

Activity Report

2024

Mission Europe
pour la Recherche

amU Aix
Marseille
Université



Inserm





A pivotal year in strengthening support for European research projects on the Aix-Marseille site

JANUARY 27TH 2025

Contents

Foreword by the Mission Europe for Research's Steering Committee (COFIL)	7
Introduction	8
1. Establishing the MER as a key on-site stakeholder for European research and innovation projects	10
1.1. Establishing strong, agile and shared governance	11
1.2. Defining a communication strategy and an integrated service offer	11
1.3. Drawing up the 2025-2027 Europe Multi-Annual Action Plan	12
2. Implementing a strategy for detection, anticipation and influence	14
2.1. Implementing a personalised awareness-raising and detection programme	15
2.2. A multi-level strategy to present work programme opportunities	16
2.3. Structuring a site-level influence strategy	17
3. Structuring and reinforcing support for project construction and monitoring	19
3.1. The implementation of structuring tools and processes	20
3.2. Improving and reinforcing support for setting up projects	21
3.3. The roll-out of a project security strategy	22
4. Team integration and development of skills	24
4.1. Constructing an integrated team	25
4.2. Skill development is a priority	26
4.3. Closer collaboration between the divisions	27

Appendices	28
Appendix 1. Organisational diagram showing how the MER serves researchers and academics	28
Appendix 2. Organisation of the Europe 2025-2027 Multi-Annual Action Plan	29

List of Boxes

BOX 1. KEY MILESTONES FOR 2024

BOX 2. MANY INITIATIVES TO SHARE AND DISSEMINATE MER EXPERIENCES

BOX 3. RENEWAL OF SUPPORT FOR ERCs THROUGH LE CERCLE

- THE ERC CLUB ON THE AIX-MARSEILLE SITE

BOX 4. KEY FIGURES ON PROJECT SUBMISSION SUPPORT AND MONITORING IN 2024 AND AN APPRAISAL OF THE SITE'S HORIZON EUROPE RESULTS AT END 2024

BOX 5. ANTICIPATING CHANGES LINKED TO THE MOVE TO LUMP SUMS



Foreword

by the Mission Europe for Research's
Steering Committee (COFIL)

The Mission Europe for Research (MER) is the result of the collective ambition of four partner Establishments - Aix-Marseille University (amU), the CNRS, the National Institute of Health and Medical Research (Inserm) and the Research Institute for Development (IRD). The Mission is the embodiment of the ambition to bring about far-reaching transformations to serve research and innovation on the Aix-Marseille site. The MER brings together research support staff specialising in European programmes from our organisations and from Protisvalor, an amU subsidiary in charge – amongst others - of the financial management of European research projects, plus new staff members recruited through the ASDESR Booster project. It marks a major step forward in bolstering our capacity to support our site's academic community. The MER also provides a response to the strong need for simplification and reactivity in what is a demanding and constantly changing environment, thus helping our researchers and academics to take part in the EU's Framework Programmes for research and innovation and in sector-based R&I programmes.

The MER is currently unique in France in terms of its ambition and scope, a testament to our shared commitment to making access to European funding easier for all our researchers and academics, facilitating their integration into the best research networks and contributing to enhancing the Aix-Marseille site's influence within the European Research Area.

Since its operational launch on January 1st 2024, the MER has distinguished itself through its work in the field and the individualised support it gives researchers and academics faced with increased European competition to help them maximise their chances of success and ensure the effective, simple and secure implementation of winning projects. The MER team is now ready to provide a harmonised, improved and innovative service to drive our site's collective performance and enhance its attractiveness.

This activity report testifies to the progress made and the first results obtained in 2024. The work carried out so far has provided a solid foundation for a structure destined to become a reference organisation in its field and a source of inspiration for those working on other research support activities.

On behalf of all the MER's supervisory authorities, we would like to pay tribute to the commitment of our teams and the work they have accomplished to serve the scientific community.

An ambition
for profound
transformation
in the service of
research and
innovation.

Stefan ENOCH

Vice-President in charge of Research at Aix-Marseille University

Jérôme VITRE

CNRS Regional Officer

Françoise SIMON-PLAS

Inserm Regional Officer

Christophe CHAMBON

IRD Regional Officer for south-east France

Introduction

The year 2024 marked a turning point in support on the Aix-Marseille site for research units aiming to work on European projects. The creation of the Mission Europe for Research is the culmination of many years of work by amU, the CNRS, the Inserm and the IRD to pool their strengths to support our scientific community and help them progress in attracting European funding.¹ This pioneering initiative's objective is to **simplify and reinforce access to European research and innovation funding** by using three levers - **harmonising** our parent organisations' work processes, **enhancing the services provided** for researchers and academics and finally **providing them with individually tailored support** in developing their European strategy, putting submission files together and setting up their projects.

The first year of existence was particularly intense. The MER coped with **a strong increase in activity** on the site with **the number of projects submitted doubling** (from 90 in 2023 to 191 in 2024), 38 projects accepted for negotiations in 2024 and 194 managed projects with financial monitoring by our partner Establishments' European financial units. Alongside this, the MER undertook an **in-depth overhaul** of its processes and tools to simplify, optimise and reinforce support for researchers and academics. The MER's response to this dual challenge has been a success because of the unfailing commitment of the teams involved and the constant support of the organisations.

This first Activity Report was written towards the end of what was in many respects a pivotal year and is notably dense in nature and of particular importance. It is not intended to be exhaustive, instead talking a look back at the MER's most remarkable achievements. These have enabled the MER to establish itself as a key stakeholder for Europe on our site (section 1), implement a detection, anticipation and influence strategy (section 2) and structure and reinforce support for project construction and non-financial project monitoring (section 3). It also presents the actions taken to ensure the effective integration of the team and the development of its members' skillsets (section 4).

