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NOTE

From: ERAC Secretariat
To: Delegations

Subject: ERAC Opinion on Streamlining the Research and Innovation Monitoring
and Reporting Landscape

Delegations will find attached the ERAC Opinion on Streamlining the Research and Innovation Monitoring and Reporting Landscape as approved by written procedure.

Draft ERAC Opinion on Streamlining the Research and Innovation Monitoring and Reporting Landscape

Remit

In April 2014 an ERAC Opinion¹ linked to the National Reform Programme process highlighted that “the increasing burden on many Member States calls for some streamlining of the various reporting exercises in the field of research and innovation.” A recommendation was also addressed to ERAC calling for a discussion of the issue of the reporting burden and to propose solutions for its alleviation.

The Council in its Conclusions on the ERA Advisory Structure of December 2015 agreed that more effort needs to be made to reduce added monitoring and reporting burden on the Member States and called upon the Commission and the ERA-related groups to identify areas where monitoring and administrative burdens of reporting may be reduced through further streamlining.

The Maltese Presidency of the Council identified streamlining of monitoring and reporting the R&I landscape as one of its priorities and its aim is to adopt Council conclusions on the topic in May 2017. To support this initiative, broadly welcomed by the Member States, the Associated Countries and the European Commission, ERAC has deemed it opportune to prepare an Opinion on the subject in view of its overarching role in the ERA implementation.

Approach and process

Following a preliminary stocktaking exercise by Malta on which it reported to ERAC in September 2016 (see Annex 1 in the addendum to this document), a preliminary discussion was held and a first round of written comments was received. More structured and complete input from ERAC delegations on what matters most in alleviating Member States’ burden through the streamlining of monitoring in the R&I landscape, was subsequently collected through a comprehensive online survey. This survey was open from 10 to 25th of November 2016 and yielded the response of 13 Member States and Associated Countries². The survey results are summarised in Annex 2 in the addendum to this document.

¹ ERAC 1209/14: ERAC opinion on Member States' reporting on Research and Innovation reforms in view of their National Reform Programmes, 2 June 2014.

² Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland.

Complementing the online survey, a dedicated seminar took place in Brussels on 15 November 2016, attended by 18 Member States and Associated Countries. Participants discussed the scope and results of the Maltese stocktaking exercise, provided and analysed highlights of preliminary responses to the online survey, and were presented with and discussed results of the recent work on the subject by the Commission services (DG RTD's presentation is contained in Annex 3 in the addendum to this document) undertaken in response to ERAC's streamlining exercise.

The outline of the ERAC Opinion was presented by the rapporteur³ at the ERAC plenary on 2 December 2016, delegations were invited to provide written comments on the text by 9 December 2016 and a further version of the document for opinion was distributed before the end of the 2016.

The present draft ERAC Opinion is based on the input received (from ERAC delegations and the Commission services) and on the outcomes of the discussions held throughout the process. It contains analyses and puts forward recommendations on the (further) streamlining of R&I monitoring and reporting, including on improving the ERA reporting process and practice.

Draft ERAC Opinion

General remarks

As in any policy area, monitoring and reporting are intrinsic elements of sound, evidence-based and effective policy-making in the area of research and innovation, both at national/regional and at EU level. This means that on agreed EU-wide policies, such as on the European Semester of economic policy co-ordination or the European Research Area (ERA), reporting efforts on the side of the Member States and Associated Countries are necessary and inherent to the policy cycle and its quality in order to permit adequate monitoring. ERAC delegations are well aware of this.

³ Karina Angelieva, Counsellor, Head of Section Education and Research, Permanent Representation of the Republic of Bulgaria to the EU.

However, reporting processes and content should be guided simultaneously by the principles of *efficiency, proportionality and impact*, to maximise the usefulness of results for effective monitoring and evidence-based policy-making. At the same time, the streamlining of the monitoring and reporting process should be balanced against demands for information and/or evidence by the Member States and the Associated Countries for the purposes of their national R&I policy making process.

In this context it is also useful to recall the relevance of the 2015 European Commission guidelines on monitoring⁴ as part of its overall “Better Regulation” package. These guidelines identify a number of principles for monitoring and reporting on EU policy initiatives, whether for regulatory initiatives or not. A “key requirement” for the Commission is to ensure that “*it will be possible to assess the performance of an initiative while avoiding unnecessary or duplicative requests for information*”. In addition, the guidelines call to “*Establish monitoring arrangements and indicators that will generate the necessary information for subsequent evaluation of the performance of the intervention while minimising data collection costs*”. Apart from the principles already mentioned, the guidelines also address inter alia the importance of making data publicly available to stakeholders.

