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The role of the ERC for the career of young researchers

Opportunities and challenges and the role of the ERC Ambassador

Themis Alissafi
ERC Ambassador to Greece
Assist. Prof. Medical School NKUA
Affiliated Investigator BRFAA

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
14 October 2026



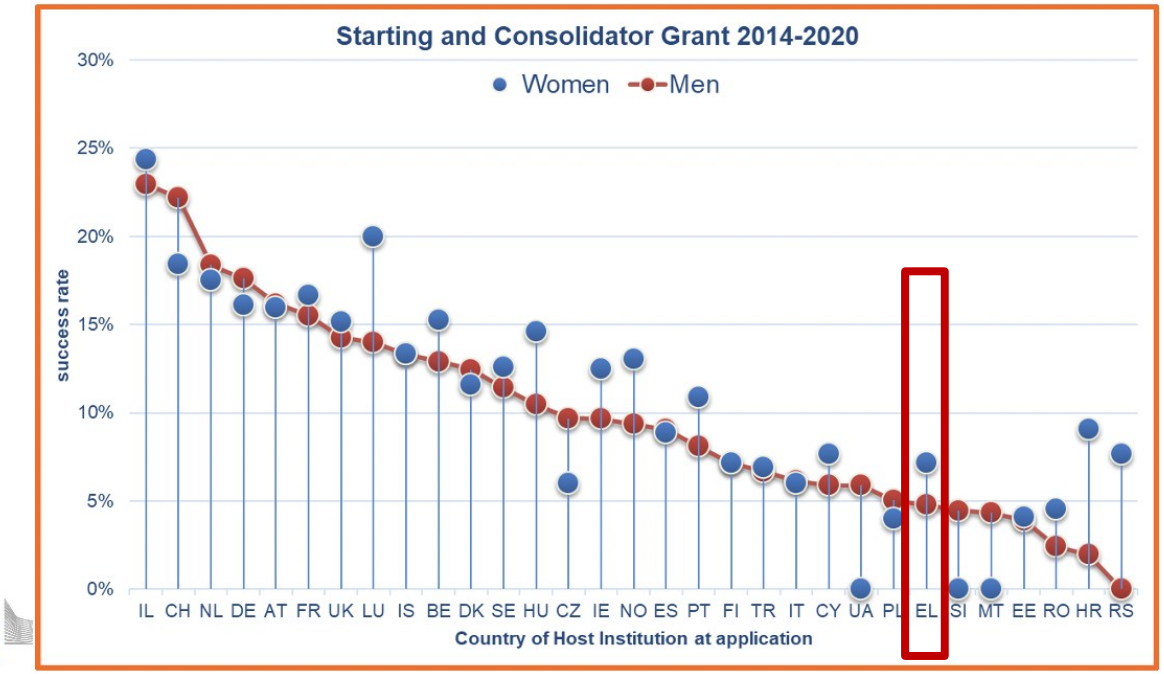
Challenges and Opportunities

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- **Challenges we need to overcome**:

1. one of the lowest success rates in ERC grants in Europe,
2. limited awareness,
3. high competition,
4. brain drain

H2020: Success Rate by Country of Host Institution



- **Opportunities**: growing talent pool, strong diaspora, strong EU collaborations

Greece's ERC challenge

Strong researchers, significant potential, but room for growth

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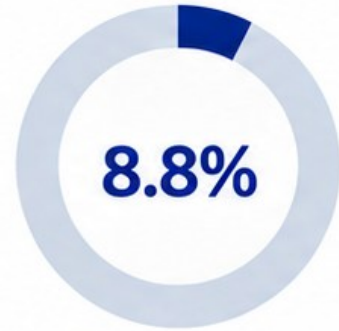
ERC Starting Grant 2026 – Greece (host institution)

39 applications (Step 1) › **5** reached Step 2 › **1** funded project

Only 39 applications from Greek host institutions.
Is Greece's ERC applicant pipeline too small?



Success rate Greece-hosted (1/39)



Success rate overall call (all countries)

Highly talented researchers

Greek researchers demonstrate strong scientific output and are competitive at European level.

Persistent challenges

Low conversion from Step 1 to Step 2 and to funding, raising questions about structural and support gaps.

Opportunity for growth

With targeted measures, Greece can increase its applicant pipeline and success rate, strengthening its position in ERC.

What the ERC meant for my scientific career

Beyond funding: the opportunity to build an independent research programme

Scientific independence

The freedom to pursue ambitious questions in immune regulation and cancer.

Building a team

The opportunity to develop a research group and invest in people, expertise and new approaches.

A longer-term vision

Time and resources to establish a distinctive scientific direction and pursue high-risk ideas.

From Starting Grant to Proof of Concept

REGSIGN → MetaReg: building on discovery research

REGSIGN | ERC Starting Grant

Investigating fundamental mechanisms of immune regulation and their relevance to cancer.

Scientific foundations

New insights and research capabilities can create opportunities for further exploration.

MetaReg | ERC Proof of Concept

A next step to explore the translational potential of discoveries emerging from the research programme.

