

EU framework programme processes Adoption, implementation, evaluation

SUMMARY

Over the past 35 years, the European Union (EU) institutions have adopted eight framework programmes for research. The lifecycles of these framework programmes have been progressively streamlined and aligned with the general guidelines for the adoption of EU programmes. These lifecycles unfold in four key phases: adoption, implementation, execution, and evaluation, with the EU institutions being in charge of all phases except execution.

The adoption of a new framework programme includes the preparation of an impact assessment, the preparation of the Commission proposals and the adoption of the various legislative acts by the European Parliament and the Council to establish the programme. The implementation phase covers the adoption of the work programmes and the selection of the projects to be funded. Following the execution of the research and innovation activities, the evaluation phase aims to assess the outcomes of the programmes and whether the initial objectives have been met.

In 2018, a new cycle is expected to start for the adoption of the ninth framework programme for research and innovation (FP9) to be effective by 2020. Understanding the processes that take place under each phase of this cycle is important for the preparation and adoption of the key legislative acts, establishing (1) the framework programme itself, (2) the specific programmes for implementation, and (3) the rules for participation, and for dissemination of the programme's results.



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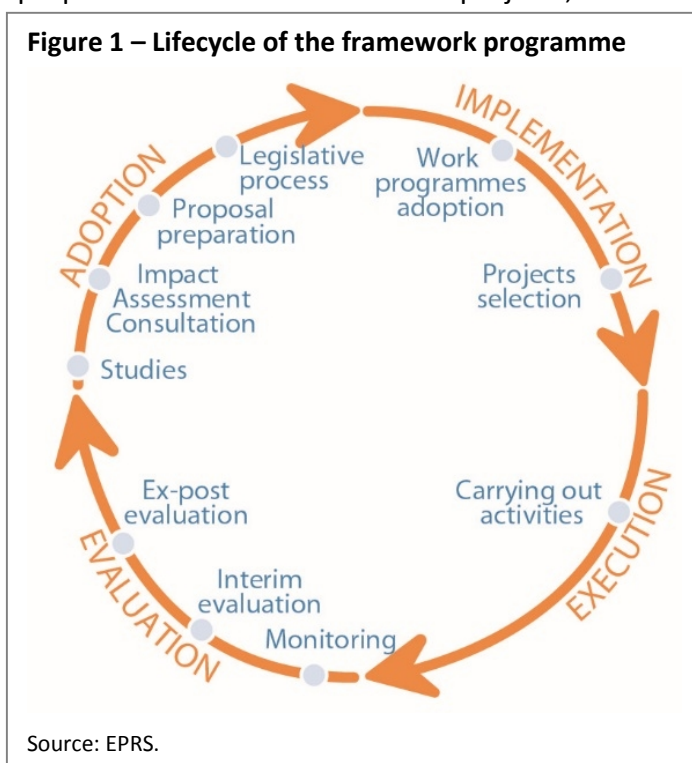
Lifecycle of the framework programme

Over the past 35 years, eight European framework programmes for research and innovation (FP) were adopted in succession.¹ During this time, a lifecycle for the FP was designed and streamlined to include four key phases (see Figure 1):

1. the **adoption** phase: consultation on the structure and scope of the next FP, the preparation of the proposal by the Commission, and the legislative process leading to the adoption of the required legislation;
2. the **implementation** phase: the adoption of the work programmes and work plans implementing the FP, the submission of proposals and the selection of the projects;
3. the **execution** phase: carrying out the activities and projects selected for funding;
4. the **evaluation** phase: the monitoring, interim evaluation and ex-post evaluation of projects, instruments and the programme as a whole.

The adoption of the FP has also been synchronised with the adoption and execution of the multiannual financial framework of the Union.

While the EU is about to undertake a ninth repetition of this lifecycle for the adoption and implementation of a new framework programme (FP9), this briefing aims to clarify the processes that constitute each of the three phases under the responsibility of the EU institutions: the adoption, implementation, and evaluation phases.



Adoption: the birth a new framework programme

Required legislation

The [Treaty](#) on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) requires the adoption of three pieces of legislation to establish a framework programme (Articles [182-183](#) TFEU):

1. A **regulation establishing the framework programme** that defines the scientific and technological objectives to be achieved, indicates the broad lines of activities and fixes the maximum overall amount and the detailed rules for Union financial participation in the programme.
2. A **decision establishing each of the specific programmes** implementing the FP that define the detailed rules for implementation, fix their duration and provide for the means deemed necessary for each specific programme.
3. A **regulation that determines the rules for the participation** of undertakings, research centres and universities, and lays down the rules governing the dissemination of research results.

