

The European Research Council

ERC funding schemes,
novelties, and tips for writing a
good proposal

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Head of Sector, Scientific Department,
European Research Council Executive Agency
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Info Day, Ljubljana, Slovenia



European Research Council

Established by the European Commission

Overview

1. General outline ERC grant schemes
2. Submission and evaluation process (including novelties in the 2026 Work Programme)
3. Tips and hints for preparing your proposal

Questions & answers

4. How is Slovenia doing at the ERC?

Questions & answers

ERC mission

".... to support investigator-driven frontier research across all fields, based on scientific excellence."

bottom-up
no pre-determined priorities

ERC is....

1. Part of Horizon Europe (2021-2027)



EUR 16 billion

ERC budget in Horizon Europe



17%

of the entire
Horizon Europe budget



ERC is....

2. The Scientific Council

Life Sciences



Geneviève
Almouzni
Molecular Cell
Biology



Liselotte
Højgaard
Medicine



Leszek
Kaczmarek
Neurobiology



Dirk
Inzé
Plant Biology



Luke
O'Neill
Biochemistry and
Immunology



Jesper
Svejstrup
Vice-President
Biochemistry



Maria Leptin
ERC President
Cell Biology



Gerd Gigerenzer
Vice-President
Psychology



Eystein
Jansen
Vice-President
Earth Science

Social Sciences and Humanities



Harriet
Bulkeley
Geography



Mercedes
García-Arenal
History



Torsten
Persson
Economics



Giovanni
Sartor
Law



Milena
Žic Fuchs
Linguistics

Physical Sciences and Engineering



Conny
Aerts
Astrophysics



Tom
Henzinger
Computer
Science



Maarit
Karppinen
Chemistry



Sylvie
Lorente
Mechanical
Engineering



Björn
Ottersten
Electrical
Engineering



Tomaž Prosen
Physics



Nicola
Spaldin
Materials Theory



András
Stipsicz
Mathematics



ERC is....

3. The ERC Executive Agency

- Implements the ERC strategy as set by the Scientific Council
- Manages ERC operations (e.g. organises peer-review evaluations, follows up on projects funded)
- Carries out communication activities and ensures dissemination of information to stakeholders



European Research Council
Established by the European Commission



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
- Move with your grant to any place in Europe if desired ('Portability of grants')
- Attract additional funding and gain recognition: ERC is a quality label

Independence & flexibility & visibility

ERC in Figures



Over **14,000**
top researchers funded since
the ERC creation in 2007



Over **100,000**
researchers and other professionals
employed in ERC research teams



Over **2,400**
patents and other IPR applications
generated by ERC funding



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



Over **220,000**
articles from ERC projects published
in scientific journals



Over **950** research institutions hosting
ERC grantees – universities, public or
private research centres in the EU or
Associated Countries



93
nationalities of
grant holders



14 Nobel Prizes, **6** Fields Medals, **11** Wolf Prizes
and other prizes awarded to ERC grantees

ERC Grant schemes



Starting Grants

2-7 years after PhD

up to € 1.5 Mio for 5 years
possibility for additional funding



Advanced Grants

track-record of significant research achievements

up to € 2.5 Mio for 5 years
possibility for additional funding



Proof-of-Concept

bridging gap between research - earliest stage of marketable innovation

€150,000 **for ERC grant holders**



Consolidator Grants

7-12 years after PhD

up to € 2 Mio for 5 years
possibility for additional funding



Synergy Grants

2 – 4 Principal Investigators

up to € 10.0 Mio for 6 years
1 PI can be based outside EU/Associated Countries;
possibility for up to € 4 Mio 'additional funding'



Additional funding – Work Programme 2026

StG, CoG, AdG*

- Additional funding can be requested to cover further eligible costs if needed for implementing the project
- No more pre-defined cost categories for additional funding
- May include personnel costs



Up to €1 million

Applicants already based in an EU Member State or country associated to HE

Up to €2 million

Applicants re-locating to the EU or an Associated Country from elsewhere to take up their ERC grant



Eligibility periods: What changes in ERC Work Programme 2027?

StG: 0-10 years after PhD
CoG: 5-15 years after PhD

The eligibility period for both Starting and Consolidator Grant schemes will be widened:

- From 2027 on, researchers will be eligible to apply for a **Starting Grant immediately after successfully defending their PhD, and at any time within the following 10-year period**
- **Consolidator Grant** applicants will be eligible to apply **between 5 and 15 years after defending their PhD**
- Researchers will be awarded no more than one Starting Grant and one Consolidator Grant during their career
- The rules for the extension of the eligibility periods will remain in place

ERC plus – to be added to the 2026 ERC Work Programme

New funding instrument

The ERC Scientific Council is currently working on a new instrument to offer ambitious researchers substantial funding for up to seven years, as part of the **Choose Europe for Science** initiative announced by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. More details about the modalities will follow in due course. The new funding instrument will be included in an amended version of the ERC Work Programme 2026 that is expected to be adopted by the end of 2025.

