Guideline for Research and Innovation Programmes (Programme Area 03)

EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms 2021-2028

Adopted by the Financial Mechanism Committee on 18 July 2025

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List of abbreviations

EEA – European Economic Area

EFTA – European Free Trade Association

NMFA – Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs

FMC – Financial Mechanism Committee

FMO – Financial Mechanism Office

DPP – Donor Programme Partner

PO – Programme Operator

IPO – International Partner Organisation

R&I projects – Research and Innovation projects

C&C projects – Coordination and Capacity projects

EPSS – Electronic Proposal Submission System

ESR – Evaluation Summary Report

1. General

This Guideline applies to the implementation of programmes funded by the European Economic Area (EEA) and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms 2021-2028 falling under the Programme Area "Research and Innovation" (hereinafter referred to as "research and innovation programmes"). Furthermore, provisions of this Guideline may, by way of specific provisions contained in the Programme Agreement, be applied to other Programmes.

The following documents constitute the legally binding framework which applies to the present Guideline:

- Protocol 38d of the EEA Agreement establishing an EEA Financial Mechanism and/or the Agreement between the Kingdom of Norway and the European Union on a Norwegian Financial Mechanism for the Period 2021-2028, as applicable;

- The Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Donor State(s) and Beneficiary State;

- The Regulations on the implementation of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism 2021-2028 and Annexes and/or the Regulations on the implementation of the

Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2021-2028 and Annexes ('the Regulations'), as applicable;

- Any guidelines adopted by the Financial Mechanism Committee ('FMC') / the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs ('NMFA').

Programmes and programme components falling under the Programme Area "Research and Innovation" shall be established and implemented in accordance with the legal framework referred to above, this Guideline as well as any specific provisions contained in Programme Agreements.

This Guideline contains references to certain Articles of the Regulations however users must refer to the entire Regulations, which contain provisions applicable to Research and Innovation programmes not addressed in this Guideline. This Guideline contains rules specific to the implementation of Research and Innovation programmes and consequently expands and further specifies certain provisions of the Regulations. In case of inconsistency between specific provisions of the Regulations and specific provisions within this Guideline, or where specifically indicated in this Guideline, the relevant provisions of this Guideline shall apply.

Nothing in this Guideline shall be deemed to require any natural or legal person to breach any mandatory statutory law which it is governed by.

2. Objective and rationale of the Research and Innovation Programmes

The objective of the Research and Innovation Programmes is enhanced excellence in research and research-based innovation, strengthening the foundations for the green and digital transitions, democracy, rule of law, human rights, social inclusion and resilience.

Rationale for the support

Research and innovation strengthen value creation and competitiveness and build knowledge and capacity to solve societal challenges and support democratic values and principles. Research and innovation have a key role to play in addressing systemic and lasting challenges that put a strain on citizens and communities in Europe. Examples include climate change and environmental degradation, security threats, health issues and well-being, changes in working life and the labour market, rapid technological change, and disinformation.

Research and innovation are key to strengthening the understanding of these complex societal challenges and to helping address them by developing innovative responses to further the green transition and enhance resilience, social cohesion, inclusive growth,

green jobs, democracy and active citizen participation, and the well-being of citizens in Europe. The support contributes to addressing the gap in research and development in Europe.

Areas of support:

- Cooperation on research and research-based innovation.
- Informing evidence-based policymaking on societal challenges.
- Engaging citizens in science.
- Overcoming barriers for the career progression of women and early-stage researchers.
- Strengthening the research and innovation ecosystem, such as research administration, communication of research and open science.

The programmes will support the enhanced valorisation[1] of research results aiming to create social and economic value from knowledge. In addition to promoting the effective transfer of knowledge into market-ready products and services, the programmes will include activities to strengthen the use of research in decision-making, evidence-based policymaking, and informed public dialogue, to uphold and enhance democracy. To achieve these goals, innovative approaches for engaging citizens, end-users, policymakers, and other stakeholders in research, innovation, and related activities will be explored.

Research and Innovation Programmes will:

- aim to build research and innovation capacity in the Beneficiary States, encouraging increased participation in the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation;
- encourage research within the social sciences and humanities;
- encourage cooperation across disciplines and sectors;
- encourage the integration of research, education and innovation;
- promote gender equality in research;
- promote co-creation and co-design through the engagement of citizens and civil society and relevant stakeholders;
- encourage learning and exchanging experience across institutions and countries, including between different Beneficiary States. This involves the sharing of best-practices and knowledge between Programme Operators;

[1] The European Commission defines knowledge valorisation as: "the process of **creating social and economic value from knowledge** by liking different areas and sectors and **transforming data, know-how and research results** into sustainable products, services, solutions and knowledge-based policies that benefit society." Furthermore: "EU knowledge valorisation policy covers both **technological and non-technological solutions** that can derive benefits to the society as a whole. It calls for the **participation of all actors** in the research and innovation ecosystem including **users, citizens and policy-makers**.

- explore new approaches to dealing with societal challenges and new technologies, and to ensure societal relevance, uptake and impact of new solutions; and
- support the strengthening of the research and innovation ecosystem, for example by supporting advances towards open science, fostering FAIR[2] data practices to enhance the transparency and reusability of data, safeguarding scientific activities against misuse, and enhancing the skills of research administrators.

