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ERC Synergy grants

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Synergy grant call coordinator

Call and Project Follow-up Coordination Unit

Rehovot, Weizmann Institute, 13 June 2019



Synergy Grants 2018: Results – Israeli perspective



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2018 - proposals with a
Israeli Host Institution:

18

2018 - Successful
Israeli proposals:

2

2018 IL Success
rate:

11%
(Call SR: 9,6%)

2019 - proposals with a
Israeli Host Institution:

8

SyG2018: 27 proposals were
selected for funding

2019 – Expected call
success rate:

~14%

Overview



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- SyG 2018: the Israeli projects
- Features of a Synergy grant
- Preparing an application
- Evaluation process and timeline
- Evaluation principles and criteria
- Hints and tips
- SyG 2018- SyG 2019 proposals overview

SyG 2018 – Israeli funded projects



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BacterialCORE: "Widespread Bacterial CORE Complex Executes Intra- and Inter-Kingdom Cytoplasmic Molecular Trade"

Sigal BEN-YEHUDA (IL)	THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM	IL
Ilan ROSENHINE (IL)		

Partner organisation: BIRKBECK COLLEGE - UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Budget: 6 930 796 €

Duration: 6 years

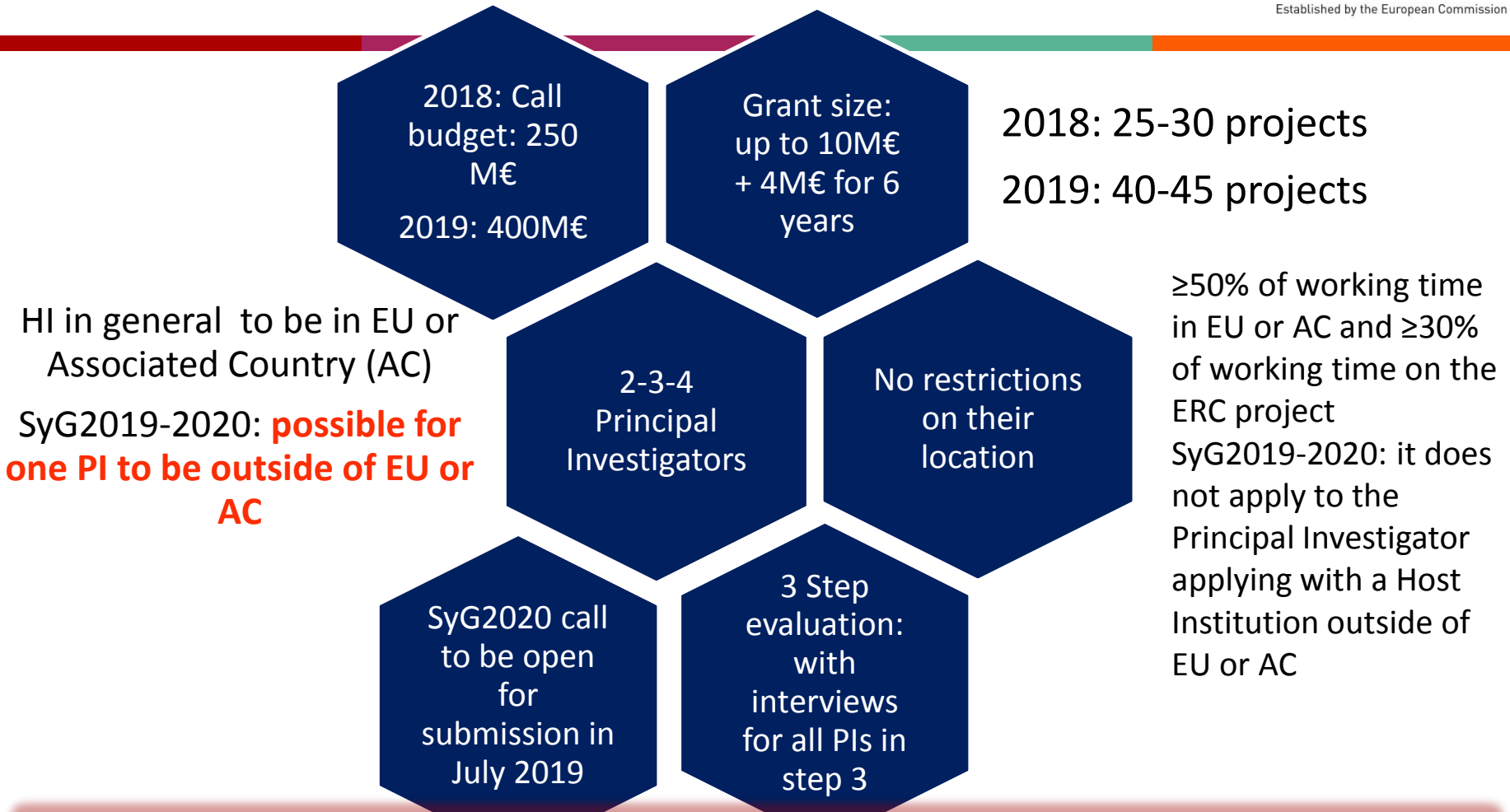
CloudCT: Climate CT- Cloud Tomography by Satellites for Better Climate Prediction

Yoav SCHECHNER	TECHNION - ISRAEL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY	IL
Klaus SCHILLING		
Ilan KOREN		

Budget: 13 878 593 €

Duration: 6 years

Design of the Synergy call in a nutshell



SyG2020: call to close for submission on 5 November 2019
Budget: 350M€: around 40 grants to be funded



ERC Synergy Grant features

2-3-4 PIs

- Can apply from anywhere in the world when they apply
- One PI (not the corresponding PI) can apply with a Host Instit. outside of EU or Associated Countries

MAX 10 M€ + 4M€

- **Call budget for 2020: 350 M€**
- Allow for **funding of ~40 projects**
- Additional **max 4M€ globally** for the project

UP TO 6 YEARS

- Max of 10M€ reduced *pro rata* for shorter duration

4M€ MAX

IN ADDITION FOR

- 'start-up' costs for Principal Investigators moving to the EU or AC and/or
- the purchase of major equipment and/or
- access to large facilities and/or
- **NEW: other major experimental and field work costs, excluding personnel costs.**

ERC Synergy – Key features

What to look for in a SyG proposal?

AMBITIOUS RESEARCH PROBLEM

- To promote substantial advances at the frontiers of knowledge,
- To cross-fertilize scientific fields,
- To encourage new productive lines of enquiry and new methods and techniques, including unconventional approaches and investigations at the interface between established disciplines,
- To enable transformative research not only at the forefront of European science but also to become a benchmark on a global scale.