**Up to 7 years
Up to €7 million**

**Details to be
published
later in 2025
as an amendment to
ERC Work
Programme 2026**

<https://erc.europa.eu/news-events/news/choose-europe-science-erc-welcomes-new-budget-super-grants>

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Evaluation criteria and process



Excellence
is the sole evaluation criterion

Excellence of the Research Project

- Ground-breaking nature
- Ambition
- Feasibility of the research project

Excellence of the Principal Investigator

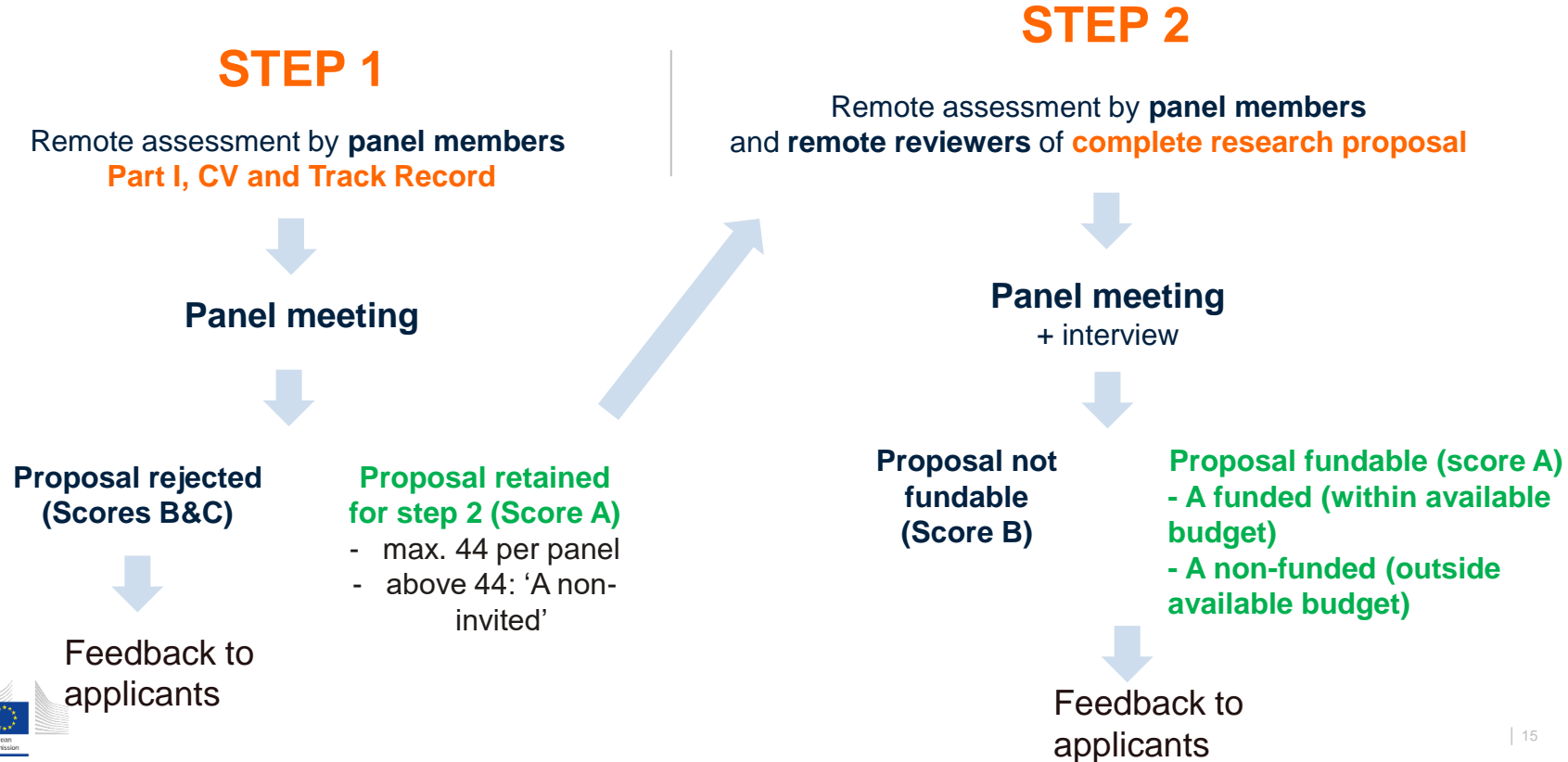
- Intellectual capacity
- Creativity
- Commitment

The panels will **primarily evaluate the ground-breaking nature and ambition of the project.**

At the same time, the panels will evaluate the intellectual capacity and creativity of the PI, with a focus on the extent to which the PI has the required scientific expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project (no numerical scoring of PI)

Evaluation: Process

For main grant schemes (Starting, Consolidator, Advanced grants): a single submission but a **two-step** evaluation



Evaluation: Process

For Synergy grant: a single submission but a **three-step** evaluation with interviews with all PIs in step 3



Changes in ERC Work Programme 2026

Grant application

- New structure of the scientific proposal:
 - Scientific Proposal Part I (up to 5 pages)
 - Scientific Proposal Part II (up to 7 pages or 10 pages for Synergy Grant)



The panels will use Part I for evaluation at Step 1 and both parts together for their evaluation at Step 2.

Changes in ERC Work Programme 2026

Part I of the Scientific Proposal (max. 5 pages)

References should be included (they do not count towards the page limit)



Why your proposal is an original, creative idea about an important question in your research field(s) and how the project will advance the frontier of knowledge.

What you expect may be changed, opened, challenged or how the current understanding will be different after your work has been undertaken.

- (1) lay out the current state of knowledge
- (2) explain the scientific question and the objectives of the project
- (3) present the overall approach or research strategy you propose to use to reach the project goals.

Feasibility of the scientific approach will no longer be assessed at Step 1

See pp. 21-23: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/information-for-applicants_he-erc-stg-cog_en.pdf

Changes in ERC Work Programme 2026

Part II of the Scientific Proposal (max. 7 pages)

References should be included (they do not count towards the page limit)



Detailed explanation of the project implementation, including research methodology, work plan, risk assessment, and mitigating measures, justification for the requested budget and resources, and any further necessary background not included in Part I.