3. Common values and principles

3.1 Common values of the EEA and Norway Grants

The EEA and Norway Grants are based on the common values and principles of: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

All programmes and activities funded by the EEA and Norway Grants shall be consistent with respect for these values and principles and abstain from supporting operations that may fail to do so. Their implementation shall comply with the fundamental rights and obligations enshrined in relevant instruments and standards.

Transparency, accountability, and cost efficiency shall be applied throughout implementation, together with good governance, partnership and multi-level governance, sustainable development, gender equality and non-discrimination.

Gender equality is a core value in the implementation of the EEA and Norway Grants and will be integrated throughout all programme areas, both as a guiding principle and through targeted activities in relevant programmes.

The EEA and Norway Grants support Beneficiary States in fulfilling their human rights obligations in accordance with international human rights standards.

3.2. Research and Innovation Programme Principles

The research and innovation programmes shall be designed in accordance with the following:

- Safeguarding fundamental principles and values in research and innovation, such as research ethics and integrity, academic freedom and open science, in line with the Pact for research and innovation in Europe and the Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research, is fundamental. This encompasses ethical and human rights dimensions of new technology, including artificial intelligence.

[2] FAIR - Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable. The objective of FAIR data principles is to make data easier to share and reuse.

- All projects shall reflect the principles of research integrity as outlined in the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

- To support increased participation of the Beneficiary states in the EU Framework Programme for research and innovation, the programmes shall foster synergies and complementarities with the Framework Programme and the EU Missions. The project selection and management under the programme area shall be aligned with the principles of the Framework Programme as far as possible. This includes provisions on gender equality, non-discrimination and open science.

- The programmes and projects shall promote responsible international cooperation and follow the Council Recommendation of 23 May 2024 on enhancing research security (C/2024/3510).

- The programmes shall include considerations of the gender dimension in research and innovation content, unless the non-relevance of sex and/or gender analysis is indicated at topic level.

4. Research and Innovation Programme measures

Research and Innovation Programmes shall be implemented by way of the following types of projects:

4.1 Research and Innovation projects (R&I projects)

R&I projects consist of research and innovation activities that aim primarily to establish new knowledge and/or to explore the feasibility of a new or improved technology, product, process, service or solution. For this purpose, they may include basic and applied research, technology development and integration, testing, demonstration and validation of a small-scale prototype in a laboratory or simulated environment.

Participation of at least one partner from a Donor State is mandatory in all R&I projects, unless otherwise stipulated in the Programme Agreement.

The minimum duration of R&I projects is 36 months and the minimum grants size will be 800,000 EUR, unless otherwise stipulated in the Programme Agreement.

The cooperation in R&I projects is founded on equal partnerships between entities involved in research and development in the Donor State(s) and entities involved in research and development in the Beneficiary States, with the Beneficiary State playing a leading role.

R&I projects will be selected through calls for proposals in accordance with the Programme Agreement and this Guideline.

4.2 Coordination and Capacity projects (C&C projects)

Coordination and Capacity (C&C) projects consist of activities, other than research and innovation, which contribute to capacity-building and further developing research and innovation communities. Activities may include, but are not limited to, dissemination, awareness-raising and communication, networking, coordination or support services, policy dialogues, and mutual learning excercises and studies. Coordination and Capacity projects can exceptionally include research and innovation activities if the main activities of the project involve capacity-building. Coordination and Capacity projects will be selected through calls for proposals in accordance with the Programme Agreement and the selection procedure in Chapter 7 of the Regulations.

4.3 Pre-defined projects

Pre-defined projects as identified in accordance with Article 6.5 of the Regulations.

5. Programme Operator

In addition to the provisions in Article 5.6 of the Regulations, the responsibilities of the Programme Operator in Research and Innovation Programmes shall include:

a) taking the necessary steps to establish and maintain English as the main language of communication in the Programme;
b) ensuring access to a well-functioning Electronic Proposal Submission System (EPSS), see point 9.2;
c) ensuring that the members of the Cooperation Committee and the Selection Committee or the Regional Programme Committee, are granted access to all documents necessary for the performance of their tasks, including but not limited to project proposals and ranking lists, sufficiently in advance of any meetings;
d) developing, publishing and updating guides in English in consultation with the Donor Programme Partner(s), including but not limited to, a guide for evaluators, a guide for applicants, an implementation guide for project promoters and partners;
e) developing and publishing templates in English in consultation with the Donor Programme Partner(s), including but not limited to, a template for project contracts, a template for partnership agreements (based on the provided template), and templates for reporting documents, based on relevant templates of the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation;
f) organising appropriate capacity building measures to support the development of good programme and project management practices;

g) organising appropriate capacity building measures to support the project partners in preparing for joint participation in international initiatives, in particular the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation; and
h) contributing to relevant experience-sharing and capacity-building across Beneficiary State and Donor State institutions.

6. Donor Programme Partner

In addition to provisions contained in the Regulations concerning the role of Donor Programme Partners, the responsibilities of the Donor Programme Partners in Research and Innovation Programmes shall include:

a) contributing to the dissemination of information about Research and Innovation Programmes and calls in the Donor State(s), including partner search activities, communication with Donor State partners, and dissemination of results;
b) liaising between Programme Operators from different Beneficiary States and Donor State entities in order to promote the sharing of good practice in Research and Innovation Programmes and project management;
c) recommending Selection Committee or Regional Programme Committee members representing the Donor State; and
d) participate as observer in the Selection Committee or Regional Programme Committee if the Donor Programme Partner is not a member.

