

Consultation of the European Commission on the simplification of the implementation of the EU Research Framework Programmes

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Contact: Estelle Barrillon

European Commission
Office[SDME 02/74
B-1049 Brussels

Tel. (32-2) 29-93228

E-mail: estelle.barrillon@ec.europa.eu

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This stakeholder consultation opened in July to collect ideas and suggestions for the planned Communication in 2010 on simplification.

The consultation ended on 30 September. The European Commission has received 294 online contributions.

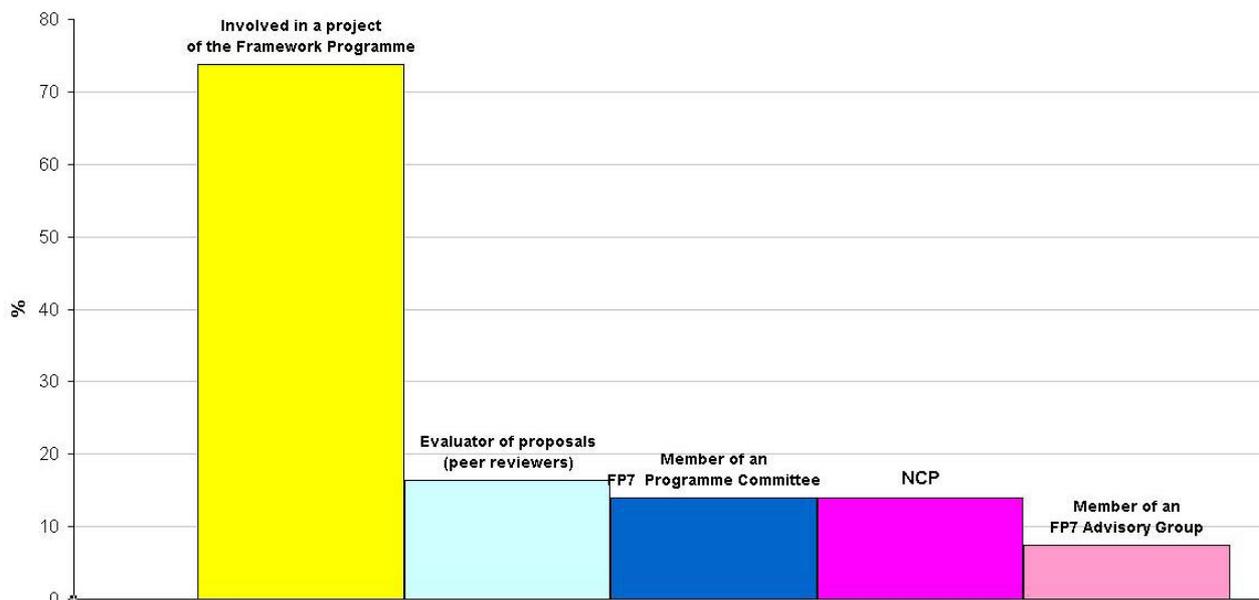
To raise awareness an e-mailing was sent to specific target groups - about 3000 contacts - such as the Programme Committees of the 7th Framework Programme, the National Contact Points (NCPs), the members of the Parliament Committee ITRE, the advisory groups of the 7th Framework Programme and the Council research group (permanent representations). An informal possibility was given to them to send contributions in free format after this date, until the 31 October.

Profile of the respondents

Many of the online contributions are consolidated views from research bodies and other organisation.

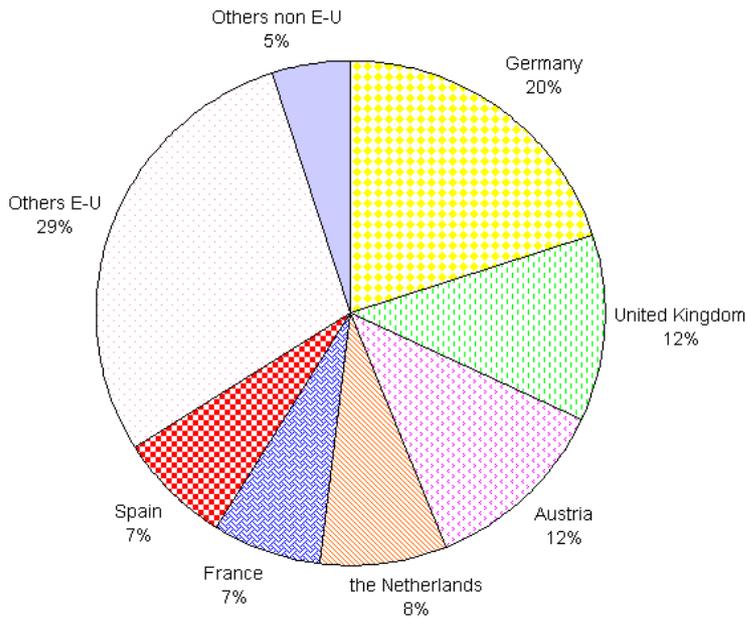
Implication in the Framework Programme

- 75% of the respondents are or have been involved in a project of the Framework Programme;
- 16% are evaluators of proposals (peer reviewers);
- 14% are members of an FP7 Programme Committee;
- 14% are NCPs;
- And 7% are members of an FP7 Advisory Group.



