

The European Research Council

An Introduction to the ERC

11/07/2022

NCP Greece and Cyprus

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European Research Council

Established by the European Commission

An introduction to the ERC

1. What is the ERC
2. How to apply
3. Statistics

ERC is....

1. Part of Horizon Europe

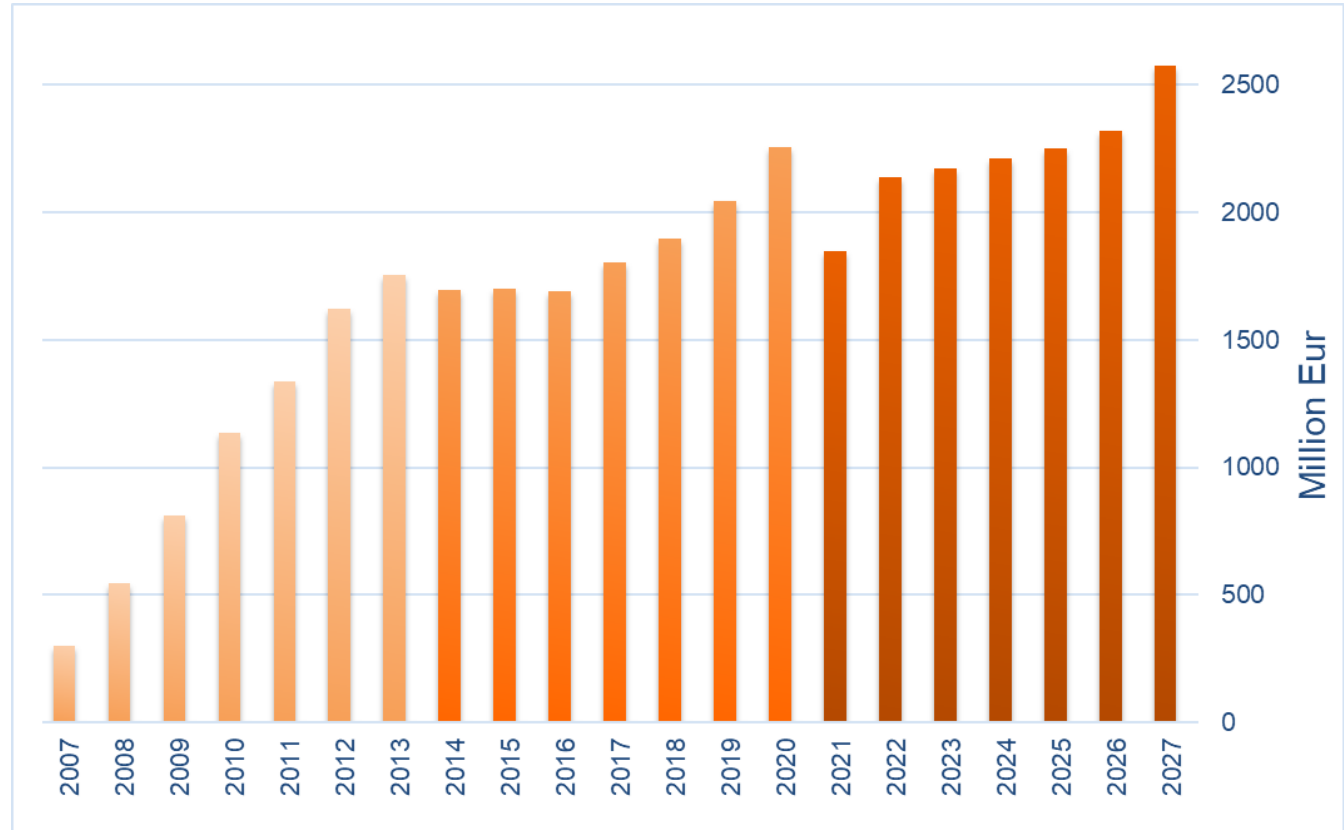


EUR 16 billion
ERC budget in Horizon Europe



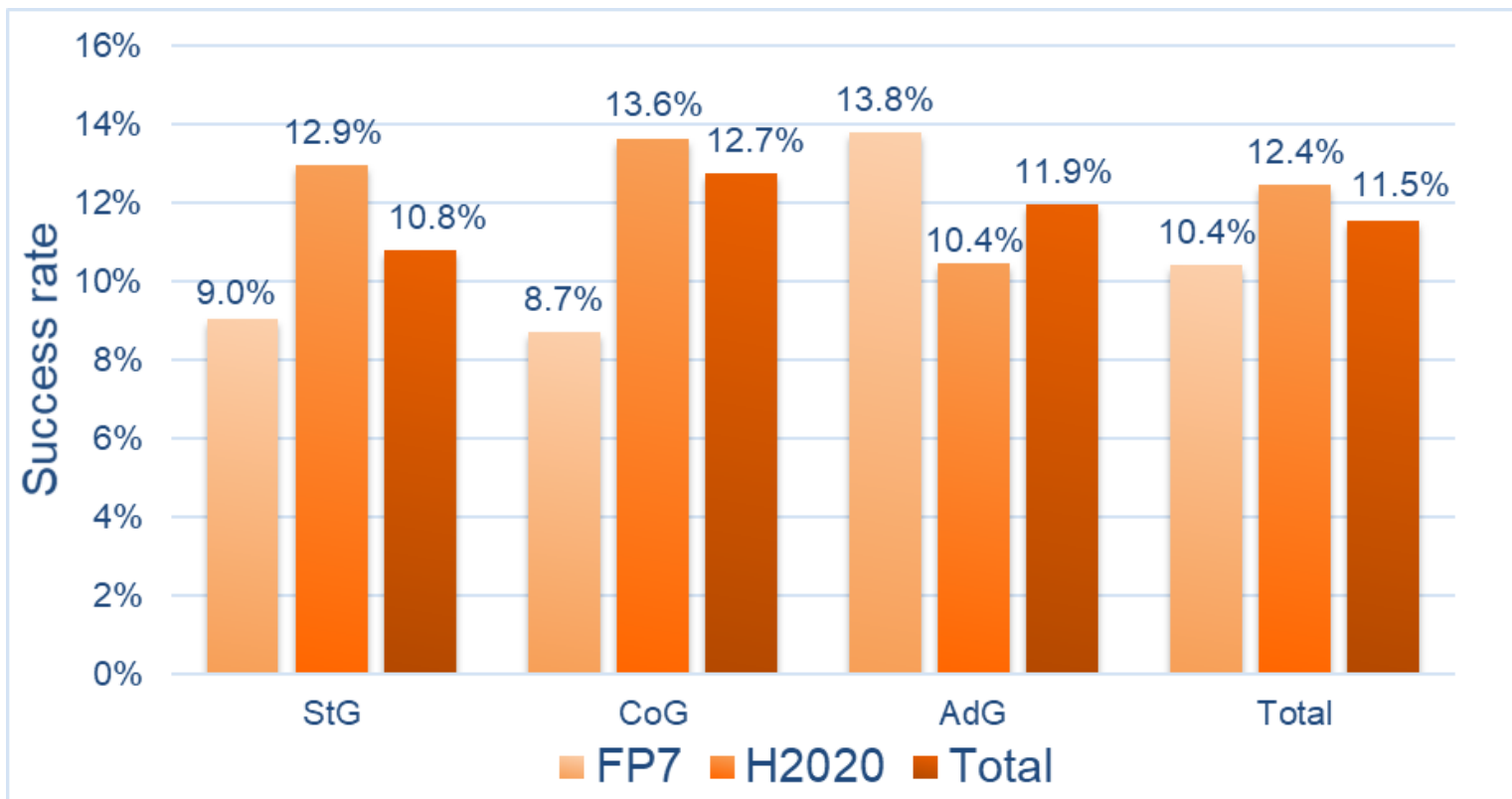
17%
of the entire
Horizon Europe budget

ERC Budget 2007 – 2027: EUR 36.5 billion



- FP7: €7.5 billion
- H2020: €13 billion
- HE: €16 billion

ERC Success Rate



ERC is....

