



Press Release

Luxembourg, 21 March 2018

Simplify research funding further, say EU Auditors

There is still a need to simplify EU funding for research after 2020, according to a new Briefing Paper from the European Court of Auditors. The paper was prepared for the European Parliament and the Council as input to their discussions on the successor to Horizon 2020, the EU research and innovation programme.

The auditors focus on simplification. They have previously pointed out that an over-complex legal framework could hinder the efficient implementation of research programmes. For Horizon 2020, they distinguish two ways of removing unnecessary complexity: rewriting the basic legal rules and/or creating a simpler interface adapted to researchers' real-life circumstances.

But simplification is complicated, say the auditors. They describe some of the dilemmas affecting the European Commission's efforts and link these to the design of the regulatory framework for research, the funding model and the participation scheme.

"Horizon 2020 is complex due to its range of regulations, rules, guidelines, procedures and processes for implementation and the multitude of its funding instruments", said Alex Brenninkmeijer, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the Briefing Paper, "and unnecessary complexity brings risk."

Different organisations and individuals at EU and national level may also interpret the rules differently, and some researchers are concerned about a lack of legal certainty.

In comparison with earlier research programmes, say the auditors, practitioners do appreciate Horizon 2020 as the best EU programme for research and innovation so far, and considerable efforts at simplification have been made.

However, the basic regulations remain difficult to comprehend, especially for SMEs, the implementation of simpler funding options remains difficult for beneficiaries, and their control remains difficult for auditors.

The purpose of this press release is to give the main messages of the briefing paper by the European Court of Auditors. The full paper is on www.eca.europa.eu.

ECA Press

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The briefing paper highlights a number of areas to which attention should be given to better focus the current discussion on research spending:

- providing a reasonable timespan between adoption and implementation of legal acts;
- assessing the further use of simplified cost options, such as lump sums and prizes;
- explaining the use of guidelines as non-binding rules;
- accepting beneficiaries' accounting practices;
- recognising good project proposals under Horizon 2020 in other programmes via a one-stop-shop approach.

Notes to Editors

Horizon 2020 has made nearly €80 billion of funding available over seven years (2014-2020). It is one of the largest public research and development funding programmes in the world and accounts for around 8% of the EU budget. Participants include universities, research institutions, SMEs, large companies and public bodies. To date, more than 130,000 applications have been submitted and almost 20,000 projects have received funding.

This briefing paper is not an audit report. The European Court of Auditors is conducting a performance audit on the simplification in Horizon 2020, scheduled for publication in late 2018, which will provide an audit assessment of the effectiveness of the Commission's simplification measures.

The ECA's briefing paper "A contribution to simplification of EU research programme beyond Horizon 2020" is available on the ECA website (eca.europa.eu) in English.