At step 1, only Part I and the CV & track record are assessed

At step 2, the panel assesses the complete Research Proposal:

- both Part I and Part II **(no need to repeat sections of Part I in Part II)**
- CV and Track Record
- Resources
- Time commitment

See pp. 21-23: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/information-for-applicants_he-erc-stg-cog_en.pdf

2026 Calendar

ERC call*	Call Opening	Submission Deadline
Starting Grants ERC-2026-StG	9 July 2025	14 October 2025 ←
Consolidator Grants ERC-2026-CoG	25 September 2025	13 January 2026 ←
Advanced Grants ERC-2026-AdG	28 May 2026	27 August 2026
Synergy Grants ERC-2026-SyG	10 July 2025	5 November 2025 ←

*New *ERC plus* scheme expected to be added to Work Programme 2026 later this year

Overview

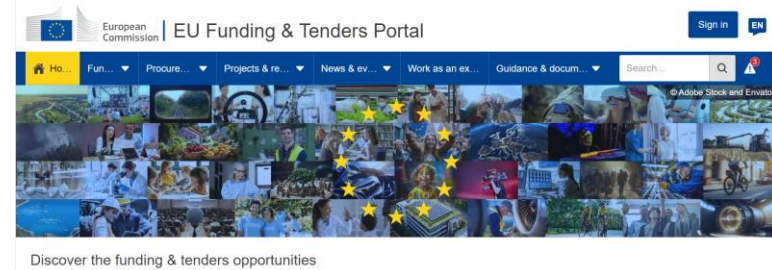
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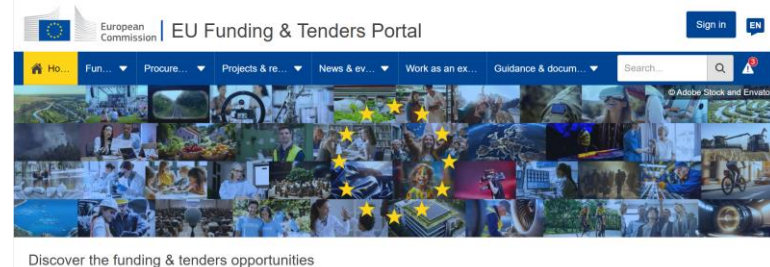
Before you start:



- Do you have that idea for an ERC project? Start developing it, do your literature research, run your idea by peers/mentors
- Are you convinced your idea is innovative and potentially ground-breaking?
- Are you passionate about your idea and eager to demonstrate that it works?

If the answer is yes, then go for it !

Step 1: Get 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 – get a HI letter; be aware of your NCP and events
- Talk to ERC grantees and former panel members
- Contact the ERCEA to ask all your questions well ahead of the submission deadline—e.g., ERC-2026-STG-APPLICANTS@ec.europa.eu, ERC-2026-COG-APPLICANTS@ec.europa.eu , ...
- Get the written consent of your collaborators before the submission deadline (a simple email exchange is sufficient)

Step 2: Choose grant type & ensure eligibility

- Window is calculated as according to the 1st of January of the year of the call (i.e. 1 January 2026 for the 2026 calls).

StG-2026: 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2023 (inclusive)

CoG-2026: 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2018 (inclusive)

The reference date shall be the certified date of the successful defence of the first PhD degree

- If you previously applied to an ERC call, check resubmission restrictions
- Minimum 50% of PI working time in an EU Member State or Associated Country
- Time commitment on the project: Min. 50% (StG), 40% (CoG), 30% (AdG/SyG)

Starting/Consolidator Grant: Extension of the Eligibility Window

For documented situations occurring before the call deadline

- Maternity leave: 18 months for each child born before/after the date of the successful defence of PhD degree;
- Paternity/parental leave: documented time taken for each child born before or after the date of the successful defence of PhD degree;
- Long-term illness (>90 days for the PI or a close family member) or national service: documented amount of leave taken for each incident that occurred after the date of the successful defence of PhD degree;
- **Clinical training:** documented amount of clinical training received after the reference date of the 1st eligible degree, up to a maximum of 4 years;
- Major disaster (natural or human-caused such as armed conflicts)
- Seeking asylum
- Gender-based violence or any other form of violence



Step 3 (or better 4?): Choose a panel

Panel structure: Annex 1 of [Work Programme 2026](#) available on the ERC website

- When you submit your proposal, you need to **choose a review panel**
- ERC panel structure provides **guidance**, not meant to be a complete scientific classification (***not exhaustive***);
- Panel titles, subtitles, descriptors **do not reflect priorities**;
- **Any topic/field** is equally welcome, whether mentioned in panel structure or not;
- You can flag one '**secondary review panel**'. Explain why proposal is 'cross-panel' in Part B1!

Common misconception: Choose the panel '**strategically**', to increase chances of success

NOT true: The budget is distributed among the scientific panels as a function of demand, success rate is equal amongst panels → **choose the panel that is right for your proposal!**



Evaluation panel structure (2025, 2026)

Life Sciences

- LS1 Molecules of Life: Biological Mechanisms, Structures and Functions
- LS2 Integrative Biology: From Genes and Genomes to Systems
- LS3 Cell Biology, Development, Stem Cells and Regeneration
- 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 Processes 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 Interactions
- SH4 The Human Mind and Its Complexity
- SH5 Texts and Concepts
- SH6 The Study of the Human Past
- SH7 Human Mobility, Environment, and Space
- SH8 Studies of Cultures and Arts

Choosing a panel

- Check the keywords of the panel
- Check the panel members of previous calls of a particular panel ([Panel Members | ERC \(europa.eu\)](#))
- Check funded projects from a particular panel ([Projects & statistics | ERC \(europa.eu\)](#))
- Proposals are initially assigned to the panel of the PI's choice.
- Transfer of proposals between panels may occur if:
 - there is a clear mistake on the part of the applicant
 - the necessary expertise is not available in the panel chosen by the applicant

Both Panel Chairs must agree on the transfer

Step 4 (or better 3?): Start writing seriously ...

PART A – admin forms online

Section 1 General information

Section 2 Participants

Section 3 Budget

Section 4 Ethics and security

Section 5 Other Questions

Annexes – submitted as .pdf

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

If applicable:

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

PART B1 – submitted as single .pdf



Abstract (2000 characters)

Secondary panel explanation (1000 characters)

Part I Scientific Proposal 5 p.

