In the spotlight: Sharing Excellence – taking stock and moving forward to bridge the innovation divide in Europe: a Unit at your service

Foreword by Magda De Carli
Head of the Unit 'Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation' in DG Research

I am pleased to address the 'Widening' community in this 4th edition of the Wide-Net bulletin, which comes at a very crucial moment between the launch of the last waves of calls under Horizon 2020 and the discussions on the Commission's proposal for Horizon Europe, the EU's next research and innovation programme.

In Horizon 2020, we have set aside over **€900 million** to help less R&I performing countries to carry out complex institutional and structural reforms that will make their R&I systems more efficient and competitive.

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Collaboration and mutual learning with more advanced partners is at the heart of all the projects we fund from this budget.

So far, we have allocated **€281 million** to creating and modernising centres of excellence through **72 Teaming projects**. We are also funding **97 Twinning projects** with **€97.3 million** to help research institutions to engage in institutional networking with leading counterparts. In addition, we are supporting **27 ERA chairs** with **€66.5 million**, to help R&I institutions to attract outstanding academics and promote structural changes. This leaves half of the Horizon 2020 Widening budget still to be allocated through the upcoming calls.

Therefore, this is the perfect moment to reflect on our achievements and make renewed efforts to reach the ambitious objectives of the programme.

With my team of 16 highly experienced and motivated colleagues – and relying on the precious support of the Research Executive Agency and the NCP Widenet – we are at the service of the entire Widening research community, including the more experienced partners.

For example, we have reached the final phase of our **information and training programme,** which is **helping R&I communities in those Widening countries** who achieved poor results in previous Widening calls to compete more successfully in the upcoming calls. This should lead to a more even distribution of projects across eligible countries.

Through our communication campaigns, we are also appealing to **advanced partners** to actively participate in Widening projects by highlighting to them the benefit of establishing long-term partnerships and tapping into new markets.

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The second edition of **the Widening days** took place on the 15-17 October 2018 in Brussels, bringing together the coordinators of the ongoing Widening projects with those just starting on their projects, to provide a forum for mutual learning.

While we heard many success stories about Widening projects contributing to long-lasting improvements in the national R&I systems, we also learnt about some of the challenges projects are still facing, including lengthy procedures and red tape at national level and the need for support of some seed research activities.

Understanding the **expected policy impacts of reforms** is indispensable for closing the R&I divide in Europe. Therefore, my unit started providing "country intelligence" i.e. in depth information about the R&I policies and systems for Widening countries in close collaboration with the unit in charge of the Policy Support Facility and the involvement of all relevant Thematic units.

For the same token, the Commission's Director-General for Research and Innovation, **Mr. Jean-Eric Paquet is visiting all Widening countries, meeting the R&I community, the Ministers responsible for Research and Innovation, and the Ministers responsible for the Structural Funds.** The information we collect is used as input for future policies and strategic discussions with the Member States.

In addition, country visits and our events will also provide valuable insights when we start designing the work programmes of Horizon Europe, which is currently being debated with the Member States and the European Parliament.

While the Commission stays firm about its proposal to carry over the current system of fully excellence-based and competitive calls to Horizon Europe, it also recognises that excellence is everywhere and that existing pockets of excellence should be fully exploited.

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Therefore, the Commission has proposed to continue the targeted support to researchers and innovators in less R&I-performing countries in Horizon Europe through the core actions Teaming, Twinning and ERA Chairs and the support to the intergovernmental networking programme COST (European **Co**operation in **S**cience and **T**echnology) under the new **name 'Sharing excellence'**, doubling to €1.7 billion the overall budget dedicated to this part and including some research components and support to brain circulation.

Sharing excellence means shared responsibility and shared benefits

Sharing excellence and bridging the R&I divide in Europe is a **shared responsibility** to be addressed both nationally and at EU level. The structural reform of national R&I systems is necessary for increasing their efficiency and quality.

Besides Sharing Excellence, also the Policy Support facility will be continued under Horizon Europe to provide support to MS in the design of policy reforms. But only national authorities can decide and implement these reforms.

At EU level, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) will remain a key instrument to provide financial support for building research and innovation capacities and supportive ecosystems in the regions.

Therefore, we would like to increase the **synergies and flexibility** between the future Horizon Europe programme and other European funding schemes. Besides encouraging downstream and upstream synergies, managing authorities for the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) could for example take up high-quality proposals submitted to Horizon Europe but not funded due to a lack of budget. These projects receive the Seal of Excellence as a testimony to their excellent quality.

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The idea is that ESIF managing authorities could apply the funding rates of Horizon Europe to these projects, without obliging them to go through a second technical evaluation. Managing authorities could also decide to **transfer part of their budget** (up to 5%) to other EU programmes, like Horizon Europe, to fund projects implemented by their national/regional entities. **Combining funds from Horizon Europe and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** in the same project would also continue to be possible under specific conditions.

All these plans are, of course, subject to the outcome of ongoing political discussions about Horizon Europe.

