

The European Research Council

ERC Synergy grants 2025

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ERC.B.2 - Call and Project Follow-up Coordination Unit

7 June 2024, Norwegian webinar



European Research Council

Established by the European Commission

Overview

- About the ERC and its funding schemes
- Norway's participation in the Synergy call
- Changes in the Work Programme 2025
- ERC Synergy grant features & proposal structure
- Evaluation criteria, process and timeline
- Hints and tips



ERC Grant Schemes

Starting Grants

2-7 years after PhD
up to € 1.5 + 1 Mio
for 5 years



50%



50%

Consolidator Grants

7-12 years after PhD
up to € 2 + 1 Mio
for 5 years



40%



50%

Advanced Grants

track-record of significant
research achievements
up to € 2.5 + 1 Mio
for 5 years



30%



50%

Synergy Grants

2 – 4 Principal Investigators
any career stage
up to € 10.0 + 4 Mio for 6 years

1 PI can be based outside EU/Associated Country



30%



50%, except
non-EU/AC PI

Proof-of-Concept

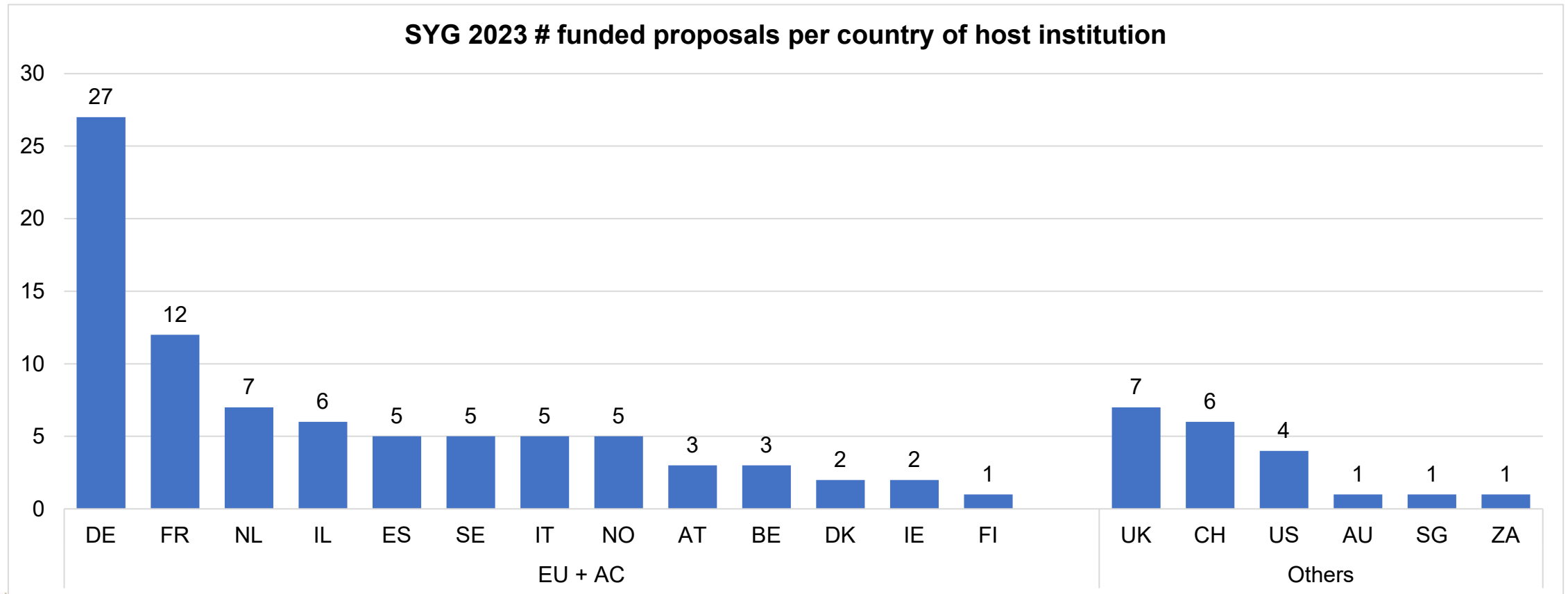
bridging gap between research - earliest stage of marketable or social innovation
lump sum €150,000 for ERC grant holders



ERC SyG2023

Proposals per country

- 20/37 funded proposals have Host institutions outside EU or Associated Countries
- No widening countries funded

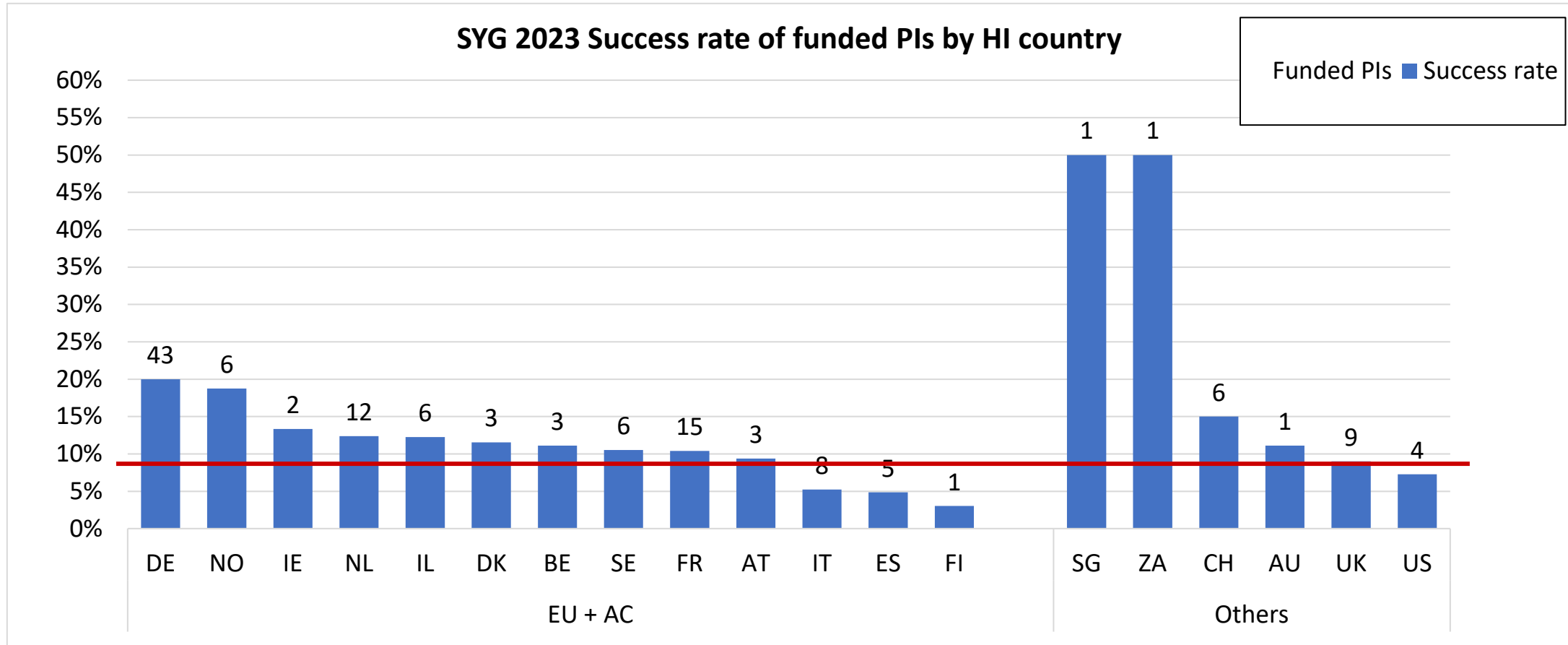


If there are several HIs/PIs from the same country in a proposal, they are counted only once.