2. Scientific Council Members



Prof. Maria
LEPTIN
(Biology)
ERC President



Prof. Eveline
CRONE
(Psychology)
Vice-President



Prof. Andrzej
JAJSZCZYK
(Electronics and Communication Engineering)
Vice-President



Prof. Nektarios
TAVERNARAKIS
(Molecular Systems Biology)
Vice-President



Prof. Geneviève
ALMOUZIONI
(Biology)



Prof. Paola
BOVOLENTA
(Neurobiology)



Prof. Ben
FERINGA
(Organic Chemistry)



Prof. Mercedes
GARCÍA-ARENAL
(History)



Prof. Gerd
GIGERENZER
(Psychology)



Prof. Liselotte
HØJGAARD
(Medicine)



Prof. Dirk
INZÉ
(Plant Biology)



Prof. Eystein
JANSEN
(Earth Science)



Prof. Chryssa
KOUVELIOTOU
(High-Energy Astrophysics)



Prof. László
LOVÁSZ
(Mathematics)



Prof. Kurt
MEHLHORN
(Computer Science)



Prof. Nicola
SPALDIN
(Materials Theory)



Prof. Giovanni
SARTOR
(Law)



Prof. Jesper
SVEJSTRUP
(Biology)



Prof. Alice
VALKÁROVÁ
(Physics)



Prof. Milena
ŽIĆ FUCHS
(Linguistics)



ERC is....

3. The ERCEA

The ERC Dedicated Implementation Structure

Implements the ERC strategy as set by the Scientific Council and manages ERC operations



ERC in Figures: After 15 Years, a Success Story



Over **11,000**
top researchers funded since
the ERC creation in 2007



Over **200,000**
articles from ERC projects published
in scientific journals



Over **80,000**
researchers and other professionals
employed in ERC research teams



Over **890** research institutions hosting ERC
grantees – universities, public or private
research centres in the EU or Associated
Countries



Over **2,200**
patents and other IPR applications
generated by ERC funding



87
nationalities of
grant holders



Over **400**
start-ups identified as founded
or co-founded by ERC grantees



9 Nobel Prizes, **4** Fields Medals, **11** Wolf Prizes
and other prizes awarded to ERC grantees



ERC Basics:

1 researcher, 1 Host Institution, 1 project, 1 selection criterion



European Research Council
Established by the European Commission

INDIVIDUAL RESEARCHERS
FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD
**LONG TERM
GRANTS**

TO HIGH-RISK/HIGH-GAIN PIONEERING PROJECTS
IN ANY FIELD OF FRONTIER RESEARCH



Life Sciences



Physical Sciences and Engineering



Social Sciences and Humanities



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ERC Grant Schemes



Starting Grants
starters (2-7 years after PhD) up to € 1.5 Mio
for 5 years



Consolidator Grants
Consolidators (7-12 years after PhD) up to € 2 Mio
for 5 years



Advanced Grants
track-record of significant research achievements in
the last 10 years up to € 2.5 Mio
for 5 years



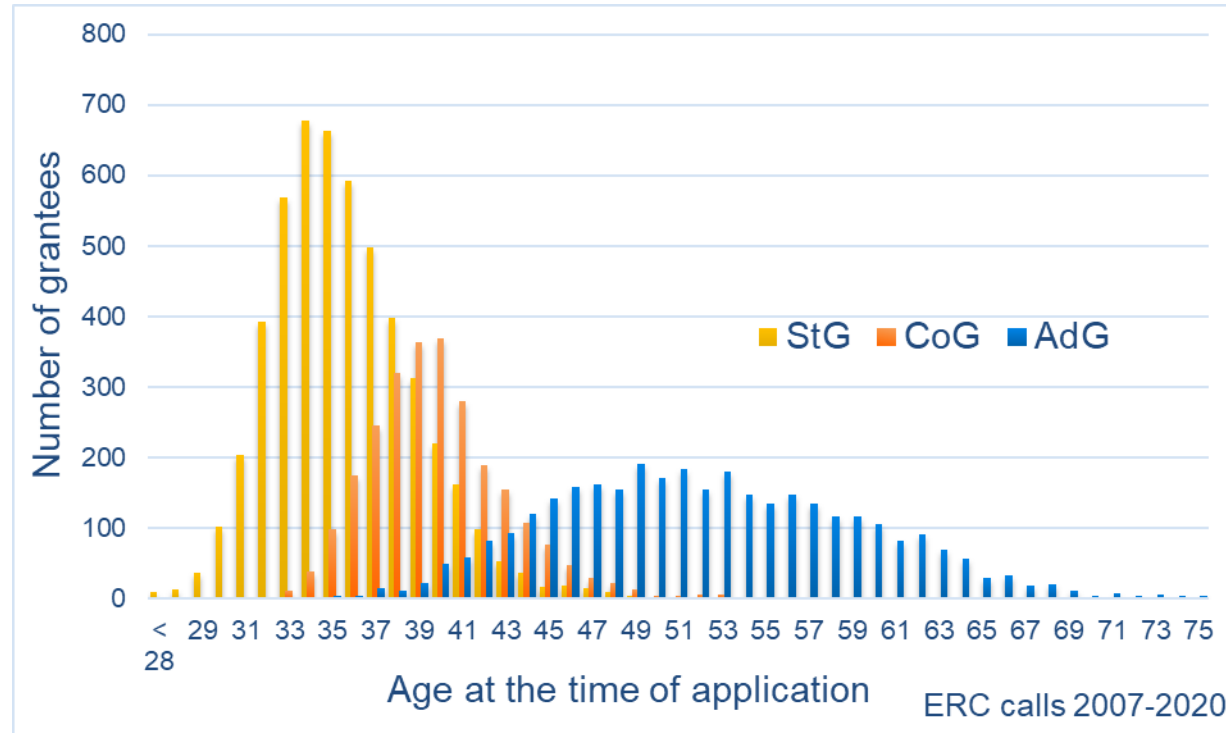
Synergy Grants
2 – 4 Principal Investigators up to € 10.0 Mio for 6
years
1 PI can be based outside EU/AC



Proof-of-Concept
bridging gap between research - earliest stage of marketable innovation
lump sum €150,000 for ERC grant holders



Priority to Young Scientists



Two-thirds of ERC grants to early-stage Principal Investigators

Evaluation process

Individual grants

EXCELLENCE IS THE SOLE EVALUATION CRITERION

Excellence of the Research Project

Ground-breaking nature & Potential scientific impact

- ✓ Important scientific challenges
- ✓ Ambitious & Beyond state-of-art
- ✓ High risk/High gain

Scientific approach

- ✓ Feasibility
- ✓ Relevance

Excellence of the Principal Investigator

- ✓ Ability for ground-breaking research
- ✓ Scientific expertise and capacity to execute the project
- ✓ Know-how (skills, experience, disciplines, teams)
- ✓ Leadership (potential or proven)

At **step 2** methodology, resources and PIs commitment are assessed



Evaluation process

Synergy grants

EXCELLENCE IS THE SOLE EVALUATION CRITERION

Excellence of the Research Project

Ground-breaking nature & Potential scientific impact

- ✓ Important scientific challenges
- ✓ Ambitious & Beyond state-of-art
- ✓ High risk/High gain

Scientific approach

- ✓ Feasibility
- ✓ Relevance
- ✓ **Sum beyond individual PIs alone**
- ✓ **Combination of scientific approaches**

Excellence of the Principal Investigators

- ✓ Ability for ground-breaking research
- ✓ Scientific expertise and capacity to execute the project
- ✓ Know-how (skills, experience, disciplines, teams)
- ✓ **Each PI to be assessed according to their career benchmarks**
- ✓ **The group as a whole is assessed: intellectual capacity, creativity**

At **step 2 and 3** methodology, resources and PIs commitment are assessed

Why Should one Apply for an ERC grant?

