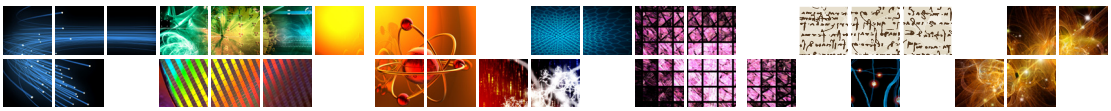
European Research Council

ideas

Newsletter of the European Research Council



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Editorial by the ERC President

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As the European Research Council enters a novel chapter under the new research Framework Programme Horizon 2020, I have the privilege of leading this great European endeavour on the next step of its journey. The ERC is an organisation I have believed in and promoted for a long time; initially as a scientist and later as chair of the mathematics panel in the first ERC Starting Grant call.

In its short lifetime, the ERC has achieved a great deal. The credit goes to my predecessors on the ERC Scientific Council, as well as to the management of the ERC Executive Agency. The ERC has just passed the milestone of funding 4000 grantees across Europe - as marked in this newsletter.

I can now look back on three intense first months as President: I have quickly become acquainted with all the key players, learned a lot from the ERC staff and appreciated its high level of professionalism.

There are challenges ahead though. One concern, which the ERC takes very seriously, is the unbalanced geographical spread of ERC grants across institutions on our continent. The ERC is at the same time keen to attract more top talent from overseas.

An equally important challenge is to achieve a better gender balance in the ERC calls, a matter I feel strongly about. With International Women's Day just behind us, this newsletter focuses on gender issues across the research world, and in the ERC calls in particular.

The ERC cannot boast very uplifting numbers when it comes to the share of women amongst applicants, or grantees for that matter (see p. 3). These figures mirror the state of affairs in the research community, but this fact does not make them more acceptable. The underrepresentation of women in science has to be addressed throughout the system, starting at an early stage. Female role models in science are key to inspiring more girls to pursue a research career. Those women who embark on a scientific path should be encouraged by an environment offering real opportunities, and equal ones. Biases of all sorts must be tackled.

Without departing from the principle of funding only excellent researchers, the Scientific Council has shown it is committed to gender equality. I believe there is a real need to nurture all scientifically curious and creative minds, whether male or female. Europe can simply not afford to waste any of its talent.

You will learn more about this challenge in this issue. Enjoy reading.

Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, ERC President

In this issue

Mind the gap

The female face of science

Looking back in time, female scientists such as Rosalind Franklin, Marie Skłodowska-Curie and Dorothy Hodgkin all faced major challenges in their careers. Today women contribute actively to the world of research, but the scientific community still remains male-dominated overall. Generally speaking, female researchers are paid less, remain underrepresented in some domains and often hit the glass ceiling when competing for leadership positions. The ERC, for its part, continues its efforts to break the gender bias and change the female face of science.

Data show that just over 20% of ERC grantees are women. Why so few? Fewer women apply for ERC funding than men: in total, they account for only 25% of applicants. Unsurprisingly, there is a substantial difference between the age categories: around 30% of applicants in Starting and Consolidator Grant calls are female, but this rate drops to 15% in Advanced Grant calls. The ERC figures reflect the situation of female scientists in Europe across the board. It is a well-known fact that a large portion of women withdrawn from a scientific career: one of the reasons often cited is the difficulty of combining it with raising a family. Additionally, several studies have shown the existence of an 'unconscious gender bias' in academia, which makes female scientists' career progression more difficult, for example whilst competing for professorships, or publishing research results.

Another general trend that is reflected in the ERC is women's underrepresentation in natural sciences. In the ERC calls, women account for 36% of applicants in Social Sciences and Humanities (SH), 30% in Life Sciences (LS), and only 17% in Physical Sciences and Engineering (PE).

