EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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ANNEX

ANNEX

to the

Commission Decision

approving the Annual Work Programme 2020 of the European Research Council Executive Agency

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Annual Work Programme 2020

European Research Council Executive Agency

Contents

PART 1. MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The European Commission created the European Research Council (ERC) in 2007 to respond to the scientific community's need for a pan-European funding agency focusing on bottom-up frontier research with the intention of attracting and retaining top scientific talent and the most accomplished researchers to work in Europe and the Associated Countries. The ERC supports the best principal investigators in Europe in all fields of science and selects research projects on the sole basis of scientific excellence. The ERC Executive Agency (ERCEA) was created in 2009 to support the work of the ERC and implement the funding strategy established by the ERC Scientific Council as the ERC's dedicated implementation structure.

Under the oversight of DG Research and Innovation (DG RTD) and the ERC Scientific Council, the ERCEA is responsible for managing 17% of the budget of the Horizon 2020 programme dedicated to frontier research actions in all areas of science and the humanities. Thereby the Agency supports its parent DG achieving its specific objective of implementing Horizon 2020 and contributes to fulfilling the Commission's general objective *"A new boost for Jobs, Growth and Investment"*.

The ERC has so far funded more than 10 000 long-term research projects in Europe and the Associated Countries. This led to the formation of an equal number of research teams that have offered training and employment opportunities under the EU's top scientists for more than 50 000 young scientists and other professionals hired in their teams who will eventually take up careers in academia, industry and other employment sectors. ERC projects have also yielded a significant amount of patent applications for unique inventions[1]. This is especially valid for the Proof of Concept scheme where more than 42% of the ERC-funded principal investigators file a patent[2]. Moreover, over 100 spin-off companies were created from ERC frontier research activities. One example is "Babelscape", a Sapienza spin-off that applies artificial intelligence to large-scale processing of text in multiple languages[3]. Two ERC projects have also recently won Horizon Impact Awards in the areas of internet security and child abuse prevention[4].

In 2020, as stated in the 2020 ERC Work Programme[5] adopted by the Commission on 2 July 2019[6], the ERCEA will continue implementing the Horizon 2020 specific objective "Strengthening frontier research through the activities of the European Research Council" of part I "Excellent Science" of the Horizon 2020 Specific Programme[7], as well as supporting the ERC Scientific Council in its tasks[8]. An operational budget of more than EUR 2 billion will be devoted to fund the best researchers and most compelling research proposals. The ERCEA will launch calls for proposals under the Starting, Consolidator, Advanced and Synergy Grant schemes[9], as well as offer opportunities for supplementary funding by means of the Proof of Concept instrument which helps bringing frontier

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[1] Cf. http://umet.univlille1.fr/Projets/RheoMan/uploads/Documents/L244%20Crv_European%20Research%20Council_WhitePaper_A4_008.pdf

[2] cf. https://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/poc_review_report.pdf

[3] http://babelscape.com/

[4] https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/commission-announces-winners-horizon-impact-award-2019-2019-sep-26_en

[5] The ERC Work Programme is established by the ERC Scientific Council, the autonomous body responsible for setting and monitoring of the overall scientific strategy of the ERC.

[6] Cf. Commission Implementing Decision C(2019)4904 of 2/07/2019 adopting the 2020 Work Programme in the framework of the specific programme implementing Horizon 2020 – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020) in relation to the specific objective "Strengthening frontier research, through the activities of the European Research Council".

[7] Cf. Council Decision 2013/743/EU of 3/12/2013 establishing the specific programme implementing Horizon 2020 – The Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020) (OJ L347, 20/12/2013).

[8] More details about the tasks under the remit of the ERC Scientific Council are provided in Art. 7 of Council Decision 2013/743/EU/ of 3/12/2013 (OJ L347 of 20/12/2013).

[9] For more information about these schemes, cf. p. 7 and 2020 ERC Work Programme (C(2019)4904).

research closer to the market. The ERCEA will also continue ensuring the implementation of FP7 legacy ("Ideas"). 385 ERC FP7 projects are expected to be finished in 2020.

Both programmes will further be managed by an effective, efficient and cost-effective implementation structure keeping the ratio of the administrative payments over the operational ones around 3%. The Agency will continue using its acquired experience to monitor and maintain the effectiveness of its operations and seek efficiency gains and process improvements. The ERCEA will implement the 2020 operational and operating budgets entrusted to it in accordance with the principles of sound financial management.

By the end of 2020, it is expected that around 6330 funded projects will be running, out of which 5% (316) being funded under FP7 and 95% (6014) under H2020. In addition, final payments, which require more complex transactions, will increase by 13% for FP7 (385) and H2020 (725)[10] cumulatively. Regarding the scientific evaluation, some panels in the 2020 Starting Grant call have received a very high number of applications resulting in the split of the step 2 evaluation because of a maximum number of interviews that a panel can conduct within one week. The ERCEA also expects a peak in the number of scientific reports to assess (2112 scientific reports including 257 FP7 and 869 H2020 final reports). These scientific reports together with the qualitative assessment of research outcomes of completed projects[11] will continue offering insights into the impact of the "Ideas" specific programme and H2020 achievements and produce outputs which can be used by DG RTD for its policy making objectives. Finally, in this last year of the current Framework Programme the Agency aims to carry out a thorough analytical exercise aimed at evaluating the overall impact of ERC under Horizon 2020. This can be done also thanks to an investment in the in-house monitoring and evaluation expertise.

The achievement of the operational objectives set in this annual work programme for key processes will be measured by a number of relevant performance indicators. The five key performance indicators selected by the Agency, namely "time to inform", "time to sign grant agreements from the date of informing successful applicants", "budget execution" (commitment and payments), "time to pay" and "*ex-post* control error rate" are highlighted in bold in the related tables[12].

2020 will be a challenging year for the ERC – both for the Scientific Council and the Executive Agency. The EU negotiations on Horizon Europe and on the Multiannual Financial Framework have entered their final phase, and depending on their outcomes, and the status of the UK in Horizon Europe, the ERCEA will have to flexibly adapt its capacity starting in 2020 to ensure efficient programme implementation from 2021 on. In addition, changes of key players will occur: the new ERC President, Professor Mauro Ferrari, will take office on 1 January 2020, and at the same time two new ERC vice-Presidents will take up their duties. The appointment of the new Executive Agency Director is expected for the first quarter of 2020, too.

The role of groundbreaking and frontier research will remain important, in particular in view of the new EU political priorities that address the necessary transitions to climate neutrality, green industries and a digital future. Without the bold ideas of today, Europe is in danger of missing out on the innovations of tomorrow, innovations that can make a difference to the future of Europe and its citizens.

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[10] Regarding H2020 final payments the ERCEA workflow for the final financial and scientific reporting has been implemented within the H2020 common IT tools; therefore the internal ERCEA final payment procedure, reporting modalities and internal guidance are being finalised while certain incremental IT enhancements required to be implemented by the CIC, so that the final payments process be smooth and efficient in anticipation of the rise of the final payments anticipated in the next years.

