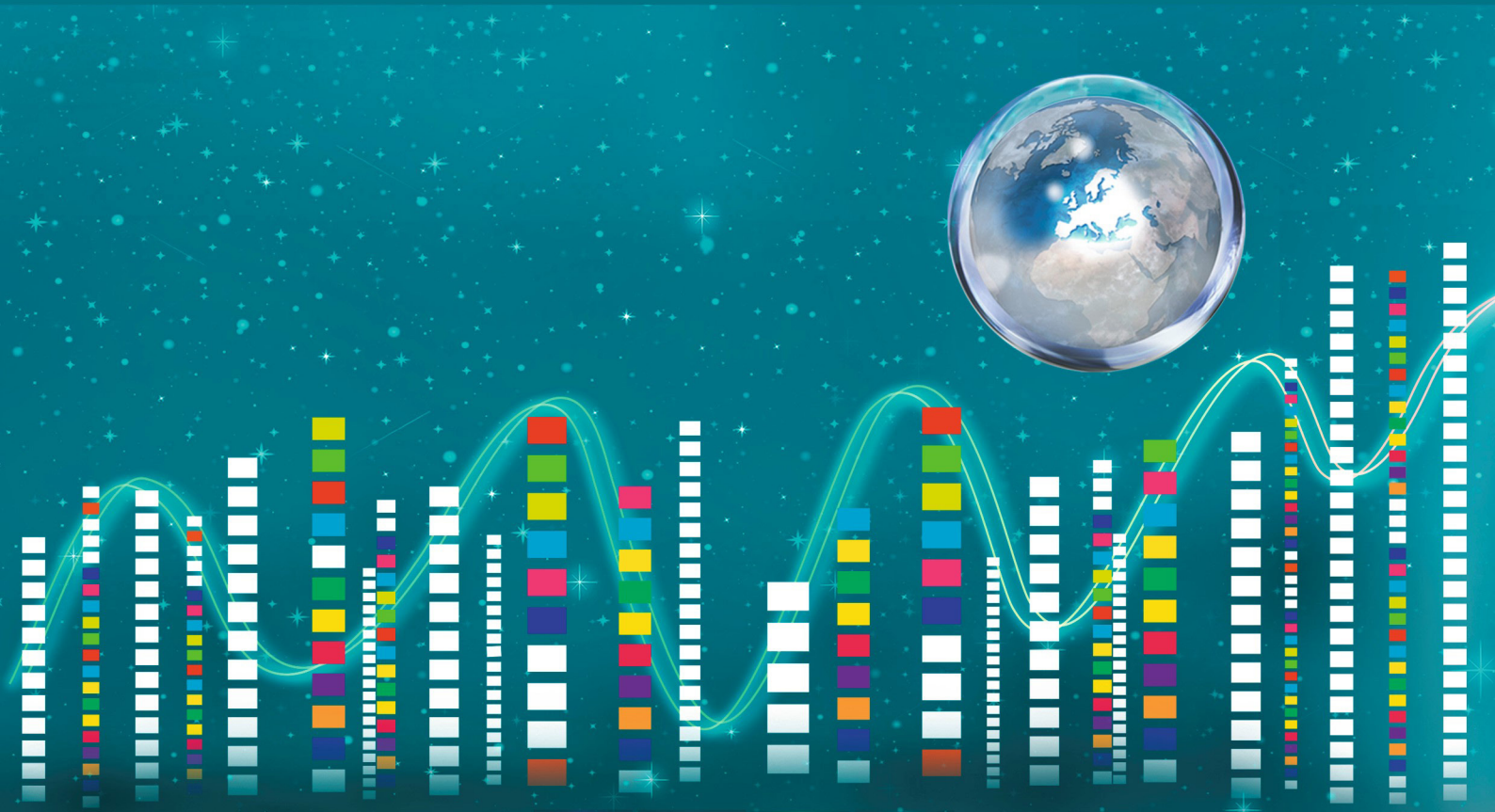




A short guide for Horizon 2020 National Contact Points in EU partner countries



*Research and
Innovation*

A short guide for Horizon 2020 National Contact Points in EU partner countries

European Commission

Directorate-General for Research and Innovation

Directorate C — International cooperation

Unit C.3 — European Neighbourhood Policy, Africa and the Gulf

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Introduction

The objective of this handbook is to provide information and practical advice on the daily work of a National Contact Point (NCP) within the European Horizon 2020 (H2020) Programme. NCPs play a crucial role as providers of information and assistance to potential applicants for new research and innovation projects and beneficiaries in on-going projects.

