Contents

EURAXESS Members in Focus: Portugal ....................... 2
  Portuguese research landscape .................................. 2
  Facts & Figures .......................................................... 2
  Bilateral and International cooperation ......................... 3
  Portugal as a destination ............................................ 3

Hot topic: “The unofficial guide to writing EU research grant proposals” ......................................................... 4

Meet Orestes Rivadas, newly awarded ‘Make Our Planet Great Again’ fellow from OIST, Japan .................... 7

EURAXESS Japan Activities Update .............................. 10
  Grants In Practice 2018: Intensive training on EU grant writing for individual researchers .................................. 10
  European Research Day 2018 Call for Abstracts: showcase your research, career & relation to Europe .................. 11

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Centuries of history and culture, and a prime location and Mediterranean lifestyle, make Portugal the right place to learn and do science. Speaking the language of the future, Portugal is a hub for creativity and innovation, a gateway to the world. It is a unique place to live and share good memories.

Portuguese research landscape

With one of the oldest universities in Europe, the University of Coimbra, founded in 1290, Portugal has a long tradition in education and research. The country has also made significant progress in the last 25 years in enhancing its national research and innovation system, by extending its reach to a larger share of the population, by broadening its scope to all areas of knowledge, by fostering strong links with society, in particular with economic actors, and by always striving for excellent research as defined by international standards. In fact, the Portuguese research and innovation system is structurally internationalised, in part because of the relatively small size of the country and the need to share expertise with a broader community, but also because of the strong policy vision that we can only push the boundaries of modern science and technology in collaborative efforts, that have to go above and beyond national borders.

The main funding agency in Portugal is the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), responsible for the implementation of the public policies that arise from the Ministry for Science, Technology and Higher Education. In 2016, the Government published its “Compromise with Knowledge and Science: the compromise with the future”, a strategic document that defined the policy ambitions up to 2020. Among them was the goal of reinforcing the scientific institutions, to expand and dignify the scientific careers, to continue the stimulus for internationalisation, and to develop, with the involvement of the scientific community, a set of research and innovation agendas in different thematic areas that should guide national policies up to 2030.

Facts & Figures

Portugal has 132 Higher Education Institutions spread throughout the country, supporting a community of almost 360 000 students, 12% of which are foreigners. In fact, the number of foreign students in Portugal increased by 95% in the last 7 years, a clear sign of the attractiveness of the country.

The national research and innovation system includes 307 research centres dedicated to all areas of knowledge, originating around 2000 doctorates completed each year, a 74% growth between 2000 and 2010. The strong and long-lasting support to S&T policies led to a 35-fold increase in scientific production in the last 25 years – actually, Portugal had the second highest average annual growth rate of publications between 2001 and 2014 within the EU.

The country also had a 45-fold increase in registered patents between 2001 and 2014. An innovation-friendly environment led to an annual rate of 31 000 new start-ups created every year, and almost 310 000 created between 2007 and 2014.
2015. This reflects a changing economic environment in the country, also reflected in the 130% increase of the technology-based firms between 2007 and 2010. To continue fostering this dynamic, the Government has recently launched the Collaborative Laboratories (Colabs), a new model of association between academia and the industry, where the main goal is to create skilled and scientific jobs in Portugal, both directly and indirectly, by implementing research and innovation agendas geared at creating economic and social value.

Bilateral and International cooperation

Portugal has a number of active, bilateral agreements in Science and Technology, most under the responsibility of FCT. These bilateral agreements normally support researcher mobility and, in some cases, collaborative projects.

International cooperation is a fundamental characteristic of the Portuguese Research and Innovation landscape.

Along with the bilateral agreements, the country is an active member of several international organisations, such as ESA, which is a part of the national Space Programme, EMBO, EMBL or CERN. Portugal is also a very active participant in the COST programme, as well as in CYTED, the Ibero-american programme for science and technology for development.

Taking advantage of its historical connection to the ocean, of the privileged geographical location, and of the expertise that has been built during the last decades, Portugal has recently promoted the creation of the Atlantic International Research Centre (AIR Centre), an intergovernmental initiative to foster collaborative research activities on climate, land, space and oceans.

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions at Portuguese institutions

Experienced researchers willing to move to Portugal can apply to an Individual Fellowship (IF) of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), irrespective of their country of origin.

Portugal is in the list of widening countries, and therefore, from 2018 to 2020, proposals above the quality threshold of 70% but not retained for funding through the MSCA IF call with a host institution in Portugal will be automatically reassigned to the Widening Fellowships call (unless the applicants explicitly opted-out).

