

What could we learn from the EU Missions?

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Science, research and innovation are investments for future resilience. The exceptional bearing of the EU's Framework Programme should not be reduced.

So far, we are not yet in a situation where connections between different policy-driven instruments, programmatic or financial, can be seen clearly.

EU Missions - A new instrument in Horizon Europe

The emergence of Mission-oriented policy debates at EU level sparked during the programmatic preparations of Horizon Europe around 2017. The Lamy Report¹ looked at how Europe could maximise the impact of EU R&I Programmes. One of its recommendations was to adopt a Mission-oriented, impact-focused approach to address global challenges.

In response to the findings of the Lamy report the concept of an EU Mission policy was further developed, first by the Expert Group on the Economic and Societal Impact of Research and Innovation (ESIR)² in 2017 and subsequently by Mariana Mazzucato³ in 2018.

With these reports as inspiration, the Commission designed the Mission-oriented policy approach to be implemented within the Horizon Europe Regulations⁴ and proposed five initial broad Mission areas in autumn 2018⁵. The Mission areas were discussed and adjusted in the Council, deciding on a novel policy approach which could be applied to any number of Missions within the time span of Horizon Europe.

Member States with overarching wish lists

The first Mission Calls in Horizon Europe were launched in 2021. Very soon, in June 2022, the Council concluded that EU Missions shall enable the:

“...collaborative, transnational, inclusive, multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach to address complex societal challenges through the development of a systemic and coordinated approach across the whole value chain at EU, national, regional and local level through relevant actors, public policies, private initiatives and funding instruments and programmes within a set timeframe and with measurable goals...”

Did they conclude on missions as a policy or missions as a Horizon Europe instrument? Importantly, the Conclusions highlighted that for many aspects of the Missions there needs to be a recognition of the novelty and context-specificity of the Missions, i.e. each of the Missions may require a unique/tailored governance set-up. Also, each of the EU Member State is free to implement its own governance model to contribute to Missions.

Hence, different actors are learning about the potential and practicalities of using this novel approach. This implies that the first years of implementing Missions are clearly experimental. There are no baseline

¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, LAB – FAB – APP – [Investing in the European future we want – Report of the independent High Level Group on maximising the impact of EU research & innovation programmes](#), Publications Office, 2017.

² European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, [Towards a mission-oriented research and innovation policy in the European Union – An ESIR memorandum](#), Publications Office, 2017.

³ European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Mazzucato, M., [Mission-oriented research & innovation in the European Union – A problem-solving approach to fuel innovation-led growth](#), Publications Office, 2018.

⁴ [Commission Staff Working Document Impact Assessment](#), accompanying the document Proposals for a Regulation of the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, SWD/2018/307 final.

⁵ Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities; Cancer; Adaptation to Climate Change; A Soil Deal for Europe; Restore our Ocean and Waters

indicators and no baseline policy and governance processes for missions as a policy. Then, how can we assess whether the policy implementation is working, or what type of adjustments would be needed?

Have we understood the experimental character of EU Missions?

At EU level, the role of Missions as a policy approach is strictly confined in the Horizon Europe Regulation. There is no EU document, beyond Article 8 of the HE Regulation, that sets out the exact structure and logic of EU Missions as a policy experiment beyond Horizon Europe. De facto, the Mission implementation structures and activities have been designed by the five Missions individually, in the context of Horizon Europe.

EU Missions are not yet at a stage where monitoring of their contribution to the substantive transformative goals of each Mission, can be done. In terms of EU Missions:

- The Horizon Europe timeframe is extended; EU Missions set their core targets around 2030 or even later and their substantive goals extend clearly beyond the traditional 7-year timeframe the Horizon Europe Programme.
- The traditional R&I policy context is extended; The ambitions of the EU Missions to achieve transformative changes within relatively short timeframes requires pooling of additional resources on a scale that extends a traditional R&I policy context and Horizon Europe Programme.
- The participatory process is extended: The emphasis on citizen and stakeholder involvement, in all stages of Mission policy from design to implementation and monitoring and evaluation, opens a traditionally technocratic and expert-driven policy arena of R&I to more democratic processes of priority-setting and co-creation.

Alongside the traditional outputs from R&I activities in the Horizon Europe, monitoring the progress of EU Missions, as a policy experiment, requires that we monitor the evolving governance, implementation and participatory processes. Consequently, in the first stages of monitoring, we need to focus on mapping the emergent practices through exploratory means.