The handbook is not meant to be exhaustive in terms of duties and tasks that need to be performed by an NCP, but to provide an overview of the most common tasks and challenges in the work of an NCP; and facilitate communication as well as sharing of experiences and good practice with the network. It is then up to each NCP to pick and choose the elements that are relevant for their daily work. To facilitate the use of this booklet, the text is accompanied by a practical and user-friendly profile checklist.

The system of National Contact Points is established, operated and financed under the responsibility of the Member States and countries associated to the programme. The structure of national NCP systems exists in various forms, from highly centralised to decentralised structures and the organisations that run NCPs range from ministries, public research councils, universities and research institutions to private companies and consultancies. This means that the responsible persons' work in all kinds of environments and their working methods vary accordingly.

However, there are a number of common tasks that most NCPs undertake in their work. The recommended tasks are promotion and awareness raising, providing information about the H2020 Programme; advising and assisting applicants when preparing their proposals and providing them with training in order to understand the programme better; and not least, the NCPs are an important link between the European Commission and the national research community, communicating with researchers as well as signposting and giving feedback to the Commission regarding implementation of the programme in their countries.

What it takes to be a H2020 NCP

The network of National Contact Points (NCPs) is the main structure to provide guidance, practical information and assistance to any interested party on all aspects of participation in Horizon 2020.

In first place, NCPs are national structures established and financed by governments of the 28 EU member states and the states associated to the framework programme. However, third countries are highly encouraged to establish their own NCP and many have already done so. They are usually established within the international relations directorates of ministries, councils or departments responsible for the management of STI.

The typical NCP structure involves both cross-cutting and thematic NCPs.

Cross-cutting NCPs are:

- The National NCP coordinator who is responsible for the overall coordination of the NCPs, ensuring the quality of the provided services, as well as the official communication with the EC services. The NCP coordinator also provides policy advice to the Commission services on general issues of development and improvement of the NCP system.
- The Legal and Financial Aspects NCP who is responsible for providing guidance, practical information and assistance on all issues related to the legal framework and the financial rules of H2020 pertaining all sectors and themes of the programme.

Thematic NCPs cover the different themes and sectors of the programme and are responsible for providing services related to the specific part of H2020 for which they are experts. In case an inquiry is addressed to them that should be dealt by another thematic or the Legal and Financial NCP, they should refer to the interested stakeholder accordingly.

Although there is a great variety in the set-up of NCP systems from country to country, the establishment of these is founded on certain common guidelines and principles as described in the [NCP Minimum Standards and Guiding Principles](#) agreed by all Member States and Associated Countries.

In short, there is no specific NCP system that needs to be established in all countries: Whatever works best for you - taking into consideration country specificities, common guidelines or principles - should be followed.



General fields of action

NCPs aim at establishing permanent support capacities to assist researchers, research groups, R&D managers and SMEs interested in all matters relating to cooperation with the EU, in particular with the identification of opportunities and preparation of proposals for access to community funding under the H2020 Programme.

As NCPs are national structures, the type and level of services offered may differ from country to country, however, the general fields of action are as follows:

- Analysis of the main results of the cooperation between the country and the European Union.
- Assessment of the current situation and prospects for STI cooperation between the country and the EU.
- Proposition of guidelines for the development of strategies in order to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of the cooperation, considering the sustainability of the Offices.
- Coordination of joint actions at the bi-regional level to develop bi-regional cooperation in STI.
- Collaboration in updating roadmaps for the joint definition of cooperation priorities.
- Increased visibility of R&D country entities in Europe and vice versa, with the aim of creating strategic partnerships and consortia in fields of scientific and technological relevance.
- Coordination of activities with other NCPs and NCP networks worldwide, to exchange knowledge and good practices.