7. Cooperation Committee in Research and Innovation Programmes

In addition to the provisions on the composition and tasks described in Article 4.3 of the Regulations, the tasks of the Cooperation Committee shall include deciding in consensus on:

a) the guide for evaluators, the guide for applicants and the implementation guide for project promoters and partners;
b) the selection criteria and the texts for the calls for proposals; and
c) the procedures for selection of projects.

8. Regional Research and Innovation Programmes

If stipulated in the Programme Agreements, Research and Innovation Programmes in two or more Beneficiary States can collaborate on the design and implementation of joint calls as one regional programme. In such cases the programme is a Regional Research and Innovation Programme.

The provisions of the Regulations and Research and Innovation Guidelines concerning the Cooperation Committee and Selection Committee shall not apply to Regional

Research and Innovation programmes. They will instead have a Regional Programme Committee.

The Programme Operators shall establish the Regional Programme Committee with representatives from the Donor States and the Beneficiary States. The Programme Operators may establish the Regional Programme Committee as soon as the Donor Programme Partners(s) and Programme Operators are designated.

9. Calls for proposals for Research and Innovation projects

Chapter 9 only applies to Research and Innovation projects as described in Chapter 4, unless stated otherwise.

9.1 Calls for proposals

The following provisions apply in addition to the provisions of Article 7.3 of the Regulations.

The call documents comprise the main call text, the online application form provided in the Electronic Proposal Submission Service described in Chapter 9.2, the Guide for Applicants, and the Guide for Evaluators.

The main call text shall as a minimum comply with the following:

a) contain a clear description of the title, scope and thematic focus of the call;
b) ensure, to the extent possible, alignment with the requirements and structure of proposals in the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, such as data management plans, ethics assessments, pathways to impact, and guidance on the use of generative AI tools for the preparation of the proposal;
c) specify the eligibility criteria of the call, such as the minimum size of partnerships and/or duration of projects; and
d) specify the evaluation, selection and award criteria of the call, including scoring, weighting, and thresholds and tiebreakers.

9.1.1 Multilateral calls

To achieve the objectives of the programme, calls may be conducted in cooperation between several entities by way of Lead Agency procedures. The entity acting as the "Lead Agency" has the responsibility for receiving and evaluating proposals.

Subject to agreement between the Donor States and all concerned Beneficiary States, the organisation and implementation of a call for proposals may be delegated to an appropriate legal entity established either inside or outside the Beneficiary State. Alternatively, two or more Beneficiary States may decide to let the Programme Operator from one of these states act as the Lead Agency. Further provisions on the procedure to

be followed shall, as appropriate, be described in the Concept Note(s) and in the respective Programme Agreement(s).

In no case shall the implementation of the Lead Agency procedure affect the responsibility of the Beneficiary State(s) and the Programme Operator(s) for the effective management and control of the contribution under the country specific allocation and the individual Programme, respectively. The selection of projects and the award of grants shall in all cases follow the principles of good governance, transparency, equality, efficiency and zero tolerance towards corruption.

9.2 Electronic Proposal Submission Service (EPSS)

Proposals shall be submitted electronically and through a specific Electronic Proposal Submission Service (EPSS). The EPSS shall as a minimum support the following functionalities:

- possibility for applicants to edit the proposal until the closing date of the call.;
- access for evaluators (individual experts and Selection Committee members) to read all application documents online;
- communication with applicants, notably the sending out of evaluation reports after the selection; and
- submission of interim and final reports from projects funded, or the export of data for the funded project to another electronic online system for reporting and monitoring.

The EPSS may be established in cooperation between Programme Operators from two or more Beneficiary States.

9.3 Submission

Among the applicants in a proposed partnership, only the project promoter is authorised to submit a proposal. The call text specifies the deadline by which all proposals must be submitted.

The proposals shall be submitted through the EPSS. Proposals submitted in any other way will not be regarded as having been received by the Programme Operator.

A procedure for the withdrawal of a proposal by its project promoter shall be given in the Guide for Applicants. A withdrawn proposal will not subsequently be considered by the Programme Operator.

9.4 Reception and archiving by the Programme Operator

The date and time of receipt of the last version of submitted proposals are recorded by the EPSS. After the closing of the call, an acknowledgement of receipt is sent through

EPSS to the proposal project promoter containing the proposal title and the acronym and unique proposal identifier (proposal number).

Proposals shall be archived under secure conditions at all times. After completion of the selection the relevant documents shall be kept, for archiving and/or auditing.

10. Administrative and eligibility criteria

10.1 Eligibility of project promoters and project partners

The following provisions apply in addition to the provisions of Article 7.2 of the Regulations, unless otherwise stipulated in the Programme Agreement.

Any public or private entity, commercial or non-commercial, as well as non-governmental organisation, established as a legal person in a country other than the Donor States or Beneficiary State, is eligible to participate as project partners in Research and Innovation Programmes, if such participation is justified in terms of the enhanced contribution made to the aims of the Research and Innovation Programme.

10.2 General administrative criteria

The following administrative requirements apply to all proposals submitted under a call in Research and Innovation Programmes. The proposals shall:

a) describe the details of planned work, organized into major subdivisions (work packages), including the distribution of work between the project promoter and the project partners;
b) contain the detailed budget for the activities planned; and
c) comply with the call text, including all required administrative forms and the proposal description.

