

Developments and thinking on European Framework Programme Funding for ‘Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment’

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NI Success from first Horizon Europe Calls

The results from the first Cluster 6 calls under Horizon Europe were sent to applicants in January and February. Early indications are that seven proposals from Northern Ireland applicants were successful. The successful projects are now awaiting signature of the Association Agreement between the UK and EU to enable signature of grant agreements.

UK Participation in Horizon Europe

UK applicants have been able to join consortia and submit proposals since the launch of initial calls. (see: [European Commission Q&A](#)), however, due to the continuing delays and regardless of the outcome of the UK’s efforts to associate to Horizon Europe, the government has committed to supporting successful Horizon applicants who are unable to sign grant agreements.

On 15 March the UK Government announced an extension of the guarantee to ensure that important individual and collaborative projects can go ahead as planned, and to provide reassurance for those who are about to apply. Details are available on the [UKRI website](#). This extends the guarantee made by the UK Government to grant agreements expected to be signed by December 2022. The message from the government states:

“We encourage the UK sector to continue applying to Horizon Europe calls and to continue forming consortia. Once the EU completes the UK’s association, successful UK applicants who have not yet signed a grant agreement with UKRI under the guarantee will be able to sign grant agreements with the European Commission. As stated by the Commission in their Q&A document from December 2021, UK entities are already eligible to apply ahead of formally associating.”

Associated Country or Associated Partner - Confused?

UK is seeking to become an **Associated Country** (AC) to Horizon Europe. This will allow legal entities to be full **beneficiary partners** in Horizon Europe projects, receiving money from the EC.

If UK does not become an AC, we will become a **Third Country** (TC) and can still participate; legal entities in UK will become **associated partners** in Horizon Europe projects, receiving money from the UK.



Cluster 6 ‘Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture & Environment’

The seven 2022 calls under Cluster 6 “Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture & Environment” closed in February and March 2022, and results will be communicated to applicants in May and June.

Early indications from the responses to the 2021 and 2022 calls suggests continued high interest in applying to Horizon Europe. There are large numbers of applications for many topics, and proposals are of high quality. UK applicants are still part of winning projects and there have even been a few successful UK coordinators.

Experienced applicants are adapting to the new application form template and to the novelties therein. Indeed, how these novelties are addressed in proposals is often used to separate otherwise excellent proposals. Those who have not paid attention to the new requirements are losing marks and failing to win funding.

Integration of Social Sciences and Humanities

Where projects contribute solutions to pressing societal challenges there is a requirement to ensure that societal needs are fully understood and that societal acceptance is likely. In some topics the call text includes a requirement to integrate research and researchers from Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) disciplines into projects to aid take up and acceptance of the solutions developed ([SSH disciplines offer a realistic boost to projects in Horizon Europe](#)). This is one of the areas that is poorly addressed in proposals. Unfortunately comments from evaluations such as that quoted below are all too common (a ‘shortcoming’ general means loss of half a mark, which can mean dropping a place in the evaluation rankings and the project not receiving funding).

“The proposal addresses inter-disciplinary approaches to some extent. However, the contribution of social science and humanities (SSH) disciplines is not sufficiently addressed. This is a shortcoming.”

**SAVE THE
DATE**

An upcoming North-South event for Cluster 6, with a focus on integration of SSH, will provide guidance in this area as well as networking of researchers (NI/IE/EU) using the B2Match platform. The event is being developed with Queen’s University Belfast, Invest NI, DAERA (AFBI), DAFM, the Irish Research Council and InterTradeIreland. Please hold the date - **15 June 2022** – further information and registration to follow.

Cluster 6 calls in 2023 and 2024

The Cluster 6 work programme for 2023-2024 is currently being developed and will again feature the seven call areas or ‘Destinations’ that were introduced in 2021 (Biodiversity, Farm-to-fork, Circular Bioeconomy, Zero Pollution, Climate, Communities and Governance). There is no overall budget set yet for the work programme; early indications suggest just under 100 topics in 2023 and just under 75 in 2024. There have been calls for more two-stage proposals, and more topics that have budgets to fund several projects, not just a single project.

