

Taftie Insights report
Meeting 3 (14 June 2023)

Horizon & EIC projects

Executive summary

The 2023 Annual Meeting of the Taftie network focused on the engagement of innovation agencies with Horizon Europe, paying particular attention to the European Innovation Council (EIC) and the agencies' roles in designing and implementing Horizon projects.

Preceding the meeting, a survey was conducted amongst the innovation agencies to assess their involvement and activities in Horizon Europe and EIC programmes. This survey provided critical insights:

- More than 80% of respondent agencies have delivered projects in partnership with, or funded by, Horizon Europe or Horizon 2020.
- Agencies have a varying degree of involvement in Horizon projects, with over half not leading any projects and a small number leading more than three. The areas covered by the programmes are wide-ranging, from SME Innovation to Climate Neutrality and Research Coordination.
- Similarly, there's an active participation of agencies in EIC and EIT programmes. This engagement includes promoting the participation of national stakeholders and direct involvement in programmes like the EIC Accelerator.
- Regarding collaborations, Horizon projects usually involve 10 to 25 partners on average, and a majority of the respondent agencies are already collaborating or are open to collaborating more with other Taftie agencies in Horizon projects.

Key insights from the discussion included:

- Consideration of the complementarities between Taftie agencies and the EIC, such as the ability of innovation agencies to identify and signpost promising companies to the EIC and other Horizon funding programmes, as well as themselves supporting companies that are deemed excellent but that miss out on European funding
- The need for more sharing of data and lessons learned about supporting disruptive innovation

- Initial ideas about the focus for future Taftie exchanges and learning on this topic, such as consolidating feedback on the EIC application process and exchanging lessons about the reality of supporting SMEs and other innovators through the application process.

Part 1: Introduction

The theme of the Annual Meeting of 2023 was 'Horizon programmes with a focus on EIC'. Here we were interested in how innovation agencies engage with Horizon Europe programmes.

Horizon Europe is the European Union's flagship research and innovation (R&I) funding programme, operating from 2021 to 2027. With a budget nearing €95.5 billion, it aims to bolster Europe's scientific and technological leadership, address pressing global challenges, and enhance citizens' daily lives. It builds upon the foundations laid by Horizon 2020, the EU's previous R&I funding programme that ran from 2014 to 2020. The European Innovation Council is Europe's premier innovation programme, dedicated to identifying, developing, and scaling breakthrough technologies and transformative innovations.

To contextualise the discussion on Horizon projects and define the current and potential roles of innovation agencies within this ecosystem, a pre-meeting survey was conducted, examining the activities of Taftie agencies in this domain. During the meeting, representatives from innovation agencies and various sectors were invited to present their insights and participate in a panel discussion exploring the key challenges and opportunities. The key takeaways from the survey and the discussion are synthesised and summarised in the following sections.

Part 2: Insights from survey data

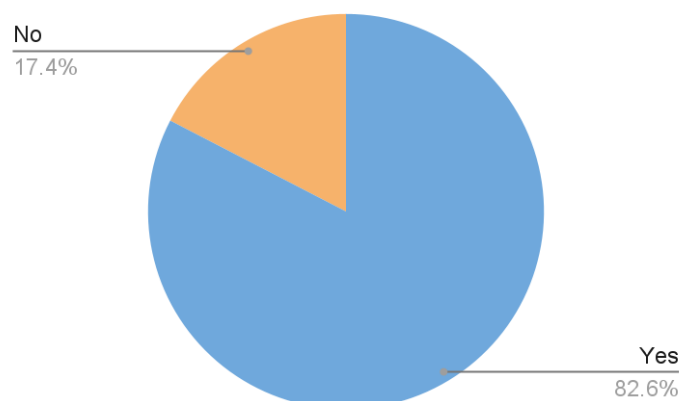
In anticipation of the Taftie Annual Meeting of June 2023, a survey was distributed to all 34 member agencies. The aim was to gain insights into the agencies' engagement with Horizon Europe programmes and the European Innovation Council (EIC). We sought to understand the nature of the projects they were involved in, the extent of their participation, and the challenges they encountered during the process. This survey was primarily completed by representatives from each agency who had a comprehensive knowledge of their institution's interaction with Horizon Europe and EIC.