Against this background, NCPs should provide the following core services to their national R&I communities:

Informing and awareness raising

- Circulate general and specific documentation on Horizon 2020, including conditions for participation, possibilities and conditions for submission of proposals, project budgeting and reporting.
- Organise information and promotional activities – in liaison with the Commission services when appropriate, e.g. infodays, seminars, conferences, newsletters, web sites, fairs, etc.
- Raise awareness of:
 - » Innovation activities in H2020, including enhanced participation of industry and SMEs.
 - » Interdisciplinary nature of H2020, especially with regard to the societal challenges.
 - » Increased participation of women in H2020; increased strengthening of the link between science and civil society.
 - » Activities of the Joint Research Centre and the in-house science service of the Commission to relevant national stakeholders from the scientific community, industry and public authorities.
- Provide information as necessary on other European RTD-programmes such as COSME, Eureka, COST, and establish working links with the respective specialist support services.



Mr. Piotr Świerczyński – NCP Space; NCP Secure Societies, Poland:

My personal advice towards a new NCP: To learn as much as possible from an experienced NCP, and to use good practices developed in this field by European NCPs, also through NCP Network projects.”



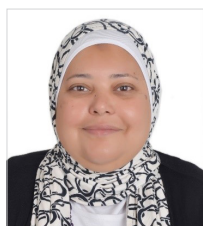


Assisting, advising, and training

- Assist researchers and organisations, in particular new actors and SMEs, with a view to increasing their participation in H2020.
- Assist in partner search activities notably by using internet based tools, cooperation networks, European Enterprise Network partnership services for SMEs etc.
- Advise on administrative procedures, rules and issues (e.g. role and responsibilities of participants in a consortium, costs, rights and obligations of participants, ethical rules). Where necessary, this will be in liaison with the specialist Legal and Financial NCPs.
- Advise participants, in particular smaller organisations and SMEs, on the setting up of appropriate management and legal structures in projects with large budgets and/or numerous participants.
- Explain the scope and the modalities of funding schemes to be used in H2020.
- Organise courses and training sessions on H2020 for intermediaries and information multipliers to ensure high quality of advice.
- Organise courses and training seminars for specific target groups (SMEs, universities, business organisations, women in science etc.) or on specific topics (legal aspects, modalities for participation, research and innovation areas covered by several specific challenges and programmes, financial rules etc.).

Signposting and cooperation

- Signpost the way for potential participants who require assistance on general EU matters, on information about internal markets, technology transfer, intellectual property rights (IPR) or on regional development to the corresponding networks (e.g. EEN, EIB, Structural Funds, YourEurope, Solvit).
- Signpost the way to national funding services and programmes and to ERA Net Projects.



Ms. Zeinab El-Sadr, National NCP Coordinator, Egypt:

“NCPs should build their own network of potential applicants and actors nationally as well as in other countries to be able to matchmake national experts with their counter parts from Europe or other countries. At the same time, NCPs should work on knowing the research and innovation landscape of their countries to be able to identify (jointly with the applicants) the strengths and opportunities for partnership.”



Further competencies of NCPs



Beyond the aforementioned services which are explicitly mentioned in the "[Minimum Standards and Guiding Principles](#)", NCPs

- Know national capacities and collect national interests
- Identify those issues of H2020 that are most open to third countries
- Analyse the calls and disseminate opportunities in the area
- Encourage and guide the participation of the R&D community
- Assist in the search of potential national and European partners
- Provide assistance in proposal writing
- Assist in contract negotiation, management of projects, project reporting and drafting of consortium agreements
- Participate in international NCP networks
- Participate in information days and training activities
- Promote national capacities at strategic events in Europe
- Advise on the choice of thematic fields and types of action of H2020
- Produce publications (folders, leaflets, success stories)
- Organize information sessions and training for ministry staff and other stakeholders
- Pro-actively network and communicate with the EC, other NCPs and relevant international stakeholders
- Provide workstations for domestic researchers in the Brussels NCP liaison office
- Encourage participation of national experts in evaluation processes



Ms. Tugela Matubatuba, NCP Legal and Financial Issues, South Africa:

“Activities of the NCPs are to adhere to the guidelines and to further their effectiveness by undertaking promotional activities, handling enquiries and contributing to the resolution of issues that arise from the stakeholders.”



