

# The European Research Council

## ERC 2026 Proof of Concept

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Unit B.2. - Call & Project Follow-up Coordination

11th December 2025  
UK NCP-ERC Webinar



**European Research Council**

Established by the European Commission

# ERC supplementary funding for PIs

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## Proof of Concept

Size of the grant: €150 000 (lump sum)

Duration: 18 months

*Demonstrate that the idea funded by the original ERC grant has innovation potential and significant economic or societal benefits*

- One continuous open call
- **Two cut-off deadlines**
- 60M EUR PoC call budget in 2026 (budget split btw the 2 cut-off deadlines)

The diagram illustrates the innovation lifecycle, showing the progression from idea to commercialisation, the 'Valley of Death' for cash flow, and the roles of various investors at different stages.

**Stages of Innovation:**

- Idea** (invent and/or produce analytic design)
- Development** (detail design and test; redesign and produce)
- Commercialisation** (distribute & market)

**Cash Flow:** The graph shows Cash Flow on the Y-axis and Time on the X-axis. The 'Valley of Death' is the period where cash flow is negative, occurring during the Development and early Commercialisation stages.

**Investment Sources and Milestones:**

- ERC Frontier Research:** Associated with Typical Primary Investors (Universities, Funding Agencies, EU FPs, ERC).
- ERC Proof of Concept:** A key milestone in the Idea stage.
- EIC Pathfinder:** A milestone in the Development stage.
- EIC Transition:** A milestone in the Development stage.
- EIC Accelerator:** A milestone in the Commercialisation stage.

**Investor Roles:**

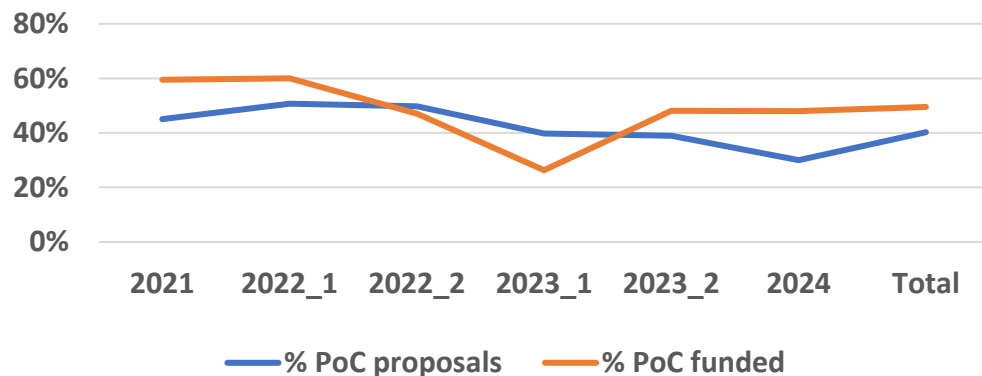
- Typical Primary Investors:** Universities, Funding Agencies, EU FPs, ERC.
- Entrepreneurs:** Seed/Angel Investors, EU FPs, Other public grants.
- Venture Capitalists:** EU FPs.
- IPO:** The final outcome of successful commercialisation.

**Outcomes:** The lifecycle can result in 'Successful', 'Moderately successful', or 'Unsuccessful' outcomes, depending on the progression through the stages and the 'Valley of Death'.

# EIC Transition: Proposals originating from ERC PoC

EIC Transition call	PoC proposals	PoC funded	Other proposals	Other funded	Total proposals	Total funded	% PoC proposals	% PoC funded
2021	104	25	127	17	231	42	45%	60%
2022_DL1	73	12	71	8	144	20	51%	60%
2022_DL2	91	16	92	18	183	34	50%	47%
2023_DL1	66	5	100	14	166	19	40%	26%
2023_DL2	100	13	157	14	257	27	39%	48%
2024	117	19	273	21	390	40	30%	48%
Total	551	90	820	92	1371	182	40%	49%

ERC PoC in EIC Transition



# PoC objectives and scope in Horizon Europe

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- Objective: facilitating the exploration of the commercial and social innovation potential of ERC-funded research.
  - **Less of a focus on achieving economic or social impact as a direct result of the grant;**
- Scope enlarged
  - **to include further research activities needed to explore the innovation potential of the idea proposed;**
- Evaluation based on the sole criterion of excellence, comprising:
  - **Breakthrough innovation potential,**
  - **Approach and methodology,**
  - **Principal Investigator: strategic lead and project management**
- Data Management Plan now required (within 6 months from project start).
- Gender Equality Plan required at the signature of the grant

# Which activities are funded?

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The activities to be funded shall draw substantially on scientifically excellent ERC-funded research.

The funding will cover:

- activities aimed at exploring the pathway from ground-breaking research towards innovation
- activities at the very early stage of moving research ideas towards an innovation or socially valuable proposition
- this includes further research to translate and valorise research ideas to possible application, and also further development and testing to validate the idea in the lab



# Proof of Concept 2026: Eligibility

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- Eligible Principal Investigators **have an ERC grant**, which is either **running** or **ends after 1 January 2025**
- The PoC idea has to **draw substantially on the ERC funded research**
- Only **one eligible application per PI per year** = per PoC call
- Maximum **3 PoC grants** per ERC StG, CoG or AdG grant (can run in parallel)
- Maximum **6 PoC grants** per ERC SyG (with consent of all SyG PIs)
- The **host institution can be different** than for the main grant; **Additional beneficiaries are allowed** as for ERC main grants
- **Same rules regarding portability** of the PoC grant as for ERC main grants

# Proof of Concept: Proposal

**10-page proposal (excl. abstract, references & risk mitigation table):**

- 1. The idea – breakthrough innovation potential** (max. 3 pages)
- 2. Approach and Methodology** (max. 6 pages)
- 3. Principal Investigator - strategic lead and project management** (max. 1 page)

**Online administrative submission form A** (similar to ERC main grant applications)

**Supplementary documents** (e.g., Host Institution  
**Support letter: Letters of support or letters of intent**)



European Research Council  
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[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v\\_WAKrKgWKs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_WAKrKgWKs)

**Read more:**  
**<https://erc.europa.eu/apply-grant/proof-concept>**



# PoC - evaluation questions ERC WP 2026

## 1.a Breakthrough innovation potential

- Does the proposed idea have the potential to drive innovation and business inventiveness and/or tackle societal challenges? → Section 1a.i
- Are the proposed expected outcomes innovative or distinctive compared to existing solutions? → Section 1a.ii
- Is the proposed idea high risk-high gain? → Section 1a.iii
  - If successful, will the outcome result in a breakthrough innovation?
  - Is there a risk that some aspects are difficult to overcome?

# PoC - evaluation questions ERC WP 2026

## 1.b Approach and methodology

- Are the proposed activities and planning appropriate and effective to explore the pathway from ground-breaking research towards innovation? Activities may include:
  - testing, experimenting, demonstrating and validating the idea;
  - conducting research required to carry out the above activities and to address the weaknesses uncovered by them;
  - clarifying IPR protection or knowledge transfer strategy;
  - involving industry partners, societal or cultural organisations, policymakers, or any other potential stakeholder supporting the translation of research results into innovation;
  - assessing potential “end users” of the expected innovation.