A total of 22 agencies responded, detailing the specific programmes they were engaged in and shedding light on the potential hurdles they faced. This accounts for a response rate of slightly over 65%. An additional agency submitted their responses after the initial deadline, and their data has since been incorporated into this report, taking the total to 23 participating agencies. Although about a third of the Taftie agencies did not participate in the survey, the information gathered provides a substantial understanding of the trends within the innovation ecosystem and offers valuable insights into individual agency practices and programmes.

Participation of Taftie Agencies in Horizon Programmes

Nineteen respondent agencies (82.6%) have delivered projects in partnership with, or funded by, Horizon Europe or Horizon 2020. Another four agencies do not participate directly in Horizon programmes.

Figure 1: Distribution of Taftie agencies delivering Horizon projects



The primary reasons why these four agencies do not participate in Horizon programmes are varied. However, we have observed that most (particularly non-EU agencies) offer advice, mobilise, and communicate opportunities to businesses and industries to apply, but do not apply on their own behalf. These agencies often cite a lack of resources and other administrative reasons, whereas for other Taftie agencies, another institution in their country leads the work on Horizon funding. Only one of these agencies that do not participate in Horizon programmes has a specific team dedicated to Horizon initiatives.

There are significantly different levels of involvement amongst agencies that deliver Horizon programmes directly.

Figure 3: Distribution of agencies leading Horizon projects

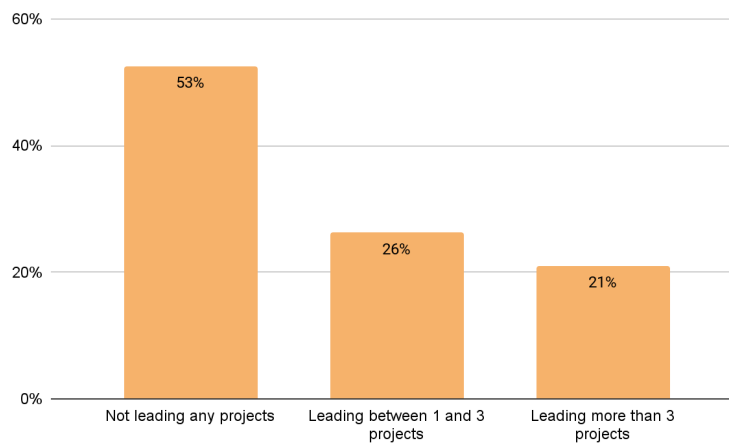
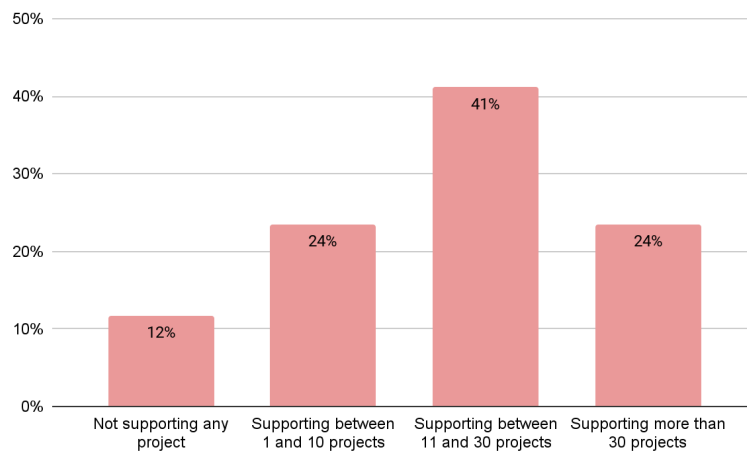


Figure 3 illustrates that most (53%) of agencies do not lead Horizon projects. 23% lead between 1 and 3 projects, and 21% lead more than 3 projects. This suggests that leading projects is challenging for many agencies, and when they do, they tend to oversee a low number of projects. On average, an agency leads between 2 and 3 projects. However, one agency is leading up to 6 projects.

