Foreword by Marc Tachelet
Director of the Research Executive Agency

I feel honoured to contribute to the current issue of the NCP_WIDE.NET bulletin and to address the readers of this newsletter.

As you know, the Research Executive Agency (REA) was entrusted by the European Commission with certain tasks in the management of the EU Research and Innovation framework programmes. REA managed a number of programmes under FP7 and is continuing to manage their legacy, it is in charge of a significant part of the Horizon 2020 framework programme and its remit will grow further with the introduction of Horizon Europe, which will run from 2021 to 2027.

In addition to launching calls for proposals, running evaluations, signing Grant Agreements and following the project implementation in all of its phases (including interim and final reviews and related payments), we are also responsible for other activities such as contracting and payment of expert evaluators, managing the EC Research Enquiry Service, legal validation and financial capacity assessment of project participants.

Contributors: Anna Vosečková, Kaspars Kalniņš, Kristin Kraav | **Editors: Wojciech Adamiak, Kristin Kraav, Anna Mossolova**

Foreword by Marc Tachelet, REA

An important part of our work is to provide Policy Feedback to our colleagues in the European Commission based on our direct contact with our beneficiaries whose opinions on our actions we value and treasure. We therefore place enormous attention on lessons learnt from projects, in terms of what works well and what needs improvement in order to contribute to the design and development of the best implementing modalities for future actions under the new Research and Innovation framework programme. The idea is to offer a new R&I framework programme which best responds to our clients' needs and expectations. This entails a regular contact with all of our coordinators at every stage of the project lifespan and a frequent exchange with important stakeholders such as our NCPs; to use a well-fitting metaphor, every single instrument in the orchestra is of great value in order to create a beautiful symphony.

The Spreading Excellence and Widening participation Programme (SEWP) was created in H2020 aiming to ''*contribute to the strengthening of research and innovation institutions in Widening countries, producing in parallel important structuring effects at national level and synergies with other EU programmes*.'' The main instruments of SEWP (namely, Teaming, Twinning, ERA Chairs, COST) have fostered the creation of numerous centres of excellence in Widening countries, enhancing networking opportunities, strengthening institutions and promoting institutional changes. Today we have clear signs that these actions have contributed to the increased attractiveness of institutions, they have enhanced research profiles and they have provided a stronger innovation potential with a clear outlook towards sustainability in the Widening community. The internationally leading institutions have equally found these opportunities beneficial in terms of long lasting research collaborations with institutions in Widening countries.

Foreword by Marc Tachelet, REA

Building upon the five years of experience from the start of the SEWP Programme in H2020 and being involved in evaluations, the complete project management cycle and policy feedback, the Research Executive Agency (REA) and its stake-holders play a crucial role in bringing forward the needed recommendations for the preparation of the future Widening actions under Horizon Europe.

The core aim of Teaming as a flagship action of the Widening Programme is institution-building. The creation of new or the upgrade of existing centres of excellence in Widening countries through a coupling process with a leading scientific institution has proved to be a success. The EU financial support to implement a business plan of the future centre of excellence, developed during the phase 1 project and in line with the host region's Smart Specialisation Strategy, has allowed for the development of 25 Centres of Excellence.

To provide a few examples, the **Inno-Renew CoE** in Slovenia is developing an international and interdisciplinary independent Centre of Excellence dealing with renewable materials and sustainable buildings. The **HiLASE CoE project** in the Czech Republic is working on a top class research Centre in advanced laser tech-nology, located in the heart of the new and dynamically developing region STAR (Science and Technology Advanced Re-gion). The new Latvian Teaming Phase 2 project **BBCE** is dealing with an innovative topic of advanced biomaterials develop-ment for bone regeneration and biomed-ical applications which broadly comple-ment one of the Horizon Europe missions linked to health.

As it can be seen from the three Teaming 2 projects presented above, any field of research can be addressed by the WIDENING actions (including ERACHAIRS and TWINNING) as they are so called “bottom-up” thus allowing for a vast range of research topics to be covered.

Foreword by Marc Tachelet, REA

It is not too early to say that the positive impact of Twinning projects from the first H2020 Call is evident. 15 Member States and 13 H2020 Associated Countries (eligible for Widening support) participated in the Twinning action. Twinning policy feedback questionnaires sent to successful coordinators indicate that institutions in the Widening Countries enhanced their scientific and technological capacities and raised their research profiles and research excellence through networking and training activities. This increased the reputation and attractiveness of coordinating institutions and developed new networks. Among our success stories we have projects like **EXCELL** (coordinated by Hungary) dealing with the exploitation of Big Data, **Athena** (coordinated by Cyprus) on Remote Sensing Science Centre for Cultural Heritage, **MaXIMA** (coordinated by Bulgaria) on breast cancer models for X-ray Imaging research and **FOWARIM** (coordinated by Malta) focusing on water-agriculture research.

Finally, the ERA Chairs action provides the means for achieving institutional changes within the ERA Chair host institutions in Widening countries and strengthens their participation in the European Research Area. Successful examples of ERA Chair projects show that the scheme is very beneficial for Widening countries, bringing positive novelties to the institutions involved, contributing to their international visibility, strengthening the attractiveness of the institution and further building research excellence. The first H2020 Call of ERA Chairs already shows tangible impacts. An interesting example of ERA Chairs is the project **CREATE**, at the Institute of Physical Chemistry in Poland, with the ERA Chair Holder who has enormous international experience from USA, UK, Austrian and Australian Universities. The institutional changes through this ERA Chair project contributed to the increased national ranking of the host institution, led to the opening of the new joint interdisciplinary doctorate school and the achievement of a new grant, which will help to establish a centre of excellence.

Foreword by Marc Tachelet, REA

Al these positive examples of SEWP projects indicate the success of the Programme and provide a strong motivation for continuing with the actions in the future.

Turning to proposal evaluations, let me provide you with an overview. With the selection of 97 new projects (20 ERA Chairs and 77 Twinning) in the last two calls, the WIDESPREAD Programme has now completed the execution of all calls for proposals foreseen in H2020. The WIDEPSREAD project portfolio managed by REA amounts to 356 projects, of which 86 Teaming, 59 ERA chairs and 211 Twinning.

In terms of budget, the WIDESPREAD programme has currently implemented its budget for a total amount of 567 M€. This breaks down over the different actions as 293 M€ for Teaming, 128 M€ for Twinning, 146 M€ ERA Chairs. Participation to the last two calls is well in line with the global performance of the programme, which recorded a total of 9475 participations (single applicants).

The largest contribution comes from the Twinning calls with 7859 participations. Runner up is Teaming with 1211 participations. Finally, ERA Chairs totalizes 405 participations in submitted applications.

In the last two calls, we recorded 1793 participants distributed over 439 proposals for Twinning and 114 participants for the same amount of single beneficiary proposals in ERA chairs. The vast majority of applicants—up to 70%—originates from Higher Education Institutes (HES). This is true for all types of WIDEPSREAD calls, albeit to a minor extent for Teaming (56%). The combination of HES and the Research Organisations totalizes about 99% of participants, leaving around 1% to others (mostly private sector and SME). The success ratio compares well with other H2020 programme parts. Overall, WIDESPREAD participants record a success ratio equaling 15%. A slightly better performance was recorded in the last two calls with respectively 17.5% for ERA chairs and 17.6% for Twinning.

Foreword by Marc Tachelet, REA

This is partly due to the increase in budget available for the two calls (69 M€ for Twinning and 50 M€ for ERA chairs).

Call results, including the most recent ones, show that the "catching-up" countries are not equally successful in these calls, and the demand for these actions is high. In my view, this is a clear indication for the needed continuity of these actions in the adapted environment of Horizon Europe. In REA's perspective, from the project implementation side, we can re-confirm the importance of SEWP actions, as they are real stepping-stones for improved R&I and collaborative, managerial capacities of targeted countries.

We all know that the research and innovation divide still constitutes a challenge in Europe. That is why the SEWP actions were introduced in H2020 to help the targeted countries to catch up in terms of R&I intensity and R&I performance, thereby facilitating their wider participation in Framework Programmes.