Moreover, the FP's implementation also requires the adoption of complementary legislation to establish some instruments managing part of the FP budget, such as:

- regulations to establish the joint undertakings based on Article [187](#) TFEU that implement the [joint technology initiatives \(public-private partnerships\)](#);
- decisions on the participation of the Union in the [public-public partnerships](#) established under [Article 185](#) TFEU;
- a decision to adopt the strategic innovation agenda (SIA) of the [European Institute for Innovation and Technology \(EIT\)](#) (potentially with a modification of the regulation establishing the EIT).

The above regulations and decisions are adopted either by the Council of the EU and the European Parliament under the ordinary legislative procedure, or by the Council following consultation with the European Parliament (see Table 1). So far, Horizon 2020 has required the adoption of 16 legislative acts (the programme, one specific programme, the rules for participation and dissemination, five Article 185 TFEU decisions, six joint undertaking regulations, an amendment to the regulation of the EIT, and the EIT SIA decision).

Table 1 – Procedures for the adoption of the framework programme legislative acts

Piece of legislation	Type	Article TFEU	Procedure
Framework programme (FP)	Regulation	182(1)	Ordinary legislative procedure
Specific programmes	Decision	182(3)	Consultation procedure
Rules for participation and dissemination	Regulation	183	Ordinary legislative procedure
Public-public partnerships	Decision	185	Ordinary legislative procedure
Joint undertakings	Regulation	187	Consultation procedure
European Institute for Innovation and technology (EIT)	Regulation	173(3)	Ordinary legislative procedure
Strategic agenda of the EIT	Decision	173(3)	Ordinary legislative procedure

Source: EPRS based on EUR-Lex.

Setting the framework programme budget: the multiannual financial framework

The EU [multiannual financial framework](#) (MFF) currently provides the financial perspective for the Union for a period of seven years. Based on agreed political priorities, the MFF defines the list of EU programmes to be implemented for a given period and sets the maximum level of resources for each of them. The negotiation of the MFF constitutes an important aspect in the adoption of the FP, as the overall budget of the FP is defined in the MFF. The preparation of the MFF proposal and the adoption of the MFF regulation runs in parallel with the adoption of the FP legislative acts, creating a dynamic process between the two.

Past evaluations and preparation studies

As the adoption of the FP has become a cyclical process, the preparation of the new FP legislative acts takes numerous evaluations and studies into account:

- the ex-post evaluation of the last completed FP;
- the interim evaluation of the current FP;
- studies on the evaluation of specific FP priorities or instruments;
- foresight and expert studies, to provide a frame for the preparation of the FP.

For the preparation of FP9, documents available so far include: the [ex-post evaluation](#) of FP7; the [interim evaluation](#) of Horizon 2020;² [input studies](#) on various instruments and priorities; the [conclusions](#) of a high-level group on the impact of EU research and innovation programmes (known as the 'Lamy report'); and the [conclusions](#) of a foresight study (Bohemia study). The European Parliament [resolution](#) on the implementation of Horizon 2020, adopted in June 2017, also provides input for the preparation of FP9.

Adopting the European Commission proposal

The adoption of the Commission proposal for the new FP follows the process laid down in the European Commission's better regulation [guidelines](#) (see Figure 2).³ Following political validation that a new FP is needed, the Commission is expected to publish an inception impact assessment to present the problems that the programme is to address, the possible options on the table, and their likely impacts. This leads to the preparation of an impact assessment, which aims to assess if EU action is justified and how the programme should be designed to achieve the desired policy objectives. Preparation of the impact assessment includes a 12-week internet-based stakeholder consultation.⁴ The impact assessment also draws content from the evaluations and studies mentioned in the previous section.