- Research topic of own choice, with a team of own choice
- True financial autonomy for 5 years
- Negotiate with the host institution the best conditions of work
- Attract top team members (EU and non-EU) and collaborators
- Portability of grants within Europe
- Attract additional funding

An introduction to the ERC

1. What is the ERC
2. How to apply
3. Statistics

Step 1: Get the information (early on)!

- Register early, get familiar with the European Commission's Funding and Tender portal and download the templates

<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home>

- Read the call documents (**Information for Applicants**, Work Programme, Frequently Asked Questions) that explain how to prepare your proposal

- Talk to your Institution's grant office

- Talk to ERC grantees



The screenshot displays the European Commission's 'Funding & tender opportunities' portal. The header includes the European Commission logo and the text 'Single Electronic Data Interchange Area (SEDIA)'. Below the header, there is a navigation menu with options: 'SEARCH FUNDING & TENDERS', 'HOW TO PARTICIPATE', 'PROJECTS & RESULTS', 'WORK AS AN EXPERT', and 'SUPPORT'. The main content area features a blue banner for 'Horizon 2020 Framework Programme (H2020)'. Below this, a section titled 'ERC STARTING GRANTS' is visible, dated 'Jul 17, 2019' with ID 'ERC-2020-STG'. The 'Type of action' is listed as 'ERC-STG Starting Grant', with a 'Deadline Model: single-stage' and an 'Opening: 17 July 2019'. At the bottom, there is a 'Horizon 2020' section with a 'Work programme: ERC-2020' and a call to action: 'Call name: Call for proposals for ERC Starting Grant | Call ID: ERC-2020-STG' with a link to 'See all topics of this call >'.

Step 2: make sure you are eligible!

- Window is calculated as according to the 1st of January of the year of the Call.
- Extensions of eligibility window possible for StG and CoG for documented cases of:
 - ➔ Maternity – 18 months per child (before or after PhD)
 - ➔ Paternity – actual time taken off
 - ➔ Military service
 - ➔ Medical specialty training
 - ➔ Caring for seriously ill family members
- No limit to the total years of extension



WP2023: Change in PhD Eligibility Reference Date

New « PhD eligibility reference date » rule:

The reference date towards the calculation of the eligibility period shall be the **certified date of the successful defence**.

- Allows for the eligibility window to reflect the real academic age instead of the “administrative age” of the PI
- Puts an end to confusion about “award according to national rules” - brings clarity to applicants
- Most PhD certificates include the defence date
- If the PhD certificate does not show defence date, the candidate has to ask for written confirmation from the awarding institution

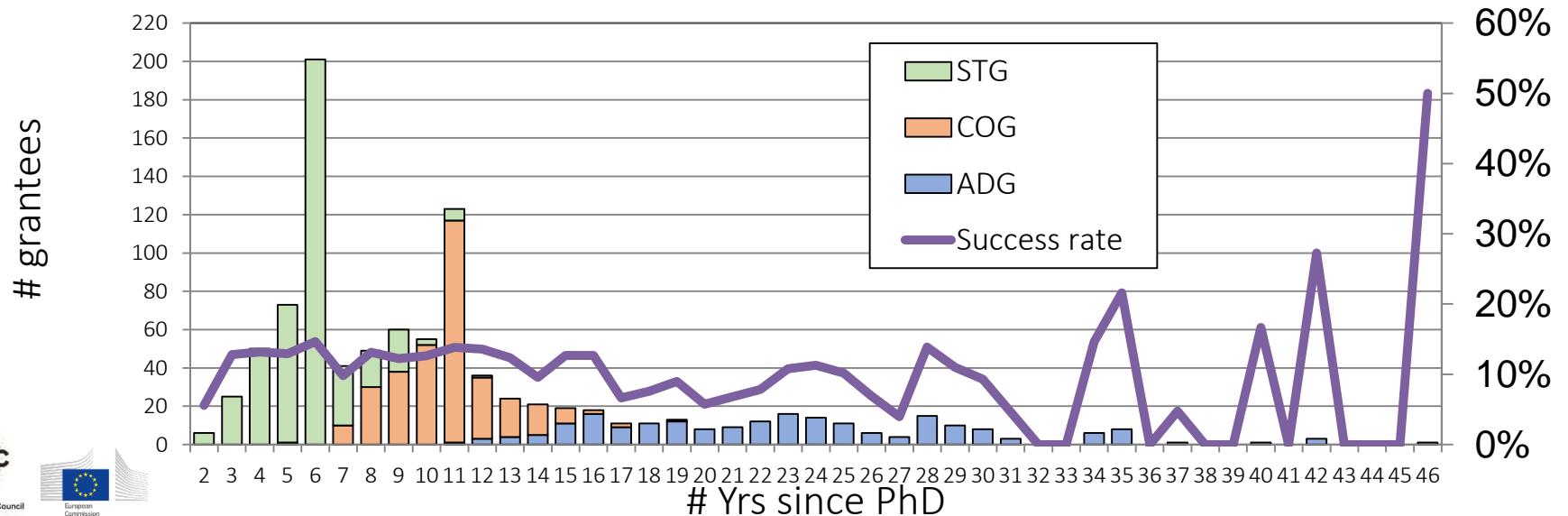


Step 3: Decide whether to apply.

Rumour: I should wait until the end of the eligibility window in order to accumulate enough seniority: only then I will be competitive.

✗ NOT true: The success rate is virtually flat across the eligibility window (StG, CoG). For advanced grantees only the preceding 10 years are considered, not life-time achievements.

STG COG ADG 2020 Grantees by years since PhD



Step 4: Choose your Panel!

Evaluation Panel Structure (2021-2023)

Life Sciences

- LS1 Molecules of Life: Biological Mechanisms, Structures and Functions
- LS2 Integrative Biology: From Genes and Genomes to Systems
- LS3 Cellular, Developmental and Regenerative Biology
- LS4 Physiology in Health, Disease and Ageing
- LS5 Neuroscience and Disorders of the Nervous System
- LS6 Immunity, Infection and Immunotherapy
- LS7 Prevention, Diagnosis and Treatment of Human Diseases
- LS8 Environmental Biology, Ecology and Evolution
- LS9 Biotechnology and Biosystems Engineering

Physical Sciences & Engineering

- PE1 Mathematics
- PE2 Fundamental Constituents of Matter
- PE3 Condensed Matter Physics
- PE4 Physical and Analytical Chemical Sciences
- PE5 Synthetic Chemistry and Materials
- PE6 Computer Science and Informatics
- PE7 Systems and Communication Engineering
- PE8 Products and Process Engineering
- PE9 Universe Sciences
- PE10 Earth System Science
- PE11 Materials Engineering

Social Sciences and Humanities

- SH1 Individuals, Markets and Organisations
- SH2 Institutions, Governance and Legal Systems
- SH3 The Social World and Its Diversity
- SH4 The Human Mind and Its Complexity
- SH5 Cultures and Cultural Production
- SH6 The Study of the Human Past
- SH7 Human Mobility, Environment, and Space



Step 5: Start writing ...