Association of ERC Grantees

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The ERC Ambassadors

The ERC and the Association of ERC Grantees (AERG) launched the new Ambassadors for the ERC network on 28 April 2025.



The role is completely voluntary

32 ERC grantees have been selected and nominated as Ambassadors for the ERC. Among them are 17 women and 15 men from 21 EU Member States as well as five Associated Countries

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Association of ERC Grantees

The role of the ERC Ambassadors

- Advocate the Importance of Fundamental Research
  "funding frontier research is not optional, it is essential for Europe's long-term health and prosperity"
- Represent ERC at national and local level
- Bridge between ERC and Greek research community
- Work along ERC National Contact Points to disseminate information on opportunities and calls
- Promote ERC's mission and visibility
- Engage with Policy makers to secure additional funding for Fundamental Research

Association of ERC Grantees

Amplifying Research Voices

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- Supporting researchers in accessing ERC opportunities
- Encouraging participation of young and established researchers
- Highlighting success stories from Greece
- Ensuring diverse voices are heard

From advocacy to action in Greece

ERC Ambassador engagement in Greece: connecting researchers, institutions and policymakers



Engaging the next generation

- Outreach activities in schools to introduce young audiences to frontier research and scientific careers
- Public communication through school events and digital channels



Supporting ERC applicants and building community

- Individual guidance and mock interviews for prospective ERC applicants
- Participation in the Advisory Board of the Greek ERC Mentoring Initiative
- Collaboration with ERC National Contact Points and research offices
- ERC information sessions and community-building activities



Policy dialogue

- Exchange with the Deputy Minister for Research and Innovation on challenges facing frontier research in Greece
- Organisation and coordination of ERC President Maria Leptin's visit to Greece (20–21 October 2026)
- Upcoming high-level discussion with the Greek Prime Minister, the Minister of Development, the Minister of State, the ERC President and scientists involved in shaping the proposed Ministry of Research, focusing on structural reforms to strengthen frontier research in Greece



Raising visibility for ERC and Greek research

- Contributions to national media to highlight the value of ERC and Greek research
- Communication of the ERC Ambassador initiative
- Promotion of ERC-funded research and scientific excellence in Greece

ERC grants vs national funding



*EU Widening countries in orange, Widening Associated countries in yellow, all other countries in blue

Source: *ERC Dashboard*; Eurostat

A Greek ERC Pipeline

A proposed national framework to strengthen ERC participation

1. Identify talent and ideas early
2. National ERC expert network
3. ERC Academy
4. Targeted preparatory funding
5. Second opportunity

Identify talent and ideas early

(12–24 months before submission)

- Outreach in universities and research centres to identify promising researchers and ideas
- Awareness activities and role models
- Early engagement with potential ERC candidates

A Greek ERC Pipeline

A proposed national framework to strengthen ERC participation

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National ERC expert network

Scientific mentoring across disciplines

- Network of experienced ERC grantees (in Greece and abroad)
- Discipline-specific mentoring and peer support

A Greek ERC Pipeline

A proposed national framework to strengthen ERC participation

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ERC Greek Academy

Specialized hands on workshops for Critical idea review, proposal feedback and mock interviews

- Structured training programme (from idea to submission)
- Critical review panels and mock interviews by ERC-experienced researchers
- Tailored feedback and guidance

A Greek ERC Pipeline

A proposed national framework to strengthen ERC participation

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Targeted preparatory funding

Seed grants and research mobility

- Small competitive grants (e.g. €10k) to generate preliminary data and strengthen ERC proposals
- Small competitive grants for research mobility to travel and work with ERC grantees and collaborate with leading groups in Europe

A Greek ERC Pipeline

A proposed national framework to strengthen ERC participation

1. Identify talent and ideas early
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5. Second opportunity

5. Funding continuity

1 Fund for a Second Opportunity → High-quality unfunded ERC proposals → **Stronger resubmissions**

Targeted support to improve promising proposals and enable resubmission

2 National Bridge Funding Following ERC → ERC grant completion → **Retain teams & research momentum**

Time-limited national funding to preserve expertise and enable the next grant

ΑΚΑΔΗΜΙΑ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ

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ΙΙΒΕΑΑ
ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΙΑΤΡΟΒΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ ΑΚΑΔΗΜΙΑΣ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ

Strengthening Greece's Participation

IN THE ERC

Visit of **Professor Maria Leptin**

President of the European Research Council



Tuesday 20 October

Biomedical Research Foundation Academy of Athens

UNDER THE AUSPICE

ΓΓΕΚ
ΓΕΝΙΚΗ ΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΕΙΑ ΕΡΕΥΝΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΙΝΟΤΟΜΙΑΣ

IN PARTICIPATION

πράξη
δίκτυο διάχυσης τεχνολογίας

ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
Εθνικόν και Καποδιστριακόν Πανεπιστήμιον Αθηνών



Together, we amplify research voices for a stronger future

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Contact:
Email: talissafi@med.uoa.gr
Linkedin: linkedin.com/in/themis-alissafi

Useful URLs
https://erc.europa.eu/homepage
https://aerg.eu/