



Implementing synergies with Horizon Europe

Vademecum by the UnLiON working group on Synergies

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DISCLAIMER

This document is not an official position of the UnLiON Network nor its member Universities, but the result of the collection of input from members in the UnLiON working group on Synergies.

ABOUT UnLiON

UnLiON is an informal network of over 50 liaison offices representing more than 150 excellent universities based in Europe, Japan and Russia. The network represents an arena of exchange where the participants share information, create collaboration and act as information multipliers towards the represented organisations.

For questions, please contact the UnLiON secretariat at secretary@unilion.eu.



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1. Introduction

The UnLiON working group on synergies, co-chaired by Ghent University and Aix-Marseille University, has kept track of the efforts made by the European Commission in the preparation of Horizon Europe to facilitate synergies with other funding programmes in the programming period 2021-2027. This vademecum synthesises the work that was done between March 2020 and November 2021 and takes stock of the opportunities for synergies with Horizon Europe.

This vademecum is addressed to Research support offices of the UnLiON network and beyond and serves to support them in their efforts to implement synergies between Horizon Europe and other Union programmes by presenting

- a) an overview of the main implementation modes and the legislative references to synergies in European Union funding programs in the programming period 2021-2027 and
- b) possible actions Research Support Offices can undertake to implement synergies.

Acknowledgement

This vademecum is inspired by

- The *Vademecum*¹ published by GIURI (Gruppo Informale Uffici di Rappresentanza Italiani per la Ricerca e Innovazione) as published on February 2021.
- The work of the UnLiON synergies working group between March 2020 and November 2021
- Several representatives who were willing to discuss the topic of synergies with the UnLiON wg from the following organisations: NRW (DE), DG RTD, DG REGIO, ERRIN, etc.

Nota bene

This vademecum is a living document that will need to be updated according to future evolutions in the legislative framework.

¹ http://download.apre.it/GIURI_vademecum_sinergie_febbraio_2021.pdf



2. Vademecum on synergies with Horizon Europe

2.1 The need for synergies

The European Commission's interim evaluation of Horizon 2020² and even of FP7 identified the need to improve synergies between Horizon Europe and other Union programmes, as an action point in. The European Parliament³ and several high-level expert groups explicitly supported this call to have more synergies between the different EU funding programmes. As a result, implementing synergies became a core message of the European Commission's proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 in May 2018 and stayed at the centre of the debate in the following negotiations on the MFF between the European institutes.

At the core of these debates was the recognition that the added-value of synergies needs to go beyond the combination of different funding streams to enlarge EU-budget for a certain policy or project. Synergies should aim at maximising scientific, economic and societal impact of public investments by bringing different perspectives together.

In order to implement them, synergies requires an alignment on three levels. At the policy level by constructing a shared vision, at strategic programming level through aligning objectives of different programmes and at operational level by providing consistent provisions in the frameworks.

This vademecum presents an overview on the opportunities for synergies at the strategic programming level and the operational level.

2.2 Strategic programming level

The objectives of the different funding streams should ideally be complementary, coherent and compatible to each other to ensure that synergies have an added-value and can be implemented. The Annex IV "SYNERGIES WITH OTHER UNION PROGRAMMES"⁴ of the Horizon Europe regulation is instrumental in this perspective because it spells out how the different EU funding programmes align with Horizon Europe. **As it is included in the Horizon Europe Regulation, the Annex IV can be seen as a legal basis for Universities, Managing Authorities, Principal Investigators in EU projects, etc. to rely on in order to stimulate synergies in practice and convince evaluators about the relevance of a synergy as part of a project proposal, which can explicitly refer to this text.** Annex IV foresees an alignment between Horizon Europe and the

- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)
- European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)
- European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF)
- European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)
- Erasmus+ (E+)

² <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2018/EN/COM-2018-2-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>

³ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2017-0253_EN.html

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/695/oj>



- Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL)
- Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)
- EU4Health
- Programme for Environment and Climate Action (LIFE)
- Single Market Programme (SMP)
- InvestEU Programme
- Union Space Programme
- Creative Europe Programme (CREA)
- European Defence Fund (EDF)
- Innovation Fund (INNOVFUND)
- Internal Security Fund (ISF)
- Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) and the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III)
- Euratom Programme
- Just Transition Mechanism (JTM)
- Recovery and Resilience Facility (RREF)

It is important to note that up to 80% of the EU budget expenditure, regulated by the mentioned funding programmes, is managed by Member States through so-called 'shared management'⁵. Implementing synergies between Horizon Europe, which is directly managed by the European Commission, and shared management funds inevitably holds a strategic alignment of Horizon Europe with shared managed funds and vice-versa. Key in this alignment are the Smart Specialisation Strategies & Operational Programmes that provide input to and are reference documents for managing authorities in every region and country in the EU. It is beneficial to explore R&I links in these reference documents to ensure synergies.

