

Southeast Asia – Europe Joint Funding Scheme Annual Evaluation Report 1



DLR Project Management Agency

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List of abbreviations

EC – European Commission
DG R&D – Directorate General for Research & Innovation
ISF – International Service Facility
EU – European Union
ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian nations
JFS 2 – Joint Funding Scheme phase 2
C&D – Communication and Dissemination
MEF – Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
KPI – Key Performance Indicator
FP – Framework Programme
PSC – Programme Steering Committee
CSA – Coordination and Support Action
ICSF – International Cooperation Service Facility
NCP – National Contact Point
WP – Work Programme
H2020 – Horizon 2020

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1 Introduction

An integral activity of this Specific Contract is the *monitoring of the funded projects under JFS contracts 1 and 2* (cf. Activity 3¹), which is further broken down into two actions: the *development of a monitoring methodology framework for the projects funded under the JFS calls* (A3.1) and the *implementation of the monitoring* (A3.2).

As outlined in A3.2, its output is the *annual monitoring report* (D3.2) that is based on the MEF (monitoring and evaluation framework) presented in D3.1 that described the target audience, the input required to implement the monitoring, the overall process and timing, and the envisioned output. Consequently, this document represents D3.2 and is comprised of the main results of the first monitoring phase.

2 Funded projects

Following the methodology described in the MEF (monitoring and evaluation framework, cf. D3.1), we invited the coordinators of the *Calls 1 and 2 projects*, i. e. in total 19 individuals to participate in our online survey. 15 invitees responded and actually participated, which translates to a satisfactory response rate of roughly 80 %.

The questionnaire was organised along the dimensions of the evaluation questions that guided the design of the MEF. They are as follows:

1. Composition of research teams working on JFS-funded projects (early career and female researchers),
2. Scientific excellence,
3. Innovation,
4. Networks and mobility,
5. Sustainability,
6. Project implementation, and
7. Additionality.

The results of the monitoring are being presented in this order. The esteemed reader is free to jump directly to the sections they are most interested in, it is not necessary to know the content of preceding sections.

¹ Activity 3: Monitoring of the funded projects under JFS contract 1 (1st and 2nd Joint Call) and JFS contract 2 (3rd and 4th Joint Call):

Action 3.1: Development of a monitoring methodology framework for the projects funded under the JFS calls

Action 3.2: Implementation of the monitoring

2.1 Composition of research teams working on the JFS-funded projects

The purpose of this dimension is to get some insights about the composition of the research team, especially about the share of *early career researchers* and *female researchers*.

The average number of researchers working on a project team amounted to 11, the minimum being 5 and the maximum being 25.

The share of early career researchers has, on average across all surveyed projects, amounted to ca. 28 %.

The share of female researcher has, on average across all surveyed projects, amounted to ca. 42 %.

Conclusion: The shares of early career and more senior researchers seem balanced; the share of female researchers seems adequate high.

2.2 Scientific excellence

A key success factor to achieve scientific excellence is growth of the involved researchers in terms of improved skills (both formal or informal) or knowledge (knowledge in their scientific domain, on procedures, on project management, on networking, etc.).

Here, each project coordinator assessed the growth of the involved researchers overall, that of early career researchers, and that of female researchers.

Regarding the growth of the researchers involved in the project overall, roughly 70 % of project coordinators reported that the skills and knowledge gains were as expected, the rest reported that their expectations were exceeded. For female researchers, vis-à-vis their male colleagues, roughly 75 % stated that their expectations were met, the others that theirs was exceeded.

The growth of early career researchers stands out slightly: 65 % of project coordinators reported it to have met their expectations while 35 % reported it to have exceeded their expectations.

To get some sense of scientific excellence, we consider scientific works such as journal articles, both peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed. We focus solely on works jointly published by authors from both regions; works that originated in only one region are not considered.

As the table below shows, almost all peer-reviewed works were jointly co-authored by researchers from both regions (14 out of 16 publications). Roughly 2/3 of all peer reviewed works were published open access. Non-peer-reviewed works were clearly not in the focus on the collaborative efforts and amount to only 2 works in total.

Table 1: Published scientific works, including Open Access and bi-regionally co-authored works

Type of scientific works	Number of published works	Number of open access works	Number of bi-regionally co-authored works
Peer-reviewed journal publications	16	11	14
Non-peer-reviewed articles	2	0	0
Conference papers	9	2	6

Two project coordinators reported that their project had generated additional types of scientific outcomes, i. e. one was awarded a grant by a Japanese foundation, the other received the iLab Grand Prix in 2020.

Scientific excellence: conclusions

The growth of the involved researchers in terms of skill and knowledge gains was generally more positive than the project coordinators expected. This is especially true for early career researchers.