The work of the MER in the coming years will aim to **continue and amplify this momentum** in a context including Horizon Europe's final programming (2026-2027) and the preparation of the 10th Research and Innovation Framework Programme (FP10). In 2025, a new phase will start with the implementation of the **Europe 2025-2027 Multi-Annual Action Plan** (see section 1.3). The new plan will make it possible to experiment with and bolster new activities, notably in the areas of networking, detection in the field, support in constructing project submissions and improving their quality. The work to come also includes setting up a skills development system within the MER, driving a network of on-site European Project Managers (EPM) and raising the general awareness of European projects.

1. The process to set up the MER started with an in-depth analysis of existing practices, a study of the requirements of researchers and academics and benchmarking on the European scale. This carried on in 2023 with the close involvement of teams and stakeholders on defining a pooling model and the method for implementing it operationally. To sum up, three main factors bolstered this pioneering approach - strong financial support from the partner Establishments and from the FTAP (French Public Sector Transformation Fund) PAgEU project, the ANR through the Booster project and Amidex; using an agile project mode that enables reactive decision-making; and finally, the close involvement of the different stakeholders including MER staff members in a co-construction approach.



BOX 1. KEY MILESTONES FOR 2024

- Janvier** ● **02/01** - The MER opens and in operational terms
- Février** ● **07/02** - The MER submits its first project: an HSS coordination is funded!
16/02 - Launch of the MER's website
16/02 - Inauguration of the MER in the presence of the presidents of the 4 partner Establishments
24/02 - Visit from Minister Sylvie Retailleau to Aix-Marseille University, presentation and exchanges with the MER's Management and Steering Committees
- Mars** ● **07/03** - 25 EIC project submissions
12/03 - 16 Infras project submissions
21/03 - Presentation of MER to the DRARI and representatives of the programme committees
- Avril** ●
- Mai** ● **15/05** - Interview in Le Monde's European elections issue: «Our research cannot work without Europe».
27/05 - Meeting with Stéphane Ndong and Charlie Barla (CISAM) - Identification of winning projects by site
- Juin** ● **03/06** - CERClE Workshop - Advanced writing for ERCs workshop
20/06 - CERClE information session - ERC Starting and Consolidator calls
25/06 - The SHADOC project obtains co-funding
- Juillet** ● **01-02/ 07** - RETEX for Units 1 and 2 with support from Sud Performance
05/07 - CERClE Masterclass - ERC Starting and Consolidator - NCP
08/07 - Publication of the amU Essential roadmap (construction phase)
09/07 - Workshop led by the MER - MSCA PF Q&A session
- Août** ● **29/08** - 12 AdG ERC projects submitted
- Septembre** ● **05/09** - 7 ERC Starting Grants obtained. 100th ERC Winner - Maud Gratuze
11/09 - 33 MSCA PF project submissions
13/09 - CERClE Workshop: ERC Starting writing workshop
- Octobre** ● **02/10 and 18 /10** - Study workshops on the MER's multi-annual action plan
15/10 - 26 ERC Starting projects submitted
- Novembre** ● **01/11** - Nicolas Gochgarian appointed Head of the Detection Unit
12/11 - The Regional Office Tuesdays: «How to navigate with the MER?»
12/11 - Official ceremony for the CNRS's Collective Cristal Award to the MER
12/11 - Launch of the 1st Expert Group - Digital ICTs
22/11 - CERClE workshop: ERC CoG writing workshop
- Décembre** ● **04/12** - Networking events on European funding for marine sciences (EOREA Alliance)
16/12 - CERClE annual plenary session
17/12 - HSS ERC event - CERClE
17/12 - amU General Management Board vote on the updated incentive policy for European programmes
18/12 - MER seminar - Team building

1.

Establishing the MER as a key on-site stakeholder for European research and innovation projects

The work carried out in 2024 has established the MER as the key stakeholder for supporting European research and innovation projects on our site. A governance structure was set up involving the management of the organisations (amU, CNRS, Inserm and IRD) with an integrated service offer defined for all our site's researchers and academics. This work also enabled us to look to the future through the creation of our 2025-2027 action plan which aims to amplify the dynamic derived from the MER's creation and strengthen our site's participation in European programmes. The creation of the MER team and its organisation in 2 Units (see appendix 1) is described in section 4.



1.1 Establishing strong, agile and shared governance

The MER's governance was defined in the partnership agreement the Establishments signed on February 16th 2024 and was implemented at the start of 2024, based on experience gained in the MER's design phase that took place in recent years. This governance is structured around 3 complementary bodies:

- **THE STEERING COMMITTEE (COPIL)**

is made up of the amU's Vice-President in charge of Research and Deputy Director General of Services (DGSA) and the Regional Officers from our partner national research organisations, the CNRS, the Inserm and the IRD. It meets 2 or 3 times per year to define strategy and take political decisions.

- **THE MONITORING COMMITTEE (COSUI)**

is made up of the directors of research (or equivalent) within the partner Establishments. It holds meetings once every two months to supervise the roll-out of its activities and make sure its objectives are being successfully fulfilled.

- **THE GENERAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (CODIR)**

made up of head of the MER and the Detection and Engineering Units' managers meets once a week to implement site policy on taking part in European research programmes and ensure the Mission Europe for Research runs smoothly.²

The governance's operating methods are now firmly established and mean the MER benefits from strong political steering, constant support from management and effective decision-making all through the year. This means the MER has a solid institutional and operational base which has been of crucial importance for ensuring a continued service and the development of activities during this installation phase. Also, the collective dynamic driven by the MER has enabled newly-appointed managers from the Establishments with no previous experience of the project to be rapidly integrated into its governance bodies.

1.2. Defining a communication strategy and an integrated service offer

The MER rolled out an **ambitious communication strategy** right from its creation to raise its profile on the site, inform researchers and academics about its range of services and more broadly drive researchers' participation in European programmes.

The Mission began by collaborating with the communication departments from the 4 partner Establishments to create a strong, shared **visual identity, website, LinkedIn page** and harmonised communication tools.

