

Council Decision (EU) 2021/764: Establishing the Specific Programme Implementing Horizon Europe – the Framework Progr...

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Countries Involved

China (CHN)	India (IND)	Japan (JPN)
Korea, Republic of (KOR)	Moldova, Republic of (MDA)	Poland (POL)
Ukraine (UKR)	United States (USA)	

Executive Summary

The European Commission, under Council Decision (EU) 2021/764 and its 2024 Implementing Decision, has adopted the 2025-2027 strategic research and innovation plan for Horizon Europe, the EU's flagship Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. This multiannual plan ensures alignment between EU and national priorities, supports rapid responses to emerging

challenges, and covers a broad range of activities across four main pillars: Excellent Science, Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness, Innovative Europe, and Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area (ERA). Key objectives include fostering scientific excellence, supporting breakthrough innovations, addressing societal and global challenges (such as health, climate, digitalization, and security), and enhancing collaboration and inclusivity across Europe. The plan emphasizes open science, gender equality, international cooperation, and the effective dissemination and exploitation of research results, with a total budget exceeding €83 billion for 2021-2027.

Taxonomies

Themes

- **Digital Acceleration** (Digital Transformation & Strategy)
- **Digital Platforms** (Digital Transformation & Strategy)
- **Digital Infrastructure** (Digital Transformation & Strategy)
- **Digital Policy** (Digital Transformation & Strategy)
- **Digital Ecosystem** (Digital Transformation & Strategy)
- **Digital Investment** (Digital Transformation & Strategy)
- **Digital Regulation** (Digital Transformation & Strategy)
- **Digital Transitions** (Digital Transformation & Strategy)
- **Digital Research** (Digital Transformation & Strategy)
- **Digital Economy** (Digital Transformation & Strategy)
- **Digital Skills Development** (Digital Transformation & Strategy)
- **Artificial Intelligence** (Technology & Innovation)
- **Tech-Driven Solutions** (Technology & Innovation)
- **Quantum Technologies** (Technology & Innovation)
- **ICT Innovation** (Technology & Innovation)
- **Technology Regulations** (Technology & Innovation)
- **High-Performance Computing** (Technology & Innovation)
- **Cloud Computing** (Technology & Innovation)
- **Innovation in Computing** (Technology & Innovation)
- **Blockchain** (Technology & Innovation)
- **5G** (Technology & Innovation)
- **VRE** (Technology & Innovation)
- **Data Governance** (Data & Governance)
- **Digital Rights** (Data & Governance)
- **Digital Governance** (Data & Governance)
- **Data Protection** (Data & Governance)
- **Cybersecurity** (Data & Governance)
- **Cyber Risk Management** (Data & Governance)
- **Data Privacy** (Data & Governance)
- **Digital Access** (Data & Governance)
- **Digital Identity Management** (Data & Governance)
- **Internet Governance** (Data & Governance)
- **Digital Ethics** (Data & Governance)
- **E-Governance** (Data & Governance)
- **Digital Inclusion** (Inclusion & Social Development)

- **Social Cohesion** (Inclusion & Social Development)
- **Gender Equality in Tech** (Inclusion & Social Development)
- **Digital Education** (Inclusion & Social Development)
- **Connectivity** (Inclusion & Social Development)
- **Sustainable Digital Development** (Inclusion & Social Development)
- **EU-LAC Digital Alliance** (Regional & International Cooperation)
- **Bi-regional Cooperation** (Regional & International Cooperation)
- **Global Digital Cooperation** (Regional & International Cooperation)
- **Multilateralism** (Regional & International Cooperation)
- **EU-CELAC Digital Partnership** (Regional & International Cooperation)
- **Digital & Technological Partnerships** (Regional & International Cooperation)
- **Digital Agenda** (Digital Transformation & Strategy) - Relevance: 0.98

Justification: The Digital Agenda, encompassing digital transformation, strategy, infrastructure, and policy, is central to the Horizon Europe Specific Programme. The document dedicates extensive content to digitalisation as a cross-cutting priority, highlighting its role in driving innovation, economic growth, and competitiveness across all clusters (e.g., Digital, Industry and Space; Health; Climate, Energy and Mobility). Digital transformation is repeatedly referenced as a strategic objective, with significant budget allocations and policy mechanisms supporting it. It is also directly linked to EU priorities and commitments, such as the Digital Single Market and the need for digital skills, infrastructure, and regulation.

