant Agreement (e-AGA)** will provide a user-friendly explanation of the various clauses. The possibility of having different versions of the e-AGA (simplified version addressed to newcomers, detailed version for expert users) will be explored.

It is intended to use more instances of **simplified forms of cost** in the new programme, removing the need for financial audits, and the retention of evidential financial documentation by participants. The extent to which **lump sum** based projects will be supported, and where they may be most suited, will depend on a full analysis of the pilots currently underway.

Measures will be taken to **rationalise and simplify the control regime**, based on trust, and an analysis of risks and the specific circumstances of projects and the entities concerned. System and Process Audits (SPAs), consisting of test of controls and test of transactions, will mainly target larger participants in the Programme. Positive conclusion of a SPA may contribute to the reduction of the audit burden of beneficiaries via fewer Certificates of Financial Statements and less intense futures audits. For *ex ante* controls, current practice will be continued, limiting the administrative burden, with attention focused on early detection of emerging risks, preventive actions and awareness- raising.

The implementation of a major part of the Horizon Europe budget and the H2020 legacy will be delegated to **Executive Agencies**. This will further **simplify the programme management** while reducing even more the administrative costs, focusing on performance and improving synergies both

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[7] Depending on the results of the ongoing pilot for the EIC accelerator, other novel evaluation modalities may be introduced.
[8] The current minimum standards for ESRs will be reviewed and beefed up if necessary, and implemented across the board.

among R&I delegated activities and with other non-R&I delegated programmes. This will also permit to **the Research DGs to jointly improve their support to the policy initiatives** of the Commission by focusing on the core task of policy-making.

The **general governance of Horizon Europe** will still be determined following the conclusion of the ongoing cost benefit analysis led by the Corporate Management Board. This concerns the scope of delegation to Executive Agencies, the allocation of resources, the working methodologies for a reinforced cooperation between Research DGs and the supervision of the Executive Agencies aligning better the implementation tasks to programme objectives. This includes also a **concerted, simplified and flexible approach of the budgetary responsibilities**.

Access to **calls arising from European partnerships and EIT** will be made simpler with universal publication of calls on the Funding and Tenders Portal. The number of implementation modalities will be limited, and they will be built as much as possible on standards of Horizon Europe (ways to ensure a common approach and centralisation of submission, evaluation and reporting procedures will be explored). The EIT will ensure openness and transparency across its operations, including with regard to the selection of new KICs, and will maintain oversight and monitoring of the KICs to ensure they comply with their obligations stemming from the Horizon Europe implementation framework. A systematic approach across all institutionalized partnerships based on Art. 187 TFEU will be adopted for processes and implementation modalities and reporting. This approach will be accountable, coherent and supports the openness of initiatives.

Measures will also be put in place to facilitate access to calls involving **international cooperation**. The future Work Programme wording will provide further clarity as regards standard calls with mandatory international participation and terms/specifications of different types of calls. Dedicated guidance for the implementation of special call will be developed. Building upon the international cooperation provisions under Horizon Europe legislation, the MGA will introduce a number of improvements in response to several concerns by third country participants under Horizon 2020. Further progress will be made to tackle the difficulties encountered by international participants with the validation process.

Access, transparency and simplification: *Summary of key measures*	Indicative timing
7. *Design simpler, shorter and less complex multi-annual work programmes, possibly with more frequent use of topics which offer the possibility of submission for more than one year*	By Q4 2020, (depending on political process)
8. *Streamline the proposal template, minimising the elements requested (in line with criteria), with reference to external sources where possible (e.g. researchers' ID), and substantial reduction in maximum length*	Q2 2020
9. *Develop and test innovative evaluation modalities:*	
– *Organise a right to react' (rebuttal) pilot, as part of proposal evaluation, seeking greater transparency and more detailed feedback for applicants*	Q2/3 2021
– *Organise anonymised first stage proposal evaluation ('blind evaluation') in one or more pilots in early calls of HE (as per Art 25.3a)*	Q2/3 2021
10. *Enshrine key simplifications via the corporate model grant agreement, including a single formula for personnel costs, and further enrich informative materials and tools such as tutorials and documents, including the e-AGA (and its possible different versions)*	By Q4 2020, then continuous
11. *Streamline financial and technical reporting templates, for example enabling simpler calculations and reporting on costs, making the process less cumbersome and less error-prone*	Q2 2021
12. *Regarding controls:*	
– *Design an overall control strategy for Horizon Europe, aiming at better control rather than more control. Attention will be focussed on preventing and detecting fraud, in line with the updated Anti-Fraud strategy of the Commission*	Q4 2020
– *Explore the possibility of introducing System and Process Audits (SPAs) mainly in the larger participants in the Programme*	Pilot SPAs on H2020 legal basis, Q2- Q4 2020
– *Explore the possibility of enhanced cross reliance on audits and assessments, following Articles 126 and 127 of the Financial Regulations*	Q4 2020
13. *For Partnerships (art 185/7) and EIT, aim for a single set of rules for participation and funding, with limited derogations*	Q4 2020

