



PSF Open Romania

Executive Summary

June 2023

Implementation Plans for Recommendations from the PSF Country Review of the Romanian Research and Innovation System

In October 2022, the Romanian Minister for Research, Innovation and Digitalisation as well as the Minister for Education jointly requested support of the European Commission Policy Support Facility (PSF) in the form of PSF Open. PSF Open is a novelty of the PSF tool and the PSF Open Romania exercise is the first of such an activity. The aim of PSF Open project was to support the Romanian authorities in implementing a range of selected recommendations from the PSF Country review of the Romanian R&I system¹ carried out between September 2021 and June 2022. It provides expert support to define ‘implementation plans’ for 10 out of the 30 PSF recommendations falling under the following key policy messages from the PSF Country review, namely on governance; human resources and internationalisation. The implementation plans take into account the interconnections between the PSF recommendations and the Romanian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP²) investment milestones and reform targets, as there is close connection between the latter and the PSF Country Review’s recommendations. The PSF Open Panel carried out its work from November 2022 to June 2023 and conducted two field visits during which it interviewed a wide range of representatives of the Romanian R&I system and discussed draft plans and options, checking their feasibility and seeking their endorsement and commitment. The work has also been deployed in collaboration with the World Bank who has been working on other PSF recommendations during the same period.

The PSF Open Romania project makes proposals for action plans to take for the implementation of the following recommendations:

KEY POLICY MESSAGE 1: Reinforce the overall governance of the R&I system through cross-governmental coordination and inclusion of the voice of society into this system.

- **Recommendation 1.1:** Strengthen the national vision for investment in R&I and coordination in the system through concerted action between the President’s and the Prime Minister’s offices, and with the engagement of key Ministers and Ministries.

Authorities at the national level are encouraged to agree on and strengthen the vision, for example in the form of a ‘solemn declaration’ or National Pact. This would be a short, ‘umbrella-like’ document potentially similar to the National Pact on Education, which would reconfirm Romania’s commitment to RDI such as also stated in the latest revision to Government Ordinance 57.

¹<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/8a4a2522-eac3-11ec-a534-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-259353375>

²https://commission.europa.eu/publications/proposal-council-implementing-decision-approval-assessment-recovery-and-resilience-plan-romania-and_en

- **Recommendation 1.2:** Under Reform 2 of the NRRP, establish a single R&I Coordination Structure with: at the political level, an inter-Ministerial Committee under the Prime Minister, coordinated by MCID, with close association of MIPE; and at the implementation level, a professional/technical national body - possibly a development of the Committee for Coordination of Smart Specialisation (CCSI). The executive structure should cover both national and Cohesion Policy programmes and be appropriately empowered and resourced to implement complex coordination actions with national and regional dimensions, including the synchronisation of funding calls, mutualisation of specialist expertise, enhanced data collection and monitoring between programmes.

The National Council for Science, Technology and Innovation Policy CNPSTI (the Council) will become the single coordinating body that will ensure coordination of the country's RDI activities and servicing the Council would be proposed by MCID (State R&D Authority).

It is a precondition that the Government ensures that the legal framework properly reflects the decision made (CID annex for Reform 2) concerning establishing a single Coordinating Structure for RDI. Also, the Government must clarify the composition of the CNPSTI, revise the legislation in accordance with the PSF recommendations 1.1 and 1.2, and amend Government Ordinance 57 to reflect CNPSTI's role in a single Coordinating Structure for RDI.

The national coordination is assured in a two-tier structure in which CNPSTI is supported. Two bodies - Inter-Institutional Committee for RDI and the Coordinating Committee on Smart Specialisation, CCSI - were recently established and coordinated by the national authority (MCID). These two bodies function as a second tier in the national coordinating structure in order to ensure horizontal and vertical cohesion.

Support for CNPSTI's work would be orchestrated by MCID in coordination with the PM's office, and flanked with adequate technical and professional support, for example by its own secretariat. MCID would ensure coordination with other ministries.

The national governance structure would count on input from the existing advisory bodies detailed in the PSF Report, from UEFISCDI, from the newly established honorary council of MCID, and from consolidated Monitoring & Evaluation data collected in accordance with internationally recognised manuals as recommended in the PSF Report.

The Council will become the umbrella for the advisory system as it is, and through relevant line ministries it would revisit the rationale, composition and mandates of each advisory body, and when necessary, propose adjustments to ensure an adequate and coherent advisory structure and transparent decision flows.

As soon as the Council has been established, a constituent meeting, for example in conjunction with a kick-off retreat/symposium, could be called under the auspices of the Prime Minister.

Following the constituent meeting of CNPSTI, the council would, with support coordinated by MCID, establish its own agenda with a focus on high-level policy and strategy issues.

KEY POLICY MESSAGE 10: Reinforce the role of EU Cohesion Policy Funds to support R&I in Romania through greater political support, enhanced synergies between programmes and improved implementation quality.

- **Recommendation 10.1:** Mobilise all forces, from the highest level, to fight more convincingly for R&I in the country's Cohesion Policy budget context over the medium to long terms. This should resist any threats to its existing Cohesion Policy budget from other fields of intervention, where it is easier to spend EU money. Performance on new R&I interventions must be robust and visible enough to enable the sector to achieve its full potential from the mid-term 'flexibility amount' award in 2025.
- **Recommendation 10.2:** Under Reform 2 of the NRRP, ensure that enhanced coordination of EU Cohesion Policy programmes and between them and NRRP and the PNCDI IV is a principal attribution of the single R&I Coordination Structure to be established (see Recommendation 1.2).