[11] For more information on the *ex-post* peer review assessment of randomly selected completed projects, cf. p.47 of the 2020 ERC WP (C(2019)4904 and ERC website for the results of last exercise (https://erc.europa.eu/news/impact-erc-funded-research-confirmed-independent-study).

[12] Cf. tables under section 3.1 and 4.1.2, pp 10-11 and 19.

I wish to sincerely thank the ERC President and all members of the Scientific Council for all their contributions and close collaboration with the Executive Agency. My thanks also go to the Director-General, Jean-Eric Paquet, and all my collegues in DG RTD as well as to the ERCEA Steering Committee members.

Waldemar Kütt

ERCEA Acting Director

PART 2. MISSION STATEMENT

The aim of the European Research Council (ERC) is to provide attractive and flexible funding to enable talented and creative individual researchers and their teams to pursue ground-breaking, high-gain/high-risk research in any field at the frontier of science. Such EU-funded research responds to the need to increase the research attractiveness of Europe and strengthening the EU ability to generate new knowledge. Both the "Ideas" and H2020 objectives are fully in line with the aims of the Europe 2020 strategy designed to deliver smart, sustainable and inclusive growth through the strengthening of every link in the innovation chain, from 'blue sky' research to commercialisation and contribute to the Commission's general objective "*A new boost for Jobs, Growth and Investment*".

For that purpose, the ERC is composed on the one hand of an independent Scientific Council of 22 scientists, scholars and engineers of the highest repute who establish the overall ERC's scientific strategy and have full authority over decisions on the type of research to be funded. On the other hand, a dedicated implementation structure in the form of an Executive Agency (ERCEA[13]) is responsible for the administrative implementation and programme execution[14] under the oversight of its parent DG, DG RTD.

The ERCEA is committed to funding cutting-edge research aimed at bringing major scientific breakthroughs and providing the Commission and more specifically its parent DG, DG RTD, with valuable input for evidence-based policy making. By implementing effectively and efficiently the H2020 specific objective it has been entrusted with, the Agency will support DG RTD in achieving its specific objective related to the implementation of this programme[15], as it is doing for FP7.

As reflected in its mission statement, the ERCEA is "Dedicated to selecting and funding the excellent ideas that have not happened yet and the scientists that are dreaming them up".

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[13] The ERCEA established by Decision 2013/779/EU (OJ L346, 20/12/2013) replaced and succeeded the Executive Agency set up by Decision 2008/37/EC.

[14] The ERCEA Delegation act (cf. Commission Decision C(2013)9428 of 20/12/2013 amended by Commission Decision C(2014)9437 specifies the tasks delegated by DG RTD to the Agency for the implementation of the above-mentioned H2020 specific objective and FP7 legacy.

[15] Cf. Strategic Plan 2016-2020 – Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, pp.13-14 & 49-51 (Ares(2016)1051529 of 01/03/2016): Specific objective 1.3: *To ensure an effective and efficient implementation of Horizon 2020 and other RTD programmes and maximise synergies*.

PART 3. OVERVIEW OF OUTPUTS FOR THE YEAR

The management of the specific objective delegated to the ERC by the FP7 as well as H2020 programmes is defined in the annual ERC work programme. This work programme, which is established by the Scientific Council and adopted by the Commission, describes in detail the type of funding instruments aiming at reinforcing excellence, dynamism and creativity in European research by providing attractive long-term funding to support excellent investigators and their research teams.

In order to measure the implementation of specific programmes entrusted to the ERCEA, the following results indicators stemming from the legal basis are measured:

Ideas Specific Programme (FP7) - SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE	To enhance the generation of excellent, innovative ideas in frontier research in Europe	
Result indicators	Latest known results August 2019[16])	Target (result)
Number of international prizes and awards by grant holders	1 800[17]	200 in 2020
Number of scientific publications by grant holders	157 000[18]	~40-60 000 in 2020

H2020 SP SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1	Excellent science – European Research Council (ERC) – Strengthening frontier research	
Indicator	Share of publications from ERC-funded projects which are among the top 1% highly cited per field of science	
Baseline	Milestone	Target for Horizon 2020[19]
	2018	
New approach	1.5%	1.8%

3.1 ERC funding instruments and calls for proposals

The Scientific Council establishes among other tasks the methods and procedures for the peer review and proposal evaluation on the basis of which proposals to be funded are selected, while the ERCEA ensures the administrative implementation and programme execution[20]. The ERC work programme 2020[21] provides all the information related to the research activities implemented through calls for proposals as well as other types of activities allowing the ERC to carry out its duties and mandate.

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[16] The ERCEA is currently collecting the available data in order to provide a cumulative figure covering all Horizon 2020 by the next reporting period, therefore results as from December 2019 are not available.

[17] This number refers to the prizes/awards and other form of recognition which are recorded in ERC internal data systems, taken from reporting by ERC grantees and public records.

[18] The number refers only to the publications that the ERC grant holders have directly reported in their mid-term or final scientific reports. They are taken largely from the reporting SESAM tool and include about 1200 which were reported before ERC started using the SESAM reporting tool.

[19] The reference for this target is the year when the last actions financed under Horizon 2020 will be finished *i.e.* several years after the formal end of the programme in 2020.

[20] Art. 7(2)(c) and 8(1) of Council Decision 2013/743/EU of 3/12/2013 (OJ L347, 20/12/2013).

[21] Cf. C(2019)4904 of 02/07/2019 adopting the 2020 ERC Work Programme.

As planned in the ERC WP 2020[22], the ERCEA will launch and/or evaluate five calls for proposals under the Starting (StG), Consolidator (CoG), Advanced (AdG) and Synergy grant (SyG) schemes as well as provide opportunities for supplementary funding by means of the Proof of Concept instrument (PoC), whose aim is to bridge the gap between research and the early phases of its commercialisation.

The objective of StG and CoG is to boost the independent careers of excellent researchers by providing adequate support at the critical stage where they are starting or consolidating their own independent research team and research programme whilst AdG encourages substantial advances at the frontier of knowledge by supporting excellent, leading advanced investigators to pursue ground breaking, high-risk/high-gain research. The aim of SyG is to promote substantial advances at the frontiers of knowledge, to cross-fertilise scientific fields and to encourage new productive lines of enquiry and new methods and techniques including unconventional approaches and investigations at the interface between established disciplines[23].

The 2020 operational budget, the biggest ever since the creation of the ERC will be split between young scientists (StG and CoG), established research leaders (AdG) and groups of scientists (SyG) with nearly 16% allocated for the latter. This budget will enable to grant around 210 established leaders and roughly three times more young scientists as well as to fund 40 groups of scientists. The budget assigned to the PoC will also support the innovation potential as well as the economic and/or societal impact of 167 ERC funded projects.

As planned by the 2020 ERC work programme, a single deadline is set for each type of call except for the PoC call which has three closing dates spread over the year.