References (does not count towards page limit)

CV & Track Record up to 4 p.

PART B2 – submitted as single .pdf



Part II Scientific Proposal 7 p.

References (does not count towards page limit)

Funding ID (does not count towards page limit)

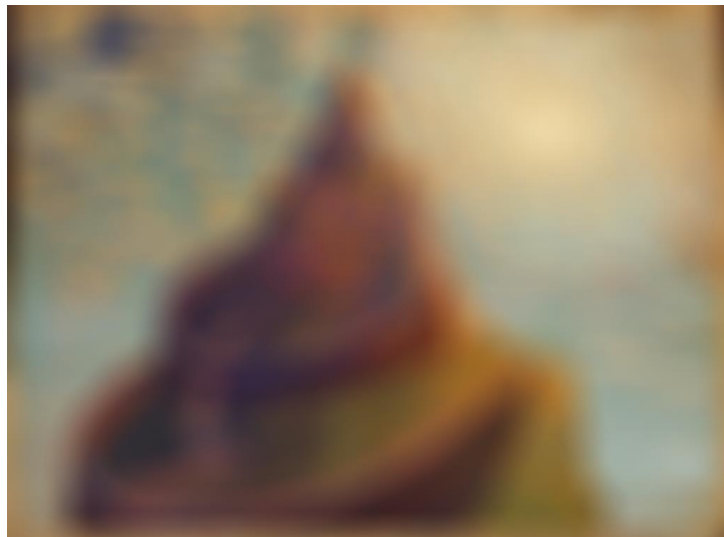
seen by the panel



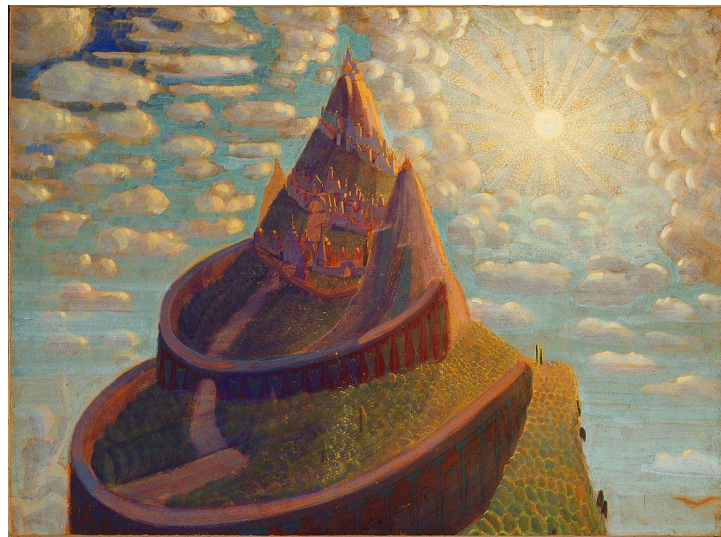
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Objectives



shallow
blurred
unsound
unworkable



deep
focused
credible
feasible

Typical reasons for not making it

- Hypothesis and objectives not sufficiently clear
- Incremental in nature, missing the ground-breaking potential
- No realisation of risks & challenges, contingency
- Overly ambitious (promising too much) or 'overselling' yourself
- For interdisciplinary proposals: expertise missing in one area

CV & Track Record: Modernised principles for evaluating the applicant - as of Work Programme 2024

- No prescriptive Principal Investigator profiles in Work Programme
- Simplification of CV and track record documentation
- Allowing researchers to provide narrative descriptions of their work
- Room for explaining career breaks or unconventional career paths
- Room for describing contributions that go beyond standard academic duties
- Extramural funding not an evaluation criterion
- Supervision of graduate student or post-docs not an evaluation criterion



New Curriculum Vitae and Track Record template - as of work programme 2024

1. Personal details

2. Research achievements and peer recognition

*The applicant can provide a **short, factual narrative** on the significance of the listed achievements and recognitions in relation to the research field and the proposed project.*

- Research achievements (<=10 outputs):
 - Demonstrating advancement in the field
 - Emphasis on recent achievements
- Peer recognition, such as prizes or awards

New Curriculum Vitae and Track Record template - as of work programme 2024

3. Additional information

Relevant additional information on their research career to provide context when assessing their research achievements and peer recognition.

- Career breaks, diverse career paths, life events
- Other noteworthy contributions to the research community

Novelties – Research Assessment (as from work programme 2024)

Evaluation of research proposals: the why and what of the ERC's recent changes, 2024,
Maria Leptin, ERC President

<https://erc.europa.eu/news-events/news/ercs-new-approach-research-proposal-evaluations>

General tips

- Make the project easy to read and attractive to the eye – divide into sections, font large enough, correct typos!!
- Check coherence of figures – pay attention to figure legends
- Make sure you give full references – these are excluded from the page limit, so there is no excuse not to properly reference
- Only list collaborators who have agreed to collaborate with you
- Honest presentation (own work, work of others, order of authorship on papers)
- Avoid ‘bonus’ objectives (usually overly ambitious, vaguely articulated and poorly integrated; often translational)
- “Test” your proposal with peers/mentors/friends – you need to re-write it many times!
- **Writing a proposal is hard – devote plenty of time!** do not work right up to the deadline; a submitted proposal can be revised until the call deadline by submitting a new version and overwriting the previous one

I have been invited for 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. Do not waste time during answers. It is in your interest to answer as many questions as possible
- Know the details of your proposal and methods, as well as your research area – who are your main competitors/collaborators?
- If you have new work on the topic – present it!
- Know the details of your budget, be prepared to explain the necessity of any extra budget request
- No need to over-explain your CV – the panel members know it
- Keep to time, PRACTISE well