SYNERGETIC ASPECT

- PIs must demonstrate the synergies, complementarities and added value that could lead to **breakthroughs that would not be possible by the individual Principal Investigators working alone.**

EQUALITY AMONG PIs

- With a designated corresponding PI (cPI) and corresponding HI (cHI) who will be the administrative contacts for the duration of the project

STRONG COMMITMENT

- PIs to engage genuinely in the collaboration
- $\geq 50\%$ of working time in EU or Associated Countries (AC) and
- $\geq 30\%$ of working time on the ERC project
- SyG2019: 50% commitment requirement to stay in EU or AC does not apply to the PI outside of EU or AC

PIs CAN BE OF ANY CAREER STAGE

- They have to present either an early achievement track-record (Starting or Consolidator stage) or
- A 10-year track-record (Advanced grant stage), **whichever the applicants consider most appropriate** for their career stage

COMPLEMENTARY EXPERTISE

- Complementarity of the PIs is essential

JOINT EFFORT

- To foster research at intellectual frontiers
- To allow for new combination of skills and disciplines
- To bring together researchers be that from the same institution or different institutions in the country or EU and Associated Countries wide

ERC Synergy Grant features

Synergy aspects

SYNERGY

A major scientific question with a transformative scientific potential that could not be addressed by an individual PI and their team working alone

Involves teams with exceptional combinations of knowledge and skills with the PIs holding a central role

PIs must demonstrate that their group can successfully bring together the scientific elements necessary to address the scope and complexity of the proposed research question.

ERC Synergy Grant features

Synergy aspects

**NOT
SYNERGY**

Loose cooperation or
networking between PIs

Simple passing of data or
information from one team
to another

Note: The proposed work does not need to cover more than one discipline or field to be considered for the Synergy grants

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European
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Horizon 2020
European Union funding
for Research & Innovation

ERC Synergy - Proposal Structure

In step 1 only part B1 is reviewed.

Administrative data and eligibility are checked by ERC staff.



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Administrative forms (Part A)

- 1 – General information
- 2 – Administrative data of participating organisations
- 3 – Budget
- 4 – Ethics
- 5 – Call specific questions

4-6 ERC keywords are selected, panels are not defined at submission

New SYG2020: each Host Institution has to submit their support letter for the PI(s) hosted by them.

Part B1 (submitted as pdf)

Evaluated in Step 1 & Step 2 & Step 3

Text box - Cross-domain nature explanation

- a – Extended synopsis 5 pages
- b – Curriculum vitae 2 pages ***per PI!***
- Appendix – Funding ID
- c - Track-record 2 pages ***per PI!***

Part B2 (submitted as pdf)

NOT evaluated in Step 1 (only in Step 2 & 3)

- Scientific proposal 15 pages
- a – State-of-the-art and objectives
- b – Methodology
- c – Resources (***budget breakdown per PI + a joint one***)

Indicative restrictions for the SyG2020 call



May 2019: These restrictions may still be changed and are pending on the approval of the ERC Work Programme 2020.

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Evaluation		Can a PI apply to		
Result of SyG2019	Step	StG/CoG call in 2020?	AdG call in 2020?	SyG call in 2020?
C	1	yes ^{New}	no	no
B	1	yes	yes	no
B	2	yes	yes	yes ^{New}
A or B	3	yes	yes	yes

Applicants to previous StG/CoG/AdG ERC calls can apply to the SyG2020 call regardless of the score received previously.

To be eligible for SyG2020: a running ERC grant has to end before 5 November 2021

A PI can be part of only one application published under the same Work Programme regardless of the call. The first application will be considered, the subsequent ones will be declared ineligible.

Overview



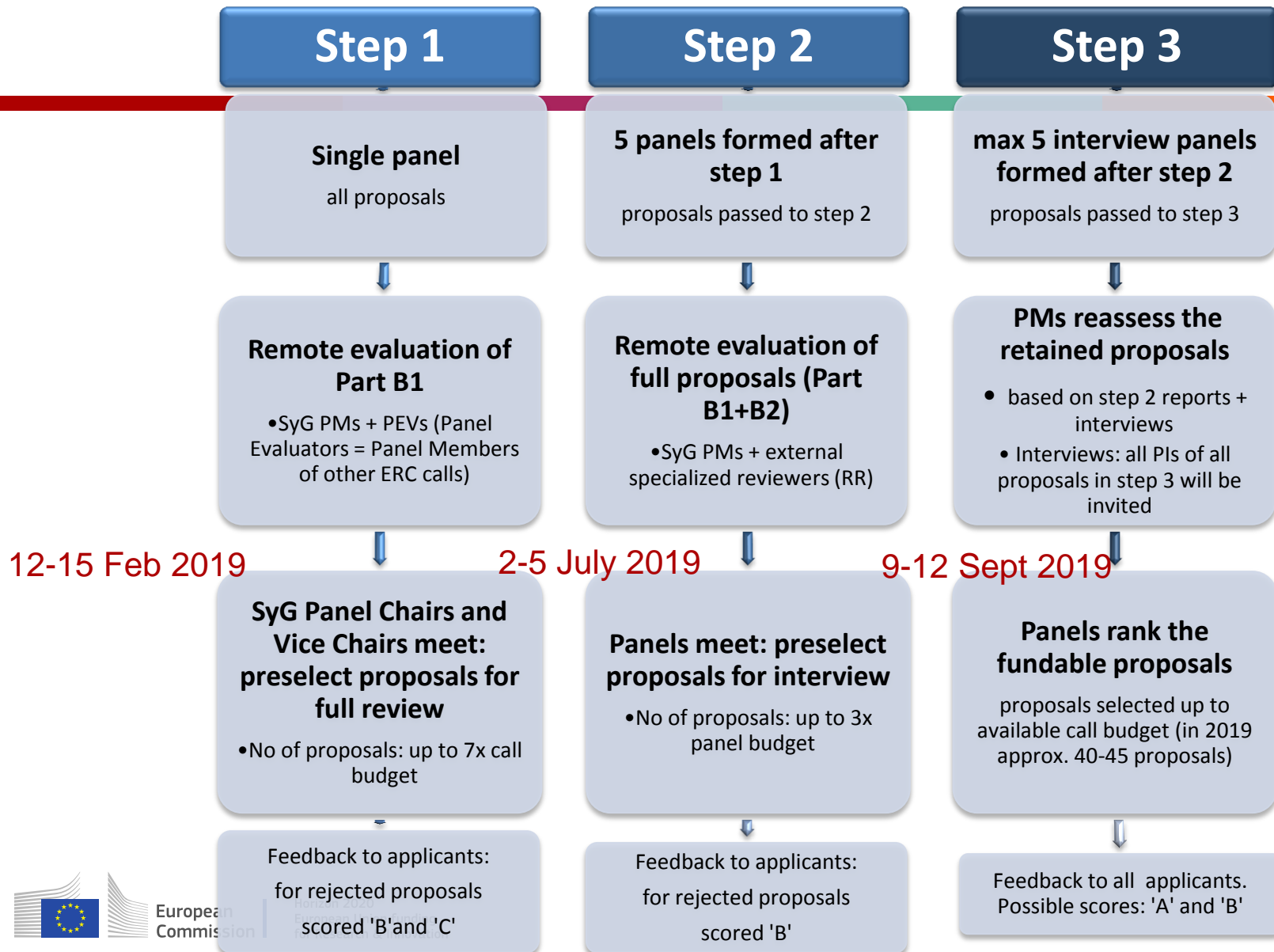
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ERC Synergy 2019 - Evaluation process



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SyG 2018 – Step 1- Who were the reviewers?