NCP Structure

National NCP Coordinator	Legal and Financial aspects
SMEs	Access to Finance
European Research Council	Future and Emerging Technologies
Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions on skills, training and career development	Research Infrastructures
Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)	Nanotechnologies, advanced materials and advanced manufacturing and processing
Space	Health, demographic change and wellbeing
Food security, sustainable agriculture, marine and maritime research and the bio-economy & Biotechnology	Secure, clean and efficient energy
Smart, green and integrated transport	Climate action, resource efficiency and raw materials
Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies	Security
Euratom	Joint Research Centre
Spreading excellence and widening participation 22. Science with and for Society	Science with and for Society

Although the NCP structure as presented above should be more or less similar for all countries, NCP systems may vary in response to the local R&I ecosystem from highly centralised to completely decentralised. Portrayed below are different NCP systems in 3 EU Member States reflecting this variation.

The NCP system in Italy

The Italian NCP system can be considered as highly centralised, since all Italian National Contact Points for Horizon 2020 are hosted in one non-profit research organisation (Agency for the Promotion of European Research). NCPs are appointed by the Italian Ministry for Higher Education and Research (MIUR), which has the overall coordination of the NCP system. The Ministry provides APRE with general guidelines and policy of operation. At the same time, APRE reports on a regular basis to the Ministry.

The NCP system in Poland

The Polish NCP system is a centralized one. All NCPs for Horizon 2020 are based in one organization (Institute of Fundamental Technological Research of Polish Academy of Sciences). At the same time, the Polish NCP system has decentralising elements, since Regional Contact Points covering all the regions of Poland have been established to support applicants in their participation in H2020 at the regional level.

The NCP system in France

The French NCP system is organised in a decentralised way. The main coordination comes from the Ministry for Higher Education and Research (MESR). However, for each H2020 theme a consortium of institutions is responsible to carry out the NCP activities, with one main responsible person to coordinate the activities and several alternative contact points at the regional level or for specific sub-topics or activities. The profile of institutions in each consortium may vary from universities to SMEs.



Mr. Bogdan Cernat, NCP Transport, Romania:

“Every year I participate at the Info Day in Brussels where I collect questions from the local community and infer with fellow NCPs and EC officials at the event. Other yearly participations are ad-hoc based on the profile of the event and the perceived interest for the field/ topic.”



Benefits of NCPs

The Commission considers NCPs to be important partners in the implementation of Horizon 2020 and provides them with:

- General and specialist information on H2020 related to the mandate of NCPs
- Timely information on H2020 Work Programmes and roadmaps, upcoming calls, changes in thematic priorities or administrative procedures, statistics of calls and evaluation results, etc.
- Aggregated evaluation data and selected data on proposals
- Invitations to participate in information & awareness activities
- Invitations to thematic conferences and seminars organized by the Directorates
- Training programmes for NCPs

The Commission also supports transnational networks of NCPs as a means of stimulating European cooperation in research and innovation, and as a contribution to the realisation of the Innovation Union and the European Research Area.

NCP nomination process

Each country is responsible for selecting the persons and/or host organizations for their own NCP system, as well as for configuring it in accordance with national requirements. The National Contact Point is appointed by the main competent body for science, research and technological development and communicated to the Directorate-General for Research & Innovation of the European Commission by e-mail, sending the names and contact details (address, telephone, email etc.). Any subsequent changes to the nominated persons should be communicated in the same way, while minor changes of contact details (address, phone number etc.) can be sent directly to the Commission services in charge of the online NCP database.

E-mail for nominations: RTD-NCP-NOMINATIONS@ec.europa.eu



Good practice examples

Since there is a large degree of flexibility in the operation of NCPs from country to country, as well as a wide variety in the services that are being provided, this section makes an attempt to showcase some good practice examples:

“Under one roof” principle: NCPs based in the same premises. This enhances cooperation between NCPs through everyday interaction in the workplace.