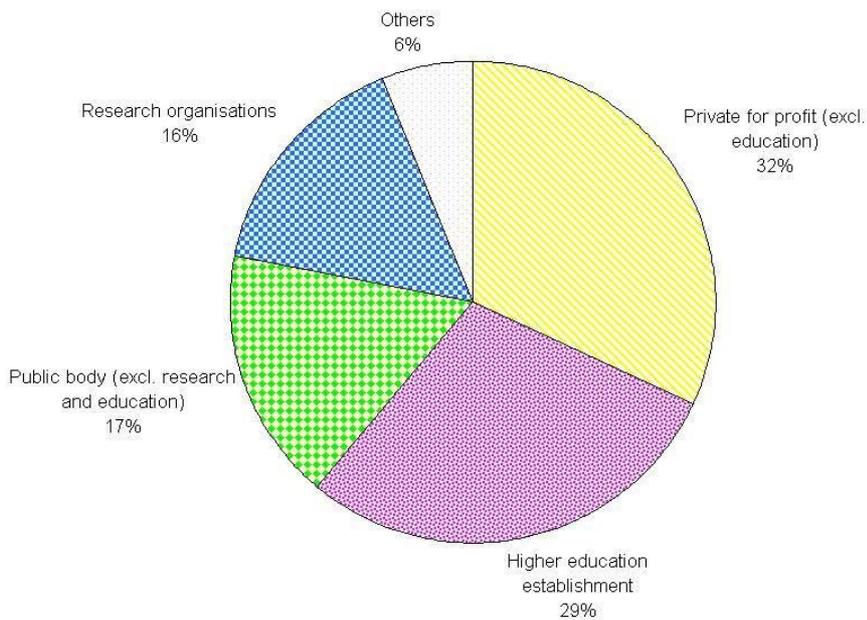
Countries

- All member States are represented.
- 2/3 of the online responses come from a group of countries involving Germany, the United Kingdom, Austria, the Netherlands, France and Spain;
- 29% are coming from the other EU member states; 5% from third countries



Categories

Commercial organisations and universities are well represented.



Recurring themes have been identified along the FP7 “life-cycle”.

Three major themes

- Simplification of the Framework Programme structure and of the corresponding administrative and financial rules
- Improved access to the programme and user support
- Tackling the timing issue: faster execution and optimised timing of deadlines

Two types of suggestions can be distinguished:

- The structural ones, which involve changes in the legal basis, calling for the implication of the legislator (Council and Parliament);
- The practical ones, which the Commission can implement under the current legal framework.

Simplification of the FP structure and rules

Many respondents point to the complexity of portfolios, funding schemes and intervention mechanisms as well as to a lack of coherence and harmonisation of rules between the different mechanisms.

They call for the:

- **Optimisation of the portfolios** - Critical analysis of all the mechanisms used so far before launching FP8 (and adding new ones).
- **Harmonization of the rules and procedures across all mechanisms** - The same set of rules, procedures and legal provisions should be used for programmes like ERA-net, Article 169, Joint Technology Initiatives (JTIs) and the "traditional schemes" of the FP. Respondents request streamlined implementation of these rules across the 4 European Commission Directorates-General and 2 agencies as well as the Joint Undertakings implementing the JTIs.
- **Simplification of the financial accountability requirements:** respondents ask for a more trust-based and risk-tolerant approach in European research funding; acceptance of the usual accounting and management principles and practices of the beneficiary; acceptance of audits and certificates on the methodology provided by national authorities; an assessment of the use of lump sums and of result-based payment vs cost-based payment.

Improvement of access to the programme and user support

The respondents criticise the lack of guidance and call for the adoption of a more user-centric approach at every stage of the project life-cycle:

- Improvement of the guidance material - One Guide for Applicants for each type of applicant (individual, universities, research organisations, SME, industry...); less jargon; consistency of the terminology; user friendly online help...
- Optimisation of the IT-systems supporting project management – Single sign-on to access all the systems through a unique Participant Portal; speed up the signature process by handling it electronically...
- Personalised support by the EU Project Officer - Keep the same Project Officer throughout the lifetime of the project; more workshops on financial reporting and project management...

Faster execution and optimised timing of deadlines

The respondents indicated too long delays as another important bottleneck faced at every stage of the project life cycle, with important impacts in particular on smaller organisations or on the relevancy of the call itself in quickly developing areas.

They invite the Commission to:

- Better timing of the call publication and no deadlines directly after the summer break or at the beginning of the year; permanently open calls
- Extended time for the preparation of proposals - Earlier access to draft Work Programmes;
- Reduce the time to grant and to pay
- More flexibility regarding the reporting periods when a change of deliverables date/scope is required during the project.