Portugal as a destination

Besides its excellent universities and research centres, there are a number of reasons to justify the attractiveness of Portugal as a study and research destination. Not only the sun, the food and the friendliness of the people, but also the reasonable cost of living and of accommodation, the comprehensive health system, or knowing that the country has been among the top 5 countries in the Global Peace Index for a number of years now. In fact, there are at least 10 reasons to choose Portugal as a study and research destination. Find a job or a hosting institution and experience this beautiful country.
Hot topic: “The unofficial guide to writing EU research grant proposals”

Piece originally published by Sami Makelainen, an experienced FP7 and H2020 proposal evaluator, in his blog entry of the same title, accessible here, and reproduced below as-is with his consent.

For the past several years, I have been involved as an independent expert, commissioned by the European Commission, to evaluate FP7 research proposals (and more recently the Horizon 2020 program). Every time I do this, it entails reading hundreds or even thousands of pages of research proposals in a relatively short time period, so good, clear and concise proposal writing would be appreciated.

In order to help whoever is vying for funding via these channels, I offer the following advice. Please note that this is my individual view, not explicitly or implicitly condoned by the European Commission in any way, shape or form. Also note there are several experts independently reviewing every single proposal, so just writing it so that I like it will not get you any money. In other words, this advise comes with no warranty whatsoever, but here goes:

**Cut the complicated language.** One often wishes the writers would just get the basics of good writing right. Writing in a complicated way and using a wide range of meaningless buzzwords is not a sign that you know your domain, nor is it a sign of intelligence. At best it’s a sign of laziness, at worst it’s an attempt to cover up the lack of any real substance. Write simply. Do not try to complicate things unnecessarily; most of the time what you’re doing is completely feasible to present in very simple terms – dump the buzzwords and the pretend-intellectualism. And, please, check that the sentences you write make sense. Because sometimes they make no sense whatsoever, or do not mean anything.

**Be realistic on impacts.** Too many times the applicants completely forget they are operating with finite time and resources. I know the EC asks for impact assessments, but this needs to be realistic. Any talk of “saving Europe” or similar grandiose statements through just this one research project is unrealistic and will be treated as such.

**Focus; don’t try to achieve too much.** It may seem that the more goals you have in a project and that the wider they are, the better it must be. It’s not. Have a clear focus, because that’s the only way to achieve something. If you focus on everything, you’re not focusing on anything and will accomplish exactly that. This is particularly important for Small or medium-scale focused research projects (STREP) proposals. You do NOT need to address every single element in the call.

**Don’t do research for research’s sake.** Anything that you attempt to do that goes beyond state-of-the-art must have an application or use somewhere. It’s
not good enough to say that after you research topic X for three years, you’ll have good grounds to continue the research.

**Don’t waste money – get onto the ‘lean’ boat.** Just having multi-year funding from the EC doesn’t mean you can use outdated project methodologies. Two iterations over three years is not “agile”. There is also no reason for you not to borrow a page or two from the Lean Startup. The EC – really the European taxpayers – don’t like to see their money wasted any more than a VC would. Keep in mind that most of the time part of the funding comes out of your tax dollars – would you invest in your project?

**Don’t waste money, part II.** 15% of project funding to management overhead is unacceptable. That is proposing to buy loads of gear or services at unreasonable prices.

**Learn to pitch.** Something you should learn from the startups; make sure you develop a compelling pitch – why should your project be funded? Don’t bury the lead on page 78, by when the reviewers will have lost any faith in you coming up with something good. It’s essential for the abstract to be compelling and engaging.

**Learn to write (English).** I bet you were taught to write essays in school, and scientific articles at the university. Try to remember those lessons: Use clear layout. Break into appropriate sentences and paragraphs. Reference concisely, i.e. in a way that doesn’t interfere with reading (superscripted [21] is good, [Lastname 1, Lastname 2, publication XYZ, page B, 2010] is not.). Use graphics, but make them clear. Check the spelling. Check the grammar. Write clearly. Avoid sentences that are like 100 words long. Avoid paragraphs spanning half a page. Pay attention to layout and pagination. Check the spelling and grammar again. Make sure the sentences make sense.

Did I mention you need to check the spelling and grammar? Surprising as it may be, it turns out we can’t read minds.

*If, btw, your writing or scientific writing courses did _not_ teach you these things, take a better one that does.*

**Be specific.** Particularly when discussing what it is that you’re going to be doing beyond state-of-the-art, it’s essential that you say something more than “research” this and that. And don’t forget to be realistic, too; don’t say you’re going to achieve something awesome which is clearly unrealistic. It is, however, fine to say you will try to do something.