ERC SyG2023

Success rate of PIs per host country

135 Principal Investigators funded in the 37 proposals



29 other countries had no successful Principal Investigators

Overall PI success rate 9.3% (when proposals are counted, the success rate is 9.6%)

2025 Draft Call Calendar – Pending on the adoption of the Work Programme 2025 in July 2024

	Starting Grant	Consolidator Grant	Advanced Grant	Synergy Grant
Call identifier	ERC-2025-StG	ERC-2025-CoG	ERC-2025-AdG	ERC-2025-SyG
Call opens	10 July 2024	26 September 2024	22 May 2025	11 July 2024
Call deadline	15 October 2024	14 January 2025	28 August 2025	6 November 2024
Budget million EUR <i>(estimated number of grants)</i>	751 (483)	719 (354)	683 (276)	500 (48)

Novelties applicable since the SyG2024 call (1)

CVs and Track records

- **CV & Track Record templates** are combined + simplified

⇒ broad assessment of the Principal Investigator

4 pages in total / PI

- List of up to ten research outputs that demonstrate how the applicants have advanced knowledge in their field, with an emphasis on more recent achievements, and a list of selected examples of significant peer recognition (for example, prizes).
- Applicants will be able to **add short narrative descriptions** to explain information provided: the significance of the selected outputs, the applicant's role in producing each of them, and how the applicant has demonstrated their capacity to successfully carry out the proposed project
- Applicants are invited to explain **career breaks or unconventional career paths &**
- Applicants can describe **exceptional contributions** to research community



Novelties applicable since the SyG2024 call (1)

Evaluation procedure

- Proposals **continue to be evaluated by peer review panels** composed of leading scientists and scholars using sole criterion of scientific excellence
- New scoring introduced at step 1: A not invited- *‘A not invited is of excellent quality but not ranked sufficiently high to pass to step 2 of the evaluation’*
 - A candidate whose proposal is scored A at step 1 of the evaluation, but not taken to interview, will be free to submit a proposal in the following year’s calls.
 - Introducing this score does not affect the resubmission rules in SyG, which are different from the individual PI resubmission restrictions – ‘C’ scored applicants only are not allowed to apply the following two years to the SyG call.
- Cap on the number of proposals passing to step 2 in Starting, Consolidator and Advanced Grants calls: **at most 44 proposals can be passed to step 2** of the evaluation. No cap for SyG.



Novelties applicable since the SyG2024 call (3)

Revised evaluation questions;

Explicitly evaluating primarily the research project

- Explicitly **weighing the project proposal more** than past achievements of the applicants during evaluation
- **Evaluation questions have been revised** (no question any longer on high risk/ high gain aspect, neither on development of novel methodology:

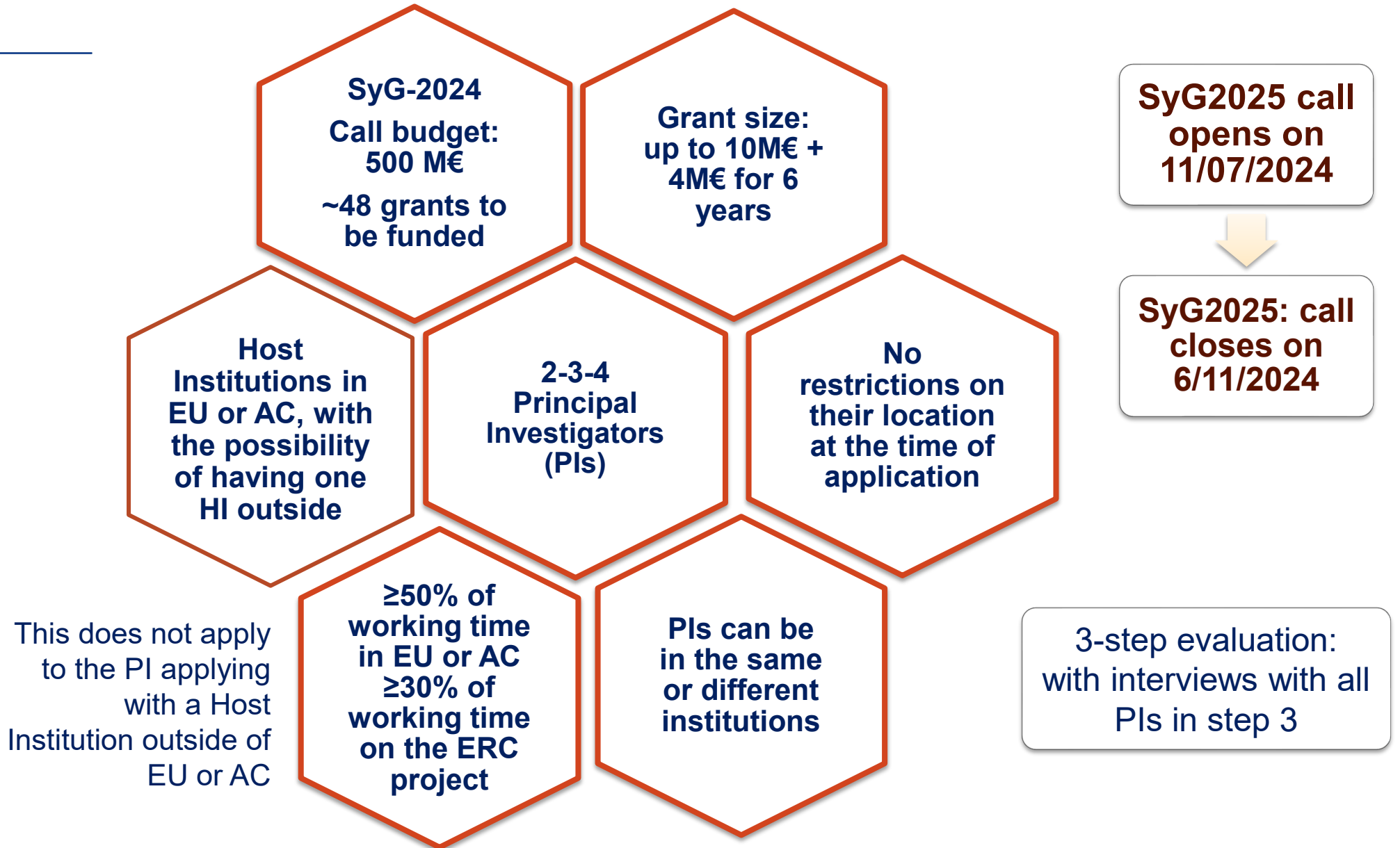
focus rather on the extent of the ground-breaking nature and ambition of the proposed research)

➤ [Evaluation of ERC grant proposals: what to expect in 2024 | ERC \(europa.eu\)](#) (April 2023)