Effective implementation of recommendation 10.1 and 10.2 would be within the mandate and guidance of the Council (CNPSTI).

KEY POLICY MESSAGE 6: Provide a better environment for human resources in the public research system

- **Recommendation 6.1:** Under Reform 3 in the NRRP, simplify the evaluation of human resources in the research system and align conditions for career advancement to those implemented in other EU countries. Individual career plans should be agreed with institutions, and researchers should be held accountable against their own development plans.

Measure 1. Reform the evaluation system of researchers.

- Maintain the same institution for accreditation of (at least) level R3 and R4 researchers and professors. The competences on universities and research should be under the same ministry.
- Apply the commitments and principles of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (2022) to the evaluation of human resources.
- Reform CNATDCU and other advisory committees for research assessment increasing diversity in their members (following the recommendations from the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment), providing flexibility of their structure and making remuneration for their members symbolic and based on prestige.

Measure 2. Reform the career path.

- Reform the Higher Education Law to allow more flexibility regarding the number of teaching hours and include specific career paths that specialize in research, based on a contractual basis to be revised according to performance.
- Devise procedures, based on merit and performance, to assign additional positions (mixed teaching and research, in the case of HEI) to high performing university departments and research institutes.
- Approve annual calls at a fixed date for open positions as PhD student and post-doc researchers, assigned to consolidated groups for the integration of junior researchers (R1 and R2).
- Establish employment contract (instead of scholarship) for junior (pre-doc) researchers (3-4 years) as described in the implementation of recommendation 6.3., concerning the reform of doctoral programmes.

- Revise all the contracts currently available at the HEIs and RIs for personnel not holding a PhD and ensure that the working conditions do not preclude the employees from obtaining a PhD title and advance in their career.
- Integrate new researchers in R3 positions.
- Design a mechanism to integrate R4-level researchers attracted through the different available or future programmes into the Romanian R&I system.

- **Recommendation 6.2:** Clarify and realign the conditions and incentives in the salary and other remuneration for human resources in PROs and HEIs, as well as focusing on improving social prestige and recognition. Provide reasonable income guarantees to researchers and ensure fair treatment.

Measure 1. Revise salaries.

- Maintain equivalence in the classification and requirements for all researchers in HEIs and research institutes. The salaries should also correspond to the same scales and have a common base salary, with complements depending on the position and responsibilities.
- Update the salaries at the different scales of the research careers based on the ratio to the minimum wages. Correct discrepancies with other European countries, which are particularly large for higher levels in the career path (R3 and R4).

Measure 2. Design incentives, both monetary and non-monetary, to improve the quality of research in Romania.

- Align the incentives given to the researchers and faculty with the institutional criteria used to fund the HEIs and the Research Institutes.
- Establish a simple centralised research-performance individual incentive, voluntary but associated with quality and recognition of activities.
- Promote the adoption of internal incentives to researchers and research groups based on the criteria followed by the funding bodies to allocate resources to institutions.

- **Recommendation 6.3:** Complete the reform of doctoral studies (under responsibility of ME), encouraging collaboration between different institutions (National Research and Development Institutes, Academies and Universities).

Measure 1. Reserve an annual budget for funding of PhD students by yearly open call (scholarships or employment contracts).

Measure 2. Exploit different funding sources.

Measure 3. Establish clear tasks and rules for doctoral studies.

Measure 4. Set up clear supervision rules and guaranty the quality of supervision.

Measure 5. Innovate the organisation of the doctorate studies.

Measure 6. Extend and generalise the collaboration with other national or international programmes.

KEY POLICY MESSAGE 9: Offer more effective support for the internationalisation of Romanian research actors, relying on a more focused internationalisation strategy and stronger incentives for ‘brain circulation’.

- **Recommendation 9.2:** Devote efforts to improve the position of Romania in the European context, moving from a passive to a more active role, concentrating on priority areas and involving experts with forward-looking views.

Measure 1. Establish a professionalised NCP network with full-time jobs under a common strategic plan aimed at providing pro-active support.

Measure 2. Establish a spider web with two elements working in synergy with the NCPs: support centres for internationalisation at research institutions and a new ‘generalist’ signposting mission to Regional Development Agencies.

Measure 3. Adapt financial support to access EU funding and networking opportunities.

- **Recommendation 9.3:** Reform the National Contact Point (NCP) model, moving towards a more integrated, more professional and adequately funded NCP network.

Measure 1. Use the ‘centres of competence’ funded under NRRP Investment 5 (NRRP I5) and other researchers networks such as the UEFISCDI working groups organised by the NCP Network, to provide organised access to top Romanian expertise in relevant fields of EU research.

Measure 2. Develop networks of funding agencies for joint programming.

Measure 3. Extend interface efforts beyond the realm of MCID to other Ministries.

- **Recommendation 9.4:** Develop ‘intermittent brain circulation’ rather than ‘brain attraction’ strategies to attract researchers from abroad, as a more realistic path given the current conditions for conducting public research in Romania.

Measure 1. Establish a funding scheme to promote brain circulation for the benefit of the Romanian public research system, which builds on existing schemes and suggests improvements.

Measure 2. Ensure effective support services for mobile researchers and their families.

Measure 3. Enhance internationalisation incentives at institutional level.

Measure 4. Develop better intelligence and evidence on brain circulation and on effectiveness of mobility schemes.