

06 JRC support to Member States' Stairway to Excellence

Type of support / service available

The provision of assistance to regions and countries in order to close the innovation gap and promote excellence in all regions and EU countries. This can be through cross-cutting analysis or specific focused events.

Relevance for regional authorities

The S2E initiative provides support to Member States and Regions to support a more efficient and effective implementation of Smart Specialisation Strategies by building synergies between R&I funding instruments. Initially focused on EU13 Member States (the ones that joined the EU after 2004: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia), under the mandate from the current European Parliament, the geographical scope has been extended also to the EU15 Member States (the countries that joined the EU before 2004: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom).

The initiative improves administrative efficiency and coordination in setting priorities and using public funds for the benefits of citizens and creating growth and jobs. Based on planned investments under different programmes, it provides regions, industry and research organisations with tailor-made support in research and innovation themes. The aim is to help them make the best use of community funding programmes such as the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), Horizon 2020, and other funds in areas such as energy, bio-economy, health, aviation or agro-food. It also fosters dialogue and generates opportunities between regions and key stakeholders with common research and innovation priorities.

Support has initially focused on country-specific analysis, support and events. With the extension to all EU28 Member States, the project focuses more on both non-country specific analytical support and on policy and partnering support.

The analytical support aims to:

- Identify ways to address barriers in closing the innovation gap and enhancing the combination of different EU R&I funding sources in RIS3 implementation
- Increase the understanding of factors of success and failure in the H2020 programme
- Identify areas for targeted support, of common interest to different Member States and regions with regard to RIS3 implementation, H2020 participation and the optimal use of various R&I funding sources
- Examine progress in take-up of R&I funding, in particular from H2020 and from ERDF

The policy support and partnering support activities aim to:

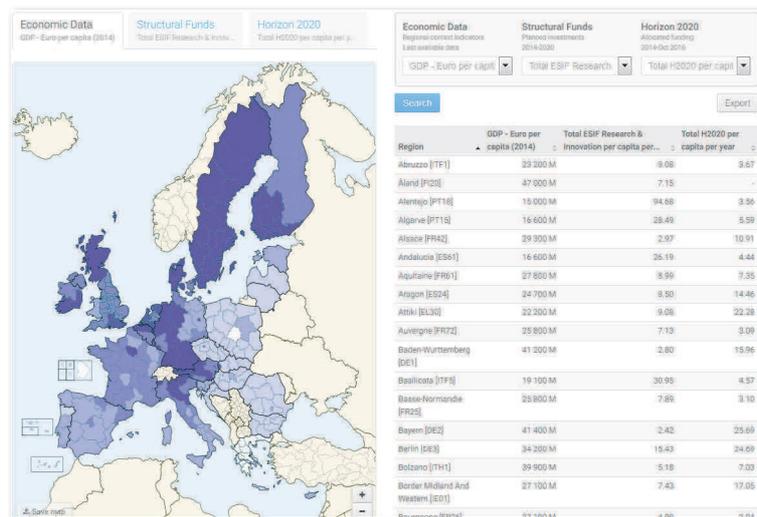
- Support EU Member States and regions in closing the innovation gap and in combining different EU R&I funding sources in RIS3 implementation
- Deliver policy support to national and regional managing authorities in areas of common interest in relation to building capacity, improving RIS3 governance, and optimal use of R&I funds
- Facilitate both partnering and mutual learning between more and less advanced regions

Policy context

Horizon 2020 is the EU's centrally managed primary funding mechanism for supporting collaborative, transnational R&D and innovation (R&I) across Member States. However, given the persistent regional disparity which still affects the EU in terms of overall R&I capacity, successful participation to excellence-based research programmes, such as Horizon 2020, is uneven. European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs) for the period 2014–2020 have registered a strong shift in their policy rationale in favour of the higher thematic concentration for R&I investments. Supporting synergies in their use may deliver additional gains in terms of innovation results, may help close the innovation gap in Europe and promote economic growth. To this end, the Commission also produced a guide on “Enabling synergies between European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020 and other research, innovation and competitiveness related Union programmes”¹.