Call identifier	Opening date	Closing date	Indicative n° of outputs	Budget EUR million
ERC-2020-StG – Starting Grant	17/07/2019	16/10/2019	455	**677**
ERC-2020-CoG – Consolidator Grant	24/10/2019	4/02/2020	343	**657**
ERC-2020-AdG – Advanced Grant	14/05/2020	26/08/2020	209	**492**
ERC-2020-SyG – Synergy Grant	18/07/2019	5/11/2019	39	**350**
ERC-2020-PoC – Proof of Concept	15/10/2019	1) 21/01/2020 2) 23/04/2020 3) 17/09/2020	167	**25**

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[22]   For more information, cf. pp. 4-5 of C(2019)4904 of 02/07/2019 adopting the 2020 ERC Work Programme.
[23]   For additional information, cf. C(2019)4904 of 02/07/2019 adopting the 2020 ERC Work Programme.

Relevant general objective: *A new boost for Jobs, Growth and Investment*		Parent DG: *DG RTD*
RTD Specific objective: *To ensure an effective and efficient implementation of Horizon 2020 and other RTD programmes and maximise synergies*		Related to spending programme: *H2020*
ERC Specific objective: *Excellent Science – European Research Council (ERC) – Strengthening frontier research*[24]		Related to spending programme: *H2020*
Main outputs in 2020:		
Outputs	**Indicators**	**2020 Targets**
Launch of calls for proposals[25]	% of calls for proposals successfully launched according to agreed deadlines	100 %
Evaluation of calls	% of 2020 calls evaluated in 2020 % of 2019 calls evaluated in 2020	100% of 4 2020 calls[26] 100% of 1 2019 call[27]
Grants signed in 2020	Proposals selected under 2019 calls granted in 2020	100%[28]

The outputs listed above, related to the ERC Specific objective *Excellent Science – ERC – Strengthening frontier research,* will contribute helping DG RTD to achieve its specific objective: *to ensure an effective and efficient implementation of Horizon 2020 and other RTD programmes and maximise synergies*.

The implementation of the ERC work programme by the ERCEA covers various processes from the management of calls and of experts, the evaluation of proposals received, to the granting process[29] as well as the financial and scientific follow up. Below are listed their related operational objectives together with indicators and targets enabling to measure their achievement.

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[24] The ERC Specific objective (provided by Article 3 of Council Decision 2013/743/EU of 3/12/2013) has been included by DG RTD, the parent DG, into the following global specific objective: *To ensure an effective and efficient implementation of Horizon 2020 and other RTD programmes and maximise synergies* whilst the relevant general objective is: *A new Boost for Jobs, Growth and Investment.*

[25] Some ERC 2021 calls will also be launched in 2020 further to the adoption of the 2021 ERC work programme foreseen to be adopted by the Commission in June 2020.

[26] Namely ERC – 2020 StG- Starting Grant, ERC – 2020 CoG – Consolidator Grant, ERC – 2020 SyG – Synergy Grant and ERC – 2020 – PoC – Proof of Concept.

[27] Namely ERC-2019-AdG – Advanced Grant.

[28] Covering all successfully concluded projects *e.g.* excluding terminations, withdrawals etc.

[29] Indicators related to the granting process and the financial management are shown under part 4.1.2.

Objectives	Performance indicators	2020 targets	Latest known results December 2019
Call management: Clear and stable guidance on the application procedures provided to applicants	a) % of ineligible proposals / total proposals submitted, per call	2020 StG, CoG, AdG, calls: 1.5% 2020 SyG:2% 2020 PoC: 3%	2019-StG: 1% 2019-CoG: 1.1% 2019-AdG: on-going 2019-SyG: 1% 2019-PoC-1: 1.5% 2019-PoC-2: 0.8% 2019-PoC-3: 4.8%
	b) Maximum % increase of submitted proposals from previous year by call	2020-StG: 0% 2020-CoG: 0% 2020-AdG: 0% 2020-PoC: 10% 2020-SyG: 30%	2019-StG: -2% 2019-CoG: +2.7% 2019-AdG: -8.3 2019-SyG: -4% 2019-PoC-1: +15.1% 2019-PoC-2: -0.8% 2019-PoC-3: +32.1%
	c) % success rate per call[30]	2020-StG: 14.5% 2020-CoG: 13.3% 2020-AdG: 9.4% 2020-SyG: 9.5% 2020-PoC: 35%	2018-AdG: 10.9% 2019-StG: 13.3% 2019-CoG: 16.2% 2019-AdG: on-going 2019-SyG: 13.3% 2019-PoC-1: 40.7% 2019-PoC-2: 47.3% 2019-PoC-3: 37.2%
Evaluations: Feedback to all applicants on the evaluation result is timely, unbiased and transparent	**Time to inform[31] all (average time in days)/successful applicants on the outcome of the evaluation of their application from the final date for submission of completed proposals[32]**	**2020-StG: 219/296 2020-CoG:182/311 2020-AdG: 159/240 2020-SyG: 250/370 2020-PoC: 100**	**2018-AdG: 160/202 2019-StG: 226/301 2019-CoG: 197/299 2019-AdG: on-going 2019-SyG: 249/334 2019-PoC-1: 93 2019-PoC-2: 86 2019-PoC-3: 91**
	Overall average number of remote referee reviews per proposal	All calls (except PoC): 2	2019-StG: 3.3 2019-CoG: 3.3 2019-AdG: on-going 2019-SyG: 6.1
	% of re-evaluations out of overall proposals submitted and following requests for redress	All calls: 0.1%	2019-StG: 0.03% 2019-CoG: 0.04% 2019-AdG: on-going 2019-SyG: 0% 2019-PoC-1: 1.46% 2019-PoC-2:0% 2019-PoC-3: 0%
Ethical Review: To ensure that ERC grants comply with the ethics principles and relevant legislation by providing timely ethical review and monitoring.	Time to ethics clearance (average)[33]	45 days	2018 calls: 51 days 2019 calls: ongoing

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[30]   This indicator is calculated as follows: (Main+ Reserve)/Evaluated proposals.

[31]   According to Article 20.3 of the Rules for Participation and dissemination in H2020 (cf. OJ. L347 of 20/12/2013, p. 92), the ERCEA may exceed the period of 5 months from the final date for submission of complete proposals to inform all applicants of the outcome of the scientific evaluation of their application.

[32]   Indicators in bold are Key Performance Indicators, complemented by other 3 shown on p.17. They are namely: "time to inform", "time to sign grant agreements from the date of informing successful applicants", and on p. 17 "budget execution" (commitment and payments), "time to pay" and "*ex-post* control error rate".

[33]   Data relates to the pre-granting ethics review. This time span runs in parallel to the granting process.

