

## **Summary Report: IGLO Global Research Area in Action**

### **Feedback from National Experts on the Participation of Third Countries in Horizon 2020 and Suggestions for Framework Programme 9**

**Brussels, 9 March 2017**

#### **Background and objectives**

The *Global Research Area in Action* event was organised by the Informal Group of RTD Liaison Offices (IGLO) in Brussels as a follow-up from a previous event, held on 17 October 2016, during which representatives of IGLO, third country stakeholder organisations and the wider public discussed a number of legal, financial and practical obstacles to the participation of third countries in Horizon 2020.

The aim of the *Global Research Area in Action* event was to facilitate the discussions of national experts on the current rules for participation of third countries in Horizon 2020 in the context of the programme's on-going interim evaluation and to enable them to come up with a set of specific suggestions for improved rules for participation of third countries in Framework Programme 9 (FP9).

The suggestions included in this report are the outcome of the discussions held by over 50 national experts from EU Member States/Associated Countries and representatives of third countries (National Contact Points, S&T Counsellors from diplomatic missions to the EU, etc.), which took place during the event. Each of the four discussion groups addressed several aspects related to the participation of international partners in Horizon 2020, namely the appropriateness of the current policy framework, financial rules, legal rules and practical problems, and made recommendations for the future.

Several written contributions from national experts, who were unable to attend the event (focusing on projects involving beneficiaries from Australia, USA, India, Sri Lanka and numerous African countries), were also received by the organisers.

**Consequently, the suggestions listed in the following parts of this report are those of the national experts who took part in the discussions, or submitted written contributions, and do not necessarily represent the views of the IGLO network.**

This summary report will be passed on to the European Parliament and the European Commission, as well as the High Level Group on maximising impact of EU Research and Innovation Programmes, to feed into the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020.

## Event summary

The event commenced with a brief introduction to the subject by a representative of the IGLO Working Group on International Cooperation in the context of the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020. This was followed by several presentations by representatives of EU institutions (European Parliament and European Commission) and stakeholder organisations dealing with international cooperation in EU Framework Programmes (Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation - SFIC, EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation and the Austrian Research Promotion Agency – FFG).

The representative of the **European Parliament** presented the institution's views on the participation of third countries in Horizon 2020 and potential scenarios for the next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. He stressed the role of the European Parliament not only in negotiating the Framework Programme's budget, but also in science diplomacy.

The representative of the **European Commission (DG RTD)**, on the other hand, highlighted the importance of international cooperation in tackling major societal challenges, as stated in the 2012 EU strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation. He reminded the audience about the Commission's recent work on improving the framework conditions for increased international cooperation in Horizon 2020 (e.g. negotiation of the so-called co-funding mechanisms with some third countries) and highlighted the latest legal changes to the rules for participation of some third country partners in Horizon 2020 projects, introduced by version 4.0 of the Model Grant Agreement (Article 14a - Implementation of action tasks by international partners), as well as the Implementing/ Administrative Arrangements recently signed with USA and Canada. This was followed by an outline of the European Commission's plans for potential incentives for international cooperation, early ideas on the association status in future Framework Programmes and an introduction of the new Service Facility in support of the strategic development of international cooperation in research and innovation, currently being launched by the European Commission.

Next, a representative of the **Strategic Forum for International Science and Technology Cooperation (SFIC)** presented the main recommendations of Member States' representatives from SFIC for the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020, included in the Forum's latest opinion on this matter, adopted in February 2017. He highlighted a number of problems identified in the opinion – such as lack of visibility of international cooperation in Horizon 2020 topics or insufficient links between the Roadmaps for international cooperation for some third countries and the Work Programmes of Horizon 2020 – many of which were also mentioned by the national experts in the subsequent discussions.

This presentation was followed by an overview of **Japan's participation in Horizon 2020** to date and some of the problems faced by Japanese participants working with European researchers on Horizon 2020-funded projects. The speaker hinted on some of the less known difficulties with the administrative procedure on Horizon 2020, such as the inability to provide certified translations of

Japanese documents by the applicants (due to lack of suitable service providers in Japan) and made suggestions for potential solutions to such problems.

Finally, a representative of the **Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG)** presented the newly-selected Centres/Networks of European research and innovation in Brazil (CEBRABIC), China (ERICENA) and the USA (NearUS), which are funded under Societal Challenge 6 of Horizon 2020 – ‘Europe in a changing world - inclusive, innovative and reflective societies’. The first two projects commenced on 1 January 2017 and the one in the USA is expected to commence in April 2017. The speaker explained the role of the new centres in supporting international cooperation in research and innovation between the EU and the selected third countries, and encouraged the participants to respond to an upcoming collective demand survey to help shape the centres’ future services.