The preparation of the impact assessment is steered by an inter-service group chaired by the lead Commission directorate-general (DG) – DG Research and Innovation in the case of FP9 – with the participation of other DGs linked to the programme. Once finalised, the draft impact assessment has to be checked by the regulatory scrutiny board, an internal Commission

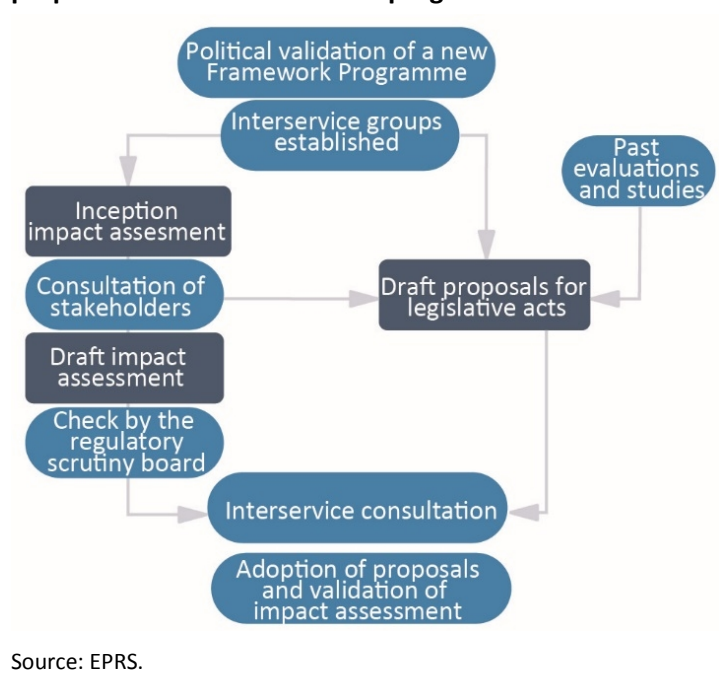
body that provides quality control and support in the implementation of the better regulation processes. When this board provides a positive opinion, the impact assessment is submitted to inter-service consultation of all Commission DGs, to ensure the collegiality of the final documents.

In parallel to the preparation of the impact assessment, the Commission begins drafting the proposals for the required legislative acts. These drafts are prepared by the lead DG with other DGs feeding into the process and, when finalised, are submitted to inter-service consultation. The draft proposals for legislative acts are then adopted by the Commission, representing the first step of the legislative process, and are transmitted to the co-legislators with the impact assessment.⁵

Legislative process

The adoption of the legislative acts necessary to establish a FP follow two different procedures: the ordinary legislative procedure or the consultation procedure. The key legislative acts (framework programme, specific programmes and rules for participation) are interdependent and dealt with as a package.

Figure 2 – Preparation of the European Commission proposal for a new framework programme



In the ordinary legislative [procedure](#), the European Parliament and Council must agree jointly on any amendments before the Commission's proposal can be adopted. While the procedure provides for two readings by each institution, and subsequently a conciliation committee to negotiate a compromise text at 'third reading', in practice informal trilogue meetings are held between the institutions, with the aim of agreeing on a text at first reading.⁶ This shortened procedure was used for the adoption of Horizon 2020.

In the consultation procedure, the European Parliament adopts an opinion on the proposed legislative act. The Council can then amend the Commission proposal and adopt the legislative act with no obligation to take account of the Parliament's position.

Implementation: from the regulation to calls for projects

Implementation of the framework programme requires that the priorities and objectives set in the FP regulation and the specific programmes are translated into calls for projects. This leads to the preparation and adoption of work programmes and work plans.

Adoption of the work programmes

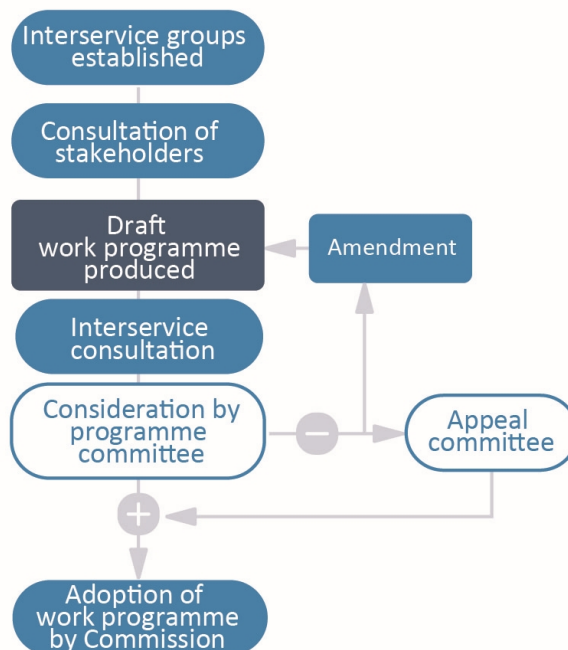
The term 'work programme' refers to the documents adopted by the Commission in order to implement the parts of the specific programmes under its budgetary responsibility. This includes the main work programme (WP), the work programme of the [European Research Council](#) (ERC) and the work programme of the [Joint Research Centre](#) (JRC). The WP is an implementing act adopted by the Commission following a process where a programme committee consisting of representatives of the Member States considers the draft WP before its adoption by the Commission (see Figure 3).