² Also, the dedicated Europe - ASDESR Booster Executive Committee (ComEx Europe) steers the project's European dimension which has enabled 8 additional staff members to be recruited to join the MER.

These tools were launched in February to disseminate information about upcoming calls for projects, events related to Europe and successes achieved on the Aix-Marseille site. **Regular events** (see Box 1) are also organised to help enhance the MER's visibility and integrate the Mission into the French academic ecosystem.

The experience acquired during the year was used as the basis for the MER to develop **an integrated service offer to explain the support available** for 4 types of project: coordination of collaborative projects, participation in collaborative projects, ERCs and individual Post-Docs Marie Skłodowska Curie projects. This range of services was approved by the MER's COFIL in December and its objectives are to:

- **Promote the MER's range of services**, from awareness-raising and detection to support for setting up projects, contracting, non-financial monitoring and also the new support activities to be tested in the framework of the MER's Multi-Annual Action Plan for Europe (see section 1.3).
- **Define reverse scheduling for these services** stressing the importance of advance planning for submissions as early as possible and contacting the MER at that early stage to benefit from the best support.
- **Provide the right basis and support for drawing up 'contracts' between researchers or academics and the MER** to guarantee their joint commitment. By clarifying the work the MER can take on or activities that are the responsibility of researchers and academics, the service offer will help define tailored support packages that are specific to each project.

This offer could evolve over time in reaction to experiences gained in its implementation, particularly systematic feedback from researchers and academics at the end of support for complex projects.

1.3. Drawing up the 2025-2027 Europe Multi-Annual Action Plan

As well as the work involved in setting up the site and its recurrent work on support for European projects, in 2024 the MER also began drawing up **a Europe Multi-Annual Action Plan for the coming 3 years** to bolster and enhance the support offered to research teams. This initiative was launched following the Amidex³ Steering Committee's decision to provide the MER with funding of 780,000€ for the 2024-2027 period to reinforce the site's participation in European research programmes, a **major investment** set out in the Amidex 4.0 strategic roadmap. It is complementary to the Booster project's support and will cover investment and operating costs to enable new actions to be tested that will benefit teams involved in European programmes.

It is in this context that the CODIR of the MER worked on a **strategic study process involving all stakeholders** between August and November 2024, with the support of the higher education consultancy

3. "The Amidex University Foundation aims to support the development of a world-class higher education and research cluster in terms of research, training and innovation in the Aix-Marseille University area. It facilitates, accompanies and accelerates structuring projects for the Aix-Marseille site so that it is identified as a player capable of meeting the societal and scientific challenges of today and tomorrow." (amU website).

Dual Conseil. This work was based on 6 preparatory interviews with researchers and academics from the site and external experts and, most importantly, two study workshops attended by over 20 participants (users, establishment directors and MER staff members). These were based on the objectives defined for the MER in the framework of the Booster project which established the MER's development strategy for the coming 10 years. The workshops concentrated on **analysis of the main obstacles** on the site and defining **innovative actions** to amplify the dynamic generated by the MER's creation and bolster the site's participation in European programmes.

All of these discussions fed into the development of a multi-annual plan structured around **8 action points covering all of the MER's areas of activity** (see appendix 2) also helped with the definition of the operational implementation procedures (objectives, target audiences, procedures, scheduling, budget, indicators). The study process also identified actions to reinforce the impact of the other axes set out in the Amidex Roadmap 4.0 regarding the site's participation in European programmes. This action plan was approved by the steering committees of the MER and the Amidex before implementation in January 2025.



BOX 2. MANY INITIATIVES TO SHARE AND DISSEMINATE MER EXPERIENCES

The implementation of the MER is the result of an **approach that is unprecedented in the French higher education and research landscape**. It received initial support in the framework of an FTAP (*French Public Sector Transformation Fund*) project then, from 2023 onwards, it worked within the dynamic driven at national level by the publication of the **Gillet mission report** with its recommendations for enhanced structuring and simplification of the research sphere. In this respect, the creation of the MER could prove a **source of inspiration** for projects involving universities and national research organisations pooling their support services for European projects as is the case in other areas of activity.

In this context, the MER has received and responded to **many requests to share its experiences** and its view of the key success factors that paved the way for its creation. **At the local and regional level**, meetings were set up on the Aix-Marseille site to feed into other pooling initiatives while discussions were also held with the Region and the DRARIs (*Regional Academic Delegates for Research and Innovation*). **At the national level**, along with exchanges within the PAGeU project consortium with the universities of Bordeaux and Strasbourg, meetings were organised with the France Universités network of European Correspondents, the R3SUP network made up of universities' research and innovation directors and other CNRS, Inserm and IRD Regional Offices. The Minister for Higher Education and Research Sylvie Retailleau's visit on February 24th showcased the experiment and in March another meeting was organised with the Ministry of Higher Education and Research's (MESRI) European and International Affairs Delegation along with a presentation at a national meeting of the DRARIs.

2.

Implementing a strategy for detection, anticipation and influence

In 2024, the MER particularly focused on structuring its detection work which was previously carried out in a differentiated manner by on-site support services or at the head offices of our partner Establishments which meant the different laboratories involved may have had unequal access to information. The work concentrated on rolling out a tailored support offer in this area, presenting opportunities in Europe for 2024 and structuring a site-wide strategy to influence the development of upcoming European work programmes.



