

RM ROADMAP

Consensus Document for Country Community Croatia

Co-Creation Session 1: Understanding the landscape: National Networks and Associations

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RM ROADMAP

“Creating Framework Conditions for Research Management to Strengthen the European Research Area”

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Understanding the landscape: National Networks and Associations

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1. Introduction

This is an important moment for the research management (RM) community in Europe. The European Commission (EC) and countries across Europe want to better understand the current research management landscape to further strengthen the European Research Area (ERA).

Research management includes a broad range of professionals supporting researchers to achieve excellence in research. For the purpose of this Co-Creation exercise, Research Managers (RMs) are to be considered as broad as possible including: research policy advisers, research managers, financial support staff, data stewards, research infrastructure operators, knowledge transfer officers, business developers, knowledge brokers, innovation managers, etc. For simplicity, we use the term research management but this exercise covers also other terms such as research support, research management and administration, professionals at the interface of science and other terms which are used as the norm in the national landscapes across Europe.

The RM Roadmap Knowledge and Community Platform (KCP) brings research managers together to shape the future of the profession and support the strengthening of an inclusive research management community in Europe. The KCP is a place where research managers share their views and introduce issues for discussion in a solution-focused endeavour. RM Roadmap Ambassadors lead the discussions for each country on the Knowledge and Community Platform, supported by national and regional RM networks.

This Co-Creation exercise is the biggest collaboration between RM networks ever to take place in Europe. With a focus on learning insights from RMs, the Co-Creation exercise seeks to establish a robust framework that can support professional growth and collaboration across the EU and associated countries.

By 2023, 40 country communities have been established within the RM Roadmap Ambassador Network. The RM Roadmap project will use the outcomes from this Co-Creation exercise to make a roadmap for the future of research management in Europe and to build and exchange solid knowledge on career framework opportunities, upskilling and networking for research managers. RM Roadmap will ultimately build a value proposition for policy makers and institutional leaders who want to strengthen and modernise their research support departments.

This **consensus document for Country Community Croatia** contains the outcomes of the **First Co-Creation Session - Understanding the landscape: National Networks and Associations**.

A short summary of the main outcomes from the Co-Creation exercise is included in section 2. More information about the topic of RM National Networks and Associations is detailed in section 3. Recommendations about best practices, challenges and lessons learnt about (formal or informal) national networks, associations, communities are provided in section 4.

For more information about the RM Roadmap initiative, the reader can consult the following website: www.rmroadmap.eu

2. Summary of Co-Creation Session 1

The first Co-Creation process, on the understanding of the landscape of RM national networks and the needs of the national RM community was conducted according to the project timeline. The process started on October 2nd and finished on October 13th, 2023. The invitation for the first Co-Creation session was sent to more than 1.000 email addresses, followed by an intensive campaign on social media and designated web pages (national Horizon Europe webpage, University of Rijeka and Split webpages, Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes and Ministry of Science and Education).

In total 104 members joined the Country Community Croatia on the Knowledge and Community Platform. Most of the members (more than 50%) come from research organisations, mainly universities and research institutes. There are also several RMs coming from SMEs and the NGO sector as well as Horizon Europe National contact points from the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes and policy advisers from the Ministry of Science and Education, covering almost all types of organisations from both the private and public sectors. Regarding the level of experience, some of the members have very valuable experience with more than 20 years working as RMs and very much appreciated this initiative. Some of the members are newcomers who also recognise the importance of this initiative.

Before the official start of the Co-Creation session, national RM Roadmap Ambassadors and Associate ambassadors discussed the national specificities and agreed on the joint approach that would be followed. During the process, ambassadors tried not to influence the direction of the discussion with their personal opinions while they supported the community to express their opinions in the most honest manner. It finally obtained an astonishing result of more than 100 members on the platform and a very fruitful discussion led by Ambassadors with 23 comments in total which are summarised in Section 3. Apart from the close collaboration of Ambassadors and Associate Ambassadors and the previously agreed common approach, the first Co-Creation session was announced already at the first national conference for research managers in Zagreb on 15 June 2023. During the conference, through a Slido session with different questions, partly in line with the questions posed in this Co-Creation session, ambassadors gathered their first insights. Some of them were also used for drafting the first Co-Creation session conclusions.