Some concluding remarks

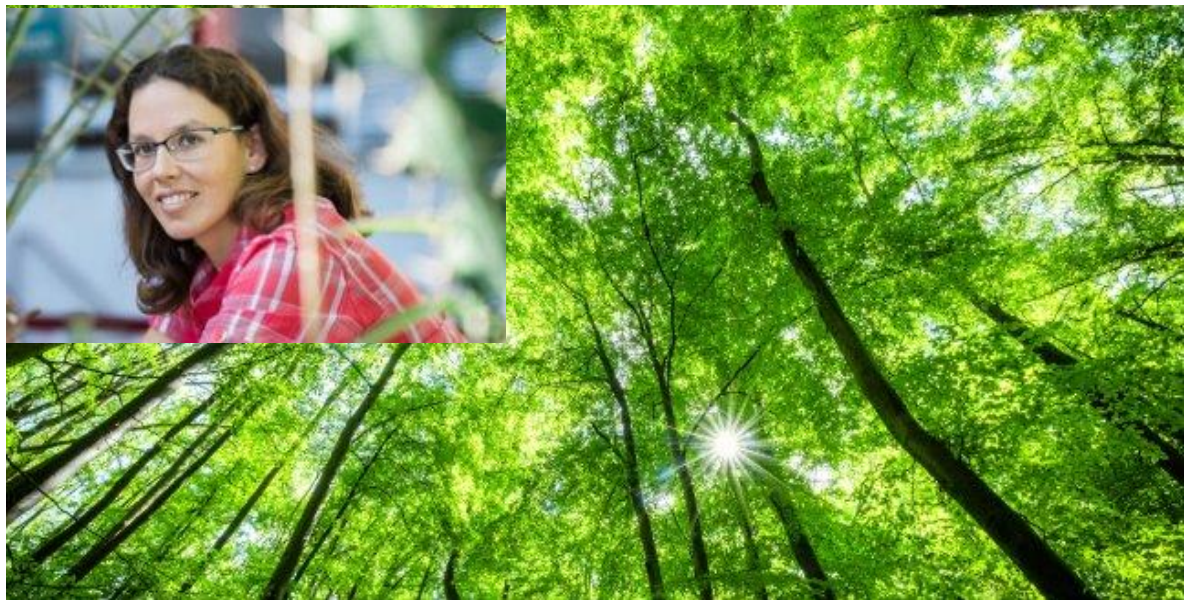
- **Don't exclude yourself from participating in ERC calls** - if you have an idea that you think will make a significant change in your field of research: go for it!
- **Take risks**, explain your project's high scientific impact if you reach your aims, and **provide evidence that you can do it**
- CV and track record: no pre-defined profiles, room for narrative description of contributions, room for out-of-the-usual contributions
- Evaluation: more focus on project, less on PI
- Mobility, grant income, supervision/mentoring not evaluated
- Journal impact factor metric not allowed
- **If you fail, try again!** Gain experience from evaluation. Panel feedback is useful and resubmissions have a higher success rate

Concluding message

BABE

Why is the world green

Researcher: Katerina Sam
ERC Starting Grant 2018
HI: Biologické Centrum AV ČR,
v. v. i., Czech Republic



“My advice would be that if you have a great idea for a project, just believe in it and go for the ERC. When I got my ERC grant some people came to me asking what to write about to get an ERC. This is not how it works – you need to have that really good idea first and then apply with it, not the other way around”.

Where can you find more information?

[Apply for a grant | ERC](#)



7 Videos - ERC Classes

- How can you get started with your ERC proposals?
- How can you write your ERC proposal?
- How do we evaluate your ERC proposal?
- What do you need to know about the ERC Synergy Grants?
- How can you best prepare for your ERC interview?
- Why care about ethics in your ERC proposal?
- How to communicate on your ERC science project?

[ERC CLASSES - YouTube](#)

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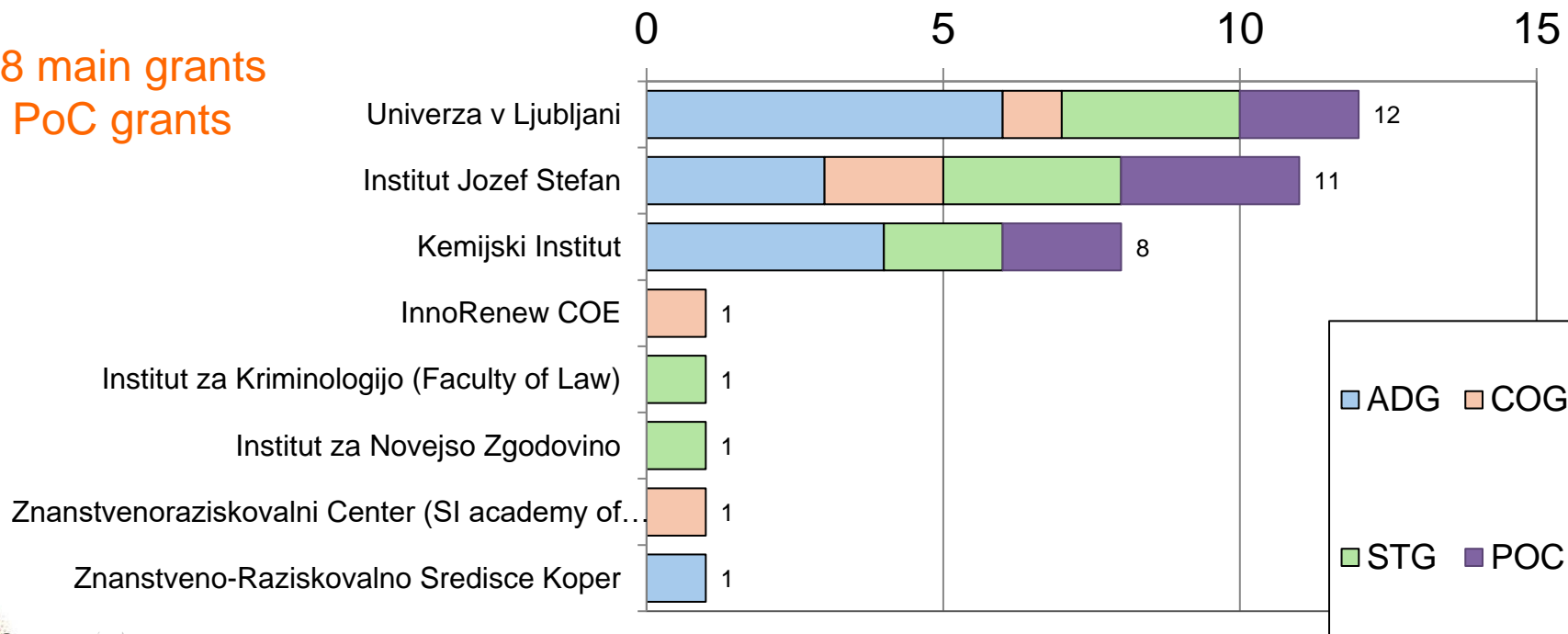
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H2020 and HE signed grants HI Slovenia by call type