PART A – admin forms online

Section 1 Proposal and PI info

Section 2 Host Institution info

Section 3 Budget

Section 4 Ethics

Section 5 Call-specific Questions

Annexes – submitted as .pdf

- Statement of support of HI
- copy of PhD or equiv. (StG & CoG)

If applicable:

- document for extension of eligibility window (StG & CoG)
- explanatory info on ethical issues

Seen by the
panel

PART B1 – submitted as .pdf

Abstract and Cross-Panel explanation 1 p.

Extended Synopsis 5 p.

(Recommended Model) CV 2 p.

Funding ID 1 p.

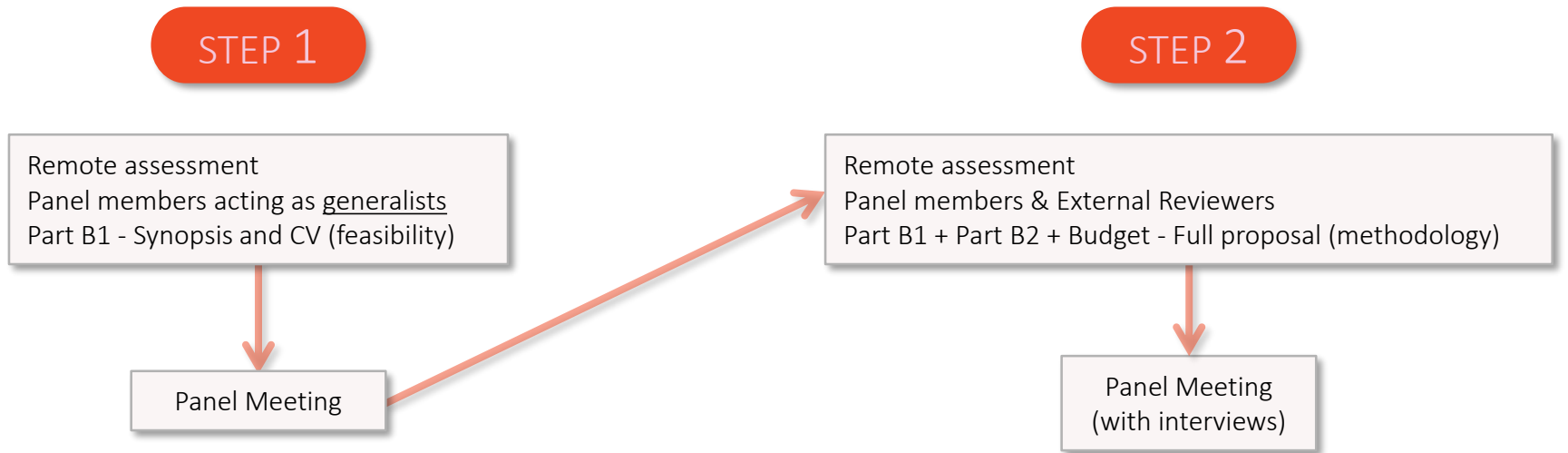
Track Record 2 p.

PART B2 – submitted as .pdf

Scientific Proposal 15 p.
(incl. budget table)



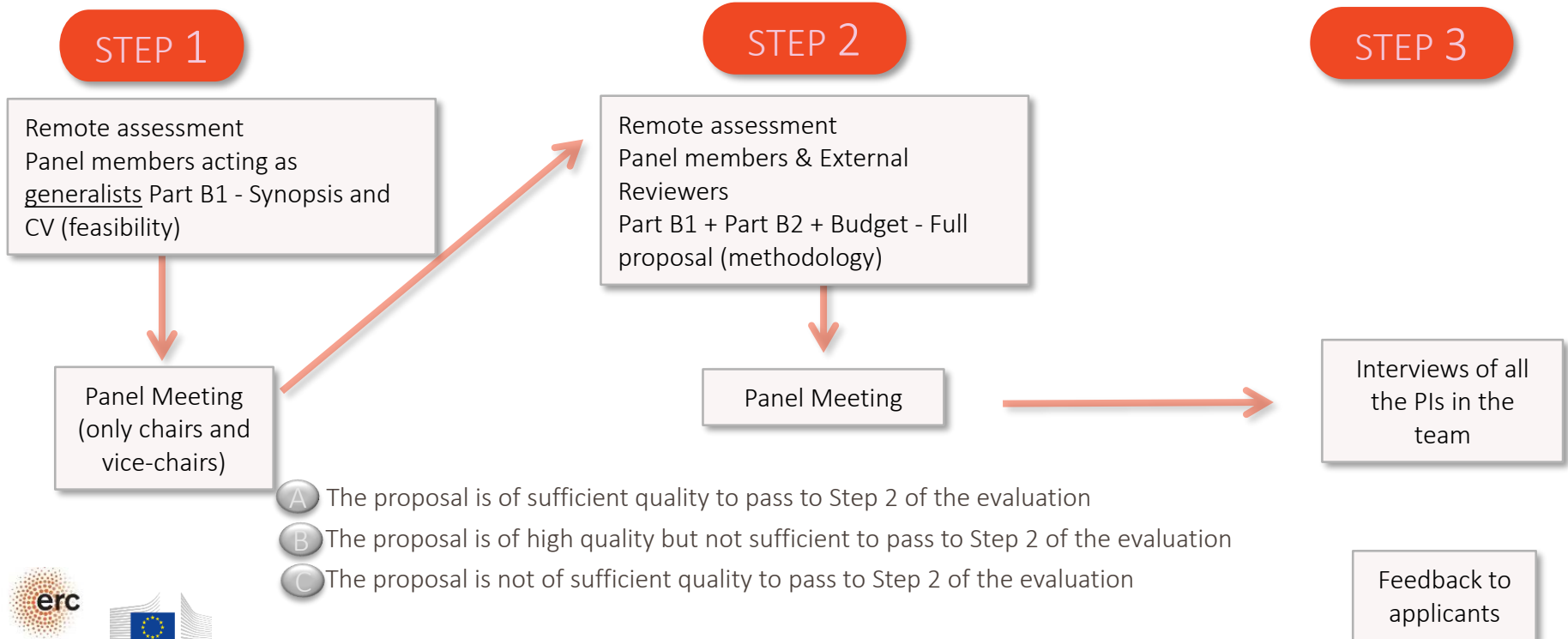
Evaluation procedure and scoring system - individual grants



- A The proposal is of sufficient quality to pass to Step 2 of the evaluation
- B The proposal is of high quality but not sufficient to pass to Step 2 of the evaluation
- C The proposal is not of sufficient quality to pass to Step 2 of the evaluation

Feedback to applicants

Evaluation procedure and scoring system - **synergy** grants



Step 6: Proof-read and Submit!