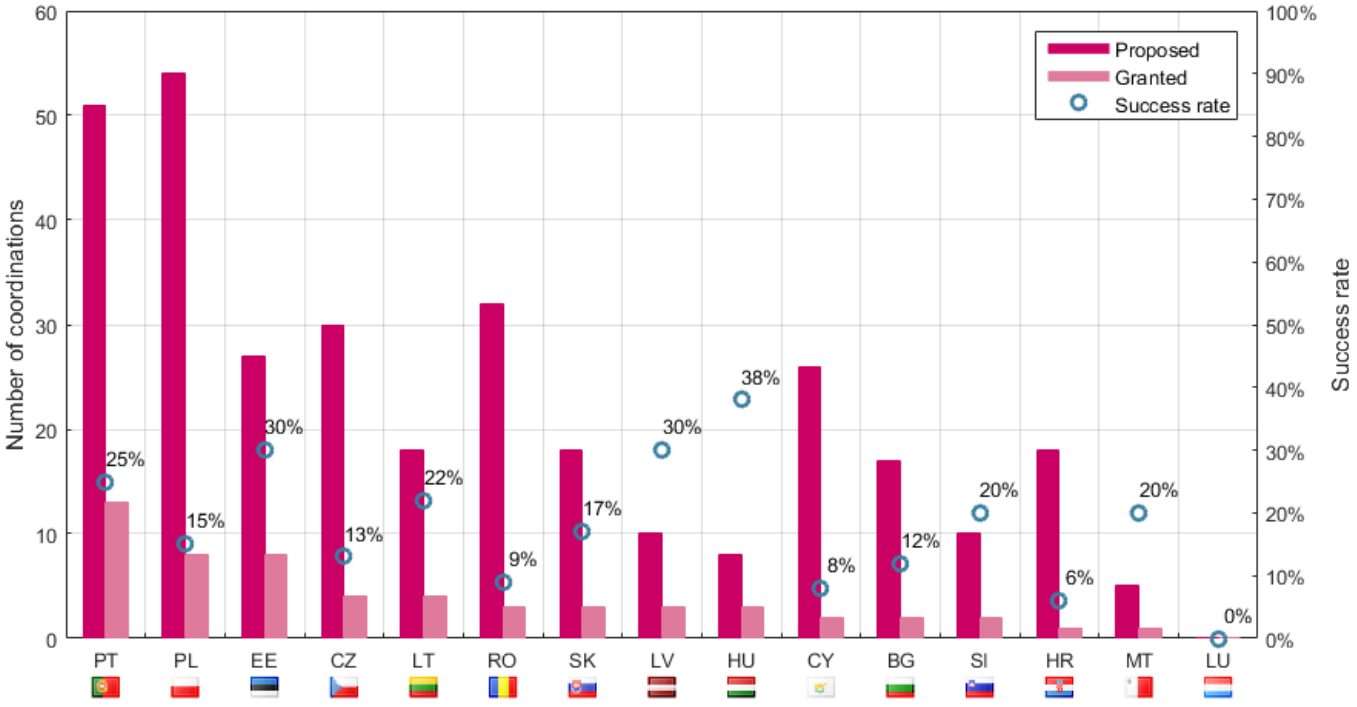
So far, important results have been achieved which we can all be proud of but a lot of work still needs to be done in this direction, hence the importance of continuing with the Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation Programme in Horizon Europe.

Marc Tachelet
Director, Research Executive Agency

Statistics of the 2020 Twinning and ERA Chairs calls

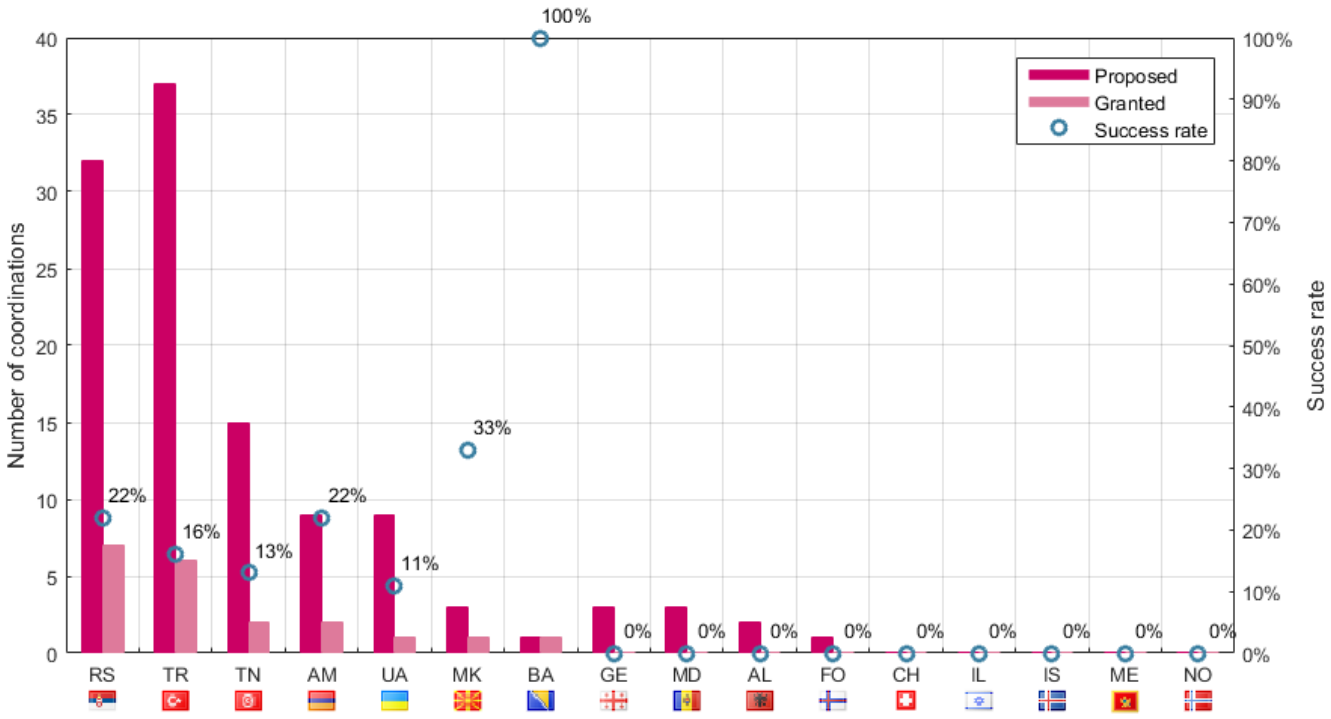
In the following 15 pages you will find **the analysis of the 2020 Twinning and ERA Chairs calls**, (with the deadline on 14 November 2019) in comparison to the previous call. The data is based on succesful proposals, as information on the signed grants was not yet available at the time of writing this article.

As coordinators of 2020 Twinning proposals, PL and LT have increased most compared to past performance. While PL has the highest number of proposals, PT has secured its lead as the country with the highest number of funded projects. HR and CY saw high oversubscription in 2020.