Undoubtedly, scaling up and improving investment in R&I is a proven pathway to economic growth. Increasing the R&I performance in lower-performing Member States and fully integrating their un-exploited potential into the European Research Area and single market will maximise the impact of R&I investments, both for the EU as a whole and for each country concerned. At the end of the day, this is all about us, citizens, because a healthier EU economy means a better and safer life and higher standard of living for all Europeans.

I am proud that my Unit can contribute to this process and I invite you to use all the services we offer to make Europe better.

Most Frequent Mistakes in Twinning Proposals: What to be Aware of

This article describes the **most frequent mistakes observed in the proposals submitted to the 2017 Twinning call**.

'Most frequent mistakes' means the comments made by independent experts that appeared in the Evaluation Summary Reports several times and had a negative impact on scoring. Our aim is to draw the applicants' attention to issues they should be aware of to avoid losing precious points and improve their chances of succeeding in the competition. We strongly re-commend that the applicants check this list carefully and make sure their proposal is free of these issues.

The most frequent comments that the experts made have been divided into three blocks according to the structure of the Coordination and Support Action (CSA) proposal template, Technical Annex (Part B), i.e. Excellence, Impact and Implemen-tation. Within these three blocks, the most frequent mistakes related to specific issues are grouped to make them easier to find.

Criterion: Excellence

Within this part, the evaluators are asked to take into account the extent to which the proposed work corresponds to the topic description in the call text as well as to the relevant work programme. The evaluators then check the clarity and pertinence of the objectives, the credibility of the proposed methodology and the soundness of the concept. Finally, they assess the quality of the proposed CSA measures.

Criterion: Impact

In this part, the evaluators are asked to take into account the extent to which the output would contribute to each of the expected impacts stated in the work programme and the call text respectively. Then the experts assess the quality of the proposed measures to exploit and disseminate project results, including IPR, and to manage research data where relevant. Finally, they look at the quality of the proposed measures to communicate project activities to different target audiences.

Most Frequent Mistakes in Twinning Proposals: What to be Aware of

Criterion: Implementation

Evaluators have to look at all the aspects that allow for the efficient and effective implementation of the proposed project. Specifically, this means that they have to check the quality and effectiveness of the work plan, including the extent to which the resources assigned to the work packages are in line with their objectives and deliverables. Closely linked to this is the aspect of the appropriateness of the management structures and procedures, including risk and innovation management. The evaluators of course carefully assess the complementarity of the participants and the extent to which the consortium as a whole brings together the necessary expertise.

Last but not least, the experts look at the appropriateness of the allocation of tasks, ensuring that all participants have a valid role and adequate resources in the project to fulfil that role.
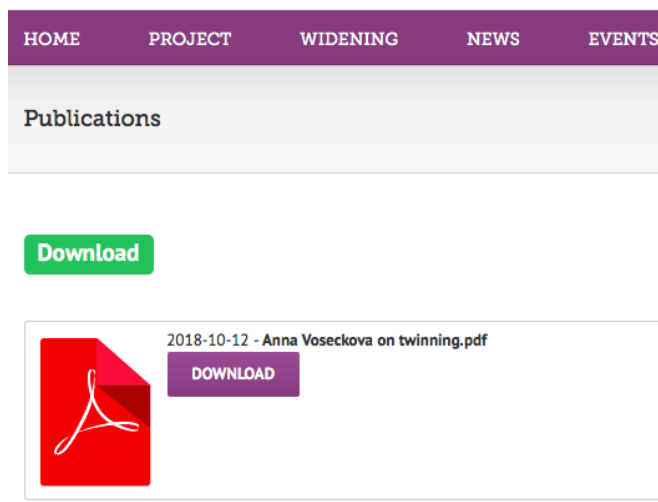
General recommendations

To conclude, we would like to give the potential applicants to the Twinning call a set of recommendations to help them include all the necessary elements and to increase their chances in the grant competition. Firstly, they must be aware that a thorough SWOT analysis forms the basis for a good proposal. They should be self-critical and elaborate especially well on the weaknesses and threats. The analysis results should be then fully incorporated into the action plan and the individual work packages objectives, right down to the level of individual tasks. There should not be too many work packages (5-7 is optimal), bearing in mind that three of them are obligatory: WP on management, WP on communication and dissemination, and WP dedicated to early-stage research, which is a new element in the 2018 call. The management structure should be simple and the roles and responsibilities of the people involved should be described clearly.

Most Frequent Mistakes in Twinning Proposals: What to be Aware of

The proposal should be clear and brief, structured in short paragraphs, using simple sentences, and avoiding buzzwords and abbreviations where possible. Any interconnection with national and regional RIS3 strategies as well as the use of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) should not be omitted. References to relevant European documents and strategies are of course an asset. Regarding the widening institution, please be aware that the evaluators will check the English version of your website to learn more about you, specifically about your participation in European and international projects. Several documents published recently could help you improve your proposal, e.g. the EC Social Media Guide published in April 2018, the IPR Helpdesk brochure Communication, Dissemination and Exploitation of March 2018, and a blog article by Angela Hengsberger explaining all aspects of innovation management.