11. Selection Committee and international experts

Chapter 11 only applies to Research and Innovation projects, unless stated otherwise.

11.1 Selection Committee

Article 7.4.1 and 7.4.2 of the Regulations are replaced with:

For each call for proposals, the Programme Operator shall establish a Selection Committee that shall recommend the projects to be funded within the programme on the basis of an international expert review. The Selection Committee shall consist of at least three persons possessing the relevant expertise. At least one of them shall be external to the Programme Operator, Donor Programme Partner(s) and IPO(s). The composition of the Selection Committee(s) shall be further specified in the Programme Agreement.

The Cooperation Committee shall approve the nominees to the Selection Committee prior to the Programme Operator's decision. The FMC, the embassies of the Donor States and the National Focal Point shall be invited to participate in the Selection Committee as observers.

11.2 International experts

Each proposal that meets the administrative and eligibility criteria shall be reviewed by three international experts in accordance with the selection procedure described in Chapter 12 of this Guideline. Costs related to experts shall be covered from the management cost of the Programme Operator.

International experts must be employed by or have an equivalent affiliation with an organisation outside the respective Beneficiary State and the Donor States. International experts must conduct their tasks in a personal capacity and in performing the work, must not represent any organisation (see further in 11.2.1).

Experts are required to have skills and knowledge appropriate to the areas of activity in which they are asked to assist. They must also have a high level of professional experience in the public or private sector in one or more of the following areas or activities:

- research in the relevant scientific and technological fields or field of innovation;
- administration, management or evaluation of projects;
- use of the results of research, technological development and/or innovation projects;
- technology transfer and innovation; and
- international cooperation in science, technology and/or innovation.

The Programme Operator shall establish or make use of a pool of international experts containing the details of suitable candidates in cooperation with the Donor Programme Partner.

The pool of international experts may be established in cooperation between Programme Operators from two or more Beneficiary States.

The Programme Operator(s) may at any time include any individual with the appropriate skills in the pool.

The Programme Operator may request access to the European Commission database of experts used in the evaluation of projects in EU Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation in order to supplement its pool of international experts. Other dedicated expert identification tools may also be used.

To evaluate the proposals submitted in response to a call, the Programme Operator draws up a list of appropriate experts (including, if necessary, a reserve list). The lists are drawn up primarily using as selection criteria:

- a high level of expertise; and
- an appropriate range of competencies.

Providing the above conditions can be satisfied a reasonable gender balance shall also be taken into consideration.

In constituting the lists of experts, the Programme Operator also takes into account, as necessary, their abilities to appreciate the industrial and/or societal dimension, and policy relevance, of the topics covered by the call. Experts must also have the appropriate language skills required for the proposals to be evaluated.

The list of experts to be used for evaluation sessions is decided by the Programme Operator. The names of the experts assigned to individual proposals are not made public. However, the Programme Operator shall within six months from publication of the decision to award project grants, publish on the internet the list of experts used for the evaluation of projects in the call.

11.2.1 Terms of appointment, code of conduct and conflict of interest

The Programme Operator shall conclude an 'appointment letter' with each expert. The appointment letter binds the expert to a code of conduct, establishes the essential provisions regarding confidentiality, and specifies in particular the description of work, the conditions of payment, and reimbursement of expenses.

When appointing experts, the Programme Operator shall take all necessary steps to ensure that they are not faced with a conflict of interest in relation to the proposals on which they are required to give an opinion.

To this end, experts are required to sign a declaration that no such conflict of interest exists at the time of their appointment and that they undertake to inform the Programme Operator if one should arise in the course of their duties. When so informed, the Programme Operator takes all necessary actions to remove the conflict of interest.

In addition, all experts are required to confirm that they have no conflict of interest for each proposal that they are asked to examine at the moment of the evaluation.

The declaration makes a distinction between 'disqualifying' and 'potential' conflicts of interest.

When a disqualifying conflict of interest is reported by the expert or established by the Programme Operator on the basis of any available source of information, the expert shall not evaluate the proposal concerned.

Experts who are employed by one of the applicant organisations in a proposal are normally considered as facing a 'disqualifying' conflict of interest.

When a potential conflict of interest is reported by the expert or brought to the attention of the Programme Operator by any means, the Programme Operator will consider the circumstances of the case and will decide, on the basis of the objective elements of information at its disposal, on the existence of a disqualifying conflict of interest. If such a disqualifying conflict is established, the expert will be excluded.

12. Selection procedures

Chapter 12 only applies to Research and Innovation projects, unless stated otherwise.

Chapter 12 on selection procedures replaces Article 7.6 of the Regulations.

12.1 Administrative and eligibility review

The Programme Operator shall review the proposal against the administrative and eligibility criteria set in the call for proposals and in Chapter 10 of this Guideline.

The Programme Operator shall set the procedures to follow if one or more of the administrative criteria have not been fulfilled in the call for proposals.

If it becomes clear at any point in the selection process that one or more of the eligibility criteria have not been fulfilled, the proposal is declared ineligible by the Programme Operator, and is withdrawn from any further examination.

The Programme Operator shall as soon as possible after deciding that a proposal is ineligible, inform the Cooperation Committee and clarify the reasons for the decision.

The Programme Operator will during the eligibility check deem a proposal ineligible on grounds of “scope” only in clear-cut cases. The Selection Committee or the Regional Programme Committee will review the cases of where proposals have been rejected on the grounds of "scope" before the Programme Operator makes its decision.