Following the introductory presentations, the national experts participated in group discussions on the policy framework, legal, financial and practical problems related to the current rules for participation of third countries in Horizon 2020. Presented below are the main discussion points and suggestions for improving these rules to foster international cooperation in the remainder of Horizon 2020 and FP9.

## **Main discussion points and suggestions of national experts**

### **Discussion points on the policy framework**

The experts welcomed the creation and recent update of the Multiannual Roadmaps for international cooperation with selected third countries/regions and praised big initiatives, such as BRAIN, ARTIC, and AMR for bringing together various actors from around the world. Furthermore, the ERA-NETs and the Belmont Forum were mentioned as good examples of how Member States and the European Commission can together approach certain regions in the world, for example the USA.

However, much of the discussions on the policy framework focused on the lack of clear linkages between the priorities of the Member States (represented by SFIC), the Commission’s Multiannual Roadmaps for third countries and the Work Programmes of Horizon 2020. The experts also called for **increased involvement of third countries in priority setting** to ensure that the future calls for proposals are relevant and more attractive for researchers, and businesses from outside Europe. This could be done by strengthening the involvement of the joint committees (where the EU and third countries are represented) in the development of the future Work Programmes with calls focusing on international cooperation.

Furthermore, as the current priority setting process remains widely unknown to the wider public, **open public consultations** on deciding such priorities should also be considered to enable researchers and innovators from Member States and third countries to shape the scope and character of the future calls for proposals. The experts also called for a thematic approach to international cooperation in a variable geometry configuration to make the international cooperation

aspects of EU Framework Programmes clearer and more visible. Some experts also suggested **strengthening the involvement of the European Technology Platforms (ETP)** in the activities focused on priority setting with third countries to take advantage of their knowledge in the respective technological fields.

Lastly, some experts made **suggestions for improvements of the current EU-Africa policy priorities**, which determine the Horizon 2020 calls for proposals on EU-Africa cooperation, calling for stronger focus on Research for Development (R4D) in EU Framework Programmes, which might effectively require better synergies and cross-fertilisation between them and the programmes of DG DEVCO.

It was suggested by one of the experts, who submitted a written contribution, that the future policy framework for cooperation with Africa in research and innovation should take into account the key and most persistent weakness of the African countries, such as underdeveloped national/institutional policies in education, research and entrepreneurship, which, if supported properly, could result in programmes that stimulate sustainable collaboration and knowledge exchange between research subsystems and the business subsystems. Such policy needs to promote a robust, broad, active and effective commitment in Africa's development, as well as close collaboration between governments and non-governmental actors.

Furthermore, it was suggested that since the absence of a "research culture" prevents research findings from being appreciated and utilised, a roadmap that will incorporate interest of policy makers in linking research and economic transformation might make a difference. Any future priority strategy should include coordinated efforts to improve the training/skills of researchers in the target countries and Research for Development (R4D) should be an integral part of any future EU Framework Programme.

### **Suggestions**

- The linkages between priorities of the Member States, (represented by SFIC), the Commission's Multiannual Roadmaps for third countries and the Work Programmes of Horizon 2020 should be clearer;
- Third countries should be much more involved in the setting policy priorities (e.g. through the existing joint committees) to make the future Horizon 2020 and FP9 calls for proposals more relevant for them and thus more attractive for organisations from outside Europe;
- The process of setting priorities should be more structured, open and transparent. For example, the Commission could consider open public consultations to enable researchers and innovators from Members States/third countries to shape future calls for proposals;
- European Technology Platforms should be much more involved in activities focused on priority setting with third countries to take advantage of their knowledge in the respective technological fields;
- More emphasis should be placed on incorporating Research for Development (R4D) in FP9 and easier linkages should be made between this programme and those of DG DEVCO.

### Discussion points on financial rules

Many national experts are familiar with financial rules related to the participation of third countries in the various parts of Horizon 2020 and welcomed the creation of the national co-funding mechanisms in some third countries, which are not automatically eligible to receive EU funding. However, some experts pointed out that the current division between states that are eligible to receive funding under Horizon 2020 (those mentioned in Annex A to the Work Programme) and the emerging or developed economies (e.g. BRIC, Mexico, Canada, Japan, etc.) prevents smaller organisations from these countries, which often face difficulties when accessing national funding, from receiving EU funding. Therefore, it was suggested that not all organisations in such countries should be treated the same way and that the eligibility for EU funding should depend on factors other than just being located in a specific country.