Sections 1b.i + ii

- Are the proposed timescales and resources adequate for the implementation and feasibility of the project, and properly justified? Will the activities be conducted by persons well qualified for the purpose?



Section 1b.iii

# PoC - evaluation questions ERC WP 2026

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## 1.c. Principal Investigator - strategic lead and project management

- Does the PI demonstrate a clear vision on how to organise the management of the project, the consolidation of information and data needed to take strategic decisions and implement the proposed plan, including risk and contingency measures?



Section 1c



# Proof of Concept: Evaluation procedure

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## Single step evaluation procedure (~100 days from submission to notification):

- Remote evaluation by 5 independent experts in technology transfer and social innovation
- Each evaluation element receives a comment and a mark: *very good*, *good (pass)* or *fail*
- No panel meeting discussion – only individual reviews
- Rank listed proposals have to pass all evaluation elements (pass-mark by majority of experts)
- Ranked list established by the marks given by experts to evaluation elements 1, 2 and 3
- Highest weight is given to evaluation element 1 followed by element 2 and 3
- Highest ranked proposals within the budget for the evaluation round are main listed
- A reserve list is created in case of additional funding to the call or in case of granting failure among the main list projects.



# Proof of Concept: Tips for applicants

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- Be convincing about your involvement in the project – PI lead and project management!
- Know your competitors and describe the competitive landscape!
- What is the novelty in your specific idea or application – how is it different from other solutions?
- Who are your end-users? Who will benefit from your innovation when fully developed?
- In case of a commercially valuable innovation idea – describe your market!
- In case of a socially valuable proposition – what will be the expected impact of your project idea when fully developed?
- In case of a database or application development – how will this be maintained beyond the project period?
- In case additional funding/investment is needed – how will this be pursued? Through which channels?



# Seal of Excellence

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- ERC Work Programme 2026

‘A Seal of Excellence will be awarded to proposals that have received a pass mark in all three of the evaluation elements set out in this Work Programme, but cannot be funded due to lack of budget available to the call.’

The Seal of Excellence will be provided automatically to the applicants when they receive the evaluation outcome in the F & T Portal (with the rejection letter). To be eligible for a Seal of Excellence you must give consent to sharing some basic information about your application with other funding and support organisations.

Guidance from RTD will be provided as to where the applicants can search for funding of their project from other sources.

Information on funding bodies that recognise and support Seal of Excellence projects is available at:  
[https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/seal-excellence\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/seal-excellence_en)

# **Proof of Concept**

## Statistics

# POC 2024 Submissions and Results

Domain of grant	Eligible parent grants	Evaluated	% submission rate	Ineligible and withdrawn	Funded	Success rate
Physical Sciences and Engineering	3056	310	10%		136	44%
Life Sciences	2069	226	11%		80	35%
Social Sciences and Humanities	1833	131	7%		21	16%
Synergy	165	31	*5.2%		8	26%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7123</b>	<b>698</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>245</b>	
<b>Success rate</b>						<b>35%</b>