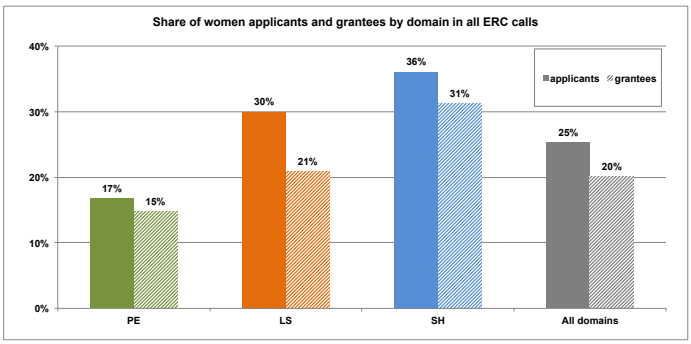
Work in progress

In 2008, the ERC Scientific Council created a dedicated Working Group on Gender Balance, which came up with a gender balance plan and monitors the issue carefully. With a view to boosting female participation in ERC calls, the Scientific Council also decided to remove the self-evaluation section from the ERC application forms (women scientists tend to be less self-confident), reduce the number of publications requested from an applicant (women tend to get published less partly due to the gender bias), and to take maternity into account when assessing eligibility.

In addition, last December the Working Group held a workshop in Brussels on how to improve gender balance in science, and in particular in the ERC schemes. One of the speakers, Prof. Curt Rice (University of Tromsø), emphasised that the culture has to change to provide equal opportunities for scientists. "Individual-oriented measures need to be taken together with a cultural change and awareness in order to last", he noted.

The unconscious gender bias was a key point highlighted during the workshop. It was a common view that panel members, editors, advisors and other experts should be trained to recognise when gender exclusion is taking place. The importance of having female scientist role models, which could be done by showcasing top female ERC grantees, was also stressed. The conclusion of the workshop was clear: to get to grips with gender imbalance, women need to become more involved in science, from preparing scientific proposals to publishing papers, from applying for university studies to securing leadership positions.

Aside from this workshop, the ERC has commissioned two studies on the topic of gender. One is looking into career paths and patterns, and in particular into differences and similarities in the career paths of female and male ERC grant holders. The outcomes are due shortly. The second study will begin in April and will look into the ERC's practices and processes in the context of gender mainstreaming, in particular during proposal submission and peer review.



Interview with

Prof. Isabelle Vernos

ERC Scientific Council member Prof. Isabelle Vernos chairs the ERC working group which monitors gender balance and promotes equal opportunities in ERC competitions. We asked her about gender in science.

Why is gender balance important?

It is a question of fairness. Since there are at least as many trained and competent women as men, they should have equal opportunities for professional development. Also, from an economic perspective, the investment made to train highly qualified individuals should be recovered through their contribution to society. Therefore, losing a large share of them, mostly women, along the career path is not cost effective. Finally, increasing diversity by including individuals with different perspectives on how to tackle problems is the best way to increase creativity and research quality, and therefore innovation.

How are women doing in the ERC calls?

The number of female applicants is systematically lower, particularly for Advanced Grants. This is not surprising, as the female share in top scientific positions is generally very low. Although the numbers are a bit better in the Starting Grant calls, the gap is visible there too. As the share of male and female postdocs is still quite balanced, it suggests that there is a difficult career transition for women from the postdoctoral stage to their first independent position.

Interestingly, our data show large variations between EU countries in the number of female ERC applicants and their success rates. This material could help countries reflect on strengths and weaknesses, and identify appropriate actions.

How does the ERC deal with the issue?

We take it very seriously. We have created a working group, which gathers and analyses gender-related data on applications, success rates, team and panel composition, women's situation in specific countries, etc.

One of our strongest concerns is to ensure equal opportunities for all researchers throughout the selection process. We are, for instance, continually assessing the application forms for ERC calls and monitoring the gender composition of the evaluation panels. Recently, we have included a section on unconscious gender bias in the briefing that panellists receive before evaluation. We also contribute to gender equality meetings and have commissioned ad hoc studies to obtain objective data on gender imbalances in science.

Is there a correlation between the number of women on ERC evaluation panels and female grantees?