(August 2025)

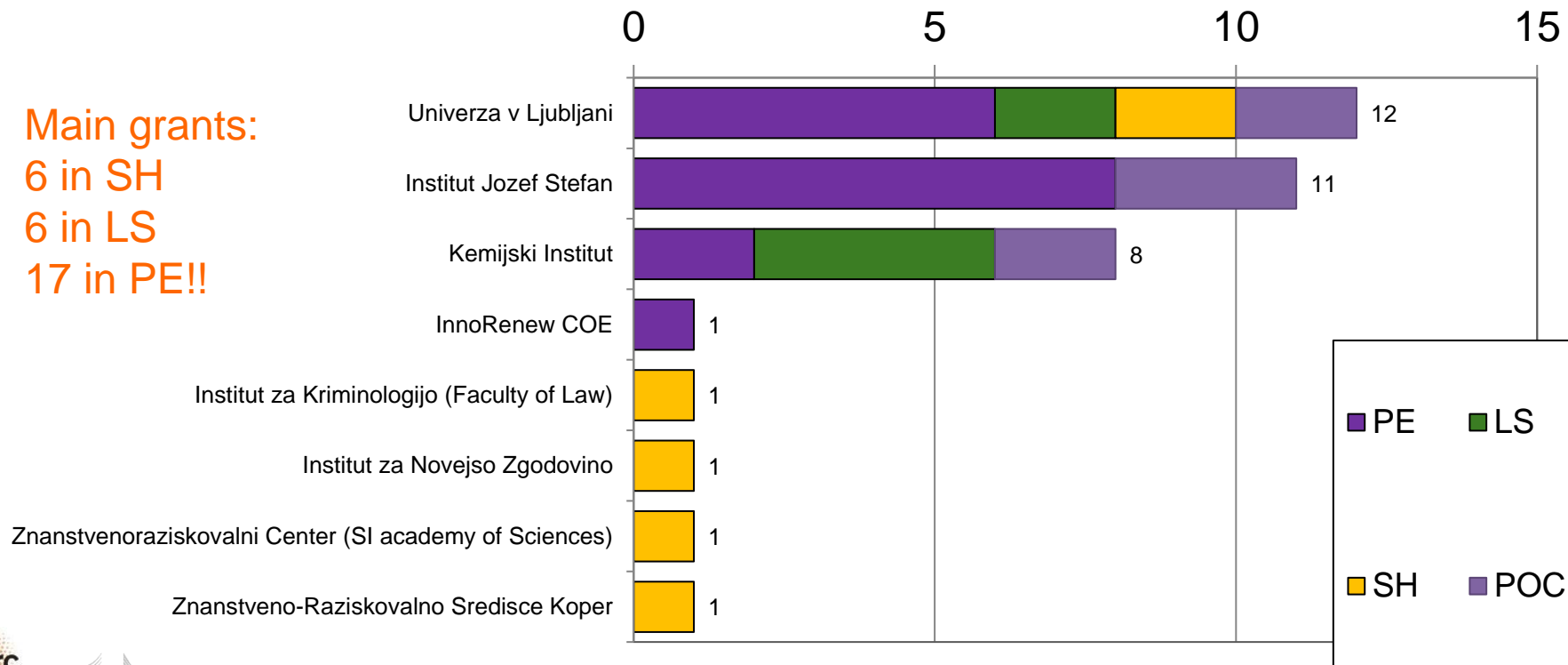
28 main grants
7 PoC grants



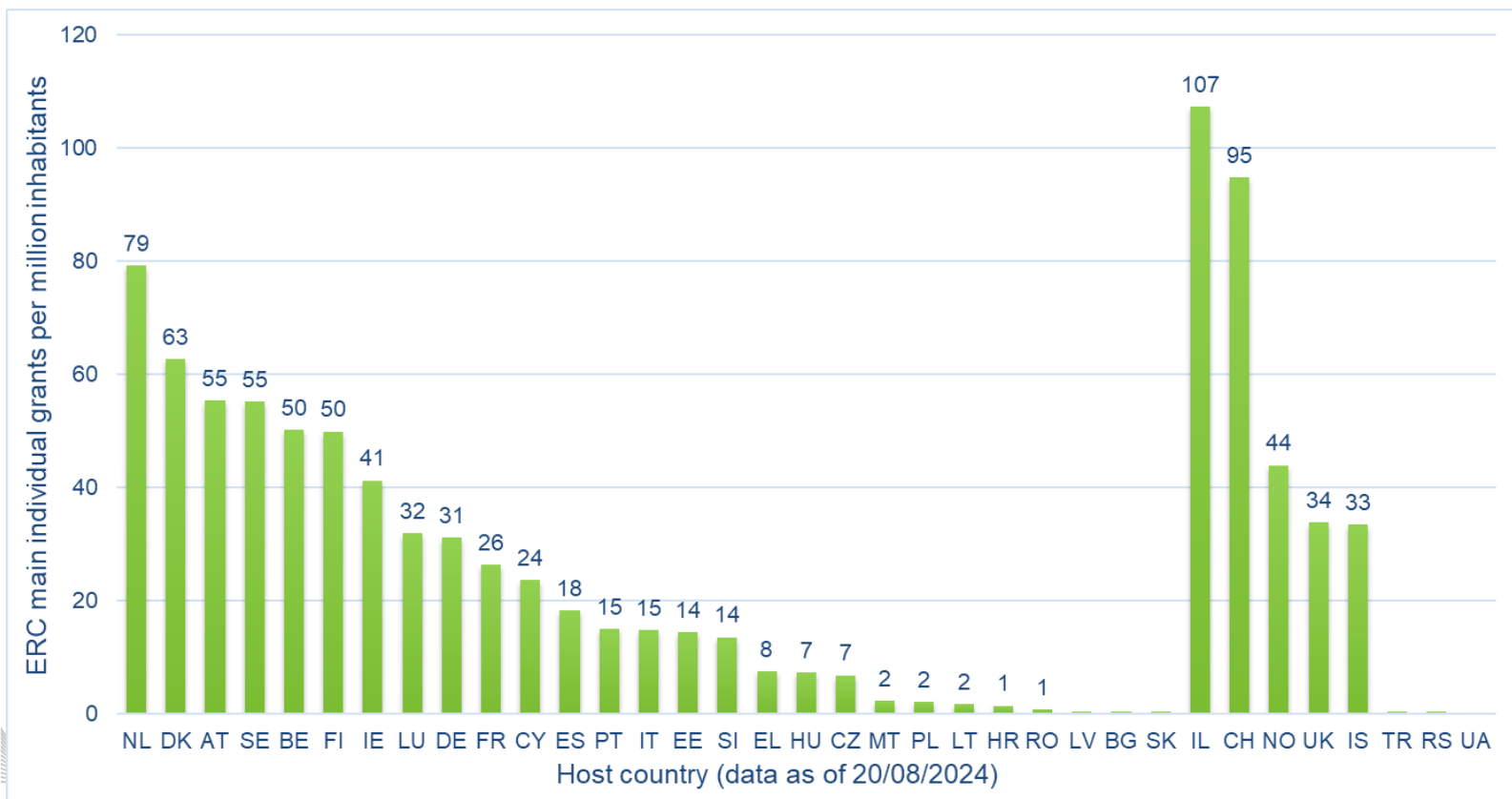
H2020 and HE signed grants HI Slovenia by scientific domain

(August 2025)

Main grants:
6 in SH
6 in LS
17 in PE!!



ERC grants per population (ERC calls 2007-2024)



Success rate by country of Host Institution (HI)



Widening European Participation: Problems faced by countries underrepresented in the Research & Innovation Framework Programme

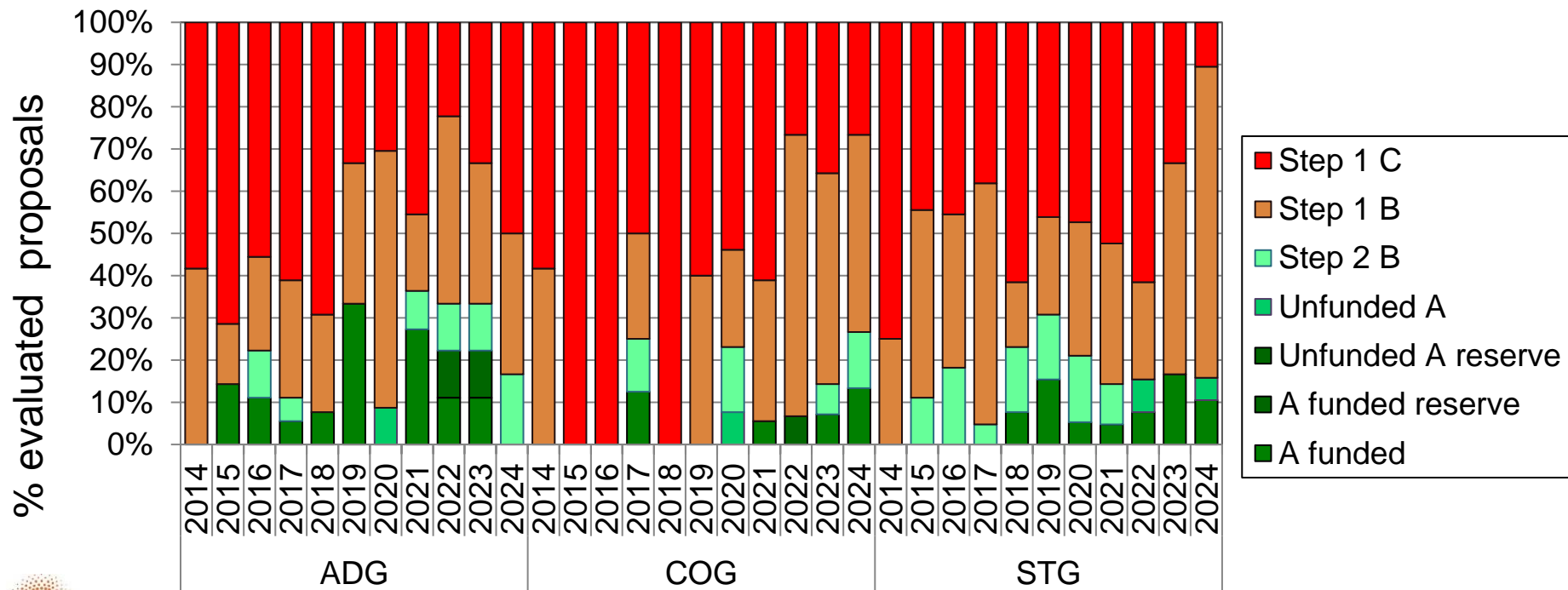
- WEP country applicants apply or reapply less frequently and less successfully to the ERC. However, **proposals that pass to Step 2 do as well as any other**
- Often fail in step 1 due to grantsmanship skills, **no difference in CVs**
- Low national investment into R&I
- Poor support by granting offices -if any- or by National Contact Points
- Lower exposure to international research and innovation networks, larger distance between the research and innovation
- Poorer research facilities and conditions, salaries, equipment etc.