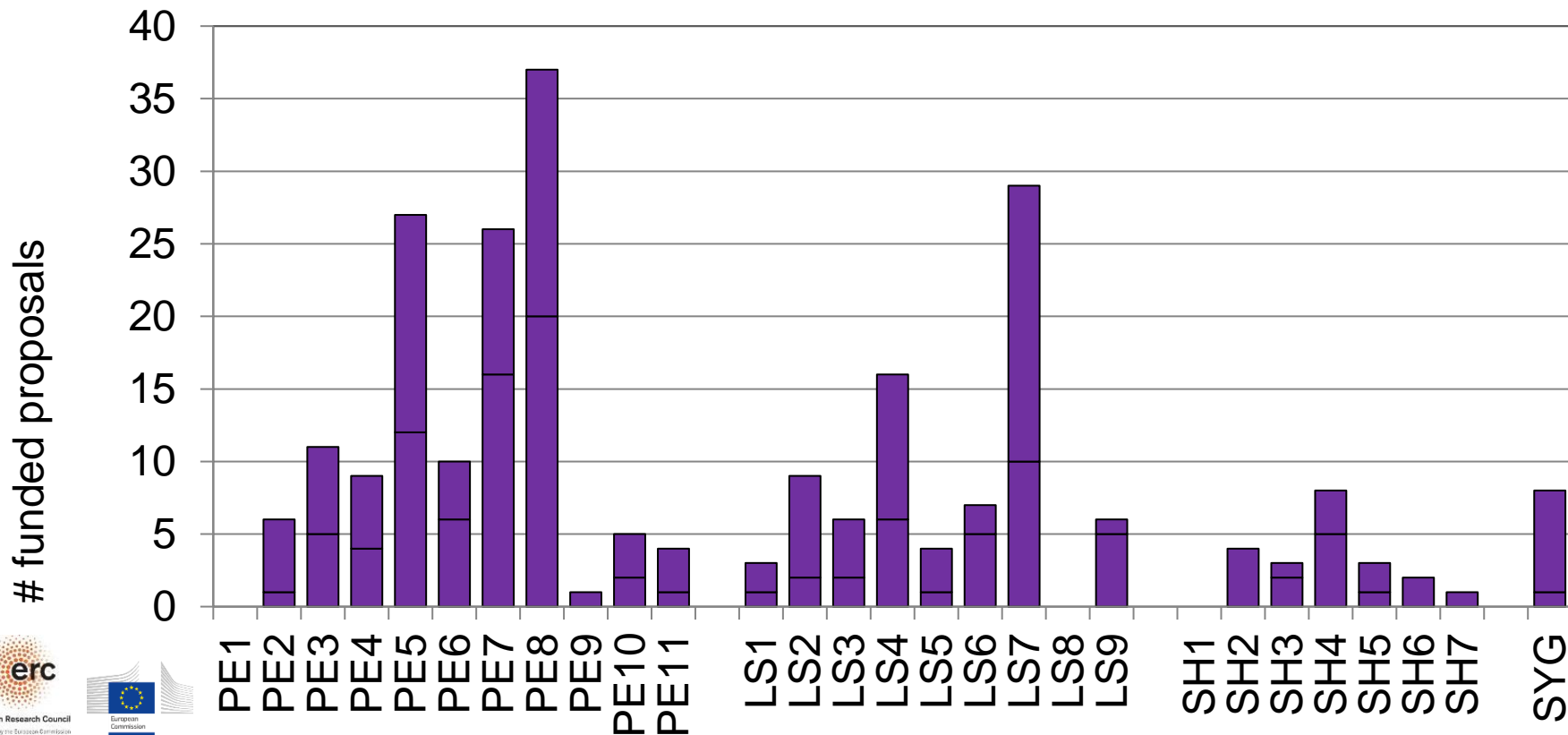


\*18.8% if calculated by eligible SyG projects



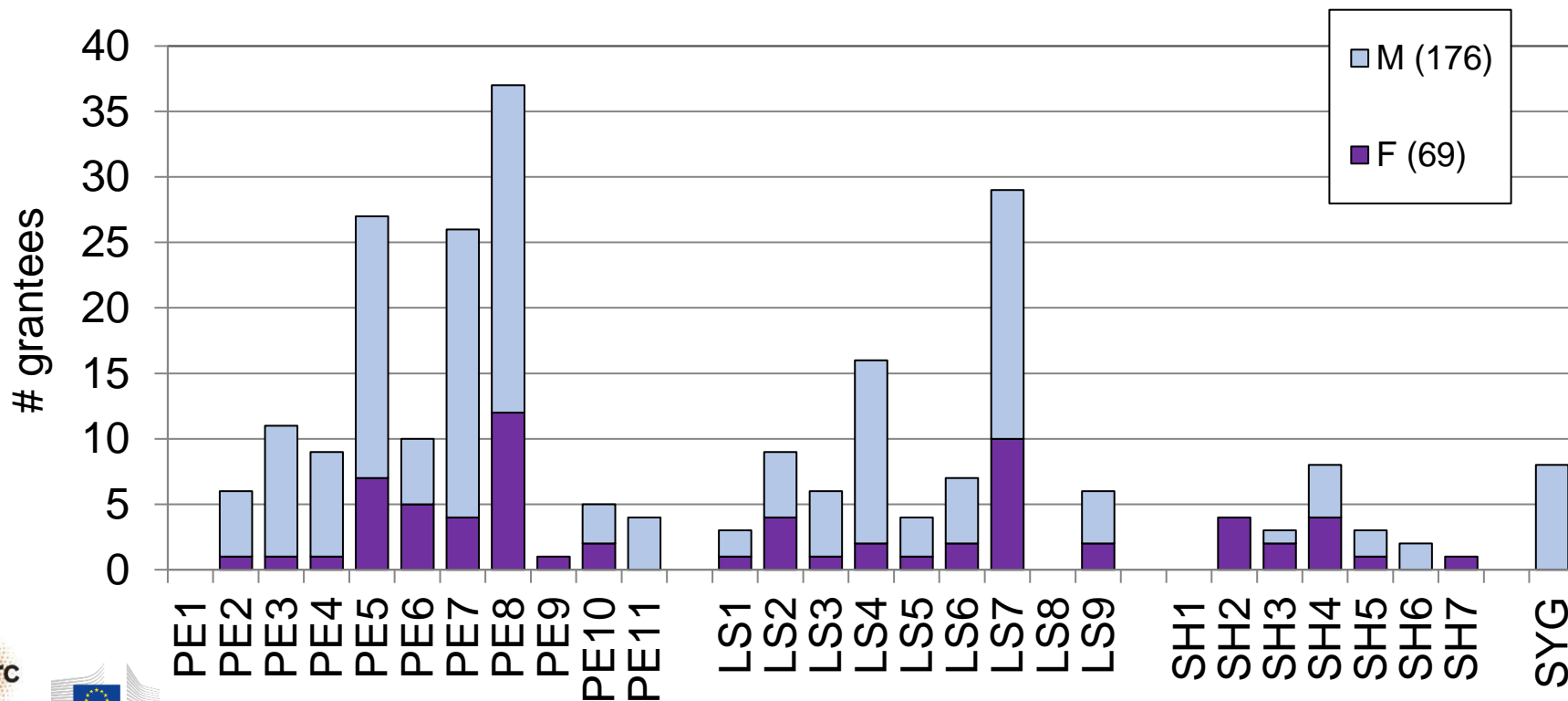
# POC 2024 Funded proposals

## Panel of original grant



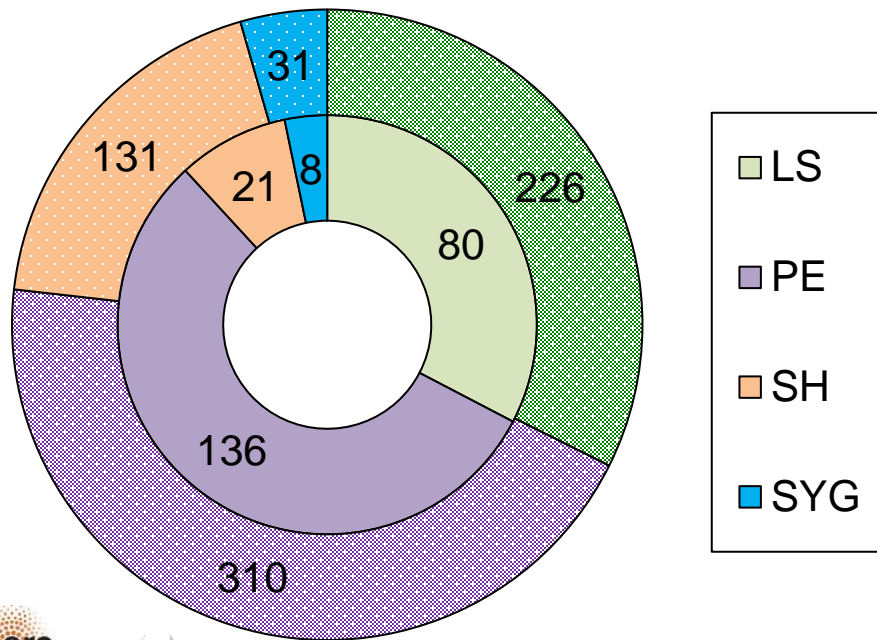
# POC 2024

## Grantees by gender and panel of original grant

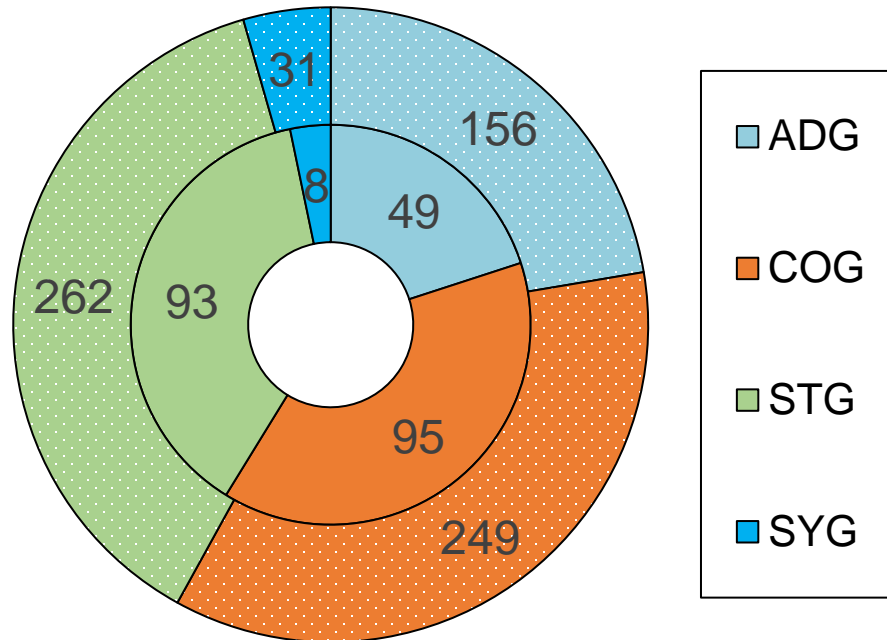