- A submitted proposal can be **revised until the call deadline** by submitting a new version and overwriting the previous one.
- Once you submit, all you need to do is wait!



It's our turn to do the work!

I have been invited for an interview – now what?



I have been invited for an interview – now what?

- Have clear and representative slides and focus on SCIENCE! Don't try to make a business presentation – you are talking to scientists.
- Anticipate questions. Prepare also for cases where you do not have an answer
- Know the details of your proposal and methods, as well as your research area – who are your main competitors/collaborators?
- Visit your collaborators and discuss your supporting evidence with them
- Just in case, be able to answer the questions:
 - Which 2 sentences you hope will be added to a textbook thanks to your ERC project?
 - Where do you want to be in 5 years?



I have been invited for an interview – now what?

- Don't over-explain your CV.
- When the panel asks questions, don't answer with “excellent question”.
- Keep the time.
- PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!!!!

Rumour 1: Choose your Acronym in alphabetical order, interviews are planned alphabetically.

✗NOT true: the important thing is to choose an easy-to-say acronym since this helps panel members during discussions!

Rumour 2: Late afternoon interviews have less chance, PMs are tired.

✗NOT true: you need to "shake" the PMs up no matter what time of day!



Typical reasons for rejection

Research Project

- Scope: Too narrow \leftrightarrow too broad/unfocussed
- Incremental research
- Collaborative project, several PIs
- Work plan not detailed enough/unclear
- Insufficient risk management
- Part B2 did not give sufficient information on the methodology

Principle Investigator

- Insufficient track-record
- Insufficient potential for independence

Interview

- Vaguely addressed questions
- Panel not convinced is their own idea/project
- Lack of supporting evidence
- Similar work published in the meantime
- Unaddressed issues

If rejected, **KEEP TRYING**

Reapplications have a higher success rate

Use the feedback from evaluation reports



2023 Call Calendar

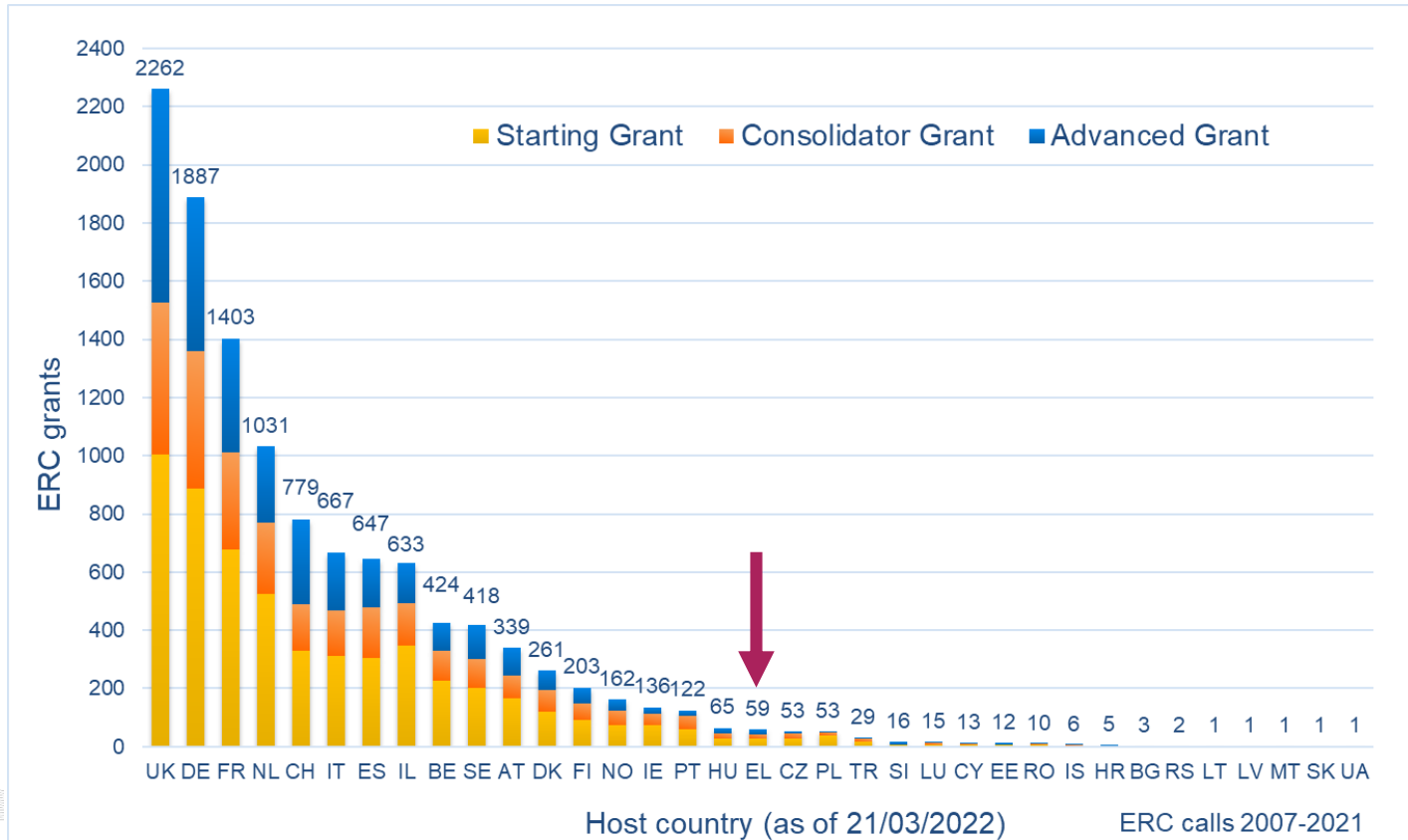
| ERC calls | Call Opening | Submission Deadline |
|---|--------------|---------------------|
| Starting Grants (TBC) ERC-2023-StG | 12/07/2022* | 25/10/2022* |
| Synergy Grants (TBC) ERC-2023-SyG | 13/07/2022* | 08/11/2022* |
| Consolidator Grants (TBC) ERC-2023-CoG | 28/09/2022* | 02/02/2023* |
| Advanced Grants (TBC) ERC-2023-AdG | 08/12/2022* | 23/05/2023* |