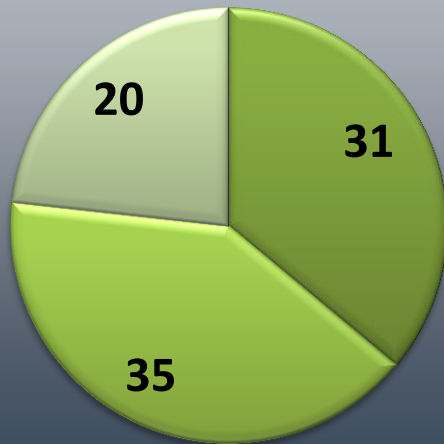
Overview of number and type of reviewers

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186 Reviewers; 27 Nationalities; 59 Men and 28 Women

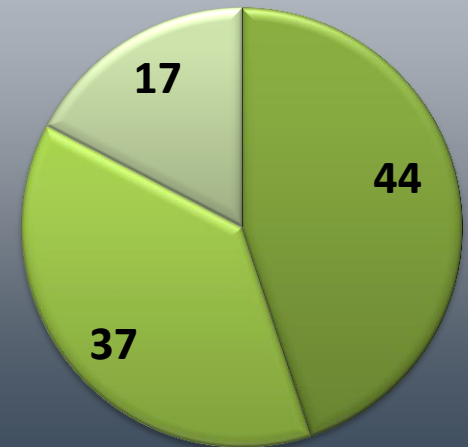
Scientific background

87 Panel Members - PM
(5 chairs and 6 vice chairs)



- Life Sciences (LS)
- Physical Sciences and Engineering (PE)
- Social Sciences and Humanities (SH)

99 Panel Evaluators - PEVs
(Panel members from other ERC Calls)



SyG2018 Step 2 & 3 – Who were the reviewers?

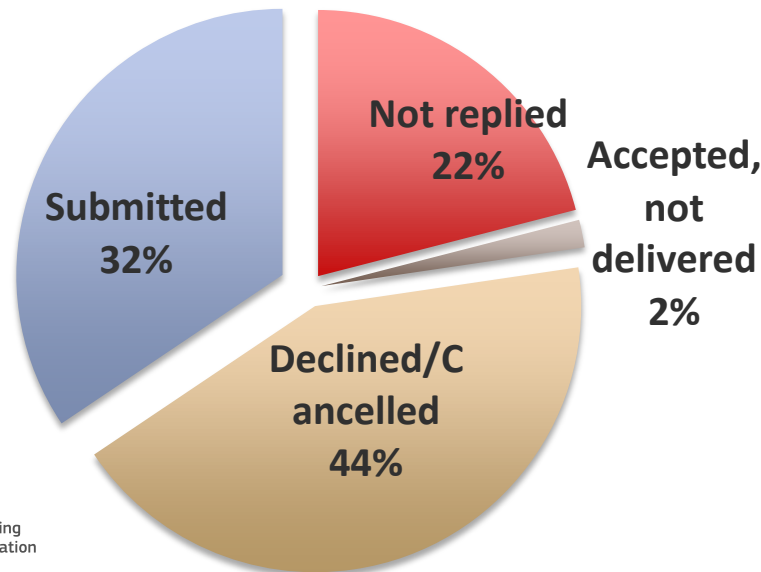


Overview of number and type of reviewers

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- Panel members:
 - About 85 in 5 panels
- Remote referees (unpaid):
 - 2681 invited – 851 reviews delivered
- Each proposal had 8 to 13 reviews

Remote referees replies to ERC's invitation to review in step 2



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What are the evaluation criteria?

Excellence is the sole evaluation criterion: addressed at two levels



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1. EXCELLENCE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

- Ground breaking nature
- Potential impact
- Scientific approach
- Synergetic aspects
- In **step 1** the **feasibility** is assessed only => methodology in step 2
- Resources are not assessed in step 1

2. EXCELLENCE OF THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

- Each PI assessed according to their career benchmarks
- Intellectual capacity
- Creativity
- Commitment => evaluated in step 2 and 3 only

ERC SyG 2020 Evaluation questions



SyG2020: check the ERC Work Programme or Information for Applicants to the SyG2020 call in July 2019 for the evaluation questions

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Criterion 1 - Research Project

The following are used in STEP 1, 2 and 3. The answers to the below questions should be found in part B1, as only the short synopsis is evaluated at step 1.

Ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research project

- To what extent does the proposed research address important challenges?
- To what extent are the objectives ambitious and beyond the state of the art (e.g. novel concepts and approaches or development between or across disciplines)?
- To what extent is the proposed research high risk/high gain (i.e. if successful the payoffs will be very significant, but there is a higher-than-normal risk that the research project does not entirely fulfil its aims)?

Scientific Approach

- To what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible bearing in mind the extent that the proposed research is high risk/high gain?
- To what extent does the proposal go beyond what the individual Principal Investigators could achieve alone?
- **Reformulated question: To what extent is the combination of scientific elements put forward in the proposal crucial to address the scope and complexity of the research**

ERC SyG 2020 Evaluation questions - continued

SyG2020: check the ERC Work Programme or Information for Applicants to the SyG2020 call in July 2019 for the evaluation questions

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Further questions relating to Criterion 1 Research project

used only in STEP 2 and 3, when the reviewers have access to both parts of application, part B1 and B2 :

- To what extent are the proposed research methodology and working arrangements appropriate to achieve the goals of the project (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?
- To what extent does the proposal involve the development of novel methodology (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?
- To what extent are the proposed timescales, resources and PI commitment adequate and properly justified (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?

ERC SyG 2020 Evaluation questions - continued

SyG2020: check the ERC Work Programme or Information for Applicants to the SyG2020 call in July 2019 for the evaluation questions (slight modifications)

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Criterion 2 – Principal Investigators – used in all steps

Intellectual capacity, creativity and commitment

- To what extent have the PIs demonstrated the ability to conduct ground-breaking research?
- To what extent do the PIs have the required scientific expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project?

New question used only in STEP 2 and 3:

- To what extent does the Synergy Grant Group successfully demonstrate in the proposal that it brings together the elements – such as skills, knowledge, experience, expertise, disciplines, methods, approaches, teams – necessary to address the proposed research question (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?

Evaluation reports (ER) sent to the applicants

After the proposals are discussed in the panel meeting, a final score is awarded and the decision summarised in a panel comment

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STEP 1 REJECTED PROPOSALS

- Predefined standard panel comment based on the score, summarizing the decision taken by the panel
- Individual assessments, without names and grades
- Possible scores given by the panel: 'A', 'B', 'C'
- For 'A' score (passed to step 2) ERs are not provided

STEP 2 REJECTED PROPOSALS

- Carefully drafted panel comments for each rejected proposal
- Individual assessments, without names and grades
- Possible scores: 'A', 'B'
- For 'A' score (passed to step 3) ERs are not provided

STEP 3 ALL PROPOSALS

- Carefully drafted panel comments for each proposal
- Individual assessments, without names and grades
- Possible scores: 'A', 'B'
- Outcome based on ranking: 'A' –(funded; reserve; not funded, but excellent quality) 'B'- not fundable

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Hints and tips

How to prepare an ERC SyG proposal?