# POC 2024 submitted and funded proposals by domain and call type

## Domain of original grant

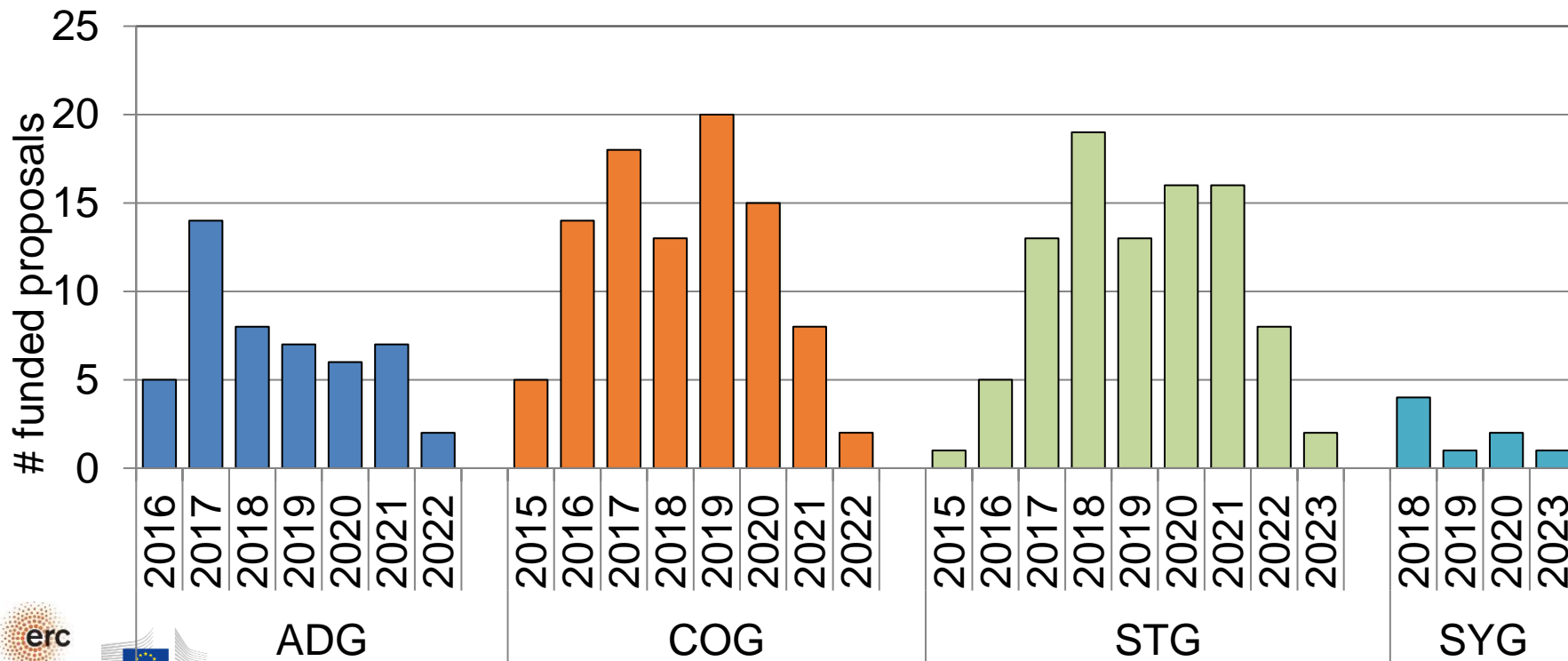


## Call of original grant



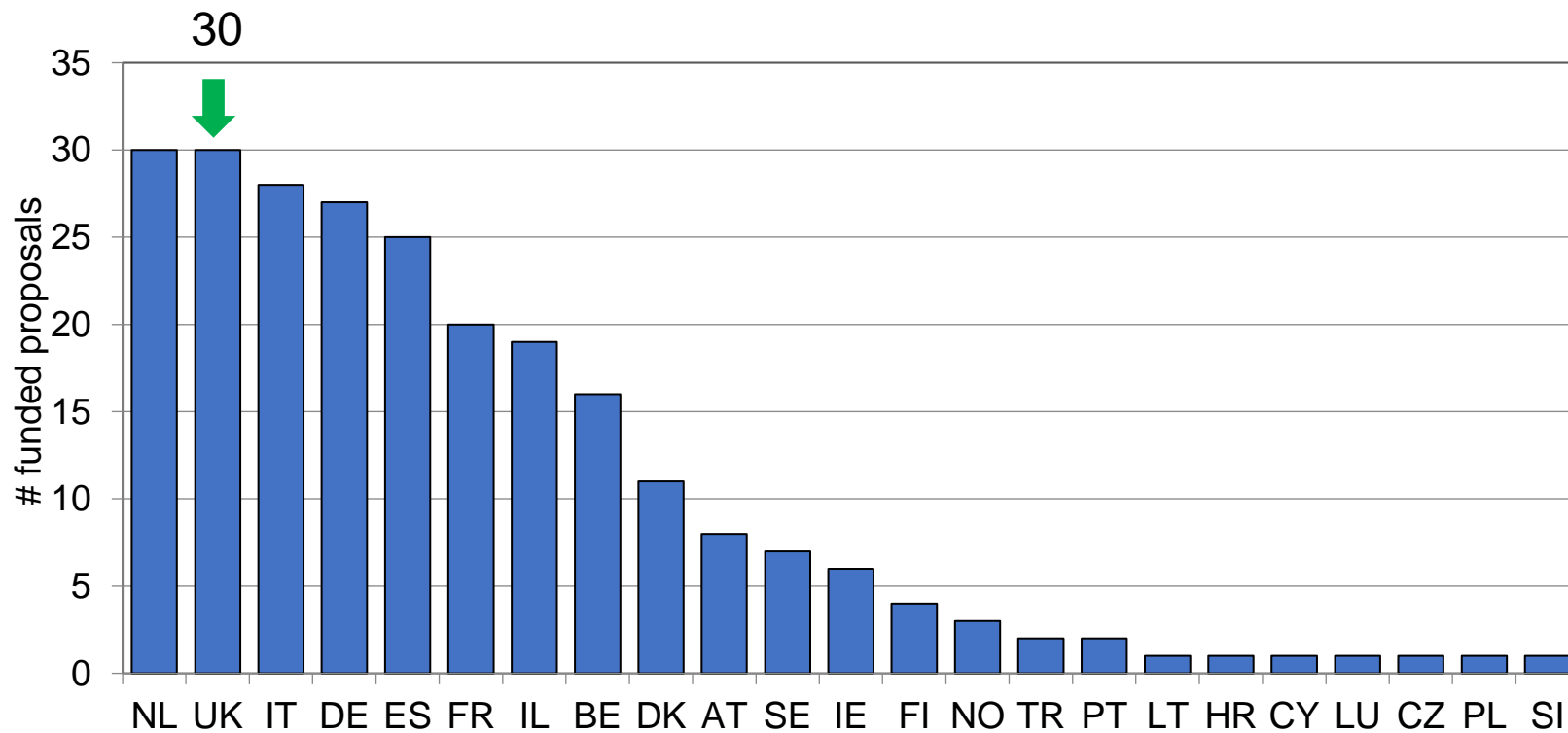
# POC 2024

## Funded proposals by call of original grant



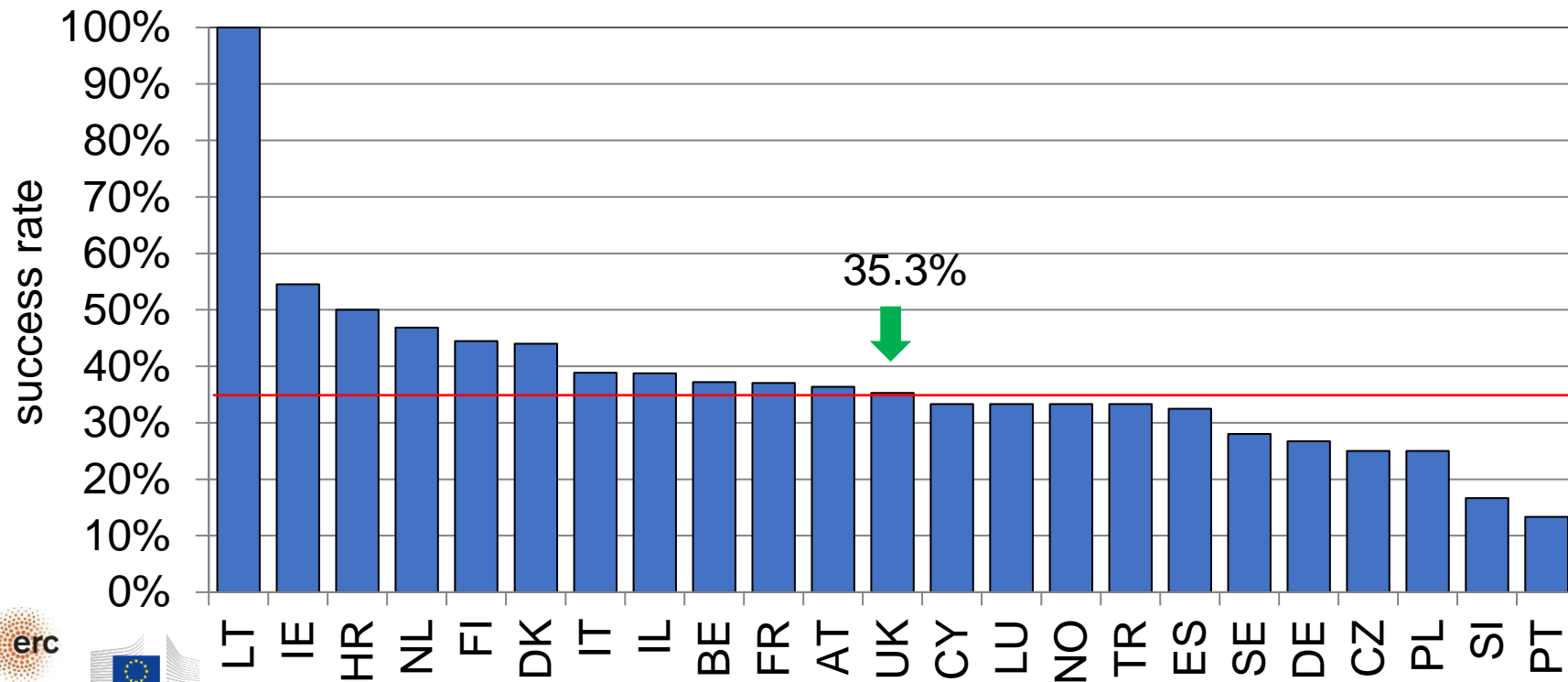
# POC 2024 funded proposals

## By Host country



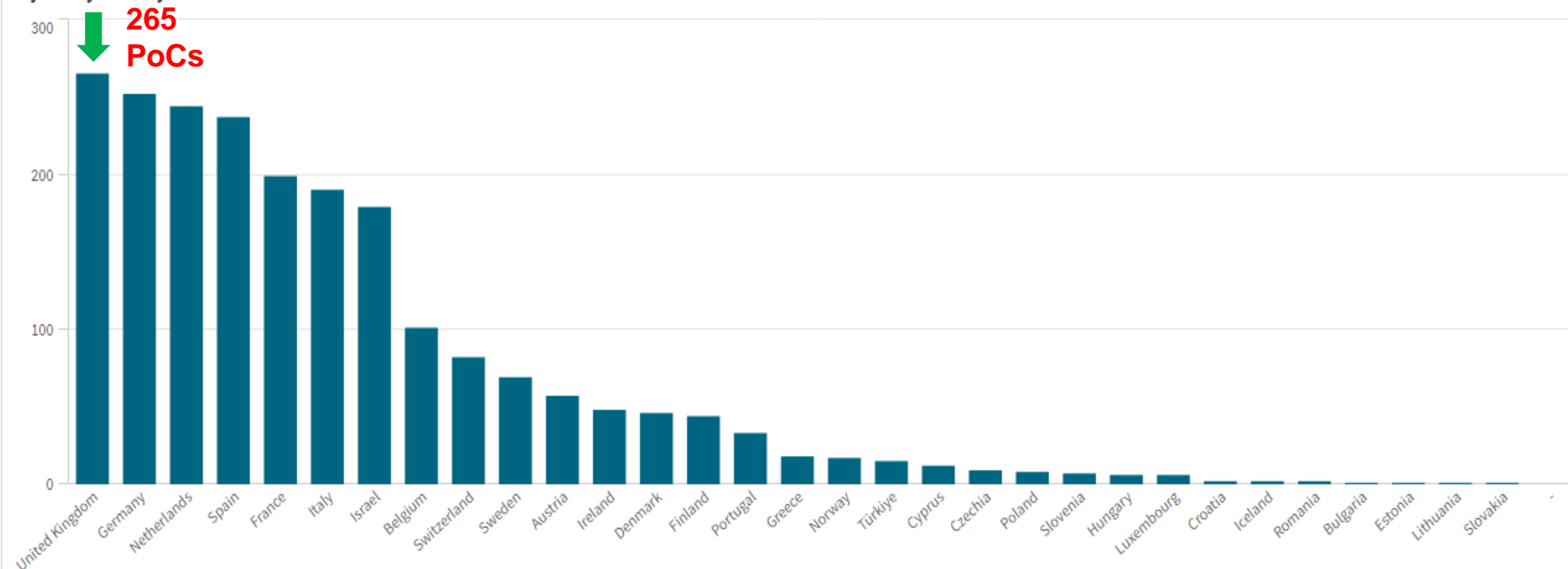