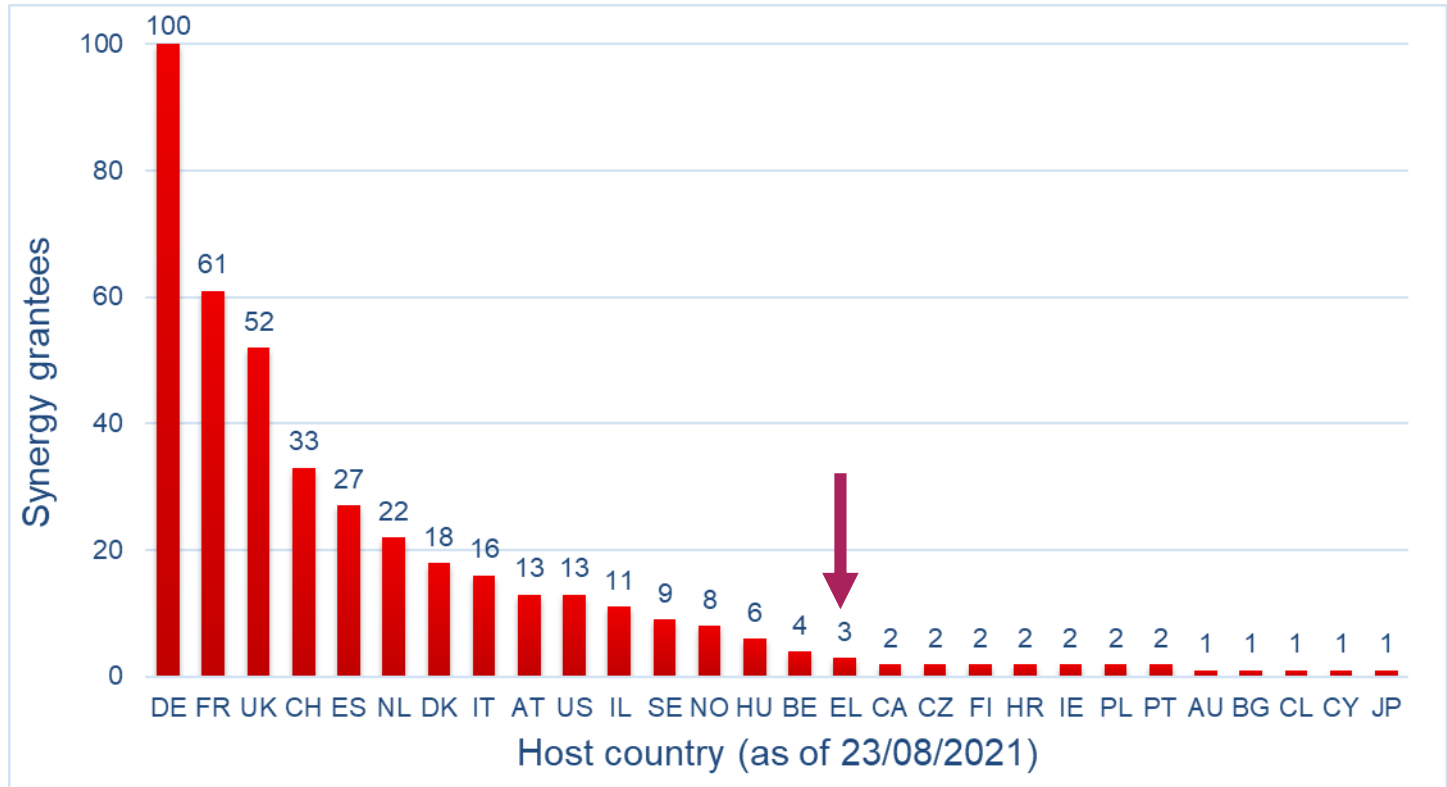
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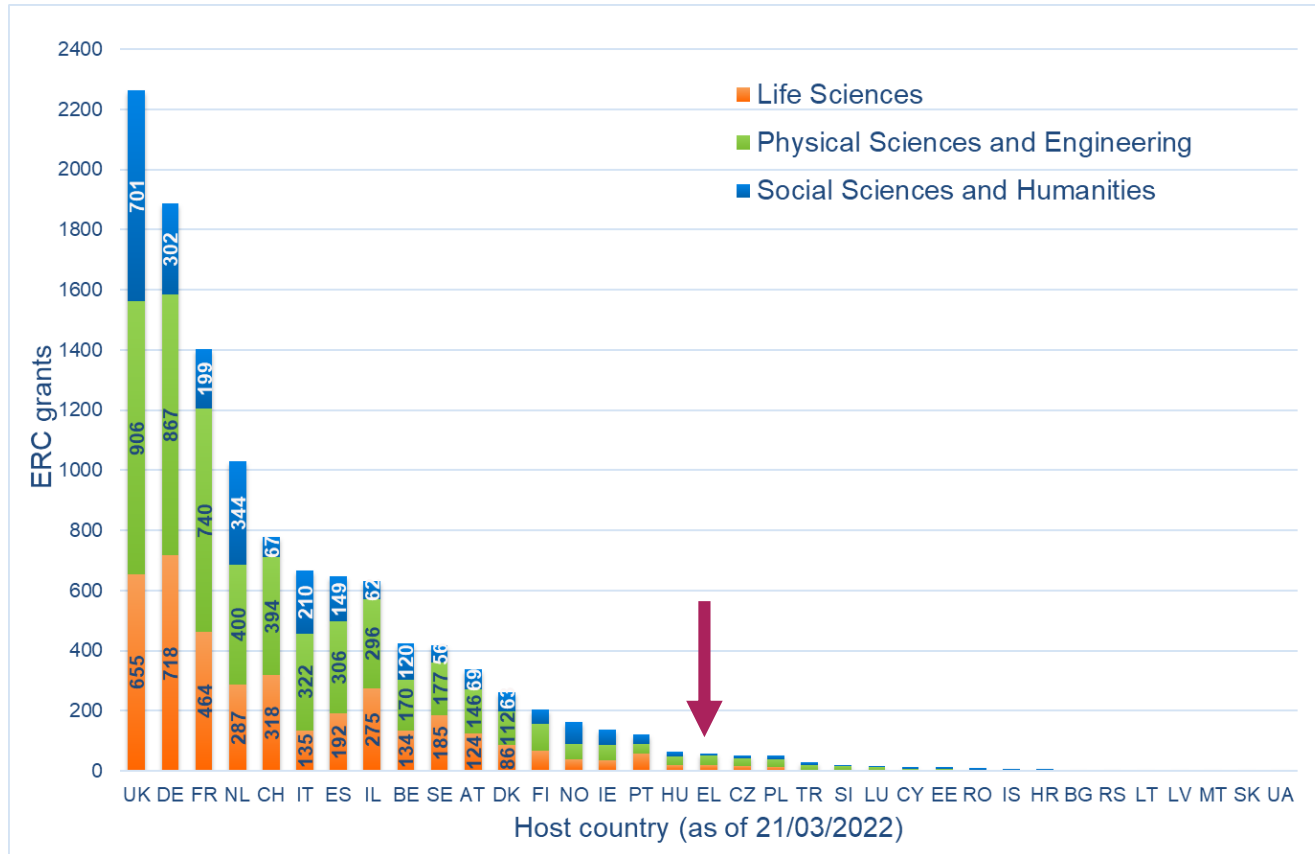
ERC Funded Projects by Country of HI



