

Actions in R&I in response to the COVID-19: activities of ERA-related groups

(item 3. of the agenda)

SFIC

As chair of SFIC, I would like to share the following observations:

SFIC has been able to hold one physical meeting in 2020 on the 2nd of March 2020 and a thematic workshop on Africa on the 3rd of March 2020, shortly before restrictions were set in place all over Europe.

Since then work has continued remotely in the various Task Forces etc.; Moreover we have been able to hold an informal virtual meeting on the 27th of May 2020.

However, one can see the following challenges:

The crisis has affected the way many people are able to work profoundly and we have to respect that.

Moreover many colleagues were and are also heavily involved in national contingency measures etc. and are occupied with those tasks.

But we are also seeing something like a return to a situation that is less an “emergency mode” than a mode “adapted to the new realities”.

We have tried to accommodate the situation by extending deadlines for comments etc. and after a short phase of fewer responses, we can see a situation where delegations are responding in a good way to the surveys, documents etc.

Overall we are really glad about the continuous commitment of delegations.

As the electronic working methods will continue to be essential, it would be helpful to have shared spaces for working on documents etc..

To have one entry point for each group where the different Task Forces/ working Groups can share their documents and work on them would really be helpful.

Now each Task force / Working Group within the ERA-related groups has to find its own solution and in many cases also the national structures can't provide sufficient IT-solutions for working across countries and organisations...

We are grateful that for May, the Presidency and Council Secretariat listed SFIC as an essential meeting and we would hope that this could also be the case for the two envisaged meetings in the second half of 2020, as this would give us a clear structure and modality for working, even if we would not be able to meet physically.

GPC

As far as the GPC is concerned, one of the two task-forces had finished its work just before the confinement, so the main issue now is focused on the ongoing work on the impact of JP.

A workshop was initially foreseen in April but it was decided to postpone it. An online GPC meeting was organized on May 25 (conditions were very good, the Council system for videoconferences was of high quality), but it was decided that organizing a workshop aiming at exchanging experiences online was not the most appropriate format, and given that there was no immediate urgency to organize this workshop before the summer, it will be considered again after the summer, hopefully if physical meetings can take place again after September.

Another aspect is how the GPC could contribute to the fight against the Covid-19 crisis. On the one hand, there is indeed an issue with coordination of national funding. On the other hand, this is already part of the R&I Action Plan for Covid-19, which could lead to duplications or little added-value. It was concluded that there was no added-value for the GPC to carry out any specific action related to the Covid-19 crisis, as topics such as coordination of national R&I activities and a possible initiative related to it are already tackled in other fora.

SWG on Gender in R&I

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the SWG GRI agreed to form a task force at its online meeting held on 1 and 2 April 2020 to address gender aspects in the COVID-19 outbreak. The Position paper on the current COVID-19 outbreak and gendered impacts on researchers and teachers, with examples of actions that have been taken by national authorities, RFOs and RPOs at national level, was issued on 2 June 2020 under document number WK 5659/2020.

SWG GRI does not perceive any negative impact on its working modalities. The group held a successful meeting over two half days on 1 and 2 April, with great support from the Secretariat. This successful online meeting is leading the chair and vice-chair to proposing to the group to introduce an additional online meeting on top of the existing two (normally physical meetings) per year. Virtual meetings also meet the wish of many delegations to reduce their ecological footprint. The virtual meeting has attracted a higher number of participants – for some delegations both the members participated which is not always the case with the physical meetings. Additionally, some delegations invited guests to sit in on the virtual meeting.

SWG GRI, however, takes note of the very difficult working conditions of its members with caring responsibilities, and is aligned with the position of ETH Zurich leadership, which is treating the additional time employees spend caring for children or relatives as normal working hours while the protective measures are in place.

SWG on Open Science and Innovation

- **Specific SWG OSI actions launched in the context of the COVID-19 crisis:**
 - SWG OSI has drafted an **Open Register of Open Science and Open Innovation initiatives in the context of the pandemic**. We aim at collecting information about initiatives at institutional, national, European level and international level. We dedicate a specific attention to the initiatives in the fields of SSH and social innovation since these are relatively less documented than those in STEM and health

sciences. The document has been put on line in the form of an open google doc so that OSI delegates, external experts and stakeholders alike could complete and update it. The Register can be used as a source of inspiration at national level. Furthermore, SWG OSI intends to use the collection of initiatives to make an ex post assessment of the Open Science added value – but also the gaps that may be identified – in a pandemic crisis context. Hence the Open Register will offer the empirical basis for a future SWG OSI opinion paper on the topic.