To download the full version of this article with the list of suggestions for each evaluation sub-criteria, please proceed to the Publications section of the NCP_WIDE.NET project website www.ncpwidenet.eu/publications:

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EIT Regional Innovation Scheme

European Institute of Innovation & Technology

Who are we?

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) is an EU body that boosts Europe's ability to innovate. The EIT nurtures entrepreneurial talent and supports new ideas by fully integrating the entire innovation value chain: from student to entrepreneur, from idea to product, from lab to customer, incl. scaling up the successful start-ups. Fostering innovation is more than providing financing. Innovation needs a pipeline of ideas and talent and a healthy ecosystem that enables the innovation.

EIT Regional Innovation Scheme — bridging the gap

However, Europe is characterised by considerable disparities in terms of innovation performance.

This has resulted in a classification of European countries as innovation leaders and strong innovators versus moderate and modest innovators in the European Innovation Scoreboard. One reason for poorer innovation performance is the weak link between key players among businesses and research institutions and academia, as well as in the private and public sector. A systematic approach towards innovation is needed. The EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (EIT RIS) was introduced as a response to this challenge.

The **objective of the EIT RIS** is to contribute to boosting innovation in European countries and regions that belong to the groups of 'modest and moderate' innovators. The EIT and its Innovation Communities aim to achieve this objective by engaging local organisations and individuals in KIC activities, share good practises and know-how with the local innovation ecosystems and offer tailor-made services to address innovation gaps.
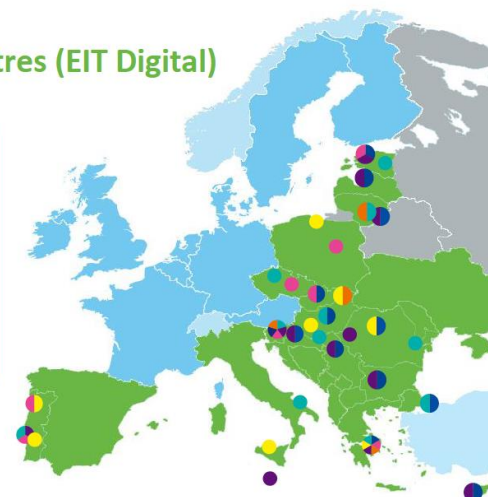
EIT Regional Innovation Scheme

EIT hubs–strong footing in local innovation ecosystems

EIT KICs also known as Innovation Communities engage local organisations to serve as EIT Hubs in EIT RIS eligible countries and regions with an ambition to grow them into regional and national innovation hubs able to spark the cooperation and co-creation among local business, research, academia and public sector players with a view to facilitating the use of local competences and resources for a better innovation output. To date, **18 EIT RIS countries are involved in EIT Innovation Communities' RIS activities** via EIT hubs, and in case of EIT Digital — via 'Innovation Centres'.   They all are local organisations that have demonstrated their suitability for the role via open competitive selection process. Nevertheless, a number of EIT RIS activities are open to EIT RIS countries where there is no EIT Hubs designated (yet), e.g. participation in business creation and education programmes, and alike. Innovation communities set out different mechanisms to coordinate the work of EIT Hubs.

For instance, EIT InnoEnergy operates on the premise that the power lies in the network and has networked its EIT Hubs in *PowerAlliance* — a platform of enabling and empowering tools for the EIT Hubs such an internal sharing and communication platforms, methodology for business acceleration and venture supporting material (PowerGuide — a workbook for entrepreneurs), EIT InnoEnergy's Digital Library (PowerBank), as well as the *PowerUp!* annual start-up competition, which serves as a summon of the ecosystem. All in all, it is a platform for mutual learning and strengthening of each EIT Hub business, innovation, and

EIT Hubs and Innovation Centres (EIT Digital)

- EIT Climate-KIC
- EIT Digital
- EIT Food
- EIT Health
- EIT InnoEnergy
- EIT Raw Materials

European Institute of Innovation & Technology

EIT Regional Innovation Scheme

Targeted business creation services

EIT Innovation Communities identified EIT RIS area specific gaps that they want to address. One of the overarching gap is the lower business maturity of young entrepreneurs in the EIT RIS countries. Hence, several Innovation Communities have developed **business creation/ acceleration programmes tailored to the needs of the EIT RIS countries**. For instance, EIT Climate-KIC runs its EIT RIS accelerator already for the third year in a row. EIT Digital this year launched its ARISE Venture Program addressing the Eastern and Western Balkans. The programme, a two-stage competition, supports the establishment of deep-tech-based ventures. After a competitive selection process, 15 teams were selected to join programme, which included a two-day boot-camp followed by a six-week pre-acceleration phase. Teams that managed to incorporate their ventures and advance in their MVP had the chance to apply for the Final Prize. By these means, the Venture Program supported the creation of 13 new ventures in 2018.