Objectives	Performance indicators	2020 targets	Latest known results December 2019
Time to grant:[34] **To minimise the duration of the granting process aiming at ensuring a prompt implementation of the Grant Agreements through a simple and transparent grant preparation process**.	**Time to sign grant agreements from the date of informing successful applicants (average values)**	**2019-StG: 120 days** **2019-CoG: 120 days** **2019-AdG: 120 days** **2019-SyG: 140 days** **2019-PoC-2/3:120 days** **2020-PoC-1/2:120 days** **2020-StG: 120 days**	**2018-StG: 102.9[35]** **2018-CoG: 87.1[36]** **2018-AdG: 81.3[37]** **2018-SyG: 118.3[38]** **2018-PoC-2: 97.5[39]** **2018-PoC-3: 89.8[40]** **2019-StG: 67.9[41]** **2019-CoG: 15.2[42]** **2019-SyG: 58.7[43]** **2019-PoC-1: 94.9[44]** **2019-PoC-2: 91.3[45]**
	Time to grant[46] measured (average) from call deadline to signature of grants[47]	2019-StG: 435 days 2019-CoG: 434 days 2019-AdG: 352 days 2019-SyG: 497 days 2019-PoC-2/3: 220 days 2020-PoC-1/2:220 days 2020-StG: 416 days	2018-StG: 382.9 2018-CoG: 372.1 2018-AdG: 283.3 2018-SyG: 460.3 2018-PoC-2: 197.5 2018-PoC-3:187.8 2019-StG: 368.9 2019-CoG: 314.2 2019-SyG: 391.7 2019-PoC-1: 186.9 2019-PoC-2: 176.3
Scientific follow-up: Timely communicate the assessment of PI's final scientific reports	% of final reports which exceeded 60 days	All calls: 3%	StG: 1% CoG: 1% AdG: 1% PoC: 1% SyG: 25%[48]

3.2   Support to the ERC Scientific Council

In addition to managing the evaluation of project proposals and the ERC grant portfolio as set by the Scientific Council, the ERCEA has the legislative mandate to support the Scientific Council in all the tasks the Council performs directly[49]. This requires the Agency to provide strategy support to the Scientific Council and related bodies (standing committees, working groups, task forces, ERC Board), to produce briefings, papers,

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[34]   Main and reserve list.
[35]   Completion rate: 100%
[36]   Completion rate: 100%
[37]   Completion rate: 100%
[38]   Completion rate: 100%
[39]   Completion rate: 100%
[40]   Completion rate: 100%
[41]   Completion rate: 79.2%
[42]   Completion rate: 14.5%
[43]   Completion rate: 28.9%
[44]   Completion rate: 96.7%
[45]   Completion rate: 80.6%
[46]   According to Article 20.3 of the Rules for Participation and dissemination in H2020 (cf. OJ. L347 of 20/12/2013, p. 92), the ERCEA may exceed the period of 8 months from the final date for submission of complete proposals to signature of grant agreements with applicants.
[47]   The target calculation excludes for proposals put on a reserve list the time elapsed between the information and the invitation letter, in line with DG BUDG Vade mecum, 5.9.1 and 5.9.2.
[48]   Only 4 reports received with 1 exceeding the 60 days target.
[49]   Establishment of the overall strategy for the ERC, the work programme for the implementation of ERC activities, the methods and procedures for the peer review and proposal evaluation on the basis of which the proposals to be funded are determined, its position on any matter which from a scientific perspective may enhance achievements and impact on the ERC and the quality of the research carried out, a code of conduct addressing, *inter alia* the avoidance of conflict of interest.

reports in relation to the ERC's scientific strategy, to support the institutional relations and networking activities of the ERC President and Scientific Council members, to coordinate and support the ERC's external communication and to perform ERC programme-level monitoring and evaluation activities.

For 2020, the Agency has the following priorities:

The Agency will support the Scientific Council so that the Council timely contributes to the content of key documents related to the Horizon Europe preparation, such as the ERCEA Establishment Act, the ERCEA Delegation Act, the ERC Rules for Submission, the ERC Work Programme 2021, the ERC Model Grant Agreement, etc.

In addition, in 2020 the Agency aims to deliver a "Final H2020 Report", based on the analysis of the operation and achievements of ERC under Horizon 2020. The Agency will also start working at the preparation of the ERC section of the Commission's Horizon 2020 *ex-post* assessment.

Also, between the start of 2019 and the end of 2020 more than half of the Scientific Council members will have been replaced. The Agency will assist the newly configured Scientific Council in the transition to the next ERC President's office, and in the transition to the new Framework Programme. It will keep supporting the Scientific Council in the process of monitoring the peer review system and restructuring evaluation panels, through the on-going provision of data analysis and strategic documents.

Finally, the Agency has recently invested in its monitoring and evaluation capacities through the recruitment of new in-house expertise. In 2020 it will keep developing its monitoring and evaluation tools in order to assist the Scientific Council in assessing the impact of ERC funding on frontier scientific knowledge, technology transfer, national research policies, host institutions, research careers, and other aspect described in the ERC Monitoring and Evaluation strategy.

In 2019, the Agency delivered approximately 150 briefings, 150 presentations, and 10 data analysis documents, responding to the Scientific Council and DG RTD's requests. In 2020, the number and content of briefings/presentations/data analysis will depend on i) the priorities of the new ERC President; ii) the issues that the renewed Council will choose to focus on; iii) the working relation with DG RTD in the last year of the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme.

A performance indicator has been established in agreement with the Scientific Council, namely the % of documents necessary for a plenary meeting that are delivered a week in advance (benchmark: 80%). The ERCEA will also plan and organise logistics, including the timely compensation of Scientific Council members. The 2020 target is to pay all their compensations within 30 days following ERC meetings (latest known results December 2019: 100%).

PART 4. ORGANISATIONAL MANAGEMENT

4.1. Relevant objectives and indicators

4.1.1. Human Resource Management

The mission of the ERCEA's HR Unit is to manage the Agency's human resources, internal communication activities and to provide logistics and infrastructure support. The Unit acts as a strategic partner aligned with the Agency's objectives and priorities and actively supports management and staff in view of ensuring the smooth operations of the ERCEA.

In 2020, the main focus of the Agency's human resources management continues to be the recruitment, retention and development of its staff. Staffing the different services according to the establishment plan will support this objective.

Concerning recruitment, 12 new posts are foreseen in the staff allocation of 2020, bringing the total staff number of the ERCEA from 517 in 2019 to 529 in 2020. Based on historical trends, an average turnover of about 7% is expected. The ERCEA will analyse the need of selection processes for scientific profiles in the three scientific domains represented in the Scientific Management Department, also in view of the future staff allocation of ERCEA beyond 2020. In addition, a number of specific selection processes, for Contract Agent staff and SNEs, will be organised throughout 2020. The HR Unit will thus continue its recruitment efforts in 2020, aiming to reach an occupation rate of at least 98% at the end of the year. Once the ERCEA staff allocation under Horizon Europe is known, the planning of future selections will become a priority.

At the same time, additional efforts in retaining and motivating staff will be put in place with a series of targeted actions, as outlined in the Agency's HR strategy[50]. In particular, measures relating to career evolution will be undertaken also in follow-up to the results of the 2018 Staff Survey (e.g., by supporting social dialogue and continuing to voice the concerns of staff to DG HR). Actions in the context of absenteeism as well as in conflict management will be undertaken. Furthermore, initiatives that are aimed at raising awareness on the psycho-social and physical wellbeing of Agency staff will be high on the agenda.

Completing and continuing work on the Staff Survey Action Plan of the ERCEA will be important for 2020. Four priority areas were identified by the ERCEA management team on the basis of the input of ERCEA staff: i) promote the ERCEA's high performance culture; ii) enhance information flows within the Agency and beyond; iii) increase staff involvement in decision-making; iv) keep the spirit of ERC special and open to change.