In terms of easing the administrative burden on third country participants (especially from cash-based economies), some experts suggested **offering lump sums to beneficiaries in those countries**, as was the case in previous Framework Programmes.

While the creation of the **national co-funding mechanisms** in some third countries is seen as a very positive development by the national experts, the inconsistencies in their coverage of various Horizon 2020 programme parts, limited information on the national application procedures and different timetables to those of Horizon 2020, leave many European and third country applicants confused. Several of the co-funding mechanisms only cover selected topics or calls in Horizon 2020 (e.g. Australia, Japan, etc.); others are available only for researchers from specific regions in the third countries (e.g. Brazil), which limits the possibilities of engaging foreign researchers.

Another problem related to the co-funding mechanisms concerns double submission, double evaluation and double audits. Many calls under the national co-funding mechanism require a separate application and have different deadlines to those of Horizon 2020; there is also a separate peer review process in the third country, which is used to assess the participation of the foreign researchers in Horizon 2020 projects, meaning that the funding usually arrives much later than needed. Very often this leads to problems with aligning the project activities accordingly and means that foreign researchers cannot participate in the kick-off meetings. It was reported by one of the experts that, in an extreme case, when funding was not awarded for any reason, non-EU partners had to leave the consortium and the project needed to be re-designed accordingly, causing problems for the consortium and the Commission services.

Many experts suggested **harmonising the application processes** of Horizon 2020 and of national funding bodies in third countries to avoid unnecessary uncertainty for coordinators. The Horizon 2020 evaluation procedure is seen as robust and sufficient for many third countries and could thus be accepted by the national funders to ensure the funding is awarded automatically, once the Horizon 2020 application is successful.

Lastly, **reciprocal opening of programmes**, such as the one between the EU and the USA, allowing American organisations to receive funding under the Societal Challenge 1 of Horizon 2020, is seen as a positive development and the experts called for an extension of the scheme to other areas.

## Suggestions

- The eligibility for EU funding under FP9 could be adjusted to the situation of smaller organisation in non-eligible countries to enable them to benefit financially from EU projects;
- Lump sum funding could be a solution to the problem of administrative burden for certain types of projects involving third countries, especially for partners from cash-based economies;
- The Commission should actively engage with third countries to expand the existing and create new national co-funding mechanisms for the remainder of Horizon 2020, leading to more co-funded calls;
- The application procedures to Horizon 2020 and to national co-funding mechanisms in third countries (e.g. deadlines, application forms, etc.) should be harmonised and wherever possible, the Horizon 2020 application should be automatically accepted by national funders to avoid unnecessary delays and uncertainty for the applicants;
- Further reciprocal opening of funding programmes should be promoted between the EU and third countries.

### Discussion points on legal rules

Many experts agreed that the participation of third countries in some parts of Horizon 2020/FP9 could be compulsory to further promote international cooperation in EU Framework Programmes. This would result in clearer situations for the applicants who often struggle to understand the requirements included in the current Work Programmes, which often state that the participation of legal entities from third countries in selected topics is ‘strongly encouraged’ but not mandatory, as it was the case in FP7 SICA calls. This leads to confusion as to how proposals without the relevant participants will be assessed by the expert evaluators. Making it mandatory for third country organisations to be included in consortia applying for collaborative projects in the form of Research and Innovation Actions, Innovation Actions, or Coordination and Support Actions would make the situation clearer and lead to increased participation of international partners in the programme.

There was no general consensus on the use of joint/coordinated calls with third countries in EU Framework Programmes with some experts seeing them as problematic and unnecessary, while others called for more of these in the future. Much of the criticism derives from the fact that often the two separate application procedures of joint/coordinated calls are not harmonised, with little information provided on them in the third countries. There is a need for better alignment of the application procedures of such calls to subsequently allow for better alignment of the respective project activities, and for providing the relevant links to third country funders’ websites on the Participant Portal.

Concerning the specific legal rules for third country participants, the experts welcomed the Administrative Arrangement between the EU and Canada, and the Implementing Arrangement between the EU and the USA, which were put in place last year and which allow certain public

entities in those countries, that are unable to sign the Horizon 2020 grant agreement for legal reasons, to collaborate with Horizon 2020-funded consortia outside of the programme's legal framework. It was suggested that such positive developments, which are likely to result in increased cooperation of public entities from Canada and the USA with their European counterparts, should continue in FP9.

