

Inquiry conducted by the Belgian L&F NCPs on 'implementation aspects of Horizon 2020'



NCP Flanders



Why this survey?



And yet...



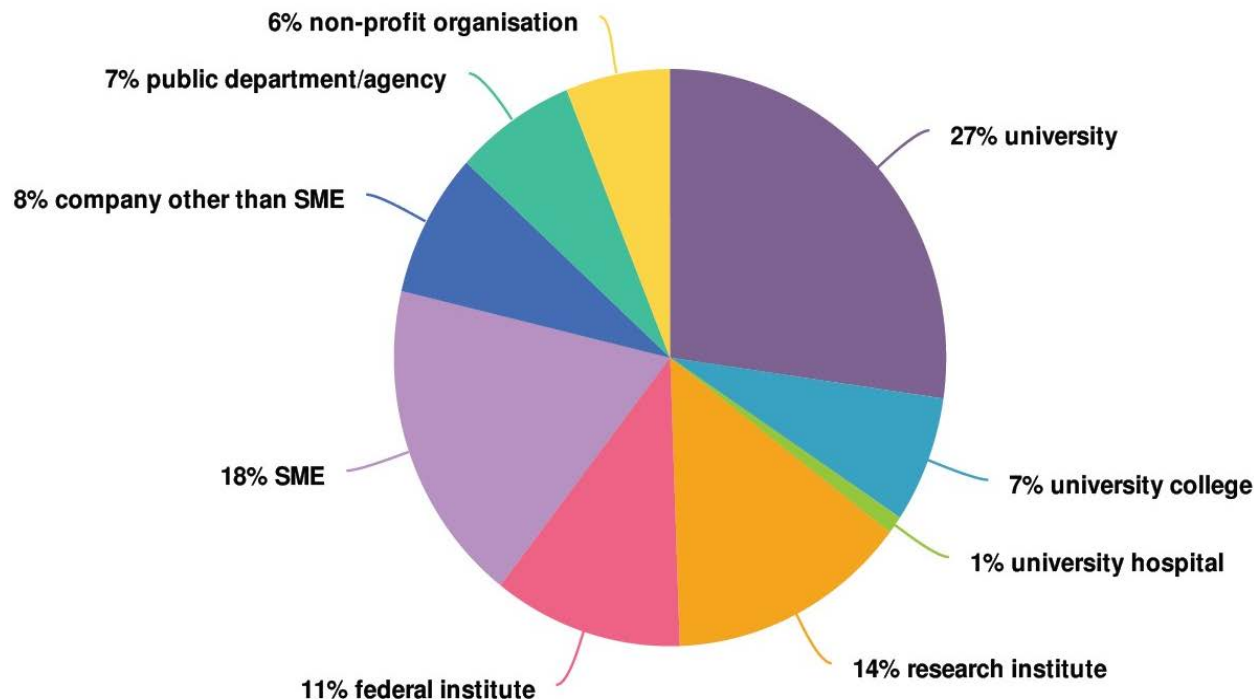
- Joint Belgian **reality check**
- Complement **at field level** the interim evaluation of H2020 done at policy level
- Focus on qualitative and content suggestions
Limited sample of strongly involved Applicants / Beneficiaries

Survey characteristics

- Open from 19 June 2018 to 15 July 2018 – disseminated by all Belgian L&F NCPs to their stakeholders through their usual communication channels
- Main objective: receive anonymous comments from the stakeholders about the implementation of the current H2020 programme, that could be suggested as points of improvement of the new “Horizon Europe”, for a **simplified programme implementation**
- Information has been gathered about
 1. **proposal submission**
 2. **evaluation**
 3. **grant agreement preparation**
 4. **non-financial reporting**
 5. **financial rules and reporting**
 6. **Audits**

Survey results: general (1)

- 99 respondents (not all could see all questions / answered to all questions)
- respondents coming from **whole spectrum of organizations types:**



Survey results: general (2)

Concerning the participants role within the organisation (99 responses):

- 32 researchers
- 21 administrative staff in central administration
- 13 administrative staff in projects
- 24 managing staff /CEO
- 9 other

From the 99 responses:

- 80 submitted (or helped to submit) a proposal in H2020
- 68 obtained (or helped to obtain) funding for a H2020 project
- 64 had direct experience in H2020 project administration
- 68 had already participated in previous European research framework programmes

Concerning the audit questions, (68 responses), 26 have been audited.

