



HYDROGEN EUROPE RESEARCH
FEEDBACK TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE PAST, PRESENT AND
FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH & INNOVATION FRAMEWORK
PROGRAMMES 2014-2027

Hydrogen Europe Research is pleased to provide its feedback to the consultation on the European Research and Innovation (R&I) Framework programmes based on the experience of its members and on its continuous implication in the Joint Undertaking on Hydrogen and Fuel Cells.

As **one of the three partners in the Clean Hydrogen Partnership**, alongside the European Commission and the industry-led association, Hydrogen Europe, Hydrogen Europe Research wishes to **emphasize the benefits of having a hydrogen Joint Undertaking (JU) within the Horizon Europe programme**. Collaborative research and partnerships are key instruments to ensure a quick transfer from knowledge into application and thus innovation. Therefore, **Hydrogen Europe Research calls for strengthening partnerships and their financial resources**.

The continuation of the JU since 2008 and through the three R&I framework programmes has **strengthened the hydrogen ecosystem by providing a platform to connect European stakeholders through concrete projects**. Furthermore, **research organisations, industries of all sizes and decision makers are constantly working on aligning their vision to identify the priorities for the European hydrogen sector**, as shown through the definition of annual and multi annual work plans. **The JU is an open and transparent platform through which projects across the entire TRL spectrum can be funded**. The support to the entire R&I chain, from basic research to application-oriented research and technology demonstration and validation is crucial to ensure European leadership and European competitiveness in the world.

Funding opportunities on hydrogen are mainly concentrated in the Clean Hydrogen Partnership. However, considering the cross-cutting nature of hydrogen, other Horizon Europe clusters and partnerships are integrating hydrogen topics in their calls for proposals. In this regard, **alignments between European partnerships have improved thanks to the proactivity of the European Commission in creating platforms to discuss and harness synergies**. Nevertheless, more specific collaboration streams should be developed to increase stakeholder engagement from the beginning of different call development processes. Currently, most of the collaboration channels are connected between associations or Programme Offices and could benefit from more involvement from European Commissions services.





In addition, the European Commission should pay attention to **defining calls that are clearly understandable, specific and delimitable in their scope**, in order to limit the further increase of oversubscription to calls. This is especially relevant for the different programmes in which hydrogen is included.

Increasing R&I investments is crucial for the future of Europe in a globalised world, where success depends ever more on the production and conversion of knowledge into technological innovation. Especially in times of economic pressure due to external factors such as the impact of climate change or the war of aggression waged by Russia in Ukraine, it remains essential to continue to allocate sufficient funding for R&I. Without this support, the development of the next generation of technologies, for Europe and made in Europe, may suffer from delays and face difficulties to compete with world competitors (namely China, the USA and Japan). To this end, lower TRL projects (TRL 1-2) could be funded in a similar way than done in the Framework Programme 7 (FP7) calls on “Future Emerging Technologies” through strategic areas.

Considering the wide scope of research activities to be funded within the Research and Innovation Framework Programme, and the challenges that research is expected to solve, an **earmarked budget for R&I activities is much needed**. Such a budget **should not be transferred to other programmes or instruments**. For example, funds that are not entirely allocated after a call should remain available for R&I activities and not be allocated to other European instruments.

Regarding **administrative procedures** when applying for calls and the management of grants, several points were noted by Hydrogen Europe Research’s members.

- The time to apply for calls has become shorter making it more challenging to prepare qualitative call proposals in time. A solution that could be implemented to provide more time to draft proposals could be to **apply different deadlines for applications** depending on the type of project. **Large scale demonstration projects requiring a longer preparation would benefit from a longer timeframe to submit proposals**.
- Overlapping deadlines for calls addressing common priorities are difficult to manage for organisations (e.g. Clean Hydrogen Partnership calls deadlines are overlapping with Cluster 4 and Cluster 5 deadlines). **Avoiding overlaps would allow spreading the efforts to apply for calls throughout the year**.
- Simplification efforts (such as the Lump Sum approach) are welcomed if researchers (and their institutions) can actually benefit from them. **The Lump Sum system allowed to lighten the workload during the realisation of the project**.





However, it has also shifted the administrative burden from the accounting to the project preparation phase. In the preparation phase, an important work requires to clarify collaboration and risks. In general, there is a higher risk of seeing the funding cut if a work package goal is not met. **This could lead to reduced interest which leads to reduced output and/or innovation in the programme since institutions may be reluctant to work on risky tasks.** Furthermore, measures like Lump Sums can weaken international cooperation as known partners are favoured to unknown partners with whom possible risks are harder to assess. In this case, the Lump Sum approach is even counterproductive. Further feedback should be provided to assess this mechanism in more detail.



Hydrogen Europe Research is an international, non-profit association composed of more than 130 Universities and Research & Technology Organisations (RTO) from 29 countries in Europe and beyond. Our members are active within the European hydrogen and fuel cell sector.

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