We have found that the number of female reviewers on evaluation panels does not influence the success rate of female applicants. This suggests that improving gender balance in panels will not be a critical step towards equalising male and female success rates. However, we are still working towards well balanced panels because of other positive consequences for women: increasing their visibility in their own and adjacent scientific fields and broadening professional networks. Besides, participating in panels is excellent training in itself.

Is the world of research ready for a change of culture?

There is still a lot of work to be done, and many challenges ahead. Firstly, the structure of a traditional scientific career is not particularly suited to a work/life balance for researchers raising children. It is necessary to find new ways to evaluate career paths and the potential for creativity and innovation, without assuming that more achievements in a shorter time reflect a better potential in this respect. Some criteria, such as international mobility, should also be revised to include other ways of participating in international projects that may not necessarily involve long and repetitive periods of work abroad.

Listen to an interview with Isabelle Vernos
Biography of Prof. Vernos

ERC projects

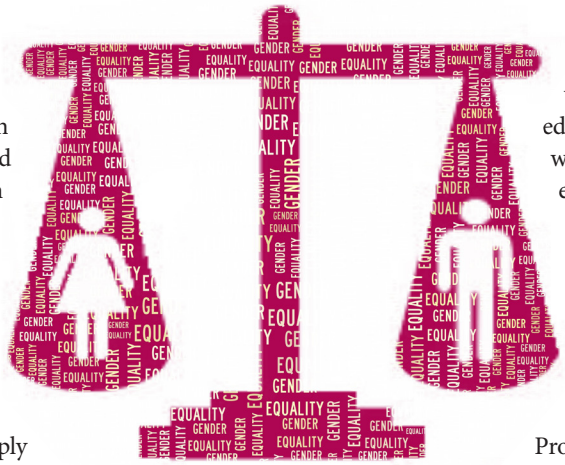
Exploring the role of gender

How is the changing gender balance influencing the economy and society at large? From the disappearance of foot binding in China to the role of educational level in partner choice, and the well-being of working mothers and their families: learn about the research conducted by three ERC grantees.

From foot binding to macroeconomics

How does monetary aid for women enhance international development? Is domestic violence related to the business cycle? And how did foot binding affect the Chinese economy? These are some of the questions addressed by Prof. Michèle Tertilt in her research into the economic consequences of gender differences.

Traditional macroeconomic models based on 'representative households' have usually focused on men, whereas microeconomic household models have typically assumed cooperative decision-making between spouses. Prof. Tertilt and her team are working on novel strategic models to accommodate gender differences within macroeconomics, and uncover women's impact on the economy.



The researchers will apply their models to early 20th century laws which prevented women from working. One of the phenomena they will focus on is foot binding in China and its subsequent disappearance. They will test a hypothesis that foot binding was carried out to immobilise women, so that they would work in the domestic textile industry, and that the departure from this tradition was in part due to the commercial textile industry taking over.

The team will also use their models to explore topics such as the economics of HIV, the macroeconomic impact of domestic violence, what happens in developing countries if women are given higher purchasing power, and optimal taxation systems for families.

With this comprehensive study, Prof. Tertilt hopes to uncover crucial data and new mechanisms to inform policies on economic development: from a fairer tax system to effective delivery of international aid.

Principal Investigator: **Prof. Michèle Tertilt**
ERC Project: Gender Differences: A Macroeconomic Perspective (GENDERMACRO)
Host Institution: University of Mannheim, Germany
ERC Call: Starting Grant 2012

Making a match: How educated is your partner?

Would you prefer a partner who is more, equally or less educated than you? Traditionally men have tended to marry women who were at most as highly educated as themselves, while women have chosen better-educated men. But this is now becoming impractical: women in Europe are reaching higher levels of education than men, so the 'mating-market' will be forced to change.

Prof. Jan Van Bavel studies how reproductive demography in Europe is reacting to this changing educational gender imbalance. He analyses the decisions people make when choosing a partner and raising their family. The aim is to discover how these changes will affect the household economy, fertility and birth rates, and levels of separation or divorce.

This is the first time that researchers have analysed the potential consequences of the reversal of gender inequality in education as a factor in predicting important social, economic and demographic trends.

