

## Project Deliverable Information Sheet

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## Document Control Sheet

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## WP 5, task 5.1: Outreach promotion open access pilot

### Deliverable 5.1 Report on promotion open access

#### Background

In countries without large research infrastructures, the research community is less aware of the possibilities offered and of course, much less familiar with the application procedures. Preparing a successful experiment proposal for a research infrastructure offering open access based in competition is not a trivial task. In addition to the knowledge of the research field it requires the capacity to provide all the important details in a very short text, therefore describing the experiments in the most efficient way but not omitting any clue information that may be considered as a weakness in the experimental plan. In addition, the presentation of preliminary results usually reinforces the proposal, but for researchers without access to other advanced characterization technique this evolves a vicious circle that make their chances even lower. One of the objectives of CERIC is to contribute to the development of the ERA and its innovation potential, and this can only be achieved if the gaps across Europe are reduced. For this reason, CERIC proposed two pilots to be developed in the frame of the project ACCELERATE, one on fast access (see D5.1) and the second one, called “Promotion open access”.

The purpose of this pilot was to increase the participation of researchers from countries where the user base is not well developed. Through some targeted actions of outreach, promotion and personalised support, we aimed at receiving a higher number of proposals from researchers working in the target countries and to help them improve their proposals, so they could be successful when applying to European research infrastructures with open access based on quality peer review.

The initial rationale behind this task was to support the TNA of users coming from the selected target countries that were granted access to the CERIC facilities. Given the low number of successful proposals from the target countries, it was decided to change the approach and start offering a personalized support for the design of the proposal, the performance of the measurements on the instruments granted and in the data analysis. Of course this change was more demanding for the scientific and technical personnel of the facilities, but since the obstacle was getting successful proposals, the p

The synergy of this action with the outreach activities of WP 4: “Enlargement and International Outreach” goes in both directions: on one side, the activities in WP4 engage users for the pilot; on the other side, the implementation and monitoring of this pilot, done in WP5, provides feedback to WP4 on the communities to target.

#### Implementation of the promotion open access pilot

The pilot started formally in July 2018, although users started to take advantage of this personalised support already in September 2017: as a result of the CONTACT event, three researchers from the target countries applied for beamtime to the CERIC calls for proposals. Two of them received support in proposal writing from the scientists that led the practical session at the CONTACT workshop, or from the facility’s staff, and they were awarded time. The facilities made an effort to provide time to these users, from the time reserved for their internal research, and were very supportive during measurements and after, helping with data analysis. This experience helped us to tune the pilot according to this experience.

The pilot focused on three main aspects:

- **Support for the preparation and submission of proposals**

The time of a researcher competent in the scientific area of interest of the user was allocated for specific support such as feasibility tests, discussion of the experiment, proposal writing and submission. An average of 0.5 PMs (2 weeks) was allocated per every user group requesting to participate to the pilot. Additional time was allocated on demand, for complex multi-technique proposals.

- **Support during the measurements**

Researchers from the facilities' staff with a good knowledge of the instrumentation and experience on the specific measurements were designated to follow the user group during the measurements with the scope of guiding and supporting them. An average of 0.25 PMs were allocated per every user group requesting to participate to the pilot. In case of complex multi-technique proposals that required additional effort for instance the preparation of the samples, this was taken into account.

- **Support after the measurements**

The equivalent of 0.5 PMs (2 weeks) of a researcher was allocated for successful user groups for specific support during data analysis, reporting and publication. Additional time could be allocated on demand, for complex multi-technique proposals.

During the course of the promotional open access pilot the instrumentation made available to users by facilities changed, due to the availability of the human resources dedicated from each facility to the pilot. As mentioned earlier, the pilot as originally conceived was not efficient as expected, so it was decided to adapt it. The pilot was redesigned to address the problem of the lack of successful applications coming from the target countries, and to keep also into account the workload needed after the measurements, since the research groups participating in these measurements usually had little knowledge of the complex data analysis tools needed to extract the results from the data produced during the measurements. This support is fundamental for the exploitation of the outputs of the measurements and finally, the publication of the results, that is one of the parameters against which facilities are ultimately evaluated.