Interaction with evaluators: NCPs establish good contacts with H2020 proposal evaluators. In a second step also to connect unsuccessful applicants with evaluators for improvement of proposals.

Pre-screening of proposals/intensive consulting: Tailor made coaching to improve proposals including one-to-one meetings.

Mentoring visits: Targeted visits to stakeholders with potentially good ideas for mentoring purposes.

Training workshops for applicants: Organisation of targeted workshops for prospective H2020 applicants on specific themes, with presentation of success stories.

Training seminars for multipliers: Organisation of seminars for EU projects advisors from RTOs, Universities; SME innovation departments, clusters’ representatives, etc.

Master classes: Organisation of training seminars involving the participation of foreign experts with significant experience in the Framework Programme.

Visits to R&I stakeholders: Visits to key R&I organisations for training of personnel and awareness raising.

Participation in H2020 EC Infodays

Handouts of H2020 calls and topics: Creation of thematic files with calls and topics to be shared with prospective applicants.

Development of Internal guidelines: For the operation of the NCP network to ensure uniformity of provided services and continuity.

Profiling of RTOs and Universities: In order to have a database of prospective applicants and facilitate partner search services.

Coordination meetings: At regular intervals with the participation of all NCPs.

NCP Thematic Networks: What are they?

NCP thematic networks are projects funded through H2020 comprised mainly of EU MS and AC NCP organisations of a common H2020 thematic priority area. Their aim:

- Provide professional services to prospective applicants of H2020
- Offer partner search/liason services to H2020 applicants through
 - » Dedicated partner search engines
 - » Consortium building
 - » Clarification of call conditions
 - » Tips for proposal writing
- Embed the international cooperation dimension in the consortia
- Lower the entry barriers for participation in H2020 for EU and International Partners, especially for first comers
- Exchange of good practices and capacity building among their members including training and mentoring activities

Third country NCPs are encouraged to create contacts and participate in the activities of these Networks in order to:

- Promote profiles of R&I stakeholders within the European R&I community
- Locate suitable partners and secure access to international consortia for their clients
- Increase networking opportunities
- Take part in their training, mentoring, and other capacity building activities.

The following NCP thematic networks are currently in operation:

NCP network	Website	H2020 Theme	Activities targeting 3 rd countries
Net4Mob ility	https://www.net4mobility.eu/	Researchers Mobility – MSCA/ERC	Open to participation from 3 rd countries NCPs without funding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twinning schemes • Webinars • Training seminars • Brokerage events
RICH	http://www.rich2020.eu/	Research Infrastructures	
Idealist	http://www.ideal-ist.eu/about	Information and Communication Technologies	Open to participation from 3 rd countries NCPs without funding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twinning schemes • Webinars • Training seminars • Brokerage events
COSMOS 2020	http://ncp-space.net/	Space	Visits scheme targeting third countries with specific focus on Space Fare nations
NMP_TeAM	http://www.nmpteam.eu/	Nanotechnologies, Advanced Materials and Advanced Manufacturing and Processing	Open to participation from 3 rd countries NCPs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twinning schemes • Webinars • Training seminars • Brokerage events
Access4SMEs	http://www.access4smes.eu/	SMEs	N/A
HNN 2.0	http://www.healthncp.net/health-ncp-net-hnn-20	Health	
Bio horizon	http://www.ncp-biohorizon.net/	Food, Agriculture, Forestry, Marine, Maritime, inland water research, bioeconomy, biotechnology	E-mentoring scheme is open to 3 rd countries NCPs
C-Energy2020	http://www.c-energy2020.eu/	Energy	Open to participation from 3 rd countries NCPs without funding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twinning schemes • Webinars • Training seminars • Brokerage events

