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Fact sheet: International Participation in Horizon 2020

A Key Element of Horizon 2020

The importance of international cooperation in science and technology is explicitly recognised in the European Union's Innovation Union flagship initiative and the proposals for Horizon 2020, the next EU funding programme for research and innovation.

Many of our international partner countries are investing more-and-more in research and innovation, and cooperation will be vital if research is to reach its full potential. An active and more strategic international cooperation will also contribute to achieving the EU's wider policy objectives.

A New International Strategy

On 14 September 2012, the European Commission set out its new approach to international cooperation under Horizon 2020 in a Communication entitled "Enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation: a strategic approach"¹. In-line with this approach, international cooperation activities developed under Horizon 2020 should contribute to the objectives of:

- Strengthening the Union's excellence and attractiveness in research and innovation and its economic and industrial competitiveness;
- Tackling global societal challenges; and,
- Supporting the Union's external policies.

The new international cooperation strategy focuses on research in areas of common interest and mutual benefit in order to achieve these objectives. To strengthen implementation, the strategy also differentiates between three country groupings:

- Industrialised and emerging economies (which will only receive funding under specific conditions);
- Enlargement and neighbourhood countries (eligible for automatic funding); and
- Developing countries (eligible for automatic funding).

¹ COM(2012)497

Association Agreements

Association to the EU's research funding framework programme has been an important feature of international cooperation. It represents the closest form of cooperation which has been implemented with non-EU countries. It involves formal participation in the programme and a financial contribution to the budget. In return, organisations and researchers in the Associated countries have participation rights equal to their EU counterparts. Association will continue to play a key role in Horizon 2020. However, countries which are currently associated to the current programme (FP7) will have to renegotiate their agreements under Horizon 2020.

International Participation in FP7

Global cooperation has been an important element of FP7 so far. Partner countries account for around 5% of total participations²; the top international partner countries are Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS), the Ukraine and the USA. One-in-five projects include an international partner in addition to participants from Member States or Associated countries.

International Dimension of the European Research Council (ERC)

The ERC's mission is to encourage the highest quality research in Europe through competitive funding and to support investigator-initiated frontier research across all fields of research on the basis of scientific excellence. The aim is to recognise the best ideas, and retain and confer status and visibility to the best brains in Europe, while also attracting talent from abroad. Under Horizon 2020, the ERC will continue to play a major role in fostering scientific excellence, building on its success in FP7.

With a view to increase the ERC's visibility and to attract more applicants from overseas, in 2012 the ERC launched an international awareness-raising campaign – 'ERC goes Global' – led by its Secretary General. Visits to North and South America, Africa, Russia and Asia took place. Some of the measures implemented in the past included extra funding for researchers moving from a non-EU/Associated country (an additional €500,000 - €1 million depending on the grant). Moreover, some team members can be based overseas. In 2012, an agreement was launched with the US National Science Foundation (NSF) to allow early-career NSF researchers in the US to join the teams of ERC grantees in Europe. The ERC is also involved in the Global Research Council, a forum launched last year.

Marie-Curie Actions to enhance International Cooperation

Europe needs to attract and train the best talents worldwide in order to remain competitive and consolidate the European Research Area. In this perspective, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MCAs) are a key EU instrument to attract researchers to Europe from around the world, competitively awarding mobility grants to researchers of any nationality.

² In the "Cooperation" and "Capacities" specific programmes, and Euratom. These 5% of partners account for just over 2% of the Framework programme budget.

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions promote inter-disciplinary, inter-sectorial and international mobility as well as knowledge-sharing. By attracting non-European researchers, this programme enhances international research cooperation, and facilitates the mobility and exchange of researchers between EU and non-EU universities, research institutions, and private companies. Since their creation in 1996, the MCAs have helped train over 65 000 fellows of more than 130 nationalities, 30% of them coming from outside Europe. They will be further developed under Horizon 2020.