The experts also discussed the association status of third countries and suggested revising the rules for FP9 to allow major international partner countries (e.g. Canada, the USA) to participate in the programme on an equal footing to EU Member States, should this be politically and financially viable. However, many experts also called for the revision of approaches that are currently used in Horizon 2020 (top-down approach in collaborative projects, pre-determined and relatively prescriptive topics), which are not that attractive for many third countries, including the USA, Canada, Japan, South Korea and Australia. Providing more bottom-up opportunities and making the topics more open would allow for better alignment of priorities with those of third countries and could lead to increased international cooperation on the programmes. Some experts also suggested making it easier for organisations from third countries to join existing projects on an *ad hoc* basis, for example, using a simplified amendment process.

Finally, the ERA-NET Cofund was praised as a great example of a funding instrument that is easy for European and third country participants to participate in because it allows for national funding rules to be applied to the funded projects. The ERA-Can+ project, which supported EU-Canada cooperation in research and innovation, was provided as an example.

### **Suggestions**

- Participation of third countries in some parts of Horizon 2020/FP9 could be compulsory to increase the visibility of and to further promote international cooperation in the programmes;
- Coordinated/joint calls should be organised where appropriate in Horizon 2020/FP9. However the application procedures should be aligned better and links to the relevant websites of third country funders should be provided on the Participant Portal;
- Practical solutions to legal obstacles, such as the Administrative Arrangement between the EU and Canada, and the Implementing Arrangement between the EU and the USA should continue in FP9;
- The top-down approach, currently seen in Horizon 2020, should be revised in the future and there should be more bottom-up opportunities available for participants from third countries in the collaborative projects (similar to the SME Instrument or Fast Track to Innovation Pilot). Furthermore, future topics should be less prescriptive and more impact-focused to allow for better alignment with priorities of third countries;
- The Commission should consider making it easier for participants from third countries to join on-going projects on an *ad hoc* basis, especially if they do not qualify to receive EU funding;
- ERA-NET Cofunds, which allow for national rules to be applied to projects, should be promoted further and focus on engaging a greater number of third countries.

## [Discussion points on practical problems on projects](#)

### **Legal entity validation and using the Participant Portal**

By far, the most problematic issue for third country participants, discussed by the experts, concerns the registration on the Beneficiary Register and operating the Participant Portal. While the Portal is mostly regarded a significant improvement from the previous versions and is widely praised by users across Europe, applicants from third countries often struggle with the administrative procedures required for registration and subsequently also with using the Portal, which is not adapted to the various IT systems operating in non-EU countries and not intuitive enough to allow applicants from third countries to use it effectively.

Many participants pointed out that cultural differences and practical problems prevent them from responding to the EU requirement adequately. For example, Japanese applicants face major difficulties with obtaining certified translations of documents, as there is no organisation that could attest to the accuracy of translations in the country. Another example provided by the experts concerns obtaining the necessary paperwork to complete the institutional validation in the system. Like many other developing countries, Pakistan has a limited registry system and access to certain documents is problematic due to loss caused by political instability; obtaining certain legal documents can constitute a major obstacle to the participation of legal entities from such countries. The experts believe that the registration procedure should be relaxed in certain cases and adjusted to the situation of the third countries targeted for cooperation. In particular, many experts suggested that the administrative burden should be reduced to absolute minimum, if the third country partner does not receive EU funding from the Framework Programmes.

Using the Participant Portal seemed to be another major problem for third country applicants, as the system is not straightforward enough even for European researchers using it more regularly. The problem becomes even more severe when Policy Officers of the European Commission are unable to assist the applicants/beneficiaries with the various technical processes, due to lack of knowledge. Some experts highlighted the need for better communication of specific aspects of Horizon 2020 (rules of participation, financial rules, audits, etc.) and suggested developing MOOCs (Massive Online Open Courses) or targeted webinars as a possible solution to the problem. Furthermore, proper training of Commission staff should also be considered.

### **Lack of visibility of international cooperation aspects in Horizon 2020**

Another issue addressed by the experts was the relative lack of visibility of the international cooperation aspects of Horizon 2020 in some topics. Since international cooperation is a cross-cutting issue in the programme and does not have a dedicated theme (as was the case in FP7), some applicants struggle with understanding if working with international partners is required on a specific topic or not. While all topics for which international cooperation is relevant are now specifically tagged on the Participant Portal and can be found in a single location, this functionality remains unknown to many users and should be communicated better by the Commission services.