An indicative timeline for development suggests publication in October, although the Commission is being pressured to make a pre-final version, a so-called ‘Orientation Paper’, available much earlier to allow less experienced applicants more time for development of ideas and proposals. At present the 2023 calls are expected to open at the end of October, with deadlines in February and March 2023.

If you would like to find out how your interests and ideas might fit into the forthcoming calls, and explore the next steps to take, please do get in touch and arrange a time to discuss them with me (contact details below), or with another member of the Northern Ireland Contact Point Network (details: <https://horizoneuropeni.com/supportcontacts/>)

Missions

EU Missions are a novelty in Horizon Europe, aiming to address some of the greatest challenges facing our society in five areas: Climate adaptation; Cancer; Climate-neutral and smart cities; Oceans and water; Soil health. **Missions will be delivered by a portfolio of research and non-traditional actions.**

Authorities in most countries are still trying to understand what missions will look like on the ground. It is clear that delivery of the missions will require new ways of thinking. If you are familiar with the focus of INTERREG projects, tending to support ‘action on the ground aiming to transform society’, and you think of missions through this type of lens, you will be close to the current consensus. Also John Bell (EC: Director ‘Healthy Planet’, DG RTD) has said the missions are ‘innovations in governance’. This is true at multiple levels from the myriad of authorities responsible for aspects of soils, to the actions on the ground and the living labs that will develop and showcase innovations and best practice.

The 2021 Mission Work Programmes were published on 22 December 2021 for the 2021 calls which opened in December. Closing dates were in March and April.

Info Days took place on 17 and 18 January 2022. Links to the recordings, presentations and other documents can be found at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/events/upcoming-events/horizon-europe-info-days/eu-missions_en



Although the calls for 2021 are now closed it is worth revisiting some of the presentations to inform your thinking and ideas for the future.

Forthcoming calls

Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe



- The Horizon Europe mission work programme for 2022 will be published on 12 May 2022, with a call for proposals to support the implementation of the EU Soil Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe.
- The info day for this call is planned for 17-18 May.

Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking (CBE JU)

The CBE JU is the legal and universal successor of BBI JU (Bio-Based Industries Joint Undertaking). CBE JU recently commenced operations appointing both a States Representative Group and a CBE JU Scientific Committee.



Consultation on the CBE JU Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) is underway. The draft can be viewed at the following link: [‘Strategic Innovation and Research Agenda \(SIRA 2030\) for a Circular Bio-based Europe: Realising a future-fit circular bio-society in Europe’](#). This will pave the way for its first annual call for proposals which is expected in early summer. The CBE JU call will be open for application as part of Horizon Europe, with individual topics published on the Funding and Tenders Portal.



Circular Bio-based Northern Ireland: sidestreams and byproducts from local agri-food production have potential as resources for bio-based ingredients and materials. NICPs can help local companies seeking new value chains as feedstock suppliers or material end users.

Northern Ireland has a regional profile under the Bioeconomy Regions platform developed by the Bio-Industries Consortium (BIC), the private part of the BCE JU Public –Private Partnership. This is now live and

available to members of BIC interested in investment or collaborations in regions (e.g. for access to feedstocks) <https://www.bioeconomy-regions.eu/project/30/new/platform-now-live-and-fully-functional-european-regions-and-bio-based-industry>. Northern Ireland is allowed one seat at the forthcoming match-making meeting run by BIC for its members on 19 May in Brussels. If you have a particular expertise that you would like presented at this event, or are seeking partnerships for specific value chains in the circular bioeconomy area, please contact me as soon as possible.

Strategic areas and developing policy

Circular Economy Package

In terms of policy, The Commission published [forward plans](#) for its Circular Economy Package on 30 March, as part of the European Green Deal, to streamline sustainability across all physical goods, boost circular business models, and increase Europe's resource independence. The package will affect all manufacturers based in Europe as well as anyone importing products to Europe and covers construction products, consumer electronics, household appliances, and textiles. Upcoming actions and initiatives in this area can be viewed here: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/circular-economy-action-plan_en

Soil strategy for 2030

The Commission adopted an EU Soil Strategy for 2030 in November. It sets out a framework and measures to protect and restore soils, and ensure that they are used sustainably, and sets a vision and objectives for actions by 2030 and to achieve healthy soils by 2050. It also announces a new Soil Health Law by 2023 to ensure a level playing field and a high level of environmental and health protection. Key documents:

- [New EU Soil Strategy for 2030](#)
- [Staff Working Document](#)
- [Factsheet](#)



Long-term vision for rural areas

The European Commission has launched a Rural Pact initiative, which was announced in its Long-term Vision for the Rural Areas presented in June 2021. The new pact aims to mobilise public authorities and stakeholders to act on the needs and aspirations of rural communities.