12.2 Expert evaluation

The Programme Operator shall submit eligible proposals to international expert evaluation in line with Chapter 11.2 of this Guideline.

12.2.1 Selection criteria

The experts shall score the proposal according to the following selection criteria, and any additional criteria specified in a call for proposal:

1. Excellence:
   Clarity and pertinence of the project's objectives, and the extent to which the proposed work is ambitious, and goes beyond the state-of-the-art. Soundness of the proposed methodology, including the underlying concepts, models, assumptions, interdisciplinary approaches, appropriate consideration of the gender dimension in research and innovation content, and the quality of open science practices including sharing and management of research outputs and engagement of citizens, civil society and end users where appropriate.
2. Impact:
   Credibility of the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts specified in the call text, and the likely scale and significance of the contributions due to the project.
   Suitability and quality of the measures to maximize expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities.

3. Implementation:
   Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks, and appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages, and the resources overall.
   Capacity and role of each participant, and extent to which the consortium as a whole brings together the necessary expertise.

4. Bilateral dimension:
   a. Added value of bilateral cooperation for excellence
   b. Added value of bilateral cooperation on impact

Any proposal that contravenes fundamental ethical principles, which does not respect the values and principles set in Article 1.3.1 of the Regulations and/or does not fulfil the conditions set out in the Programme Agreement or in the call for proposals shall not be selected. Thresholds for some or all of the criteria shall be set by the Cooperation Committee, such that any proposal failing to achieve the threshold scores will be rejected. In addition, an overall threshold may also be set. The thresholds to be applied to each criterion as well as any overall threshold shall be included in the call documents.

According to the specific nature of the funding schemes and the call, it may be decided to weight the criteria. The weightings to be applied to each criterion shall be included in the call documents.

12.2.2 Proposal scoring

Experts examine the issues to be considered comprising each evaluation criterion, and score these on a scale from 0 to 5. Half point scores may be given. For each criterion under examination, score values indicate the following assessments:

0. The proposal fails to address the criterion under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.
1. Poor. The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
2. Fair. While the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, there are significant weaknesses.
3. Good. The proposal addresses the criterion well, although improvements would be necessary.
4. Very Good. The proposal addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are still possible.
5. Excellent. The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.

A ‘minor shortcoming’ is an issue that relates only to a marginal aspect of the proposal with respect to the criterion and/or can easily be rectified (it will not impact the scoring).

A ‘shortcoming’ is a problem that relates to an important aspect of the proposal. It impacts the scoring but does not render the proposal inappropriate for funding, i.e. the proposal is still expected to lead to useful results with positive impact.

A ‘significant weakness’ means that the proposal addresses the criterion in a limited and/or not sufficiently effective way (will lower the score below threshold). This can also be the case when the proposal includes a large number of shortcomings, each one of them not rendering the proposal inappropriate for funding, though all together make the proposal not addressing the criterion sufficiently in an effective way.

12.2.3 Evaluation procedure

12.2.3.1 Briefing of the experts

The Programme Operator is responsible for the briefing of experts before evaluation sessions. The briefing of the experts shall at minimum cover:

- the fundamental values and principles to be borne in mind when assessing proposals;
- standard evaluation procedure;
- individual evaluation and scoring;
- evaluating the excellence, impact and quality of the implementation criteria;
- guidance on the use of generative AI tools for the preparation of the proposal;
- implicit gender bias;
- confidentiality; and
- conflict of interest.

12.2.3.2 Individual evaluation of proposals

In the initial phase of the evaluation each expert works individually and gives scores and comments for each criterion.

They also indicate if the proposal:

- falls entirely out of the scope of the call for proposals;
- deals with sensitive ethical issues, including use of human embryonic stem cells (hESC) and human embryos (hE);
- is compliant with the "Do no significant harm principle" (DNSH) in accordance with the EU Taxonomy Regulations and provide comments in the case the answer to the question is 'Partially', 'No' or 'Cannot be assessed'; and
- involves the use and/or development of AI-based systems and/or techniques.

After the individual evaluation of a proposal, the expert completes an individual evaluation report confirming his/her individual reading and assessment.

If a proposal is considered to be out of scope by all individual experts, it may be considered to be ineligible and may not be passed on to the consensus stage, in accordance with the procedure specified in the guide for evaluators.

12.2.3.3 Consensus assessment

Once all the experts to whom a proposal has been assigned have completed their individual assessments, the evaluation progresses to a consensus assessment, representing their common views.

Scores and comments are set out in the consensus report.

Comments should be suitable for feedback to the proposal project promoter.

If applicable, they also come to a common view on the questions of scope and on ethics, as mentioned above.

If during the consensus discussion it is found to be impossible to bring all the experts to a common point of view on any particular aspect of the proposal, the Programme Operator official in charge of the evaluation may ask additional experts to examine the proposal.

The outcome of the consensus step is the consensus report, approved by all the experts. In the case that it is impossible to reach a consensus, the report sets out the majority view of the experts but also records any dissenting views from any particular expert(s).

The Programme Operator will take the necessary steps to assure the quality of the consensus reports, with particular attention given to clarity, consistency, and an appropriate level of detail.

If important changes are necessary, the reports will be referred back to the experts concerned.

The signing of the consensus report completes the consensus step.