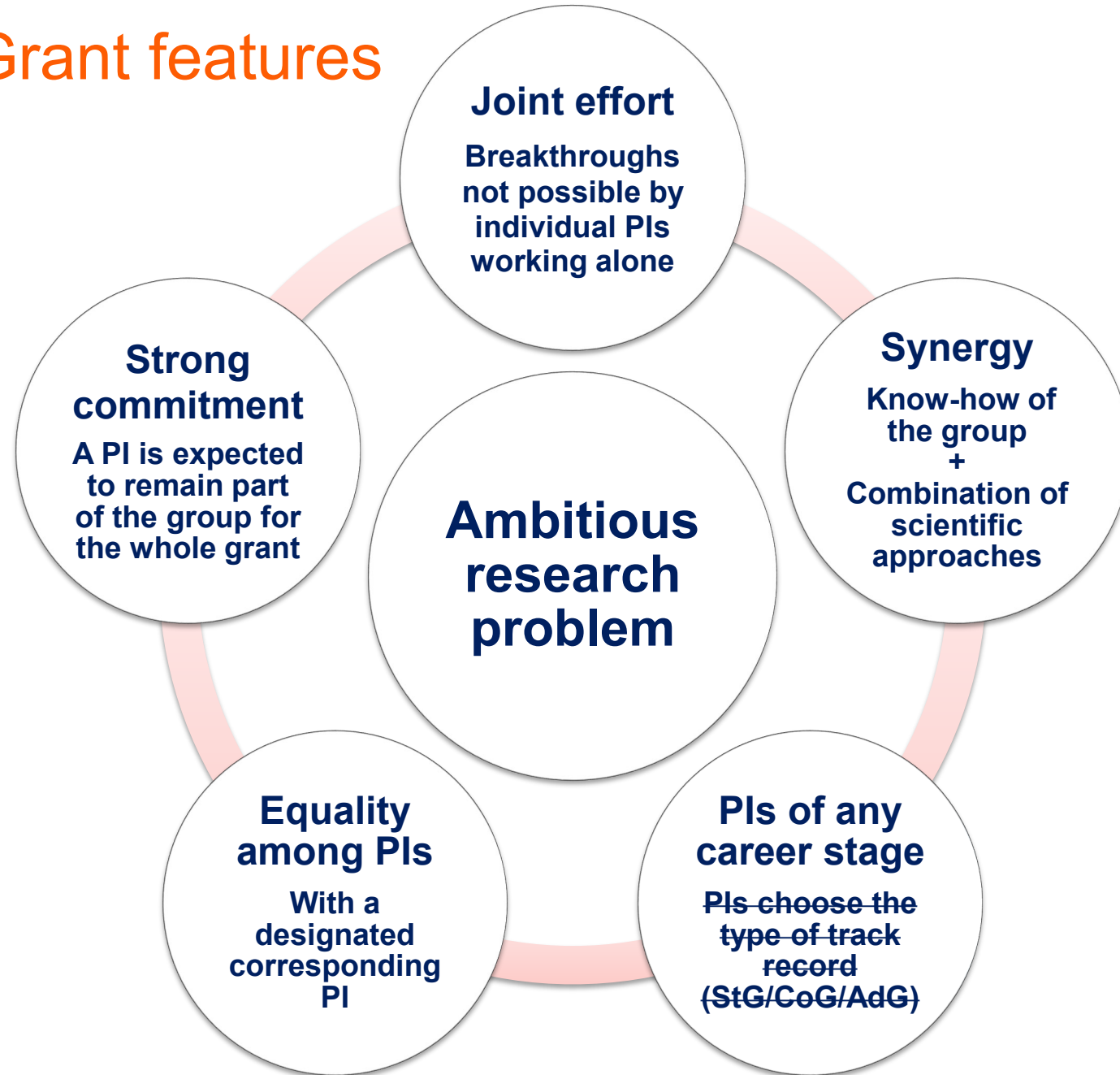
➤ [Scientific Council statement on research assessment](#) (Dec. 2022)

Design of the Synergy call 2025

Pending on the adoption the Work Programme 2025 on 10 July 2024



ERC Synergy Grant features



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



ERC Synergy - Proposal Structure

In step 1 only part B1 is reviewed.

Administrative data and eligibility are checked by ERC staff.

Check out the final version of the submission forms after the call opening mid-July 2024

Administrative forms (Part A)

- 1 – General information
 - 2 – Administrative data of organisations
 - 3 – Budget
 - 4 – Ethics
 - 5 – Call specific questions
- 4-6 ERC keywords are selected, panels are not defined at submission*

Annexes

Commitment of ALL the Host Institutions, ethics docs, etc.

Part B1 (submitted as pdf)

Evaluated in Step 1 & Step 2 & Step 3

a – Extended synopsis 5 pages

b – Curriculum vitae &
c - Track-record



4 pages per PI
Templates available on the F&T portal

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:

- justification of resources in B2
- **NEW: separate Budget table annex with the budget breakdown per PI**



Submission restrictions for the SyG2025 call

When checking for a rule look for the **call year** (in the title of the call), not calendar year.

Evaluation		Can a PI apply to		
Result of SyG 2023 or 2024	Step	StG/CoG call in 2025?	AdG call in 2025?	SyG call in 2025?
C	1	yes	yes	no
B	1	yes	yes	yes
B	2	yes	yes	yes
A or B	3	yes	yes	yes

Applicants to previous StG/CoG/AdG ERC calls can apply to the SyG2025 call regardless of the score received previously.

To be eligible for SyG2024: a **running ERC grant has to end before 6 November 2026**

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.



Evaluation

Excellence is the sole evaluation criterion; focus on the project

Be familiar with the evaluation questions in the Work Programme or in the Information for applicants to the Synergy grants call.

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 and 3 (in part B2)
- 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 (information in part B2)

ERC SyG 2024 Evaluation Process

Timeframe for SyG2025 will be published on ERC's website in autumn 2024

interdisciplinary panels: 2 Life sciences, 2 Physical sciences and Engineering, 1 Social science and humanities oriented; defined only when we know what type of proposals remain in evaluation after step 1

Step 1: 1 panel

REMOTE REVIEWS:

- Only part B1
 - Mainly generalists:
 - panel members
 - panel evaluators*

26 February - 1 March 2024

Meeting: panel chairs & vice chairs → scoring:

- A – invited (max 7 x budget) ~ 230 proposals
- A - uninvited
- B - rejected
- C** - rejected

Step 2: 5 panels

REMOTE REVIEWS:

- Parts B1 & B2
 - Mainly generalists: panel members
 - Specialists: remote referees

17 – 21 June 2024

Meeting: all panel members → scoring:

- A (max 4 x budget) ~ 120 proposals
- B - rejected

Step 3: 5 panels

NO REMOTE REVIEWS

- Parts B1 & B2
 - Panel members: interview preparation: formulate questions based on step 2 reviews