For instance, marrying spouses with a similar level of education could increase socioeconomic inequality, as partners' combined salaries would significantly differ between more and less educated couples. On the other hand, marriage migration could become more common due to a greater 'marriage squeeze', or lack of acceptable partners in certain regions. In terms of fertility, the project will provide novel data on how different partner preferences can affect the timing and number of children the couple choose to have.

Principal Investigator: **Prof. Jan Van Bavel**
ERC Project: Implications of the Shifting Gender Balance in Education for Reproductive Behaviour in Europe (GENDERBALL)
Host Institution: K.U. Leuven, Belgium
ERC Call: Starting Grant 2012

Work and family: a healthy balancing act?

Combining professional work and family responsibilities has become the norm for women in the UK over the past few decades but the impact on their health, as well as on the health of their families, is as yet unknown.

Early concerns about the potential harm caused by the conflicting demands of diverse roles were contradicted by research suggesting that multiple roles help women become more self-confident and sociable, and provide a budget boost for the family. However, these studies have not considered the impact of these social changes on men and children.

Dr Anne McMunn's research is the first to provide a comprehensive overview of the work/family balance by using new statistical techniques that draw on life course data and health indicators.

Dr McMunn and her team intend to analyse work-family patterns amongst British men and women to assess the health effects for both genders, and to find out how the balance of work between mothers and fathers affects children's emotional and physical development.

By comparing different generations over a long time period and observing work and family transitions, Dr McMunn hopes to understand how socioeconomic circumstances, gender relations and modern expectations affect the health of the whole family.

Principal Investigator: **Dr Anne McMunn**
ERC Project: Health Effects of Social Change in Gender, Work & Family: Life Course Evidence from Great Britain (SocialChangeHealth)
Host Institution: University College London, UK
ERC Call: Starting Grant 2011

What's new

Changes at the heart of the ERC

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Helga Nowotny at the handover ceremony

After waving off President Helga Nowotny – the charismatic figure who has been the ERC's guiding light over the past four years - the start of 2014 saw the arrival of a new leader, Prof. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, who has taken on the role with gusto and vision. The symbolic handover event was the occasion to take stock, say goodbye and look to the future. In January, the ERC also welcomed a third Vice-President and three new Scientific Council members.

Meet the renewed ERC Scientific Council

The Scientific Council is the ERC's governing body, made up of 22 exceptional researchers from all over Europe. In January, the Council started its work with some new faces in its midst. The main change was the appointment of its new Chair and ERC President, Prof. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, who took office following the departure of Prof. Helga Nowotny at the end of the year.

He chaired his first meeting in February, which was the occasion to present Scientific Council member Prof. Núria Sebastián Gallés as a new ERC Vice-President responsible for the domain Social Sciences and Humanities. From now on, the ERC will have three Vice-Presidents, each representing one of the ERC's three domains. The other Vice-Presidents, Professors Pavel Exner and Carl-Henrik Heldin, continue their functions.

The Scientific Council plenary was also an opportunity to meet its new members: Prof. Nils Chr. Stenseth, (University of Oslo), Prof. Martin Stokhof (University of Amsterdam), and Prof. Michel Wieviorka (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris). They replaced Prof. Carlos Duarte, Dr Daniel Estève and Prof. Alain Peyraube. Their term of office runs until the end of 2017.

Farewell, so long, aufwiedersehen, goodbye..

At the beginning of the year, a symbolic handover event took place in Brussels, nearly seven years to the day since the official launch of the ERC. The evening gathering was an occasion to mark Prof. Nowotny's achievements as the head of the ERC, but also to look to the future.

The host of the evening, ERC Executive Agency Director Pablo Amor, praised the former president as a personality who '*leaves no one unmarked*' by her enthusiasm and dedication. Representing the Greek Presidency of the EU, Dr Christos Vasilakos, State Secretary for Research and Technology, recognised Prof. Nowotny's inspiring role in the ERC, which he called '*a catalyst for change*'. The Commission's Director General for Research and Innovation, Robert-Jan Smits noted that the ERC was '*the best and bravest thing the Commission has done*' and applauded Prof. Nowotny's contribution to making the ERC known further afield. Amongst the speakers was also Jack Metthey, Director in the Commission DG Research and Innovation, who warmly thanked the outgoing president for her long and fruitful cooperation. The voice of an ERC grantee, Estelle Cantillon, was also heard during the soiree: "*with an ERC grant the only limit to your research is your ambition*", she said.