Concerning the two-stage submission (77 responses), 56 have experience with the procedure [and most of them were positive]

Survey results - 1 very appreciated feature

Indirect Costs

- Question: **A flat rate of 25 % for indirect costs is used in Horizon 2020. Are you satisfied with this rate?**
- Answer: **86,5% rates (very) positive**
- If negative - remarks, but only 4:
 - 3 wish a higher rate
 - 1 info: *"in some occasions the EC refers to the indirect costs for costs that were categorised by them as ineligible, which is not considered as a good practice"*

Personnel cost

- Question: **Do you consider the calculation of personnel costs in Horizon 2020 as complex**
- 46 answers with experience: **52% too complex**
- Because: *actual cost of **previous year** • **underestimation** • **fixed team and limited number of categories, not reality** • **1720h is not real** • **we cannot use the monthly calculation** • **whole series of calculations**, often leading to losses • **back to the FP7 requirements** • **calculation of p.m.** • **double ceiling**, maternity leave, salary corrections, **are complex**. It would be easier to **just claim real personnel cost**, multiplied by the % time allocation when not 100% • **not the same** than for the national public authorities • **EC updates its rules** on a constant basis and expects everybody to abide by their views and interpretations • ...*

Survey results - 1 topic having received **many** comments

Timesheets

- Question: **Are the rules about the time sheets requirements sufficiently clear ?**
- 53 responses: **positive majority**
 - 39 answered rather yes/yes very much;
 - 9 answered not at all/not really;
 - and 5 had no opinion.

Reasons for dislike:

*“rules should be **more simple, univocal, consistent**” • “level of evidence ambiguous” • “rules too generic” • “**should comply with national TS requirements**” • “**template timesheet** [AGA], discussed with the EC and their audit services, confirms that this **would not suffice** when audited. extremely confusing and makes it very hard to implement stricter time recording...seems to allow the presentation only showing actual time worked in the project , but also need to present holidays, sick leave, and other activities” • “**Researchers work much more hours**, at other locations than at work. They have to recalculate the actual hours to office hours and for multiple projects, teaching etc. This **should be simplified a lot!**” • “No timesheets... would be a good signal of respect and trust from EC to European researchers” • “**creativity needs to be evaluated**” • “**No more TS** for personnel working above 90%” • ...*

SME & MSCA unit costs

- Question: **Are you satisfied with the ‘SME owners’/MSCA unit cost?**
- 11 answers SME (only 18 participated to the inquiry)
 - **45% not satisfied** - conform remarks received in many occasions by SMEs during Horizon 2020:

“A rate that it so low that it is in many cases in no relation to the real and demonstrably received payments received by SME owners. It hence discourages SMEs and SME owners to participate - contrary to the proclaimed political objectives of the EU.”

Key problem in Belgium: SME owners cannot exhibit a contract as an employee by law hence are obliged to use SME unit cost

- 24 answers MSCA
 - **41% not satisfied – does not cover actual costs**

Survey results - 1 question having received balanced answers

Negotiation

- Question: **In Horizon 2020, proposals selected for funding are turned into grants as they were submitted – without requesting changes to the technical content ('no negotiation' approach). Do you feel a need for the possibility of introducing changes ('negotiations' with the European Commission) during the preparation phase?**
- Answer:
 - 58 answers received
 - **50% yes – 50 % no**

No shared views on the topic > no strong support to request a move back to the FP7 approach (keep stable rules is also simplification)

Top comments (selected by NCPs)

- The structure of the **proposals** that is imposed is too cumbersome and leads to repetitive elements in the project description. Especially when it comes to describing probable results, impact and dissemination. Often these 3 are very interrelated and describing them separately is artificial. & Shorter proposals
- **ESR**: need for more **constructive** suggestions on the weakness and less general comments. Reviewers feedback should be specific to proposal and not a superficial copy/paste text (no standard form).
- More room for local **SME** size organisations
- The **time sheets** are not an appropriate tool to judge scientific production. It is just a waste of time. & No more timesheets & No time sheets for personnel working above 90% of full employment
- Straightforward **calculation of personnel costs**. & The calculation method of direct personnel cost doesn't match the actual amount & **Actual** salary costs (cf FP7) & Make claiming of real personnel costs possible
- The **administrative burden** is colossal and counterproductive & Massive overhead and consortiums, little money left for the real R&D
- Deliverables should be more **flexible**. In science, you should be able to keep an open mind about the results. & Scrum-like structures should be introduced.
- **Audits**: need for a follow-up letter for the respectively DG who has financed the project closing the whole audit procedure

How we used this further

- Shared with BE representatives in September
Keep the link between policy and operation
- Shared with COM at L&F NCP meeting in October
- Fed in the discussion on Horizon Europe Rules for Participation (link with relevant Articles)
Brainteaser for further simplification on the field
- Thank the participants and provide them with feedback (TODAY)
Keep the link with the field
Make Applicants/Beneficiaries aware of the variety of views

Joint qualitative inquiry as reality check to feed our exchanges on Horizon Europe participation rules

Thanks for your attention.



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