9 - 13 September 2024

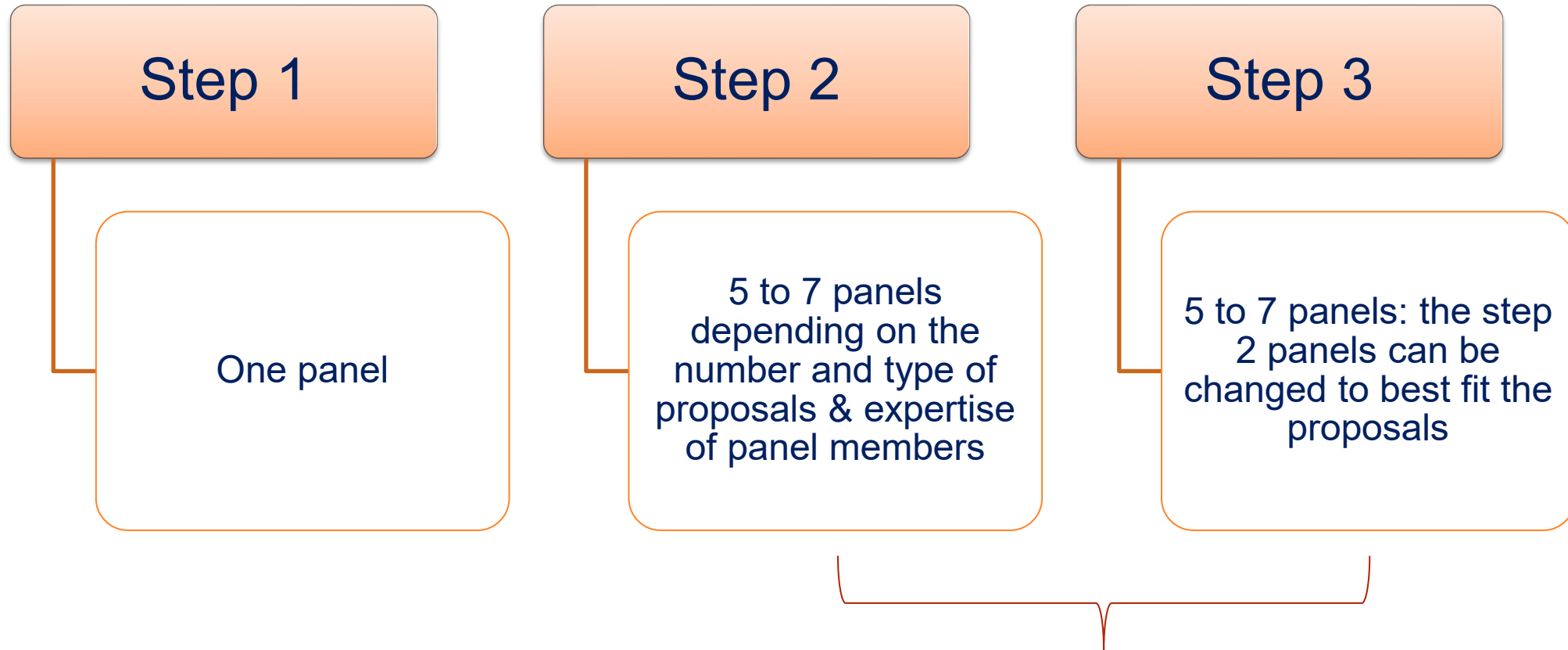
Meeting: all panel members; interviews with all PIs → scoring & ranking:

- Top A - main list ~ 40 funded
- A below funding limit - reserve + rejected
- B - rejected

*panel evaluators (PEVs) are panel members of other ERC calls assisting in the remote review phase by providing individual reviews

** might be restricted from applying to the next ERC SyG call.

Changes in ERC the SyG 2025 Evaluation Process



The number and the composition of the interdisciplinary Step 2 panels are defined only when we know what type of proposals remain in evaluation after each step

Who is evaluating Synergy proposals?

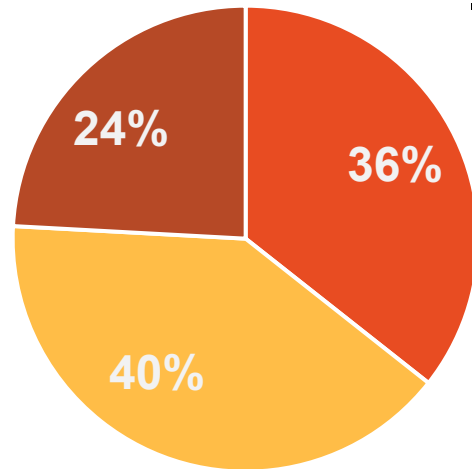
SyG 2023 – Overview reviewers - Step 1: Remote Evaluation – all experts in one panel

203 Reviewers; 36 Nationalities; 143 Men and 60 Women (30%)

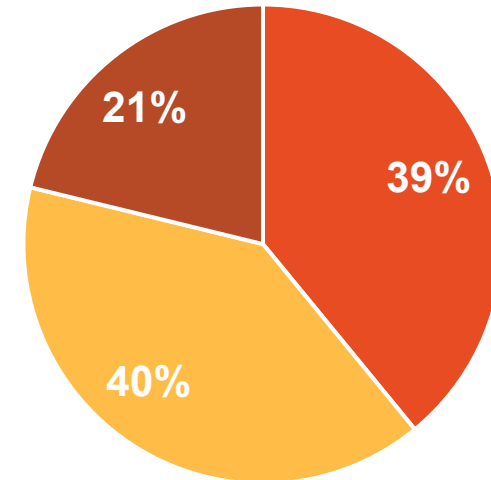
87 Panel Members Including 5 Chairs
and Vice Chairs

152 Panel Evaluators (PMs of other
ERC calls)

Scientific background



■ LS ■ PE ■ SH



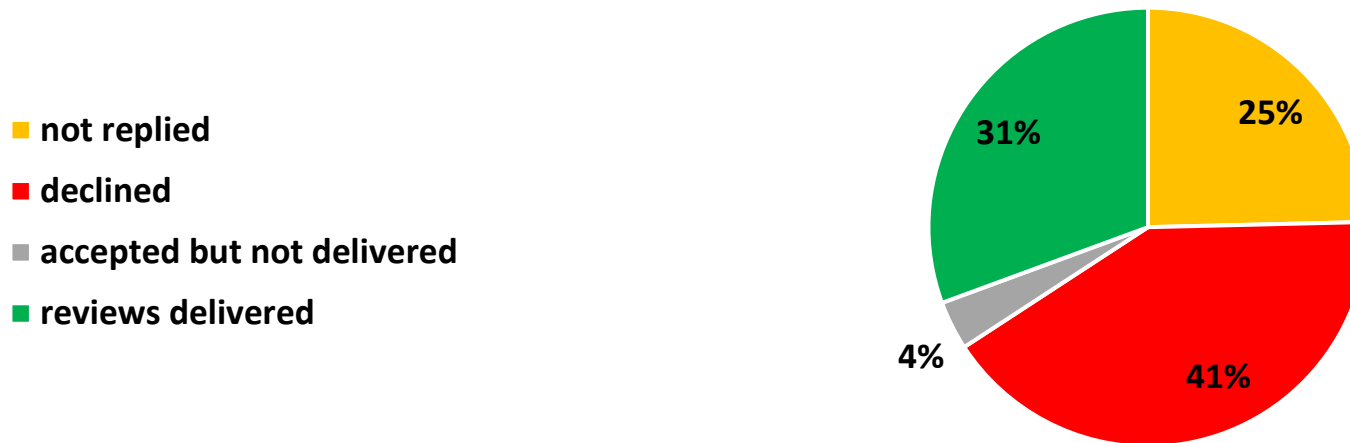
■ LS ■ PE ■ SH

ERC SyG2023 Data on step 2 panels

Overview reviewers in step 2 – in all 5 panels

- Panel members in step 2: 87 in 5 panels
- Remote referees: 4646 invited – 1422 reviews submitted
- Each proposal has between 7 and 18 reviews:
 - Panel members between 4 to 7 reviews per proposal
 - Remote referees and panel evaluators: between 3 to 12 reviews

Remote referees recruitment statistics



2261 Reviews
submitted for 208
proposals

Hints and tips

Preparing an application

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, make sure it is accessible to non-specialists!