3. Discussion Outcomes of Co-Creation Session 1

The Croatian RM community is relatively small when it comes to the number of people skilled in providing research support activities compared to some other EU countries. However, as in other communities, RMs have multiple roles at their institutions providing a wide set of different services to boost R&I activities. Currently, there is no formal network of RMs in Croatia, but some networking activities, conducted by the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes (AMEUP) and the Ministry of Science and Education (MSE), were organised recently, giving baseline information about the current state of the art and setting the ground for the potential formalization of the network. Furthermore, MSE has supported Action 17 of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 showcasing its strong commitment to the professionalization of the RMs.

First of all, the Croatian RM community appreciated the initiative and the effort the project RM Roadmap was making in creating the future of the profession. Members have used the platform as an opportunity to share comments on the research managers' topics more widely than might have been envisaged with the first Co-Creation session. This confirms the need for Croatian members to be asked for their opinions and their desire for networking. Furthermore, it also showcases the need for the development of formal RM networks as a means primarily organised to provide structure, support and lobbying for the better recognition and upskilling, of research managers thus improving the quality of R&I activities. This was very clearly communicated by the majority of the members during the 1st Co-Creation session with comments that underlay the current situation in Croatia very well.

The main outcomes of the discussion can be summarised in several points:

- **Lack of recognition:** Even though some improvements on a national level have been seen lately, as stated previously, RMs are not recognised at the institutional or national level. Management of institutions is not aware of the changing research landscape and the importance of the profession. There is a lack of understanding of the daily tasks and responsibilities of RMs in general which stems from various factors, often rooted in the fact that many RMs started their careers with a single project that needed managing and with little or no support at all. To be recognised, RMs continuously need to negotiate, discuss with their superiors, and showcase the benefits and direct and indirect results of their work. This is still being done on a very personal level and with a bottom-up approach, which is not contributing to the policy or institutional recognition of RMs. Hence, the RM profession should have its own career path and promotion, not scientific and not administrative. RMs salaries are also usually in line with the mentioned perception of the RM role as administrators, specifically at public research institutions where they have salaries as any other administrative offices or departments.
- **Broad job description and high flexibility:** The Croatian RM community has confirmed that RMs have a wide-ranging job description, considered as broad as possible and going far beyond traditional administrative roles. Activities of RMs in Croatia differ depending on whether they work in a public/policy body, private sector, research institute or as a member of a higher education



institution (university/faculty/school). Sometimes RMs activities are more structured and staff is divided into specialized departments for different funding programmes, or for different project phases (i.e., project application/project implementation), or different aspects (financial/legal). However, the activities of RMs at the level of higher education institution (HEI) are generally defined more broadly and less specialized in a sense that a single research manager serves as an application consultant and administrator (for all calls), project manager, accounting consultant (HEI financial departments often do not have a designated person just for projects), legal support (for Consortium agreement, Grant Agreements, etc.), research ethics administrator, event organiser, contact point for young researchers and PhD students, in short; administrator/one-stop service for all issues connected to the support of research activities at HEI level. Furthermore, RMs not only assist and support researchers in writing research proposals and implementing research projects but very often they are the ones who completely create their own project proposals and implement their project activities as a part of their everyday job (CSA actions, ERA Talents as a good example). There are even cases where RMs are at the interface with scientific committees through all kinds of very scientifically focused roles, playing an important role in overseeing and facilitating research projects within institutions. The result is a very uneven and heterogeneous level of development of RMs in different institutions and regions. Furthermore, RMs often need to be particularly flexible in smaller communities or countries like Croatia where resources and research support might be limited. In addition, RM should be very creative and flexible in adapting project rules and dynamics to very often slow institutional administration.