- **Technology & Innovation (Artificial Intelligence, Quantum Technologies, ICT Innovation)** (Technology & Innovation) - Relevance: 0.95

Justification: Technology and innovation, especially in areas like Artificial Intelligence, Quantum Technologies, and ICT, are at the heart of the Horizon Europe programme. The document devotes substantial sections to supporting breakthrough and deep-tech innovations, with the European Innovation Council (EIC) and other instruments specifically targeting these areas. These technologies are identified as key drivers for Europe's future competitiveness, economic growth, and addressing global challenges. Their strategic importance is underscored by their integration into multiple clusters and their role in achieving the EU's digital and industrial leadership objectives.

- **Data Governance & Cybersecurity** (Data & Governance) - Relevance: 0.92

Justification: Data governance, including cybersecurity, data protection, privacy, and digital rights, is a major theme throughout the document. The programme emphasizes the need for secure, trustworthy, and ethical management of data as foundational to digital transformation and innovation. Cybersecurity is highlighted as a critical area for research, investment, and policy development, given its importance for the functioning of the digital economy, protection of critical infrastructure, and safeguarding citizens' rights. The strategic importance of this theme is reflected in dedicated clusters, cross-cutting actions, and its alignment with EU regulatory frameworks and international commitments.

Actors

- **EU Member States** (Political Actors)
- **European Council** (Political Actors)
- **European Parliament** (Political Actors)
- **European Institute of Innovation and Technology** (Research and Innovation Actors)
- **Knowledge and Innovation Communities** (Research and Innovation Actors)
- **Innovators** (Research and Innovation Actors)
- **Universities** (Research and Innovation Actors)
- **Academic Institutions** (Research and Innovation Actors)
- **Research Performing Organisations** (Research and Innovation Actors)
- **Technology Organisations** (Research and Innovation Actors)
- **Digital Innovation Hubs** (Research and Innovation Actors)
- **Thematic communities** (Research and Innovation Actors)
- **Pan-European Research and Education Network** (Research and Innovation Actors)
- **Research Funding Organisations** (Economic Actors)
- **Industry Actors** (Economic Actors)

- **Private Sector Representatives** (Economic Actors)
- **Digital Companies** (Economic Actors)
- **ICT Companies** (Economic Actors)
- **Telecommunication Companies** (Economic Actors)
- **Civil Society Organisations** (Civil Society Actors)
- **Non-governmental Institutions** (Civil Society Actors)
- **Digital Training and Education Providers** (Civil Society Actors)
- **Digital Skills Development Platforms** (Civil Society Actors)
- **Digital Literacy Initiatives** (Civil Society Actors)
- **Technology Providers** (Civil Society Actors)
- **European Commission** (Political Actors) - Relevance: 1.0

Justification: The European Commission is the central actor in the implementation, management, and decision-making of the Horizon Europe Specific Programme. It is repeatedly referenced as the body adopting strategic plans, work programmes, and implementing decisions, and is responsible for appointing key boards and committees. Its influence permeates all aspects of the programme, from policy to execution.

- **European Union** (Political Actors) - Relevance: 0.95

Justification: The European Union is the overarching entity under which the entire Horizon Europe framework operates. The programme is designed to serve the EU's policy objectives, legal frameworks, and strategic goals. The EU's priorities, budget, and legal acts are foundational to the structure and purpose of the programme, making it a highly influential actor.

- **Researchers** (Research and Innovation Actors) - Relevance: 0.9

Justification: Researchers are the primary beneficiaries and drivers of the Horizon Europe programme. The text emphasizes their central role in achieving scientific excellence, innovation, and societal impact. Researchers are repeatedly mentioned in the context of funding, mobility, training, and participation in key initiatives such as the European Research Council and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions.