THINK BIG

Hints and tips

How to prepare an ERC SyG proposal?

- Have an **original and exciting idea** that requires the **joint effort** of 2 or 3 or 4 PIs
- **Design a research project** to implement the idea
 - It is not about a consortium, but about a tight-knit small group of PIs and their teams. The PIs are equal and indispensable for the project!
- Get a letter of support from your **Host Institution**- **note a change for SyG2020** (in Syg2019, only the corresponding HI provided a letter)
 - **SyG2020: each HI has to provide a support letter for the PI(s) hosted by them***
- **Write** the research proposal (carefully plan the resources)
 - Choose carefully the 4-6 keywords: applications are not submitted to a StG/CoG/AdG types of the panels
- Read carefully the **evaluation criteria** and try to ensure that the reviewers can find the answers to them in your proposal (part B2 is not a mere repetition of part B1)
- **Get feedback** from your peers
- **Submit** your research proposal **before the deadline** -> fully electronic/web based submission system

Hints and tips

Questions to ask yourself as an applicant



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Principal Investigators

- Is each of the PIs internationally competitive as a researcher at each of their career stage and in each of their discipline?
- Is each of the PIs able to work independently, and to manage a 6-year project with a substantial budget?
- How strong is the group of PIs as a whole?
- Does the proposal demonstrate that the PIs bring together the necessary elements to address the research question?

Hints and tips

Questions to ask yourself as an applicant



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Research Project

- Why is the proposed project important?
- Does it promise to go substantially beyond the state of the art?
- Has it the chance to cross-fertilize disciplines?
- What is the scientific transformative potential?
- Does it have a grand challenge that can boost European research?
- Why are we the best/only persons to carry it out?
- Why is this particular combination of the PIs the best for the project?
- Is the other person(s) really needed as a PI or only as a team member?
- Is it timely? (Why wasn't it done in the past? Is it feasible now?)
- What's the risk? Is it justified by a substantial potential gain? Do we have a plan for managing the risk?

Typical reasons for rejection

Principal investigators

- Insufficient track-record
- Insufficient (potential for) independence (StG and CoG profiles)
- Insufficient experience in leading projects (AdG profile)
- Complementarity of PIs not evident enough
- Not evident that the necessary elements can be successfully brought together (skills, knowledge, experience, expertise, disciplines, methods, approaches, teams)

Proposed project

- Scope: Too narrow \leftrightarrow too broad/unfocussed
- Not synergetic enough
- Incremental research
- Work plan not detailed enough/unclear
- Insufficient risk management

 **Poor interview:** prepare well! (all PIs in step 3 are invited to Brussels)

Hints and tips

Preparing an application



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Differences in Part B1 and Part B2

In **Step 1: Panel members** (act as **generalists**) they see **only Part B1** of your proposal: Prepare it accordingly!

- Pay particular attention to the **ground-breaking nature** of the research project – no incremental research. State-of-the-art is not enough. Think big!
- For SyG: Synergetic aspects crucial - complementarity and possibly interdisciplinarity (if any) to be emphasised
- Know your competitors – what is the **state of play** and why is your idea and scientific approach outstanding?
- **Only the extended Synopsis is read at Step 1: concise and clear presentation** is crucial (**Outline** of the **methodological approach** – feasibility is assessed)
- Show , if applicable for StG and CoG profiles, the **scientific independence** in the CVs, the scientific leadership in the AdG profile

Hints and tips

Preparing an application

Differences in Part B1 and Part B2



- In **Step 2** : Both **Part B1 and B2** are sent to specialists around the world (**specialised external referees**)
 - Do not just repeat the synopsis in part B2
 - Provide **sufficient detail** on methodology, work plan, selection of case studies etc. (15 pages) (references do not count towards page limit)
 - Check coherency of figures, **justify requested resources** (outside of 15 pages)
 - Explain **involvement of additional team members** (it is possible to have further beneficiaries/partners in the project)
 - Provide alternative strategies to **mitigate risk**

In Step 3: no new reviews are written, but part B1 and B2 are re-assessed

Explain the budget properly!

- Budget analysis carried out in Step 3 evaluation.
- Panels have the responsibility to ensure that resources requested are reasonable and well justified.
- Budget cuts need to be justified on a proposal-by-proposal basis (no across-the-board cuts).

Not explained costs are often cut!

- Panels recommend a final maximum budget based on the resources allocated/removed.
- Panels do not 'micro-manage' project finances.
- Awards made on a 'take-it-or-leave-it' basis: no negotiations.
- Ask for funding for Open Access in case needed– this is obligatory in Horizon2020!

Rumour : *Ask for more money, the reviewers will anyhow cut it down.*

✗ NOT true: however, unexplained or non-motivated requests can be cut, so if you artificially inflate your budget, it will be reduced.

When writing the CVs

- Remember that the CVs/Track Records are as important as the project!
- Explain what has been each PI's own contribution to their key publications.
- Explain publishing habits in the field and country if needed.
- If the PI knows that he/she has gaps or other issues in the CV (e.g. co-authored publications), explain them.
- Describe activities which can indicate scientific maturity.
- Use the CV template provided by the ERC in the submission system
- No need to provide PhD supporting documents

Rumour : *One needs publications in Nature/Science/High Impact Factor journals to succeed.*

✗ NOT true: in addition note: for StG profiles: publishing with senior scientists (former supervisors) raises doubts about maturity/scientific independence.