# POC 2024 funded proposals

## Success rate by host country



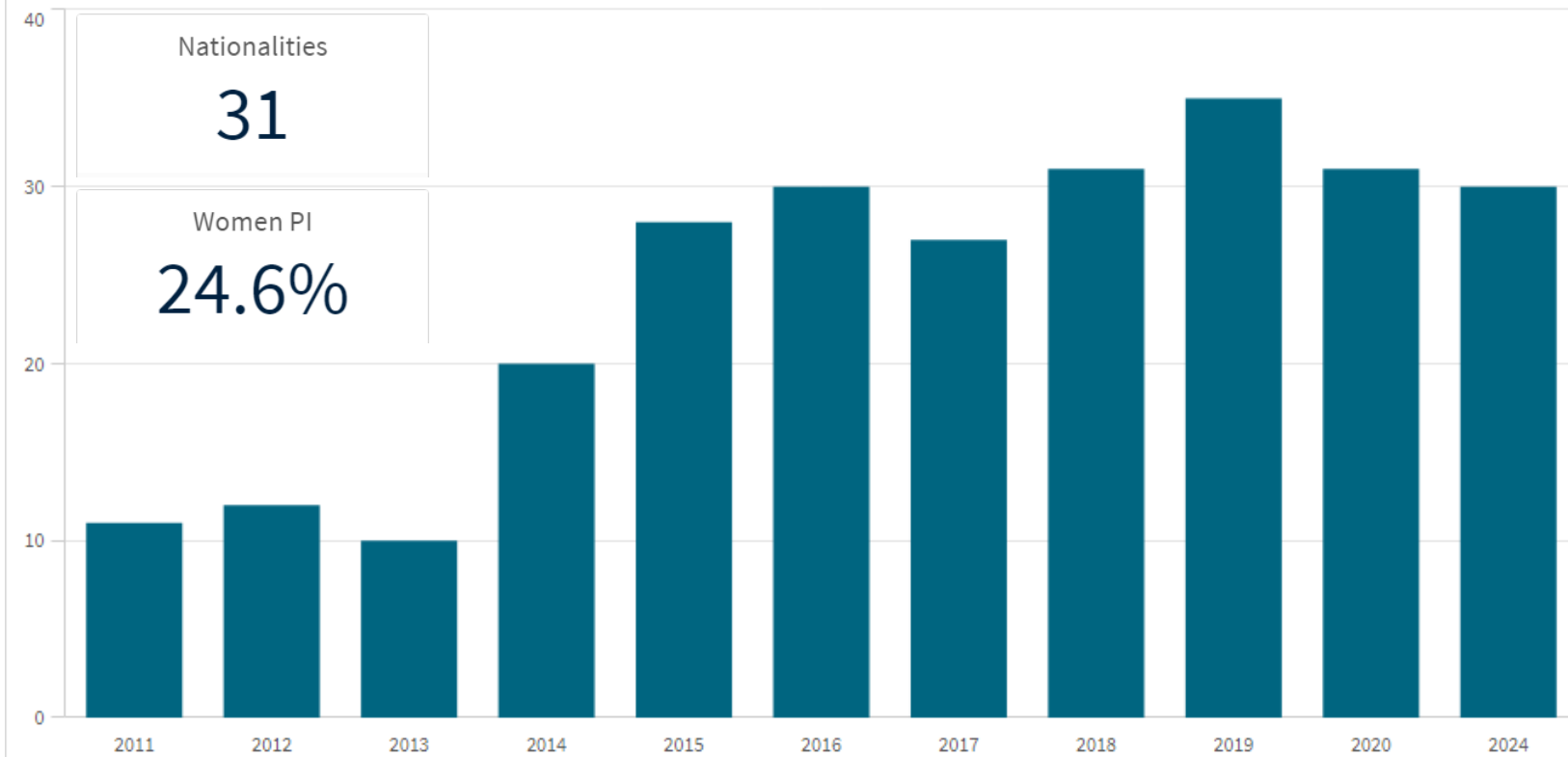
# Proof of Concept: Funded projects 2011-2024

Projects by country



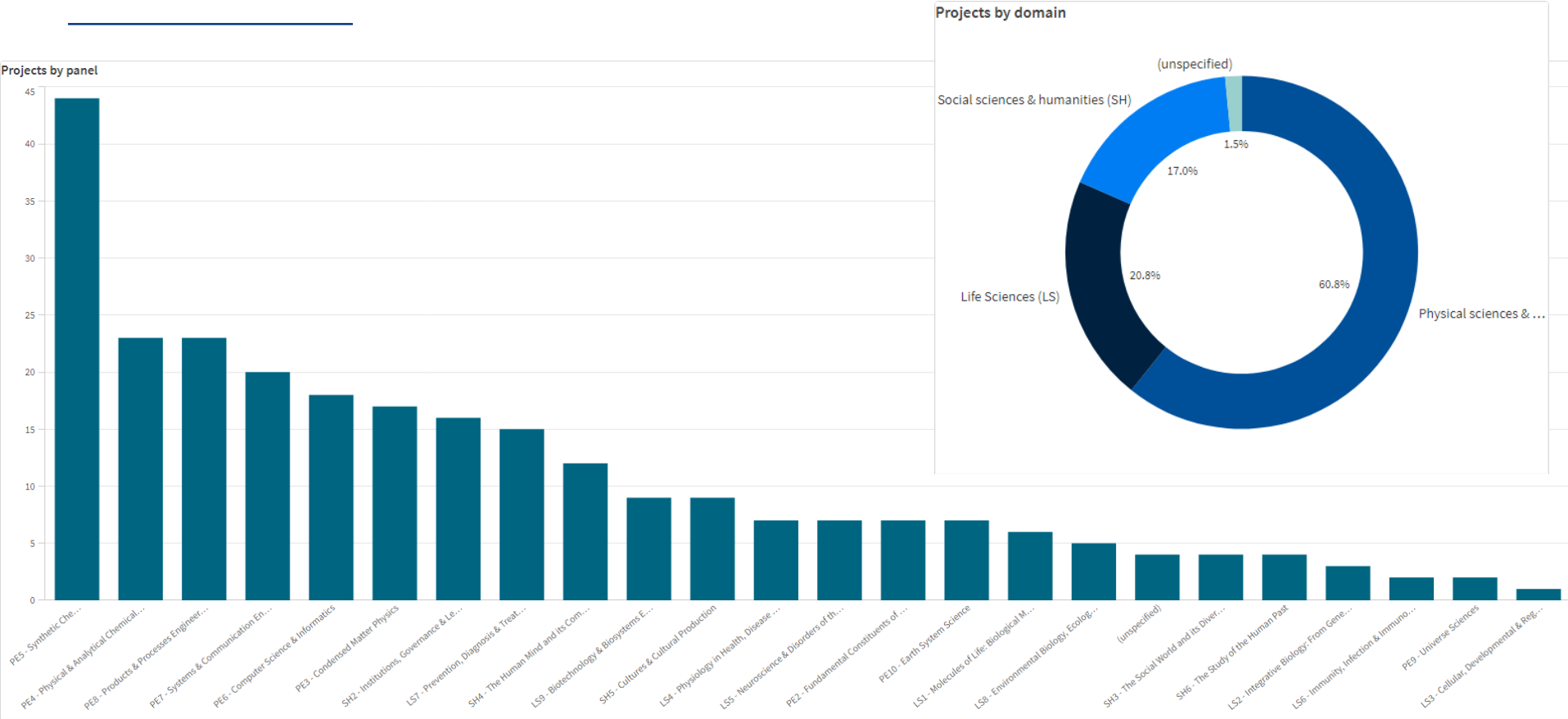
# Proof of Concept: 265 funded UK projects 2011-2024

Projects by call year





# Proof of Concept: Funded UK projects 2011-2024



# Proof of Concept: Calendar for 2026

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ERC calls	Call Opening	Submission Deadline
Starting Grants ERC-2026-StG	9/07/2025	14/10/2025
Consolidator Grants ERC-2026-CoG	25/09/2025	13/01/2026
Advanced Grants ERC-2026-AdG	28/05/2026	27/08/2026
<b>Proof of Concept</b> ERC-2026-PoC	13/11/2025 (delayed)	17/03/2026 17/09/2026
Synergy Grants ERC-2026-SyG	10/07/2025	05/11/2025

