



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



TITLE: MIRRIS (Mobilizing Institutional Reforms for Research and Innovation Systems)

Mid- term results – September 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Europe as a whole must advance significantly in research and innovation performances in order to make the EU the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy, as foreseen in the Europe 2020 strategy. There are countries lagging behind in the effectiveness of exploiting EU funded programs in the field of R&D&I. The obstacles can be sought among local conditions, resources and assets facing a specific system.

MIRRIS (Mobilising Institutional Reforms in Research and Innovation Systems) is a supporting action aiming at encouraging a better exploitation of European research and innovation programmes and a larger participation in the European Research Area of the EU12¹ countries plus Croatia.

In order to allow these countries to better exploit the European research and innovation programmes, MIRRIS is providing an extensive policy learning exercise to identify barriers and debate how innovation systems can better address the participation to the European research area.

During the 1st round of Policy Dialogues conducted in period March to July 2014 in each of the above noted EU 13 Member States, input was collected from the target national stakeholders based on the country profile presented, which was addressing views on barriers and other relevant factors impacting single country's participation to FP7/H2020. In average per country, 15-20 national stakeholders were present on behalf of the following groups: decision makers, implementation institutions and supporting structures.

From single country profiles and analysed statistics, it is evident that all EU 13 Member States are significantly lagging behind compared with EU15 Member States. Moreover, the participation to FP7 when providing a benchmark to previous FP5 and FP6 programmes significantly declined. The whole philosophy of the European Research Funding has changed from FP6 to FP7 programme. FP6 was based on large consortia where it was relatively easier for researchers to "penetrate," while FP7 consortia were much smaller and a "stronger" more qualified participation was required. Additionally, in FP7, the societal involvement and the business orientation for (almost) each project became mandatory. The comparison of results between FP6 and FP7 demonstrates how new

¹ MIRRIS is focusing on the following countries: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

member states were not able to build on the previous involvement to consolidate their presence and how “excellence” was not represented.

In each of the above noted EU13 Member States, participation to European Regional Structural Funds (ERDF, furthermore in text: ESIF) funded projects is significantly higher and was found less burdensome from the administrative point of view. Even more so, the success rate for applying was much higher than if participating to FP7, thus participation to ESIF in general became a priority and path that was chosen. This path in particular become a barrier towards internalization, access to networks and building of strong partnerships and consortia. It also become a barrier in progressing towards excellence as EU 15 Member States continued to build on that path and moved the threshold bar significantly higher.

Another important factor that became a barrier is perception of ESIF versus FP7/H2020 programmes. ESIF has been considered as competitive funding rather than looking for synergies between the two.

The lack of national funding for research and still underperforming R&I system as a whole, lack of vision and national strategy, resulted in a “non-friendly-motivational” environment for researchers. The main obstacles for researchers are recognized in lack of available infrastructure they are having at disposal, financial predispositions and measures that would allow them easier outreach towards international exchange of knowledge and experience as well as building of partnerships. The analysed statistics are showcasing very low mobility of researchers as well as participation to cross border or mobility programmes, which are again a result of numerous structural but also motivational factors. There are weak connections with diaspora and absence of tailored measures that would result in leveraging from their international networks, knowledge, experience, ability to inspire and mentor young researchers and other added values that this re-connection would bring back to the respective country (insights into R&I systems of more developed countries, more strategy oriented thinking etc.).

The lack of supporting administrative infrastructure and human resources to effectively support potential participants, both at national administration and at individual organization levels (pre-information, lobbying in Brussels, pre-check of draft project, pre-evaluation tips, early scouting of call priorities, networking and other) is an evident barrier across all EU 13 Member States. There are just few Universities and Research Centres that have project offices that are providing all necessary administrative support (example of such offices can be found in Slovenia).