2.1. Implementing a personalised awareness-raising and detection programme

In 2024, the MER set up an awareness-raising and detection process intended for all the site's units. Initially, this work concentrated on Horizon Europe opportunities alone but gradually it will be extended to other European programmes within the MER's working scope. This process of awareness-raising and detection is based on **individual support for each unit** and each researcher or academic to enable them to develop a European strategy tailored to fit their requirements. The Detection Unit's project officers work with potential project leaders to identify their requirements, assess the maturity of their initiatives, anticipate suitable European calls and understand the specific requirements in terms of scientific and non-scientific activities, impact, gender equality or participation rules. This ambitious approach to tailored support is made possible by:

- **Using a theme-based approach** based on allocating a **portfolio of units** to each project officer so these can specialise in the research themes in that portfolio and thus obtain a deeper understanding of the laboratories and teams. This also makes it easier for the project officers to detect the local or national projects most likely to develop into European projects, identify the most active European stakeholders in the fields concerned, offer targeted monitoring and develop links between laboratories that work on related subjects.
- **Face-to-face meetings** in the units so the Detection Unit's project officers are identified as key contacts and relationships of trust are built up with Unit Directors, team leaders, researchers and academics. This relationship of trust is crucial to counter misconceptions about European research programmes and encourage the site's researchers and academics to take part in European projects.
- **Collective work within the Detection Unit** to share its project officers' experiences and identify transversal opportunities at the interface of their thematic portfolios.

Specific support for the site's graduate schools⁴ (instituts d'établissements) also began this year in line with Amidex's new strategy in this area. Examples of this include the presence of staff from the Detection Unit at these school's meetings and general assemblies and work on identifying targeted funding opportunities

4. On-site groupings of researchers and academics from several research units working on interdisciplinary issues. Their objective is to promote the combination of training, research and training through research.

2.2. A multi-level strategy to present work programme opportunities

It is essential to present the opportunities offered by Horizon Europe work programmes to then identify upcoming project submissions from our site at an early stage, enable teams to benefit from the MER's full range of services and thus maximise the site's teams' chances of coordinating or being a partner in a winning project.

For the 2024 work programmes, the Detection Unit has implemented a strategy very early on to present and publicise future opportunities on three complementary levels:

- **At unit level.** The MER's project officers work proactively to contact the units on our site to make targeted presentations to their directors and team leaders on any European opportunities that may interest them.
- **At the level of the site's graduate schools.** Interdisciplinarity is a core factor of many European calls for proposals which is why the site's graduate schools represent an ideal channel for raising the awareness of researchers and academics working in different scientific disciplines but with common themes.
- **On the individual level.** Finally, the Detection Unit's project officers individually contact researchers and academics. These officers base their work on their knowledge of the units in their portfolios along with several databases (previous submissions to European or national projects, scientific awards, bibliometrics, Funding Portal, networking events run by the European Commission or National Contact Points/NCPs, etc.).

Similar work has begun **for 2025's calls for proposals**, with the Detection Unit's staff members already involved since the preparation phase. A **summary** of upcoming work programmes facilitates work in the field and helps researchers and academics understand and find out more about upcoming opportunities, while respecting any confidentiality rules regarding the documents concerned.

For this work, the Detection Unit's project officers **particularly focus on the presentation of calls from Horizon Europe's 2nd pillar clusters** (societal challenges) and from the **European Innovation Council (EIC)**. These funding opportunities are priorities for the MER to help increase the participation of the site⁵ in collaborative projects and enhance the potential of our units. As such these opportunities represent key success indicators for the Booster project.

5. An analysis of the funding obtained for Aix-Marseille units' projects under the previous framework programme - Horizon 2020 - has highlighted the decline in the site's ability to attract funding for collaborative research (Pillar 2) even though this is the area with the most funding, offering numerous project opportunities.

6. Représentants aux comités de programme = Programme Committee Representatives

2.3. Structuring a site-level influence strategy

Work on enhancing influence is essential to reinforce the Aix-Marseille site's participation in European research and innovation programmes. It enables researchers and academics to find out more about how these programmes work and thus represents a complementary vector for informing and raising awareness among on-site teams.

The influence strategy put in place by the MER in 2024 was jointly constructed with our partner Establishments. First and foremost this requires **involvement in all the National Thematic Groups (GTNs)**. These are national consultation bodies for public and private research and innovation stakeholders that contribute to the definition of a shared French position that the Programme Committee Representatives (PCRs) then defend at European level. In this context, the MER has appointed a project officer from the Detection Unit to each of the 15 GTNs to help define the national position on European programmes and promote our site's research themes.

To make a relevant contribution to consultations of this kind the MER has also set up **Groups of Site Thematic Experts** mirroring the GTNs. These groups of experts consist of researchers and academics from the site appointed through a mission letter. Their role is to work on preparing the site's responses to national and European Commission consultations, particularly by proposing research subjects and scientific suggestions for future work programmes.

This organisational set-up was approved by the Establishments (regional and head offices) and presented to the MESRI's RCP⁶ coordinator in June. It **has been effective since September**, with proposals already made for the work programmes envisaged for 2025, 2026 and 2027.





BOX 3. RENEWAL OF SUPPORT FOR ERCs THROUGH LE CERCLE - THE ERC CLUB ON THE AIX-MARSEILLE SITE

The CERCLe was launched in 2017 and has produced a dynamic of reinforced collaboration between the 'Europe' administrative teams on the Aix-Marseille site which formed the basis for setting up the MER itself. This club's objective is to speed up ERC project applications and provide support to improve the quality thereof. It has more than demonstrated its usefulness as it has contributed to the Aix-Marseille site progressing from **29 winners in FP7 to 41 Horizon 2020 winners and currently to 31 winners at Horizon Europe's halfway stage**. In 2024, 51 ERC applicants received such support, with 207 supported since the launch of Horizon Europe. There were 15 successful new projects in 2024 including our 100th prize-winner⁷, Maude Gratuze from the Institute of NeuroPhysiopathology (INP- UMR7051). It is interesting to note that Aix-Marseille academics and researchers have a 21% success rate in the Horizon Europe programme which is higher than the French national and European averages.

The creation of the MER and, more broadly, the professionalisation of on-site support teams successfully breathed **new life into the scheme** in 2024. As well as the existing awareness-raising sessions with prize-winners and panel members and writing and speaking workshops, new initiatives were introduced last year and will be further strengthened in 2025. One example is the **workshop** run in July by the former ERC NCP coordinator and the MER's 'writing support' project officers. This focused on the design and evaluation of ERC Starting and Consolidator projects and was based on examples of accepted projects from previous calls. The **CERCLe's plenary session** was also an opportunity to focus on the humanities sector. The ERC Vice-President in charge of HSS panels attended for two days and interacted with the governance of the MER's partner Establishments, grant winners from our site, unit directors, applicants and many researchers and academics.