# ERC PoC results on the ERC website

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Press releases: [ERC PoC 2023](#) & [ERC PoC 2024](#)

Project examples: [ERC-2023-PoC](#) & [ERC-2024-PoC](#)

ERC searchable [project database](#) – PoCs searchable by panel of original grant

Other support services:



[Horizon Results Booster](#)

EIC Tech 2 Market: [Tech to Market Programme \(T2M\) - European Commission](#)  
[erc.europa.eu](#)

# Horizon Results Booster



- Targets all EU-funded projects
- Free-of-charge and tailored to individual project needs

The services include:

## Dissemination support

- ✓ to assess and improve dissemination plans and methods
- ✓ to identify appropriate audiences and channels

## Go-To-Market support

- ✓ to increase maturity of results
- ✓ develop effective business and exploitation plans
- ✓ identify further exploitation opportunities of research results

# EIC Tech-2-Market trainings

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- Part of EIC Business acceleration services
- 5-6 trainings per year (will resume in Q3 of 2025)
- For ERC PoC PIs and team members in projects that are eligible to apply for an EIC Transition grant

ERC PoC grant holders are eligible for the EIC Innovation Discovery trainings: Two half-days of online collective sessions to learn about the basics of entrepreneurial skills and advice on how to pitch.

ERC PoC grant holders are informed about these opportunities by email.

## Services currently available under the Booster:

### 1. Personalised Support via Single Point of Contact / Mentor



Entry-Level Consultation



Follow-Up Support

### 2. D&E Building Blocks



Dissemination Support



Go-To-Market **Support**

### 3. D&E Add-Ons



Networking



Portfolio Analysis



Intellectual Assets  
Management



Coaching for Public  
Speaking



Audio-Visual Support

# Horizon Results Booster

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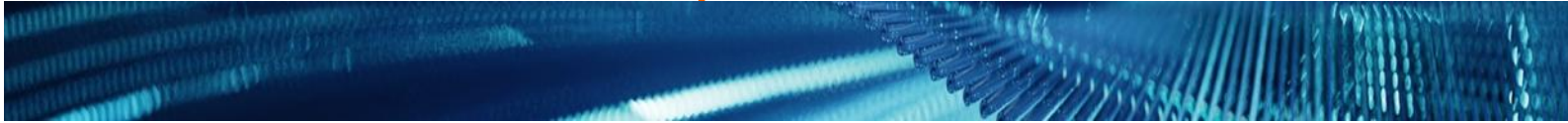


The Booster services are accessible at: <https://www.horizonresultsbooster.eu/>

Achievements with innovation potential registered on the Horizon Results Platform receive additional go-to-market support, including matchmaking and participation in events with investors or business angels. More information at:

[EU Funding & Tenders Portal | Results & Innovation support](#)

# Mapping ERC Frontier Research ERC Proof-of-Concept Grants 2014 - 2023



Please see here the links:

[ERC Proof of Concept Grants: Targeted investment, big innovation return | ERC](#)  
[How ERC frontier research strengthens Europe's competitiveness | ERC](#)  
[Mapping ERC Frontier Research: An Overview](#)