Beneficiary Groups

- **Researchers** (Researchers & Academia)
- **Rural Populations** (Rural & Remote Communities)
- **Small and Medium Enterprises** (SMEs / Businesses)
- **Start-ups** (Start-ups / Innovators)
- **Women in Tech** (Women & Girls)

Additional Beneficiary Groups

- woman
- SME
- researcher
- startup
- rural area

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- SDG 1: No Poverty
- SDG 2: Zero Hunger
- SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being
- SDG 4: Quality Education
- SDG 5: Gender Equality
- SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

- SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy
- SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
- SDG 13: Climate Action
- SDG 14: Life Below Water
- SDG 15: Life on Land
- SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
- SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

EU Policy Alignments

- Digital Decade
- Horizon Europe
- NDICI-Global Europe

Commitments

Commitment 1

Actions under the Specific Programme should contribute at least 35% of the overall financial envelope of the Specific Programme to climate objectives.

Details:

- Actions under the Specific Programme should contribute at least 35% of the overall financial envelope of the Specific Programme to climate objectives. (Type: Programmatic)

Commitment 2

The financial envelope for the implementation of the Specific Programme for the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2027 shall be EUR 83,397,000,000 in current prices.

Details:

- The financial envelope for the implementation of the Specific Programme for the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2027 shall be EUR 83,397,000,000 in current prices. (Type: Financed)

Commitment 3

The amount referred to above shall be increased by an additional allocation of EUR 2,790,000,000 in constant 2018 prices for the Specific Programme.

Details:

- The amount referred to above shall be increased by an additional allocation of EUR 2,790,000,000 in constant 2018 prices for the Specific Programme. (Type: Financed)

Commitment 4

EUR 8,952,000,000 in current prices is to support the cluster 'Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment' for the period 2021-2027.

Details:

- EUR 8,952,000,000 in current prices is to support the cluster 'Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment' for the period 2021-2027. (Type: Financed)

Commitment 5

The completion of the Digital Single Market and the growing opportunities from the convergence of digital and physical technologies require a substantial increase in spending on main digital R&I activities compared to the framework programme Horizon 2020.

Details:

- The completion of the Digital Single Market and the growing opportunities from the convergence of digital and physical technologies require a substantial increase in spending on main digital R&I activities compared to the framework programme Horizon 2020. (Type: Declarative)

Commitment 6

The measures referred to in Article 1(2) of Council Regulation (EU) 2020/2094 shall be implemented under this Specific Programme through amounts referred to in point (a)(iv) of Article 2(2) of that Regulation, with the indicative distribution of these additional amounts as follows: 25% to cluster 'Health'; 25% to cluster 'Digital, Industry and Space'; 25% to cluster 'Climate, Energy and Mobility'; 25% to the EIC.

Details:

- The measures referred to in Article 1(2) of Council Regulation (EU) 2020/2094 shall be implemented under this Specific Programme through amounts referred to in point (a)(iv) of Article 2(2) of that Regulation, with the indicative distribution of these additional amounts as follows: 25% to cluster 'Health'; 25% to cluster 'Digital, Industry and Space'; 25% to cluster 'Climate, Energy and Mobility'; 25% to the EIC. (Type: Implemented)

Commitment 7

The MSCA (Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions) aim to train and employ at least one million new researchers by 2027 in order to achieve the targets being set for increased investment in R&I;

Details:

- The MSCA (Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions) aim to train and employ at least one million new researchers by 2027 in order to achieve the targets being set for increased investment in R&I.; (Type: Programmatic)

Commitment 8

A start-up or an SME may benefit only once during Horizon Europe from grant-only support from the EIC, and that support will not exceed EUR 2.5 million.