Looking ahead

Innovation Communities continue to intensify their activities under the EIT RIS by strengthening the role of EIT Hubs and expanding their business creation programmes. For instance, EIT Food, EIT Health and EIT RawMaterials are expanding their jointly run cross-sectoral business creation programme on terms of in terms of developing early-stage business ideas further, and by identifying possible synergies with *Primer*. In addition, next year individual KICs will pay more attention to the education activities in the EIT RIS countries by adding on the current scholarship, fellowship programmes and summer schools. Read more here.

Also, see the video report from 2nd edition of the Joint Business Ideas Bootcamp organized in cooperation of EIT Health, EIT Food and EIT Raw Materials at Demola Budapest, on 11-12 May, 2018.

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STRONGMAR: Robots at Sea

INESC TEC explores the research of marine science and technology in an effort to address the challenges in the Portuguese region of maritime influence:

- ❖ Dimension: coverage of a vast area of water and soil, where the sole use of manned vehicles is unfeasible if physical on-site presence is required.
- ❖ Depth: exploration and exploitation of deep and ultra-deep sea, where the physical presence of humans is not an option.

Addressing these challenges implies putting together multiple competences in many complementary fields of marine science and technology. The multi-disciplinary and applied nature of the field demands a new scientific and tech-nological perspective.

In addition to improving deep knowledge in their field, researchers will need to acquire new knowledge about adjacent fields of expertise and work together in multidisciplinary teams, bringing up the profile of a new multidisciplinary re-searcher who has broader and deeper scientific knowledge and understands the stakeholders' requirements.

This will be of utmost importance in improving the knowledge of **INESC TEC'**s researchers and generating new ideas with higher scientific and economic impact, as well as in successfully addressing the challenges of applied research and working at different levels of technology readiness.

In order to meet these objectives, INESC TEC submitted a CSA proposal under the call H2020-TWINN-2015 and was selected to receive almost a million euros from January 2016 to December 2018 to help fund the implementation of the STRONGMAR concept.
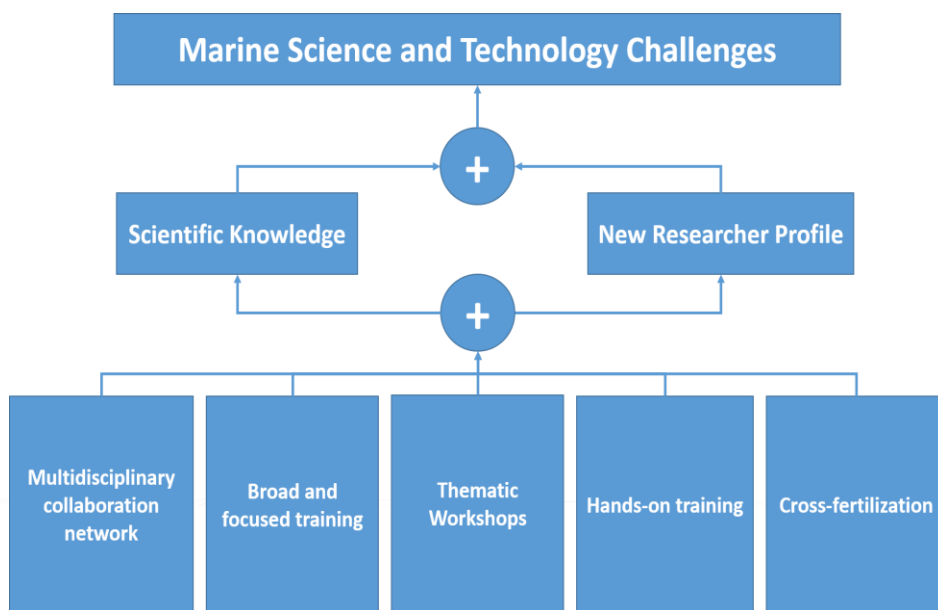
STRONGMAR: Robots at Sea

The STRONGMAR concept will be implemented by means of two complementary sets of coordination and support activities with the aim of contributing to the two ultimate goals of this Twinning action:

- Improve the scientific knowledge of **INESC TEC**'s researchers in key areas of marine science and technology.
- Improve the profile of **INESC TEC** researchers in marine science and technology.

Five pillars support the concept of the project:

1. Multidisciplinary collaboration network
A new collaboration network involving top European research institutions in marine science and technology (Heriot-Watt University; the University of Aberdeen; the NATO Science and Technology Organisation; the University of Girona) cooperates with existing networks in specific fields of expertise.

Concept scheme of STRONGMAR project
Source: www.strongmar.eu

STRONGMAR: Robots at Sea

2. Broad and focused training

The training strategy is based on sessions touching on multidisciplinary aspects followed by sessions that focus on specific fields of expertise, allowing researchers to improve their knowledge and preparing them for the research and implementation challenges in the harsh sea environment.