Overview



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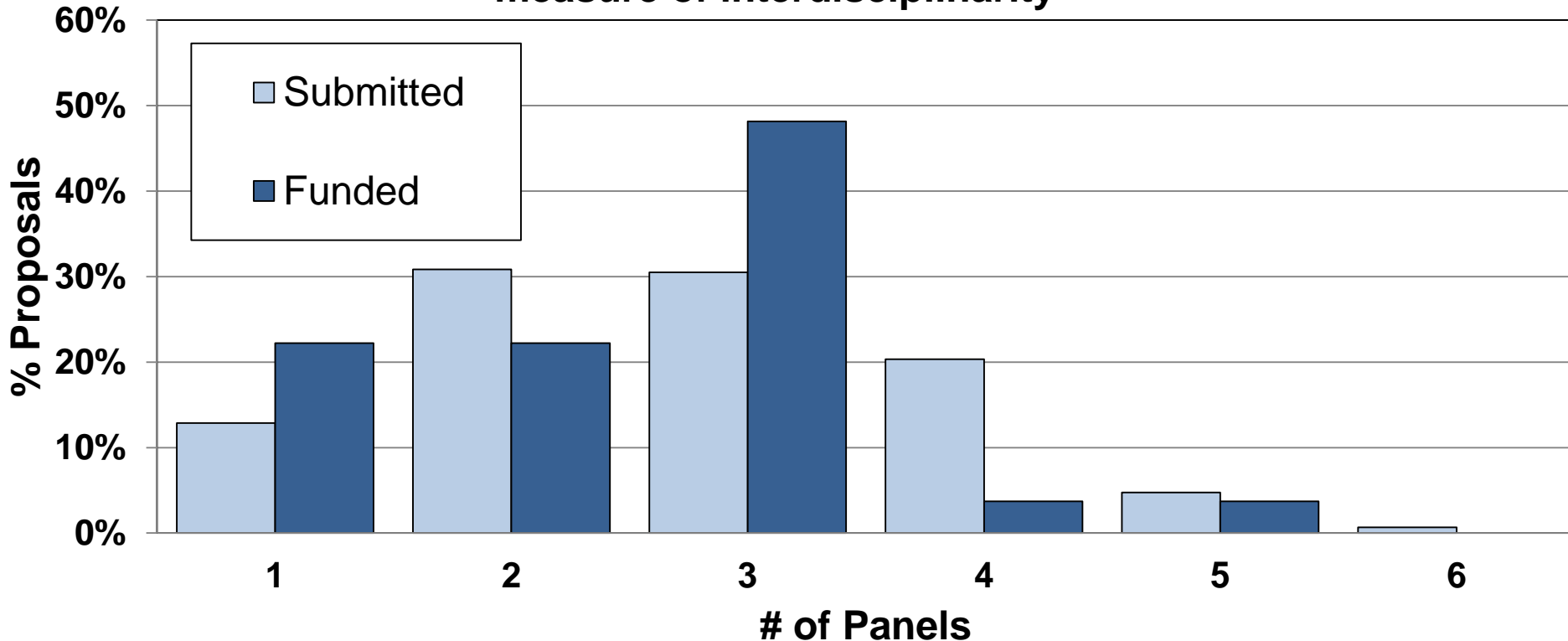
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Observations: SyG 2018 funded proposals



Majority are interdisciplinary, across multiple 'regular' ERC panels

Number of panels spanned by using keywords selected by the applicants in the submitted and funded proposals – one possible measure of interdisciplinarity



SyG 2018 Results

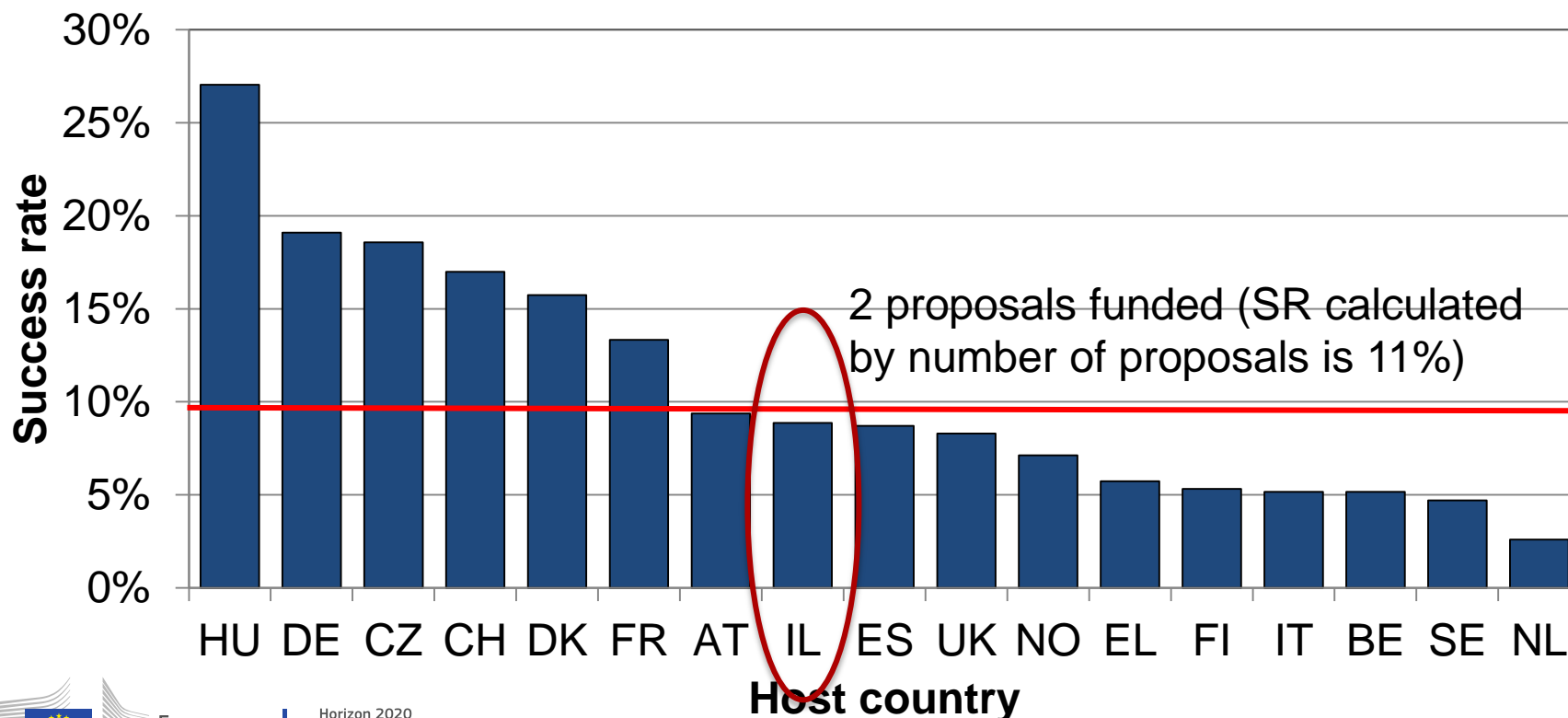
Success rates by amount awarded / amount requested



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SYG 2018 Success rate (SR) by HI country
calculated by total awarded / total requested budget
Overall SR = 9.6



SyG 2018 and 2019 Overview

2019 Budget 400 M € (40-45 projects to be funded, ~ 14% success rate)



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		2018	2019
Proposals received		300	288 (- 4%)
PIs		980	951
	Average # PIs	3.3	3.3
	Female PIs	21% (208)	23% (223)
HIs		465	454
	Average # HIs	2.8	2.8
	Average # beneficiaries	3.0	3.1
# proposals with partners		68 (23%)	47 (16%)
# proposals with an HI outside of EU or H2020 Associated Country		-	56

SyG 2018 and 2019 Overview

2019 Budget 400 M € (40-45 projects to be funded, ~ 14% success rate)



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	2018	2019
Average Duration	69 months	69 months
Average budget requested	8.4 M€	8.6 M€
# Ineligible	4	3
# Passed to Step 2	154	182 (+ 18%)
Step 1 SR	51%	64%
% Awarded C	17%	9%
% PI Female passed to step 2	17%	23%
Budget multiplier (max 7)	5.75	4.26

