



PLATFORM

PLATFORM POLICY BRIEF Series, No. 3

The role of the ERA-NET instrument in fostering inclusiveness



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In the spirit of building an inclusive European Research Area, this policy brief provides recommendations for the European Commission (EC), ERA-NET initiatives and the so-called lower performing countries (LPCs) on how LPCs can become an integral and empowered part of the ERA-NET community.

Motivation

Disparities in research and innovation performance continue to exist among Member States, but the LPCs, as defined in the Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation Program of H2020, are not a homogeneous group, this applying also to their performance in ERA-NET initiatives. However, insight beyond general statistics was lacking. This motivated PLATFORM to take a more in-depth look at the participation of LPCs in bioeconomy ERA-NETs. PLATFORM focused on obstacles faced in joining ERA-NETs, the role LPCs have once their participation in an ERA-NET is secured (including the activities they perform and their success in joint transnational calls - JTCs), measures taken by ERA-NETs to increase LPC participation in network activities and in joint transnational calls (JTCs), and positive effects that participation may have for LPCs.

Approach

A statistical overview of LPC participation in bioeconomy ERA-NETs was first made, followed by surveys for ERA-NET coordinators, LPC National Contact Points/Program Committee/Standing Committee on Agricultural Research members, and LPC ERA-NET participants. The results of the surveys provided a comprehensive overview of issues at stake. This served as a basis for the PLATFORM Master Class on Inclusiveness, which aimed to support and empower LPCs to increase their involvement in bioeconomy ERA-NETs. The results of the surveys and the outcomes of the Master Class were further discussed with the whole bioeconomy P2P community and other relevant stakeholders in the 2016 PLATFORM Annual Event. The analysis, conclusions of the workshop, and the event report are available at www.era-platform.eu.

Results

The reasons why LPCs join ERA-NETs include:

- a potential to develop a (stronger) research community;
- an invitation to join;
- good experience in previous ERA-NETs;
- national policy makers propose participation;
- relevance to national Smart Specialization Strategy.

Reasons why LPCs do not join ERA-NETs include:

- lack of national funding, human resources or experience with ERA-NETs;
- administrative burdens and issues deriving from national legislation not being adapted for transnational cooperation;
- missing strategies regarding public-public partnership involvement and resulting lack of a systematic approach, unclear national priorities, and criteria for participation.

LPCs take up task and work package (WP) leadership in only a small number of ERA-NETs. The reasons include:

- experience, knowledge and competence for task;
- encouragement by consortium to take up task;
- funds for personnel needed;
- available human resources.

Reasons for not taking up WP or task leadership include:

- lack of human resources;
- lack of experience, knowledge or competence for task;
- position not offered;
- task already taken when joining the consortium.

LPCs experience several problems when it comes to JTC participation and success rates. These include:

- few project proposals;
- inability to use funds due to lower ranking;
- inability to secure funds;
- lack of flexibility in national rules and procedures;
- minor roles of LPC researchers in selected projects;
- contracting problems.

Table 1 Overview of Member States involved in the bioeconomy relevant ERA-NET Cofunds

	AT	BE	BG	CH	CY	CZ	DE	DK	ES	ET	FI	FR	GR	HU	IE	IT	LT	LV	MT	NL	NO	PO	PT	RO	SE	SK	SI	UK	Other	
BiodivERsA3																														
Waterworks2014																														
FACCE SURPLUS																														
BESTF3																														
ERA-HDHL																														
ERA4CS																														
SuSan																														
WaterWorks2015																														
FACCE ERA-GAS																														
CORE Organic 4																														
CoBioTech																														
LEAP AGRI																														
HDHL-INTIMIC																														
SUSFOOD2																														
marTERA																														

Legend: ■ Coordinator ■ Participant x Country not participating in the JTC

• LPCs: BG, CY, CZ, ET, HU, LT, LV, MT, PO, RO, SK, SI

• Associate countries CH and NO are also included in the overview

• "Other" include associate and third countries (eligible for EU funding) and other countries. Specified for the ERA-NET Cofunds: BiodivERsA3: TR; Waterworks2014: IL, MD, TR; ERA-HDHL: CA, TR; SuSan: TR; WaterWorks2015: CA, EG, MD, ZA, TN, TR, TW; FACCE ERA-GAS: NZ, TR; CORE Organic 4: TR; CoBioTech: AR, IL, TR; LEAP AGRI: BF, CM, DZ, EG, GH, KE, ZA, SN, TR, UG; HDHL-INTIMIC: IL; SUSFOOD2: TR; marTERA: AR, BY, ZA, TR

• There are two more ERA-NET Cofunds in preparation phase, described in the H2020 Work Programme 2016-2017 as "Sustainable crop production" and "Innovative forest-based bioeconomy", which put great efforts in including LPCs into their consortia.

Recommendations for the EC

ERA-NETs should be recognized and promoted as a WIDENING INSTRUMENT, which allows LPCs and their research communities to become more involved in transnational activities.

THE MESSAGE AND THE WORDING SHOULD CHANGE. Countries that are currently 'low performing' could have untapped potential. Addressing those as (possibly) high potential countries (HPC) is more encouraging and stimulating. More needs to be done to communicate success stories, not just the barriers and problems LPCs face.

SIMPLE STATISTICS DO NOT TELL THE ENTIRE STORY. Content-based analysis needs to look behind the numbers, e.g. in JTCs success should be measured on the one hand by participation in the JTC and on the other by the number of funded projects (and not amount of funds an LPC puts into a JTC).