**1731**  
Projects



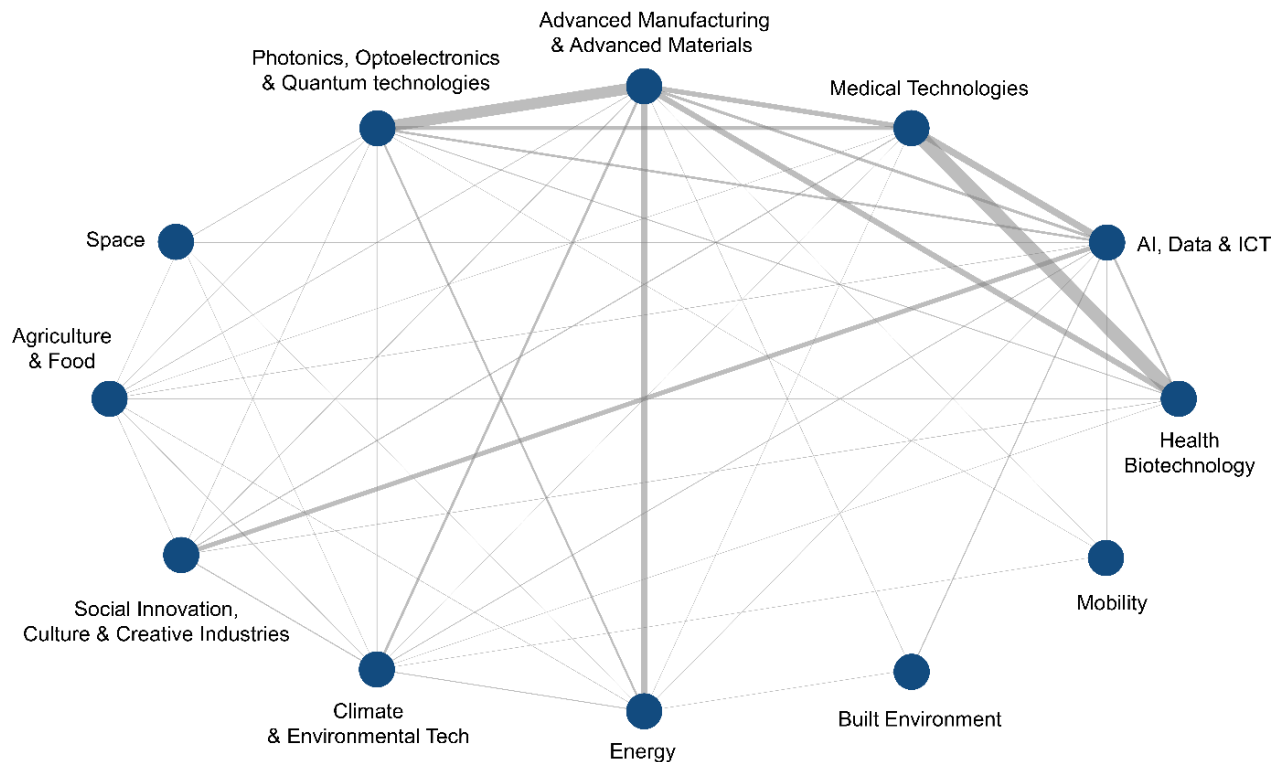
**EUR 259 million**  
Budget



**1473 Researchers**  
in 30 countries



# ERC Proof-of-Concept Grants 2014 - 2023



# Mapping ERC Frontier Research ERC Proof-of-Concept Grants 2014 - 2023

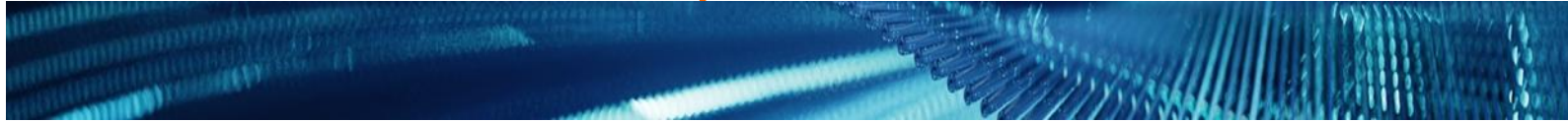
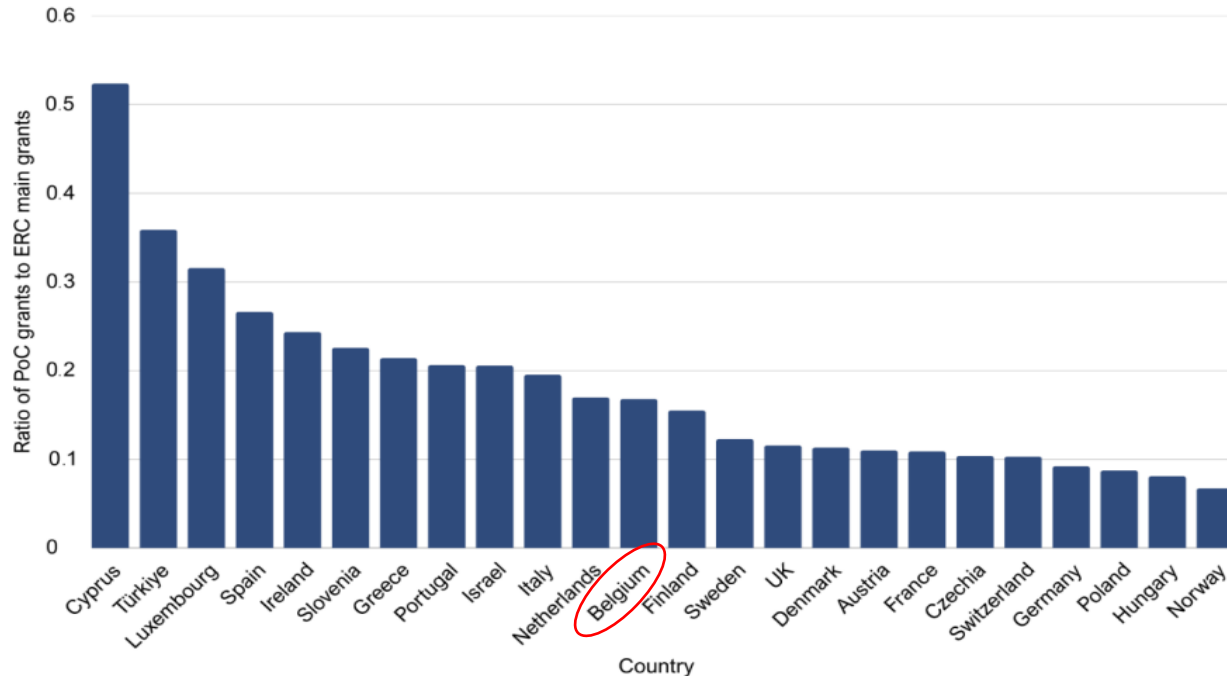


Figure 3: Ratio of ERC PoC grants to ERC main grants by country



# Mapping ERC Frontier Research ERC Proof-of-Concept Grants 2014 - 2023

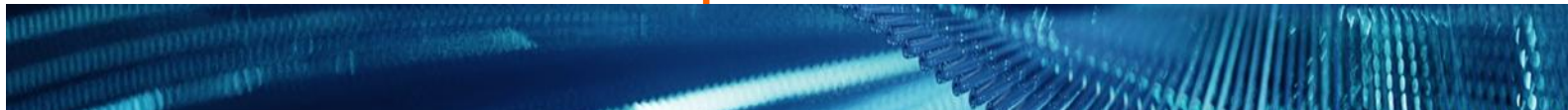
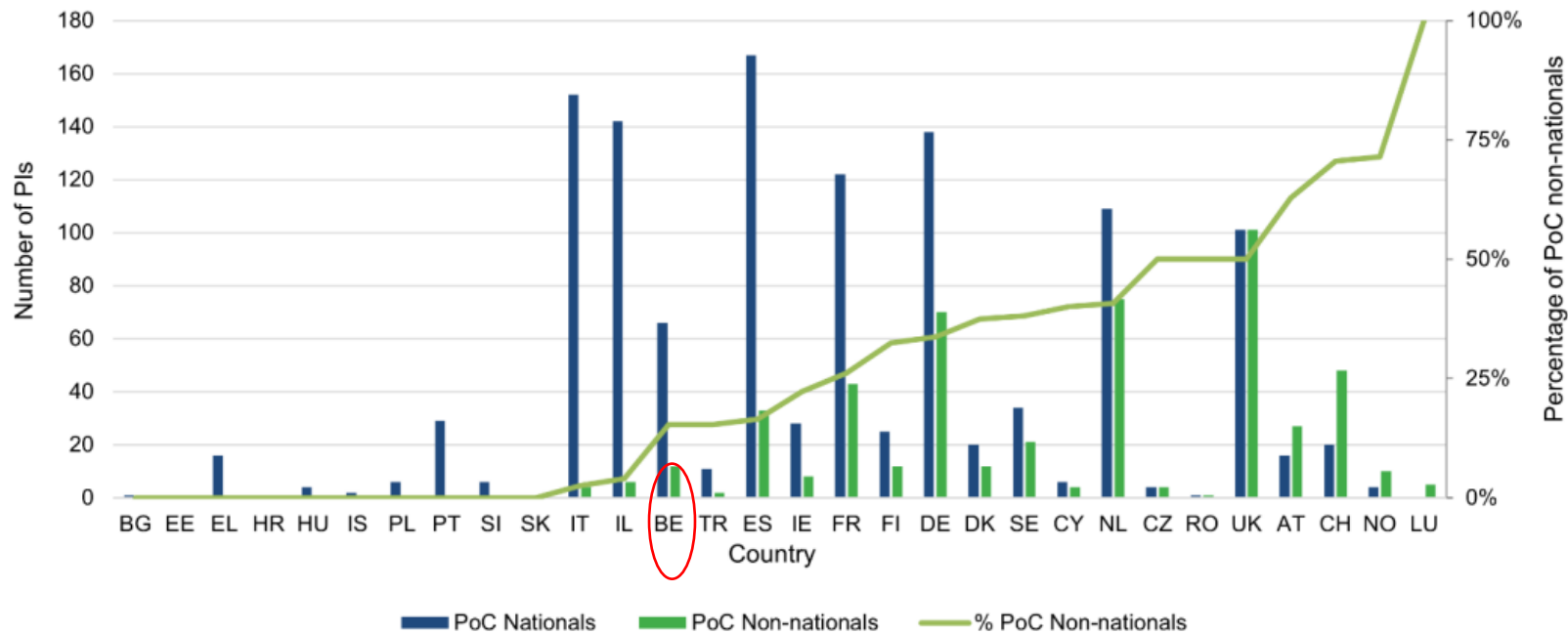


Figure 5: ERC PoC grantees' nationality by HI country



# Thank You!

Contact the ERC Proof of Concept team on  
[ERC-POC-APPLICANTS@ec.europa.eu](mailto:ERC-POC-APPLICANTS@ec.europa.eu)

More information: [erc.europa.eu/apply-grant/proof-concept](https://erc.europa.eu/apply-grant/proof-concept)

National Contact Point: [erc.europa.eu/national-contact-points](https://erc.europa.eu/national-contact-points)

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Funding & Tender Opportunities: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home>

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<https://www.youtube.com/c/EuropeanResearchCouncil>