In her farewell speech, Helga Nowotny expressed her gratitude to all those who contributed to the ERC's success, including her colleagues in the ERC and the Commission. The evening finished with a symbolic handover to Prof. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, who congratulated Helga Nowotny on her great accomplishments, and promised to defend scientists across Europe in his new role.

Going Global

(Re)search for growth in Davos

In January, the ERC took part in the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum with a clear message for world leaders: supporting creative frontier research is good for the economy.

This renowned alpine meeting in Davos, Switzerland, brings together political and business leaders from around the world to discuss pressing global issues. This year's theme was "The Reshaping of the World: Consequences for Society, Politics and Business".

Former ERC President Prof. Helga Nowotny and Scientific Council member and Nobel laureate Sir Tim Hunt held a press conference together with Belgian Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo, originally a scientist himself. He said that the ERC "plays a major role in guaranteeing that Europe's research will be competitive and of great quality" and stressed the need for investment in basic research as a key step towards economic recovery. Sir Tim Hunt encouraged scientific creativity: "*giving researchers the freedom to explore new avenues and follow their noses beyond conventional wisdom. That's how real discoveries are made that enrich our understanding of the world, helping both society and the economy.*"

The ERC participated in eight sessions, entering lively debates on innovation, science funding, climate change and cancer to demonstrate the value of blue sky research. Alongside former United Nations head Kofi Annan and European Parliament President Martin Schultz, ERC grantee Wolfgang Lutz also debated the topic of immigration at the forum.

ERC press release

ERC Press conference with Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo

The ERC across the pond

With increasing funding and scientific collaboration, the European Research Area has a lot to offer scientists from around the world. In early 2014, the ERC attended two events in the USA to take part in debates, nurture relations and present its opportunities to researchers 'across the pond'.

First stop was Destination Europe held at MIT on 31 January. Organised by DG for Research and Innovation, this event showcased the vibrant research culture and funding available in Europe to the US scientific community. The ERC spoke to early-career and senior researchers interested in pursuing their 'blue sky' ideas in Europe.

Two weeks later ERC President Jean-Pierre Bourguignon and Scientific Council members Professors Klaus Bock and Nils Chr. Stenseth took part in the annual meeting of the AAAS (*American Association for the Advancement of Science)* in Chicago.

At the ERC press briefing there, the President highlighted the importance of giving researchers "*the freedom to choose their own research priorities*" and encouraged Americans to come to Europe to "*take part in the daring high-risk research that the ERC supports.*" The ERC delegates - including ERC grantees Professors Walter Salzburger and Anna Fontcuberta i Morral - spoke in four sessions on topics such as public policy, and research on nanowires and evolutionary biology.

Don't miss the ERC's next visits to the USA in April at conferences in San Diego and Tampa.

© Peter Krause

From left to right: Prof. Bourguignon, US former Secretary of Energy Steven Chu and Prof. Bock at AAAS

Researcher in the spotlight

The 4000th ERC grantee


Dr Manuel Arruebo

Just after its seventh birthday, the ERC celebrates a new milestone: funding its 4000th top researcher, Dr Manuel Arruebo, an Associate Professor in Chemical Engineering at Zaragoza University in Spain. His ERC Consolidator Grant, worth over €1.5 million, will allow Dr Arruebo and his team to work towards developing a pioneering method of drug delivery for patients in chronic pain: injectable drug-releasing nanoparticles.

Asked about his project, Dr Arruebo said "*The ERC grant will help me to take my research to the next level and further advance my scientific career. My priority with the grant is to gain greater insight into the interaction between matter and biological molecules. My ultimate goal is to translate advances in medical research into benefits for patients.*"

Chronic pain affects millions of people, and its effects can be crippling. Current clinical methods, particularly the localised injection of pain killers, are inadequate, as they remain active only for a short time. Longer-acting treatments are responsive to various stimuli such as light, or electrical and magnetic fields. Yet even these have their limitations: they cannot take account either of the patient's changing day-to-day physical activities, or the level of pain relief required. They also cannot be switched off until they have released all the dosage they contain.