7. <https://amu.hal.science/CERCLE/page/liste-des-erc-daix-marseille> ; <https://www.insb.cnrs.fr/fr/personne/maud-gratuze>



3.

Structuring and reinforcing support for project construction and monitoring

In 2024, the MER successfully achieved a **significant increase in the number of project submission** (see Box 4) while **rolling out structuring tools and processes** to simplify, harmonise and improve project construction, contracting and non-financial monitoring practices. The MER also worked to reinforce its capacity to support those setting up projects, particularly for the writing phase, to make the conditions for their implementation secure by ensuring a continued service between the pre- and post-award stages and finally to anticipate professional changes linked to the transition to lump sum management.



BOX 4. KEY FIGURES ON PROJECT SUBMISSION SUPPORT AND MONITORING IN 2024 AND AN APPRAISAL OF THE SITE'S HORIZON EUROPE RESULTS AT END 2024

KEY FIGURES FOR 2024:

191 projects submitted in 2024 (compared with 90 in 2023, an increase of over 112%).

An 17% average success rate for projects submitted in 2024 (14 successful projects from a total of 84 which have published results); with a **23% success rate for Pillar 1; 24% for Pillar 2** (clusters and missions) but 4% for Pillar 3 (EIC)

38 projects with formal contracts in 2024 (from calls published in 2023 and 2024) including 7 submitted in 2024 and supported by the MER

A budget of over €140M currently managed by the Establishments on the site which includes €97.2M for Horizon Europe

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE HORIZON EUROPE PROGRAMME (2021-2024):

The Aix-Marseille site had **137 winning projects for grants totalling €97.215M** at the end of 2024.

ERCs make up 28% of the successful projects and 60% of the grants obtained. Collaborative projects make up nearly half of the total number of projects obtained on the site and only a quarter of the grants obtained.

As an indication, **the average amounts of grants obtained on the site are: €1.5M for the ERC programme, €360,000 for Marie Skłodowska Curie projects** (grants and networks) and **€400,000 for collaborative projects** (2nd pillar).

3.1. The implementation of structuring tools and processes

The MER's Engineering Unit continued its ongoing activities (project construction, submission, negotiating, monitoring past projects and those accepted in 2024, etc.). It also successfully implemented and stabilised the tools and processes required to **ensure it operates efficiently, to enhance the quality of its service and to optimise the management of its work**. Firstly, the Unit ensured its employees have the right skills to master the tools and management rules of the 4 partner Establishments and Protisvalor on project submissions and management. It also worked on **formalising operating procedures for starting to work on a project**, harmonising and **simplifying the processes** for providing support for the construction and non-financial monitoring of projects, whichever Establishment manages the unit concerned. Under the French system, this represents a major step forward for joint research units as, in the past, these had to adapt to different processes depending on which supervisory authority was managing their projects. The main elements of this are presented in sections 3.2 and 3.3.

As regards monitoring and steering, the MER set up a **Horizon Europe 2021-2027 'Masterfile' table** to monitor projects on a daily basis from their submission to their final financial report. This table gives an exhaustive and up-to-date overview of submitted and obtained projects, success rates (by type of project), grants awarded and justified and the units' European contractual activity. This wealth of data (by call, by sector, by unit, etc.) could also be used to help refine the various units' European participation strategies and more generally the European strategy adopted by the whole Aix-Marseille site. The MER has also set up a **common identifier in the European Commission's tools** (with a dedicated email address for all the projects on the Funding Portal) as well as each supervisory authority's administrative contact details. This identifier means stakeholders can use the Commission's tools to carry out centralised monitoring of all the MER's project submissions and anticipate European activities at site level. It is also useful for the coordination of stakeholders.

Finally, the Engineering Unit has implemented an **allocation system for projects being developed and contractualised** for its own usage. This system optimises the allocation of resources and means its members are more autonomous in terms of project management. It provides information on call opening cycles and the associated workloads and can be used to anticipate staff members' holidays to ensure continuity of service and effective project management. It also means users can manage the balance between project allocations based on staff specialisation (by call or by theme) and allocations to non-specialist staff so best practices from other call types are implemented.

3.2. Improving and reinforcing support for setting up projects

The Engineering Unit has developed **methodological tools to enhance support for setting up projects**. These include templates for each type of call and detailed checklists for rigorous and harmonised monitoring of each stage in the process of setting up a project. The tools were developed in synergy with the MER's Detection Unit and are regularly updated according to analysis of assessment reports, best practices identified while the project was being set up, expert advice and analyses from NCPs. The Engineering and the Detection Units have also formalised a **continuous improvement approach** based on a systematic analysis of Evaluation Summary Reports (ESRs) which means project construction methodologies can be adjusted as required and helps effectively identify any areas that require attention in future projects.

The formalisation of the MER service offer (see section 1.2) and operating procedures (see section 3.1) for setting up projects has helped **reinforce support activities for project construction by adding support for drafting projects**. There are three main new features:

- **Taking charge of specific transdisciplinary areas** (like ethics or interdisciplinarity). This involves enhanced training being given to MER staff on these subjects, identifying resources within our Establishments and work on harmonisation. In 2025, personalised advice will be systematically provided on the contents of projects to comply with European requirements.

- **Support for writing the scientific sections.** Three 'writing support' research engineers (*Ingénieur de Recherche – IGR*) have been recruited for the Booster project. These have scientific background and expertise in three main areas - life and health sciences, humanities and engineering and environmental sciences. The three IGR also possess significant experience in setting up European projects and promoting research and innovation.
- **A systematic proofreading review of coordinated projects**, if the consortium involved so wishes. This service will be strengthened further in the framework of the Europe multiannual action plan and carried out by external experts who assess European projects or by service providers.

