

ESF RESEARCH NETWORKING PROGRAMMES – FACTS AND FIGURES

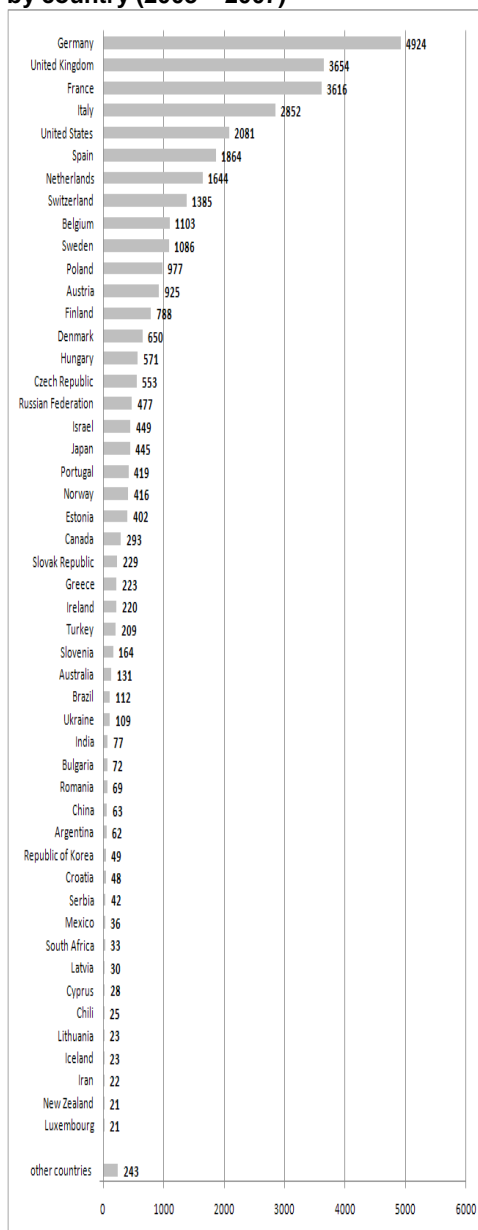
The Research Networking Programme scheme has a special place among ESF synergy instruments encouraging and stimulating cooperation between researchers and Member Organisations by creating a platform for nationally funded research groups to advance the frontiers of science. The instrument, active since 1975, has promoted European level collaboration for more than three decades with great success. The RNPs support a range of activities in which over 6,500 researchers participate annually.

Table 1 shows participations by type of activity and Chart 1 by country in RNPs activities.

Table 1: Participants per RNP activity by year

	2006	2007	TOTAL
workshops/conferences	6227	5678	11905
Exchange	685	611	1296
Schools/ Training	491	441	932
TOTAL	7403	6730	14133

Chart 1: Participants across RNP activities by country (2003 – 2007)



In 2005 ESF commissioned a study analysing the impact of its networking instruments, including Scientific Networks and Programmes now replaced by Research Networking Programmes. The study concluded:

“ESF is almost unique in providing networking funding, that aims to encourage and to level research funded by others in Europe.”

“Both the survey and the interview evidence strongly support the idea that these instruments foster research processes and help participants do and produce more than would otherwise have been the case. (...) there are clear cases where, for example, ESF instruments set common research agendas that would not otherwise easily have been tackled or create instrumentalities and infrastructures that enable progress.”

In the same year, after 30 years of operation, ESF reorganised the instrument. The ESF Scientific Networks scheme was discontinued in 2004 and the Programmes instrument has taken over its role.

Since 2005 ESF announces a common call for proposals for all research domains which facilitates interdisciplinary collaborations. In addition, a number of improvements in the assessment and selection process have been introduced. The recommended proposals are selected following a process of independent, external peer review. The referees, including referees suggested by the MOs, assess applications against a set of criteria defined in the Call. Subsequently, the ESF Standing Committees discuss the proposals and the external assessments and decide which proposals to recommend for funding. In the case of multidisciplinary proposals (in the 2008 Call 44 proposals out of 112) each Committee involved provides its own decision.

The selection criteria are strict and only excellent proposals with significance for European research are recommended which is reflected in a rather low success threshold (17,85% in 2008 Call).

On the basis of these recommendations one joint list of proposals across all research domains is agreed upon for submission to Member Organisations. At the same time all proposers receive information on the ESF decision concerning their application together with copies of the external reviews and the recommendations of the relevant Standing Committees.

ESF Member organisations decide each year which recommended proposals they will fund, thus enabling researchers from their country to participate as full partners in the networking activities.

Chart 2 shows the participation of ESF Member Organisation countries in the 46 running RNPs in 2008.

Chart 2: Participation of ESF MO countries in running RNPs in 2008 (by number of RNPs)