3. Thematic workshops

Focused workshops that enable researchers to delve deeper and improve their knowledge about specific topics, hone their skills in marine science and technology, and enhance their knowledge in adjacent fields of expertise.

4. Hands-on training

The training strategy targets not only theoretical training but also hands-on training, which means the knowledge acquired can be applied directly and the researchers can improve their understanding of the stakeholders' actual requirements, allowing them to design solutions with greater economic potential.

5. Cross-fertilisation

Interchange and interaction among different fields of expertise is fundamental to addressing the challenges of the ocean due to the multidisciplinary nature of the application area. Cross-fertilisation among fields of expertise is also key to stimulating the design of better and more specific solutions.

This strategy has already had an impact in the ecosystem and allowed INESC TEC to work with the best teams and achieve some important successes. The aerial team of INESC TEC won the ERL Emergency Robots Grand Challenge together with the terrestrial robotics team TELEROB and the underwater robotics team from the University of Girona. STRONGMAR helped in following the INESC TEC strategy towards excellence in maritime technology. Enhancing S&T capacity made it possible to participate in several projects with an overall budget of 72 million euros for underwater and sea projects.

Author: Marta Barbas
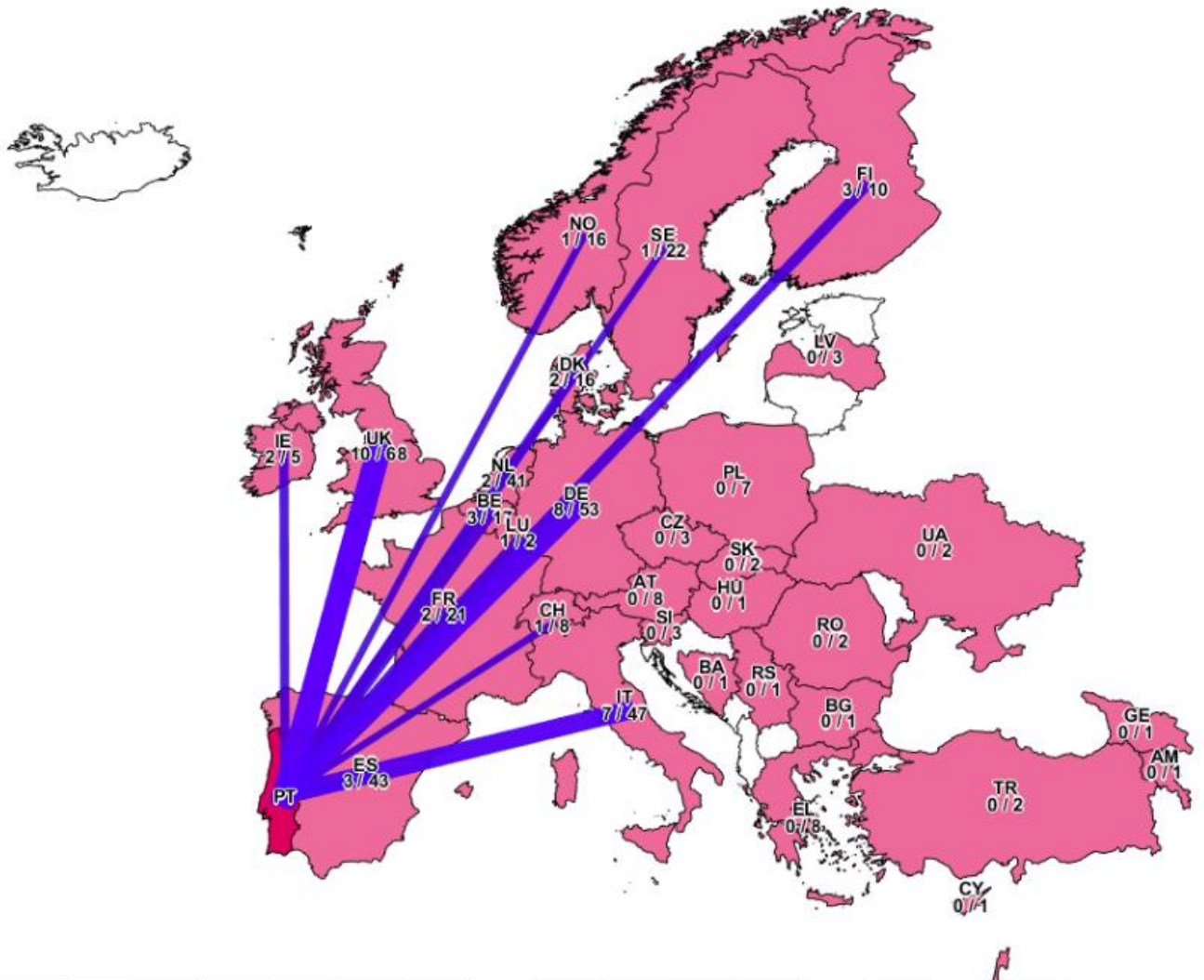INESC TEC, Portugal

Get Acquainted: the NCP_WIDE.NET analytics tool

A dedicated analytics tool has been designed by NCP_WIDE.NET in order to support the success of widening calls with a comprehensible web application. The objective is to provide widening NCPs, clients and regional policy stakeholders with an interactive tool to analyse Teaming, Twinning and ERA Chair calls in the most condense and comparative manner.