As soon as national support structures developed, number of submissions and number of successful applications go up! (e.g. Austria)



[Webinar: Applying for an ERC grant: where to seek support](#)

2014-2024 results of evaluated proposals HI Slovenia



ERC-funded projects by country of Host Institution

~~21~~ ERC main grants
based in **Slovenia**

As of now (2025): 28 !

Success rate:

1% in FP7

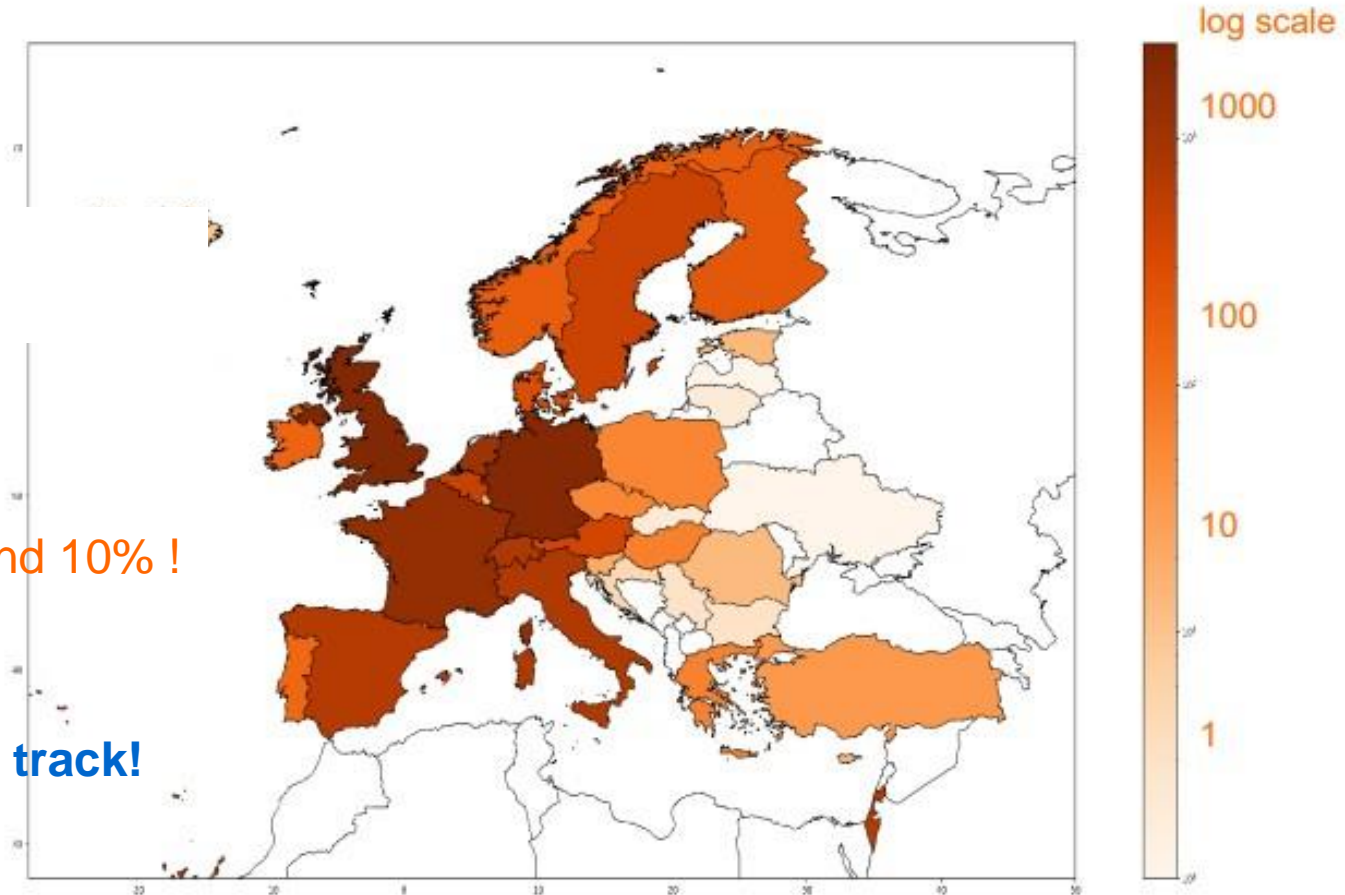
5% in H2020

~~8%~~ in Horizon Europe

As of now (2025): around 10% !

Host countries as of
28/03/2023

Slovenia is on a good track!



Specific opportunities for applicants

- Visiting Fellowship: visit an ERC lab and then write your ERC application
Participating countries: Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia
- Success rate of Visiting Fellows is **higher than for other WEP country applicants**, in particular for StG, 13%
- Mentoring Initiative: personalized guidance (from ERC grantees or former ERC panel members) on how to write an ERC grant
Participating countries: Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Turkey, Ukraine

Thank You!

Questions?

More information: erc.europa.eu



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