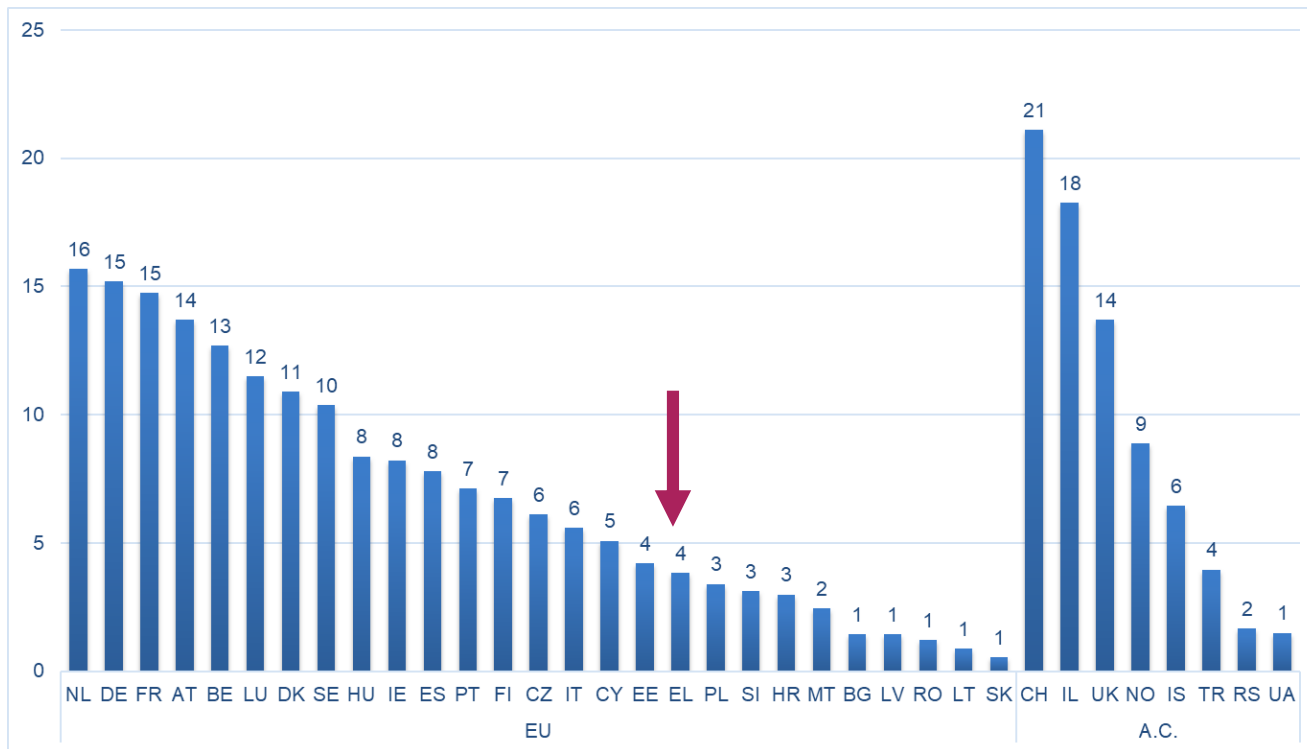
Synergy Grantees



ERC Funded Projects by Domain

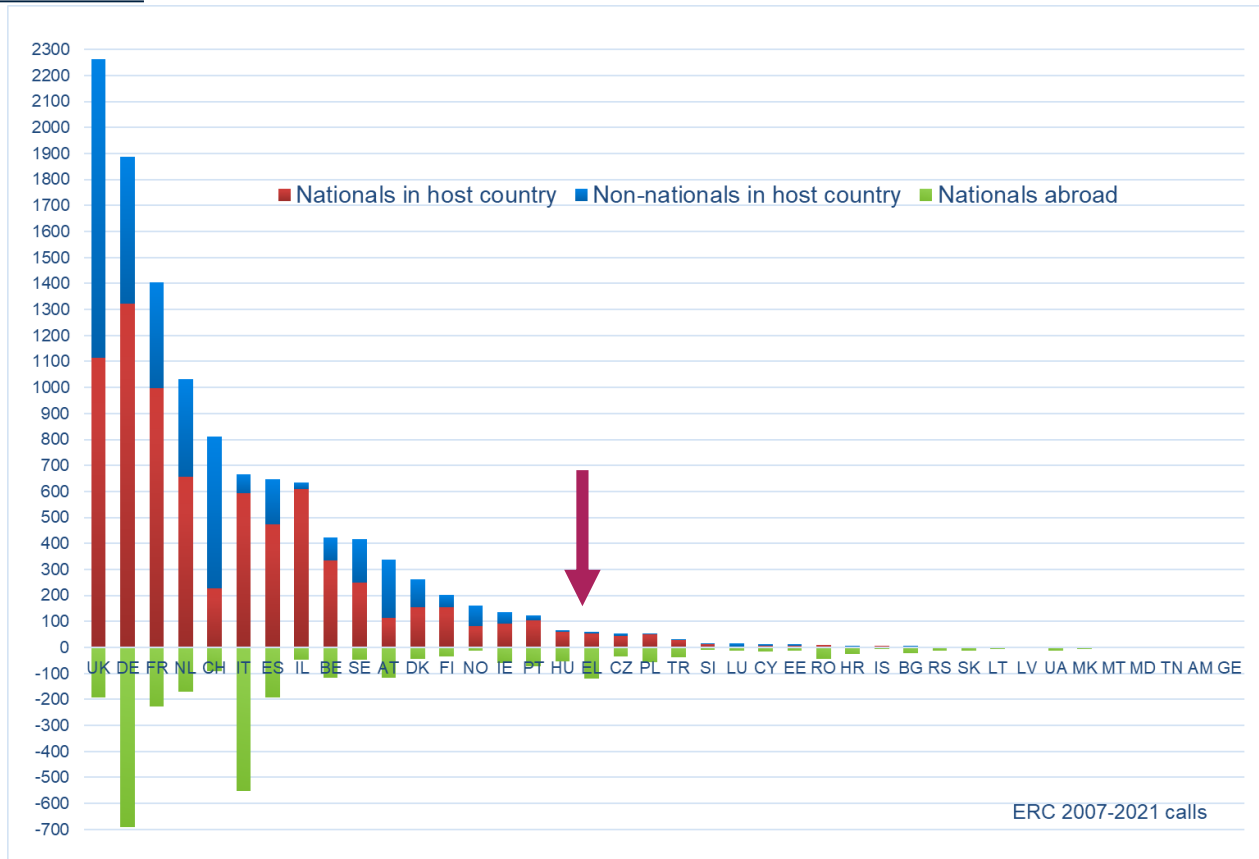


Success Rate by Country of HI

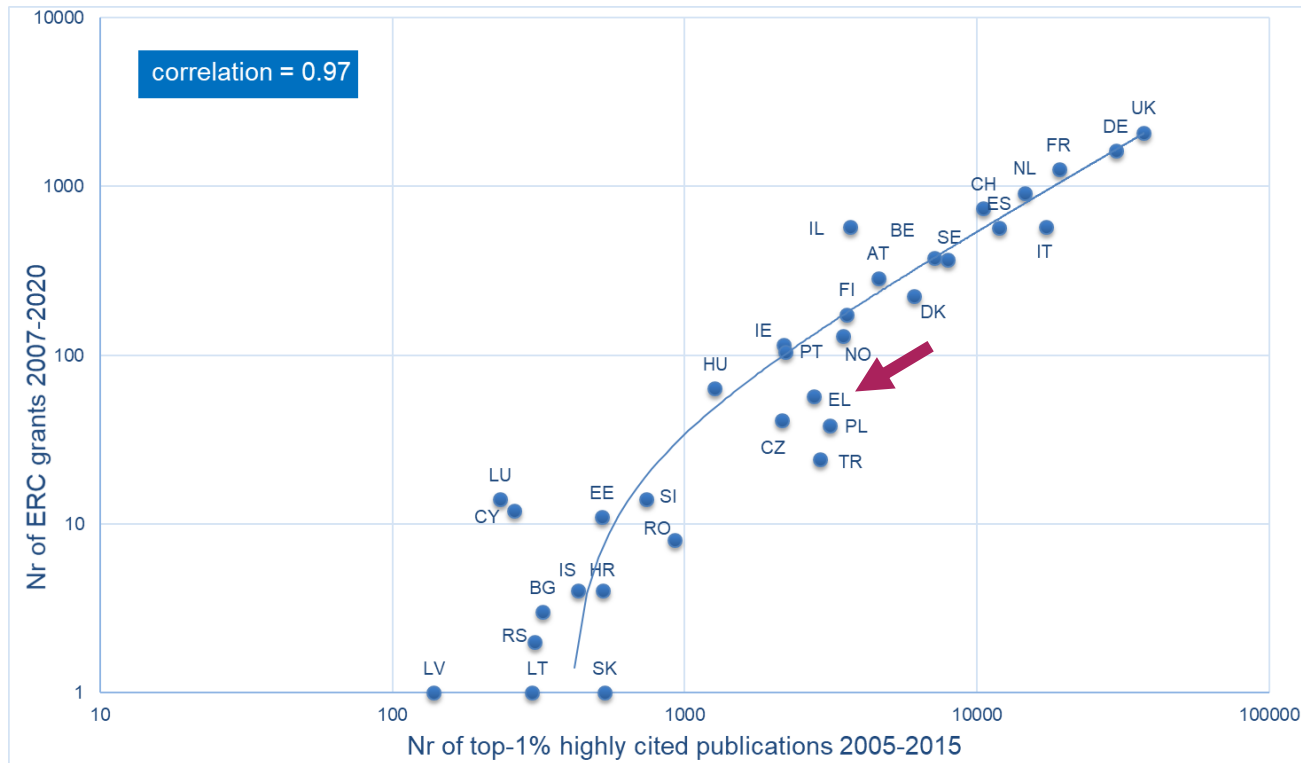


Success rate (2007-2021)

Grantees at Home and Abroad



ERC Grants versus Top Publications



———— Linear fit
Host countries as of
26/08/2020

Where Can You Find More Information?



Videos - ERC Classes

- What to consider before applying
- How to fill in the application (Part B1 and B2)
- The interview
- How the evaluation works

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbFbzkVWgCU&list=PLtv6FnsXqnXAYRk6HCerwMxwMLOZKoMcy>

Thank You!

More information: erc.europa.eu

National Contact Point: erc.europa.eu/national-contact-points

Sign up for news alerts: erc.europa.eu/keep-updated-erc

Funding & Tender Opportunities: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home>

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www.linkedin.com/company/european-research-council



<https://www.youtube.com/c/EuropeanResearchCouncil>



Let's first talk about Part B1!

- Part B1 gives the first impression of your project/yourself and will determine if you pass to Step 2
- Avoid jargon
- No excessive highlighting
- Do not oversell it



Questions to ask yourself

a) Research Project

- Is my project new, innovative, bringing in new solutions/theories?
- Does it promise to go substantially beyond the state of the art? Focus on the ground-breaking nature – no incremental research! Something significant, that will last, not just something that will be improved in 5 years (one major step better than several small steps).
- Why is my project important? Answering a complete question (not only ‘what’ but also ‘why’) - Think Big! Make sure that your idea needs an ERC to do it!
- How can I prove/support my case? Do I have a hypothesis? Do I have supporting evidence? Have I proven the project's feasibility? Are my goals realistic?
- Is it timely? (Why wasn't it done in the past?)
- What's the risk? Is it justified by a substantial potential gain? Do I have a plan for managing the risk? Make sure that your risk is not too early on in the project. Have I proposed alternatives? (proof of maturity?)
- Have I given a realistic picture of my collaborations? Show that you can drive the collaborations but that it is you who will be leading the project.



Questions to ask yourself

b) Principal Investigator

- Why am I the best/only person to carry it out? Know your competitors – what is the state of play, and why is your idea and scientific approach outstanding compared to them?
- Am I able to work independently, and to manage a 5-year project with a substantial budget? List prior research endeavours and funding, explain your role and contribution.
- Am I internationally recognised, active and competitive? Serve on or chair technical programme committees, associate editor, editor-in-chief, expert service, etc. Research mobility, international collaborations.
- Have I shown my scientific leadership in my CV?



Some more rumours...

Rumour 1: You can only apply for an ERC grant if you are a highly accomplished scientist.

✗NOT true: Accomplishments are appreciated in relation to your stage/seniority as giving some evidence of your capacity to conduct the research you propose and of creativity within the past 10-12 years of your career.

Rumour 2: To be successful, you need to continue on an established research line, to prove continuity.

✗NOT true: Generally, the opposite is true.

Rumour 3: If you have already obtained an ERC grant you are less/more likely to get another one.

✗NOT true: Panels look at each proposal on its own merit and in comparison with the other applications, irrespectively of whether you have or have not obtained an ERC grant in the past.