**Don’t forget business fundamentals.** You need to have a story on how your thing could be used in the “real” world; often this means involving one or more business entities that somehow need to make money. Having a pure research-platform is fine, too, if it’s justified – but “build it and they will come” usually does not go down well as a strategy. Remember to engage the relevant industry in your project.

**Innovate, sometimes radically.** Don’t be afraid to propose something completely different as opposed to just progressing some field in an expected, linear fashion. If you think the call has inappropriate elements – because sometimes they do – don’t be afraid to criticize them and propose alternatives.
Don’t fall for neomania, i.e. making something new just for the sake of it being new. Not everything new or even innovative is worth doing – show that your use cases are actually useful and have demand, not merely “novel”. Novelty in and of itself is valueless; don’t fall for technological solutionism either.

Test your assumptions. Another concept from the Lean Startup; too many proposals list as some their core thesis assumptions that are entirely untested. At worst they are the result of groupthink of a very unrepresentative group of researchers along the lines of “We’d love this so why wouldn’t everyone?!”. If you base your project on assumptions, you need to test and validate those assumptions early. Oh, and on a related note: Gartner or some other analyst company saying so doesn’t make it so.

Get the right team; trying to make advances in areas where the members are amateurs in and not even engaging the parties with the actual state-of-the-art technology guarantees you will not get anywhere. These are not funds purely for your internal competence development.

Don’t get stuck on the Europe bit; don’t hesitate to bring in non-European partners if you can; not all service-oriented architecture (SOA) is of European origin and engaging organizations outside Europe can bring substantial benefits.

Manage the management right. Think about using more modern project management tools than email and Word documents.

Keep the big picture in mind. Having experts onboard is good. Having experts who can see beyond their little domain and into the macro-level developments and understand their significance is better; you need to have an understanding of the macro-environment and trends and how they might affect what you are going to do.

Finally, don’t submit a bad proposal. It just isn’t worth it. It will not get funded and you will have caused reputational damage to all participating organizations and the people identified by submitting stupid things.
Meet Orestes Rivadas, newly awarded ‘Make Our Planet Great Again’ fellow from OIST, Japan

- Dear Orestes, Can you briefly introduce your research interests to our readers?

Currently, my interests are to use molecular transition metal complexes for renewable energy storage. My specific project aims to transform renewable electrical energy (such as those produced from wind or solar power stations) into chemical energy. For this purpose, we first design and synthesize organic molecules containing one or more transition metal atoms, which will be responsible to promote the reaction. The molecules synthesized will be used as catalysts, to transform carbon dioxide into highly reduced carbon products such as methane, methanol and organic compounds with higher carbon content.

- You are currently a postdoc (funded by JSPS) at the Okinawa Institute of Technology. Can you tell us a bit about the circumstances that led you to work in Japan?

Before joining OIST I was doing my postdoctoral stay at the Weizmann Institute of Science, Israel. At that time, I was working on molecular iron catalysts to promote environmentally friendly catalysts under the guidance of Prof. David Milstein. My future host professor was one of my colleagues there. When she was appointed as Assist. Prof. at OIST, we had some discussions that resulted in me joining her group as her first postdoc to start a new challenging project related with the development of multi-metallic complexes. At OIST, I found a great opportunity and facilities to advance in my research that was fully funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, JSPS.

- Anticipating the end of your contract, you applied with success to a grant within the newly launched French programme ‘Make Our Planet Great Again’. Congratulations! Can you let us know what type of grant you applied for, and the reason why you applied for it?

I started to think of the next academic position when I had one year left in my contract. I started to imagine ways to combine my knowledge on ligand synthesis and complexes formation with the potential that electrochemistry has in renewable energy related processes. I searched for potential research labs working on electrochemistry, by reading research articles and reviews. Also, I had some fruitful discussions with old colleagues. After some time, I decided to contact the group of Prof. Marc Robert from the Laboratoire d’Electrochimie Moléculaire’ (LEM) lab, belonging to the French research institute CNRS. I was planning to apply to different fellowships and grants with him. However, after our research talks, he suggested me reading...
about the MOPGA call and see if I was interested in it. After reading about it took me 5 minutes to consider applying. The conditions were great!

- **How was the application process? How much time and effort did you spend to finalise your application?**

The application process consists of 2 steps. The first consisted of filling out an application form focused on the CV and experience of the researcher. This includes research stays abroad, research articles, conferences, mentoring, etc. The second focused on the research project. Once I passed the first step I worked hard to prepare a suitable research proposal (6 pages divided mainly on context-methodology-integration in the host lab). Unluckily, I had my holidays already booked and paid for before the MOPGA call even existed. Consequently, I spent the last Christmas writing and reading the entire time. My family helped me a lot. My wife and my parents in Sevilla were taking care of my daughter and my mother in law in Jerusalem was making me coffees the entire time. The last sentences of the proposal were written at the international airport in Hong Kong after 15 hours of flight! It did not feel like holidays at all, but it was completely worth it when I received the notice that my application was successful.