Details:

- A start-up or an SME may benefit only once during Horizon Europe from grant-only support from the EIC, and that support will not exceed EUR 2.5 million. (Type: Programmatic)

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPI: Climate Objectives Financial Contribution

Description:	Actions under the Specific Programme should contribute at least 35 % of the overall financial envelope of the Specific Programme to climate objectives.
Type:	quantitative
Target Value:	35.0
Target Description:	At least 35% of the overall financial envelope of the Specific Programme should support climate objectives.
Unit:	percentage of financial envelope
Timeframe:	2021-2027
Measurement Method:	Budget allocation and expenditure tracking
Responsible Entity:	European Commission
Sector:	Climate/Environment

KPI: Cluster 6 Budget Allocation

Description:	Relevant actions under the Specific Programme should be supported by EUR 8 952 000 000 in current prices for the cluster 'Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment' for the period 2021-2027.
Type:	quantitative
Target Value:	8952000000.0
Target Description:	Allocate EUR 8.952 billion to the 'Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment' cluster.
Unit:	EUR
Timeframe:	2021-2027
Measurement Method:	Budget allocation and financial reporting
Responsible Entity:	European Commission

Sector:	Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture, Environment
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KPI: EIC Board Membership Size

Description:	The EIC Board shall be composed of 15 to 20 independent high-level individuals drawn from various parts of Europe's innovation ecosystem.
Type:	quantitative
Target Description:	Maintain EIC Board size between 15 and 20 members.
Unit:	number of members
Timeframe:	Ongoing
Measurement Method:	Board membership records
Responsible Entity:	European Commission
Sector:	Innovation Governance

KPI: ERC President Time Commitment

Description:	The ERC President shall reside in Brussels for the duration of the appointment and devote in principle at least 80 % of his or her working time to ERC business.
Type:	quantitative
Target Value:	80.0
Target Description:	ERC President to devote at least 80% of working time to ERC business.
Unit:	percentage of working time
Timeframe:	During appointment
Measurement Method:	Time allocation records
Responsible Entity:	ERC President / European Commission
Sector:	Research Governance

KPI: ERC Research Excellence and Global Impact

Description:	The ERC will aim to make a measurable improvement in the Union's share of top 1 % of most highly cited publications globally and to increase the number of excellent researchers which it funds, including from outside Europe.
Type:	qualitative
Target Description:	Increase the EU's share of top 1% most cited publications and the number of excellent researchers funded by the ERC.
Unit:	qualitative milestone
Timeframe:	2021-2027
Measurement Method:	Bibliometric analysis and ERC grant statistics
Responsible Entity:	European Research Council (ERC)
Sector:	Research Excellence

KPI: ERC Scientific Council Diversity

Description:	The ERC Scientific Council shall be composed of independent scientists, engineers and scholars of the highest repute and with the appropriate expertise, including both women and men in different age groups, and ensuring a diversity of research areas and a variety of geographical origins.
Type:	qualitative
Target Description:	Ensure diversity in gender, age, research area, and geography in the ERC Scientific Council.
Unit:	qualitative milestone
Timeframe:	Ongoing
Measurement Method:	Council composition review
Responsible Entity:	European Commission
Sector:	Research Governance

KPI: Mission-Oriented Portfolio Approach

Description:	The work programme provided for in Article 13 shall, for each mission identified in the Strategic Plan, include the design, the characteristics of their project portfolios and specific provisions to enable an efficient portfolio approach.
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Type:	qualitative
Target Description:	Include mission design, project portfolio characteristics, and provisions for efficient portfolio management in the work programme.
Unit:	qualitative milestone
Timeframe:	Per mission cycle
Measurement Method:	Work programme content review
Responsible Entity:	European Commission
Sector:	Research and Innovation Missions

KPI: New Researchers Trained and Employed

Description:	It is estimated that the Union will need to train and employ at least one million new researchers by 2027 in order to achieve the targets being set for increased investment in R&I.;
Type:	quantitative
Target Value:	1000000.0
Target Description:	Train and employ at least one million new researchers by 2027.
Unit:	researchers
Timeframe:	by 2027
Measurement Method:	Researcher employment and training statistics
Responsible Entity:	European Commission / Member States
Sector:	Human Resources in Research

KPI: Strategic Plan Duration and Flexibility

Description:	The strategic plan has to cover a maximum period of 4 years, while retaining sufficient flexibility so that the Union can respond rapidly to new and emerging challenges, unexpected opportunities and crises.
Type:	qualitative
Target Description:	Adopt a multiannual strategic plan for research and innovation activities covering up to 4 years, with built-in flexibility for rapid response.