Twinning 2020: Coordination. EU widening countries

Statistics of the 2020 Twinning and ERA Chairs calls

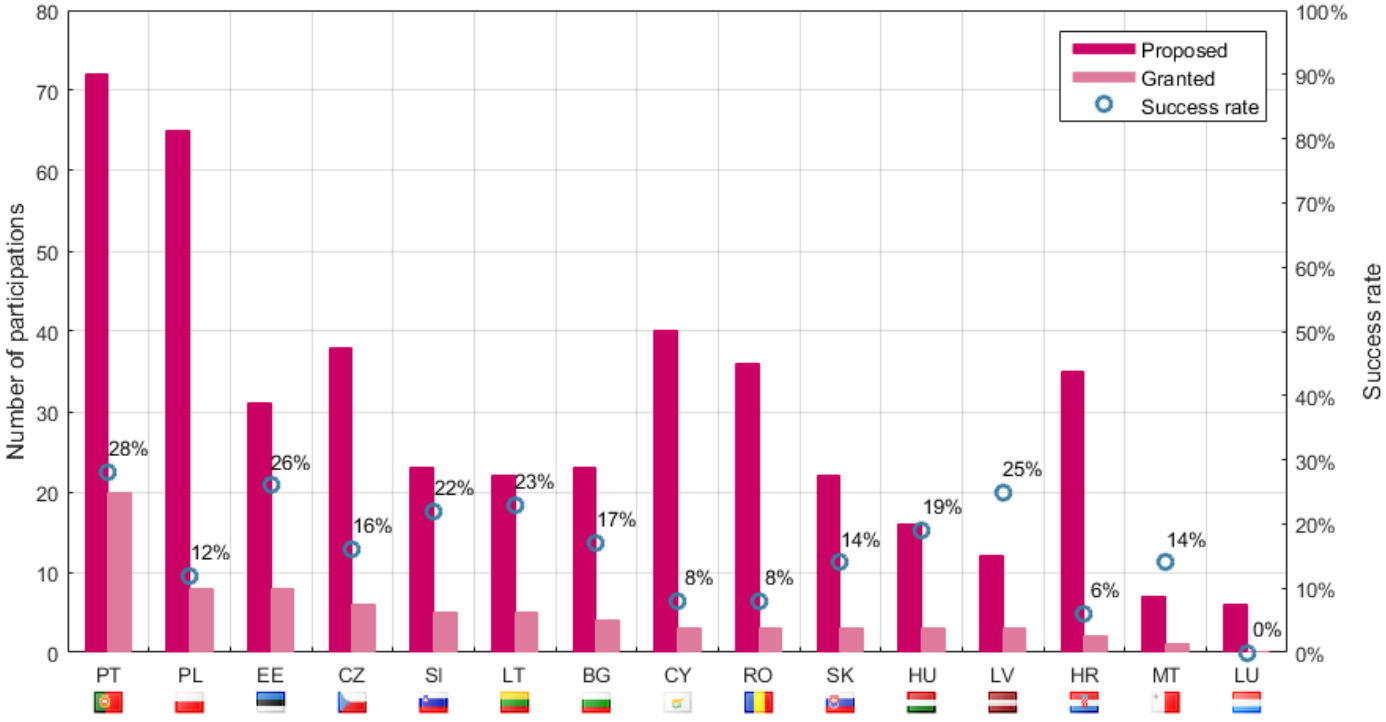


Twinning 2020: Coordination. Associated widening countries

RS continues to be a strong player and increases its success rate considerably. TR is the country with the biggest increase in submitted proposals in this group. MK and BA join the club with their first successful proposals!

Statistics of the 2020 Twinning and ERA Chairs calls

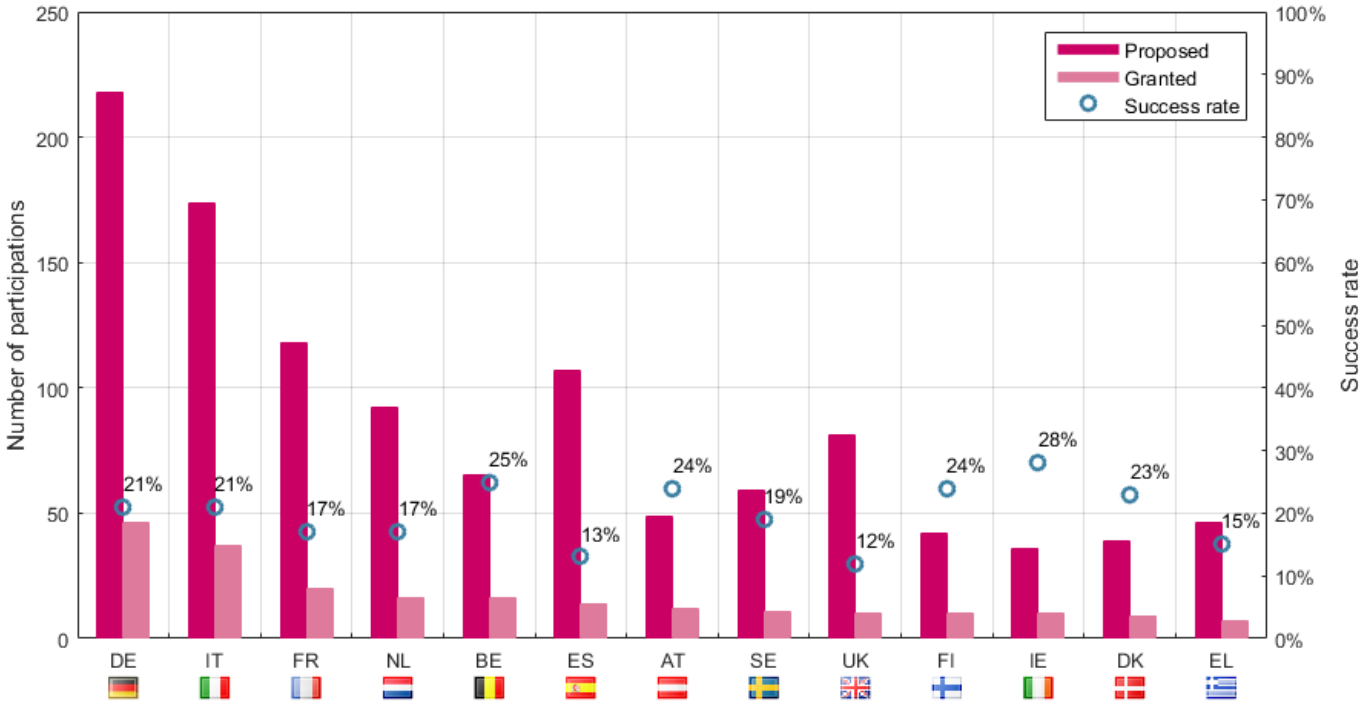
Considering participation in the call as a whole, both as coordinator and partner, PT is the overall winner. LT and BG saw most improvement, while HR experienced a drop in the success rate.



Twinning 2020: Participations. EU widening countries

Statistics of the 2020 Twinning and ERA Chairs calls

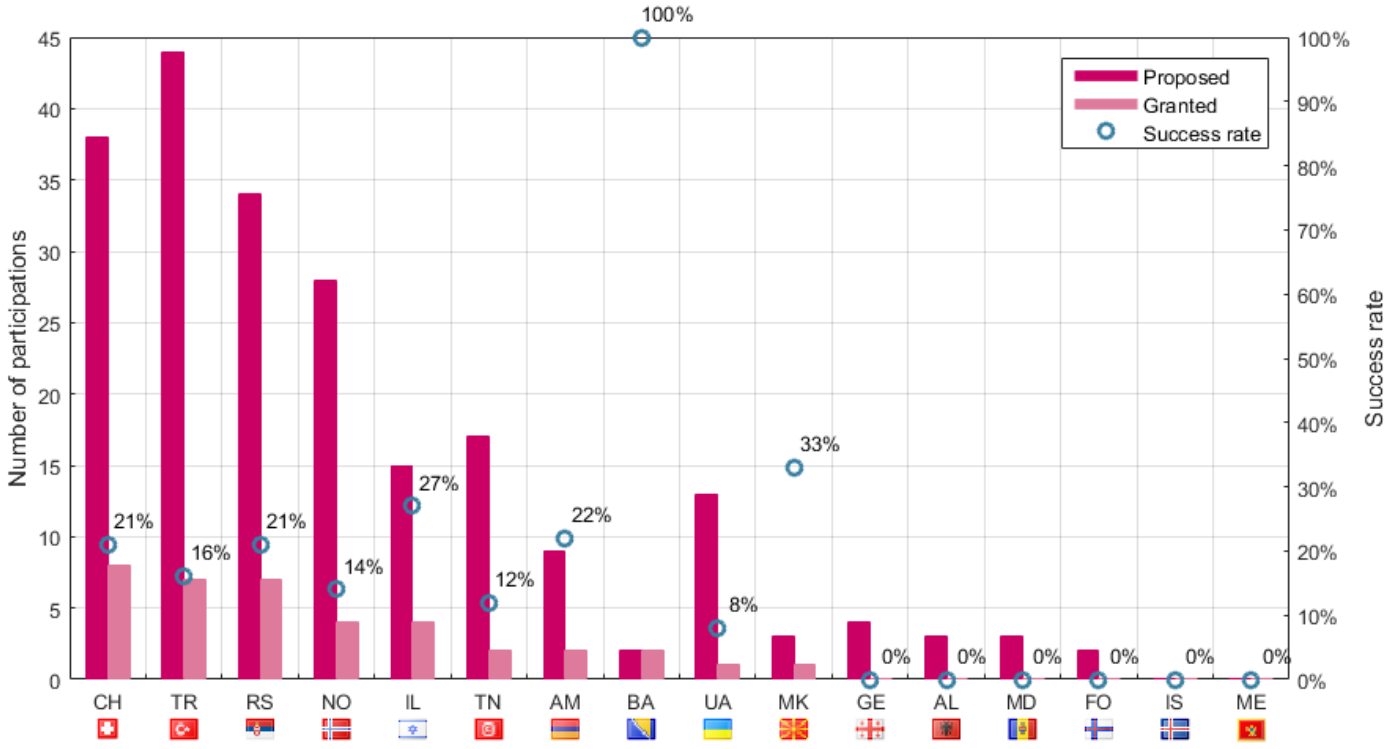
Among advanced partner countries, UK has lost its appeal due to BREXIT uncertainties. While a leader until now, in the last call we can see it only in the 9th position.



