



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 12 May 2023
(OR. en)

9275/23

RECH 178

NOTE

From: The Commission
To: Council

Subject: Seal of Excellence
- Information from the Commission

Delegations will find attached a note from the Commission on “Seal of Excellence” with a view to the AOB items at the meeting of the Competitiveness Council on 23 May 2023.

Seal of Excellence

Information from the Commission

The Seal of Excellence, firstly introduced in Horizon 2020, is awarded to project proposals submitted under Horizon Europe call which are evaluated above the quality thresholds (therefore considered excellent projects) but not funded due to lack of budget available for that call for proposals.

The Seal of Excellence facilitates the build-up of synergies between funding programmes at EU and national level, including potential alternative funding. It allows funding bodies to benefit from an independent and international evaluation process which has already taken place.

Supporting the Seal of Excellence is a voluntary choice for each Member State. It is a simple yet effective mechanism, which benefits funding bodies, host countries, regions, institutions as well as talented researchers and innovators.

In Horizon Europe, the Seal of Excellence is awarded to European Innovation Council (EIC) Accelerator and Transition projects; Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Postdoctoral Fellowships and COFUND; Teaming actions under Widening; Horizon Europe Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change and European Research Council Proof of Concept.

This note will look in particular the EIC and MSCA Seal of Excellence.

In the case of the **EIC**, Member States mobilised substantial support from the ERDF for innovative SME projects in the past programming period. According to the voluntary reporting of the members of the Seal of Excellence Community of Practice, more than 30 support schemes for EIC at both regional and/or national level have been implemented in 18 countries.

When it comes to the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)**, 25 Seal of Excellence funding schemes are currently established at national, regional or institutional level across 14 Member States and have provided funding to almost 1,200 excellent researchers since 2017.

Some Member States have exploited the opportunity of creating synergies between Horizon Europe and the **Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)** by using this new opportunity to support projects receiving the Seal of Excellence under Horizon Europe. Currently, 9 Member States indicated in their RRP funding dedicated to Seal of Excellence awarded under EIC and MSCA and some have already successfully implemented it.

To support the implementation of the Seal, the Commission set up a **Seal of Excellence Community of Practice**, where representatives of the national and regional authorities and other funding bodies at both EU and Member States level share their experiences, get the relevant information from Commission services and reinforce peer-learning at policy and administrative levels.

The **ERA Forum sub-group on Access to Excellence** is being set up to improve cooperation between Member States' R&I Policy authorities, and the national Cohesion policy authorities in charge of R&I. Bringing these communities together will foster exchange of knowledge and practices.

The Commission encourages the Member States **to actively participate in the established fora** and **to make full use of the Seal of Excellence** as a cost-efficient way to invest in high-quality research projects and retain excellent talents in Europe. The Commission's synergies guidelines provide a practical framework for the Member States to make use of cohesion policy programmes and Recovery and Resilience Plans for this purpose.