Unit:	qualitative milestone
Timeframe:	Maximum 4 years per plan
Measurement Method:	Adoption and review of strategic plan
Responsible Entity:	European Commission
Sector:	Research and Innovation

KPI: Total Programme Budget Allocation

Description:	The financial envelope for the implementation of the Specific Programme for the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2027 shall be EUR 83 397 000 000 in current prices.
Type:	quantitative
Target Value:	83397000000.0
Target Description:	Allocate EUR 83.397 billion for the implementation of the Specific Programme 2021-2027.
Unit:	EUR
Timeframe:	2021-2027
Measurement Method:	Budget allocation and financial reporting
Responsible Entity:	European Commission
Sector:	Research and Innovation

Practical Applications

Application 1:

Adoption and implementation of the 2025-2027 strategic research and innovation plan under the Specific Programme implementing Horizon Europe, as set out in the Commission Implementing Decision of 20 March 2024.

Application 2:

Ongoing implementation of Horizon Europe (2021-2027), the EU's Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, with a budget of over EUR 83 billion, structured into Pillars and Clusters addressing Excellent Science, Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness, Innovative Europe, and Widening Participation and Strengthening the ERA.

Application 3:

Active operation of the European Research Council (ERC), providing long-term, flexible funding for frontier research across all fields, including support for early-career researchers and international cooperation initiatives.

Application 4:

Ongoing Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), supporting researcher mobility, training, and career development across borders, sectors, and disciplines, including public outreach and skills development.

Application 5:

Support and development of European research infrastructures, including the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC), pan-European research and education networks, and the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) roadmap.

Application 6:

Implementation of research and innovation activities in six clusters under Pillar II, including Health; Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society; Civil Security for Society; Digital, Industry and Space; Climate, Energy and Mobility; and Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment.

Application 7:

Ongoing Joint Research Centre (JRC) non-nuclear direct actions, providing scientific and technical support for EU policies, including knowledge centres for migration, disaster risk management, food fraud, and bioeconomy.

Application 8:

Operation of the European Innovation Council (EIC), including the Pathfinder for advanced research and the Accelerator for innovation and market deployment, providing blended finance (grants and equity) to high-risk, breakthrough innovations, especially for SMEs and start-ups.

Application 9:

Implementation of EIC business acceleration services, including coaching, mentoring, and networking for funded innovators, and EIC Challenges (inducement prizes) to address global challenges.

Application 10:

Active European Innovation Ecosystems initiatives, including the EIC Forum for coordination among Member States, joint innovation programmes, and support for mentoring, technical assistance, and data-sharing platforms.

Application 11:

Ongoing Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area (ERA) activities, including Teaming, Twinning, ERA Chairs, and COST actions to build capacity and excellence in lower-performing countries.

Application 12:

Use of established funding mechanisms, such as grants, blended finance, and support for public procurement of innovation, as well as synergies with other EU programmes (e.g., InvestEU, Digital Europe, EU4Health, Erasmus+, ESF+, ERDF).

Application 13:

Implementation of policy frameworks for open science, gender equality, citizen engagement, and responsible research and innovation, including support for National Contact Points and Policy Support Facility services.

Application 14:

Active international cooperation through joint actions, partnerships, and alignment with global initiatives such as the Paris Agreement and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Application 15:

Ongoing support for the exploitation and market uptake of Horizon Europe results, including systematic identification, dissemination, and transfer of research and innovation outcomes to industry, public administrations, and civil society.

Source Files

Filename	Type	Size	Upload Date
Council Decision (EU)	PDF	1499.7 KB	2025-06-25
Council Decision (EU) Establish the Specific Programme Implementing Horizon Europe	PDF	119.4 KB	2025-06-25