- 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 important – **know-how of the group** is assessed together with the **combination** of the scientific elements
- 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 only of the methodological approach – feasibility is assessed at step 1)**

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 in part B2 and in the administrative part, **justify requested resources** (outside of 15 pages) – pay attention to the calculations and provide budget for each of the PIs –use the annex provided
- Explain **involvement of additional team members** (it is possible to have further beneficiaries/partners in the project)
- Funding ID to be filled in carefully for each PI

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



Hints and tips

Summing-up

- 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 for each PI** from their **Host Institution**
- If you have submitted previously to ERC Synergy grants check the resubmission restrictions before applying
- **Write** the research proposal (carefully plan the resources). Choose carefully the 4-6 keywords and abstract: applications are not submitted to panels used in the individual grants
- 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; have mock interviews if you passed to step 3
- Don't underestimate the **obstacle of different scientific languages** when you are merging fields
- **Submit** your research proposal **before the deadline** -> fully electronic/web-based submission system – try to avoid submitting on the last day

Take home messages – ERC Synergy grants

The end result should be more than the mere sum of the parts.

Competitive call (expected success rate of 10% in SyG2024)

- 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 group of PIs.

‘Synergy’ does not mean a loose consortium and is not the end goal

- 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

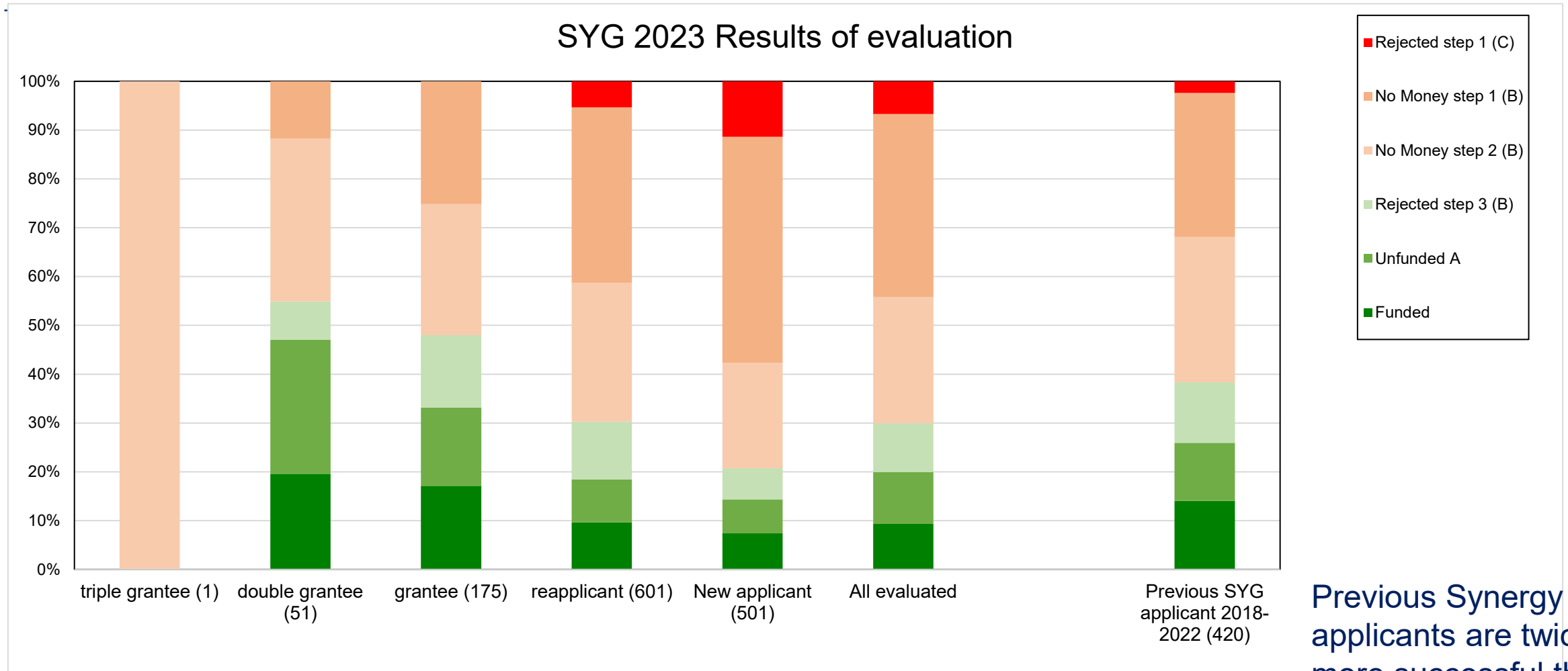


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ERC SyG2023

SyG 2023 Proposal results by applicant type



Previous Synergy applicants are twice more successful than new applicants.

Further advice

1. Consult call documents (Work Programme, Information for Applicants, [ERC classes](#))
2. Information and videos on Synergy grants on the ERC website: <https://erc.europa.eu/apply-grant/synergy-grant>
3. Look at funded projects in your field (search tool on ERC website), testimonials, tutorials ([ERC homepage](#))
4. Register early on the F&T Portal in the submission system
5. Have your documentation ready
6. Contact the ERCEA and ask all your questions well ahead of the submission deadline:
SyG mailbox: ERC-SYG-APPLICANTS@ec.europa.eu
7. Get the written consent of your collaborators before the submission deadline (a simple email exchange is OK)

Thank You!

ERC-SYG-APPLICANTS@ec.europa.eu

Agnes.Kulcsar@ec.europa.eu

More information: erc.europa.eu



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Background slides

About the ERC

ERC is part of Horizon Europe – The EU research and Innovation Programme 2021-2027

Scientific governance

- Independent Scientific Council with 22 members including the ERC President, with full authority over strategy
- Supported by a Dedicated Implementation Structure, the ERC Executive Agency

Scientific freedom

- Scientific excellence as the sole criterion
- Support to the individual scientist – *no consortia!*
- No predetermined subjects – “*bottom-up*”
- Support for frontier research in all fields of science and humanities
- International peer-review

Budget

- EUR 16 billion in Horizon Europe (17% of entire budget)
- Approx. EUR 2,2 billion to spend on calls under Work Programme 2024



Why to apply for ERC grant?

ERC offers independence, recognition & visibility to:

- work on a research topic of own choice
- gain financial autonomy for 5 years in individual grants, 6 years in Synergy grants
- negotiate the best conditions of work with the host institution
- attract excellent team members and collaborators from anywhere in the world
- move with the grant to any place in Europe if desired (“portability of grants”)
- win additional funding

ERC grants: Anyone from anywhere in the world can apply

Opportunities for researchers outside EU/Associated Countries:

- Additional “start-up” funding for researchers moving to Europe (€ 1 Mio irrespective of the individual grant scheme, € 4 Mio for Synergy grants)
- Grantees can keep affiliation with home institute outside Europe (“significant part” of work time in Europe: at least 50%)
- Team members can be based outside Europe
- Grantees can move within Europe with the grant
- Keep in mind that host institutions have to be in the EU or Associated Country. In SyG, up to 4 PIs can apply, and one of them (not the corresponding one) can apply with an institution outside Europe.



Evaluation panel structure (2024) – relevant for StG/CoG/AdG calls

(SyG applicants choose only descriptors, not a panel)

Panel structure revised – 2024 ERC Panels and panel descriptors available on the [ERC homepage](#):

- Provide guidance to applicants
- Not meant to be a complete scientific classification (not exhaustive)
- Panel titles, subtitles, descriptors do not reflect priorities
- Any topic/field is equally welcome, whether mentioned in panel structure or not
- The PI can flag one "Secondary Review Panel". If proposal is across panels: reviewers from both panels used. Explain why proposal is "cross-panel" in Part B1!

Rumour: Choose the panel "strategically" in order to increase chances of success

NOT true: The budget is distributed among the scientific panels as a function of demand → success rate is equal amongst panels → choose the Panel that is right for your proposal in the individual PI calls!