The ERCEA Learning and Development Strategy 2019-2020 (LDS) will continue to run in 2020 and define the Agency training offer. The Competency Framework, which has a central role in the LDS, will be further monitored and developed. To that end, the Agency will deploy proficiency mapping towards all ERCEA job profiles and match the competency needs with the available training offer. The Agency will also look into the possibility of linking the Competency Framework with other HR processes.

In line with the HR strategy goal of "keeping staff connected to Europe", a series of training events are planned that will cover the EU decision-making process and the role of the ERCEA in the EU research family, addressing the Multi-Annual Financial Framework and Horizon Europe issues at stake for the Agency.

In addition, the Agency will further foster the ERCEA staff development and strengthen a collaborative culture among the EU Institutions. In this context, the Executive Agencies have launched a common job-shadowing exercise in September 2019 that will run through Q1/2020, thus enabling the ERCEA staff to have a wider range of learning opportunities while fostering the collaborative culture among Executive Agencies. The

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[50]   Internal document *ERCEA HR strategy 2017 - 2020,* ref. ARES(2017)3401788.

Agency will also seek to encourage joint events and common trainings with other Executive Agencies.

The ERCEA Internal Communication Strategy Plan - Roadmap 2018-2020[51] will continue to guide the internal communication activities and outputs in 2020. Besides the ongoing efforts to reinforce the ERCEA's organisational culture and staff engagement, particular attention will be given to further connecting each staff member to the core business of the Agency, i.e. funding top researchers from across the world. To expand a culture of knowledge sharing and secure an adequate information flow in the Agency – top down, bottom-up and horizontally – the ERCEA's Internal Communication will work towards the revamping of the intranet and consider its migration to MyIntracomm. The development of knowledge sharing tools and practices will be another priority. In order to ensure that communication efforts reach the audience at optimum, indicators and relevant reporting tools for the main communication activities will be identified.

The level of staffing of the executive agencies for the years beyond 2020 depends on the outcome of he negociations on the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework and the programme allocations for Horizon Europe. The creation of additional shared working space might be necessary depending on the future staff allocation.

Objective: The Executive Agency deploys effectively its resources in support of the delivery of the Commission's priorities and core business, has a competent and engaged workforce, which is driven by an effective and gender-balanced management and which can deploy its full potential within supportive and healthy working conditions
Indicator 1: Percentage of female representation in middle management   **Source of data:** ERCEA

Baseline (2019: 25%)	Target: 40% (2020)

Indicator 2: Percentage of staff who feel that the Commission cares about their well-being   **Source of data:** Commission staff survey

Baseline (2018: 69%)	Target: Equal or above 69% (by 2020)

Indicator 3: Staff engagement index   **Source of data:** Commission staff survey

Baseline (2018: 73%)	Target: equal or above 73% (by 2020)

Main outputs in 2020:		
Output	Indicator	Target
To support Agency's core business by providing the required number of staff on time	Occupation rate at year end	98%

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[51] Internal document, ref. ARES(2018)4419238.

4.1.2. Financial Management: Internal control and Risk Management

Overarching objective: The Authorising Officer by Delegation should have reasonable assurance that resources have been used in accordance with the principles of sound financial management, and that the control procedures put in place give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions including prevention, detection, correction and follow-up of fraud and irregularities.

The Agency is committed to continuously monitor and report on the compliance and effectiveness of its internal control system while being proportionate to its risks as to ensure that reasonable assurance can be given in line with the above overarching objective.

As in previous years, the ERCEA will manage in 2020 financial and non-financial risks related to the delegated programmes and to its administrative budget.

The number of payments from Horizon 2020 programme will increase in the coming years in line with the maturity of the grants' portfolio. The *ex-post* control activities related to H2020 payments are managed by the Common Audit Service (CAS), while those related to FP7 payments fall under the remit of the Agency.

The Horizon 2020 Audit Strategy defines audit targets for each service of the Research family, and according to it in 2020 the CAS will complete audits with 160 ERCEA participations. This will result in 430 audited ERCEA participations cumulatively since the beginning of H2020 audit campaign.

In order to ensure the fulfilment of ERCEA audit targets in following years, the CAS should in 2020 select and launch audits for further 200 participations, the number of participations which corresponds to target for 2021.

In order to ensure completion of 2020 audit targets and timely and appropriate selection of participations for 2021 targets, the ERCEA will continously monitor and report on the progress of CAS audits, coordinate with CAS selection of participations for new audits, and escalate if the partial completion of targets underpinning the declaration of assurance will be at risk.

The Agency has an active role in review of the audits performed by CAS through consultation process on preliminary audit reports. In addition, the Agency will continue to proactively provide guidance and support to host institutions through host institution events and visits, to ensure equal understanding of the rules by all beneficaries.

Within the ex-post control framework the Agency will use internal resources to perform technical audits as needed. In line with CAS Working Arrangement such audits should be organised and executed by the Agency and participation of CAS if needed to ensure adequate treatment of financial aspects.

Objective 1: Effective and reliable internal control system giving the necessary guarantees concerning <u>the legality and the regularity</u> of the underlying transactions	
Indicator 1: ERCEA H2020 Estimated residual error rate[52] **Source of data: ERCEA AAR 2019**	
Baseline: 2019	Target
1.46%	Below 2%
Indicator 2: ERCEA H2020 Estimated overall amount at risk at payment for the year for the operational budget under the EAs responsibility. **Source of data: calculated on the basis of ERCEA AAR 2019 results**	
Baseline: 2019	Target
11.01 million €	none
Indicator 3: ERCEA H2020 Estimated future corrections **Source of data: calculated on the basis of ERCEA AAR 2019 results**	
Baseline: 2019	Target
4.40 million €	none

Main outputs in 2020:		
Output	Indicators	Targets
Ensure adequate quality and consideration of specificities of ERC grants in H2020 audit results	Review of Preliminary / Draft Audit Reports (PAR) by the Agency	100% of PARs submitted by CAS for Audit Liaison Officer consultations

Regarding FP7 payments, the ERCEA manages its own *ex-post* controls on the basis of the FP7 common audit strategy. As such, ERCEA FP7 projects are part of the whole population of projects of which the FP7 common representative audit samples (CRaS 1, 2 & 3) are selected, and from which the common representative error rate is derived.

However, to draw conclusions on the legality and regularity of transactions, the ERCEA does not rely only on the results of the CRaS, since the risk profile of the "Ideas" beneficiaries is inherently lower compared to the rest of the FP7. Thus, in conformity with the possibilities offered by the common audit strategy, the ERCEA has adopted an alternative assessment pattern and implemented its own multi-annual *ex-post* control indicators to provide assurance to the authorising officer by delegation (AOD) on the ERC specific population. These control indicators reflect the multi-annual results of audits performed on a representative stratified sample ("ERCEA MUS1" & "ERCEA MUS2") and on a risk based sample of ERCEA expenditure.