ETNA 2020	https://www.transport-ncps.net/	Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short trainings or webinars on International cooperation • Brokerage type events to find international partners • Partner search tool on the project website with dedicated area or international partnership
NCP CaRE	http://www.ncps-care.eu/	Climate action, Environment, Resource Efficiency and Raw Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brokerage events encouraging participation from 3rd countries • Training activities encouraging participation from 3rd countries NCPs
Net4Society	http://www.net4society.eu/	Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies	
SEREN 3	http://www.seren-project.eu/	Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satellite workshops, information sessions and presentations about the Secure societies work programme • Sharing information on international R&I cooperation aspects via e-mails and news on the project web site
NCP_WIDE.NET	https://www.ncpwidenet.eu/	Spreading excellence and widening participation	N/A
SIS.NET2	http://www.sisnetwork.eu/	Science with and for society	
NCP Academy	http://www.ncpacademy.eu/	Legal, Financial, and other cross-cutting issues	Participation in training activities: on a case-by-case basis and subject to consent by organizer

NCP Checklist - The ideal profile

1. You have a very good knowledge about all the aspects of Horizon 2020, beyond your specialist area (e.g. conditions for participation, possibilities and conditions for submission of proposals, project budgeting and reporting)
2. You have a good knowledge of the European Union Research and Innovation Policy
3. You are conversant with the objectives, principles and content of your Horizon 2020 programme part
4. You know under which rules your country can participate to Horizon 2020?
5. You have an extensive knowledge of the NCP system in your country, as well as of the international NCP structure
6. You have a deep knowledge of the R&I stakeholders' community in your country
7. You are aware of opportunities provided by Horizon 2020 related programmes, with particular reference to your country
8. You are an effective and flexible communicator, able to adapt your communication methods according to the diversity of your constituency (academia, industry, SMEs, public authorities, etc.)
9. You have solid networking skills
10. You are a passionate and innovative trainer
11. You are a creative event planner and manager
12. You are aware of all possible conflicts of interest between your NCP activity and the rest of your professional activities (Please also see the following link to "[Minimum Standards and Guiding Principles for Setting up NCP Systems](#)").

Useful links

- [DG Research and Innovation page on international cooperation](#) – background information on international cooperation in Horizon 2020, the policy framework, specific pages on important partner countries and regions, publications, news and events
- [European Commission page on Horizon 2020](#) - information on Horizon 2020, the programme areas and funding opportunities
- [NCP database](#) – constantly updated online database of all NCPs worldwide
- [Research Participant Portal](#) – main gate to the funding opportunities of Horizon 2020 and tool for submission and management of the proposals
- [Incontact 2020](#) - EU project (2014-2015) promoting the international dimension of Horizon 2020 and supporting the work of national experts on international cooperation through yearly conferences, awareness activities around the world, trainings and tools for capacity building and directly supporting the work of the national experts
- [Topics for international cooperation on the Research Participant Portal](#) - overview on topics which have been flagged as being particularly suitable for international cooperation
- [Online Manual](#) - instructions on the preparation and submission of proposals, registration of organisations as well as preparation and management of the grants
- [Specific information on international cooperation in the Online Manual](#) – with details on participation opportunities, eligibility for funding, reference documents and related links
- [Horizon 2020 reference documents](#) – list of legal documents, guidelines and templates
- [Research Enquiry Service](#) - General questions are answered quickly by Europe Direct while more specialised questions are forwarded to the relevant people in the European Commission
- [IPR Helpdesk](#) - free-of-charge IPR service to inform and advise on Intellectual and Industrial Property Rights
- [Euraxess](#) – portal with information and support services for researchers wishing to pursue a career in Europe

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Open data from the EU

The EU Open Data Portal (<http://data.europa.eu/euodp/en>) provides access to datasets from the EU. Data can be downloaded and reused for free, for both commercial and non-commercial purposes.

The network of National Contact Points (NCPs) is the main structure to provide guidance, practical information and assistance on all aspects of participation in Horizon 2020, the EU's Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. NCPs are also established in many non-EU and non-associated countries, giving personalised support on the spot to potential applicants' in their own languages.

The NCP systems can vary from one country to another from highly centralised to decentralised networks, and a number of very different actors, from ministries to universities, research centres and special agencies to private consulting companies. This guide aims at providing an overview of the most common tasks of NCPs and it includes some best practices that are in place in EU partner countries.

Studies and reports