Twinning 2020: Participations. EU non-widening countries

Statistics of the 2020 Twinning and ERA Chairs calls

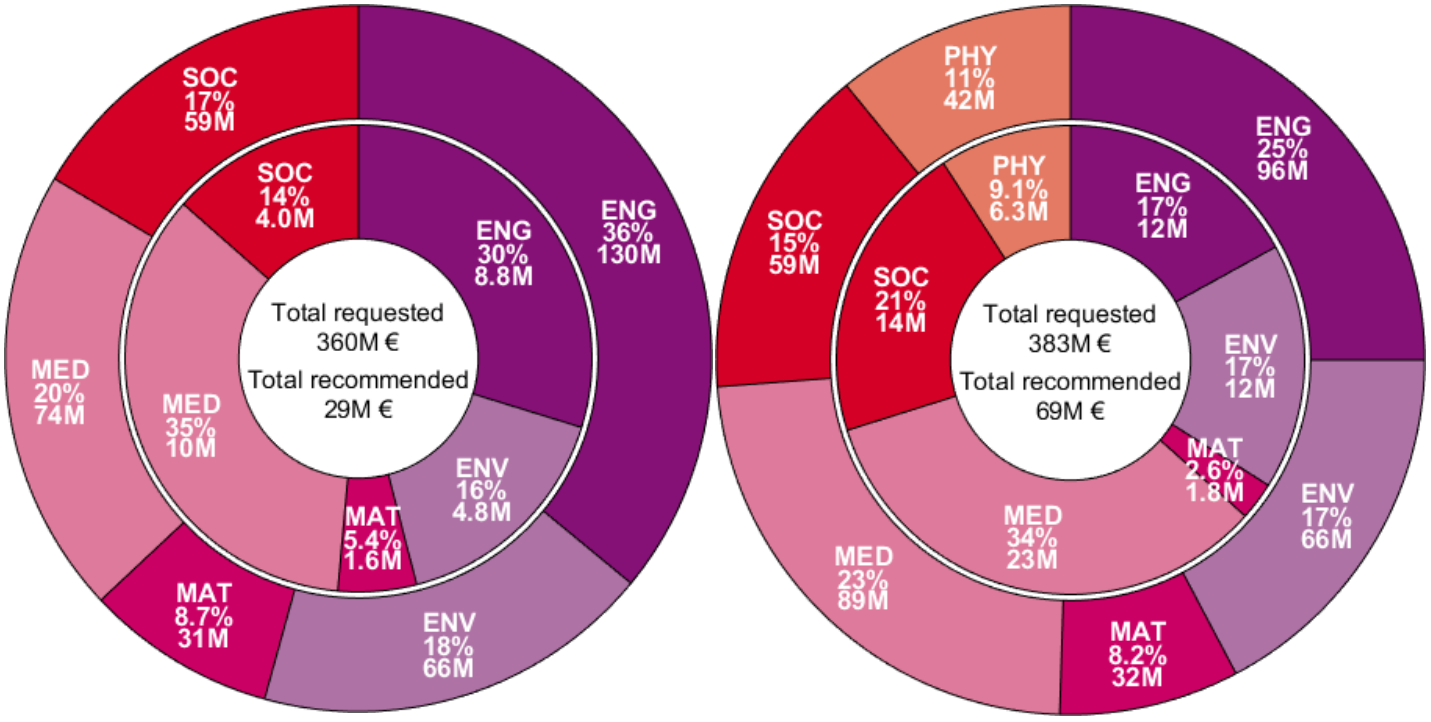
Among Associated Countries, TR stands out with the largest number of proposals. CH enjoys continued popularity as an advanced partner country.



Twinning 2020: Participations. Associated countries

Statistics of the 2020 Twinning and ERA Chairs calls

An interesting picture is revealed by comparing fields of research of the 2018 and 2020 Twinning calls. In 2018, engineering panel was the most oversubscribed, while medical sciences enjoyed a high success rate. Doubling of the call budget in 2020 increased the number of funded projects twofold. The large share of physics proposals merited a new panel. Mathematics proposals were not as successful this year.



Twinning 2018 (left) and 2020 (right):
Percentage of granted vs. submitted proposals by field panels

Statistics of the 2020 Twinning and ERA Chairs calls

Proposed

	ENG	ENV	MAT	MED	SOC
AL	2	1	0	1	1
AM	5	3	2	2	0
AT	0	0	0	0	0
BA	0	1	0	1	0
BE	0	0	0	0	0
BG	4	1	1	5	3
CH	0	0	0	0	0
CY	9	4	2	5	6
CZ	14	8	7	8	2
DE	0	0	0	0	0
DK	0	0	0	0	0
EE	4	4	0	1	11
EL	0	0	0	0	0
ES	0	0	0	0	0
FI	0	0	0	0	0
FO	0	0	0	0	0
FR	0	0	0	0	0
GE	0	3	1	0	0
HR	9	4	2	4	5
HU	3	0	3	4	1
IE	0	0	0	0	0
IL	0	0	0	0	0
IS	0	0	0	0	0
IT	0	0	0	0	0
LT	6	2	2	3	4
LU	1	0	0	1	0
LV	6	2	1	2	1
MD	1	0	1	0	0
ME	0	1	0	0	0
MK	4	0	0	0	1
MT	2	0	2	1	4
NL	0	0	0	0	0
NO	0	0	0	0	0
PL	18	7	3	9	8
PT	20	12	1	22	6
RO	14	7	2	8	11
RS	12	4	3	3	2
SE	0	0	0	0	0
SI	2	1	3	3	1
SK	7	4	0	3	4
TN	4	3	2	4	1
TR	9	9	1	1	3
UA	8	2	1	2	1
UK	0	0	0	0	0

Funded

	ENG	ENV	MAT	MED	SOC
AL	0	0	0	0	0
AM	1	0	0	1	0
AT	0	0	0	0	0
BA	0	0	0	0	0
BE	0	0	0	0	0
BG	0	0	0	0	0
CH	0	0	0	0	0
CY	0	0	1	0	0
CZ	2	1	0	1	0
DE	0	0	0	0	0
DK	0	0	0	0	0
EE	1	1	0	1	2
EL	0	0	0	0	0
ES	0	0	0	0	0
FI	0	0	0	0	0
FO	0	0	0	0	0
FR	0	0	0	0	0
GE	0	0	0	0	0
HR	0	0	1	0	0
HU	0	0	0	0	0
IE	0	0	0	0	0
IL	0	0	0	0	0
IS	0	0	0	0	0
IT	0	0	0	0	0
LT	0	0	0	0	0
LU	0	0	0	0	0
LV	0	1	0	1	0
MD	0	0	0	0	0
ME	0	0	0	0	0
MK	0	0	0	0	0
MT	2	0	0	0	0
NL	0	0	0	0	0
NO	0	0	0	0	0
PL	0	2	0	1	0
PT	2	0	0	4	1
RO	1	0	0	0	0
RS	2	0	0	0	1
SE	0	0	0	0	0
SI	0	0	0	1	0
SK	0	0	0	1	0
TN	0	0	0	1	1
TR	0	1	0	0	0
UA	0	0	0	1	0
UK	0	0	0	0	0

Twinning 2018 panels

Analyzing submitted projects per panel and by country of the coordinator, we see an interesting pattern. Not always are the most popular subjects the most successful.