So far, the JFS-funded projects have generated 27 scholarly works, roughly half of those are openly accessible.

2.3 Innovation

To get a sense of the contributions of the funded projects to *innovation*, we mainly consider tangible outputs in terms of number of patent filings (granted, filed, planned) and the involvement of SMEs – our hypothesis is that their involvement indicates a stronger market-based interest than academically-oriented endeavours without any SME-involvement.

When it comes to innovation output in terms of patent application filings, it is important to note that the period between the conclusion of the JFS-funded projects and the time we conducted the survey was too short for interested partners to submit any patent applications. That said, the respondents reported that five patent applications were planned.

A third of the project coordinators reported to have involved a SME. The kind of involvement is fairly broad, i. e. it ranged from the application of research results to advising researchers (in one instance actually a group of 20 SMEs from both regions), to participating in product design and development, to scaling up solutions provided by research, to delivering material needed (e. g. for vaccine delivery).

Innovation: conclusions

As expected, the chance that projects have been granted patents this early into their implementation is nil. The same is even true for patent filings. Nevertheless, a small number of patent applications seems to be planned. It remains to be seen whether those will indeed be filed in the future. It will be interesting to see whether and to what degree those efforts come to fruition.

Overall, 40 % of projects appear to be contributing to innovation by involving SMEs to either accommodate market knowledge in their research endeavours or generate solutions or knowledge that might be relevant for the market.

2.4 Networks and mobility

Creating and expanding one's own professional (and private) network is key in many professions, including academia. Mobility may be a means to this end but also provide opportunities to broaden one's horizon and develop an understanding for other cultures. All respondents reported that the following priorities mattered to them (percentage score in parenthesis):

- Broadening researchers' professional network in both regions (81 %)
- Increasing researchers' understanding of partner countries research systems (73 %)
- Enhancing researchers access to research facilities in both regions (79 %)
- Enhancing research data and knowledge exchange between the two regions (**87 %**)
- Enhancing mobility opportunities between the two regions (80 %)

While the development in most of these dimensions met the project coordinators' expectations, one did not: **researchers' mobility opportunities between both regions**. The reason for this may become apparent when looking at the table below, which shows that they were indeed negatively affected by the Covid-19 pandemic: roughly half of them reported to have been hampered in their ability to create connections and communicate with their partners. Furthermore, two thirds of all projects were hampered in their ability to conduct empirical research.

Table 2: Statements on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has ...	Number of affirmations	Share of affirmations (multiple choices were possible)
<i>... hampered your and your partners' ability to create connections.</i>	7	47 %
<i>... positively affected the rate of your encounters through more frequent online meetings.</i>	2	13 %
<i>... negatively affected the rate of communication between partners.</i>	4	27 %
<i>... hampered the project ability to conduct empirical research.</i>	10	67 %

As regards undertaking trips to their partner region, the opportunities to travel seem to be equally shared between female researchers and senior researchers (39 % and 37 %). Early career researchers seem to have enjoyed more opportunities to travel, namely 51 %. Presumably, the majority of those trips were undertaken before the pandemic hit; whether the same opportunities present themselves in the future will most likely depend on travel restrictions among countries.

While early career and female researchers from both regions seem to have visited their partner region equally as often, many more senior researchers from Europe did visit SEA than the other way around (35 vs. 9).

As indicator for future potential collaborations, *trust* is an indispensable factor. Here, 100 % of respondents stated that the partners gained trust among themselves during the project implementation.

Networks and mobility: conclusions

While the JFS-funded projects had building and expanding their professional network and using mobility opportunities high on their list of priorities, the Covid-19 pandemic started to negatively affect – and sometimes blocks – project activities.

Roughly 57 % of researchers were able to travel, presumably before the pandemic hit. According to the project coordinators, opportunities to do so were enjoyed by a larger share of early career researchers, compared to the share of female and senior researchers.

Building trust among project partners seems to still be going strong, despite the difficulties caused by the global pandemic.

2.5 Sustainability

The sustainability dimension has been introduced to gauge the plans and intentions of the project partners with regard to activities beyond the lifetime of the JFS-funded project. Questions range from impact achieved so far to follow-up projects to other joint activities with project partners.

When asked if they would pursue the same topic in a follow-up project, 87 % of respondents confirmed that they would; the others seem to make it conditional on the outcomes of their project.

In terms of following up with another project, five respondents reported to have submitted a project proposal – no project has been granted funding yet. 17 follow-up projects are currently in the works.