14. For international cooperation:	
– Provide further clarity in Work Programmes as regards standard calls with mandatory international participation, and terms/specifications of different types of calls	
15. For lump sums:	
– Developing an assessment framework for entire lump sum project lifecycle	Q2 2020
– Reinforcing the harmonized implementation of the lump sum pilots	Continuously ongoing
– Developing guidelines to support decision of using lump sums	Q3 2020

c) Fostering synergies with other EU spending programmes

Against the background of the Financial Regulation itself, much of the implementation of Horizon Europe will be governed by rules and procedures that are common across EU programmes (the '**corporate approach'**). In particular, the main provisions of the **model grant agreement will be common**, while providing R&I specificities where needed. This should facilitate synergies with projects receiving **sequential funding** from one programme to another (upstream and downstream of Horizon Europe), with the **accumulation of funds** from different programmes in a single project, or with **alternative funding** when Horizon Europe budget cannot cover all high quality proposals.

On the last of these, the Commission is tackling problems encountered under the **Seal of Excellence** in Horizon 2020 due to State Aid rules. Most importantly, these should be alleviated in the future through the terms of a new **General Block Exemption Regulation**, recognising the special status of certain R&I actions that will not require prior notification.

The Commission will also further develop appropriate channels so that any national and/or regional funding body can be adequately informed and consider the possibility of providing alternative funding.

The potential to use R&I results in other EU programmes and initiatives will also be a theme of Horizon Europe dissemination and exploitation measures, by better sharing of information between the actors concerned.

Fostering synergies: *Summary of key measures*	Indicative timing
16. *Ensure that the review of the State Aid General Block Exemption Regulation provides an appropriate state aid treatment for research and innovation projects already assessed under Horizon rules. (e.g. SMEs, Marie Skłodowska Curie actions awarded a Seal of Excellence, co-funded actions selected under Horizon, 'Teaming' actions)*	Q2 2020
17. *Ensure that provisions on cumulative funding, transfer, co-fund and seal of excellence in both the Horizon Europe Regulation/Specific Programme and the Cohesion Policy legislative package are made as clear, consistent and easy to implement as possible, including by crystalizing in a coherent text the new opportunities for simplification of state aid rules proposed under the currently ongoing review of the General State Aid Block Exemption*	Q2 2020
18. *Strengthen the information of national/regional funding bodies about the possibilities of providing alternative funding* – *Organise a workshop on synergies with Member states stakeholders to explain the implementation modalities of synergies* – *Strengthen the 'Community of Practices' on synergies*	Q1 2020 Q2 2020
19. *Exploit further the potential to use Framework Programme results under other programmes through guidance and services offered in relation to Horizon Europe dissemination and exploitation measures*	Q1 2020 – Q4 2021

d) Easing access through digital transformation and outreach

Digital transformation and outreach will continue to be one of the key principles of Horizon Europe Implementation.

The user experience for applicants and beneficiaries will continue to be improved though the efficient electronic platforms developed for Horizon 2020. These tools will continue to facilitate the fully electronic procedures and interaction with external stakeholders. The use of eGrants will be further expanded from Horizon Europe to other programmes centrally managed by the Commission. These will include the enhancement and further improvement of the 'one stop shop' **Funding and Tenders Portal** for all parts of Horizon Europe (including institutionalised public-private partnerships), as well as other programmes of the MFF.