How to use

Capacity mapping activities have focused on country analysis performed for EU13 new Member States to utilising qualitative and quantitative evidence related to general economic indicators on economic performance and R&I, national/regional FP7 participation patterns and ESIF-related absorption indicators (available on the project website²). The work has been enhanced with a visualisation tool, the R&I Regional Viewer³, which provides an overview of such information.



The R&I Regional Viewer: a combination of quantitative indicators and qualitative information.

The R&I Regional Viewer

S2E has to date provided capacity building activities centred on the organization of S2E national events in each EU13 Member State. These events provided a unique platform for a better understanding of the European and national R&I ecosystem, for exchanging experience, as well as raising awareness of the actions needed to enable cooperation and synergies among R&I actors. These events brought together national/regional authorities in charge of S3 and/or European funding programmes, renowned experts, as well as representatives from universities, research centres and business. As a result of each national event, a Joint Statement was published by S2E and national authorities to summarise the main policy actions needed to overcome existing barriers and create synergies for enhancing the efficiency of national R&I ecosystem. All the Joint Statements can be found at the project webpage⁴. The main issues and recommendations proposed during these events can be summarised under three dimensions:

1. http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/guides/synergy/synergies_en.pdf
2. <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/stairway-to-excellence>
3. <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/synergies-tool>
4. <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/national-events>

• **Quality of R&I governance**

FREQUENCY OF TOPICS RAISED	
HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustainability of research infrastructure and cost of maintenance; - Lack of expertise and qualified staff to support participation in Horizon 2020; - Brain drain
MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Considering ESIF as an easy/guaranteed source for short-term research projects (substitution effect versus other R&I funds); - Salary differences between researchers in EU13 and EU15 MSs; - Need to improve research collaboration with EU15 MSs
LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business access to public research infrastructure and improvement of public-private partnership; - Need for an efficient legal framework for public procurement; - Attraction of EU13 Member States to foreign researchers

• **Capacity building**

FREQUENCY OF TOPICS RAISED	
HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordination, communication and trust building between stakeholders; - Administrative burden and complicated procedures; - Business involvement in the innovation ecosystem
MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Timely information circulation (silo effect); - Strategic approach, long-term strategic planning and prioritisation; - Unstable political and administrative structure, fragmented research system and frequent changes in the policy instruments
LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heterogeneous EU regulations adoption into national provisions; - Different responses of Managing Authorities to new economic challenges; - Heterogeneous interest by Managing Authorities towards other EU innovation initiatives (i.e. macro regional EU programmes, cooperation initiatives, cluster policies)

• **Innovation to commercialisation**

FREQUENCY OF TOPICS RAISED	
HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of continuous support and incentives for commercialisation; - SMEs-based business environment with limited capacity and resources; - Lack of international collaboration and close-to-market research
MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need for enlarging the scope of Seal of Excellence initiative; - Complicated state-aid rules; - Low business and entrepreneurial culture
LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited roles of Technology Transfer Offices and support services for business; - Rigid public procurement regulations; - Lack of entrepreneurship in university curricula

Impact

Overall the combination of capacity mapping and capacity building initiatives led to significant outcomes:

- Providing a better understanding of the national and regional innovation ecosystems with a special emphasis on the identification of obstacles, barriers and potentials to innovation
- Raising awareness of the actions needed to enable synergies between ESIF, H2020 and other European and national programmes for research and innovation
- Facilitating the dissemination of case studies and experiences in combining Structural Funds and Framework Programmes (FPs and Horizon 2020) to improve excellence in R&I systems
- Drawing lessons for the future and identified follow-up actions to enhance the potential synergies between different EU funds in the Member State.

Specifically, the S2E National Events provided an opportunity for establishing informed communication between stakeholders in participating Member States. This was recognised as a novelty in itself.