The role of the National Contact Points (furthermore in text: NCPs) is very important and seems to be weak and still in some of countries even structured on voluntary basis, such in Bulgaria and Romania. Estonia is an opposite example of a country who decided to make an investment into the NCP system, which resulted in higher number of participations as well as improved success rate for the respective applicants. Another obstacle for NCPs are difficulties in reaching out to Managing authorities when trying to pass relevant information and receiving feedback or waiting for the decision to be made. There is a need for better infrastructure and support at EU level that would be supporting NCPs in overcoming that barrier at national and regional level in order to secure the flow or relevant information.

In terms of governance, the cooperation between Managing authorities and Regional Development Agencies is not apparent. This could be an added value aspect for the creation of synergies between ESIF managed at the regional level and Horizon 2020, given that the competency is normally with the national authorities.

MIRRIS

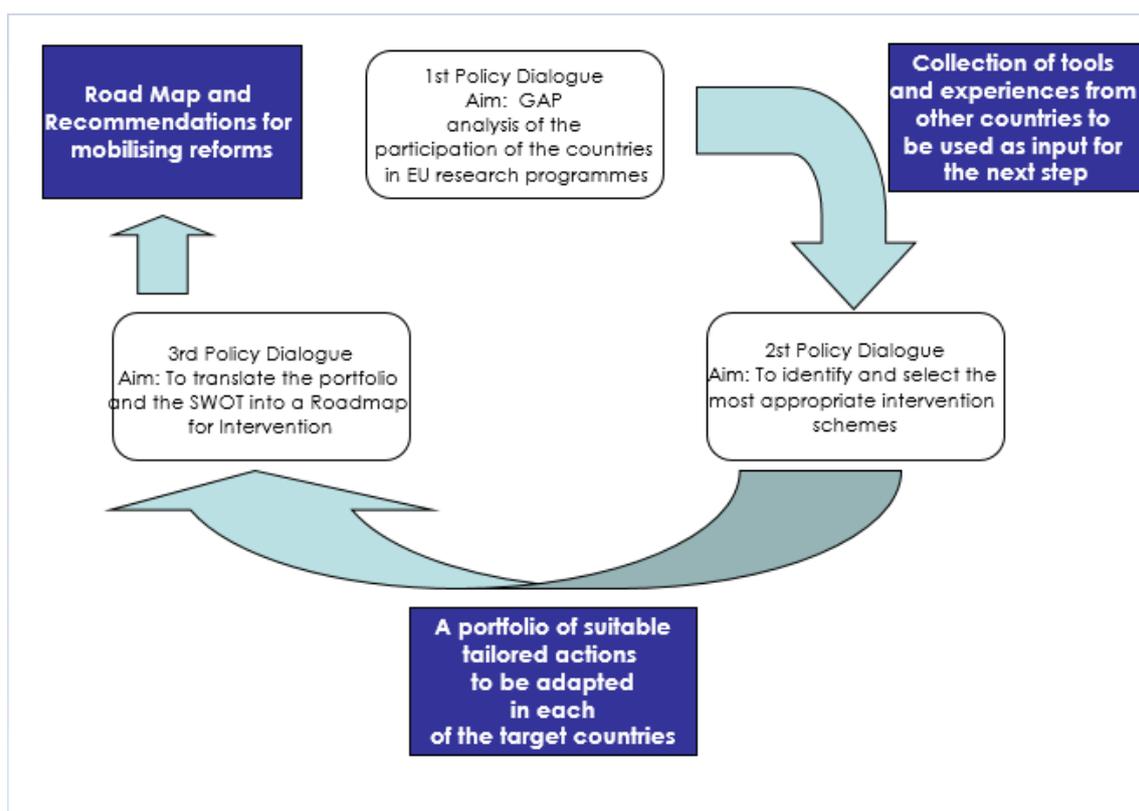
MIRRIS approach is built around the mobilisation of stakeholders and relevant actors through the organization of 3 rounds of policy dialogues in each country.