The main areas covered by the programmes that agencies are leading can be separated into the following categories:

- SME Innovation
- Climate and Urban Transitions
- Health and Care Systems Transformation
- Sustainable Research and Development
- Mobility
- Ethics and Responsibility
- Climate Neutrality
- Research Coordination and Support

Figure 4: Distribution of Agencies Supporting Horizon Projects



Conversely, among agencies delivering Horizon programmes, we note that most support projects rather than lead them. Only 12% of agencies are not supporting any projects. 24% support between 1 and 10 projects, 41% support between 11 and 30 projects, and another 24% support more than 30 projects.

On average, agencies tend to support between 16 and 17 projects. However, there is one agency that supports up to 34 projects.

The main areas covered by the programmes that agencies support can be categorised as follows:

- SME Innovation and Support
- Sustainability and Environmental Concerns
- Health and Biotechnologies
- Digital Technologies and Cybersecurity
- Research and Industry Coordination
- Energy and Resource Management
- Gender Equality

Collaborations and partnerships in Horizon projects

The number of partners involved in these projects can vary greatly. On average, each project involves between 10 and 25 partners. Some agencies have significant experience collaborating with others, having worked with over a hundred partners.

These partnerships encompass a wide array of organisations, including governmental research agencies, technological and scientific institutions, universities, SMEs, and non-profit organisations.

The methods of developing these partnerships also differ. While other partners usually invite Taftie agencies, it is less common for consultants to extend such invitations. Although some Taftie agencies have developed consortiums themselves, they generally do not take on that role.

Creating partnerships for Horizon programmes doesn't pose significant difficulty for agencies. When asked to rate the difficulty of developing partnerships on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being extremely easy and 10 being extremely difficult, the average response from the agencies was 4.2. Hence, while it is not viewed as an extremely easy process, it doesn't appear to be one of the most significant challenges they encounter.

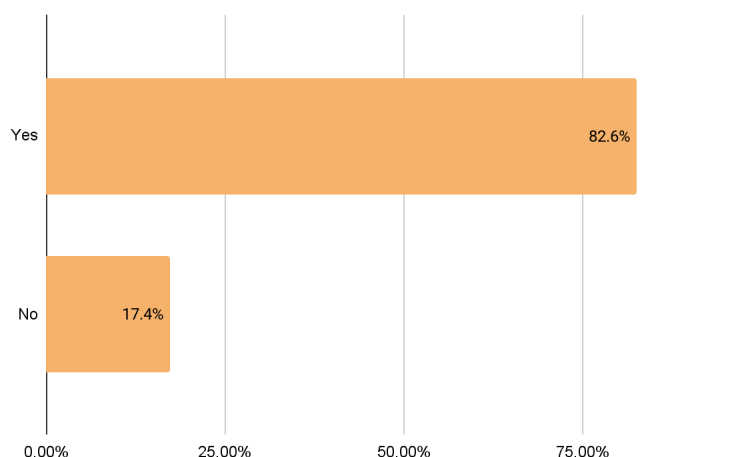
Generally, 70% of the respondent agencies are already collaborating or would be willing to collaborate more with other Taftie agencies on Horizon projects.

There are already examples of Horizon projects involving multiple Taftie members. For instance, TRAMI (the Transnational Cooperation on the Missions Approach) is an EU-funded project focused on making missions work by creating communities of practice, exchanging knowledge, and promoting mutual learning. Eleven Taftie agencies are participating in TRAMI.

EIC/EIT projects

Agencies are also engaged with the European Innovation Council (EIC) and/or the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) programmes. Interestingly, this involvement doesn't necessarily coincide with those delivering Horizon programmes, as some agencies that do not directly participate in Horizon programmes are still involved with EIC/EIT.

Figure 5: Distribution of agencies involved in EIC/EIT programmes



As depicted in Figure 5, up to 82% of agencies are actively engaged in EIC/EIT programmes.