The Commission gathered the views of rural communities and businesses creating a vision and rural action plan to help communities and businesses reach their full potential in the coming decades. Four complementary areas of action emerged, embodying a long-term vision from, by and for stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040.

Interested parties are invited to express their commitment to the goals of the vision, participate in the development and implementation of the Rural Pact and to respond to the [survey](#).



Key statistics for EU rural areas: figures relating to demographics, economic development, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. These will be of value to researchers developing Horizon Europe proposals addressing rural activities and needs.

More information (and link to key statistics) https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/long-term-vision-rural-areas_en

Other Calls and Opportunities

Opportunities for cascading funding (calls issued by projects) can be found [here on the Funding and Tenders Portal](#). Those below are most relevant to the Cluster 6 area.

SmartAgriHubs - Connecting the dots to unleash the innovation potential for digital transformation of the European agri-food sector

Aim: projects shall develop, innovate, provide, validate and/or improve services provided by Digital Innovation Hubs. Tangible innovation services shall be provided by DIHs. They shall aim at supporting the set-up and realisation of digital innovation activities realised by stakeholders of agri-food communities and related networks. The proposed project shall support individual or groups/networks of stakeholders in the DIH's region or in several regions based on the cooperation of several DIHs proposing a project.

Deadline: 29 June 2022, at 17.00 (CEST). Open for continuous submission. Proposals will be evaluated in batches at several dates. Further information: www.smartagrihubs.eu/portal/open-call

METABUILDING - GROW/HARVEST Call

Second **GROW AND HARVEST CALL** open 1st March 2022 – Deadline 25th May 2022 – Areas include:

- **Construction-Nature-Based Solutions**
 - NBS system solutions for renovation
 - Digitization of care / maintenance / monitoring for NBS

The GROW/HARVEST call aims at stimulating the cross-sectoral collaboration of SMEs in the framework of innovative projects with a grant of maximum 60.000 EUR per project. The collaborative projects should serve as a basis to help SMEs to learn from what is going on in other sectors and use knowledge, expertise and technology assets from other sectors to increase their performance and productivity. Furthermore, the GROW/HARVEST call intends to stimulate EU-wide collaboration of SMEs to allow them to detect market opportunities and establish partnerships that they are not naturally prone to look for. Cross-border collaborations of 2 or more SMEs from different eligible countries are mandatory. Register on www.metabuilding.com; Use the tools of the METABUILDING platform to find a consortium partner, technology asset and/or a service provider.

Conferences and Seminars

- **Policy Seminar "Impact of the Community Plant Variety Rights system on the EU economy and the environment"** Date - 28 April. This will coincide with the public release and presentation of a new European study jointly published by the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) and the Community Plant Variety Office (CPVO). This event will also be web streamed live and recorded. Advance registration required; information can be found here: <https://cpvo.europa.eu/en/news-and-events/conferences-and-events/cpvo-policy-seminar-plant-variety-protection-path-towards-more-sustainability-innovation-and-growth-european-union>
- **European Maritime Day** will take place this year on 19 and 20 May 2022 as hybrid event. Details are available at: https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/maritimeday/conference_en Registration is open - Deadline: 12 May 2022. This year's main theme is '**Sustainable blue economy for green recovery**', focusing on Ocean and Climate, Food from the Ocean and Healthy and Clean Oceans.
 - Session 1: EU Mission 'Restore our Oceans and Waters'
 - Session 2: Maritime Spatial Planning and Stakeholder Engagement
 - Session 3: The Sustainable Blue Economy implementation through smart specialisation
 - Session 4: Ocean observation and Blue ECONOMY Observatory
- **European Green Week 2022** will take place from 30 May to 5 June 2022. The main hybrid event on 31 May puts three important aspects of the transformation in the spotlight – circular economy, zero

pollution, and biodiversity. Throughout the week, partner events will be taking place across Europe and beyond. https://ec.europa.eu/environment/eu-green-week-2022_en