The dialogue involves stakeholders from three levels: decision makers, implementation institutions and operational structures. Main outcome of the dialogue will be a set of recommendations for institutional reform with guidelines for a successful uptake.

The initiative provides support to analyse gaps in the national research ecosystem as well as in the path for participating in EU R&D projects and to identify measures to increase the participation in H2020.

Moreover, MIRRIS undertakes a desk research regarding the absolute and relative rate of participation in FP7 and through cooperation with relevant national stakeholders it is making an effort to understand the national environment in order to suggest new and improved ways to support potential participants in H2020 calls based on experiences developed in any Member States.

MIRRIS POLICY DIALOGUE STRUCTURE



MIRRIS support is based on 3 rounds of policy dialogue

First policy dialogues

The aim of the 1st Policy dialogue is to identify gaps that are impacting the participation in EU research programmes in the target countries by presenting enablers and barriers and wider factors, which influence their performance in FP7 and a benchmark against EU 28 Member States.

MIRRIS provides participants with a country profile report, which highlights main features of the national system of research and innovation by presenting fact and figures, without providing conclusions or recommendations in order not to influence the direction of the debates. As of September this year all the policy dialogues were conducted in EU13 Member States.

Second policy dialogues

The purpose of the 2nd cycle is agreeing on gaps and barriers which prevent the widening of participation in FPs and probably also in HORIZON 2020 and identify a set of intervention actions. During the second Policy Dialogue cycle, the individual stakeholders around the table shall also reflect and discuss their own institutional concerns and own institutional strategies to improve participation in HORIZON 2020. As a final product of this 2nd Policy Dialogue cycle a SWOT analysis about the country's likely participation in HORIZON 2020 shall be established.

The second policy dialogue rounds will start in November 2014 and shall be completed by February 2015.

Third policy dialogues

The purpose of the 3rd cycle is to agree on an action plan and build consensus around a road-map for implementation. It will build on the findings and the SWOT analysis of the 2nd Policy Dialogue Cycle. Its result should be recommendations and convictions resulting in an action plan with a roadmap prioritising interventions which shall be implemented to ameliorate the participation in HORIZON 2020.

At the end of the 3rd Policy Dialogue a clear understanding on what should be done will be made available. Reporting and roll out shall include:

- A set of recommendations
- An action plan with a roadmap
- A decision on pilot activities
- An active dissemination and knowledge management procedure.

The MIRRIS Policy Dialogue targets the following group of national stakeholders:

- Decision makers: Representatives of Ministries of R&D and Enterprise, of Regional governments;
- Implementation institutions: Academies of science, Universities, Research and technology organizations, National research councils, Funding bodies;
- Support structures: NCPs, RDA, Technology and science parks, Incubators, EEN, Technology transfers offices – TTOs, Clusters, SME associations.

MIRRIS EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Whatever the statistical criteria chosen to compare the participation rate of EU15 and EU13 Member States in FP7, there is an imbalance in favour of EU15. For instance:

	EU15	EU13
EU population	80 %	20 %
GDP of the EU	87 %	13 %
FP7 total beneficiaries	91 %	9 %
FP7 total funding	95 %	5 %
Success rate	25.7 %	18.5 %
€/inhabitant	69.4	13.5
Average size of project EU27 = 100		51 %

Disparities among EU13 Member States arise and are sometimes important; Slovakia, for instance, has only captured €62 million, i.e. €11.5 per inhabitant, whilst Cyprus has captured €63 million, i.e. €78.8 per inhabitant.

It also appears that:

- Smaller countries (in number of inhabitants) have a relatively higher number of participants than big ones;
- New Member States are less acquainted with the EU playfield than the "older" ones;
- Greek and Cyprus beneficiaries seem to be over performing whilst Portuguese and Slovaks are underperforming;
- Skills (language, project management and leadership) are not always available in EU13 Member States;
- Competition occurs between national, ERDF and FP7 funding mechanisms. Some are less excellence-driven or perceived as less bureaucratic than FP7;
- There is a wrong perception of the FP7 objectives, i.e. rewarding excellent projects instead of being a lottery system.