Statistics of the 2020 Twinning and ERA Chairs calls

Proposed

	ENG	ENV	MAT	MED	SOC	PHY
AL	1	1	0	0	0	0
AM	1	3	0	1	0	4
AT	0	0	0	0	0	0
BA	0	1	0	0	0	0
BE	0	0	0	0	0	0
BG	6	2	1	1	5	2
CH	0	0	0	0	0	0
CY	10	3	3	4	4	2
CZ	5	7	1	6	1	10
DE	0	0	0	0	0	0
DK	0	0	0	0	0	0
EE	5	3	1	5	12	0
EL	0	0	0	0	0	0
ES	0	0	0	0	0	0
FI	0	0	0	0	0	0
FO	1	0	0	0	0	0
FR	0	0	0	0	0	0
GE	0	0	1	0	0	2
HR	7	3	2	0	4	2
HU	2	0	0	5	0	1
IE	0	0	0	0	0	0
IL	0	0	0	0	0	0
IS	0	0	0	0	0	0
IT	0	0	0	0	0	0
LT	3	3	3	4	4	1
LU	0	0	0	0	0	0
LV	4	0	1	3	1	0
MD	2	1	0	0	0	0
ME	0	0	0	0	0	0
MK	1	0	0	2	0	0
MT	1	1	0	1	2	0
NL	0	0	0	0	0	0
NO	0	0	0	0	0	0
PL	12	9	3	13	9	8
PT	10	9	6	18	6	2
RO	6	6	4	8	4	4
RS	8	8	0	10	2	4
SE	0	0	0	0	0	0
SI	3	0	1	3	2	1
SK	3	4	3	4	2	2
TN	4	3	2	3	1	2
TR	11	8	1	8	8	1
UA	3	0	3	2	0	1
UK	0	0	0	0	0	0

Funded

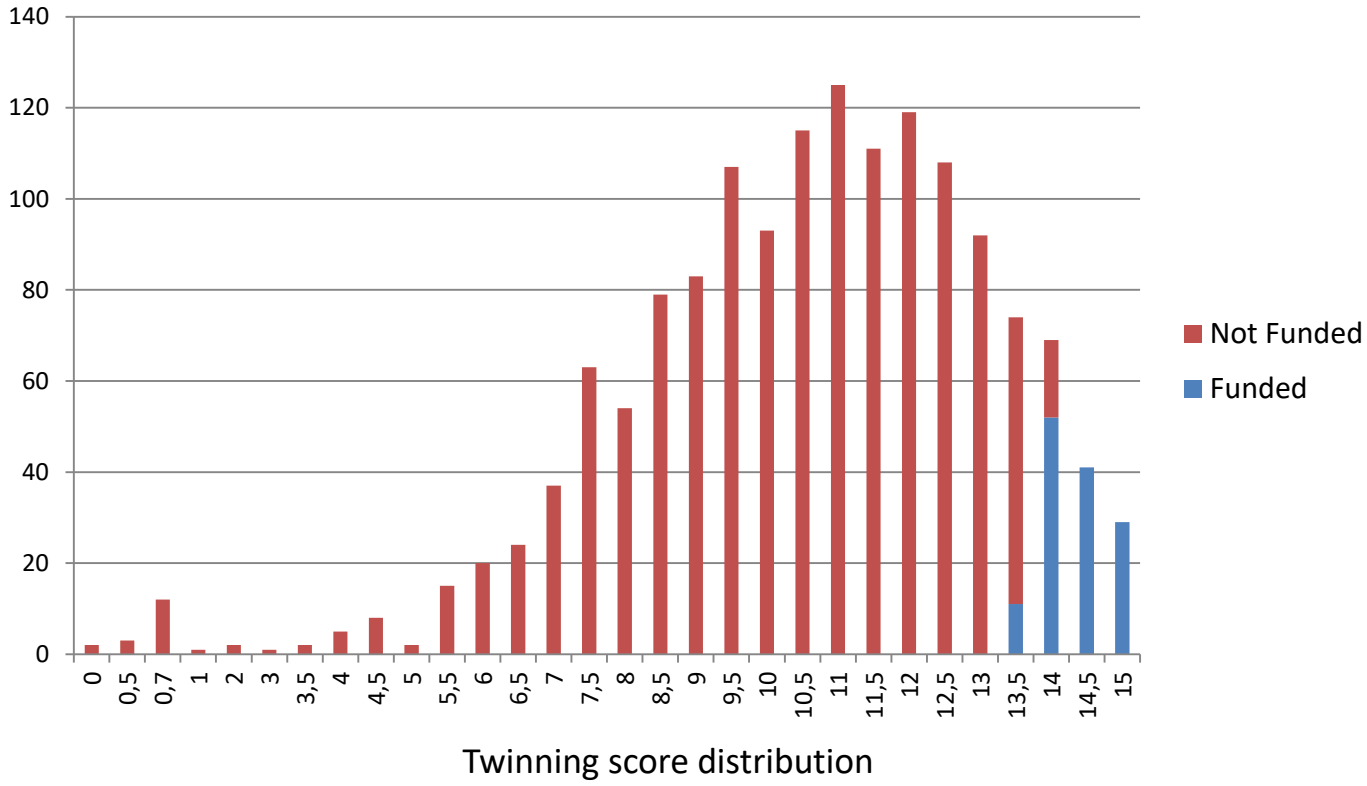
	ENG	ENV	MAT	MED	SOC	PHY
AL	0	0	0	0	0	0
AM	0	0	0	1	0	1
AT	0	0	0	0	0	0
BA	0	1	0	0	0	0
BE	0	0	0	0	0	0
BG	0	0	0	0	1	1
CH	0	0	0	0	0	0
CY	1	0	0	0	1	0
CZ	0	1	0	2	0	1
DE	0	0	0	0	0	0
DK	0	0	0	0	0	0
EE	1	1	0	1	5	0
EL	0	0	0	0	0	0
ES	0	0	0	0	0	0
FI	0	0	0	0	0	0
FO	0	0	0	0	0	0
FR	0	0	0	0	0	0
GE	0	0	0	0	0	0
HR	0	0	0	0	1	0
HU	1	0	0	2	0	0
IE	0	0	0	0	0	0
IL	0	0	0	0	0	0
IS	0	0	0	0	0	0
IT	0	0	0	0	0	0
LT	0	1	1	1	1	0
LU	0	0	0	0	0	0
LV	1	0	0	2	0	0
MD	0	0	0	0	0	0
ME	0	0	0	0	0	0
MK	0	0	0	1	0	0
MT	1	0	0	0	0	0
NL	0	0	0	0	0	0
NO	0	0	0	0	0	0
PL	1	1	0	2	2	2
PT	2	4	1	5	0	1
RO	1	0	0	1	1	0
RS	2	3	0	2	0	0
SE	0	0	0	0	0	0
SI	1	0	0	1	0	0
SK	0	0	0	2	1	0
TN	0	0	0	1	0	1
TR	1	1	0	1	3	0
UA	0	0	0	1	0	0
UK	0	0	0	0	0	0

Twinning 2020 panels

With one more panel in 2020, but many more funded proposals due to increased budget, the patchwork in 2020 is even more diverse. Not one country has a funded project in all 6 fields.