- **Employment and working conditions:** Very much related to the above issues is non-sustainability in RMs' employment and high fluctuation of people involved in the RM activities. Uncompetitive salaries and poor career advancement opportunities pose a challenge for retaining experienced research managers in academia. Very often, RMs employed on the projects do not have permanent positions and lose their jobs when the projects end. If they do not have permanent jobs, people are more eager to leave, and institutions are losing sometimes excellent, highly educated, and skilled people leading to a problem in establishing an experienced team in the long term. Giving the fact that there is no formal education for RMs and people are usually "learning by doing", losing experienced people is hardly to replace in the short period of time. Legal regulations on employment, particularly on the use of temporary contracts with a limited number of renewals, hinder the retention of younger research managers. This system creates uncertainty and instability, making it difficult for institutions to retain valuable talent. Furthermore, the allure of better compensation and career prospects outside academia can lead to the departure of more experienced professionals. Regarding **salaries**, there are not many opportunities for promotion and **no career plans** in the majority of organisations, specifically public research organisations, because salaries have to be standardized for the whole institution and, as explained above, RMs are considered administrators having the same salaries as any other administrative staff. This being said, the management of institutions is more likely to divert extra financial resources to research staff salaries and conditions than to RMs.

- **Administrative overload due to governance:** Research managers in Croatia often find themselves burdened with administrative tasks, primarily due to the way governance is organised at research performing organisations. This administrative workload limits their capacity to engage in more strategic and value-added activities, such as fostering collaborations, RM network activities and ensuring the efficient utilization of research resources. The term "research manager" in Croatia is often used interchangeably with "project support", which overlooks the multifaceted nature of their responsibilities. Specialization within the field is lacking, leading to a situation where certain critical aspects of research management, such as strategic planning and data-driven science management, remain underdeveloped.
- **Lack of financial support for upskilling:** Options for financial support for upskilling are rather limited, especially at the institutional level. Unfortunately, the scarcity of resources and funding allocated to RMs professional growth and high membership fees for professional associations of RMs hampers their ability to stay up-to-date with evolving best and state-of-the-art practices and trends in research management. The majority of the institutions do not provide any dedicated funds for capacity building or upskilling. Those opportunities then come either from the project funds, overheads, or free of charge as a part of the personal connections of some of the RMs. As a positive example MSE has adopted a *Decision on measures supporting national participation in Union programmes for research, innovation, and space*. The Decision envisages funds for trainings and networking activities of research managers in order to increase the quality and number of project proposals, empower human and operational capacities and the scientific excellence of Croatian participants in general. One of the few advantages of post-Covid time is a higher number of webinars organised by AMEUP, BESTPRAC and EARMA for which Croatian RMs are very grateful because they give them an increased sense of community and hopefully eventually lead to increased interchange of best practices, specific needs and opportunities among RMs as professionals.
- **Lack of formal education for research managers:** In Croatia, one of the prominent challenges faced by research managers is the absence of a well-structured educational system tailored specifically for their role and the needs of research managers. This gap in education hinders the development of necessary skills and competencies required for effective research management. However, there are some short educational programmes that might be at least partially relevant to RMs, specifically those for the management of the EU funded projects available at the several private universities and other lifelong learning providers.
- **Support on a national level:** The Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes has been emphasized several times as an institution that provides quality and timely support to RMs, as well as the institution that connects RMs even without an established formal network. This support is done mainly by Horizon Europe National Contact Points through providing information and guidance on calls and funding opportunities, organisation of workshops, advising, pre-screening project proposals, support in GA and CA preparation, advising the project implementation as well as providing support in communication and dissemination (info days, social media, brochures,

success stories). Moreover, during the past few years, based on the identification of the RM needs in Croatia, NCPs provided specially targeted events, including cross-cutting issues (ethics, responsible research and innovation, open science, role of the organisation in preparation of MSCA PF project proposals, etc.).