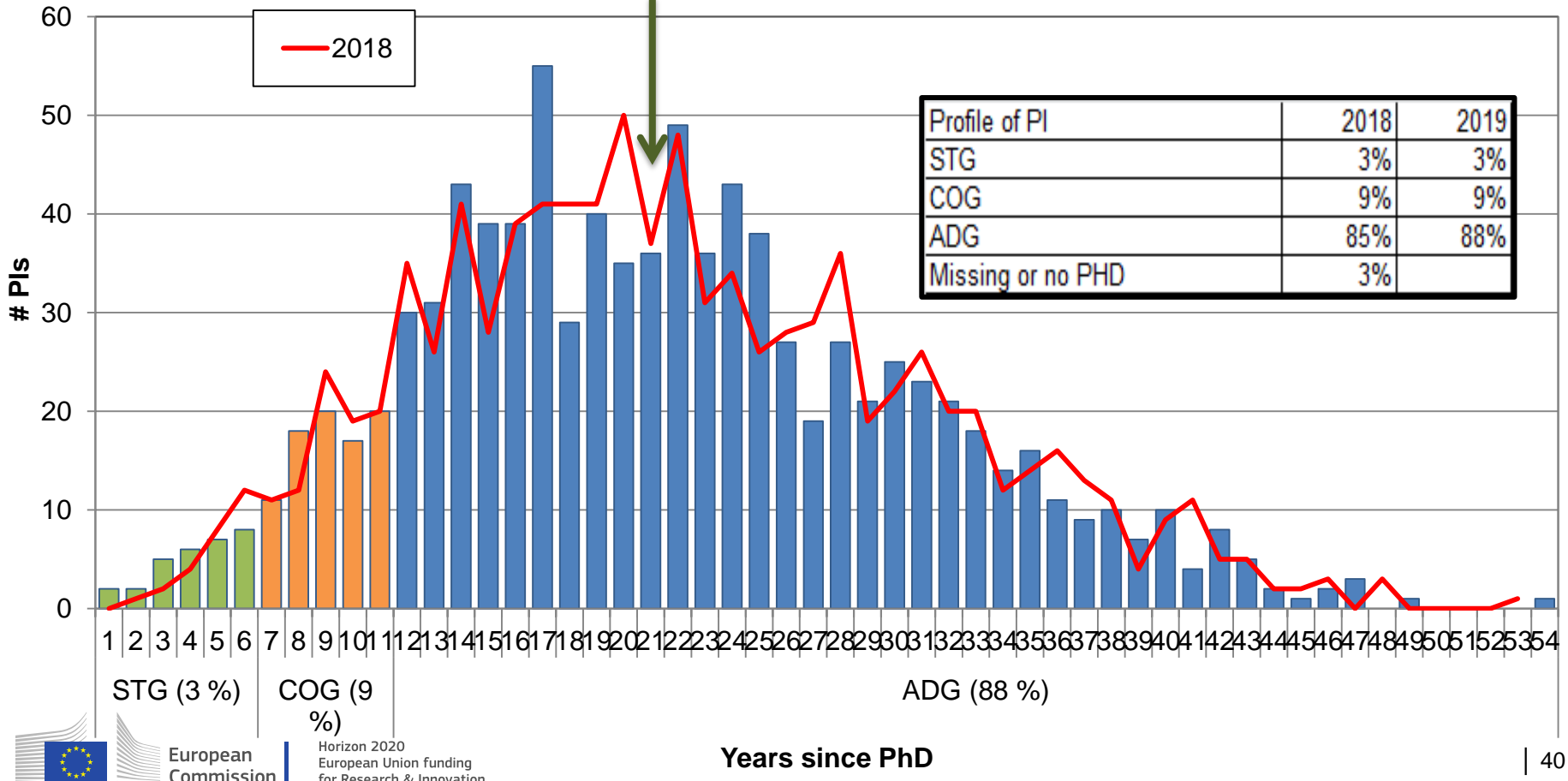
SYG 2019 PIs' Profile



SyG2020: intended relaxation of resubmission rules for early career scientists in an effort to encourage their applications to the SyG call

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SYG 2019 PIs: # years since PhD
88 % "ADG" profile, median = 21 years