This ERAC Opinion looks, in particular, into the reporting burden on the side of Member States and Associated Countries and, given ERAC’s remit, it covers the reporting related to the implementation of the ERA policy agenda. The Maltese Presidency has identified ten research and innovation related periodic reports. According to Malta’s initial mapping exercise (see Annex 1), a majority of these reports relies on input from Member States and Associated Countries and covers ERA priorities. An internal Commission services (RTD) enquiry shows (see slide 5 in Annex 3) that Member States’ input is requested in only half of the reports identified and mostly through validation of the text. The Commission also highlighted (slide 6 in Annex 3) several recent improvements aimed at reducing Member States’ reporting burden such as putting in place the [joint EC-OECD survey on STI policies](#), the elimination of the former “R&I country profiles”, and their replacement by dedicated [infographics](#), and the forthcoming shortening and focusing of the RIO Country Reports.

⁴ “Better Regulation Guidelines” Chapter V, European Commission, SWD(2015)111 of 19.05.2015.

Key issues

On this basis a number of *key issues* have been identified relevant to streamlining, which have been addressed in the aforementioned online survey amongst ERAC delegations and have by and large been confirmed by and elaborated on in the subsequent discussions with ERAC delegations:

i) avoidance of duplication of information in different reports; ii) practical relevance of the reports for monitoring of implementation and policy making; and iii) frequency of reporting, timing and the need for early warning. The discussions highlighted two additional key issues related to: (1) the way data are collected and used, in light of information available in national administrations which can be exploited to some extent by applying new technologies and through the exploitation of “Big Data”; and (2) insufficient regard for the complexities of reporting in those Member States and Associated Countries where the requested information may be held across different levels of government.

This Opinion and its recommendations keep a particular focus on these key issues, while also taking into account the above-mentioned guiding principles.

i) Duplication in data-provision and -use

Duplication in R&I monitoring and reporting has several dimensions relevant to the administrative burden on the side of Member States and Associated Countries while keeping also in mind that in many of them there are well-established and functioning national monitoring systems and the R&I reporting at the EU level is not meant to replace them but to draw on their results. One dimension is related to the collection and transmission of data and information by the Member States and the Associated Countries; another dimension is related to the use and interpretation of the data and information provided by the Commission; and another to the exploitation of these data with a view to its feeding back to Member States, Associated Countries and stakeholders.

Concerning data collection and transmission, there is overall agreement that existing statistical data forms the backbone for the reporting and that frequent additional ad-hoc surveys would contradict the joint aim of reducing the reporting burden for the Member States and Associated Countries. Thus, the provision of existing statistical data as such entails a relatively minor part of the burden on the side of Member States and Associated Countries, although the burden on respondents such as businesses and the higher educational sector should not be ignored. The reporting burden increases, when Member States and Associated Countries have to provide information at short deadlines, when the information is not available yet (regarding assessment of policy reforms or official statistics) and it has to be created ad hoc. In addition, country-level information available at the Commission services should be fully exploited for the different reports in order to avoid ad hoc requests for information when they are not strictly necessary, nor linked to the ERA implementation process.

Member States and Associated Countries welcome the Commission's intention to make further efforts to channel the lion's share of its information requests through the joint Commission-OECD survey. Should there be a need for additional information, there is broad support amongst Member States and Associated Countries that these needs have to be discussed periodically with them (e.g. at the beginning of each year) and in advance. A homogeneous planning of and clear context for the information needed, to guarantee "early warning", is considered very relevant. Some countries also showed an interest for exploring the option for a single data-entry and coordination point within the Commission services.

Still on data collection, additional requests for information from ERA-related groups and expert groups are also an issue, especially since they constitute ad-hoc requests. It is suggested that any new requests to be vetted by the ERAC Steering Board and the Commission, to ensure that the survey is really requesting new information which is essential for the functioning of the group. Planning ahead and inclusion of these ad-hoc requests as much as possible in the above-suggested overall planned and fixed cycle is commendable.

Beyond the collection of the basic information, the bulk of the administrative burden on the side of Member States and Associated Countries is clearly related to quality and consistency checks and the subsequent interaction with the different Commission services on the draft reports, which are considered the most time consuming. It should be noted, however, that the Commission has taken significant steps, and is implementing further steps, to reduce the need for validation checks from Member States.

To assist Member States and Associated Countries in correctly interpreting the Commission's assessment contained in the reports, there should be full transparency on the scopes, objectives and sources of the different reports and the approach used by the Commission for each of those. This should also be used to contextualise the data provided by Member States and Associated Countries. Transparency in advance is essential, in particular when the scope and/or objectives are subject to change. Member States and Associated Countries should be informed and consulted well in advance.