- **Support on an international level:** Some of the RMs mentioned EU projects and memberships in different international networks that connected Croatian RMs with colleagues from Europe. Some of the international networks or projects mentioned are EARMA, BestPrac, ASTP, YUFE, YERUN, LERU, EUA, UNICA, SEA_EU, V4+WB Network of Research Managers and Administrators, Interreg project Excellence-in-ReSTI, Horizon project Alliance4Life, etc.

1. If you have a national network (formal or informal), how did it help you? If you don't, please say how you have built your (internal) network and are using it.

In spite of the fact there are no formal RM networks or associations in Croatia, there are still some informal networks of RMs.

- First informal network of *scientific managers* established during the FP7 Programme were crucial for setting up the collaboration/**informal network** at a national level composed of **research managers and National contact points (NCP)** at the AMEUP. The regular and successful collaboration resulted in many activities organised by NCPs that directly or indirectly strengthen the knowledge, and expertise as well as provide the daily support to research managers. AMEUP was also important in organizing an informal thematic group led by Legal and Financial NCPs at the AMEUP and composed of research managers from the biggest research organisations in Croatia and representatives of the MSE with the aim to discuss current challenges in FP project implementation and the inconsistency of EU rules with national regulations (e.g., project-based remuneration, depreciation, etc.). Apart from that, the aim of this thematic group has been the creation of the document *The Guidelines for Financial Implementation of the Horizon 2020 Projects in the Republic of Croatia*. The document collects and summarizes rules on the financial implementation of Horizon 2020 projects, all in one place, as well as explains and aligns Programme rules with Croatian legislation. Furthermore, many ad hoc activities for research managers in strengthening financial and legal knowledge and skills were initiated at the national level by NCPs for legal and financial issues in Framework Programmes that directly contributed to strengthening the knowledge and skills of research managers, as well as providing the possibility for networking and sharing best practices. Communication is organised via mailing lists.
- Marie-Sklodowska Curie NCP stressed how useful and practical experience and knowledge acquired by NCPs in the transnational NCP and EURAXESS projects (i.e., writing the proposal, preparing the budget, implementing the Horizon Europe projects, etc.) were used to further

strengthen the skills and knowledge of research managers in Croatia. This approach was recognised as very effective because after having acquired the knowledge and experience, research managers could act as multipliers in their organisations. Communication is organised via mailing lists.

- Department for Horizontal Areas and Mobility of Researchers in AMEUP through the EURAXESS Centre, MSCA, and L&F NCPs forms an **informal thematic network for research mobility** that supports researchers, and research managers through the whole cycle of professional mobility and international projects (from framing the project idea, identifying the relevant calls, assisting in jobs and research funding as well as the implementation of the mobility and projects with its legal, financial and administrative aspects).
- **University of Zagreb project support network, an informal network** that helps RMs with general information related to research and innovation, education and funding opportunities, specific project management and issues related workshops, networking and general communication, etc. Communication is organised by e-mail project-support@unizg.hr.
- **Networks of Research managers at the University of Rijeka and the University of Split are informal networks** that keep members regularly informed with information on EU programmes and ESI funds such as calls for proposals (interesting to all constituents and specific for some research fields), webinars/information days and useful materials which contact persons (mostly vice deans for science and innovation or RMs from specific faculties) distribute to all interested researchers at their constituents. RMs within the University advise and guide these contact persons, sometimes together with researchers, throughout all phases of project cycle for EU programmes and ESI funds and serves as central point for exchange of knowledge and experience. Network also serves for the organisation of joint national and international events. Communication is organised via mailing lists.
- **Network of Technology Transfer (TT) managers** was created as a bottom-up approach of professionals in technology transfer as a result of need to share experiences and discuss issues among TT managers when trying to commercialize technologies. Recently, MSE started using this mailing list for organisation of regular meetings with national TTOs and communication on current topics of interest such as the creation of National guidelines for Technology Transfer and publishing national calls for technology transfer support, where members were asked to comment and suggest changes before public announcement of guidelines and calls for proposals. Communication is organised via mailing lists.
- The **first national conference for research managers** organised by AMEUP and MSE in June 2023, was envisaged as a long-term platform for networking of research managers at a national level.