In many chronic conditions, such as diabetes, hormonal disorders or sciatica, the patients would benefit from an on-demand release of their prescribed medication. That is why Dr Manuel Arruebo's project (NANOHEDONISM) will attempt to develop a pioneering method of drug delivery – one which is reversible, and which releases drugs only where and when they are needed.

To achieve this, Dr Arruebo and his team are exploring the possibilities afforded by injectable and biodegradable drug-loaded nanoparticles, which will be able to release drugs after receiving remote infrared signals.

Building on their previous discoveries in this field, the team aims to design and test injectable capsules which are capable of releasing drugs on demand, and remotely. This technology would allow the patient or the doctor to decide when to administer the drug in a minimally invasive manner and to provide therapeutic doses only for the length of time which is strictly necessary. This injection-based delivery method would also remove, in many cases, the need for surgery.

If the project is successful, the researchers will be able to produce a device which could have a substantial clinical impact for patients suffering from chronic pain. Such novel methods should have the additional benefit of minimising side effects for those who use them.

The ERC grant will be instrumental in this research. It will also help Dr Arruebo to consolidate his research position and give him and his team five years of substantial funding to pursue their ideas.

Over the years, the ERC has marked the occasions of each thousandth grant, awarded to three researchers in diverse fields.

Video produced by the University of Zaragoza

Past milestone grantees

1000th
Name: **Prof. Erika von Mutius**
Host Institution: Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany
Funding: ERC Advanced Grant 2009
Scientific goal: tackling asthma and allergies

2000th
Name: **Dr Matthew Holt**
Host Institution: K.U. Leuven, Belgium
Funding: ERC Starting Grant 2011
Scientific goal: understanding brain function and the causes of strokes

3000th
Name: **Prof. Christian Keysers**
Host Institution: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Amsterdam
Funding: ERC Starting Grant 2012
Scientific goal: tracking the mechanisms of empathy

Focus on

Greece

This time we turn our attention to Greece, the country holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU during the first half of this year. This fifth Greek Presidency is possibly the most challenging one since the country joined the European Communities in 1981. This comes at a crucial moment as Greece is struggling to get out of the economic crisis.

The Hellenic Presidency coincides with the launch of Horizon 2020, the new EU R&I Framework Programme. The Presidency sees it as important to invest in R&I and stated that "*Horizon 2020 can play a decisive role for jobs and growth*".

At the national level, restrictive fiscal policies are affecting the field of science. Since 2008, the national budget for universities and research centres has been cut by almost 50%, leading to further brain drain. In 2013, an estimated 150,000 Greek scientists and scholars were living and working abroad.

So, how are the Greeks doing when it comes to the ERC? Seen from a nationality perspective, 76 Greek scientists hold ERC grants. However, the statistics show that less than half of them are based in Greece. To date, Greek research institutions host around 36 ERC grantees, who all in all received around €56 million in funding.

Greek scientists are also involved in the ERC in other ways. For instance last year, 15 Greek researchers served as ERC evaluation panel members. Also, the first ERC President was a renowned Greek scientist from Imperial College London, Prof. Fotis Kafatos. He was instrumental in the earliest stage of the ERC and fought hard for it to take flight and become a success. He stayed until 2010, after which he was elected Honorary President.

Greece has thus had a quite strong foothold in the ERC since the beginning, but with the country now facing a difficult fiscal reality, attracting or even retaining high-quality scientists has become a major challenge.

The complete list of signed projects in Greece can be found on the ERC website.

A few questions to the Greek National Contact Point (NCP)

© Cristina Pascual

How are Greek researchers faring in the face of the economic crisis? On the occasion of the Hellenic Presidency of the EU, we take the opportunity to talk to Cristina Pascual, the Greek ERC National Contact Point (NCP).