2.3 Operational level

To improve the implementation of synergies in 2021-2027, the European Commission initiated two initiatives:

The eCorporate Model Grant Agreement and specific Model Grant Agreement of Horizon Europe

The European Commission paid particular attention to facilitating synergies in the Model Grant Agreements (MGA's) it publishes for every fund. Starting from 2021 a new eCorporate MGA is applicable to all European grants financed under the MFF. With this eCorporate MGA, the European Commission aligns as much as possible the different funding rules of the Union programmes. In addition to the eCorporate MGA, a programme specific MGA spells out specific rules for every programme.

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/eu-budget/how-it-works/annual-lifecycle/implementation/eu-budget-management-types_en



Revision General Block Exemption for state aid (to be finalised in 2023)

The revision of the GBER by the European Commission aims to clarify which projects selected at European level do not involve distortions of competition and therefore cannot be classified as State aid. The European Commission holds revisions or “targeted reviews” in several rounds, taking a step-by-step approach in revising the whole GBER. Examples of areas affected by the revisions, that are interesting in the face of synergies are:

- The treatment of R&I projects that have received a Seal of Excellence as well as projects that have been independently evaluated and independently selected as a result of transnational calls under Horizon Europe.
- The definitions of ‘industrial research’, ‘technology infrastructure’, etc. in order to define the right framework for investments in these actions.
- Exemptions on aid provided to co-fund Teaming actions
- ...

This will be an ongoing process until the end of 2023.

More information can be found here: https://ec.europa.eu/competition-policy/state-aid/legislation/regulations_en

2.4 Classification of possible synergies

Taking into account the initiatives taken by the European Commission at the strategical and operational level, we may present an overview of implementation modes. The classification of implementation modes of synergies can be used to highlight the possibilities of synergies to your researchers, regional programming bodies, colleagues, etc. and make the implementation of synergies more attainable.

Alternative funding (updated in Horizon Europe)

Description: This type of synergy was already possible during Horizon 2020 and is mostly associated with the use of the Seal of Excellence (SoE). The idea behind the SoE is to enhance the uptake of Horizon project proposals that were assessed as excellent but could not be funded due to insufficient call budget. With the SoE, these project proposals may be funded under ERDF, ESF+ or EAFRD – (so called ‘alternative funding’) depending on the decision of the managing authority responsible for implementing the corresponding cohesion policy programme, without a need for a separate technical evaluation. Horizon Europe eligible costs/funding rate apply. However, the compliance of the project proposal with the scope of the fund, the smart specialisation strategy constituting enabling condition and the objectives of the concerned programme must be ensured. This form of synergies is being updated and simplified with the reforms of the GBER.

Example: An ERDF Managing Authority (MA) of country X wants to fund Seal of Excellence proposals in the field of Bio economy, in line with the Smart Specialisation Strategy

- The MA may prepare a call with criteria aligned with HE criteria and an adequate budget, deciding on the best option (open call, first come first served, fixed deadline). It is also possible that the MA directly selects these projects in line with the requirements of Article



67(5) CPR (equal treatment for all Seal of Excellence holders must be ensured) when such possibility is foreseen in the concerned programme.

- Seal proposals responding to the call or selected directly are checked only against the elements set out in Article 67(5) i.e. compliance with the programme objectives, scope of the fund and enabling condition. Apart from this compliance check, no new technical evaluation is required.
- If the checks are fine, the MA can provide up to the same financial support as foreseen by HE, calculated on the same eligible costs. No state aid notification is required provided the conditions set out in Articles 25a and 25b of the GBER are met.
- The company receives ERDF support and is followed up by the MA (or intermediate body) responsible for implementing the cohesion policy programme following the specific grant rules.

Integrated or combined funding (new in Horizon Europe)

Description: Allowing contributions from programmes under shared management to Horizon Europe partnerships to be recognised as national contributions.

Example: Combined funding from shared management fund to Horizon Europe Co-funded and Institutionalised partnerships

- Financial contributions from programmes co-financed by the ERDF, the ESF+, the EMFF and the EAFRD may be considered as a contribution of the participating Member State for the purpose of participating in co-funded or institutionalised Horizon Europe partnerships.
- Co-financing rates and other applicable provisions of the Common Provisions Regulation proposal and the fund-specific regulations are applied.

Voluntary transfer of funding to Horizon Europe (new in Horizon Europe)

Description: Member States may - on a voluntary basis - transfer up to 5% of their allocation for funds under a shared management programme covered by the CPR to directly or indirectly managed programmes (including Horizon Europe) for the benefit of the transferring Member State.