### Target countries

The target countries for the pilot are listed in the table below. Researchers working in one of those countries were eligible, independently on their nationality:

Post-soviet countries via UZHNU	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Russia , Moldova
Balkan / Former Yugoslavia countries	Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, The Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania
Other Central and Eastern European countries	Slovakia, Bulgaria, Turkey

During the implementation of the pilot it was reported by a facility, that proposals submitted from Jordan were facing similar issues as those coming from target countries in terms of unsuccessful proposals design, so it has been decided to offer access to the pilot also to proposal coming from Jordan's Institutes. The inclusion of Jordan had the purpose to help this country to develop their user community, in a moment when their own synchrotron radiation facility (SESAME) was in commissioning, therefore they would have

benefitted from experienced researchers during the first years of operation of the synchrotron. This was not included in the original ACCELERATE proposal but the partnership considered the inclusion of Jordan a timely decision, in line with the objectives of CERIC and the pilot.

### Software development

For the implementation of the pilot we used the existing platform and procedures for the submission of regular proposals. No software development was necessary. Promotion access proposals followed the same path as regular proposals and were evaluated with the same procedure and criteria, to choose the most scientifically sound. The activity, after the change proposed, was focused on helping these researchers to develop excellent proposals that could compete with the others on equal grounds, not through a preferential channel or dedicated access. This was necessary to make the research groups autonomous to apply to any facility, even those without similar programmes, and also to guarantee the best use of the time of the large research infrastructures since the access time is limited and expensive, therefore the funders expect also a good level of outputs (e.g. publications in peer reviewed journals) and any other decision than choosing the best proposals would have compromised their performance.

### Dissemination

This initiative has been advertised since its launch in the users' section of the CERIC website, in the ACCELERATE website, on CERIC social media channels and campaigns, and at all the events where CERIC has participated. Moreover, the link to the CERIC users' webpage was included in the promotional email sent to all the users registered in the Virtual Unified Office (VUO), the platform used for proposal submission and administration. The VUO database contains more than 15.000 email addresses. The promotional email was also sent to all users from target countries who submitted their proposals in the previous CERIC's calls for Proposals, as well as contact points and interested researchers of past outreach events. Promotional material has been prepared (roll-ups, leaflets, banners, bookmarks, calendars and more) and was delivered during the outreach events and promoted in CERIC's social media channels.

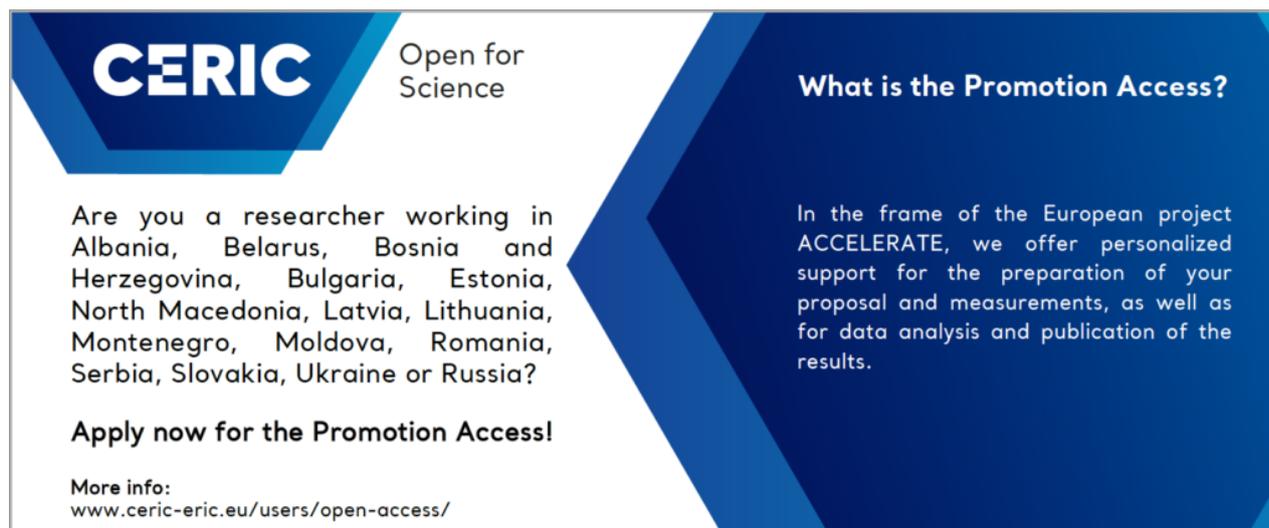


Figure 1: Example of one of the promotional banners used for the dissemination of the promotion access