- **Would you say that your research stay in Japan improved your chances at securing the grant?**

Yes. On the one hand, during my postdoc here in Japan I started to have other “chemical curiosities” that led me to build the project that was awarded. Additionally, I was awarded twice with a JSPS postdoctoral fellowship (which forced me to write several proposals). Moreover, I took an active role in setting up the lab at OIST, which aided me to become assertive, acknowledging the importance of management and organization within a research lab, including equipment set up and maintenance.

- **While being based in Japan, how did you keep/create ties with your next host institution in Europe?**

I contacted Prof. Marc Robert because of the very nice publications that he and his team have. Every time I wanted to learn some aspects of electrochemistry, one of his or his colleague’s articles came across. He was the first professor on my list when I decided to start applying to my next position. I wrote him a sincere e-mail and after a couple of Skype meetings we decided to apply to the grant. To be honest, during my stay in Japan I focused more on building a Japanese network. I attended for example the Chemical Society of Japan Annual Meetings, where I could interact with my Japanese colleagues and learn from their different approaches on chemical design and synthesis.

- **What would be your advice to other researchers looking to apply for a similar grant programme?**

I always have in my head the song from AC/DC “It’s a long way to the top (if you wanna rock ’n’ roll)”. I listen to it after a grant/article/fellowship is successful or is rejected. Thus, aim high and never give up on your goals. Besides motivation, there are many other factors to take into consideration when considering...
application to a grant programme. A very important one is to understand from where the funding comes and what the funder wants to achieve. Therefore, adapt and use your skills and expertise to the needs of our society. Finally, we must be resilient! “the academic pathway is a marathon, not a sprint” my PhD advisor, Dr. Salvador Conejero, would say.

Orestes, thank you very much for your time and good luck in your continued career in Europe!
Grants In Practice 2018: Intensive training on EU grant writing for individual researchers

The most comprehensive marie Sklodowska Curie Actions Individual Fellowships (MSCA IF) and European Research Council (ERC) proposal writing workshop ever to take place in Japan, 9-12 July Tokyo-Osaka
Full programme and registration here: bit.do/GIP2018Japan

WHAT’S THIS ABOUT?

The Grants in Practice event series brings in professional trainers from Europe to provide here in Japan, directly to you, training on grant proposal writing. In 2018 we focus exclusively on two EU grant schemes for researcher mobility:
- MSCA IF: for young or experienced researchers, 1-2 years research stays in Europe;
- ERC: for excellent researchers looking for generous funding to setup their own team in Europe.

WHERE AND WHEN?

- 9 July, EU Delegation Tokyo: MSCA IF training
- 10 July, EU Delegation Tokyo: ERC training
- 11 July, KANDAI MeRISE Osaka: MSCA IF training
- 12 July, KANDAI MeRISE Osaka: ERC training

WHO CAN ATTEND?

Students and researchers of any nationality, seniority level and discipline; or research managers/administrators. Participation is 100% free, but we ask that all participants engage themselves as actively as possible in the process of applying to one of the two grants schemes, as the training will include interactive exercises.

We look forward to receiving as many dynamic researchers as possible, but seats are limited: please make sure to attend if you register.
European Research Day 2018 Call for Abstracts: showcase your research, career & relation to Europe

The European Research Day 2018 (ERD 2018), to be held on 29 September (Saturday), Italian Cultural Institute Tokyo, is the annual event for the European community of research in Japan.

At the Researchers’ sessions: apply with an abstract and get a slot as speaker to present your research, career & relation to Europe

At the Special Sessions: get insight from existing European researcher communities in Japan

Registration & application here: [bit.do/ERD2018Japan](http://bit.do/ERD2018Japan)

**WHAT’S THIS ABOUT?**

The ERD 2018 is the fourth edition of an event organised by EURAXESS Japan, which aims to bring together the European research community currently based in Japan to discuss research, careers and relation to Europe.

**WHO CAN APPLY?**

This event is for and by the European research community of Japan. This includes researchers, citizens of any country covered by EURAXESS*; as well as researchers from other nationalities (including Japanese) who have had a long-term (one or more years) experience in Europe; or who have concrete plans to relocate to Europe at a short or midterm.

Applicants must be currently (i.e. at the time of the event) active in Japan at a recognised university or research institute/centre, public or private sector.

*the EU-28 and Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, FYRoMacedonia, Iceland, Israel, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey, for a total of 40 countries*

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: 29 AUGUST**