Thanks to this recruitment of 'writing support' IGR, the MER has been able to implement **a form of organisation in pairs to support drafts of coordinated or for ERC projects** and thus enhance support for researchers and academics. This organisational mode combines the skills of 'generalist' (European-skilled) engineers for the non-scientific aspects of setting up a project and 'writing support' engineers whose work focuses on presenting and bringing a project's scientific aspects to maturation.

3.3. The roll-out of a project security strategy

The Engineering Unit has also worked closely with the MER's managing supervisory authorities (the CNRS, Inserm and IRD Regional Offices and Protisvalor for amU- its spinn-off dedicated to financial management) to **ensure a continuity of service between the pre- and post-award stages and secure project implementations.**

It is essential to integrate best management practices right **from the set-up phase** to anticipate a project's management and monitoring requirements. A legal, administrative and financial approval process is implemented and carried out before a project is submitted. This particularly ensures the unit director and administrative team are involved in work to anticipate any challenges linked to project implementation and financial monitoring. The same applies with the university teaching departments for academics requesting reduction in teaching work during their project implementation. The Booster project has enabled the MER to recruit a legal specialist which has considerably reinforced our capacity to manage contractual and intellectual property aspects securely, particularly for the management of consortium agreements and other legal documents.

The **post-award project monitoring system** has also been structured more effectively. Now, monthly meetings are organised with the supervisory authority in charge of financial managements of European grants to synchronise actions and anticipate points requiring attention. The system also now involves systematic internal project kick-off meetings for all stakeholders (researchers/academics, administrative team, supervisory authority departments, MER Engineering Unit) intended to lay the right foundations for effective project management. A knowledge base has also been created containing information on shared experiences, issues encountered in other projects, identified best practices and end-of-project financial data. The Europe 2025-2027 Multi-Annual Action Plan (see section 1.3) posits the creation and management of a network of European Project Managers (EPMs) recruited from the site's various units as a complement to the above support for the proper implementation of projects.



BOX 5. ANTICIPATING CHANGES LINKED TO THE MOVE TO LUMP SUMS

Lump sum financial management is already part of a growing number of European calls for proposals and is likely to become standard practice under FP10 from 2028. This major shift will **simplify the process** for researchers, academics and also institutions. However, this change will clearly also lead to a **profound transformation of the support professions** working on budget preparation, financial monitoring and project implementation assessments for European projects.

The MER has worked with the Establishments to **anticipate these changes since 2024** as regards both setting up and monitoring projects. Several staff members have benefited from dedicated **training** and the same approach will be generalised in the framework of its 2025-2027 Multi-Annual Action Plan. New **tools** have also been implemented to facilitate the preparation of lump sum budgets and were used to prepare ERC Advanced Grant project submissions in August.

The Engineering Unit's **organisational** development structured around two main divisions (Project pre-award and Project post-award) was also designed to successfully manage this paradigm shift by working to develop the right expertise to monitor projects on the basis of deliverables. These will replace checks on eligible expenditure for this purpose. Finally, the work of the **network of EPMs** on the site in collaboration with the Establishments' justification units involves running training sessions and sharing best practices and means that from 2025 it will be possible to support changes and shifts in their profession linked to the widespread use of lump sums.

4.

Team integration and development of skills

The MER worked in depth during 2024 to **create an integrated collective** made up of staff members from the partner Establishments and Protisvalor along with new personnel recruited in the framework of the Booster project and through efforts made by the Establishments⁸. It is essential for this team to be cohesive to maximise their experience and expertise and encourage their commitment to providing a service to researchers and academics. This work has concentrated on the team integration, reinforcing the skills of its staff members and developing collaborative initiatives between the two divisions.

8. These are 3 research engineers (IGR) in the Engineering Unit working on project writing support, 3 project officers in the Detection Unit, a legal specialist and an Steering Officer for the MER.

INTRODUCTORY VIDEO,
FOLLOWING THE AWARD
OF THE CNRS 2024
COLLECTIVE CRYSTAL,
FOR THE COLLECTIVE
CONSTRUCTION OF THE MER



[Clickable link to the
Collective Crystal video](#)



4.1. Constructing an integrated team

Setting up the MER team was a **major challenge with much at stake because of the diversity of its cultures and practices among its staff members** from the Establishments and Protisvalor and **the multiple professions involved**. During the first year of the MER's existence, constructing an integrated team and creating a sense of belonging among them were therefore core goals involving the following:

- **The layout of our premises** was designed to promote exchanges and improve the quality of life in the workplace. There is a communal leisure area equipped for staff to take lunch and breaks together, offices were allocated to bring together staff from different establishments to help them to forge links and help information circulate and finally a spacious meeting room for working as a team or with researchers and academics.
- The *'P'tits Déjs de la MER'* are convivial team breakfast meetings held nearly twice a month which give staff the time to share information, think collectively about subjects related to the MER's core profession, present new tools that have been implemented, run 'brainstorming' sessions, transfer skills within the team or invite outside speakers to discuss targeted subjects.
- **Collective events** were organised to reinforce the team's cohesion and sense of belonging, take stock of progress and think together about ways to further enhance the way the MER functions. A feedback day was organised in July for each of the two main units with consulting support from Sud Performance along with a team seminar in December.
- Lastly, a **Welcome Guide** has been created to facilitate and support the integration of new arrivals to the team, enable a common identity to be defined and increase knowledge of the fundamental features of our 4 founding Establishments.

There is a particular focus on ways of **enabling staff members to maintain strong links with their home institutions**. More specifically, they work one day a week on the premises of their home Establishments which helps information to circulate, strengthens inter-institutional links and drives the MER's integration into the Aix-Marseille site's institutional landscape.