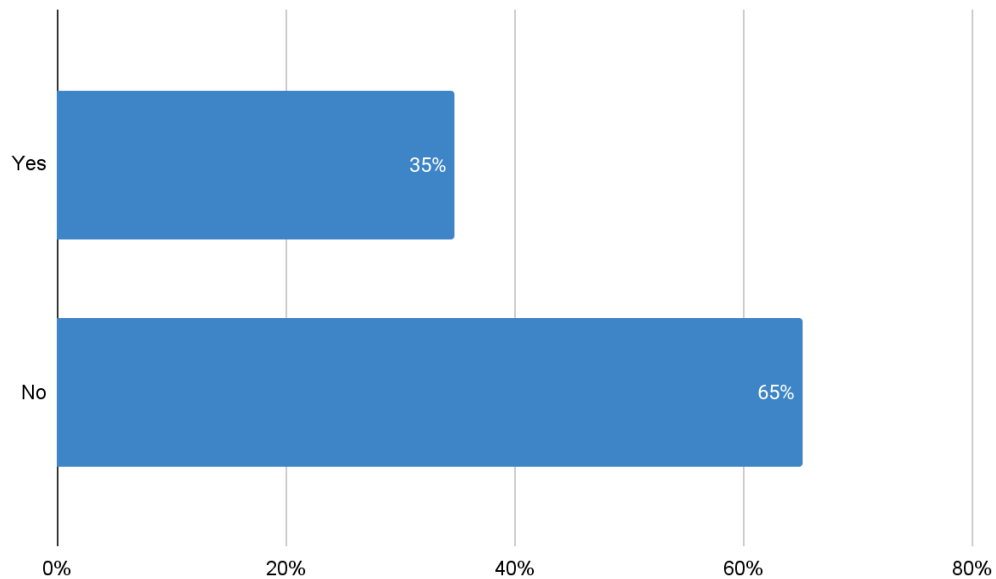
Some respondent agencies advocate for the participation of national stakeholders. In contrast, others are actively involved in initiatives such as the EIC Accelerator, which offers support to startups and small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with breakthrough innovations and high growth potential. National Contact Points (NCPs) are also present and provide information, guidance, technical assistance and feedback to potential or existing beneficiaries. Additionally, agencies are members of the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) and Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), focusing on specific societal challenges such as energy, health, digital technology or climate.

Ecosystem and incentives

In each country, an increasing number of public and private actors are involved in delivering Horizon projects. National research agencies are often the primary organisations responsible for managing and overseeing research efforts at a national level. Nevertheless, other participants contributing to Horizon programmes include ministries and government institutions, universities and academic institutions, Research and Technology Organisations (RTOs) and other research institutions, regional and local agencies, sector-specific agencies, other public institutions, as well as cluster organisations and associations.

According to respondents, some of these organisations possess a high level of expertise when working on Horizon programmes. Generally, agencies identify universities and higher education institutions as possessing the highest level of expertise. However, other research institutions, government or national innovation agencies, and certain specific companies are also mentioned.

Figure 6: Distribution of agencies providing financial incentives

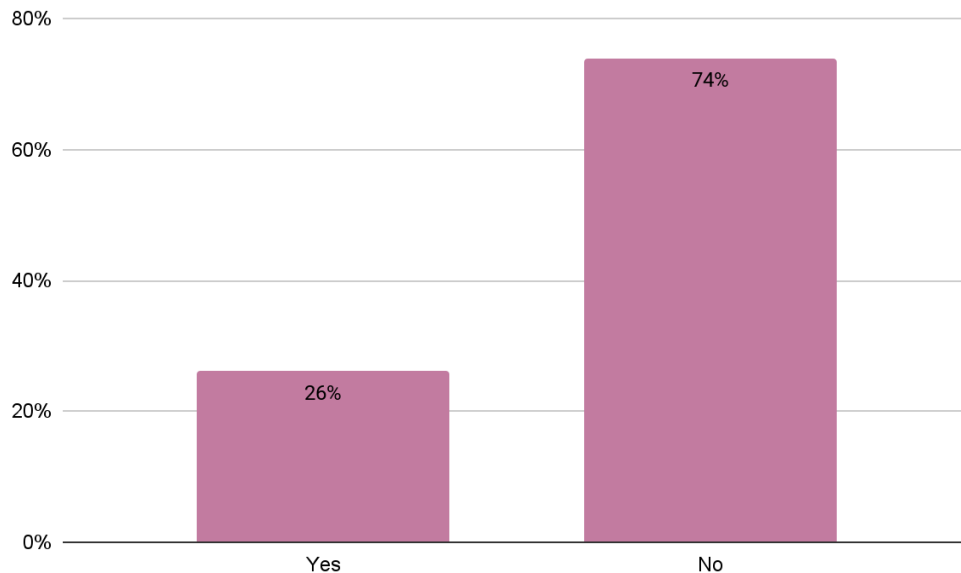


Some agencies provide financial incentives to encourage participation and active involvement in Horizon/EIT/EIC projects. However, this practice is not prevalent among the majority of agencies. As indicated in Figure 6, only 35% of Taftie agencies offer any sort of financial incentives.