The amounts transferred have to be implemented in accordance with the rules of the instrument to which the resources are transferred. Where national authorities do not attach any conditions to the use of the CPR Funds transferred to direct or indirect management, such Union funding would not qualify as State resources. For this to be the case

- The evaluation and selection of beneficiaries / projects to be supported is made in accordance with the EU central programme rules (in this case Horizon Europe).
- Rules of Horizon Europe will apply to the amounts transferred from any of the shared management Funds covered by the CPR and the amounts will be used for the benefit of the Member State concerned with the same modalities of project implementation that any other Horizon Europe project. Rules applied: Rules of Horizon Europe will apply to the amounts transferred from any of the shared management Funds covered by the CPR and the amounts will be used for the benefit of the Member State concerned with the same modalities of project implementation that any other Horizon Europe project.

Example: A Member State decides to transfer funds from an ERDF programme to Horizon Europe, e.g. to support proposals from the country under the EIC Accelerator. The resources are used to fund



proposals under an EIC Accelerator call under Horizon Europe, following the ranking list for the country in question, through grant agreements concluded by the end of year n+1 following the year where the transferred resources are made available to Horizon Europe.

Sequential funding (same as in H2020)

Description: Horizon Europe support and other EU-funding complement each other by funding the same project but for different activities. Results of previous EU funded projects are used for new projects. These can be implemented in an "up-stream" or "down-stream" sense. Up-stream refers to preparing regional R&I players to excel, down-stream refers to providing the means to exploit and diffuse R&I results. To attain this form of synergies, there needs to be an alignment of the strategic objectives of Horizon Europe and other Union programmes.

Example:

- Hypothetical up-stream: ERDF intervenes to finance the growth and improvement of research and innovation ecosystems. Horizon Europe may subsequently intervene to finance the development of business plans to create centres of excellence, industrial pilot "test industrial pilot "test beds", feasibility studies of research infrastructures.
- Hypothetical down-stream: The ERDF can intervene to bring to the market the results of Horizon Europe-funded projects to the market, accelerating deployment and transfer to marketable products and integration into value chains.

Cumulative funding (Updated in Horizon Europe)

Description: Cumulative funding makes it possible for the same action to receive two separate contributions from two Union funds or programmes, with due regard to the principle of co-financing laid down in the Financial Regulation. Under no circumstances can the combined amount exceed 100% of the eligible costs of the action and there needs to be a mechanism providing for effective control in this regard. This combination is possible between two directly managed programmes (e.g. Horizon Europe and Digital Europe) or between directly managed programmes and programmes under shared management (e.g. Horizon Europe and ERDF). Calls may stipulate that an action can receive support from several programmes. Two separate grant agreements will be signed for each respective part. The grant agreements will specify the link to the other grant agreement. The rules of each contributing Union programme shall apply to its respective contribution to the action.

Example:

- From Horizon 2020 and E+: SwafS call in Horizon Europe for proposals dedicated to European Universities selected under Erasmus+ to build on the R&I base of European Universities made cumulative funding between E+ and H2020 possible.



3. First steps to implement synergies

Implementing synergies requires collaboration across institutions, governmental entities and R&I sectors. To enhance the implementation of synergies with Horizon Europe therefore requires universities reaching out to their regional authorities and research partners. Three action points can be identified in this perspective.

1. Develop a common understanding of synergies at your institution, with your regional authorities and with other beneficiaries.

A common understanding of the possibilities of synergies is essential in developing a strategy to implement these synergies. Discussing synergies with regional authorities and other the stakeholders in the university ecosystem is essential to identify possibilities to implement synergies. By sharing intelligence (such as this vademecum) with your regional authorities, by discussing it with your peers and add it up with examples from your institution or region may be instrumental.

2. Develop strategic objectives in R&I in cocreation with regional authorities.

Implementing synergies with Horizon Europe is about amplifying impact of research and innovation. Engage with your regional authorities and other stakeholders to spell out strategic objectives in which synergies may be instrumental to attain these objectives.

3. Share best practices.

Share best practices to learn and keep you and your regional authorities inspired by the implementation of synergies with Horizon Europe in reaching strategic goals.



4. Annex: examples of synergies provided by UnLiON members

This annex is subject to updates

Implementation Mode	Where	Example
Sequential funding	Partners from in and outside the EU.	BioRefine Cluster Europe. Sequential funding with Agricultural Fund, Horizon 2020, Interreg, etc. https://www.biorefine.eu/about
Alternative funding	Region Sud-Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur towards higher education and research organisations	ERC Booster: financing ERC proposals assessed as excellent but not funded due to limited budget https://www.maregionsud.fr/aides-et-appels-a-projets/detail/erc-booster
Sequential funding	Aix-Marseille University and its partners through the French excellence initiative (CNRS, INSERM, IRD, CEA, AP-HM, Sciences Po Aix, Centrale Marseille)	“Transfer programme”: one call specifically supports researchers to submit their innovation projects to the EIC (consortia-building and other pre-grant activities) in complementarity with other funds (such as the MSREI program by the French research funding agency ANR). https://www.univ-amu.fr/system/files/2021-09/AMIDEX%20-%20Texte%20de%20cadrage%20-%20AAP%204%20Transfert.pdf