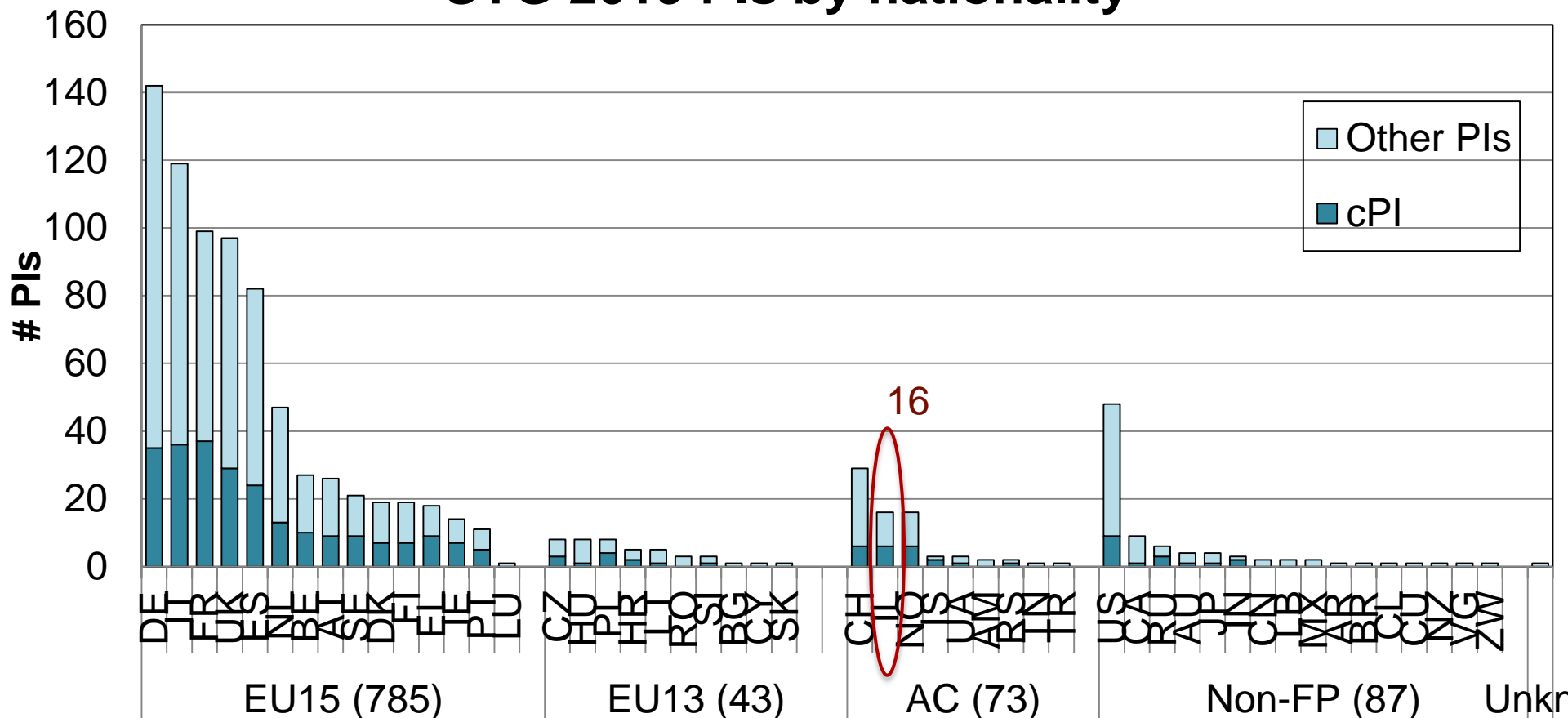


SYG 2019 PIs' Nationality



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SYG 2019 PIs by nationality

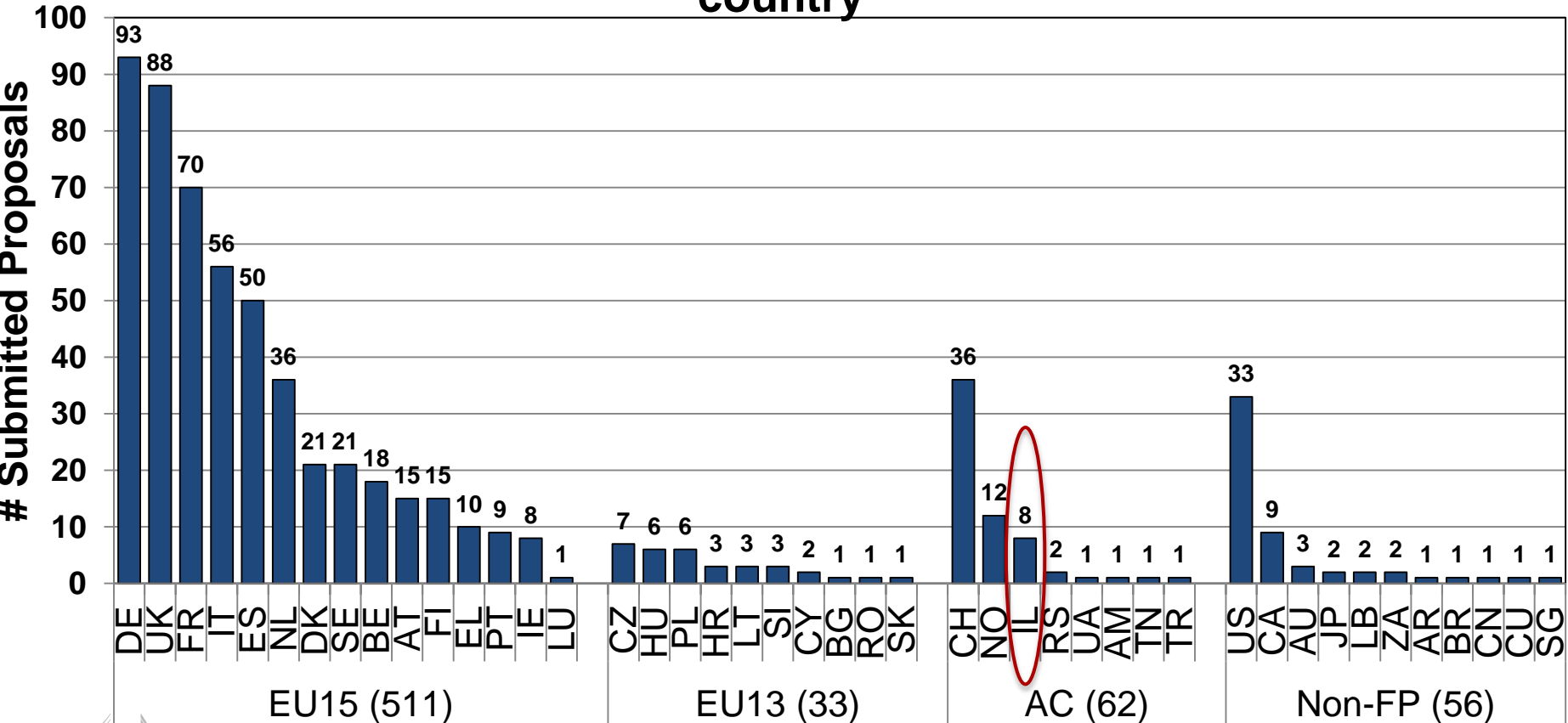


SYG 2019 Host Institutions



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SYG 2019 # submitted proposals in Host Institution country



Take home messages



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- Competitive call
 - only exceptional proposals are likely to be funded that will demonstrate that the **truly ambitious** research questions could lead to breakthroughs **only through the joint effort** of the complementary and synergistic group of PIs.
- ‘Synergy’ does not mean a loose consortium
 - The interaction would yield something more than just the sum of the individual parts.
 - To yield possibly either unforeseen, completely new science, to cross fertilize disciplines or to solve important research problems that until now could not be dreamt of solving.
- Early career applicants are encouraged to apply
 - Regardless of the score received in SyG2019, applicants will be to apply to the StG and CoG calls under the ERC Work Programme 2020.

Preparing your application

Information sources



- Check the **ERC website** for latest funding opportunities: <https://erc.europa.eu/>
 - **4 videos about ongoing Synergy grants are published**
- **Register early**, get familiar with the European Commission's Funding & Tenders Portal system, download the templates and start filling in the forms
<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home>
View the **step-by-step video** Introduction to application process, including tips & tricks for the interview: <https://vimeo.com/94179654>
- Use the **help tools and call documents** (**Information for Applicants**, Work Programme, Frequently Asked Questions) to prepare your proposal
 - 💡 Read the guidelines carefully!
 - 💡 Find out about the formatting rules and page limits to respect!
 - 💡 Check statistics on ERC website
- **Talk to your Institution's grant office and other ERC grantees**
- **Contact your National Contact Point if you have questions**

SyG 2018: Proposals selected for funding SH

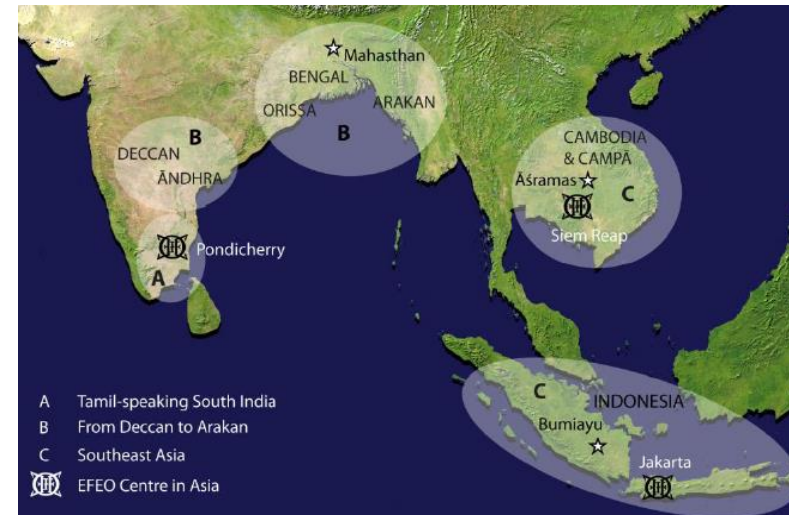


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DHARMA - The Domestication of 'Hindu' Asceticism and the Religious Making of South and Southeast Asia

Emmanuel FRANCIS (BE)	CENTRE NATIONAL DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE	FR
Arlo GRIFFITHS (NL)	ÉCOLE FRANÇAISE D'EXTRÊME-ORIENT	FR
Annette SCHMIEDCHEN (DE)	HUMBOLDT UNIVERSITÄT	DE

- An investigation of Hinduism in a broad range of regional contexts in South and South East Asia to uncover the complex **interplay of religion, state and society** in between the 6th and 13th centuries.