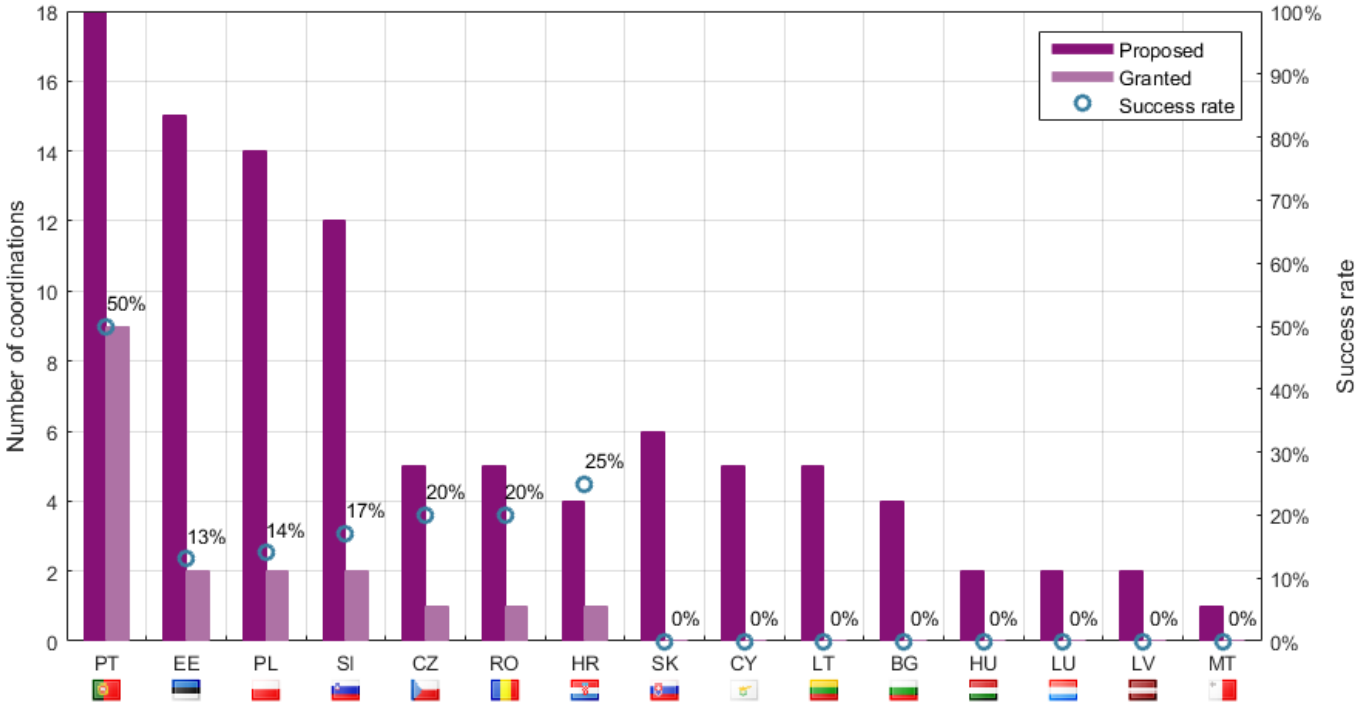
Statistics of the 2020 Twinning and ERA Chairs calls

Looking at the scores of Twinning proposals over the years we can see that in some calls, even a score as high as 14 was not enough to get funded. Competition is tough and even minor shortcomings can be fatal.



Statistics of the 2020 Twinning and ERA Chairs calls

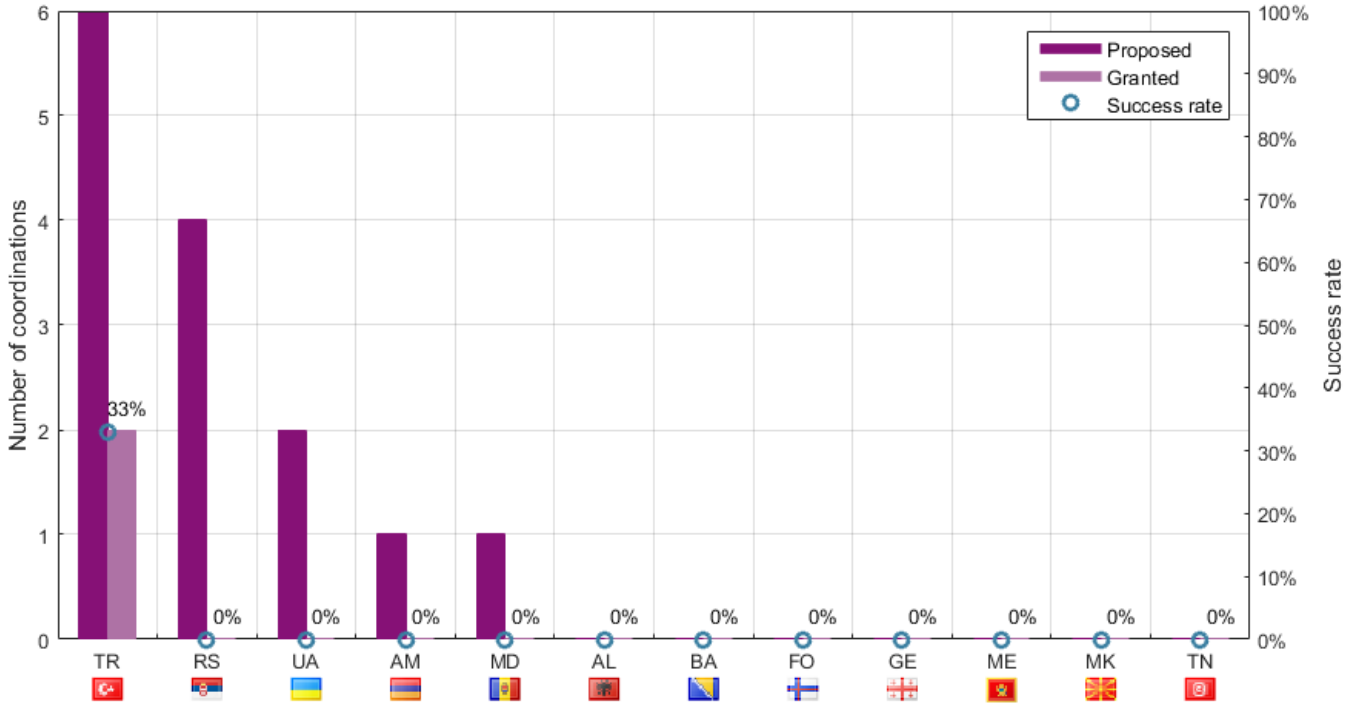
PT sky rocketed to the top with 9 successful ERA Chairs proposals in 2020. HU, LV and MT find themselves without a funded ERA Chair by the end of Horizon 2020.



ERA Chairs 2020: Coordination. EU widening countries

Statistics of the 2020 Twinning and ERA Chairs calls

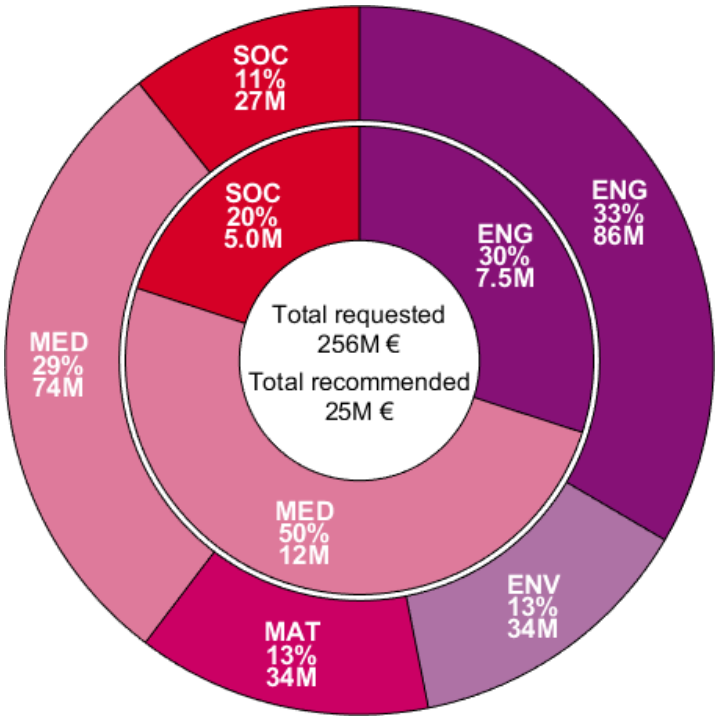
TR made a tiger leap and joined the club of Associated countries with at least one ERA Chair – with RS.

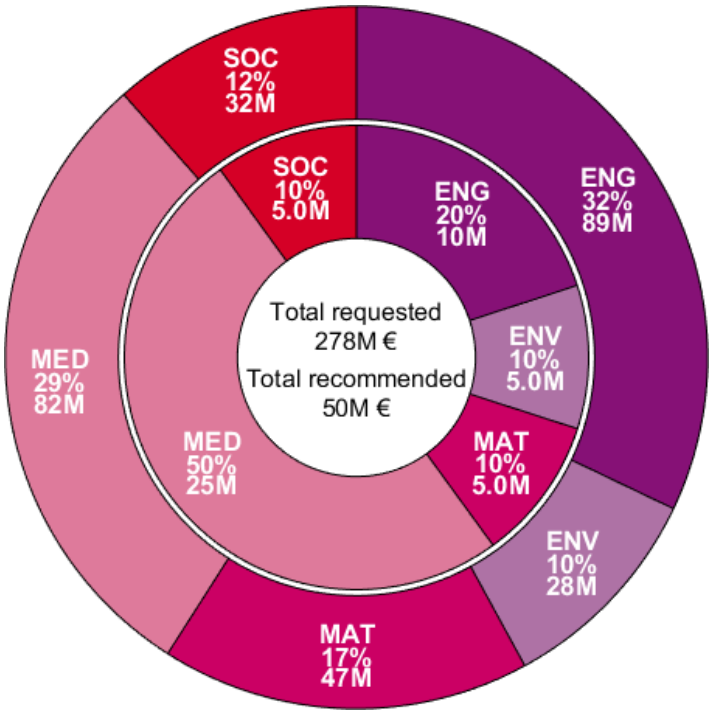


ERA Chairs 2020: Coordination. Associated widening countries

Statistics of the 2020 Twinning and ERA Chairs calls

Social sciences and medicine were the most successful panels in 2019, with environment drawing a blank. In 2020, the picture is more balanced – with medicine still in the lead.





