

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Budget line

13 03 77 13

1.2. Basic Act

Not applicable

1.3. Policy context

The two EU funding sources - the European Structural and Investment Funds and Horizon 2020 - when operating individually, provide significant support for research, development and innovation. Supporting synergies in their use may deliver additional gains in terms of innovation results, contribute to closing the innovation gap in Europe and promote economic growth.

1.4. General objectives of the Pilot Project:

Building excellence in a given area of research and innovation often takes sustained efforts and long-term strategic planning. The development of good national/regional research and innovation strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3) is considered essential for sustaining the innovation performance and the economic growth of the European Union via i.e. contributing to higher and more effective knowledge investments at the regional level and reinforcing partnership between businesses, public entities and knowledge institutions. Therefore, the support by the Smart Specialisation Platform (S3 Platform) to Member States and regions to design and upgrade their RIS3 is essential.

The Pilot Project Stairway to Excellence (S2E) is centred on the provision of support to enhance the value of two key EU funding sources for research, development and innovation (the European Structural and Investment Funds and Horizon 2020) by actively promoting their combination. In particular, this allows Member States and regions to identify a limited number of areas of good quality research and economic activities with high innovation potential in their territory that will be further reinforced and developed using the European Structural and Investment Funds to become more excellent and more competitive in Horizon 2020 calls. Beyond a stronger innovation generation capacity, this policy framework also allows to increase the absorption capacity of the innovation results developed / generated in more innovative territories in the context of past Framework Programme projects.

With the new resources of the Pilot Project, the activity within the Smart Specialisation Platform supporting Member States/regions who joined in and after 2004 to develop and exploit the synergies between Horizon 2020 and European Structural and Investment Funds will be further implemented. In line with the ongoing activity aimed at enhancing complementarities with other related initiatives, the Pilot Project will continue to build cooperation with other Commission DGs, the Policy Support Facility (PSF) as well as other EU-funded Collaborative research and Cooperation and support actions (i.e. MIRRIS).

2. ACTIONS/ TYPE OF FINANCIAL INTERVENTION

In continuation of the first phase, the Pilot Project implementation will be entrusted to the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission through the signature of an Administrative Agreement. The duration of this phase of the Pilot Project should not exceed fifteen months from its launching. However, these activities would need to be continued beyond 2016 if they are to have a major impact on moving Member States who joined in and after 2004 up the Stairway to Excellence.

2.1. ACTION 1: Assistance to Member States who joined in 2004, 2007 and 2013 in closing the innovation gap, in order to promote excellence in all regions and Member States of the European Union

The action aims at launching "Upstream actions" to prepare regional R&I players to participate in Horizon 2020 ("stairways to excellence") to be developed, where necessary, through capacity mapping and capacity building. Communication and cooperation between Horizon 2020 national contact points and managing authorities of the European Structural and Investment Funds shall be strengthened.

The objective of this Action is twofold.

First, it will provide regions of Member States who joined in 2004, 2007 and 2013 with analyses and evaluation of their past performance in Framework Programmes, strengths and weaknesses in terms of regional R&I capacity, institutional features, and alignment between public R&I and business innovation needs. Moreover, novel evidence related to participation to the first calls of Horizon 2020 will be provided together with a more in-depth analysis of research actors and policies in EU regions. These inputs will be mainly built on in-house data and analyses complemented – when possible - by evidence provided by regional authorities and they will aim at better defining the methodological aspects which could lead regional actors to successfully adopt and finance support structures and R&D&I instruments via synergies between funds.

Second, it will adapt to the national context the highly effective peer review and mutual learning methodology developed for assessing RIS3, to peer review the structures and instruments used by the regions of Member States who joined in 2004, 2007 and 2013 to enhance participation to Framework Programme / Horizon 2020 and exploit the synergies between Horizon 2020 and ESIF. Similarly to the first phase of the project, S2E national events based on analyses and evaluation of regional R&I systems and past performance in EU funding instruments will be organised to pool together the ESIF and Horizon 2020 actors and seek opportunities for synergies. Following the activity already launched in 2015, all remaining national events in EU13 would be organised in 2016 while thematic workshops independently or in combination with the S3 Platform would be decided on the basis of policy needs and available resources.

Indicative budget: EUR 800 000

2.2. ACTION 2: Stimulating the effective implementation of national and regional Smart Specialisation Strategies

The action aims at launching "Downstream actions" to provide the means to exploit and diffuse R&I results, stemming from Horizon 2020 and preceding programmes, into the market

with particular attention on creating an innovation-friendly environment for business and industry, including SMEs and in line with the priorities identified for the territories in the relevant smart specialisation strategy.

In order to maximise complementarities with other ongoing initiatives under the S3 Platform and elsewhere in the Union, it is proposed to launch thematic surveys to gather information from innovation actors on policy instruments and platforms and to integrate these information as much as possible into support envisaged to regions via national events or thematic peer reviews.

Some examples of possible actions will be the following:

- Deepening engagement and support to the EU-wide regional networks involved in thematic / sectorial participation to Horizon 2020 (i.e. space, health, environment and so on) and the Horizon 2020 NCP network (especially under the Horizon 2020 WIDESPREAD pillar).
- In line with current ongoing activity, exploring potential synergies with other existing networks (i.e. EIB on financial instruments, KETs, other Horizon 2020 NCP networks, COSME, EIT/KICs) and providing a comprehensive toolkit and analysis via a devoted section on our webpage.

Indicative budget: EUR 400 000

3. TOTAL BUDGET: EUR 1 200 000

Of this total budget, an indicative amount of up to EUR 100 000 will be reserved for procurement of experts. This will be engaged mostly through individual ad-hoc expert contracts on issues of interest for the S2E project which will complement the analysis already carried out in 2015.

A similar amount (EUR 100 000) will be used for preparation and animation of workshops and other specific stakeholder liaison activities, and associated reporting.

Given the duration of the project, the necessary procurement procedures would be initiated in the first quarter 2016.

4. INDICATIVE CALENDAR FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION

The Union contribution to the procedures described in the work programme will be covered by commitment appropriations for 2015 for which an amount of EUR 1 200 000 is to be made available. Most of the actions will start on the 1st quarter of 2016 and in any case after the signature of the Administrative Agreement.