12.2.3.4 Panel review

The Programme Operator in consultation with the Donor Programme Partner(s), shall decide whether it is appropriate to include a panel review within the selection procedure. The practical arrangements shall be determined in the light of the nature of the call and number of proposals submitted to it. Such arrangements and specific procedural rules to be followed by the panel shall be detailed in the guide for applicants. All stakeholders shall be promptly notified of the decision to adopt a panel procedure and of the procedure to be followed.

The panel is the final step involving international experts, which allows the experts to compare the results of the consensus stage across proposals evaluated by different teams of experts. It allows them to formulate their recommendations to the Selection Committee or Regional Programme Committee having had an overview of the results of the consensus step.

12.3 Finalisation of evaluation and award of project grants by the Programme Operator

The Programme Operator shall examine the eligibility of the proposed budget and whether the requested funding is appropriate for each proposal. For the budgets of Donor project partners, the Programme Operator may consult the Donor Programme Partners in order to assess whether the requested funding is appropriate.

The Programme Operator shall prepare a preliminary ranking list based on the international experts' evaluation of the proposals that passed the evaluation thresholds. Due account is taken of the scores received and of any advice from the experts. It will also

take account of the available budget, the strategic objectives of the programme, as well as the overall balance of proposals to be funded. A suggested grant amount is determined for each of these proposals.

The Selection or Regional Programme Committee is granted access to proposals and evaluations and presented with a scored list of proposals the Programme Operator has found eligible, including the suggested funding for each proposal. If an expert-panel evaluation procedure is used, the Selection or Regional Programme Committee is presented with the ranking lists prepared by the panel(s).

The Selection or Regional Programme Committee shall review the Programme Operator's preliminary ranking list and on the basis of this, draw up a final ranking list in accordance with the call for proposals. The Programme Operator then issues individual decisions to award a grant to projects based on the final ranking list approved by the Selection or Regional Programme Committee, for those projects for which grants are available.

In case the final ranking list recommended by the Selection Committee or Regional Programme Committee reveals that a small amount of funding prevents the inclusion of another project onto the funded list, the Programme Operator may, acting on a proposal from the Selection Committee, apply minor budget cuts uniformly across all projects, not exceeding 3% of the requested budget. The Programme Operator is otherwise not allowed to modify the final ranking list.

During the selection meeting of the Selection Committee or Regional Programme Committee, the Programme Operator should address any aspects that would need to be modified before concluding the contract, based on the advice of the experts. This can include any conditions on the award of funding as suggested by the Selection Committee.

The Programme Operator shall provide the FMC and/or NMFA as applicable with the list of selected projects no later than two weeks after the decision on grant awards and at the same time publish the list on the Programme website. The Programme Operator shall provide any relevant documents in English upon request.

12.4 Feedback to applicants

After the selection procedure is complete and the decision on the award of grants is made public, the Programme Operator makes the individual expert evaluation reports and the Consensus Report and/or the ESR, as applicable, available to the project promoter of each evaluated proposal. The project promoter shall share this information with all project partners. The Guide for Applicants will indicate the deadline for the dispatch of these reports.

The Programme Operator will not change the Consensus Report or the ESR that forms part of the Panel Report, except if necessary to improve readability or, exceptionally, to

remove any factual errors or inappropriate comments that may have escaped earlier proof-reading. The scores will never be changed.

For those proposals rejected after failing an evaluation threshold, the comments contained in the Consensus Report and/or the ESR may only be complete for those criteria examined up to the point when the threshold was failed.

Project promoters of proposals found to be ineligible will be informed of the grounds for such a decision.

12.5 Reserve List

The Selection Committee may designate a number of proposals to be kept in reserve. Once it is clear that sufficient budget has become available to fund one or more of these projects the Programme Operator may in line with the Programme Agreement award a grant to projects on the reserve list in accordance with Chapter 12.3 and begin preparation of project contracts in accordance with Chapter 13.

12.6 Programme Operator rejection decisions

The Programme Operator formally decides to reject those proposals found to be ineligible, failing any of the thresholds for evaluation criteria, and those which, because they fall below a certain ranking, cannot be funded because the available budget is insufficient.

After a rejection decision, project promoters of rejected proposals are informed in writing of the Programme Operator's decision. The letter informing them also includes an explanation of the reasons for rejection.

12.7 Appeals

Guides for applicants and evaluators shall describe the appeals procedure and deadlines applicable.

Grounds for appeals may include rejections based on administrative and eligibility criteria and conflict of interest. The opinions and scores given by experts and panels will not be subject to appeals.

13. Project contract and partnership agreements

The provisions of Chapter 13 apply in addition to the provisions of Article 7.9 and 7.10 of the Regulations.

The project contract and partnership agreement templates shall be published in English alongside the call documents, at the latest by the time the call results are announced.

Article 7.10.3 of the Regulations is replaced by the following: The partnership agreement shall be based on a partnership agreement template provided by the Research Council of Norway. The template shall be based on the Horizon Europe (DESCA) model. When the project promoter submits the draft partnership agreement to the Programme Operator, it must document and justify any deviations from the template.

14. Reporting requirements and project reviews

The following provisions apply to all projects under Research and Innovation Programmes.

To the extent possible, reporting templates shall follow a similar structure to the relevant parts of the reporting templates used in the European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

14.1 Reporting from project promoters to the Programme Operator

The project promoters shall report to the Programme Operator in English in accordance with the following provisions:

14.1.1 Projects with a duration shorter than 24 months

For projects with a duration shorter than 24 months the project promoters shall only submit a final project report upon the completion of the project ('final report'), in accordance with Chapter 14.3.

