

30 November 2011

Factsheet: Widening participation in Horizon 2020

The Framework Programmes for research and technology development (FP) have provided a vital contribution to the development of European competitiveness, growth and knowledge generation. There has however been considerable variation across Member States and regions in terms of FP participation. Horizon 2020 will continue to provide funding on the basis of excellence, regardless of geographical location. However, the European Commission will make a major effort under Horizon 2020 to recognise and promote excellence across Europe.

Analysing underperformance

Analysis of the statistics of the 7th Framework Programme participation rates suggests three broad conclusions:

- No single indicator can explain participation under FP7. The picture is multi-level and complex and does not support simple conclusions (for instance, it is not simply a case of 'East vs. West' or 'New vs. Old');
- Variation between Member States as well as regional variations within Member States needs to be addressed. In some cases those pictures can vary greatly, for instance due to significant concentration of research activity in a few major centres.
- Participation analysis should not focus solely on financial returns but also needs to take into account the various important non-financial benefits, such as knowledge acquisition, technology transfer and networking.

The variations in the participation by countries can be explained according to a series of factors, which include issues such as:

- National level investment in research
- Interaction and synergies between the FP and the national research system;
- Experience with FP procedures within national systems
- Wage levels - variation in wages, even taking into account the variations in purchasing power, is a major reason why the level of EU research funding per country varies.
- access to networks
- size of projects - large projects can be problematic for small countries and new actors
- information, communication, training and availability of advice.

Measures to widen participation in Horizon 2020

- **Support to the Member States and regions to design and upgrade their national/regional smart specialisation strategies**, for example via the Smart Specialisation Platform and a policy-learning facility.

- **Linking emerging institutions** centres of excellence and innovative clusters in less developed regions to international leading counterparts elsewhere in Europe through networking, twinning, staff exchange and expert advice.
- **"ERA chairs"** will seek to bring outstanding academics to institutions in high-potential regions. These will create a more level playing field for research and innovation in the European Research Area (ERA).
- **Improving information and communication** as well as **access to international networks** for excellent researchers and innovators. This will include support for existing structures such as COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) and the National Contact Points, in order to increase uptake of best practice from the highly effective national support systems for FP participants.
- **Mobility schemes and support to returning scientists** under Marie Curie – Measures in support of returning scientists could provide impact not only to the visibility of research systems, but also to individuals playing a mentoring role. On the other hand, more attention should be given to young newly qualified PhDs, thereby addressing what is perceived to be a gap between Marie Curie Actions and the ERASMUS scheme.
- **Simplification** – The simplification measures envisaged for Horizon 2020 will provide a major boost, especially for countries either new to the Framework Programme or with smaller administrative capacities, to improve rates of participation.
- **Room for smaller projects and less prescriptive projects** – An increase in the proportion of smaller projects driven by SMEs or small research teams could have a beneficial effect for smaller countries especially.

Synergies with EU Cohesion Policy funding

Horizon 2020 will improve recognition and support for excellence. The upgrading of infrastructure and equipment, on the other hand, will come under the remit of the Structural Funds. For our scientists this means everything from laboratories and equipment to supercomputers and high-speed data networks. In future EU Cohesion Policy will have a greater focus on helping to create this infrastructure. Less developed regions should invest at least 50% of European Regional Development Fund money into support for research and innovation, SMEs and energy efficiency and renewable energies. This will create the right basis for researchers to work and compete for EU research funding. Based on a transparent competition there will also be the possibility to create new excellent research centres, based on a cooperation of excellent research institutions and regions to give our researchers new career perspectives all over Europe, and to help less developed regions to catch up.

Strengthening national R&D investment

Although not under the remit of Horizon 2020, national R&D investment needs to be strengthened. EU Member States have pledged to reach a target of 3% of GDP spent on R&D (Combined public and private investment) by 2020. Member States must also develop national research and innovation strategies. These factors are of crucial importance to ensure there is both the appropriate capacity in the research

system and compatibility of structures to enable successful applications for EU funding.