The main WP is divided into parts that correspond to thematic topics or types of instrument, following the structure of the framework programme.⁷ An inter-service group, including representatives from all Commission DGs involved, is set up to prepare each part. The first step is the consultation of experts and stakeholders. For Horizon 2020, the Commission established 19 [advisory groups](#). The [European technology platforms](#), the [European innovation partnerships](#), the [contractual public-private partnerships](#) and scientific panels can also be consulted.

Once the draft WP has been prepared by the inter-service group and has undergone inter-service consultation in the Commission, it is sent to the programme committee for consideration under the examination procedure.⁸ For the Commission to be able to adopt the draft, the programme committee must deliver a positive opinion. Should the committee issue a negative opinion, the Commission can submit an amended draft to the committee or submit the original draft to an appeal committee.⁹ The adoption of the WP allows the publication of the calls for projects.

The procedure for the adoption of the work programme of the European Research Council (ERC) is different, as this WP is

Figure 3 – Adoption of the main work programme



Source: EPRS.

prepared by the scientific council of the ERC. It is submitted to the programme committee under the advisory procedure, meaning that the committee will adopt a non-binding opinion before the Commission formally adopts the WP.

As the JRC is itself a Commission DG, the Commission alone adopts the JRC's work programme, taking the opinion of the JRC board of governors into account. This work programme is not submitted to the programme committee.

Various types of actions in the work programme

The main work programme includes types of actions that support the FP activities: research and innovation actions; innovation actions; coordination and support actions; co-fund actions; prizes; framework partnerships and specific grant agreements; grants to identified beneficiaries; expert contracts; pre-commercial procurement; public procurement of innovative solutions; financial instruments; etc. For each type of action, the work programme defines the eligibility conditions, funding conditions and the criteria used for the evaluation of proposals.

Adoption of the work plans

The term 'work plans' refers to the documents adopted by funding bodies other than the Commission in order to implement the parts of the specific programmes under their budgetary responsibility. This includes the work plans of the joint technology initiatives (JTI) and those of the Article 185 public-public partnerships.

The JTIs adopt an annual or biannual work plan that implements their strategic research agenda. The work plan is adopted by the governing board of the JTI based on a proposal from the director. The scientific committee of the JTI and the group representing the Member States can be consulted in the preparation of the work plans. As the Commission takes part in the governing board, it is involved in the adoption of the JTI work plans.

For Article 185 initiatives, the draft work plan is prepared by the implementing structure of the initiative based on the long-term strategy adopted by the initiative. The work plan is approved by the Commission before being formally adopted by the general assembly of the initiative.

For the European Institute for Innovation and Technology (EIT), the process is different as each of the knowledge and innovation communities of the EIT adopts an annual business plan that needs to be approved by the EIT.¹⁰

Selection of projects

The [work programme](#) presents the list of calls with, for each one, the challenge to be addressed, the scope for the proposals, the expected impact of the activities to be carried out, and the type of action used to implement the call. It also presents the timetable for applicants, the planned budget for each call, the eligibility conditions and the criteria for the evaluation of the proposals.

These aspects can be tailor-made for each call based on the frame provided by the [regulation](#) on the rules for participation and dissemination. These rules impose, for example, a requirement that collaborative grants are to be awarded to consortia of at least three entities, independent of each other, established in different Member States or associated countries. They also provide the possibility for grants to be awarded to a single beneficiary, such as for the ERC grants or the small and medium-size enterprises (SME) instrument. The rules clarify the eligibility conditions for funding of the participating entities.¹¹

Based on this information provided in the WP, applicants submit their proposals through the [participant portal](#) that lists all open calls for proposal. These proposals are then evaluated and ranked. The rules for participation in Horizon 2020 identify three award criteria: excellence, impact, and quality and efficiency of the implementation. Depending on the type of action considered to implement a call, these criteria can have a different weight in the evaluation process.¹² The WP – especially the general annexes – clarify the criteria used for each call or type of action and sets the thresholds for funding.¹³

The evaluation of the proposals is conducted by independent experts as required in the rules for participation (Article 40). For Horizon 2020, the Commission established an open [database](#) of independent experts that take part in the evaluation of the proposals, monitoring of activities, and the evaluation of the programme. The experts are selected from the database or on an ad hoc basis. In the case of the ERC, experts are appointed by the Commission based on a proposal from the ERC scientific council.