There is a general recognition that the reports for which the data are used serve different purposes and objectives so merger of the reports is not immediately identified as a particular priority from a Member States' and Associated Countries' point of view. The important action expected from the Commission is a continuous attention to keep reports as focussed as possible in line with their purpose and to ensure consistency, including with regard to stronger contextualisation (interpretation of data) in publications and due quality checks. Multiple requests for the same information to Member States and Associated Countries should be avoided.

ii) **Practical relevance of the reports**

The aspect of the practical relevance and purpose of the R&I reports for both EU and national and regional level as such does not appear to be of critical importance for alleviating the administrative burden on national administrations and streamlining the ERA monitoring process. However, the discussion on the practical relevance and purpose brought forward the key question of the usefulness of R&I reports for policy-making and their added value for broader groups, such as research and industry stakeholders, and civil society.

The collected data and related analysis in the R&I reports feed into and are important for national policy making, but there is a need for increasing the visibility of the reports, for strengthening their dissemination and for facilitating access to the underlying data for a broader range of stakeholders, including those affected by the related policy decisions. The needs of different audiences should be duly taken into consideration when defining the purpose of the various reports and the respective strategies for dissemination.

There is overall agreement that the streamlining of the R&I reporting and monitoring landscape should be based on a clear ex-ante rationale and should permit to adequately monitor R&I policy and performance developments at EU and Member State level, including for the implementation of the ERA, which should be based on agreed reference indicators. In addition, this streamlining should not negatively affect the practical usefulness of the available data in terms of their quality and quantity.

Most ERAC delegations that took part in the streamlining survey identified the ERA progress report as the most valuable and useful for the ERA Roadmap implementation and monitoring. They equally found the [Science, Research and Innovation Performance of the EU Report 2016](#) and the [European Innovation Scoreboard](#) important instruments to monitor the overall R&I policies at the EU and national level and their relative national performance. The [RIO country reports](#) are also seen as an important input into the monitoring of ERA implementation at national level, but the general impression is that they could be much more concise in focus, issued in a lower frequency since there may not be significant policy developments to report on a yearly basis, and entail less interaction with Member States and Associated Countries for their drafting while introducing quality checks. Alignment of content and timing of the RIO country reports with the ERA Progress Report are therefore important factors to take into consideration in this respect.

A key issue for strengthening the usefulness of all the reports listed in the stocktaking exercise prepared by Malta and also acknowledged by the Commission in their internal analyses is the necessity to improve awareness-raising on the R&I reports and highlight their practical relevance in support of policy making. In addition, for each of the R&I reports some specific features for strengthening their added value have been suggested. Examples are the evidence-base for the ERA Progress report; increased focus for the Report on the Implementation of the Strategy on International Cooperation; or the consistency of the Member States and Associated Countries data in the She Figures.

In relation to the content of the R&I reports, some respondents expressed interest in future dialogue with the Commission to ensure increased focus on the economic and social impacts (valorisation) of the national ERA action plans' measures; further streamlining the EC-OECD survey on STI policy; or finding a possible indicator regarding the "mobility of researchers".

A related aspect which is crucial to ensure the quality of the R&I monitoring as well as the efficiency and efficacy of the produced data and analysis, is the motivation for the active involvement and for accurate reporting by the Member State and Associated Countries administrations building on data and analyses from existing national sources and reports.

iii) Frequency

The frequency of reporting was identified as a key issue during the initial stocktaking exercise. In particular, ERAC delegations highlighted in their written comments and in the discussions in Bratislava (15-16 September 2016) the fact that requests for data and/or for consistency and quality checks tend to happen in an unplanned way and do not allow the necessary time for review, especially where there are conclusions from different comparative data and statistics.

As already mentioned, that is why sharing and discussing with ERAC an annual or two-yearly indicative planning/timeframe for reporting and request for input has been identified as a transparent, effective and easy solution to be implemented.

Moreover, some of the respondents called for longer periods of reporting on national reforms and for a stronger dialogue around the reports' analyses. In addition, they have suggested when possible only brief updates or consistency checks to be held but not provision of detailed data on the whole report.

Another concrete suggestion was that the RIO Country Reports should be updated only every two years, to tie in with the data collection carried out through the Commission-OECD international survey and ERA Progress Report.

Recommendations

1. on the Principles and Dialogue:

- An agreement should be reached on the **guiding principles for R&I monitoring and reporting**, taking into account the required focus, comprehensiveness and quality, proportionality, transparency, targeted impact and consideration for the specificities of the national R&I policy landscape in each Member State and Associated Country, including increased consideration of official statistics.
- It should be ensured that **resources used** by Member States and the Associated Countries as well as the Commission on reporting and monitoring are optimised.
- Establishing a **regular ERAC dialogue with the Commission services with adequate planning** on monitoring and reporting issues should be considered to ensure a minimisation of the administrative burden, a maximisation of effectiveness and the generation of added value for the monitoring and reporting efforts at both national and EU level.
- Other guiding principles should be recognised in this dialogue, such as the importance of **open access** to data if possible, **contextualisation** and **raising awareness** on the data collected and produced while facilitating the use of the same data from a broader community.