A monitoring framework for EU Missions

A proposed monitoring framework enables a systematic monitoring of EU Missions as a policy approach. It captures the systemic nature of Missions as a policy approach by identifying 4 key pillars:

Pillar 1 - Knowledge creation and valorisation

- 1.1 Knowledge valorisation at regional and local levels for transformative Mission-oriented solutions

Pillar 2 - Governance

- 2.1 Mission-oriented governance mechanisms
- 2.2 Acceptance of Mission-oriented innovation policy

Pillar 3 - Participatory engagement of stakeholders/citizens

- 3.1 Co-creation of Mission solutions with citizens in programs beyond Horizon Europe
- 3.2 Citizens engaged in processes and activities in Mission units (*lighthouses, living labs, hubs...*)
- 3.3 Strong civil engagement with R&I solutions for societal challenges achieved

Pillar 4 - Pooling and scaling-up

- 4.1 Pooling and leveraging of public and private funds
- 4.2 Scaling of transformative solutions and supportive measures (*regulatory, technological, standards, educational...*)

The scope of the monitoring framework is 'beyond Horizon Europe', with short-term and middle-term indicators for monitoring activities. The indicators can also contribute to the monitoring of individual Missions within Horizon Europe.⁶

The monitoring framework focuses mostly on process-level elements which include the setting up of different proceedings and governance systems that are crucial for enabling the achievement of the goals of EU Missions as a policy approach. The analytical focus on EU Missions as a policy approach, as opposed to individual Missions as Horizon Europe instruments, enables to distinguish crucial elements of the systemic policy approach. This entails changing how R&I is done and used in the EU and is summarized in the 4 Pillars of the framework that do not fall into the traditional logic of HE interventions and monitoring.

What has happened so far with the EU Missions?

Horizontal governance mechanisms involving the Strategic Configuration of the Horizon Europe Programme Committee, and the Commission's sectoral Directorate-Generals for the co-management of Missions seems to be an accepted and functioning novelty.⁷ Clearly, a greater inclusion of the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy and its programmes co-managed with the Member States is necessary.

EU Missions as a novel instrument in the Horizon Europe Programme has been a significant trigger for Mission-oriented policy discussions and developments at different levels across the EU, but most actors are still in the process of "sense making" and exploring and experimenting appropriate roles and logic models for the approach, mainly based on the existing structures.

There is interest and willingness across majority of the European countries to engage in Mission-oriented thinking and policy innovation. Majority of the European countries and regions are setting up a variety of mechanisms to integrate the EU Missions in their policies and policy initiatives. Some countries are developing nationally coordinated governance approaches across the five Missions, whilst others are building more decentralized and Mission-specific models.⁸

Targeted contributions and pooling of significant resources towards the achievements of the objectives of EU Missions have not yet synergised.

What can we learn?

It would be helpful if we had seen a stronger political and policy anchoring of EU Missions in the Green Deal process. It could have allowed various programmes (EU, national, regional) to be included in Mission activities and it could have encouraged Mission targets to be included in the various strategies, programmes and emerging concepts (Smart Specialisation Strategy, Recovery and Resilience Facility, New European Innovation Agenda). This could have been achieved for MFF 2020-2027 via better alignment, timelines, permissive conditionalities and design of EU policies and programmes. For the next MFF, hopefully we have learned to do better by aiming at alignment of policies and programmes through coordinated planning cycles.

Many monitoring and evaluation reports related to a multitude of EU programmes and national/regional programmes are struggling with performance indicators. A high number of contextual KPIs have several disadvantages and problems with consolidation. A reform of performance indicators is needed to make better monitoring and understanding of the medium- to long-term impact of policy measures and their

⁶ Short and medium term indicators (p. 28–29 + 68–87), which can be used for individual EU Missions in Horizon Europe (p. 31–32). <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6b1462c3-be60-11ee-b164-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-304078095>

⁷ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52023DC0457>

⁸ Survey to the Strategic Configuration of Horizon Europe Programme Committee members, p. 35-57 + 88-98 <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6b1462c3-be60-11ee-b164-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-304078095>

implementation. When deciding on policy measures, consideration is needed, and time must be given for implementation. Making useful changes along the way requires insight based on proper monitoring and evaluation.