One of the major benefits of international collaboration is to expand one's network and gain new collaborative opportunities. Nine out of 15 project coordinators reported to having joint activities beyond the boundaries of the project – they are as follows:

Table 3: Joint activities among partners outside the project

Joint activity among partners outside the project	No. of joint activities
joint publications	2 (13 %)
joint technical research (technical analysis, lab work, etc.)	3 (20 %)
joint workshop(s), trainings, or similar	2 (13 %)
joint project proposals	5 (33 %)
careers opportunities	3 (20 %)
joint patent applications	0

When asked if the impact that the project generated on its targeted audience so far met their expectations, the vast majority (~ 67 %) confirmed that it has, 20 % think their impact is beyond expectations, 13 % that their impact – so far – scored below expectations.

As factors hampering their project's impact, the respondents emphasised the Covid-19 pandemic the most – some were even affected right at the project start, which resulted in them having had to considerably postpone field activities and installation setups.

When asked how the JFS may help in this situation, no concrete suggestions were made.

Sustainability: conclusions

All funded projects are interested in continuing to work on their topic, although two make it contingent on the outcome of their current project. Despite the pandemic, five follow-up project proposals have already been submitted, 17 are currently in the works. It remains to be seen if this level of activities can be maintained throughout the ongoing crisis.

2.6 Project implementation

This section examines a number of aspects that the JFS-funded projects experience during their implementation, e. g. factors that make their work easier or harder, i. e. that support or hinder their progress.

First of all is the support structure in place, be it advice given by either the National Contact Points or the Joint Call Secretariat, or the usefulness of the online application tool, or the clarity of regulations in place. All these items are essential in providing support to project partners.

As the figure below shows, all scrutinised aspects of support have received unfavourable ratings. Interestingly, the least unfavourable rating was given to the web application tool.

Overall, the satisfaction with the support provided by the JFS seems good but there is room for improvement. When looking at the overall picture, two items stand out: a) the advice given by the Joint Call Secretariat seems somewhat of a mixed bag – only 40 % seem satisfied, the majority remains neutral (33 %) or dissatisfied (27 %); b) the picture is fairly similar with regard to the clarity of regulations (47 % positive, 27 % neutral, 20 % dissatisfied). While not entirely positive, such results were to be expected since it is still early days for the JFS.

The satisfaction is expected to increase with each subsequent Call. Hence it will be of interest to verify whether this is the case in the next monitoring round, i. e. in particular for Calls 3 and 4.

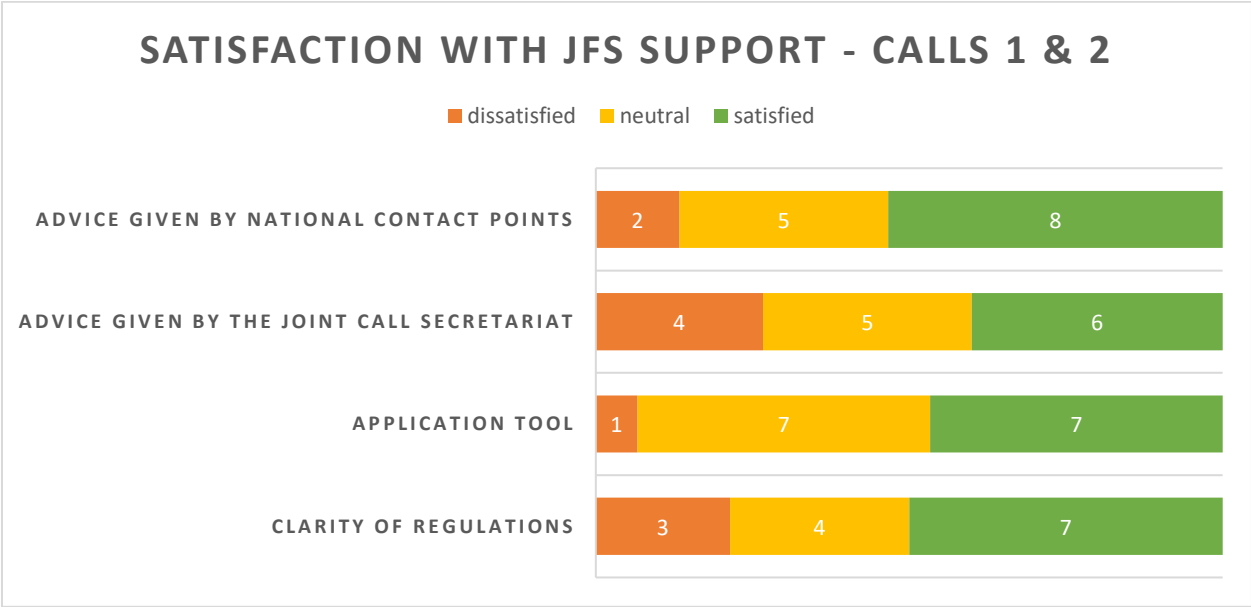


Figure 1: Satisfaction with JFS Support – Calls 1 & 2

Apart from the support provided by the JFS, it makes sense to gauge some of the challenges that the funded projects face. We have looked into three items in particular:

a) challenges with national funding, such as delays with regards to funding or contracts