The rules for participation state that applicants must be informed of the outcome of the evaluation less than five months after the final date for submitting proposals. In case an applicant considers that the evaluation of their proposal has not been carried out in accordance with the procedure, they can request an evaluation review procedure.¹⁴

Following evaluation, the proposals are ranked according to their score. Depending on the budget attributed to the call, a finite number of the highest ranked proposals are selected to receive funding.¹⁵ The funding decision (an implementing act adopted by the Commission) is submitted to the programme committee under the examination procedure if:

- the European Union contribution to the call is equal to or exceeds €2.5 million;
- the action involves the use of human embryos or human embryonic stem cells;
- the action belongs to the specific objective 'secured societies'; or
- the action belongs to the specific objectives 'Europe in a changing world', 'spreading excellence and widening participation' or 'science with and for society' and the Union contribution is equal to or exceeds €0.6 million.

Following adoption of the funding decision, the signature of the grant agreement between the funding body and the successful applicants is expected to be concluded within three months. The implementation of the funded actions have to comply with the [financial rules](#) applicable to the general budget of the Union, which can be modified or added to by the rules for participation. These regulations define the eligible costs and the funding rates depending on the type of action or category of beneficiary.¹⁶

Once the grant agreement is signed, the beneficiaries are in charge of the execution phase, which consists of carrying out the activities for which they have received funding. The Commission and the funding bodies are then in charge of monitoring the progress and evaluating the outcomes.

Evaluation: assessing the outcomes of the framework programme

The evaluation of programmes is a key aspect of the better regulation guidelines. The aim is to assess how a given action has performed and if the initial objectives have been met. It should provide information on the effectiveness, relevance and coherence of the action in order to decide whether it should be continued, modified or terminated.

The regulation of the current framework programme, Horizon 2020, requires annual monitoring of the implementation, an interim evaluation and an ex-post evaluation.

Beyond these three mandatory evaluations, the Commission can also decide to launch studies to evaluate a given instrument or a specific area of the programme. These evaluations are carried out by independent experts selected by the Commission from the database of experts or externally. The interim and ex-post evaluations follow a similar process to the preparation of the impact assessment, with guidance by an inter-service group, an internet-based public consultation, consideration by the regulatory scrutiny board and inter-service consultation.

The FP regulation also provides a frame for the control and audit of the financial transactions involving a contribution from the EU budget (Articles 29 and 30 in the Horizon 2020 Regulation). The control system is expected to ensure an appropriate balance between trust and control. The Commission and the Court of Auditors can audit all grant beneficiaries, contractors and sub-contractors that have received funding under the framework programme.¹⁷

Annual monitoring

Annual monitoring aims to gather data on the implementation of the programme during a specific year, answering the question 'what happened'. The monitoring report includes information on the calls closed during the year, such as the number of proposals received and grant agreements signed, the success rate, the budget allocated, the statistics on the type of participants or data on the output of the ongoing or completed projects. These data monitor progress towards reaching the objectives of the programme. They are also used to evaluate the progress made on a number of cross-cutting issues such as social and economic sciences and humanities, climate change and sustainable development, widening participation, cooperation with third countries or SME involvement.¹⁸

The Commission must regularly inform the programme committee of the overall progress on the implementation of the programme in order to provide input for the preparation of future programmes.¹⁹

Interim evaluation

Before the end of the fourth year of the programme (end of 2017 for Horizon 2020), the Commission is required to carry out an interim evaluation of the programme (often referred to as the mid-term evaluation). This interim evaluation aims to assess progress regarding:

- the achievements of the objectives of the programme based on a set of performance indicators;²⁰
- the efficiency and use of resources, with particular attention paid to cross-cutting issues;
- the Union added value of the programme.

The interim evaluation is also expected to provide an analysis of the aspects related to access to funding opportunities and simplification. The funding model used should be fully assessed. The Horizon 2020 Regulation also requires an interim evaluation of public-private partnerships and specific instruments. The [interim evaluation](#) of Horizon 2020 was published in May 2017, and completed with the evaluation of the [JTIs](#), the [EIT](#) and the [Article 185 partnerships](#) in October 2017.