The FP7 audit campaign has a multiannual character and is near to its conclusion. Audits based on a representative sample will be completed in the first semester of 2020[53], so in 2020 only audits on-request and follow-up or technical audits for the FP7 will be launched. Results of those audits will be included into the assessment of the regularity and legality of the financial transactions under the programme and provide input to the annual declaration of assurance of the AOD. Since the framework contract with the external contractor provider of audit services has expired in 2017, any necessary audit will have to be performed with in-house resources. Efforts will be deployed in order to

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[52] For the definition, see the guidance "Key concepts and definitions for determining error rates, amounts at risk and estimated future corrections" at <br> https://myintracomm.ec.europa.eu/budgweb/EN/rep/aar/Pages/instructions.aspx.

[53]   3 audits results from 2 ongoing audits are still expected on a total of 311 audit results.

explore any possibility to base audit conclusions on existing results, as much as possible. While maximising efficiency of own resources and minimising the administrative burdens for the beneficiary, the priority remains to ensure the sound financial management of the budget.

Objective 1: Effective and reliable internal control system giving the necessary guarantees concerning <u>the legality and the regularity</u> of the underlying transactions	
Indicator 1: ERCEA FP7 Estimated residual error rate[54] **Source of data: ERCEA AAR 2019**	
Baseline: 2019	Target
1.15%	Below the materiality threshold of 2%
Indicator 2: ERCEA FP7 Estimated overall amount at risk at payment for the year for the operational budget under the EAs responsibility. **Source of data: calculated on the basis of ERCEA AAR 2019 results**	
Baseline: 2019	Target
EUR 8.30 million	none
Indicator 3: ERCEA FP7 Estimated future corrections **Source of data: calculated on the basis of ERCEA AAR 2019 results**	
Baseline: 2019	Target
EUR 2.36 million	none

Main outputs in 2020:		
Output	Indicators	Targets
FP7 ERCEA *Ex-post* controls	- Audits launched (new + carry forward) - Audits closed - Completion of audit plan - Audit coverage	- <5 - <5 - 100% - 6%-7%

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[54]   For the definition, see the guidance "Key concepts and definitions for determining error rates, amounts at risk and estimated future corrections" at
https://myintracomm.ec.europa.eu/budgweb/EN/rep/aar/Pages/instructions.aspx.

To ensure the continuous effectiveness of its internal control system, the Agency will closely monitor on a regular basis the effective implementation of risk mitigating measures, exception requests and non-compliance events, internal control weaknesses and audit recommendations (Court of Auditors and Internal Audit Service).

Objective 2: Effective and reliable internal control system in line with sound financial management.		
Indicator 1: Conclusion reached on cost-effectiveness of controls **Source of data: ERCEA AAR 2019**		
Baseline: 2019	Target	
Yes	Yes	
Indicator 2 Cost of controls over operational expenditure (payments)		
Baseline: 2019	Target	
2.5%	Around 3% of the operational payments made	
Main outputs in 2020:		
Output	Indicator	Target
To ensure the effectiveness of the internal control system	Number of critical audit recommendation	0

Financial transactions are part of the core activities of the financial management of funded projects entrusted to the Grant Management Department. In the light of the parallel running of the two framework programmes and the volume of transactions, execution of payment credits requires a coherent and consistent interpretation of the rules and regulations and effective management supervision and controls across the units while meeting performance indicators' targets summarised in the table below:

Objectives	Performance indictors	2020 Targets		Latest known results December 2019	
		H2020	FP7	H2020	FP7
To maximise execution of the operational commitment credits delegated to ERCEA by the European Commission	**% execution of L1 commitment**[55]	**100%**		**100%**	
	% execution of L2/L1 commitment (C8)	**100%**		**99.99%**	
To ensure full yearly execution of payments credits (operational budget) through careful planning and monitoring	**% execution of payment credits (C1)**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**
Minimise financial and legal transaction time for ERC beneficiaries	**a) time to pay (% according to milestones & budget table specified in the Description of Work and processing payments *ie* economic target days)**	**Pre-financing: 95% within 30 days**		**99.9% (average 8.8 days)**	
		Interim payment: 95% within 90 days	**IP: 95% within 90 days**	**100% (average 18.7 days)**	**99.8% (average 26.4 days)**
		Final payment: 95% within 90 days	**FP: 95% within 90 days**	**100% (average 44.2 days)**	**99.8% (average 38.7 days)**
	b) time to invoice (% within 5 days)	95%	95%	98.3%	98.4%
	c) time to amend (% approved or rejected within 45 days upon receipt of valid request)	85%	95%	97.4% (average 14 days	98.6% (average 11.8 days)
Expert management: To fully execute the yearly experts' operational budget by executing efficient payment process	a) time to pay (average)	100% within 30 days		98.9% (average 11.6 days)	
	b) % of experts payments budget execution (C1)	100%		100%	
To ensure legality and regularity of underlying transactions to support ERCEA's positive Declaration of Assurance	**ERCEA specific error rates**[56]	**-ERCEA residual error rate <2%**[57]	**MUS residual error rate <2%**[59]	**-ERCEA residual error rate: 1.46%**	**MUS residual error rate: 1.15%**
		-ERCEA Detected error rate <2%[58]		**-ERCEA Detected error rate: 1.05%**	

[55]   Indicators in bold are key performance indicators. They are namely: "time to inform", "time to sign grant agreements from the date of informing successful applicants", which can be found on pp. 9-10 "budget execution" (commitment and payments), "time to pay" and "ex-post control error rate".

[56]   i.e. FP7 MUS ERCEA residual error rate, computed on the basis of MUS detected error rates; H2020 ERCEA residual error rate drawn from Common representative error rate ; H2020 ERCEA detected error rate based on a randomly selected ERCEA participations.

[57]   H2020 ERCEA residual error rate drawn from Common representative error rate

[58]   H2020 ERCEA detected error rate based on a Randomly selected ERCEA participations

[59]   FP7 MUS ERCEA residual error rate, computed on the basis of MUS detected error rates

During 2020, further to the review of the Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy (CAFS), - finalised during the first semester of 2019 - and of the Research Family Anti-Fraud Strategy (RAFS) adopted in July 2019, the ERCEA Anti-fraud strategy will be updated in 2020 with regard to ERCEA's administrative budget as well as the specificities of the Agency's operational budget. It will take into account in particular the H2020 internal control strategy, in coordination with the anti-fraud networks of the Research Family and OLAF.

Finally, the effective coordination with OLAF on detected and reported cases of serious irregularities and potential fraud will be ensured.