The types of financial support these agencies provide vary but can broadly be categorised as follows:

- **Consulting services for proposal development:** Some agencies offer grants to cover the costs associated with preparing for Horizon Europe projects. Some plans cover the cost of a consultant to help draft an application and also include reviewer costs.
- **Cost coverage for project preparation:** Certain agencies offer grants to cover expenses linked with preparing for Horizon Europe projects. This could encompass personnel costs, travel expenses, and other preparatory costs.
- **Funding for project-associated costs:** A handful of agencies offer increased funding rates or funding that could cover costs like personnel, instruments and equipment, research contracts, and other operational expenses.

Figure 7: Distribution of agencies supporting unsuccessful applicants



Nevertheless, as depicted in Figure 7, 74% of agencies do not have funding schemes that provide financial incentives for unsuccessful applications or those with a Seal of Excellence.

There are some exceptions, but they only represent 26% of the sample. These agencies reference specific funding schemes or calls designed to provide financial incentives. The eligible costs mentioned vary but typically include personnel costs, direct costs, subsidies, and indirect costs

Key lessons learned from the agencies

The agencies have gleaned several valuable insights for executing successful Horizon projects throughout the process. The most frequently mentioned lessons include:

1. **Commitment and Readiness:** Having a dedicated team that is fully committed to the application process is essential. This often involves devoting a considerable amount of time and resources to ensure the application's success. The anticipation of administrative burdens and complex processes is advised.
2. **Partnerships and Networking:** Robust partnerships are crucial. Establishing the right consortium and locating the optimal partners can be pivotal to a successful proposal. Collaboration and effective communication, both within the organisation and with external stakeholders, can significantly enhance the chances of a successful application.

3. **Strategic Approach:** It's vital to align with the organisation's long-term and EU strategies. Agencies should be discerning, well-prepared, and fully committed to participating and should invest in absorbing and disseminating the benefits and results of the project.

Part 3: Conclusions and recommendations from insight session discussions

The Insight Session featured keynote talks from a number of expert speakers, including representatives of:

- The European Innovation Council (EIC);
- The European Court of Auditors (ECA);
- Spain's Centre for the Development of Technology and Innovation (CDTI); and
- The European Association of Innovation Consultants (EAIC)

The presentations and panel discussion revealed some useful areas for individual Taftie agencies and the network as a whole to consider as they reflect on how to strengthen partnerships with the major European funding programmes and innovation initiatives.

A key theme was the idea of 'synergies' - understanding where there might be opportunities to combine efforts in order to scale impact. For example, it was suggested that national innovation agencies could usefully complement and support the work of the EIC by identifying the companies and innovators in their own regions that might be good candidates for EIC investments and conducting targeted outreach to direct them towards applying.

Taftie agencies were also encouraged to do more to support companies given a 'Seal of Excellence' by the EIC, i.e. companies that miss out on EIC awards but are considered excellent candidates for investment. A few countries have already made significant investments in the Seal of Excellence recipients. However, this practice is not yet widespread among innovation agencies across Europe.

A final recommendation related to sharing lessons and best practices, with a suggestion that Taftie agencies, the EIC and other relevant bodies should share their experiences supporting disruptive innovation and the challenges and opportunities involved. Further, there was an emphasis on the need to share data and insights on impacts and emerging technology trends to prevent duplication of efforts

The survey of Taftie agencies revealed that there is a clear interest in deepening collaboration within the network on this topic - the next step is to identify areas where fruitful mutual learning could take place. Some suggestions here include:

- sharing lessons learned from supporting SMEs going through application processes for EIC / Horizon funding
- organising joint events
- consolidating feedback on Horizon & EIC instruments and funding schemes to make them easier for companies to understand