Even though the EC Cordis platform is very useful and similar in content, it may be too complex for a newcomer to find a dedicated summary of results for particular topics. Therefore, to adapt to stakeholder needs, the NCP_WIDE.NET tool is structured to subdivide EC into countries with advanced, widening and associated R&D. A single click on a country icon in our list highlights the country with regional perspective in project/funding/coordination success and networking.
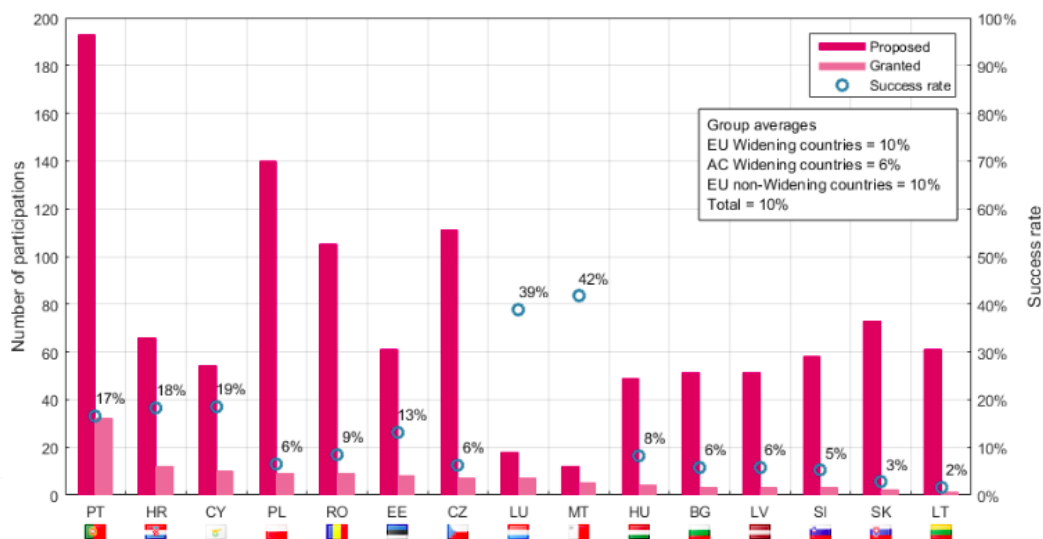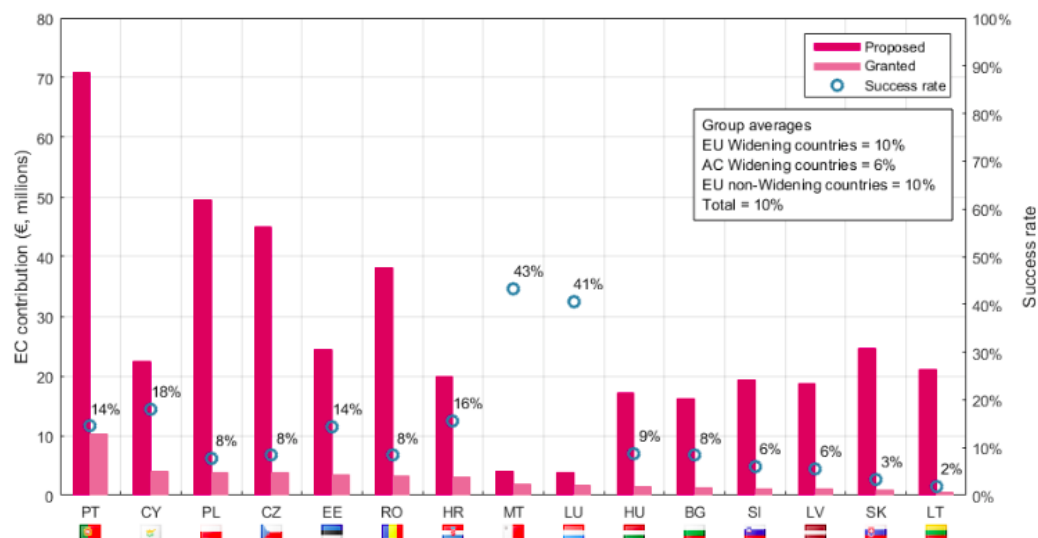
A biannual update is foreseen to keep all relevant statistics and outcomes up to date. This allows for comparative analysis, which is a prerequisite for regional policy analysis. A complimentary network graph with a list of funded entities is provided for those who are looking for links between advanced partners and widening entities as well as the most frequent project compositions. A future development will include project acronym network graphs to highlight and recognise as well as to refer to a particular project for further analysis.