Objective 3: Minimisation of the risk of fraud through application of effective anti-fraud measures, integrated in all activities of the Executive Agency, based on the EA's anti-fraud strategy (AFS) aimed at the prevention, detection and reparation of fraud.		
Indicator 1: Updated anti-fraud strategy of the ERCEA, elaborated on the basis of the methodology provided by OLAF[60] **Source of data: ERCEA AFS**		
Baseline	Target	
Date of the last update: 2/07/2019 (RTD Anti-Fraud Strategy)	The Strategy and related action plan will be reviewed further to the adoption of the new Commission common Anti-Fraud Strategy and the Research Familly Anti-Fraud Strategy.	
Indicator 2: Regular monitoring of the implementation of the anti-fraud strategy and reporting on its result to management **Source of data: ERCEA's AFS**		
Baseline	Target	
2019	- Bi-annual Report to the Director on irregularities and potential fraud cases - Annual reporting to the Director on the implementation of the AFS Action Plan	
Main outputs in 2020:		
Output	Indicator	Target
Targeted risk assessment on fraud	Timely completion of the activity	Perform the yearly update of fraud risks and review the Anti-Fraud Strategy and its related action plan in 2020

4.1.3. Information management

The main objective of the Document Management Centre (DMC) is to apply the e-Domec policy at the ERCEA by fulfilling the legal obligations related to document management. To this end, the DMC assesses the risks related to document management, provides advice to services, manages access rights to official documents, trains and supports ERCEA staff in using the dedicated tools (Hermes-Ares-Noncom), shares working

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[60] The methodology can be found on the FPDNet website: https://myintracomm.ec.europa.eu/serv/en/fraud-prevention/FPDNetwork/Documents/20151022%20-%20Methodology%20and%20guidance%20for%20DGs%20anti-fraud%20strategies%20ARES(2015)4712738.pdf

methods in a hybrid (paper and electronic) working environment, and contributes to the information management policy. For 2020 the DMC has as main goal to reach the established objectives concerning document management.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" style="background:#1f6fb4;color:white">Objective: Information and knowledge in the ERCEA is shared and reusable by other Commission services. Important documents are registered, filed and retrievable</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Indicator 1: Percentage of registered documents that are not filed[61] (ratio)
Source of data: Hermes-Ares-Nomcom (HAN)[62] statistics</td></tr>
<tr><td>Baseline 2014</td><td style="text-align:center">Target</td></tr>
<tr><td>0.95 %</td><td style="text-align:center">0.95%</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Indicator 2: Percentage of HAN files readable/accessible by all units in the EA
Source of data: HAN statistics</td></tr>
<tr><td>Baseline 2014</td><td style="text-align:center">Target</td></tr>
<tr><td>87.8 %</td><td style="text-align:center">90%</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Indicator 3: Percentage of HAN files shared with other Commission services
Source of data: HAN statistics</td></tr>
<tr><td>Baseline 2014</td><td style="text-align:center">Target</td></tr>
<tr><td>33.8%</td><td style="text-align:center">35%</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Indicator 4: Implementation of a training policy to increase knowledge of EA staff (Welcoming sessions for newcomers)
Source of data: DMC/HR – Selections and recruitment</td></tr>
<tr><td>Baseline: 2017</td><td>Target</td></tr>
<tr><td>ERCEA indicator</td><td style="text-align:center">75 % of newcomers to be trained[63]</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3" style="background:#1f6fb4;color:white">Main outputs in 2020:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Output</td><td>Indicator</td><td>Target</td></tr>
<tr><td>e-Domec correspondents network activity.</td><td>Number of meetings, specific trainings, events, communication exercise towards the network.</td><td>5/ year.</td></tr>
</table>

4.1.4 IT

The objective of the IT unit is to timely deliver and maintain reliable IT tools, IT infrastructure and support services to underpin business processes.

The main focus for 2020 of the unit will be on:

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[61] Each registered document must be filed in at least one official file of the *Chef de file*, as required by the e-Domec policy rules. The indicator is to be measured via reporting tools available in Ares.
[62] Suite of tools designed to implement the e-Domec policy rules.
[63] Number of training sessions/coaching given by the DMC compared with number of newcomers.

- Collaboration with the Common Implementation Centre to integrate the Agency's specific requirements in the common systems in the areas of evaluation, expert and grant management of the H2020 programme. It is the strategy to converge to the common systems and to phase out local solutions for ERCEA processes that could be completely serviced by the common systems. The most important projects will be the preparation of the new Framework Programme, the improvement of the financial reporting and monitoring[64], the management of the transfer of proposals between panels, the eligibility check of proposals and the support for the ethics assessment and monitoring.
- Further development and maintenance of IT systems on request of the Scientific Council (in particular for the initiatives of "Science behind the projects - (SBP)", "Qualitative Evaluation of completed ERC projects - (SAP)", "Panel Member Nominations and Competence - (PAN)" and "support the ERC Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy – (ERC ERIS)");
- Finalising the semantic referee finding pilot for identifying possible remote referees based on the submitted proposals;
- Provisioning of support services for the internal users (complementary to the ITIC service) and external users (for the evaluation and expert management processes) together with logistic services;
- Maintaining a local set of IT tools to manage the administration of the Agency in the operational areas as well as resources and support services, aiming at increasing the productivity of the business operations. The main focus will be on finishing the migration from Coldfusion.
- Further development of the management of the communication information and the integration into the Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy (ERC ERIS);
- Provisioning of a consolidated, reliable and secure IT infrastructure and the implementation of the Digital Workplace of the future;
- Maintaining and providing support for reporting, forecasting, knowledge management and business intelligence tools that are not currently supported by H2020 systems.

4.1.5 External communication

The ERCEA supports the Scientific Council in its mandate to "communicate with the scientific community, key stakeholders and the general public on the ERC's activities and achievements"[65]. External communication underpins organisational management by promoting the ERC's different funding schemes, in line with the objectives of maintaining scientific excellence while addressing issues such as widening participation and gender balance. Communication actions aim to maintain and develop the reputation for excellence that the ERC has built since its creation more than ten years ago. As a European success story, communication about the achievements of the ERC forms an important part of the Commission's broader narrative about the EU's support for research and innovation. The promotion of the Horizon 2020 programme and the EU in general forms part of the ERC's communication about excellence and results. Given the wide scope of scientific domains in which ERC grantees are active, it is frequently possible to make a link in external communication actions between their research results and the Commission's policy priorities (from growth and jobs to climate action, sustainable energy, migration, security etc.).

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[64] Enhancements expected include, among others, the creation of a Business Activity Report on the ERC final reporting and payment workflows (*e.g*. along the lines of the details available at the level of the scientific reporting workflow) and the addition of further "filtering"/reporting possibilities (*i.e*. per service/unit/officer's name, etc.) in the consultation flow in COMPASS.

[65] Horizon 2020 Specific Programme Annex 1 – OJ L347 of 20.12.2013 p.981.

Objective: Citizens perceive that the EU is working to improve their lives and engage with the EU. They feel that their concerns are taken into consideration in European decision making and they know about their rights in the EU.

Indicator 1 : Percentage of EU citizens having a positive image of the EU

Definition: Eurobarometer measures the state of public opinion in the EU Member States. This global indicator is influenced by many factors, including the work of other EU institutions and national governments, as well as political and economic factors, not just the communication actions of the Commission. It is relevant as a proxy for the overall perception of the EU citizens. Positive visibility for the EU is the desirable corporate outcome of Commission communication, even if individual Executive Agencys' actions may only make a small contribution.

