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25 Feb 21, 09:00

By [Pola Lem](#)



## EU13 states welcome ERC mentor scheme

**Matchmaking initiative patches gaps in national expertise, according to EU's newer member states**

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Representatives from the EU's 13 newer member states have welcomed the launch of a mentoring initiative designed to raise the low rate at which researchers in some of them win funding from the European Research Council.

On February 15, the EU's flagship research funder announced the initiative, which will identify past grantees and proposal reviewers to work with local and regional support offices. It said such offices "often struggle to identify international experts to provide coaching and advice for the ERC grant applicants they work with".

While researchers worldwide are eligible for ERC funding, its grantee lists tend to be dominated by those based in wealthier countries with advanced research systems. In 2007-17, just 2 per cent of ERC grants were hosted by an institution in one of the 'EU13' countries—those that joined the EU in or after 2004.

Officials from the Czech Republic, Estonia and Slovakia expressed enthusiasm for the scheme, telling Research Europe they hoped it would level the playing field for their researchers.

"Estonia is lagging behind Western European countries when it comes to the number and success rate of ERC grants," said Ülle Napa, head of the Estonian liaison office to the EU's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation in Brussels, adding that the initiative "fits perfectly with our aims".

Zuzana Čapková, the Czech Republic's national contact point for ERC grants, said the scheme would "reinforce" existing national support in her country, by providing mentors "with particular expertise which can be missing in the country" for initiatives such as training workshops. "We believe that thanks to this more focused feedback, the quality of submitted proposals will then increase, which will result in higher competitiveness of the applicants from widening countries," she said, referring to the EU scheme for widening participation in its R&D programme.

The head of Slovakia's liaison office, Andrej Kurucz, said researchers from his country often hesitated to submit proposals due to the lack of opportunity to consult on them. He said the problem persisted because "neither our supporting national programmes nor national contact points have sufficient experience with the ERC schemes".

"I strongly believe that the low participation of Slovakia in the ERC is not about lack of excellent research at all—it is more about the lack of the complex support and the right mentoring for the applicant," he said.

The ERC said it would not pay the mentors, nor cover any costs linked to the scheme. Instead, local offices should discuss time commitments and pitch compensation to mentors.

"The expectation of the ERC is that the extra costs of the implementation of the initiative will be fully covered by its promoters," the guidelines for the scheme state.

As a first step, the ERC said it would identify local offices for the initiative.

*This article also appeared in Research Europe*

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