Another concern relates to the lack of clear information on the Participant Portal on what countries are automatically eligible to receive funding from the EU in each Horizon 2020 topic. It was suggested by the experts that countries eligible for funding should be explicitly flagged for every topic, so that researchers can clearly see whether or not they can be funded in a given topic, even without being familiar with the different categories of countries in the programme.

### **Managing IPR when working with third country partners**

Furthermore, many experts pointed out to the problem of managing IPR when working with partners from third countries, in particular the USA and China, where beneficiaries often seek to own the results of the projects, thus undermining European efforts to become more innovative by turning ideas into marketable products and services. In the experience of the experts, many EU coordinators do not see owning IP on projects as a priority, possibly because of the additional administrative burden related to exploitation and protection of results, and the limited knowledge of the related processes.

The European IPR Helpdesk is of great assistance with providing initial information on such matters, however, further guidance should be provided for European beneficiaries working with US partners, as there is currently a gap in the services provided. Regional versions of the IPR SME Helpdesk exist for Latin America, China and South-East Asia, but not for North America (especially the USA). It was suggested by the experts that a similar service would be beneficial for other regions. Another option would be for the newly established European centre/network of research and innovation in the USA (NearUS), or for the new Service Facility in support of international cooperation in research and innovation, to provide such services.

### **Promotion of Horizon 2020 outside of Europe and problems with finding partners**

Finally, the experts discussed two other issues, which are related to each other – the promotion of Horizon 2020 outside of Europe and problems with finding partners in third countries. Many participants pointed out to the fact that the National Contact Points in third countries are not able to effectively promote the programme, mainly because of lack of dedicated support to their activities, which often affects the participation levels of foreign researchers. The NCP network is also expected to help with finding potential partners in third countries, but many experts stated that this is somewhat limited and should be improved in the future.

The new Service Facility in support of the strategic development of international cooperation in research and innovation could become a useful tool in promoting Horizon 2020 in third countries and helping researchers find partners there, although questions were raised about its services, which at this stage remain relatively unknown. Further questions were raised about the lack of information on the tender procedure and limited transparency of the award process, although despite these concerns, the hopes of the experts as to the effectiveness of the Service Facility remain high.

## Suggestions

- The procedure for obtaining the Participant Identification Code (PIC) and appointing the LEAR should be simplified for third country participants and adapted to different environments/settings;
- The administrative burden should be reduced to absolute minimum for third country partners not receiving EU funding;
- Creating Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs), or targeted webinars, should be considered by the European Commission to enable applicants/beneficiaries to use the Participant Portal more effectively;
- The European Commission should ensure proper training of its staff on using the Participant Portal and guiding beneficiaries through the various stages of Grant Agreement Preparation (GAP) and grant management;
- All topics flagged for international cooperation should be easily accessible on the Participant Portal and the list available should be better communicated by the European Commission, as at present, it remains relatively unknown to applicants;
- On the Participant Portal, countries eligible for EU funding should be clearly indicated for each topic, to enable researchers from third countries to know for sure whether or not they can be funded in the respective topic, without being familiar with the different categories of countries in Horizon 2020;
- The Commission should consider creating another regional version of the IPR SME Helpdesk covering North America (in particular the USA) to advise beneficiaries on IP-related matters;
- The Commission should consider improving the network of National Contact Points (NCP) in third countries by ensuring they have sufficient access to information about the legal and financial rules of Horizon 2020, as well as practical support from the European Commission services (e.g. training on using the Participant Portal, etc.);
- NCPs in third countries should have access to dedicated support mechanisms, such as twinning activities with NCPs in EU Member States/Associated Countries;
- The Service Facility in support of the strategic development of international cooperation in research and innovation should focus on promoting Horizon 2020 outside of Europe and on providing partnering opportunities with organisations from third countries, among others. As a new instrument, it should remain flexible and adaptable to the different situations in third countries (developed/developing countries).

### **Next steps**

The summary report of the *Global Research Area in Action* event will be passed on to the European Parliament and the European Commission, as well as the High Level Group on maximising impact of EU Research and Innovation Programmes, to feed into the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020.

The high number of attendees at both events organised by IGLO and the positive feedback received from the participants and speakers shows the significant interest in the subject of international cooperation in EU Framework Programmes among stakeholders and representatives of third countries in Brussels. Therefore, in the future, the IGLO network will explore the possibility of organising further activities in this area focusing on specific countries or regions.