Rumour 4: The more socially or medically relevant a grant proposal is, the higher the chances of it getting funded.

✗NOT true: ERC funds frontier research, not research that promises to be only an incremental advancement of knowledge. This is irrespectively of the field and whether it has societal, medical or clinical applications.

When writing your CV...

- Use the **recommended** model cv as much as possible.
- Remember that the CV/Track Record part of B1 are **as important as** your project!
- Convince the panel that you are the forefront of your research field – this may be (very) different for different people. Highlight your **key** strengths and accomplishments.
- Tell your story!
 - ➔ Explain what has been **your own contribution** to your publications and how they have impacted the field (incl. papers published without your PhD and postdoc supervisor). Quality is way more important than quantity!
 - ➔ Explain publishing **habits** in your field and country if needed.
 - ➔ If you know that you have **gaps** or other issues in your CV (e.g. co-authored publications), explain them.
 - ➔ Describe accurately any other activity which can indicate **scientific maturity**.
- Do not forget to put your ORCID ID
- Fill in your Funding ID **fully**.

Rumour : *One needs publications in Nature/Science/High IF journals to succeed.*

✗NOT true: however, publishing with senior scientists (former supervisors) may raise doubts about maturity/scientific independence.

Now let's talk about Part B2!

- Do not repeat the synopsis, go into the details of your methodology and work plan!
- Explain your hypothesis or provide supporting evidence (if it exists)
- Do and redo the structure of the WPs* until you are fully convinced
- Make sure that the quantitative and qualitative differences to the state-of-the-art are clear and referenced - show you did your homework!
- Provide alternative strategies to mitigate risks.
- Make sure that there is an obvious link between B1 and B2!
- Make use of the evaluation criteria to structure your text (Ground breaking nature, Potential impact, Scientific Approach) – e.g. use them as title/subtitle.

Rumour : *I need preliminary results.*

✗NOT true: however explain how the literature supports your hypothesis.



Now let's talk about Part B2!

- Make the project "easy to read and attractive" – use paragraphs and correct typos!
- Check coherence of figures – pay attention to figure legends
- Use full space available – but not more
- Make sure you give full references (these are excluded from page count so there is no excuse)
- You should add/describe some sort of timeline
- Think the project as a team - explain involvement of team members and collaborators (be careful though: ERC proposals are NOT consortium proposals)
- Justify requested resources – explain your budget properly



Synergy Grants – Key Features

ERC Synergy Grants aim to enable minimum 2 to maximum 4 Principal Investigators and their teams to bring together complementary skills, knowledge, and resources, in order to jointly address ambitious research problems.

Synergy proposals should aim:

- To promote substantial advances at the frontiers of knowledge,
- To cross-fertilize scientific fields,
- To encourage new productive lines of enquiry and new methods and techniques, including unconventional approaches and investigations at the interface between established disciplines,
- To enable transformative research not only at the forefront of European science but also to become a benchmark on a global scale.

PIs must demonstrate the synergies, complementarities and added value that could lead to breakthroughs that would not be possible by the individual PIs working alone.