Although there are different forms of informal networks set up in Croatia and motivated by the different needs of Croatian RM members, many RMs rely on **personal/professional contacts and internal networks** gathered through the years in many different ways (during past/ongoing projects, meetings, info days, AMEUP or Ministry-organised events, word of mouth, working together, etc.). These have been instrumental in sharing best practices, providing support, and creating a sense of camaraderie among research managers. The personal national networks have been particularly helpful in navigating specific "local" challenges.

2. What challenges do RM networks and associations encounter in contributing to national and European R&I systems? If there are no networks, please elaborate if there have been networking initiatives and if not, please state why you think that is the case.

As mentioned above, Croatia does not have an official RM network and there are several very small and mostly local informal networks created as an answer to the need for exchanging knowledge and ideas, getting answers to the questions, and sharing funding and other project possibilities. Except for these local networking initiatives, there have been national initiatives led in the first place by MSE and AMEUP:

- Over the duration of the FP7 programme, the establishment of a network of administrators for international research projects at universities and larger research institutes (science managers) started and continued to be the main contact list for cooperation between AMEUP and RMs.
- In 2023 MSE and AMEUP developed the concept of an event that would be held once a year with topics relevant to RMs. The aim of the first event, a conference for research managers, held on June 15, 2023, was to raise awareness of the importance of RM recognition. Furthermore, thanks to the successful collaboration between AMEUP and the RM community in Croatia, MSE considered the interest that came from the RM community to support Action 17 of ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2204. As a result, on 10 May 2023, Croatia expressed an interest in joining Action 17, which was together with the conference a great starting point in creating a national network and an opportunity for RMs to connect with colleagues having similar professions.

Challenges that RMs are facing in contributing to the national and international R&I ecosystems:

- The non-existence of formal national networks hinders the recognition, upskilling and capacity building of RMs which in turn prevents their stronger impact and contribution to both national and international R&I ecosystem. Members felt their voice is not heard and they are not contributing actively.
- When it comes to concrete contribution via transfer of knowledge and research results it is hard to make an impact since there is a lack of organised research facilities and people for that purpose. At the moment, we have the equipment and expertise, but our experts (university professors) do not have the time and staff (laboratory assistants) to help them timewise.



- Uptake of the research results and R&I activities of the SMEs and other stakeholders that are outside of the academia is extremely hard, as well as their proactive involvement in R&I project since there is a lack of skilled staff.

3. Please list all of the formal and informal networks and associations of research managers in your country and link to their websites or online groups. Skip if there are no networks your knowledge.

In spite of the fact there are no formal networks or associations in Croatia, there are still some informal networks that supported RMs:

- **Scientific managers informal network established** during the FP7 Programme;
- **Informal thematic network for research mobility** at the Department for Horizontal Areas and Mobility of Researchers in AMEUP;
- **University of Zagreb project support network:** informal network with communication organised by e-mail project-support@unizg.hr;
- **Informal network of Research managers at the University of Rijeka** composed of contact persons from all constituents who are either vice-deans for research or research managers, depending on the constituent;
- **Informal network of Research managers at the University of Split** composed of the vice deans for science and research from all constituents and research managers
- **Network of Technology Transfer managers,** a mailing list of the community involved in the technology transfer in Croatia;
- Informal **thematic group** led by Legal and Financial NCPs at the AMEUP and composed of research managers from the biggest research organisations in Croatia and representatives of the MSE
- Project management association: NGO association and branches of the international Project Management Institute with the membership model of involvement. Contact: <https://www.pmi-croatia.hr/>.
- The **first national conference for research managers** organised by AMEUP and MSE in June 2023, was envisaged as a long-term platform for networking of research managers at a national level;

4. Please list and link to any policy documents and funding which mentions research management or the equivalent national name(s) for research management.

There are national strategies and policy documents that contribute to the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda in general including ERA Action 17.