14.1.2 Projects with a duration of 24 months or longer, but shorter than 36 months

For projects with a duration of 24 months or longer, but shorter than 36 months, the project promoters shall submit

- a midterm scientific/technical report (‘interim report’) in accordance with Chapter 14.2, and
- a final project report upon the completion of the project ('final report'), in accordance with Chapter 14.3.

The Programme Operator can stipulate in the call for proposals and/or project contract to instead conduct a midterm review of the projects as an alternative to the project promoters submitting an interim report.

In the case of a midterm review, the Programme Operator decides how the review will be conducted, including what topics it will cover and what documentation the project promoter is required to submit for the review. The midterm review shall focus on providing guidance on the technical and scientific implementation of the projects.

The midterm review can take the form of a dialogue between international experts and the project promoter and project partners. If there are implementation issues which are specific or unique to the Beneficiary State or region, the dialogue may in addition to the international experts include national experts. The Programme Operator decides on how to recruit the experts and the format of the dialogue, including if it will be conducted physically or digitally.

14.1.3 Projects with a duration of 36 months or longer

For projects with a duration of 36 months or longer the project promoters shall submit

- a midterm scientific/technical ('interim report') in line with Chapter 14.2, and
- a final project report upon the completion of the project ('final report'), in accordance with Chapter 14.3.

In addition, the Programme Operator shall conduct a midterm review based on the interim report. The midterm review shall be conducted with a focus on providing guidance on the technical and scientific implementation of the projects.

The midterm review shall take the form of a dialogue between international experts and the project promoter and project partners, unless specified otherwise in the Programme Agreement. If there are implementation issues which are specific or unique to the Beneficiary State or region, the dialogue may in addition to the international experts include national experts. The Programme Operator decides on how to recruit the experts and the format of the dialogue, including if it will be conducted physically or digitally.

14.1.4 Assessment of reports

The Programme Operator shall assess the final report and deliverables in accordance with the terms of the project contract and present the reports and assessment results to the Cooperation Committee or Regional Programme Committee at the annual meeting. They may be assisted in this task by independent experts through technical project reviews.

All project partners shall receive a copy of interim and final report at the same time as they are submitted to the Programme Operator.

14.2 Interim report

During the course of the project, the project promoter shall submit one midterm (interim) report at a date set out in the project contract.

The interim report shall comprise:

a) an explanation of the work carried out by the project partners;

b) an overview of the progress of work towards the objectives of the project, including milestones and deliverables identified in the project contract;
c) explanations justifying any deviations between the carried out work and the planned work according to the project contract and suggestions on updates of the planned work if necessary;
d) an update and explanation of critical risks to the project, including foreseen risks, unforeseen risks and the state of play for mitigation measures;
e) details on the exploitation and dissemination of the results, including status on the pathways to impact, and the amended data management plan;
f) a summary suitable for a general audience for publication by the Programme Operator; and
g) a financial summary from the project promoter presenting the financial progress of the project.

14.3 Final report

The project promoter shall submit a final report, within 60 days after the end of the project as stipulated in the project contract. It consists of two parts, a technical part and a financial part.

The technical part shall contain:

1. an overview of the results of the project;
2. a description of the foreseen impact of the project, including the pathways to impact, socio-economic impact and its wider societal implications;
3. a summary suitable for a general audience for publication by the Programme Operator; and
4. a full list of publications relating to the results of the project.

The financial part shall contain:

1. a 'final financial summary ' from the project promoter covering the whole project;
2. distribution of the financial contribution between the project promoter and project partners; and
3. proof of expenditure and/or proof of conditions for each partner, if required in accordance with Chapter 15.

14.4 Format of reports and transmission modalities

The project promoter shall transmit the reports and other deliverables to the Programme Operator exclusively by electronic means, using the forms and templates provided in the EPSS.

The reports submitted to the Programme Operator, in particular their publishable parts, shall be of a suitable quality to enable direct publication without any additional editing.

15. Financial aspects

Chapter 15 applies to all projects under Research and Innovation Programmes unless otherwise specified.

15.1 Indirect costs (overheads)

The provisions in Chapter 15.1 replace the provisions of Article 8.5 of the Regulations in the case of Research and Innovation projects under the Research and Innovation Programmes.

Indirect eligible costs shall be determined by applying a flat rate of 25% of the total direct eligible costs, excluding direct eligible costs for subcontracting and the costs of resources made available by third parties which are not used on the premises of the beneficiary, as well as financial support to third parties. The 25% flat rate for indirect costs shall not be applied in the following cases:

a) when the project grant is awarded in the form of simplified cost options which include indirect costs, or
b) when indirect costs are calculated based on actual indirect costs for those project promoters and/or project partners that have an analytical accounting system to identify indirect costs incurred in direct relationship with the eligible direct costs attributed to the project.

If the project constitutes state aid exempted under Article 25 of the GBER[3], a maximum of 20% flat rate for calculating overheads (including costs of materials, supplies and similar products, incurred directly as a result of the project) can be applied (in line with Article 25(3)(e) GBER, Chapter III "Specific provisions for different categories of aid").

15.2 Payments

The Programme Operator shall ensure timely transfer to the project promoter of an advance payment, interim payments and a payment of the final balance.