SyG 2018: Proposals selected for funding SH



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EXPLO - Exploring the dynamics and causes of prehistoric land use change in the cradle of European farming

Albert HAFNER (CH)	UNIVERSITY OF BERN	CH
Willy TINNER (CH)		
Amy BOGAARD (CA)	UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD	UK
Kostas KOSTAKIS (EL)	ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI	HL

EXPLO aims to understand the **introduction, evolution and environmental** context of early agriculture in the southern Balkans and northern Greece by **combining archaeological, bioarchaeological, palaeoecological and palaeoenvironmental approaches** within the context of Neolithic and Bronze Age wetland sites.



SyG 2018: Proposals selected for funding SH

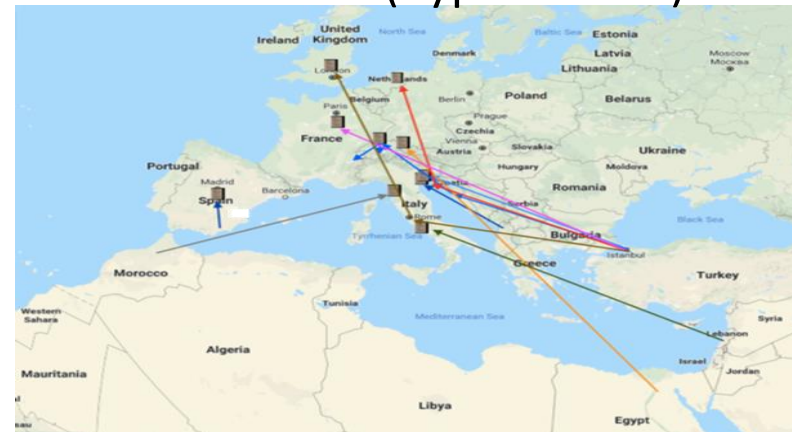


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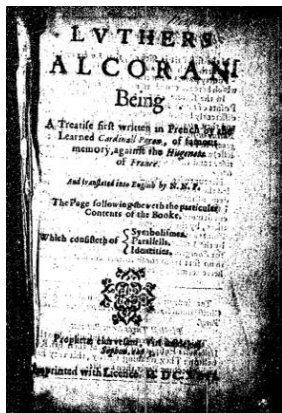
EuQu- The European Qur'an

Mercedes GARCIA-ARENAL (ES)	AGENCIA ESTATAL CONSEJO SUPERIOR DE INVESTIGACIONES CIENTIFICAS	ES
Roberto TOTTOLI (IT)	UNIVERSITÀ DI NAPOLI L'ORIENTALE	IT
Jan LOOP (CH)	UNIVERSITY OF KENT	UK
John TOLAN (FR)	UNIVERSITÉ DE NANTES	FR

Qur'an Manuscripts 1550-1600 (hypothetical)



Documenting the role that the **Qur'an** has played in the formation of **European religious and cultural Identity** as well as its intellectual history 1142 - c. 1850



Horizon 2020
European Union funding
for Research & Innovation

Budget: 9 842 534 €

SyG 2018: Proposals selected for funding SH

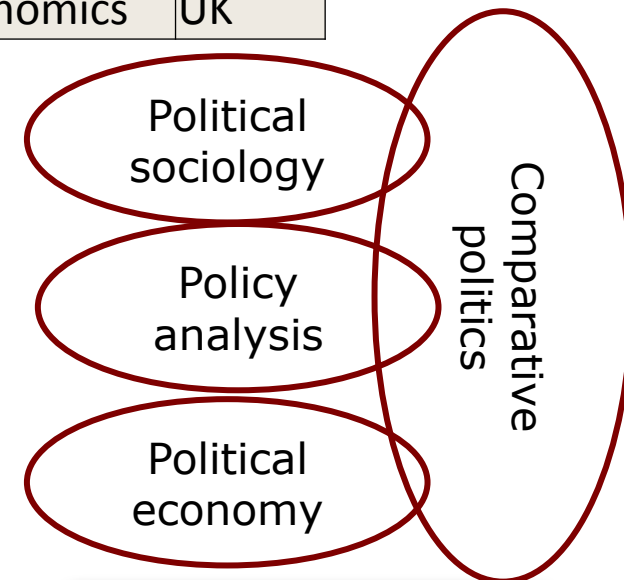


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- **SOLID'' – Policy Crisis and Crisis Politics. Sovereignty, Solidarity and Identity in the EU post 2008''**

Maurizio FERRERA (IT)	University of Milan	IT
Hanspeter KRIESI (CH)	European University Institute	IT
Waltraud SCHEKLE (DE)	London School of Economics	UK

- Explaining the presence of a deep crisis and apparent resilience of the EU policy
- Assessing the overall soundness of the EU's foundations in the wake of the political crisis



Budget: 9 604 138 €

SyG 2013: Proposals selected for funding



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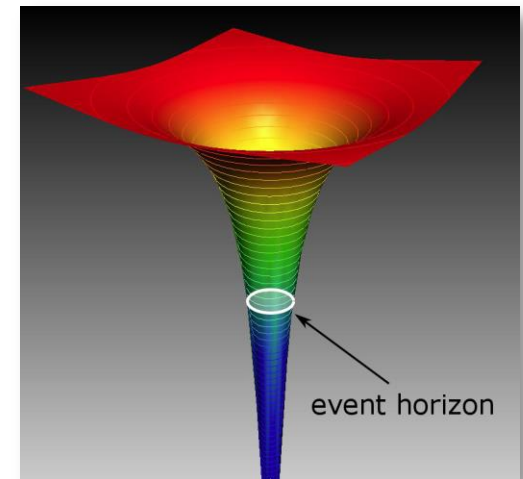
- Video of: BlackHoleCam – "Imaging the Event Horizon of Black Holes"

Heino Falcke	Stichting Katholieke Universiteit / Radboud University Nijmegen	NL
Micheal Kramer	Max-Planck-Institut für Radioastronomie	DE
Luciano Rezzolla	Max Planck Institute for Gravitational Physics/Albert Einstein Institute	DE

'Are **black holes** just a theorist's dream?'

'Prove the existence of **event horizons**, one of the **cornerstones of general relativity** '

13 975 744 €





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Thank you!

Don't hesitate to contact us:

ERC-SYG-APPLICANTS@ec.europa.eu