- a. **Regular contacts between SWG OSI Chair and Vice-Chair with Kostas Glinos and Anette Bjornsson (OS team at the Commission)** have allowed to keep exchange of information. OSI has shared with the Commission its abovementioned Open Register of OSI initiatives relating to COVID-19, while the Commission keeps OSI delegates updated about most recent initiatives, notably the COVID-19 Data Portal.
- The OSI plenary spring meeting has been postponed from 23 April to 18 June. This will be an online conference. The meeting will have a thematic focus on the issue of Open Science monitoring.

SWG on Human Resources and Mobility (HRM)

Due to the COVID-19 crisis for all European countries, science advice and STI policy response for the pandemic is becoming a top priority for European governments. In addition, the lockdown and work-from-home have drastically affected everyone's work response rate, efficiency and effectiveness. Priorities have shifted towards responding immediately and urgently to issues related to the crisis. So consequently, anything not directly related, such as ERAC or SWG HRM, the response rate and engagement has shifted, and therefore is suffering **delays and time lags**. However, nothing to be greatly concerned about, considering the context, but **planning and deadlines will be affected/pushed back**. Meanwhile, however, our new joint task force (OSI-GRI-HRM) is **working virtually** (as planned) and progressing forward (slowly).

The **next SWG HRM meeting** is planned for June 3 (the day before the ERAC plenary) and will be held virtually. Although, the initial plan was for this June meeting to be back-to back with the

European Commission Euraxess network BHO representatives, so this needs to be taken into consideration. In summary: the **challenges are:** deadlines, response rate, engagement, and technical means for virtual meetings. And therefore the **suggestion is to** adjust the timelines and expectations to the situation accordingly.

ESFRI

The Covid-19 outbreak affected the work of ESFRI on different levels.

- **ESFRI Meetings (Forum, Executive Board, Strategic Working Groups)**

Since the lockdown, all ESFRI meetings have been organized digitally, a part from the ESFRI Forum of March that was supposed to take place in Zagreb as a physical meeting and had to be cancelled. The next ESFRI Forum meeting, initially planned as a physical meeting in Kiev, will be organised fully digital on the 16 -17 of June.

Since the confinement started, six ESFRI Executive Board meetings were organized digitally (some of them also with the participation of the Strategic Working Groups' Chairs) and several Strategic Working Groups' meetings have taken place.

ESFRI noted that shorter, operational meetings organised digitally are quite effective.

- **ESFRI White Paper**

The publication of the ESFRI White Paper had to be postponed. The Covid-19 outbreak had a serious impact on the communication campaign that had to be refined in order to address the new circumstances. The crisis situation and the cancellation of all meetings and events significantly reduced or delayed the opportunities of presenting and discussing the White Paper.

For instance, the Croatian Presidency Conference "Research Infrastructures for a Smarter Future" initially planned on the 17-18 March in Zagreb, where the White Paper should have been presented and discussed, had to be cancelled, restructured and finally organised digitally

on 15 May. Also the cancellation of the ESFRI-EOSC workshop, of national RI-related events and of the presentation to ERAC affected the White Paper's communication campaign.

- **ESFRI 2021 Roadmap**

Work on the preparation of the ESFRI 2021 Roadmap (assessment of 2010 and 2016 Projects, new proposals and drafting of the Landscape Analysis) continues with the unchanged aim of publishing the new Roadmap by the end of 2021.

However, due to delays caused by the Coronavirus outbreak, Delegations requested to postpone the deadline for the presentation of new proposals planned for 5 May 2020. The ESFRI Executive Board, therefore, decided to postpone the deadline to 9 September 2020, which will not affect the publication date of the Roadmap 2021.

- **Other ESFRI activities**

Covid-19 dedicated website

To support a science-led response to the COVID-19 outbreak, ESFRI set up a dedicated [website](#), which aggregates information about dedicated services offered by Research Infrastructures (RI) at European and National level. Despite the difficult circumstances, ESFRI Delegates and RIs have actively participated to this initiative by sending their contributions in a very timely manner.

Monitoring Framework

The work on the implementation of the Monitoring Framework was slightly delayed. A detailed proposal will be presented and ESFRI will take a decision in the "digital" plenary on 16-17 June on the practical implementation of the framework.

The report is available at the ESFRI website:

https://www.esfri.eu/sites/default/files/ESFRI_WG_Monitoring_Report.pdf.

- **Impact of Covid-19 on Research Infrastructures**

The Covid-19 crisis triggered an important reflection in ESFRI on the resilience and the capacity for emergency response of RIs.

In particular, RIs are impacted by the COVID-19 crisis in many ways, as the operations related to physical access have been strongly hampered or stopped completely. Construction of large-

scale RIs face delays due to problems with delivery on needed components, which is likely to result also in a cash flow issue. Moreover, in the near future, RIs could face a situation of increased costs and decreased funding, as individual countries may change their financial priorities due to a difficult economic situation.

This topic will be further discussed in the next ESFRI “digital” Forum on 16-17 June.