Evaluation panel structure for individual grants

For calls under Work Programme 2024

Life Sciences

- LS1 Molecules of Life: Biological Mechanisms, Structures and Functions
- LS2 Integrative Biology: From Genes and Genomes to Systems
- LS3 Cell Biology, Development, Stem Cells and Regeneration
- LS4 Physiology in Health, Disease and Ageing
- LS5 Neuroscience and Disorders of the Nervous System
- LS6 Immunity, Infection and Immunotherapy
- LS7 Prevention, Diagnosis and Treatment of Human Diseases
- LS8 Environmental Biology, Ecology and Evolution
- LS9 Biotechnology and Biosystems Engineering

Physical Sciences & Engineering

- PE1 Mathematics
- PE2 Fundamental Constituents of Matter
- PE3 Condensed Matter Physics
- PE4 Physical and Analytical Chemical Sciences
- PE5 Synthetic Chemistry and Materials
- PE6 Computer Science and Informatics
- PE7 Systems and Communication Engineering
- PE8 Products and Processes Engineering
- PE9 Universe Sciences
- PE10 Earth System Science
- PE11 Materials Engineering

Social Sciences and Humanities

- SH1 Individuals, Markets and Organisations
- SH2 Institutions, Governance and Legal Systems
- SH3 The Social World and its Interactions
- SH4 The Human Mind and its Complexity
- SH5 Texts and Concepts
- SH6 The Study of the Human Past
- SH7 Human Mobility, Environment, and Space
- SH8 Studies of Cultures and Arts (NEW)



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Changes compared to WP2023
are highlighted

Changes in Work Programme 2024 (4)

Lump Sums to be introduced in Advanced Grants 2024

- Lump Sum to be introduced **only for Advanced Grants 2024** on pilot basis
- Lump Sum funding - defined up-front and fixed in the grant agreement without financial reporting
- To ensure successful implementation, series of **preconditions** need to be fulfilled for Scientific Council, taking into account specificities of frontier research:
 - Continue to support **high-risk, blue-sky frontier research**
 - **Excellence** remains ERC's sole evaluation criterion
 - **Autonomy of Principal Investigator**
 - No need for milestones or deliverables
 - Approach to **portability & flexibility** of ERC grants remain unchanged
- Scientific Council agreed conditionally to introduce lump sums for Advanced Grants as pilot in 2024 ERC Work Programme, detailed work on implementation ongoing
 - More information: [Lump sum funding in ERC Advanced Grant 2024: Questions and answers | ERC \(europa.eu\)](#) (July 2023)



ERC Synergy Grant features

Synergy aspects

SYNERGY

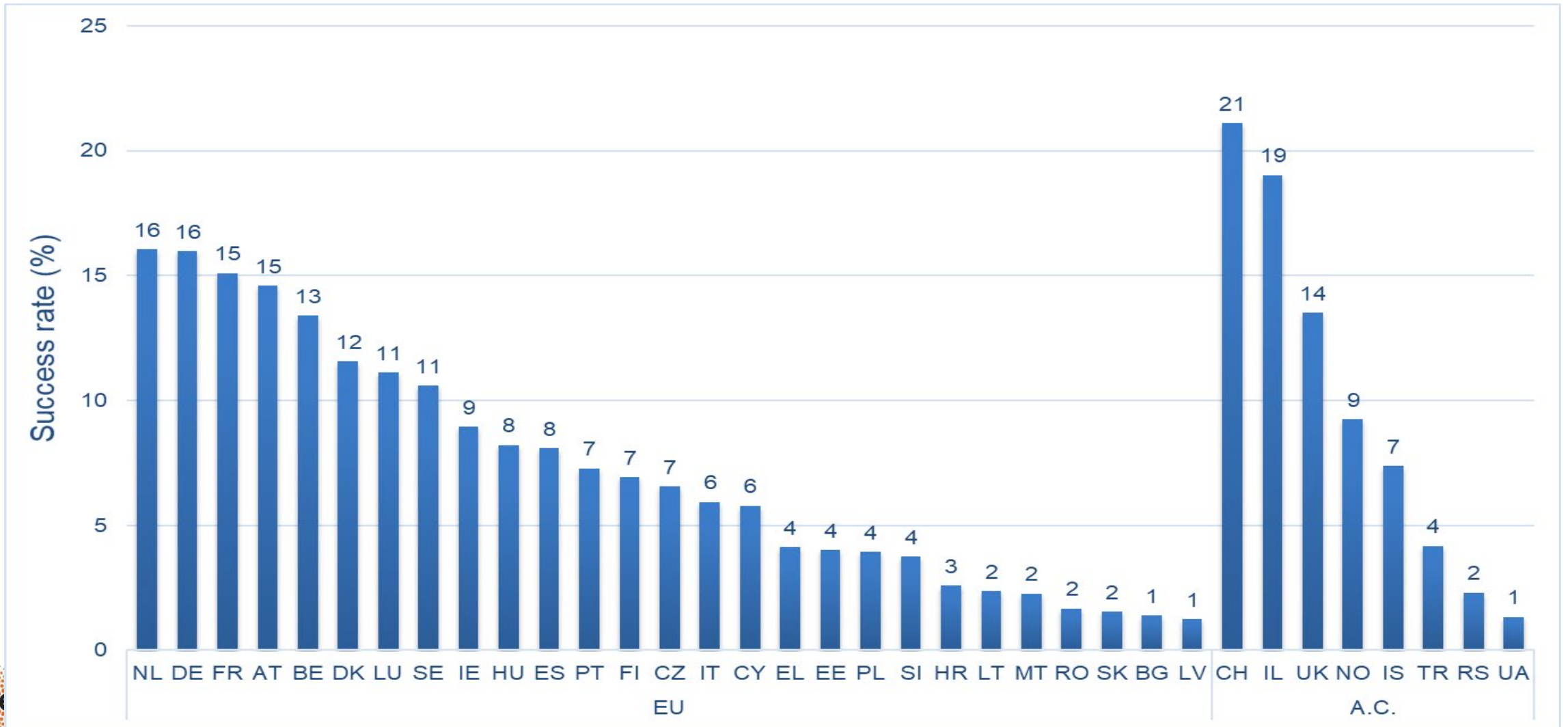
A major scientific question with a transformative scientific potential that could not be addressed by an individual PI and their team working alone

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.

