

[View this email in your browser](#)

# Newsletter June 2018



## FOREWORD



Dear readers,

I am delighted to introduce the first eNewsletter of Alliance4Life, which gives me the opportunity to share news about the progress made during the first six months of the Alliance4Life operation.

Following the kick-off meeting held in Brno in January, the release of the Alliance4Life official Declaration, and the successful introduction of our initiative in Brussels, the Alliance4Life successfully embarked on implementation of the work plan.

The ongoing tasks include the assessment of research and innovation performance of our member institutions, and benchmarking against advanced European partners. The aim of the benchmarking exercise is not to compete internally, but to inspire and help each other. Therefore, we discuss ideas of training modules that will be shared amongst the community.

We are working on the identification of best practices of how to overcome barriers and make use of factors that enable improvement of institutional governance and research management practices in our countries.

Moreover, our current work will result in the first policy communication of Alliance4Life, a position paper on the European Commission's proposal of the Horizon Europe, which will be soon made available at the EU level.

Finally, I am very pleased to share the information about the collaboration with our sister alliance, EU-

LIFE that was initiated at the second Alliance4Life meeting in the lovely Smolenice castle in Slovakia. Enjoy pictures from this meeting with a great atmosphere and news about outcomes from our focus group discussions below.

*Zlatushe Novotná*  
*Alliance4Life Coordinator*

Alliance4Life is the first Horizon-funded project that brings together the best national health research institutes from the newer EU member states, or EU-13 as they are often referred. The meeting in beautiful Smolenice castle, overlooking the breath-taking Slovakian landscape, marks the 6-month anniversary of this new community and it is clear that the project is on the right track. Smiling people greet each other as old friends, talk about their latest research, or discuss how to harmonize data in focus groups.



Participants from EU-13 countries are infrequent guests in Horizon2020 and if they come, they tend to partner with Western institutes. Why is partnering among EU-13 institutes so rare when they have so much in common? The purpose of Alliance4Life is to remove these silos. It serves as a platform to share knowledge and expertise. Partners can measure themselves against their regional peers, learn from others who face the same reality, and jointly improve their institutions.

The Smolenice meeting already demonstrated the enormous potential of this community. The wealth of data collected from institutions on many aspects from the funding source, to human resources, and to scientific publications will serve as a basis for benchmarking the institutions' performances. Formal and informal networks are forming, and travel grants will foster further scientific collaborations.

There is still a long and winding road ahead to make Alliance4Life an established, reputable, and sustainable partnership that cannot only serve its members, but also influence national and European policies. To obtain this, the recipe is simple: strong commitment, endurance, and high-quality work from partners. Visibility is equally important, and everyone can do a lot about it! Raise awareness about the alliance within your institutions, with national stakeholders, and European policy groups and do not be afraid to use 21st-century communication channels.

I believe that this community will thrive in achieving its mission, thanks to the enthusiastic work of the coordinator and the commitment of partners. From our side, you can count on the continued support of the European Commission.

*Ferenc Marofka*  
*Project Officer, European Commission*



**FOCUS GROUPS**

## Science Evaluation



The science evaluation focus group (FG) extensively discussed different barriers to success in health research & innovation and identified obstacles, which directly or indirectly relate to scientific evaluation. The FG also analysed the preliminary benchmarking data, the definition of appropriate indicators, and the processes of collecting and validating data values. Progress on other tasks was made, such as creating a common database of experts and monitoring an effective system of institutional evaluation, and further steps were proposed. During the meeting, Seppo

Parkilla, the external expert from the University of Tampere, introduced all participants to the Finnish evaluation system and the institutional activities for supporting excellent research and success in grant competitions. He also presented the SPARK programme, which provides intensive and systematic support for increasing the maturity of ideas for applications in the life sciences and health technology fields.

The meeting was a great opportunity for sharing experiences and discussing both institutional and national systems of evaluation. All group members actively participated in debating and formulating the outcomes.

## Research Ethics and Integrity

To better structure discussion on the project issues seen from the research ethics point of view, the group first defined its main objectives. The general aim of research ethics is to maintain society's trust in science and research. This general objective can be obtained by protecting the interests of research participants, as well as by following principles of research integrity and assuring high-quality data. The group identified the following as the most important barriers to achieving the aforementioned objectives:



Lack of expertise in research ethics when preparing research proposals; deficiencies in the Research Ethics Committee systems; insufficiently developed research integrity structures; difficulties in complying with personal data protection, and quality data management.

These are the most important research ethics and integrity obstacles to be dealt with at the institutional, and to some extent, national and EU levels.