## Results of the pilot

Since the implementation of the promotion open access pilot a total of 5 research groups from the target countries applied formally and received the support requested which resulted in 5 proposals submitted through the CERIC Call for Proposals open access. All of the 5 submitted proposals have been granted access to the requested instruments part of the pilot. The information about the research groups and instruments used are detailed in table 1.

In the periodic collection of feedback from the directors of the partner facilities, during the implementation of the pilot, many of them reported that they were already offering this kind of support to less experienced users, either because this represented a priority also for their national authorities or because as a research infrastructure they felt compelled to do so. Therefore, they considered that accounting their time to the pilot in a European project was not correct, since this represents their ordinary activity. Others mentioned a shortage in support personnel and therefore the need to focus on the most productive user groups, to be able to fulfil the expectations of their managers and funders. A third comment regarded the administrative burden to account for a small amount of time of their staff. This is the case of the Czech facility, where they provided the support but preferred not to account this to the project, therefore we have no official registry (e.g. timesheets) of the time spent and the user groups supported.

Proposal	Submission year	Affiliation Institute	Affiliation Country	Allocated Instruments
20177016	2017	Georgian Technical University	Georgia	Static & Dynamic Light Scattering (LSLTUG) Lab Small Angle X-ray Scattering (SXFTUG)
20177028	2017	Hacettepe University	Turkey	600 MHz NMR Spectrometer (LARA) Lab Small Angle X-ray Scattering (SXFTUG)
20192002	2019	The University of Jordan	Jordan	Small Angle X-ray Scattering (SAXS)
20192007	2019	Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan	Jordan	Small Angle X-ray Scattering (SAXS)
20192124	2019	Georgian Technical University	Georgia	Static & Dynamic Light Scattering (LSLTUG) Lab Small Angle X-ray Scattering (SXFTUG)

Table 1: Proposals that benefitted formally from the pilot, with details on the research groups and instruments used.

## Conclusions and future of the pilot

The aim of the Promotion open access pilot was to increase CERIC's user base providing dedicated and personalized support to researchers from the selected target countries, helping them in designing successful proposals, measurements and data analysis, increasing their chances to publish peer reviewed papers. Moreover, the pilot aimed at training these researchers to help them become independent and successful when applying to any large scale research infrastructure, training other researchers from their collaboration networks and developing user communities in these countries.

Unfortunately, the number of researchers that we can count as formal users of the pilot was limited to a few, despite the strong dissemination actions carried on during the entire lifetime of the project. The formal results obtained were not satisfying, although we know these do not represent the entirety of the user groups that actually received support by the facilities. However, we've seen an increase in the overall applicants from the target countries, from what we can conclude that the promotion actions were effective in attracting new users. However, the success rate for users from these countries remained low, suggesting that when researchers did not receive a very structured support they did not manage to overcome the barriers and succeed in the peer review selection.

On the contrary, when the support was delivered with the methodology adopted in the pilot it was quite effective, as all of the user participating in the pilot had been granted access to at least one of the requested instruments based on a successful proposal, although so far there is no evidence of scientific papers published, that is what we would expect to close the cycle. However, the kind of support offered during the pilot impacts significantly in the human resources of a facility, and many of them explained that unless additional personnel is hired for this purpose and this objective is clearly acknowledged by the funders, they cannot proceed with such an implementation, that uses resources (human and hardware) in competition, affecting the productivity of the facility.

For the reasons stated previously, after a careful evaluation of the cost benefit balance of this pilot, CERIC will discontinue this kind of access in the future.