The purpose of the advance payment and the interim payments is to ensure that the project promoters and partners have a positive cash-flow during the project. The rate of the advance payment and the frequency of submission of interim payment requests / declarations of expenditure of funds received shall in all cases ensure positive cash-flow

[3] Regulation - 2023/1315 - EN - EUR-Lex
Regulation - 651/2014 - EN - General Block Exemption Regulation - EUR-Lex

and appropriate provisions shall be set in the project contract and the partnership agreement.

Payments shall be made by the Programme Operator to the project promoter within 15 days after the Programme Operator's approval of payment requests / declarations of expenditure of funds received for the project. The project promoter shall ensure that all appropriate payments to the other project partners are made without unjustified delay, and not later than 30 days after the project promoter has received payment from the Programme Operator.

The Beneficiary State and the Programme Operator shall ensure financial flows that enable payments from the Project Promoter to the Donor project partner to be made in euros. This requirement shall not apply where national legislation explicitly prevents such arrangements.

15.3 Proof of expenditure

The following provisions replace the provisions of Article 8.12.5 of the Regulations.

In line with the responsibility of the Programme Operator to verify expenditure declared, requirements for the submission of proof of expenditure shall be set in the project contract and the partnership agreement, where relevant.

Proof of expenditure by project promoters and project partners shall not be submitted where the total eligible costs reimbursed by the grant to the respective project promoter or project partner does not exceed EUR 430,000. Where proof of expenditure shall be submitted, this shall be submitted once with the final project report referred to in Chapter 14.3.

Project promoters and project partners may submit proof of expenditure by way of any option identified in Article 8.12.3 of the Regulations.

15.4 Proof of conditions fulfilled for simplified cost options

The following provisions apply in addition to Article 8.13 of the Regulations.

Proof of conditions by project promoters and project partners shall not be submitted where the total eligible costs reimbursed by the grant to the respective project promoter or project partner does not exceed EUR 430,000. Where proof of conditions shall be submitted, this shall be submitted once with the final project report referred to in Chapter 14.3.

15.5 Record-keeping and maintenance of financial documents

Receipted invoices or accounting documents of equivalent probative value shall be maintained by the project promoter and project partner for all costs incurred. Proof of activities shall be maintained for costs covered by simplified cost options.

15.6 Audits

Upon request by the Financial Mechanism Committee, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the EFTA Board of Auditors and/or the Office of the Auditor General of Norway, the project promoter or project partner shall grant access to the receipted invoices, accounting documents and/or proof of conditions fulfilled referred to above. Upon request by the Audit Authority, a project promoter or project partner located within the respective Beneficiary State, shall grant access to the receipted invoices, accounting documents and/or proof of conditions fulfilled referred to above.

Donor project partners shall not be subject to audits initiated by national audit authorities in the Beneficiary States on the basis of national regulations of the Beneficiary States.

16. Intellectual property rights, exploitation and dissemination

The rules governing the dissemination of research results shall ensure that, where appropriate, the participants protect the intellectual property generated in the funded projects, and use and disseminate those results. The project promoter and project partners shall follow the principles on Open Access as described in the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation when exploiting and disseminating results, in particular in relation to publications.

All communication of the research results, including publications, websites, events etc., shall include the following statement to indicate that the results of the project were generated with financial support from the EEA/Norwegian Financial Mechanism: "The research leading to these results has received funding from the [EEA]/ [Norway] Grants 2021-2028."

The Research and Innovation Programmes shall reflect and promote the general principles of the Commission Recommendation (C(2008) 1329) on the management of intellectual property in knowledge transfer activities, and the Code of Practice for universities and other public research organisations of 10 April 2008, and the OECD Principles and Guidelines for Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities of 22 October 2003.

“Results” mean any tangible or intangible output of the project, such as data, knowledge or information, that is generated in the project, whatever its form or nature, whether or

not it can be protected, as well as any rights attached to it, including intellectual property rights.

Results arising from work carried out in projects under the Research and Innovation Programme, shall be the property of the participant carrying out the work generating those results.

Where several participants have jointly carried out work generating results and where their respective share of the work cannot be ascertained, they shall have joint ownership of such results.

An agreement shall be established regarding the allocation and terms of exercise of joint ownership. The participants must ensure that the agreement on the joint ownership of results does not contain any provision contrary to the project contract.

Where no joint ownership agreement has yet been concluded, each of the joint owners shall be entitled to grant non-exclusive licenses to third parties, without any right to sub licence, subject to the following conditions:

a) prior notice must be given to the other joint owners; and
b) fair and reasonable compensation must be provided to the other joint owners.

“Background” means any data, know-how or information whatever its form or nature, tangible or intangible, including any rights such as intellectual property rights which is:

a) held by participants prior to their accession to the project;
b) needed for carrying out the project or for exploiting the results of the project; and
c) identified by the participants.

Participants may define the background needed for the purposes of the project in a written agreement. Any background not defined in such agreement are considered excluded from the project. Later inclusions of background must be agreed upon by the Participants and, where appropriate, may exclude specific background.

The project contract shall establish further rights and obligations of participants concerning dissemination, use and access rights.

17. Evaluations of Research and Innovation Programmes

The evaluations of Research and Innovation Programmes shall be initiated and coordinated by the Programme Operator. The evaluations shall be carried out by independent experts or entities in accordance with Article 10.1 of the Regulations.