THE ROLE OF LPC NATIONAL CONTACT POINTS (NCPs) IN PROMOTING ERA-NETs SHOULD INCREASE. NCPs should be educated about the instrument and its benefits to offer guidance and administrative support to program owners/managers for their active involvement in ERA-NETs.

LPC's: a case for joining an ERA-NET

Participation in ERA-NETs means:

- ✓ accessing additional funding with a leverage effect
- ✓ accessing infrastructure, databases, and complementary skills
- ✓ accelerating knowledge-transfer
- ✓ gaining new expertise, capacity building, and unlocking potentials
- ✓ fostering excellence in science
- ✓ increasing impact at local socio-economic level
- ✓ contributing to solving societal challenges
- ✓ internationalizing the research community and increasing its visibility and prominence
- ✓ giving an opportunity to younger researchers
- ✓ gaining valuable experience in transnational

Recommendations for ERA-NETs

FOSTER CONTACT WITH ALL RELEVANT LPC INSTITUTIONS EARLY IN THE PROCESS, promoting potential benefits of participation (with the motivations and obstacles of LPCs to join an ERA-NET in mind). Build on existing networks, use hierarchy (contact high-level officials), increase the intensity and number of direct contacts and face to face meetings, directly address researchers in LPCs to push national funding organizations for (more active) participation.

TREAT LPCs AS EQUAL PARTNERS. Proactively give LPCs an opportunity to lead/actively participate in certain tasks (e.g. through WP/task co-leadership), encourage consortium meetings/ status seminars with side events for a wider research community in LPCs and increasing the number of experts from LPCs involved in the ERA-NET (as Strategic Advisory Board, Scientific Evaluation Board members, attendees of call scoping workshops, etc.).

BE SENSIBLE TOWARDS LPCs' DIFFICULTIES AND PROVIDE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT WHEN NEEDED. Dedicate a task to mentor new members, including activities such as training and other capacity building activities as well as workshops allowing for the exchange of best practices to overcome barriers of national research and innovation systems.

INVITE FUNDING AGENCIES FROM NON-PARTICIPATING LPCs AS OBSERVERS inviting them to attend meetings with covered costs and allowing them to join the consortium at a later stage (possibly by securing enough funding for their participation).

INFORM NCPs ABOUT ERA-NET ACTIVITIES, including JTCs, and encourage them to promote them in the research community.

INCLUDE MECHANISMS FOR MORE SUCCESSFUL LPC JTC PARTICIPATION such as:

- ensuring JTCs include research topics relevant to LPCs;
- ensuring geographic balance in research consortia (as a specific requirement for consortium composition);
- providing partnering tools to find collaborators;
- adjusting the EC co-funding rate according to country status (more flexibility in budgetary procedures);
- allowing in-kind contributions for LPCs;
- encouraging research consortia to include LPCs (also only in full proposal stage);
- using a wildcard system (invitation of proposals with LPCs to full proposal stage if slightly below threshold);
- giving preference to proposals with LPCs if proposals score equally.

Introduction to PLATFORM policy briefs

The Platform of bioeconomy ERA-NET Actions brings together funders and programme managers in European Research Area Networks (ERA-NETs) in the fields that make up the bioeconomy: food, agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, forestry, climate, biodiversity and biotechnologies. PLATFORM aims to improve exchange and cooperation and to strengthen the impact of the ERA-NET Actions on the European Research Area and the European bioeconomy.

PLATFORM was supported by FP7 in 2012-2014 (Grant number 288422) and is currently supported by Horizon 2020 (Grant number 652635) for the period 2015-2017. PLATFORM has become a robust forum and offers mutual learning and networking opportunities to the ERA-NET actors, thus enhancing coordination and maximising synergies. The project also engages other public-to-public (P2P) coordination networks, such as Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs) and Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) Working Groups.

During its current course, PLATFORM will publish at least three policy briefs to communicate results of analysis and discussions to decision makers at national and European level. The policy briefs are produced in frame of the Work Package 2 Policy: "Bottom-up recommendations to improve impact". The intention of policy briefs is to support and inform national programme owners and managers in their endeavours towards better coordination, the need for P2P cooperation and also towards opening up to currently underrepresented Member States that would be interested to join. The actors within the existing ERA-NETs and JPIs have, collectively, a good oversight and expertise and are well-positioned to explore opportunities for collaboration, as well as to give recommendations on new networks needed.

Policy Brief No. 3

This policy brief is a result of a several PLATFORM activities: a statistical overview of LPC participation in bioeconomy ERA-NETs, surveys for ERA-NET coordinators, LPC NCPs /PC /SCAR members, and LPC ERA-NET participants. The results of the surveys served as a basis for the PLATFORM Master Class on Inclusiveness, which aimed to support and empower LPCs to increase their involvement in bioeconomy ERA-NETs. The results of the surveys and the outcomes of the Master Class were further discussed with the whole bioeconomy P2P community and other relevant stakeholders in the 2016 PLATFORM Annual Event. The analysis, conclusions of the workshop, and the event report are available at www.era-platform.eu. We thank all speakers and other attendees for sharing information and ideas for the future and their contributions to lively group work and plenary sessions. The content of the document has been prepared by the leaders of the PLATFORM Project Tasks 1.3, 2.2 and 4.2 and the Project Coordinator. It reflects the views of the authors and is not an official position of the ERA-NET Community.

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