EU13 stakeholders and policy makers have to define their own perception of the concept of increased participation in H2020. It should indeed mean more than just drafting more proposals such as increasing the success rate, having more project managers, improving the quality of the proposals or avoiding that usual losers fill in proposals, capturing more money per beneficiary, taking a stronger role in the project partnership, putting an emphasis on a reduced number of H2020 strands in order to align H2020 funding with national sectorial priorities or ambitions, etc.

During the first round of policy dialogue a number of barriers were highlighted by the involved stakeholders to explain the rate of participation in FP7 funded projects. They have been grouped as: personal/motivational, organizational and structural barriers according to the impacting factors.

Personal/motivational barriers

- Low Economic reward/wages/incentives of researchers;
- Lack of attractiveness of FP7 funding in comparison to ERDF funding and, when available, to other national or bilateral schemes (less bureaucracy, less selection criteria, no or less international dimension);
- Lack of interest in the topics addressed in the R&D calls (EU 15 are perceived to have a dominant position in the setting of agenda).

Structural barriers

- Geographical disadvantages (specially for some countries);
- Instability of national funding mechanism of University and National Research Centers;
- Limited national R&D budget, and in many countries in particular the private investment in R&D;
- Less excellent researchers in EU13 than in EU15 due to brain drain and weak presence of foreign researchers;
- Weak supporting structure.

Organizational barriers

- Lack of an efficient infrastructure and HR to support potential applicants at national and at organization levels;
- Weak capacity of drafting good proposals, to transform ideas in research projects; cost of paying a consultant is often prohibitive;
- Limited resources to NCP (often voluntary job);
- Difficulty to maximize information and experience to better influence and address the participation to the working committees;
- Difficulty to join existing EU15 excellence consortia (lack of visibility of EU13 excellence teams on the EU map);
- No leverage on diaspora and on successful applicants to coach the other potential participant;
- No sectorial focus/strategy to support FP7 stakeholders;
- No willingness/enthusiasm for taking the responsibility of the administrative management of a FP7 project (lack of time, little or no access to a project office support team) participation, project leadership;
- Weak involvement in European networks which often play a role in generating ideas for projects and facilitating partnerships between peers.

WHAT IS BEHIND THESE ARGUMENTS ?

- Participations to FP7 Projects is seen mostly as an opportunity to increase salaries (tactical – short-term);
- The strategic motivations (international visibility, access to knowledge, opportunity to open up to new co-operations abroad, better positioning in the scientific community, etc...) are not considered/perceived at all both by researchers and organizations;
- The quest for excellence is not taken into consideration. EU programmes are not enough seen as an opportunity for the best actors in the country to remain competitive or improve their profile at international level (and, thanks to the better visibility and prestige gained via the EU project, attract more funding, including private ones!);
- Support is “information driven” and “unidirectional” (flow of already public information from Brussels to the concerned country);
- There is no organized process to exploit opportunity before the call is out (access to pre-information, engage actors/potential partners, mobilize consensus (lack of money resources are just excuses, most activities can be done at zero cost);
- The issue of talent circulation is a complex matter that goes beyond participation to EU Research programmes. It is connected to many other factors that are related to decisions at country level.

