



EU Insight - ERC's "excellence only" principle leads to grant concentration in EU's top institutions

In a recent report published by the European Research Council (ERC) on "ERC funding activities 2007-2013", key facts, patterns and trends on the council's funding activities are laid down in detail. The report not only shows the grants' high competitiveness, but – once again – demonstrates that the ERC's "excellence only" principle leads to a concentration of grants in Europe's top research institutes and universities.

The report

The report combines in-house data on ERC funding activities and data from external sources, and covers seven areas of interest: ERC proposal selection and funding, research areas, grant characteristics (such as project duration and costs), demographic profiles of applicants, and analyses of host data, i.e. host institutions of applicants, host countries, and host regions and sub-regional level.

Over the course of FP7, the 18 completed calls for proposals under the five ERC grant schemes received nearly 45,000 applications. With a budget of 7.7 billion euros, corresponding to approximately 15% of the total FP7 budget, 4,556 proposals were funded. While the overall success rate was 10.5%, the rate varied considerably amongst the different ERC grant schemes, e.g. Starting Grant (9%), Advanced Grant (13.8%), and Synergy Grant (2.1%).

Concentration of grants in Europe's top research institutes and universities

Between 2007 and 2013, the ERC received close to 42,000 eligible applications for the Starting (StG), Consolidator (CoG), and Advanced (AdG) grant funding schemes from researchers belonging to 113 different nationalities in total.¹ The researchers who received ERC grants under these schemes as Principal Investigators are of 63 different nationalities in total, including those of all 28 EU Member States, and at the time of application, they declared a total of 40 countries of residence, including 27 EU Member States. Without counting countries of nationality with none or very few grantees, the highest success rates are attained by applicants of non-EU nationalities, namely of Swiss (18.2%), Israeli (17.5%) and US (16.7%) nationalities.

As of mid-2014, ERC grant recipients are hosted by about 600 research organisations located in a smaller group of 30 countries (i.e., 'host countries'), consisting of 25 EU Member States (all but Lithuania, Malta and Romania) and 5 Associated Countries (Iceland, Israel, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey). However, there has also been a noticeable concentration of funding at a small group of Host Institutions. Over 40% of the grants have been awarded to researchers based at the top 31 Host Institutions. The report comes to the

European Research Council (ERC) grants support individual researchers of any nationality and age who wish to pursue their frontier research. The ERC encourages in particular proposals that cross disciplinary boundaries, pioneering ideas that address new and emerging fields and applications that introduce unconventional, innovative approaches.

More information on the funding schemes can be found [here](http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess).

¹ Please note that in the following paragraphs, the data only relates to these three schemes.



conclusion, that given the aims of the ERC, which include channelling resources to the most promising researchers, this distribution can be seen as a strong sign that the ERC is achieving its aims. It should be no surprise that many of Europe's top researchers are already at some of Europe's top research institutions.

Further information:

"ERC funding activities 2007-2013 – Key facts, patterns and trends", 2015, https://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publication/files/ERC_funding_activities_2007_2013.pdf

"Top institutions dominate in fierce ERC grant battle", University World News, 13 November 2015, Global Edition Issue 390, <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20151113155204222>