The main CONFERENCE is scheduled for 31 May. Please see the web page for details:

- Session 1 - Designed to last: Circular, Sustainable and Connected Products
 - Session 2 - Zero Pollution - Who pays the price for pollution?
 - Session 3 - Biodiversity - Nature Restoration Targets
 - High-level debate - From Code Red to Code Green
- The **Future of Food Conference 2022** will take place on the 16th of June in Brussels. This is a high-level forum exploring how agri-food innovation can enable and accelerate the decarbonisation of the EU's food system. Details: <https://eitfutureoffood.eu/>
 - **International Horticulture Congress “Horticulture for a world of transition – 14-20 August, Angers, France.** Theme addressing four challenges:
 1. Competitiveness and skills for horticultural value chains
 2. Food, human health and well-being of citizens
 3. Sustainability of production systems
 4. Adaptation to climate changes and effect mitigation
 Further information <https://www.ihc2022.org/>

Forthcoming Networking and Brokerage Events

- **Circular Cities and Regions Initiative** – information session on the call for Pilots and Fellows - 20 April 2022 10:00 - 11:00 CEST. More information: <https://errin.eu/events/ccri-information-session-call-pilots-and-fellows> (Registration before 19 April 2022 (13:00 CEST) is mandatory).
- **Bringing Value to Agrobiomass** <https://bringing-value-to-agrobiomass-3.b2match.io/> Meet potential cooperation partners or technology providers in this online 1:1 meetings focused on how to create value from agrobiomass and side streams from food production.
 - Webinar April 20, 2022
 - Matchmaking Meetings May 11, 2022
- **Sustainable Foodtech Solutions** <https://sustainable-foodtech.b2match.io/> 26 April 2022 - 2 May 2022
- **Matchmaking event G-STIC Climate Action Programme - Call 2022** <https://climate-action2022.b2match.io/> (May 17 - May 18, 2022)
- **Social Sciences and Humanities in Horizon Europe Cluster 6** – 15 June 2022 – Save the date
- **WaterMatch 2022** <https://watermatch2022.b2match.io/> - an official side event of the European Water Technology Week 2022 (19-22 September)
- **NutrEvent** – Nantes, 4-5 October (in person) and 11th October (online). A partnering event dedicated to innovation in Food, Feed, Nutrition and Health. It aims at identifying industrial, scientific, commercial and financial partners for R&D projects and innovations. NutrEvent gathers 650+ international actors: Food, feed, clinical nutrition, food supplement, pharmaceutical industries and distributors, innovative ingredient and process suppliers, academic institutions, technology transfer organisations, research institutes, R&D services and consulting firms and investors. A special brokerage workshop is being organised on the development of Horizon Europe projects. This session will be held in English and would focus on Cluster 6 related opportunities. More details to be provided soon <https://www.nutrevent.com/>

Travel Vouchers for developing cross-border partnerships

On the move again after COVID? You can apply for InterTradeIreland’s Cross-Border Collaboration Voucher of up to £500 to explore early-stage partnerships to scope out potential project ideas and agree collaborative working. ITI can also help identify potential partners – details and application form on [here](#).

The Northern Ireland Contact Point Network

The Northern Ireland Contact Point (NICP) network was set up in 2014 to support local applicants applying for European Horizon funding. Details are available on the [network’s website](#) which has been updated for Horizon Europe. Services offered by the NICPs include:

- **Guidance** on choosing relevant H2020 topics and types of action
- **Advice** on administrative procedures and contractual issues
- **Training**, assistance and advice on proposal writing, to improve the quality of proposals
- **Signpost** to documentation (forms, guidelines, manuals etc.) and other supports available
- **Assistance** in partner searches

UPDATE: the NICP Network has published the first of what will be regular bulletins about all opportunities and wider news on Horizon Europe.

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Previous editions of this Cluster 6 newsletter are now available for download: <https://horizoneuropeni.com/cluster-6-newsletter-archive/>



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