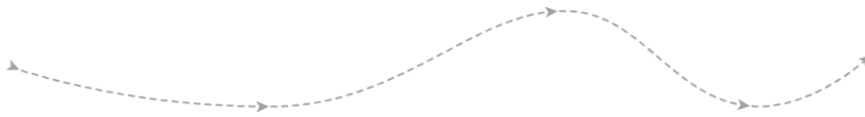# How to support the implementation of responsible innovation practices in SMEs

**Recommendations for European research and innovation policy**

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# Context

The primary target groups of the COMPASS project have, from its very initiation, been Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) and organisations that support innovation in SMEs. Over the course of the project, it has become evident that rules, regulations and funding criteria could function as external incentives to implement responsible innovation in SMEs. The Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU), as coordinator of the COMPASS project, has developed recommendations for EU research and innovation policy to support implementation of responsible innovation practices among an increasing number of companies. The set of policy recommendations has been adapted based on their discussion with members of the [COMPASS High Level Expert Advisory Board](#) in a teleconference in January 2019.

# Policy recommendations

1. The most important incentive for companies to follow a responsible innovation approach is currently an intrinsic wish to produce positive impact and reduce negative potential impact on the society and the environment. **Research and innovation policy should explore measures to externally reward companies that adopt a responsible innovation approach.** Measures could include:

   1.1. Incentivize implementation through funding criteria (i.e. easier access to financial support) but make sure that the amount of resources needed to apply for funding are not beyond what SMEs can afford. In EU FP networks, for example, most important funding criteria are scientific excellence and economic benefit. Responsible innovation will grow if responsibility and solving societal challenges are rewarded to the same degree as scientific excellence and economic benefit.

   1.2. Connect public programs to extant corporate initiatives that aim to increase responsibility of businesses' research and innovation processes and output and leverage existing company networks.

2. In contrast to large companies, SMEs tend to have less capacity for activities that do not directly concern their core business. In addition, they tend to have less developed or no innovation management structures. **Research and innovation policy programmes should provide additional support to SMEs that wish to develop responsible innovation capacities**. Measure could include:

   2.1. Provide additional information about responsible innovation and its benefits as well as clear guidance on how to implement the concept into company practices (e.g. COMPASS sectorial roadmaps, COMPASS self-check tool).

   2.2. Develop publicly funded coaching services for SMEs that provide information about and support in the implementation of responsible innovation practices; similar in concept (but not contents) to what is currently being offered as part of the Horizon 2020 SME Instrument.

   2.3. Support ethics training or other quality procedures in companies (such as e.g. implementation of codes of conducts).

   2.4. Support the development of management and organizational structures in companies. These structures could drive the implementation of responsible innovation practices by specifying responsibilities for taking action and support the commitment of employees to implementing responsible innovation.

   2.5. Support the implementation of processes of anticipation and adaptive decision-making.

3. The responsible (research and) innovation concept was first developed with research organisations in mind. **Research and innovation policy should adapt the concept to meet the realities of for-profit organisations**. Measures could include:
   3.1. Align requirements with practices and standards that are already well established in a certain industry, such as: corporate social responsibility (CSR), ethical requirements or standards for products on the market and to existing practices of user, customer or expert engagement in the idea generation and development of novel products, processes or services.
   3.2. Connect to privately funded industry initiatives with a focus on public engagement, ethics, CSR or sustainability; such as e.g. the B Corps movement, the Green World Alliance, the "Responsible 100" or the "Partnership on AI"
   3.3. Explore ways to deal with the general company disposition towards keeping vital information within the business (with regards to open access to data) as well as with the lack of perceived responsibility for science education.

4. Previous approaches to implementing responsible (research and) innovation, mainly through FP7 and Horizon 2020, have addressed single organisations. To develop a critical mass of organisations, facilitate peer groups effects and learning between organisations and networks, **research and innovation policy should focus on facilitating collaboration and network formation**. Measures could include:
   4.1. Support collaboration between actors with little experience and such with a lot of experience in dealing with responsibility and solving societal problems in innovation.
   4.2. Support co-creation and learning between different types of actors in research and innovation. Support projects and programmes that draw attention to the positive influence of considering diversity issues in innovations.
   4.3. Support the integration of e.g. civil society organisations and citizens in research and innovation activities.

## Related COMPASS project output

- Project deliverable 1.4 "Benchmarking report" (https://innovation-compass.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/D1.4-Benchmark-Report_Integration-of-the-RRI-approach-into-collaborative-Research-Development-Innovation-.pdf);
- Project deliverables 2.2-2.4 "RI Lab Reports & Roadmaps" https://innovation-compass.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/D2.2-Responsible-Innovation-Lab-Report-and-Roadmap-1-UK_FINAL.pdf https://innovation-compass.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/D2.2-Responsible-Innovation-Lab-Report-and-Roadmap-1-UK_FINAL.pdf https://innovation-compass.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/D2.3-Responsible-Innovation-Lab-Report-and-Roadmap-2-BE_FINAL.pdf;
- Auer, Alexander; Jarmai, Katharina (2018) Implementing Responsible Research and Innovation Practices in SMEs: Insights into Drivers and Barriers from the Austrian Medical Device Sector. *Sustainability* 10(1): 1-18.
- Iordanou, Kalypso (2019) Involving Patients in Research? Responsible Research and Innovation in Small- and Medium-Sized European Health Care Enterprises. Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics, 28(1).