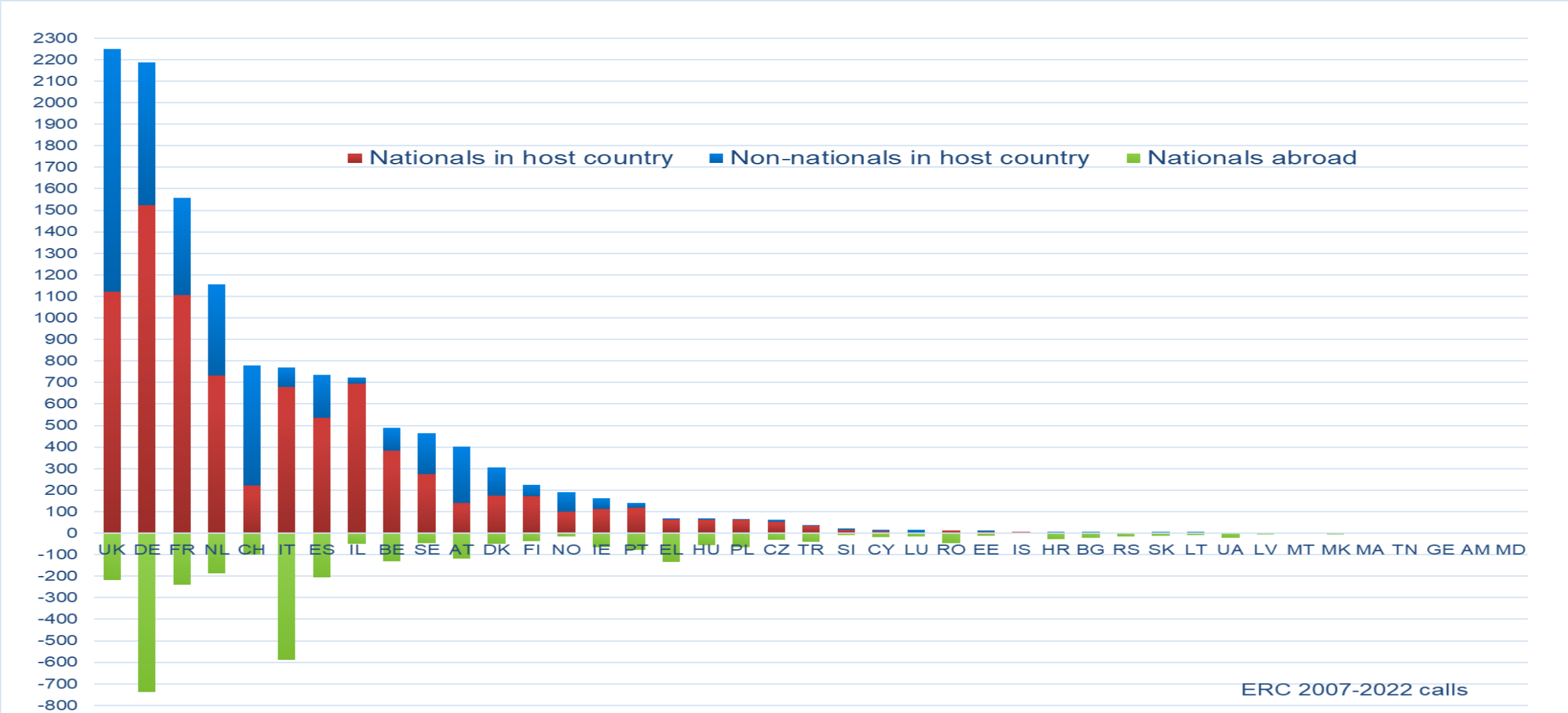


Success rate by country of Host Institution



Success rate (2007-2022)