An example of assessing the Twining call: if you select, for instance, Portugal, a dedicated four-bar chart with widening country statistics will appear along with a pie chart indicating the total budget and its division by countries, as well as a regional network graph with a list of entities (see the charts on the next page).
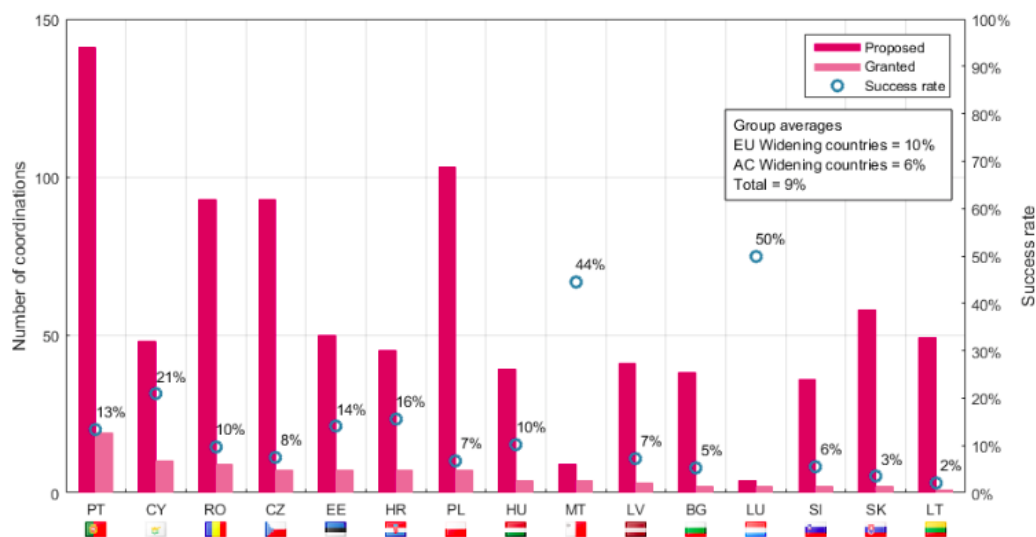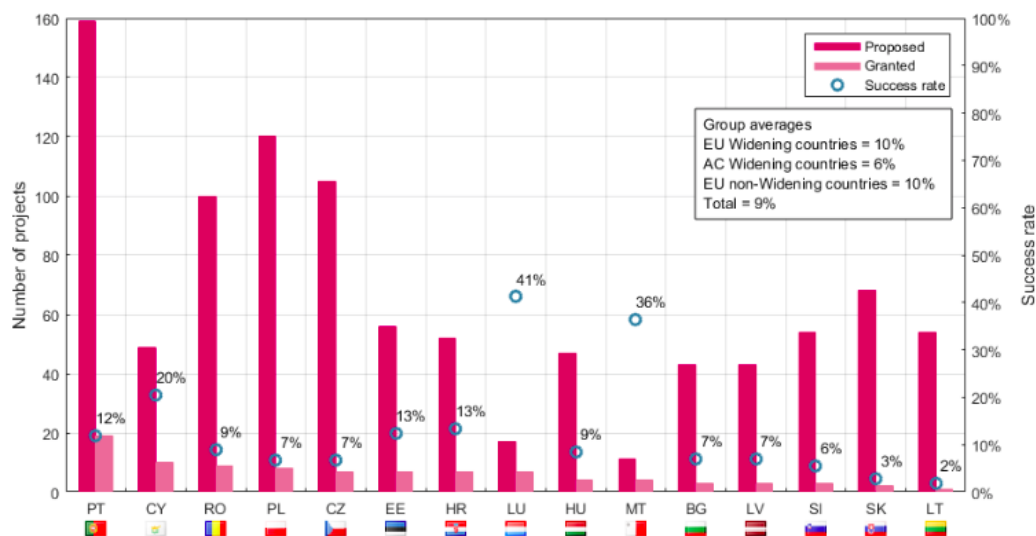
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First, on a contour graph of Europe direct links will appear, linking countries in grant projects, while depicting participation versus the granted rate (see p. 16). For example, one of eight participations have been granted with Switzerland, while ten out of 68 have with the United Kingdom. It should be noted that in several projects, more than one entity from one country take part. Pie and bar charts (see pp. 17-18) show the proposed/granted and success rate statistics: as we can see, Portugal has secured an 11% share of the Twinning budget, the largest in the widening country group.

Finally, a list of all 23 entities from Portugal and their network with advanced partners is revealed. It should be noted that in a semi-regional network group Portugal and Luxembourg are grouped together in order to enhance regional analysis. The coordinators can be re-cognised by the colour of the partner organisation acronym.