The interim evaluation is carried out just before the beginning of the process to design and adopt a new framework programme. It provides key insights about the implementation of the FP that need to be discussed and addressed in the preparation of the following programme. However, the feedback provided by the interim evaluation of

the current framework programme is usually limited, as the impact of ongoing projects cannot be fully assessed.

Ex-post evaluation

The ex-post evaluation of the programme has to be finalised three years after the end of the programme (end of 2023 for Horizon 2020). This evaluation must reflect on the rationale, implementation and achievements of the framework programme, to inform the discussion of the renewal, modification or suspension of any measures. It is also expected to assess the long-term impacts of the programme and the sustainability of the measures implemented. Given the timeframe for the preparation of the ex-post evaluation, it does not influence the following framework programme but the subsequent version. The [ex-post evaluation](#) of FP7 completed in January 2016 provides a key input for the preparation of FP9.

Research and training programme for nuclear energy

The lifecycle of the research and training programme for nuclear energy under the Euratom Treaty is similar to the lifecycle of the FP. It begins with the adoption of a [regulation](#) by the Council under the consultation procedure. The programme is implemented in a similar way to the FP, with the adoption of work programmes as implementing acts under the examination procedure, and with a programme committee in two configurations (fission aspects and fusion aspects). The calls for these research programmes are also managed under the participant portal of the FP.

Main references

European Commission, Better regulation guidelines, [SWD\(2017\) 350](#), 7 July 2017.

European Commission, [Horizon 2020 reference documents](#) on the participant portal.

Reillon V., [EU framework programmes for research and innovation](#), EPRS, European Parliament, September 2017.

Endnotes

- ¹ For more information on the history of the framework programme, see V. Reillon, [EU framework programmes for research and innovation – Evolution and key data from FP1 to Horizon 2020 in view of FP9](#), EPRS, European Parliament, September 2017.
- ² The interim evaluation included a stakeholder [consultation](#) that also provides insight for the preparation of FP9.
- ³ This briefing presents the process as defined in the better regulation guidelines. It is important to note that the process can be adapted for each programme as long as the principles stated in the guidelines are observed.
- ⁴ When the evaluation of a FP and the preparation of the impact assessment and proposal for a new FP run in parallel, it is possible that only one stakeholder consultation is conducted.
- ⁵ The impact assessment is approved as a staff working document (SWD).
- ⁶ This procedure was partially codified in a [joint declaration](#) adopted by the Parliament and Council in June 2007, complemented by the April 2016 [Interinstitutional Agreement](#) on Better Law-Making.
- ⁷ In Horizon 2020, the work programme is adopted for two or three years with possible yearly revisions of its content. The [work programmes](#) for the period 2018-2020 were [adopted](#) in October 2017.
- ⁸ The programme committee for Horizon 2020 was established by Article 10 of the Council [Decision](#) establishing the specific programme in 14 configurations listed in Annex V of the decision.
- ⁹ The option of requesting the opinion of the appeal committee has never been used, so far, for the adoption of the work programmes.
- ¹⁰ For more information, see V. Reillon, [The European Institute for Innovation and Technology](#), EPRS, European Parliament, September 2016.
- ¹¹ Derogations to these rules were introduced in the regulations and decisions establishing the public-public and public-private partnerships.
- ¹² For example, proposals for ERC grants are evaluated based on the excellence criterion only, and the impact criterion have a bigger weight for innovation actions.
- ¹³ For more information, see the [general annexes](#) of the 2018-2020 work programme.

- ¹⁴ Details of this procedure can be found in Article 16 of the [rules](#) for participation.
- ¹⁵ The [interim evaluation](#) of Horizon 2020 pointed out that 44.7 % of the eligible proposals score above the quality threshold and 11.6 % are funded.
- ¹⁶ The framework for funding rates is presented in Section III (Article 25-37) of the [rules](#) for participation.
- ¹⁷ The European Court of Auditors [report](#) for 2015 included a special focus on FP7 and Horizon 2020.
- ¹⁸ The full list of cross-cutting issues is presented in Article 14 of the Horizon 2020 [Regulation](#) and in the Annex III of the Council [Decision](#) establishing the specific programme.
- ¹⁹ Annex IV of the Council [Decision](#) establishing the specific programme provides the list of information to be transmitted to the programme committee on individual projects, outcomes of the calls, programme implementation and execution of the programme budget.
- ²⁰ The full list of performance indicators is presented in Annex II of the Council [Decision](#) establishing the specific programme.

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