Grantees at home and abroad

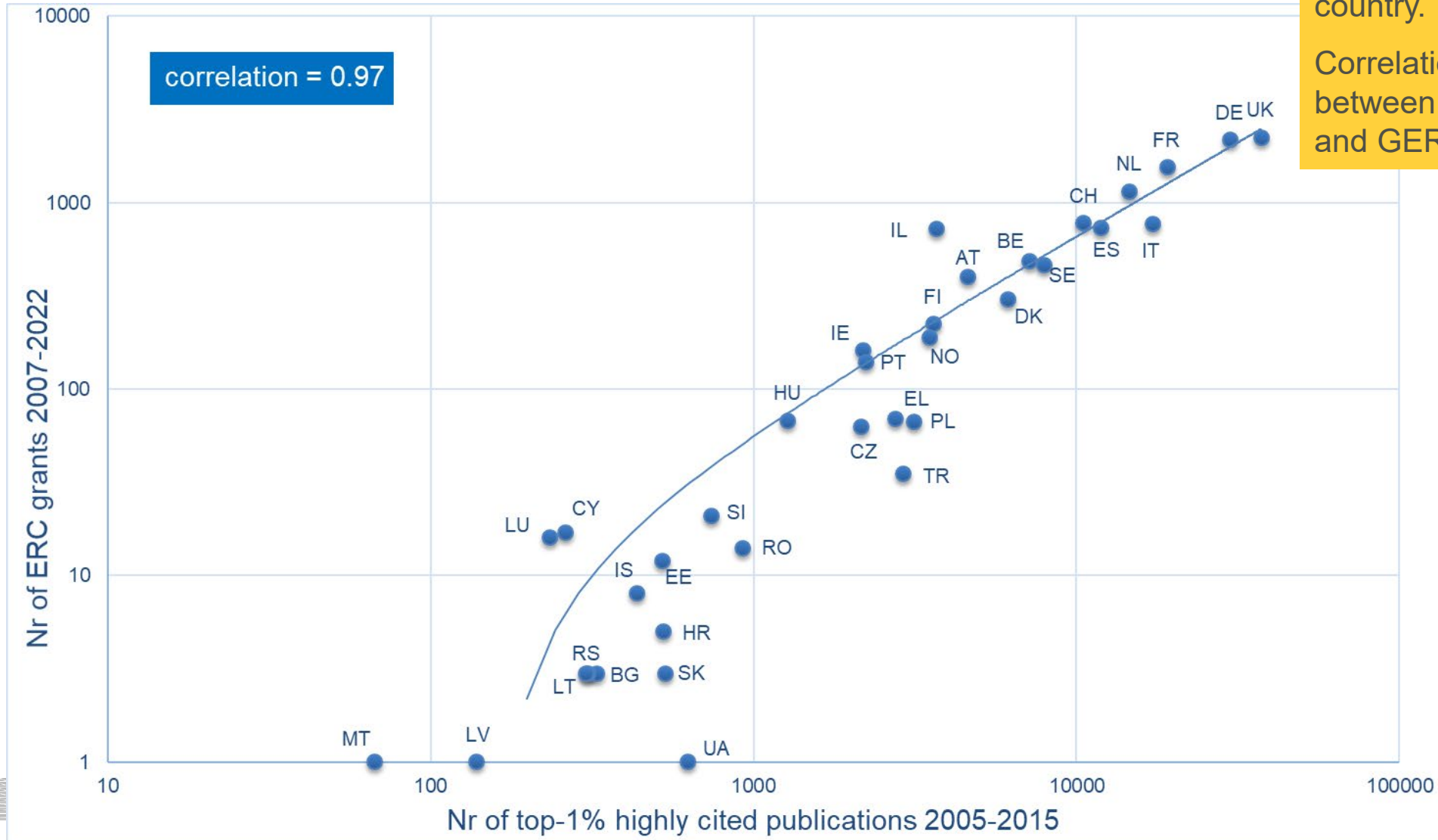


ERC 2007-2022 calls

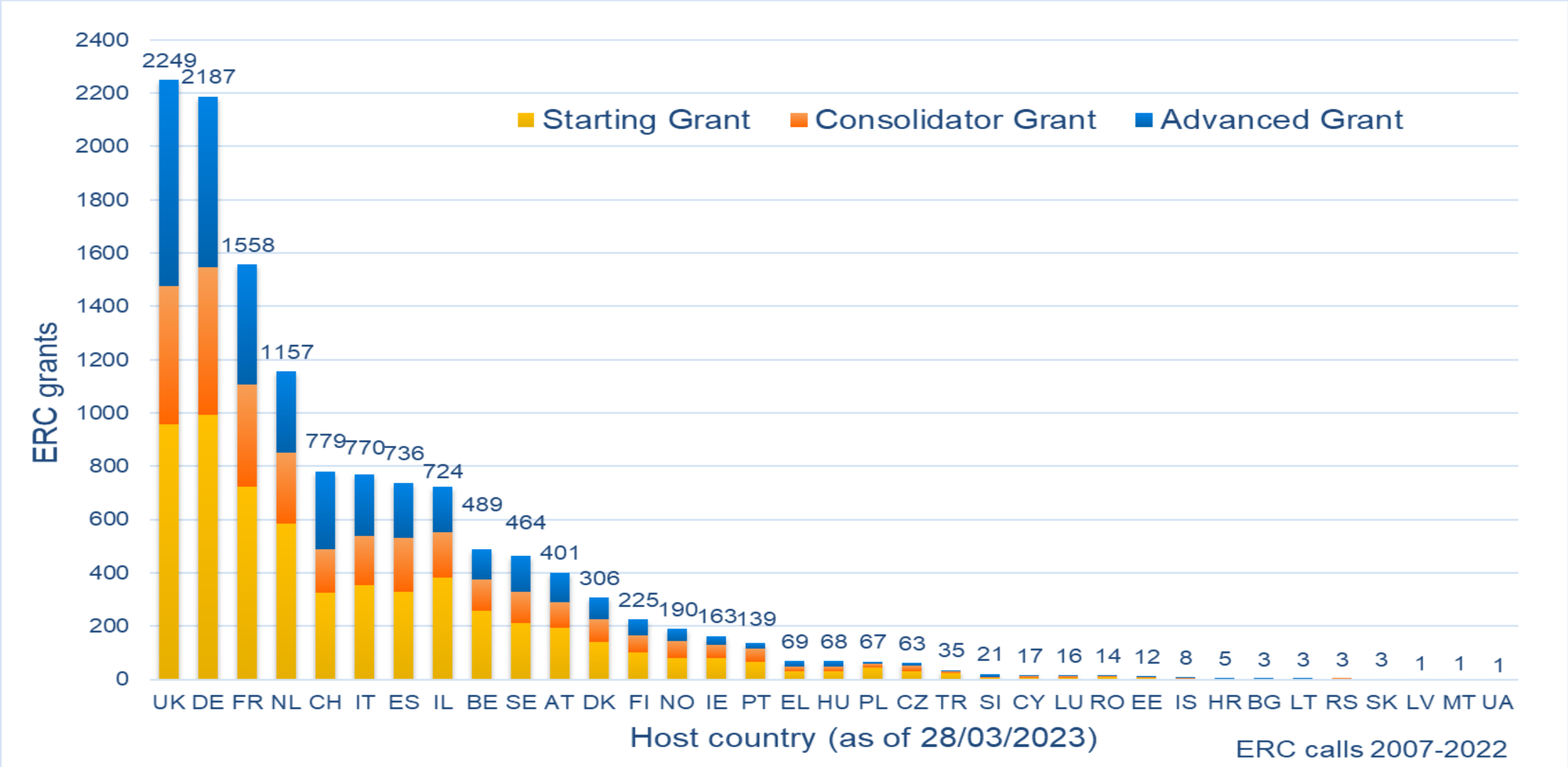
ERC grants versus top publications

Correlation of **0.97**
between nr of ERC grants
and nr of top-1% highly
cited publications per
country.

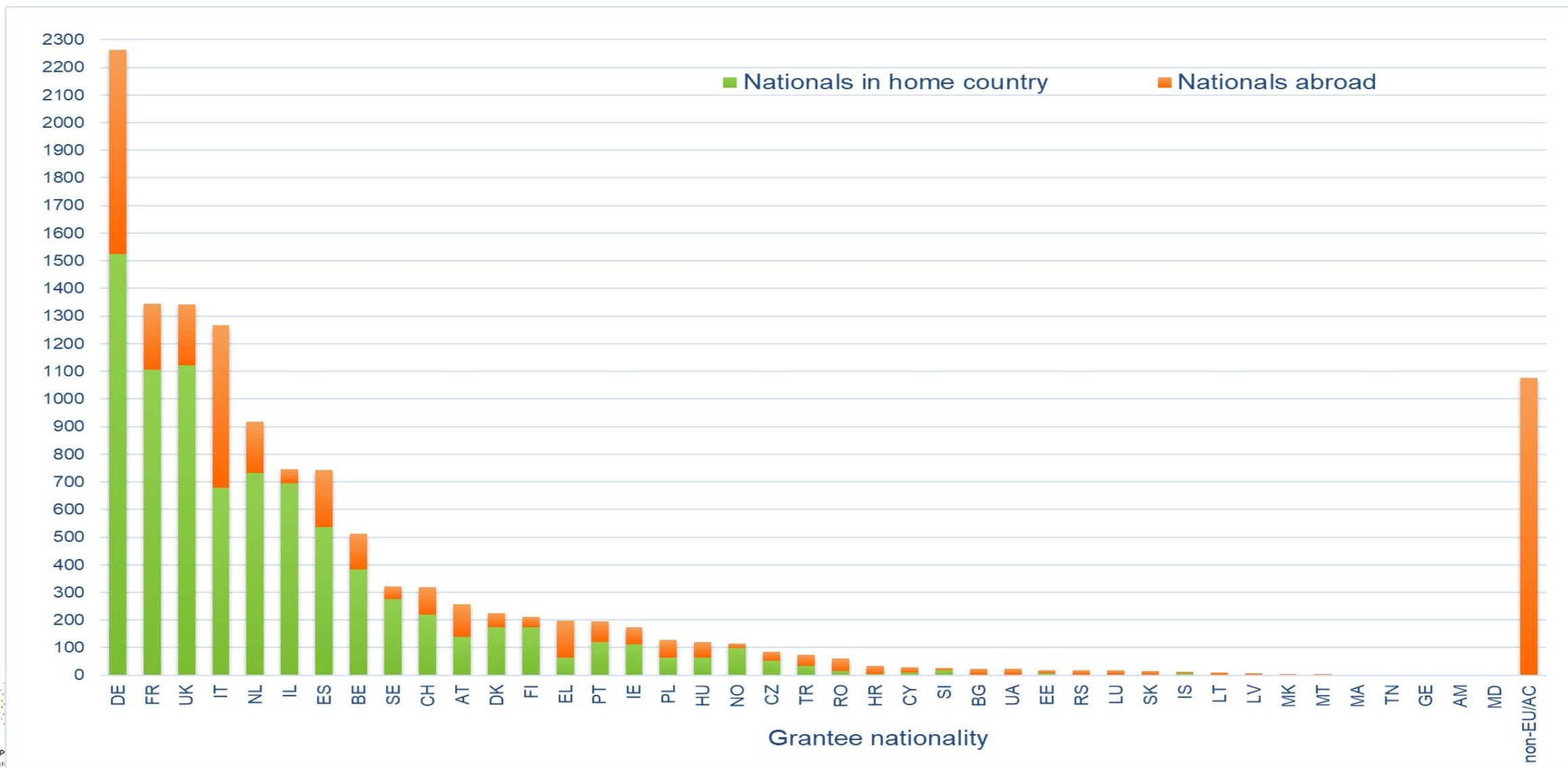
Correlation of **0.85**
between nr of ERC grants
and GERD per country.



ERC-funded projects by country of Host Institution



Nationals at home and abroad



50 non-EU/AC grantee nationalities - 8% of all ERC grants

Non-EU/AC Principal Investigators	Starting and Consolidator grants	Advanced grants	Total main grants	Synergy grantees
USA	276	142	418	28
Canada	100	21	121	3
China	77	2	79	1
India	73	3	76	2
Australia	59	16	75	2
Russia	62	11	73	6
Japan	32	9	41	2
New Zealand	19	6	25	1
Argentina	23	2	25	
Other	141	13	154	1
Total	862	225	1087	46