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Forthcoming Calls and Events

| December 6-7 Warsaw 2018 | | May/June Brussels SEWP infoday 2019 | June Iasi WIRE 2019 |

October ⟩ November ⟩ December ⟩ January ⟩ February ⟩ March ⟩ April ⟩ May ⟩ June ⟩ July

May 15
November 15th

Teaming Phase 2

Twinning

JPI Urban Europe

ERA Chairs

2018 call results

Twinning

ERA Chairs

Training "What is Widening and its impact in a view of Horizon Europe?"

When: December 6-7, 2018   **Where:** Warsaw, Poland

If you want to develop a deep understanding of the Widening concept and its impact based on real case studies, reports and statistics, register now for this interesting event! Target group: NCP Coordinators, Widening NCPs and other thematic NCPs from Widening and non-Widening countries interested in Widening instruments and its impact. Programme and registration here.

WIRE 2019

When: 2nd Quarter of 2019 **Where:** Iași, Romania

The next two-day WIRE conference (WIRE X) will be organised during the EU Presidency of Romania. The event will gather actors active in the innovation and education ecosystem with the aim to improve science-based competitiveness.

"READ ME" – RECOMMENDED PUBLICATIONS

GENERAL:

**Summary report of the Mutual Learning Exercise
on 'Widening Participation and Strengthening Synergies'**

The Mutual Learning Exercise (MLE) on 'Widening Participation and Strengthening Synergies' that was carried out during 2017-2018 by 12 Member States (BE, BG, HR, CY, DE, HU, LV, PL, PT, SI, ES, SE), with Germany participating as an observer, and one associate country (TR). This executive summary details the most important policy lessons for national and regional policymakers and administrators that emerged from the MLE review. Examples of practices deployed by some Member and Associated States are contained within the body of the report and associated background documents.

More information

**The role of universities of Science and Technology in innovation ecosystems:
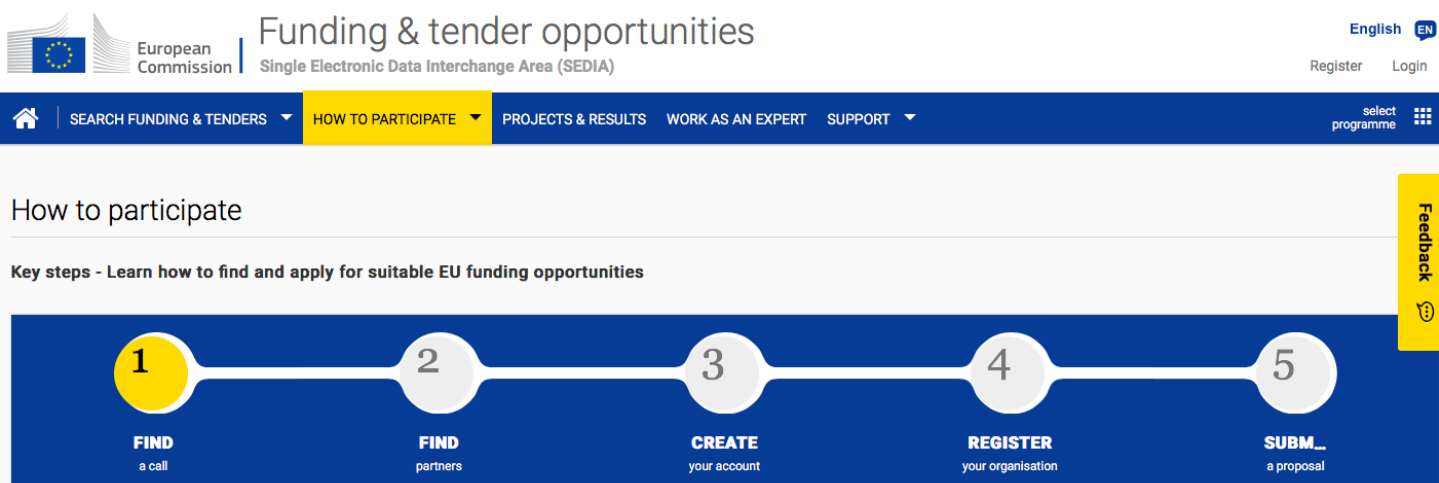towards Mission 3.1**

CESAER has published a white paper providing an overview of the role universities of Science and Technology in innovation ecosystems and building a highly competitive knowledge-based industry for the future. The paper argues that universities are crucial players of regional innovation ecosystems and play an open and collaborative leadership role that goes beyond the more passive "Third Mission". It envisages a new thinking that could be called "Mission 3.1".

More information

Are you familiar with the new Funding & Tenders Portal?

You may have noticed that when you go to the Participant Portal you are automatically invited to discover the new **Funding & Tender Opportunities Portal**. This portal will become the single entry point for finding and managing EU grants and procurement contracts, by covering all centrally managed programmes by the start of the next EU multiannual programme period in 2021.

The new portal includes a new layout and graphic design, it has been equipped with an improved keyword search function with new features and search behaviour, it reflects its multi-programme coverage and integrates the calls for tenders. The new Portal provides all the functions available under the current Participant Portal, whilst implementing new features.