Modern and sophisticated solutions for more efficient implementation will be integrated. It will include **text and data mining** (further reducing reporting demands on projects), and **human-led AI modules** (e.g. for example, a self-service tool to test if a proposal idea is in scope of a call). **New corporate grant agreement and expert contracts** will be fully automated which will continue to reduce the burden on both the beneficiaries and experts as well as the Commission services, allowing to concentrate on the essence of the research and innovation framework programme.

The use electronic solutions will also further deliver on expanded and **higher quality data**, which in turn will allow better reporting and monitoring, especially in view of the Key Impact Pathways. Highly integrated data sources will further complete the picture for information requirements as well as preventing fraud.

Outreach and stakeholder engagement will be a continuous process during which all interested parties will be able to provide their input and feedback in a seamless and efficient way.

National Contact Points (NCPs) provide front-line support to applicants and beneficiaries, in their own language. Robust standards for the new system of NCPs will be drawn up in consultation with the Member States, including new measures for **special support to NCPs in widening countries**[9].

Further support will continue to be provided via the **Research Enquiry Service (RES),** with further attention given to response time and quality of replies, as well as **outreach events** with stakeholders and trainings to discuss and explain any problematic implementation provisions.

Digital transformation: *Summary of key measures*	Indicative timing
20. *Further development and enhancement of Funding and Tenders Portal:*	
– *Introducing multilingual support on the Funding and Tender Portal for the registration process*	2020, to be ready for the launch of HE
– *Implementation of corporate search functions*	Q2 2020
– *On-boarding of new programmes on the Funding and Tenders Portals*	2020
– *Development of a personal profile for every F&T portal user who owns EU-Login account. The owner of the profile will manage accessibility and information exposed to the public*	Q3 2020

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[9] As provided by the Specific Programme: Spreading excellence and widening participation

– *Streamlining the notification system*	Q3 2020
21. *Launch the Horizon Europe NCP network based on (partially) agreed "Minimum standards and Guiding principles", for professionalised support to applicants, and including special measures for widening. A transition topic from Horizon 2020 to Horizon Europe will provide support at early stage of implementation of Horizon Europe calls, focussing on training and transnational cooperation*	NCP nominations (further to the already nominated Coordinators and Legal & Financial) will be in tandem with the development of the first work programme drafts Q2 2020
22. *Promote outreach and stakeholder engagement as a continuous process, including organisation of outreach events and trainings in the Member States, in liaison with NCPs*	Q2 2020
23. *Organise tailored events and info-days across Europe, such as the "Co-ordinator's day", using new technologies to offer a more interactive and intuitive experience for the stakeholders*	Continuous

MONITORING AND REPORTING

As the orientations and measures described in this draft strategy are firmed-up, steps will be taken to ensure that progress in deployment is tracked and reported, bottlenecks are addressed, and re-orientations agreed as and when necessary.

A consolidated progress report will be made available in the second semester 2020.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AGA	Annotated Model Grant Agreement
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CSA	Coordination and Support Action
D&E	Dissemination & Exploitation
e-AGA	Online Annotated Model Agreement
EIC	European Innovation Council
EIT	European Institute of Innovation & Technology
ECA	European Court of Auditors
EEN	Enterprise Europe Network
ERC	European Research Council
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ESR	Evaluation Summary Report
F&T Portal	Funding and Tenders Portal
FP	Framework Programme
FP7	Seventh Framework Programme for Research
GBER	General Block Exemption Regulation
IA	Innovation Action
IP	Intellectual Property
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
JRC	Joint Research Centre
KIC	Knowledge and Innovation Communities
KIP	Key Impact Pathways
LEAR	Legal Entity Appointed Representative

MGA	Model Grant Agreement
MSCA	Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions
NCP	National Contact Point
R&I	Research and Innovation
RES	Research Enquiry Service
RIA	Research and Innovation Action
RTOs	Research & Technology Organisations
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEDIA	Single Electronic Data Interchange Area
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SoE	Seal of Excellence
SPA	Systems and Processes Audits
SRL	Societal Readiness Level
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
TRL	Technology Readiness Level