2. on the Process:

- **Duplication of information requests and information checking** should be minimised and the use of already existing, preferably official data by Eurostat, OECD and other international organisations should be incentivised as much as possible. A regular dialogue with Eurostat and National Statistics Offices should be set up to plan for future needs from official statistics.
- The **timeframe and context** of the reporting should be provided to Member States and Associated Countries via ERAC in advance of the respective requests for input, preferably at the beginning of each year containing clear indications of data definition and sources in order to guarantee quality and consistency. For both collection and review of information, Member States and Associated Countries will be granted sufficient timeframes.
- Member States and Associated Countries should be informed in advance on **reporting requests stemming from EU commissioned studies including those addressing national R&I stakeholders and SMEs**.
- **e-solutions for reporting** should be examined further as a potential means for improving efficiency and timeliness and making the submission of information easier. The Commission should consider setting up a **single access point for all the information on Member States and Associated Countries provided on a voluntary basis**, building on existing progress with for example the [Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility-RIO](#) website. It should ensure that the Commission and OECD platforms providing R&I information use compatible taxonomies and architecture that facilitate the structuring of information, and that the information gathered through the joint EC-OECD survey on STI policies has an adequate feedback loop towards Member States and Associated Countries.

3. on the Impact

- Adequate **contextualisation of information** in the reports should be ensured, including the necessary qualitative interpretation along with quantitative data in close cooperation with Member States and Associated Countries as a means of encouraging utilisation by end users and for shaping policy action.
- An **effective balance between reporting, awareness-raising and follow-up implementation** should be ensured, and consultations and discussions should be put in place.
- **It is important to take stock regularly of the scope and purpose of the various reports**, considering the extent to which their content, format, process and impact remain valid and useful over time.

Recommended actions

R&I policy and performance monitoring and reporting, including the ERA monitoring process, should be further developed in close cooperation with the Member States, Associated Countries and the European Commission (including Eurostat).

1. Member States and Associated Countries should be able to feed their comments in to the assessments made in the relevant reports, especially the ERA Progress report.
2. In addition to the efforts to streamline the European R&I reporting and to reduce the burden of reporting for Member States and Associated Countries, **consistency should be ensured between the various reporting activities** such as country visits and/or targeted interviews with different stakeholders (such as SMEs, universities, etc.) and harmonisation of the methodology on the interpretation of data should be envisaged. Reports elaborated by the Commission services on R&I policy issues should consistently exploit all existing information and data.

3. **In order to reduce the administrative effort and to facilitate and draw on timely results from the RIO country reports for the ERA Progress Report, synchronisation in timing and scope of both reports on a two-yearly basis is necessary** to enable the inclusion of up-to-date information from the RIO country reports into the ERA Progress report. This will ensure greater visibility and stronger evidence base of the reports, thus increasing their usefulness and outreach to relevant stakeholders.
4. Member States and the European Commission should consider looking further into **measures enhancing the impact and the relevance of R&I monitoring and reporting for the decision-making process**. The following measures are recommended:
- Exchange of experiences on how to ensure a better use of existing statistics and administrative data, reduce costs of data collection and reporting burden on respondents as part of a more intense forward-looking **collaboration among Member States, Associated Countries and the Commission** (with due involvement of Eurostat) **and other international organisations such as OECD**, building on the existing partnership with the Commission on STI policies. This could include discussions on how to ensure that the results of the reports are relevant for the activities and practice on national and EU level;
 - Increased use of the **findings from the R&I reporting process for policy purposes**, for instance through the European Semester of economic policy-coordination and the Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility. An intensified and continuous dialogue between the European Commission, national and regional authorities in this regard is advised.

- Discussion of a possible launch of a **Community of Practice**⁵ **on monitoring of R&I developments** addressing reporting challenges and featuring good practices linked to: deliver on time, cost- and HR efficiency; quality of data and analyses; digital sources; increased impact of ERA reporting for national and EU decision-making processes on the basis of complementary national and EU monitoring systems;
 - Last but not least, **raising awareness through outreach actions** on the R&I reports to engage different stakeholders, and improve the implementation of ERA Roadmap priorities. Different activities and tools for raising awareness should be explored and/or strengthened such as voluntary targeted workshops in Member States and Associated Countries on the results and the recommendations from the R&I reports relevant to national and regional action plans on ERA implementation, etc.
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⁵ See for example: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/community-practice-better-self-and-co-regulation-0>.