## Human Resources and Mobility

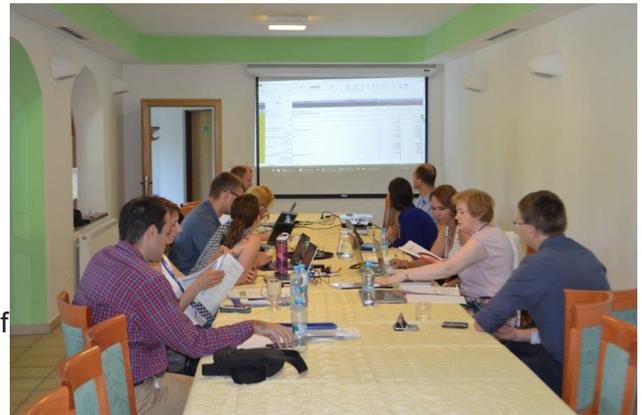
Members of the Human Resources (HR) and Mobility focus group agreed that barriers in HR in the research area are complex in nature, and therefore, solutions cannot be found solely at the institutional, national or EU levels. The real solutions will require a multi-level approach that will combine institutional efforts, and lobbying on the national and EU levels. Many actions can be launched by research institutes and universities in order to attract and retain excellent scientists. For future cooperation within the Alliance4Life and tackling identified barriers, the HR and Mobility focus group will organize a workshop on



recruitment, career development, work-life balance, gender equality, and other important topics in cooperation with the LIBRA project run by EU-LIFE institutes.

## Grants and Research Funding

As the European Commission recently released its proposal of the next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation “Horizon Europe,” the Smolenice meeting was very conveniently timed for the Grants and Research Funding focus group. The group engaged in a lively discussion on how the programme may contribute to Sharing Excellence across Europe and foster breakthrough research in emerging centres of excellence in EU-13. The group presented conclusions that will be considered for an official position paper of Alliance4Life, which will be communicated at the EU level. Beyond Horizon Europe, the group will actively promote the efficient usage of synergies with European Structural and Investment Funds, push for policy dialogue between the European and national levels, and use the experience from successful reforms in countries such as Estonia to promote and guide the development of evaluation systems in national grant agencies.



## Core Facilities & Big Data



Within the Core Facilities & Big Data focus group, the online database of equipment was created and will be launched to provide comprehensive information about core facilities' equipment. This database will initially be shared within Alliance4Life, and has the potential to involve institutes outside of Alliance4Life in the future. The main purpose is to share information about available equipment with potential users, which will allow for potential research collaborations.

## Knowledge and Technology Transfer

Innovation is the result of multiple factors, which includes excellence in research, substantial funding, institutional reputation, and knowledge transfer. It is necessary to include knowledge transfer in institutional missions and strategies. This should result in changes of the organization, including the re-design of processes, new definitions of key performance indicators, and changes in institutional culture.

The group discussed best practice examples, such as motivation schemes for researchers, and the creation of committees to provide recommendations on patentable inventions and commercialization steps. Several training topics were suggested, such as how to estimate the monetary value of an invention, how to describe its value, and how to approach possible commercialization partners.



## Science Communication



The role of the Science Communication focus group is to share best practices and learn from each other in order to increase the visibility of Alliance4Life, its member institutions, and scientific researchers. During an open discussion, the team identified two main barriers – resources, and the willingness of scientists to communicate. Functional communication teams are key for national and international visibility. It is the role of the communication staff to help scientists in communicating their work to the public. The main tools and aim of the

Science Communication group are to share best practices in the communication fields, share knowledge, and increase visibility of Alliance4Life researchers and scientific institutes in the greater scientific community and public. The communication team plans to focus on promoting open science and collaborate in this area with the ORION project, which was implemented by several members of EU-LIFE. Moreover, knowledge will be shared among partners about social media usage for science communication.

## Alliance4Life Will Offer Travel Grants for its Scientists



The member institutions of Alliance4Life offer their researchers the opportunity to participate in selected scientific events with a free or reduced registration fee and fully covered travel costs. Scientists will apply for a travel grant following the first call in September. Information and a list of events will be found on the Alliance4Life website and promoted within the partner institutions internally.

The first opportunity for travel grants will be the conference on Nucleic Acids, Immunity and Genome Defence, taking place in Brno, Czech Republic on 4–6 September 2018. See the website [HERE](#). If you are interested in participating in the conference, please contact [Iva Sedláková](#).

Next event opened for Alliance4Life partners is 13th Conference on Mitochondrial Physiology: The role of mitochondria in health, disease and drug discovery held on September 18–21, 2018 by Latvian Institute of Organic Synthesis. You can find the web



page of the conference .

For other future travel grants, please check the Alliance4Life website in September.



This project has received funding from the *European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme* under grant agreement No 779303. This Newsletter reflects only the author's view and the European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

---

*Copyright © 2018 Alliance4Life, All rights reserved.*

Want to change how you receive these emails?  
You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).

The MailChimp logo, featuring the word "MailChimp" in a white, cursive font on a grey rectangular background.