The first round of policy dialogue made evident a common challenge related to the “mishandling” of the “key participation factors” in designing, organizing and implementing support and a lack of strategic vision (value for money not clearly identified). Participation to EU R&D programmes are mostly approached as an attempt to mitigate impact of budget constraints, independently from the actual potential for being funded (and this generates frustrations and complains among the ones who have been told to participate even if they had no chance to compete).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

EU13 stakeholders have to be better pre-informed and trained about the critical success factors of the different H2020 calls. The preconditions for that are the following:

- (1) to build closer links with penholders (EU civil servants, programme committee members and other) and national H2020 representatives;
- (2) to have better access to performing coaches/mentors and proposal drafting experts by potential beneficiaries; promote more proactive approach making available specific training and education in accessing international grants and in promoting R&D offer;
- (3) NCP networks shall be empowered and strengthened across EU 13 Member States as they are the first contact point for participants and they need to have the ability to provide majority of information as well as be the point for access to networks and potential partnerships;
- (4) NCPs and EEN shall be better coordinated and aligned in providing support to potential participants;
- (5) to undertake good marketing of excellent EU13 centres and research teams to EU15 FP7 consortia leaders;
- (6) to review national funding sources; clarify national strategy aiming at obtaining EU research funding, including supporting private sector participation;
- (7) to establish a rewarding system for researchers or teams involved in H2020;
- (8) to consider the establishment of “project offices” in some universities and research centres;
- (9) to involve successful teams and the diaspora to play a “role model” for first time applicants, etc.
- (10) Providing upfront money to ask consultants to help the drafting of project proposals should be carefully assessed in order to avoid misuse of the scheme (quantity vs. quality);
- (11) Organization and exchange of researchers for the purpose of increasing abilities of speaking foreign language(s) including share of best practices and know-how. Internalization and lobbying component as well as increasing mobility of researchers shall be either included in

- the national strategy or supported through tailored set of measures as this is very important factor that will further have an impact on competitiveness of the country
- (12) Using previous ERDF investment in R&D infrastructure as flagships for marketing the capacity to be involved in H2020 projects as staircase to excellence;
 - (13) Targeting key RIS³ stakeholders as beneficiaries of ad-hoc pre-information on H2020 calls and coaching support;
 - (14) Using Article 70 of the common provision regulation in order to build long-term partnerships (Article 70(2) stipulates a possibility of up to 15% of the support from the ERDF, Cohesion Fund and EMFF at the level of the priority (up to 5% of the support from the EAFRD at the level of the programme), and up to 3% of the budget of a ESF operational programme (Article 13(3) ESF) to be allocated to operations located outside the programme area).²

² An Art. 13(3) of the ESF Regulation (Regulation (EU) N°1304/2013 of the EP and of the Council of 17/12/2013-OJ L 347/470 of 20.12.2013) allows that up to 3% of the budget of an European Social Fund (ESF) operational. programme or ESF part of a multi-fund OP may be allocated to operations located outside the programme area, provided that it concerns the thematic objective 'promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility' or 'investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and life-long learning', and provided that the relevant monitoring committee has given its agreement to the operation or types of operations concerned.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME MIRRIS (Mobilizing Institutional Reforms for Research and Innovation Systems)

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Vienna, Austria

FUNDING SCHEME

Example: FP7 Framework Programme for Research of the European Union – Coordination and Support Action –THEME [SSH.2012.1.2-2 SSH.2012.1.2-2 SSH] [Mobilising institutional reforms in research and innovation systems for better scientific, innovation and economic performances in Europe Mobilising institutional reforms in research and innovation systems for better scientific, innovation and economic performances in Europe Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities]

DURATION

July 2013 – June 2016 (36 months)

BUDGET

EU contribution: 1 496 215,38 €.

WEBSITE

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FURTHER READING

Scoping Paper of MIRRIS - Participation of EU13 countries in FP7 –Christian Saublens – EURADA, MIRRIS Consortium Partner

www.mirris.eu

Country Profile of the targeted countries – Coventry University and Aalborg University, MIRRIS Consortium Partners

MIRRIS Synthesis Report, META Group and EURADA

www.mirris.eu

MIRRIS Country Summary Reports, META Group

Enabling synergies between European Structural application: and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020 and other research, innovation and competitiveness-related Union programmes, Guidance for policy-makers and implementing bodies -European Commission

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/guides/synergy/synergies_en.pdf