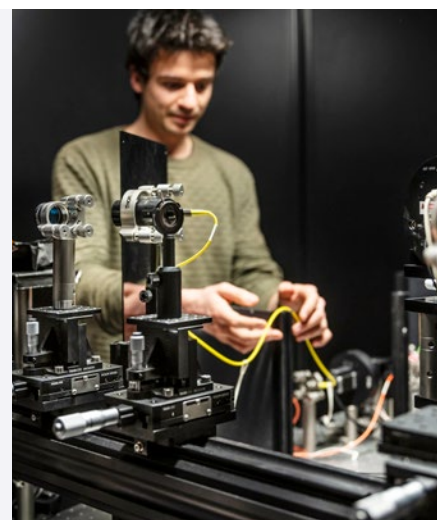
4.2. Skill development is a priority

The quality of the MER's support to the site's researchers and academics is inextricably related to our staff members' know-how, expertise and commitment which requires **a major, ongoing effort to develop staff skills**. In 2024, this was a particularly important challenge because the skillsets of new arrivals needed to be upgraded and those of existing staff broadened. It also involved supporting staff in job changes as some, for example, specialised only in the financial side of project development and finally developing new detection support activities.

In this context then, the MER organised **several targeted professional training courses** in 2024 to complement the training our staff receives from their employing Establishments. Individual monitoring is provided in close collaboration with the Unit managers to respond to the specific requirements of teams and individual staff members. For example, the Engineering Unit attended a group training course with the National Association of Research and Technology (ANRT) on how to construct and monitor European lump sum projects while some Detection Unit staff members were trained in using bibliometrics. The MER's legal specialist's expertise was enriched through ANRT training on the European model Consortium Agreement (DESCA). Finally, the members of the Management Committee attended individual coaching sessions run by *Sud Performance* to develop their managerial skills.

The MER plans to **intensify these efforts in the framework of the Europe Multi-Annual Action Plan**. This will include developing a continuous training programme for all staff members to enhance support practices for the site's units and anticipate changes in jobs and tools, particularly those deriving from the 10th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. The MER's membership of EARMA⁹ will give staff members access to EARMA⁹ training courses and facilitate their exchanges with counterparts in similar Europe units in other countries.

9. European Association of Research Managers and Administrators: <https://earma.org/>



4.3. Closer collaboration between the divisions

Finally, the MER has worked to bolster the synergies between its 2 Units to **enhance work efficiency, streamline communication and promote skillset development**. This approach has been designed to respond to an operational requirement that was expressed and identified during the RETEX sessions in July. It also helps strengthen the cohesion of the team as a whole. This work has led to cross-collaboration processes being implemented in the work of each Unit:

- **Engineering Unit staff members took part in laboratory visits organised by the Detection Unit.** This joint participation means Engineering Unit staff can discuss detection projects along with the progress of projects in the process of being set up.
- **Involving the Detection Unit in setting up projects.** Detection Unit staff members are involved in the Engineering Unit's work on certain aspects of setting up projects from laboratories in their own portfolios. This means they can deepen their knowledge of the various stages involved in setting up European projects and find out more about the European Commission's expectations for each major type of call. Some members of the Detection Unit also contributed their scientific expertise and knowledge of European projects to proofreading the individual MSCA Post-Doc Fellowship applications submitted in September.

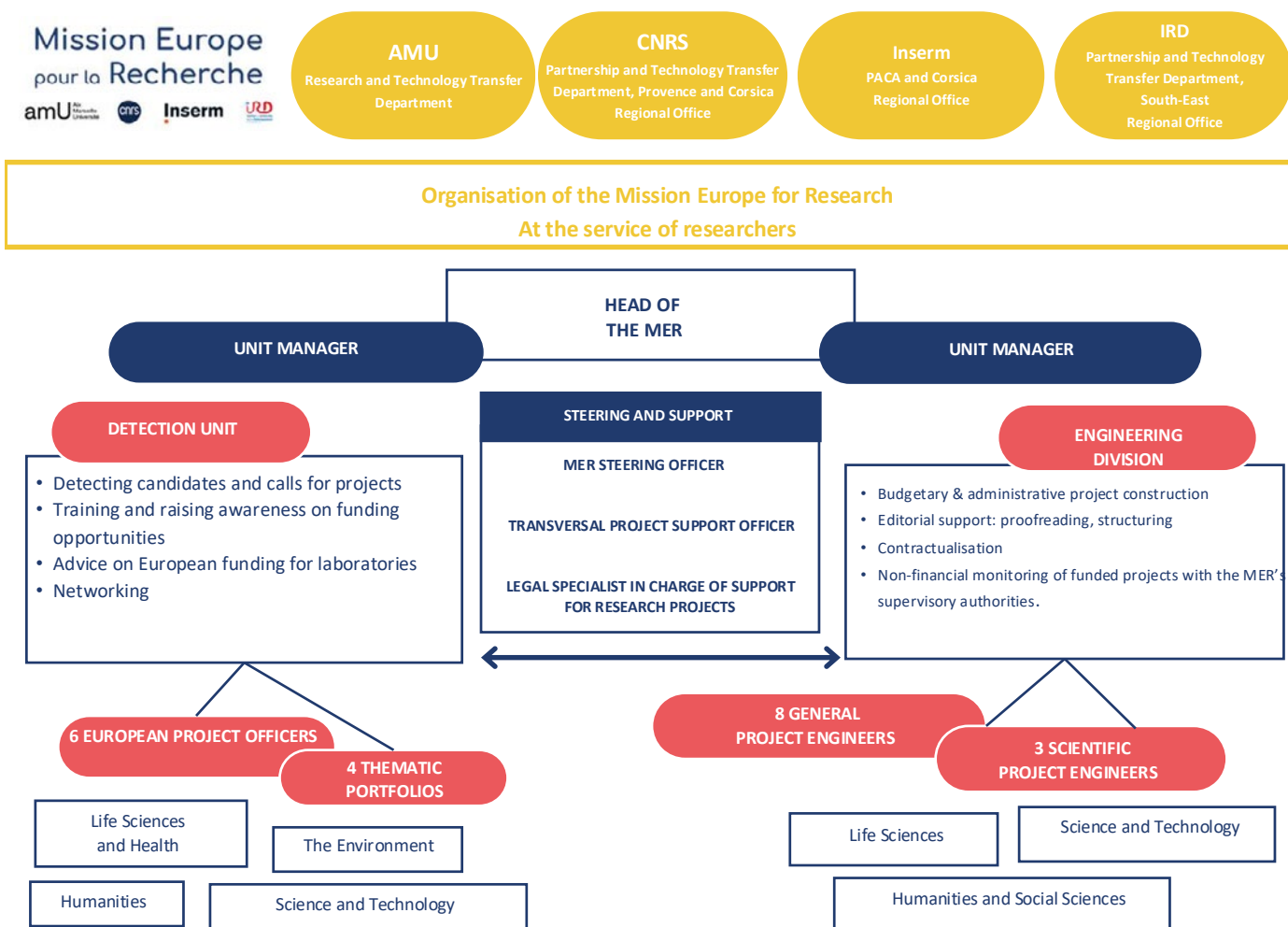
In addition, **inter-Unit pairs** have been set up to help enhance the quality of the support the MER offers to the site's academics and researchers:

- Pairs to **explore transversal themes** at the heart of European calls for proposals more deeply. These include the Nagoya Protocol (ABS), ethics, gender and open science. Each pair organises awareness-raising sessions within the MER and provides an internal practical guide along with expert support during the project set-up and monitoring phases.
- Pairs to **analyse the assessments of projects (ESRs)** submitted for each European call for proposals. They present a summary to the whole team with practical lessons so the whole team can enhance our support for the MER in setting up future projects.



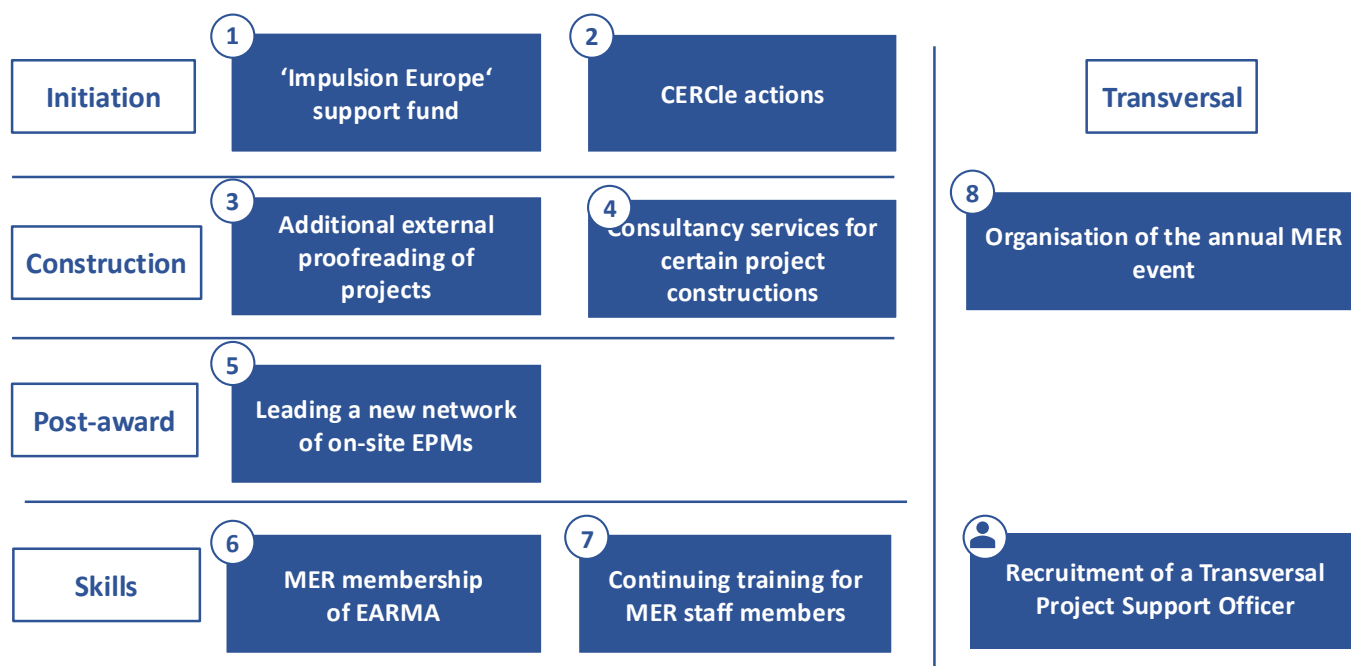
Appendices

Appendix 1. Organisational diagram showing how the MER serves researchers and academics



Annexe 2. Organisation du Plan d'action pluriannuel Europe 2025-2027

Summary of the Europe 2025-2027 Multi-Annual Action Plan



Publication team

Steering committee – Stefan Enoch, Jérôme Vitre, Françoise Simon-Plas, Christophe Chambon

Monitoring committee – Audrey Morel Senatore, Louiza Sanchez, Adrien Vinatier, Colin Volle

Management board – Céline Damon, Nicolas Gochgarian, Sarah Mahir

Steering officer – Julie Le Moine Tommasi

Editorial team

Dual Conseil – Sebastien Loisel, Maxence de la Rochère

Management board - Céline Damon, Nicolas Gochgarian, Sarah Mahir

Steering officer - Julie Le Moine Tommasi

Translation

Richard Dickinson (Inist-CNRS)

English proofreading

Marc Rubio (Inist-CNRS)

Photos

AMU image database

Art direction and design

Céline Lequeux

Printed in February 2025

Mission Europe pour la Recherche

63 La Canebière – 4^{ème} étage

13001 Marseille

Website : <https://mission-europe-recherche.fr/>

Linkedin : www.linkedin.com/company/mission-europe-pour-la-recherche





Mission Europe
pour la Recherche

amU Aix
Marseille
Université



Inserm



Activity Report

2024