Seven respondents reported to having had challenges with national funding. The biggest challenge is owed to the fact that national requirements (e. g. administrative or financial procedures) are not harmonised among countries – existing initiative in ASEAN and Europe may help in this regard – and that even individual university regulations may hinder getting a project up and running. In one instance, it was also said that funding was being transferred through many organisational levels (both external and internal), taking months for it to become available to the project consortium.

b) did the partners encounter other challenges during the implementation phase of the project

Four respondents reported to having other types of implementation challenges, some of which are more individual to projects, such as the budget of the European and SEA side being asymmetrical (SEA receiving an unproportionally high amount of funding), or that there are institutional mechanisms in place that are hard to overcome successfully, but the majority of reasons have again to do with the Covid-19 pandemic (next to impossible to travel or ship materials in a timely manner, considerable delays, impossible to conduct field work, etc.). It remains to be seen if travel restrictions will be lifted so that the projects can fully resume their planned activities; the project planning might still need to be adjusted.

c) so far, was the project able to complete its works in time and according to the originally planned budgets

Nine respondents reported to having had difficulties to completing their work in time and according to the planned budget, the sole reason being again the Covid-19 crisis.

Project implementation: conclusions

Satisfaction with the support provided by the JFS to the funded projects is mixed, which was to be expected as it still early days for the JFS. It will be important for the JFS management to keep improving its services, as well as making it easier for project partners to apply for funding and to implement their project.

Satisfaction seems highest regarding the online application tool.

Lastly, challenges have arisen mainly due to the Covid-19 crisis. While only limited options are available to the JFS in terms of taking mitigating steps, some challenges relate to national funding or regulations that should be – and most likely are already being – tackled.

2.7 Additionality

When it comes to gauging the additionality, i. e. the value added by the JFS vis-à-vis other existing sources of funding, there is a crucial question: “**Would you – meaning the project consortium – have implemented the project without the funding provided by the JFS?**”

It is usually a good sign if the majority of respondents affirms that this is NOT the case. With regard to the JFS funding, this is overwhelmingly the case: All but one project coordinators stated that they would not have implemented the project without the JFS funding; the sole person who claimed that they would clarified that they would have done so slower than with the JFS funding.

To provide more substance to scrutinising the additionality, we also added the question what the project coordinators liked most about the JFS – 13 out of 15 provided an actual answer to this open question. Most of them appreciate the multinational and interdisciplinary nature of the scheme, the relatively low administrative burden during the project implementation, the global scope of the funded topics, and that the JFS accepts all sorts of costs, which enables mobility between the two regions and the intensive form of collaboration required to successfully tackle global challenges.

The last crucial question to gauge the JFS’s additionality is to ask the project coordinators, whether they would do it again, given the opportunity and if they knew what they now know. This received 100 % confirmation, which is a clear testament to the value provided by the JFS and possibly the idea behind it. On this last point, the next monitoring phase will shed more light from the perspective of the participating R&I funders who will be consulted in autumn 2021.

Additionality: conclusions

The participating project partners agree that the JFS provides funding that is complementary to national and other international interventions.

They appreciate the low administrative burden during the project implementation, that a wide range of costs is eligible, and that the supported mobility enables collaboration that would otherwise not have been possible – these are key when it comes to jointly tackling global challenges.

Given the hindsight and opportunity, 100 % of project coordinators would again apply for and implement the project under the JFS.

3 Conclusions and outlook

Following the methodology described in the *Monitoring and Evaluation Framework* (MEF; cf. D3.1), we invited the coordinators of the *Calls 1 and 2 projects* – 15 out of the 19 invited individuals participated in our online survey, resulting in a satisfactory response rate of roughly 80 %.

This report follows the structure laid out of the MEF: (a) composition of research teams working on JFS-funded projects, (b) scientific excellence, (c) innovation, (d) networks and mobility, (e) sustainability, (f) project implementation, and (g) additionality.

The central results are captured in coloured boxes at the end of each section of the previous chapter. They are designed to eventually answer the evaluation questions posed in the MEF but, presently, remain an early and incomplete snapshot. Yet, a few preliminary insights can be provided: While the Covid-19 pandemic has made some project activities significantly more difficult to implement and even halted some, progress along many of the above-mentioned dimensions can be registered – least with regard to longer-term outcomes, such as granted patents, the biggest with regard to cooperative aspects such as drafting joint proposals or jointly publishing scientific works.

The next monitoring phase will include project of Calls 3 and 4, as well as R&I funders involved in the JFS – they will be consulted especially with regard to the idea underlying the JFS, its additionality vis-à-vis other funding interventions, and about their satisfaction with the JFS management.