Source of data: Standard Eurobarometer (DG COMM)

Baseline: June 2019	Target: 2020
Total "Positive": 45% Neutral: 37 % Total "Negative": 17%	Positive image of the EU ≥ 50%

Main outputs in 2020:		
Output	Indicator	Target
Participation in Scientific Congresses	Number of events Number of grantees mobilised Number of participants	5-6 >25 >15 000
Participation in popular science events	Number of events Number of grantees mobilised Number of participants	2-3 >25 >500 000
Organisation of events/ actions with key multipliers and communication partners	Host Institutions, Principal Investigators, National Contact Points, Commission Representations and other multipliers reached	At least one event/ action with each target group
ERC success stories	Number of stories shared (via website, online magazine, social media, press releases, conference brochures etc.)	>150 stories

Annual communication spending:	
Baseline (2019)	Estimated commitments (2020)
EUR 520 000	EUR 520 000

Objective	Performance indicators	2020 targets	Latest known results December 2019
To raise visibility and awareness of the European and worldwide scientific community and policy makers on ERC and its funding opportunities, key developments and project results[66]	Number of ERC website visitors	600 000 visitors	758 000 visitors
	ERC Press coverage (number of articles/ interviews mentioning ERC published)	12 000 media items mentioning the ERC	18 400 media items mentioning the ERC
	Social media followers	75 000 Twitter followers 35 000 Facebook followers	73 900 Twitter followers 29 300 Facebook followers

4.1.6 Example(s) of initiatives to improve economy and efficiency of financial and non-financial activities of the Executive Agency

The identification, nomination and recruitment of remote referees for the step 2 of the ERC evaluation process is critical for the quality of the evaluation and a high-volume and high-importance task both for ERC panel members and scientific officers (SOs). Providing assistance to panel members in selecting the most appropriate experts for the remote referee task can significantly increase the rate of successfully recruited remote referees, thus improving the efficiency and economy of the related tasks of SOs. The IT Business Process group of the Scientific Management Department is therefore collaborating with an external contractor to devise a system based on machine learning algorithms to provide panel members with lists of the most appropriate experts for each and every proposal. The development is currently ongoing, and now all PE and LS panels use the tool and two SH panels will be provided with this tool for the AdG2019 call that will be evaluated in 2020. Feedback on the quality of the proposed matches between experts and proposals will be sought from panel members.

Moreover, the Scientific Management Department is furthering the development of tools using machine learning algorithms developed by the Data Analysis team to improve the efficiency of operations[67]. The Scientific Management Department will keep this initiative on-going in the future to investigate which part of the operations could benefit from such artificial intelligence (A.I.) and machine learning techniques to improve the efficiency and the economy of the evaluation process.

Following up on the green light of the ERC Scientific Council and the Commission[68] to a pilot on the use of simplified forms of funding for the grants managed by ERCEA, the Agency will implement the PoC grants in form of a lump sum (EUR 150 000) for the second year in 2020 representing about 200 projects over the three deadlines. This is expected to improve the efficiency of the administrative and financial management of these grants, especially from a beneficiary's point of view, by removing the obligations

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[66] This operational objective concerning ERC communication activities contributes to some extent to DG RTD's specific objective *to translate Europe's strengths in science and technology into a global voice*.

[67] For example, the following tools were developed for SyG2018: a classifier, using supervised learning technique on passed SyG2012-2013 data, to provide SOs with an automatic assignment of submitted proposals to panels; a bi-clustering procedure using a "bootstrapping" technique to support SOs in the assignment of experts to proposals; and a software to create an optimized timetable for the panel interviews.

[68] Cf. Commission Decision C(2018)5960 of 18 September 2018 authorising the use of reimbursement on the basis of a lump sum for ERC PoC actions under the H2020 FP for research and innovation

for documenting and reporting costs as well as financial audits at the end of the projects. Moreover, in anticipation of the forthcoming PoC lump sum payments, the technical and procedural modalities are under review and will be timely defined and incorporated within the financial guidance, the ERCEA financial circuits and the PoC Model Grant Agreement, so that the expected efficiency gain can be maximised.

In addition, in view of the increased number of H2020 transactions expected in 2020, ERCEA internal grant management manuals and guidance are regularly being reviewed in line with the common rules and guidelines set by the CIC, aiming at maximum streamlining with the family processes and controls, thus optimising actors' coherence and efficiency and maintaining the Agency's excellent KPIs.

Also, the ERCEA amendment workflow will be simplified in COMPASS at the level of the actors involved. Such improvements towards an even leaner amendments process aim at increasing further the efficiency and effectiveness in the related activities' KPIs.

Finally, considering the increased number of H2020 final payments expected, 2020 will be marked by the first bulk of H2020 final financial and scientific reports submitted in the common IT tools in the 3 main schemes. The Grant management and scientific departments will define the ERCEA final reporting IT modalities and establish the relevant internal procedure, on the basis of the ERC final workflow. The latter ensure safe and sound financial operations, adequate controls and an effective and a high quality of service to beneficiaries.

4.2. Operating budget, staff and operational appropriations

4.2.1. Operating budget

Budget title		EU contribution (EUR)	EFTA/EEA contribution	Third countries' Contributions	Total appropriations (EUR)
Title 1	Staff expenditure	40 252 314	974 000	1 008 736	42 235 050
Title 2	Infrastructure and operating expenditure	8 342 884	197 954	208 612	8 749 450
Title 3	Programme support expenditure	2 723 802	64 834	67 564	2 856 200
Total		51 319 000	1 236 788	1 284 912	53 840 700

Objective	Performance indicator	2020 Target	Latest known results December 2019	
			Budget 2019 (C1)	Budget 2018(C1+C8)
To ensure sound financial management of ERCEA's operating budget as well as the regularity and legality of its underlying transactions	% budget execution commitments	99%	99.99%	
	% budget execution payments	99%		98.97%
	% of error in transactions related to staff expenditure (salaries) detected through ex-ante checks	1.5%	1.18%	
	Time to pay	<15 days	12.4 days	
	Number (and % of total) of late payments for the administrative budget	<20 (<1%)	22 (1.7%)	
	No material findings related to the sound financial management and legality and regularity of budget's underlying transactions in the financial report of the CoA	None		None

4.2.2. Human resources

The following figures are indicative and are rounded.

Programmes	Staff (EU Budget)					
	TAs	Of which Seconded officials	CAs	SNEs	Total	Percentage
FP7						
FP7	9	2	24	3	35[69]	6.6%
Management and administrative support	2	1	5	0	7	1.4%
Subtotal	**11**	**3**	**29**	**3**	**42**	**8.1%**
H2020						
H2020	95	14	285	16	397	75.1%
Management and Administrative Support	27	4	63	0	89	16.9%
Subtotal	**122**	**17**	**348**	**16**	**486**	**91.9%**
Total	**133**	**20**	**377**	**19**	**529**	**100%**

Staff financed by contributions from EFTA and/or third countries	
Staff allocated to operational activities	9
Staff allocated to management and administration	0
Total	**9**

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[69] Due to rounding.

4.2.3. Delegated operational appropriations

Budget lines		Commitment appropriations (EUR)			Payment appropriations (EUR)		
		EU Budget	EFTA/EEA	Total	EU Budget	EFTA/EEA	Total
FP7							
Budget line	08.025100	/	/	/	75.092.185	1.809.722	76.901.907
H2020							
Budget line	08.020101	2.169.970.133	52.296.280	2.222.266.413	1.978.553.728	47.683.145	2.026.236.873
Total of the operational budget managed by the Executive Agency:		**2.169.970.133**	**52.296.280**	**2.222.266.413**	**2.053.645.913**	**49.492.867**	**2.103.138.780**