What are the strengths and weaknesses of science in Greece?

Recent Bibliometric & Intelligence reports show Greece's growing scientific and cultural output, as well as excellence in numerous fields of research and technology such as health, ICT, energy and transport. However, in a country where the R&D intensity is 0.67%, amongst the lowest in the EU, the challenges faced by the Greek research and innovation system are tremendous. As we all know, Greece is in the midst of a deep economic crisis that has dramatically affected the lives of its citizens. The crisis has also further decreased public investment in research, jeopardising excellence in this field and leading to a widening innovation gap between Greece and other EU Member States. Recently, Greek authorities have established National Technology/Innovation Platforms in key innovation sectors that bring together representatives from industry, academia and research, as well as policymakers, to define effective funding strategies to increase Greek research competitiveness and technological leadership. The long-term aim is to secure, with limited resources, a competitive economy.

What could be done to make Greece more attractive for researchers and prevent further brain drain?

Greece suffers from the brain drain: young talented researchers often leave due to a lack of career opportunities in the country. However, in order to better face the crisis, Greece should use national and structural funds to retain and repatriate leading researchers and provide them with appealing long-term career prospects and entrepreneurial skills. Greek institutions must ensure scientific independence for young top researchers and a competitive working environment that is attractive for both nationals and non-nationals. Improving the quality of research infrastructures and their management, combined with boost in resources channelled into the best researchers and innovative ideas would greatly increase the quality - in terms of competitiveness and attractiveness - of the national R&I system.

What is your view on the performance of Greek scientists in the ERC calls?

Greek scientists could and should perform better. While the ERC budget for younger top researchers (Starting and Consolidator grants) has significantly increased on a yearly basis since the ERC's inception, the number of young ERC grantees in Greek host institutions per year has remained at the same level.

Are there any tips you would like to give to potential applicants?

I would like to advise researchers to take a close look at the ERC and CORDIS websites, and read about profiles of grantees and the type of research that was funded in previous ERC calls to see if they are up to the task. Also, the National Documentation Centre, where I work, has over the years built a significant archive of presentations and videos with advice on how to write a successful proposal. This is available for applicants in our institutional repository. Candidates can also read a report - *5 years of excellence in the European research area 2007-2011: the case of Greece* - to see in which areas Greece has attracted ERC funds, and what the Greek Units of Excellence are. Finally, I would advise them to carefully read all the official documents for a Call for Proposals and, before applying, contact the Greek NCP team.

ERC grants in Greece

> 36 ERC grantees are based in Greek host institutions. 20 hold Starting Grants, 14 Advanced Grants, and 2 Consolidator Grants, amounting to €56 million.
> 23 grantees are performing their research in the field of Physical Sciences and Engineering, 12 in Life Sciences, and 1 in Social Sciences and Humanities.
> 2 ERC grantees based in Greece have also received the ERC top-up grant "Proof of Concept", to bring their ideas to market.
> 36 Greek ERC grantees are based outside Greece.

Did you miss this?

First Consolidator Grants awarded

The results of the first Consolidator Grant call are in, with 312 researchers winning grants of up to €2.75 million, as announced in January. The selected projects cover domains from astronomy to economics and examples include a 'geochemical clock' to predict eruptions and a study of chemical waste management techniques. This scheme fills a gap in funding systems by supporting mid-career researchers to consolidate their team and research interests through ambitious projects. The demand for grants in the call was substantial.

Read more here

Taking great ideas to market

The results of the most recent Proof of Concept call came out in February, with 67 ERC grantees receiving top-up funding to bring their research closer to market. The grants have all gone to exceptional marketable ideas which have arisen, usually unexpectedly, from 'blue sky' fundamental research projects. They all have potential commercial or societal impacts, ranging from technology for locating skiers trapped by an avalanche to the development of better drug therapies for psychiatric disorders.

Read more here

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ERC President at European Parliament

President Bourguignon presented the ERC at a public hearing in the European Parliament in Brussels on 13 February. Addressing parliamentarians and policy-makers, he acknowledged the role of the scientific community in initiating the idea for the ERC, and praised the European institutions for their subsequent support. He also pointed to challenges ahead, including promoting a more balanced distribution of grants across genders and countries.