List of policy documents:

- **National Development Strategy**: RMs and funding for RM activities are supported by the National Development Strategy within the priority area of *Science and Technology Development*, the specific objective of *A competitive and innovative economy*.
- **Recovery and Resilience Plan**: Another important policy document implying RMs and funding for RM activities is the Recovery and Resilience Plan with specific objectives *Raising research and innovation capacity*.
- **Regulation on Programme Funding for Public Higher Education Institutions and Public Scientific Institutes in the Republic of Croatia**: in July 2023, as part of the reform of the higher education financing system this Regulation entered into force and contributed to the recognition of RM profession on the national level. Specifically, the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes proposed that the Regulation explicitly mentions the strengthening of the human resources of research support staff (research managers) as one of the specific objectives that a public higher education institution or public research institute achieves within the agreed funding period. This suggestion was adopted by the MSE which shows a high level of understanding of the importance of strengthening the role of RMs.
- **Catalogue of objectives and indicators**: as outlined above, specific objectives that public research organisations may choose are laid down in the Regulation and described in more detail in the Catalogue of objectives and indicators, which also contains general KPIs for specific objectives. The specific objective referring to RMs is strengthening the human resources of research support staff.
- A section dedicated to research managers on the **Horizon Europe national portal**: <https://www.obzoreuropa.hr/>.

There are also some recent improvements when it comes to the technology transfer managers:

- **National guidelines for knowledge and technology transfer** provide recommendations and practical advice to technology transfer offices (TTOs) and managers in research organisations to improve technology and knowledge transfer activities and results and therefore they represent an important step in the direction of defining and strengthening the position of TTOs in the Croatian innovation system. The objective of the Guidelines is to provide a framework for the effective use of results of publicly funded research through the proper management of intellectual property, increased commercialization, development of entrepreneurial culture and related skills in public scientific organisations, and for more successful interaction between the public and business sectors.

Funding that mentions research managers:



- Regulation on Programme Funding for Public Higher Education Institutions and Public Scientific Institutes in the Republic of Croatia: https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2023_07_78_1245.html.
- MSE has implemented national measures aimed at supporting the participation of Croatian organisations in EU programmes for research and innovation. Based on the [Decision on measures supporting national participation in Union programmes for research, innovation and space – May 2021](#), financial support is provided to project proposal development, as well as to the projects that passed the evaluation threshold but did not receive funding. Eligible RMs activities include participation in education, national and international conferences as well as meetings related to setting up the project contracts.

4. Recommendations

Recommendations for the support of RMs in the Republic of Croatia are as follows:

- The increased number of research managers at the national level **requires more networking** opportunities, both formal and informal, thus making it easier to seek advice, share opinions with peers, or collaborate on finding solutions to common challenges specific to the national context. Thus, the establishment of a more formal way of associating research managers could be considered, since it could bring several benefits, including improved collaboration, knowledge sharing, and the ability to address common challenges more effectively.
- **Self-recognition** through raising awareness among the professionals in research management is very much needed as a first step in better recognition of profession. Due to the high fluctuation of people and the number of different positions, some of the people included in the research support activities still do not consider them as RM professionals nor as a part of the group. Having a framework of professions with defined job descriptions might help in this process, although drafting one or even ten standardized job descriptions for these roles could be quite challenging since they are very different in all aspects.
- In addition to these bottom-up activities, there is a **need for the continuation of a top-down approach** guided by national policy makers which would be initiated towards the management of research institutions and other organisations that hire research managers. It is important to make them more aware of ERA policy documents, the need and benefits of having skilled and educated people as RMs and having them as a **separate profession in the systematisation** of the job positions, distinct from both administrative and research positions, with enough flexibility and options for advancements and career development.
- **Training activities and training programmes or professional mobility programmes** with the aim of mutual learning and exchange of experiences, professional practice would definitely be beneficial for the RM community.
- **More capacity building and training opportunities as well as opportunities to network with other international communities.** This can be achieved either through the national or institutional funds that will be dedicated for these purposes and are very easy to apply for. I.e., similar to some other EU countries each employee can have career development plan and dedicated amount of money that can be spent to implement this plan.



5. References

6. Acknowledgements

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