ERA Chair 2019(left) and 2020 (right):
Percentage of granted vs. submitted proposal by field panels

Statistics of the 2020 Twinning and ERA Chairs calls

Proposed

	ENG	ENV	MAT	MED	SOC
AL	0	0	0	0	1
AM	1	0	0	1	0
BA	0	0	0	0	0
BG	0	0	1	2	1
CY	2	0	3	1	1
CZ	2	0	1	3	0
EE	2	2	2	3	2
FO	0	0	0	0	0
GE	0	0	0	0	1
HR	3	1	0	0	0
HU	0	0	0	0	0
LT	2	0	1	0	0
LU	0	0	1	0	0
LV	4	0	0	2	0
MD	1	0	0	0	0
ME	0	0	0	1	0
MK	0	0	0	0	0
MT	0	0	1	0	1
PL	2	3	1	5	1
PT	3	2	2	9	3
RO	0	0	0	0	0
RS	1	4	0	1	0
SI	6	2	0	1	0
SK	5	0	0	0	0
TN	0	0	0	0	0
TR	0	0	0	1	0
UA	2	0	1	0	0

Funded

	ENG	ENV	MAT	MED	SOC
AL	0	0	0	0	0
AM	0	0	0	0	0
BA	0	0	0	0	0
BG	0	0	0	1	0
CY	0	0	0	0	1
CZ	0	0	0	2	0
EE	1	0	0	0	1
FO	0	0	0	0	0
GE	0	0	0	0	0
HR	0	0	0	0	0
HU	0	0	0	0	0
LT	0	0	0	0	0
LU	0	0	0	0	0
LV	0	0	0	0	0
MD	0	0	0	0	0
ME	0	0	0	0	0
MK	0	0	0	0	0
MT	0	0	0	0	0
PL	0	0	0	1	0
PT	1	0	0	1	0
RO	0	0	0	0	0
RS	1	0	0	0	0
SI	0	0	0	0	0
SK	0	0	0	0	0
TN	0	0	0	0	0
TR	0	0	0	0	0
UA	0	0	0	0	0

ERA Chairs 2019 panels

Statistics of the 2020 Twinning and ERA Chairs calls

Proposed

	ENG	ENV	MAT	MED	SOC
AL	0	0	0	0	0
AM	0	0	0	1	0
BA	0	0	0	0	0
BG	0	0	3	0	1
CY	2	0	3	0	0
CZ	1	1	1	2	0
EE	5	1	1	3	5
FO	0	0	0	0	0
GE	0	0	0	0	0
HR	2	0	2	0	0
HU	0	0	0	1	1
LT	4	1	0	0	0
LU	0	0	1	1	0
LV	0	0	1	1	0
MD	1	0	0	0	0
ME	0	0	0	0	0
MK	0	0	0	0	0
MT	0	0	1	0	0
PL	3	2	0	8	1
PT	4	3	2	6	3
RO	2	0	1	2	0
RS	0	2	0	2	0
SI	6	2	0	3	1
SK	2	0	2	1	1
TN	0	0	0	0	0
TR	3	0	0	3	0
UA	1	0	1	0	0

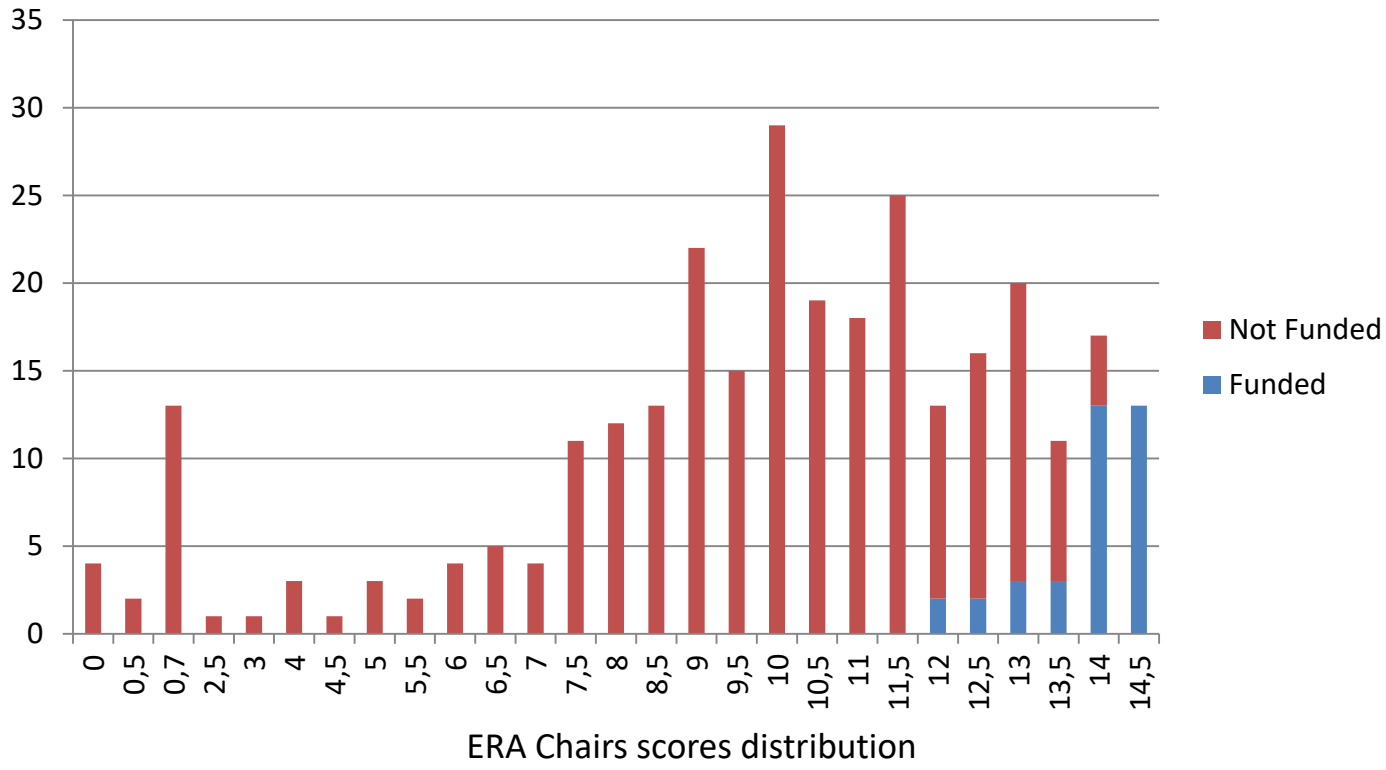
Funded

	ENG	ENV	MAT	MED	SOC
AL	0	0	0	0	0
AM	0	0	0	0	0
BA	0	0	0	0	0
BG	0	0	0	0	0
CY	0	0	0	0	0
CZ	0	1	0	0	0
EE	1	0	1	0	0
FO	0	0	0	0	0
GE	0	0	0	0	0
HR	0	0	1	0	0
HU	0	0	0	0	0
LT	0	0	0	0	0
LU	0	0	0	0	0
LV	0	0	0	0	0
MD	0	0	0	0	0
ME	0	0	0	0	0
MK	0	0	0	0	0
MT	0	0	0	0	0
PL	1	0	0	1	0
PT	1	1	0	5	2
RO	0	0	0	1	0
RS	0	0	0	0	0
SI	1	0	0	1	0
SK	0	0	0	0	0
TN	0	0	0	0	0
TR	0	0	0	2	0
UA	0	0	0	0	0

ERA Chairs 2020 panels

Statistics of the 2020 Twinning and ERA Chairs calls

Evaluators have yet to give a maximum score to an ERA Chair proposal! In the first calls of ERA Chairs, it was relatively easier to get funded.