Read more here

EU showcases innovation

On 10 March, the ERC participated in the second edition of the Innovation Convention, organised by the Commission. President Bourguignon and two Scientific Council members, Professors Dame Athene Donald (see picture) and Reinhilde Veugelers, spoke about the innovative potential created by fundamental research, among other topics. Nobel laureate, ERC Advanced grantee Prof. Serge Haroche offered inspirational career advice to young European researchers.

Read more here

Future Calls

CALENDAR OF ERC CALLS

Grants open to researchers from anywhere in the world

Call for proposals*	Publication date	Deadline	Budget	Funding
ERC 2014 Starting Grant	11 December 2013	**Extended to 27 March 2014!**	€485 million	Up to €2 million per grant
ERC 2014 Consolidator Grant	11 December 2013	20 May 2014	€713 million	Up to €2.75 million per grant
ERC 2014 Proof of Concept Grant**	11 December 2013	1 April 2014 1 October 2014	€15 million	Up to €150 000 per grant
ERC 2014 Advanced Grant	17 June 2014	21 October 2014	€450 million	Up to €3.5 million per grant

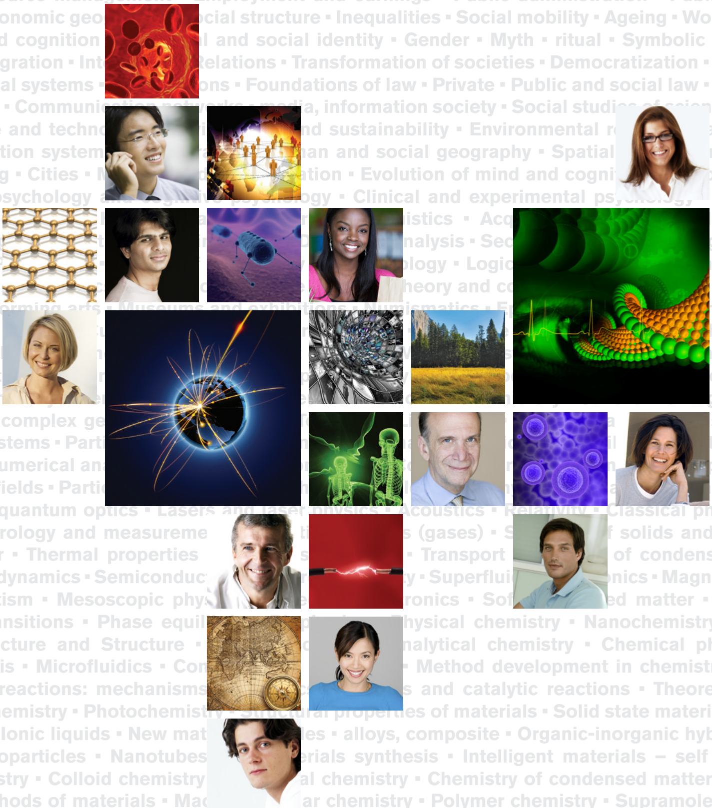
*Researchers who wish to apply to one of the ERC's calls can do so through the Participant Portal.
**Calls open to ERC grantees only

There will be no calls for Synergy Grants in 2014. (The ERC Scientific Council will analyse the pilot phase of this new scheme before deciding on future calls.)

Note that there are new rules for re-submission of proposals. For details on these rules, please see ERC Work Programme 2014 (pp. 18 and 19).

Stay informed on the ERC website.

Candidates should apply with a host institution in an EU Member State or Horizon 2020 Associated country. (See further information on the Participant Portal.)



Thanks to:

ERC Grantees: Dr Manuel Arruebo, Dr Anne McMunn, Prof. Michèle Tertilt, Prof. Jan Van Bavel

Rosalyn Gregory, Magda Kufrej, Carla Palmieri, Cristina Pascual, Olga Sarrado, Severina Shopova, Jenny Skene

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