ERA Chairs scores distribution

Author: Kaspars Kalniņš
WIDESPREAD NCP
VIAA, Latvia

Impact of COST, as assessed by two recent studies

The first **Impact Assessment Study**, which was 77 pages long and published on 3 June 2019, was initiated by **the COST Association** and executed by a consortium: the French consulting firm Erdyn and the Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI) from Austria. **The main aim was to assess whether participation in a COST Action has a positive effect on the professional development and career advancement of researchers and innovators. The field work was done during the period** between February and April 2019, and was followed by an in-depth analysis. Two main tools were used to collect the methodological data. The first was an online survey targeting 10,000 participants of COST Actions that ran in 2015–2017. The response rate was an exceptional 45.4%, or 4,543 respondents out of the 10,000. The second tool used was an in-depth phone interview with 30 participants who hold a leadership position in COST Actions. Special attention was paid to the career development of participants from Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITCs)—Widening Countries.

Main findings

- 88% of the survey respondents said COST had a strong or very strong impact on their careers and rated this impact from 3 to 5 (on a scale of 0 to 5). This was confirmed by all interviewees – they said that COST had enhanced their personal position and influenced their career track.
- COST has a larger positive impact on researchers' careers in an indirect way (by helping them establish new connections, start new collaborations and enhancing their reputation in the scientific community), while the direct impact (new career opportunities) comes in 5–10 years' time. Several Action leaders got a permanent position or were able to build their own research group thanks to their leadership position.
- Some groups of researchers clearly benefit more from their participation in COST. This is particularly the case for younger researchers, researchers in a leadership position, female researchers, researchers with multiple participations, researchers from ITCs and those from non-COST countries.

Impact of COST, as assessed by two recent studies

- COST significantly helps younger researchers (doctoral students and post-doctoral researchers) with networking. This leads them to new projects, new ideas and new collaborations. Actions are used as a pool to recruit younger researchers, e.g. those who have been doing a PhD in the Action's framework.
- Researchers from ITCs are more likely to become involved in COST Actions without previous connections to any of the other participants beforehand. Five out of the six countries with which most new networking links were created are ITCs: Serbia, Bulgaria, Portugal, Poland and Croatia.

Nevertheless, some weaknesses and suggestions for improvement were also mentioned, especially in qualitative interviews. The main concerns that the interviewees had were the relatively high administrative burden needed to manage COST Actions. One suggestion was that annual budgeting should be replaced by a budget covering the whole Action duration.

Another weakness frequently mentioned was the way Management Committee members are selected. The interviewees called for more transparency and a co-decision right for Chairs in the selection process.

In conclusion, the study stated that overall, the beneficiaries rated the COST programme very highly. All the researchers interviewed managed to expand their network thanks to being involved in a COST Action. They confirmed that the purpose of COST – to develop and expand a network of research colleagues in Europe – was definitely fulfilled. COST Actions also lead to publications and new projects (e.g. in H2020, EUROSTARS, national programmes). COST Actions have even helped to establish a new research field in some countries like Portugal, Serbia or Slovenia.

Read the entire study for more details.

Impact of COST, as assessed by two recent studies

The Benefit and Impact of COST for Germany, which was 155 pages long and published in October 2018, was written based on a study undertaken by the German consulting firm Prognos AG for the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). It was available only in German until 13 August 2019, when the BMBF published a 10-page English summary.

The main aim of the study, which ran between December 2017 and August 2018, was to survey Germany's participation in COST and evaluate it quantitatively and qualitatively, including the impact it had on researchers. Data were collected by means of two extensive online surveys of around 780 respondents, and 30 interviews with relevant experts (members of review panels and the Scientific Committee, German research policy representatives, the European Commission etc.). Further-more, 125 final COST reports and five case studies were reviewed.

Analysis shows that COST has a considerable impact not only on research in Germany but on the whole European Research Area as well. In particular, its networking support has significant direct and indirect effects on individual researchers and their institutions. Thanks to COST, some changes could also be made at the level of research and innovation systems. The study divides the effects of COST into two groups: immediate effects (improved quality of networking, trust-building, promotion of interdisciplinary partnerships, publications and follow-up projects) and longer-term effects (better circulation of knowledge in ERA, improved productivity, and establishment of new interdisciplinary research fields).

cost
EUROPEAN COOPERATION
IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Impact of COST, as assessed by two recent studies

The study elaborates on the further development of COST much more than the COST report itself does. Recommendations have been grouped based on three main levels: the programme level, the European level and the national (German) level. For the sake of this article, programme-level recommendations are mentioned. They are:

- Further ensure the accessibility and thematic openness of COST and guarantee that the core features (strengths) of COST are maintained along with the existing scientific evaluation criteria. Introducing further rules to increase the quota of participating ITCs is not recommended; existing instruments and programmes, such as Teaming and Twinning, should be used instead.
- Better communicate the programme profile of COST, specifically that it focuses on providing funding for networking. It should not be seen merely as an "entry programme" for European funding, although it is true that COST Actions participants are generally very successful in submitting proposals for subsequent projects, including in EU programmes.
- Increase the success rate of submissions under COST, e.g. by increasing the programme's budget or reducing the number of applications submitted, or improve the comparability of the evaluations independent of specific assessment cultures in various research disciplines.
- Improve the quality of scientific evaluation by independent external experts (IEEs) by considering the following measures: improve the training of IEEs, strengthen the role of the Review Panels (RPs) in the qualitative scientific review of expert evaluations, and strengthen the feedback loop between the Review Panels and the COST Administration with regard to the quality of the evaluators.

Impact of COST, as assessed by two recent studies

- Considering the low success rate, introduce a two-stage proposal submission procedure. Only draft proposals would be required at the first stage, and only those who have submitted promising proposals should be invited to submit detailed proposals. This would mean that applications with no chance of success could be eliminated earlier on in the application process.
- Pursue scientific excellence by making the procedure of appointing Management Committee (MC) members more transparent. Chairs/Main Pro-posers should have more power to refuse unsuitable MC members and ensure the active cooperation of all participants. The goal of using 80% of the COST budget for “widening actions” in Horizon Europe might substantially restrict open parti-cipation as a core element of COST.

Author:
Anna Vosečková,
WIDESPREAD NCP
Czechia

"READ ME" – Recommended Publications

Coronavirus research and innovation

The European Commission has been at the forefront of supporting research and innovation and coordinating European and global research efforts, including preparedness for pandemics. The Commission launched several special actions in 2020 that address epidemiology, preparedness and response to outbreaks, the development of diagnostics, treatments and vaccines, as well as the infrastructures and resources that enable this research.
More information

ECML COVID

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, **the Joint Research Centre** (JRC) has been supporting the European Commission in multidisciplinary areas to understand the COVID-19 emergency, anticipate its impacts, and support contingency planning. This activity forms part of a broader effort by JRC to contribute through crisis coordination mechanisms with the detection, monitoring and analysis of the COVID-19 outbreak.
More information

EIT Health community vs. COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis has placed unprecedented pressure on European healthcare systems, calling for innovative thinking and ways of partnering to face the immediate challenges of the pandemic as well as the future recovery. The EIT Health community is working tirelessly to respond to the pandemic.
More information

"READ ME" – Recommended Publications

Interview with prof. Mary O'Connell:
How is ERA Chair changing the Czech research environment?

Mary has received national, international and EU funding for her research. Since being at CEITEC, her group was funded by the ERA Chair, FP7 and currently is funded by OPVV, INTER COST 2018, GACR and MSCA. Mary has also among other awards been elected as an EMBO member 2017 and is a co-chair of the COST Network 'European Epitranscriptomics Network' or EPITRAN 2017. Mary speaks about her motivation, implementation of the project, success stories as well as obstacles and future challenges.
More information (see pp. 10-11)

EIT KICs: Collaboration in a RIS3 Context

This publication is a Science for Policy report by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and it investigates in particular the motivations, practices and opportunities for strengthening collaborations between the European Institute of Innovation and Technology Knowledge and Innovation Communities (EIT KICs) — focusing on excellence based innovation — and the Managing Authorities of national and regional European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) — focusing on innovation in line with the cohesion policy - within the context of Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3).
More information