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To beneficiaries and associate partners of ERA

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Subject: Reimbursement of travel and accommodation costs based on the new Unit Costs

Dear Partners,

The European Commission has – to our astonishment – decided to introduce a new unit cost reimbursement system for the travel, accommodation, and subsistence costs, which will have a significant effect on our pending and upcoming projects.

According to the European Commission, the new regulation – [here](#) in detail – is meant to simplify the reimbursement procedure between the European Commission and the beneficiaries by introducing a settlement based on **unit costs for travel, accommodation, and subsistence** instead of reimbursing the actual costs based on invoices and other documents. Meanwhile the Commission intends to promote train travel as an alternative to flights to contribute to the reduction in emissions from the transport sector and as a move towards more sustainable modes of transport.

Despite all the positive intentions of this initiative, the new travel unit costs are significantly lower than the cost we budgeted for in our projects (up to a maximum amount per trip regardless of the distance travelled), meaning we have to rethink our reimbursement projects. So far, we were asking the participants to submit an invoice, a boarding pass, and a travel ticket to reimburse the actual cost, which was then – also as actual cost – reimbursed by the European Commission (Contracting Authority).

For all Calls for Proposals from year 2021 ERA must switch to a flat-rate payment based on the unit costs set by the European Commission. This procedure will be applicable from 1 January 2023. This means that participants will be given a lump sum for the travel and accommodation (unit cost) and ERA will in principle not require any proof of the actual cost. In advance, each participant will be able to calculate the travel unit cost easily by using the calculator on the [webpage of the European Commission](#), and ERA will pay this amount to the participants after the event.

1. Travel costs

The unit cost is based on the distance between the venue of the event and the place of employment.

- The calculation shall be made according to the place where the participant works, not the place of residence, or the place where they are located when departing for the project event.
- The calculation is based on the one-way travel distance (not double for the return), but the unit cost shall cover both legs.
- The European Commission has a designated webpage for the calculation of travel costs, which you can find [here](#). On this webpage there are two calculators: for flight travel and rail travel (this second option includes all other means of travel). The *flight calculator* uses the shortest distance by air, while the *rail calculator* is based on the shortest road traffic route; there will always be a difference in these two calculations in favour of the rail calculator.

Travel under 50 km is not reimbursed.

- Since the European Commission will not reimburse any of these costs, we cannot reimburse these to the participants.
- However, in exceptional circumstances (for example the travel cost for a participant with limited mobility) the reimbursement of actual cost can still be eligible, but it needs to be approved by ERA beforehand.

Travel between 51 and 399 kms can be reimbursed with regard the following:

- Intra-state travel from Luxembourg, Cyprus and Malta can only be reimbursed if it is over 51 km. In this case it is based on the actual cost, therefore evidence of travel shall be provided.
- The distance is to be calculated according to the shortest road traffic route (*see: rail calculator*).
- If the actual travel cost is lower than the unit cost – for example the train ticket is cheaper, or participants are travelling together in the same vehicle and split the costs – the surplus will remain with the participant. Since the European Commission does not require any evidence or documentation of the travel, only the attendance and the place of employment need to be proven (in practice, a signed attendance sheet and a statement from the participant), it is always up to the participants to find the most suitable way to travel.
- To see the relevant costs, check the table in the attached file (1.1.).

For travel over 400 km there is a progressive flat rate, based on the distance between the venue and the place of employment. The reimbursement rules for travel over 400 km are the following:

- The same unit cost applies for the flight, rail, combined or any other mode. The two calculations will differ in distance, and rail travel might fall under a higher unit cost than flight travel.
- The European Commission (therefore neither ERA) will not ask for any evidence regarding the travel. If the participant declares in the reimbursement form that the travelling was done by plane, the *flight calculator* shall be used (the shortest distance between the venues). If the travel is declared to be done by rail or other vehicles, the calculation is based on the shortest road traffic route (*see: rail calculator*).
- Please note, even if there is no airport in the city where the event will take place or the participant is employed, the distance will be calculated between the place of employment and the venue of the event, as described above, and there is no possibility to reimburse any additional actual transfer costs (taxi, shuttle, public transportation etc.).
- The same applies for transfer flights: even if there is no direct flight between two cities, a longer distance cannot be calculated.
- To check the relevant cost over 400 km distance, check the calculator [here](#) or see the table of the attached file (1.2.).

2. Accommodation

A new unit cost is applied for accommodation too, calculated according to the country where the event takes place. This one is also set by the European Commission, and it is in alignment with the average hotel price of the country, however, especially in capital cities, the actual prices can be significantly higher than the unit cost.

If not informed or agreed otherwise, for all our events, the participants need to book the hotel themselves, and even if the actual cost exceeds the unit cost, they shall only be reimbursed the unit cost. This also means that if the actual accommodation costs are lower than the unit cost, they will receive the higher amount.

We are trying to recommend hotels near the event venue for a price that will fall within the amount of accommodation unit cost. In Trier we have an agreement with partner hotels (Vienna House Hotel, Villa Hügel, Park Plaza) to provide a special price for the participants, some of these hotel prices fall within the unit cost, some are more expensive.

The unit cost shall be calculated according to the nights spent in direct connection with the project. In the call for registrations for events we will identify how many nights are eligible for reimbursement, but in general the following needs to be kept in mind:

- If the event starts at an early hour which makes the travel on the same day not feasible, or the departure would be such an early time that the airport cannot be reached realistically, the overnight stay before the event will be eligible.
- We usually try to end the programme in a way all participants can reach their flights back home. In exceptional cases, if the return journey cannot be accomplished on the final day of the programme, an additional night may be eligible if necessary. Participants will only get a payment for this extra night if it was approved by ERA in advance.
- There is no need for the participants to present an invoice or other proof of the accommodation. It is possible that the accommodation unit cost will be higher than the actual cost of accommodation, in this case, the surplus will remain with the participant.
- The accommodation can also include breakfasts, but participants will not receive any additional reimbursement for this cost, only the accommodation unit cost listed below.

To check the accommodation unit costs and some examples for travel and accommodation reimbursement, please see the attached file.

3. Subsistence

In all projects there is an additional payment for subsistence costs, but since the catering during the event will be provided free to the participants, this will be covered by the subsistence unit costs, and will not be reimbursed to the participants. **ERA does not offer a per diem for the participants** or gives any further reimbursement for any kind of catering (breakfast, dinner etc.).

4. Booking and reimbursement procedure

Please make sure all participants you select and nominate for the events will make their travel and accommodation bookings with regards to the following:

- Before any booking, participants should **wait for the confirmation from ERA**. ERA will inform all participants if their registration is accepted, and the participation is confirmed. We will give detailed information about the reimbursed costs.

- Before making any travel arrangements, the participants will need to **check the eligible travel and accommodation unit costs** and take a look at all available travel and accommodation options. For a short or medium range trip, train or travelling by shared car can be a good option, and it will be most likely significantly cheaper than air travel, this is also a good way to decrease our carbon footprint.
- Please inform the participants that if they choose to **travel by plane**, the flight distance calculated by the European Commission may fall under a lower unit cost than the rail travel. Even though we are not asking them to show any invoices or tickets, they will need to make a statement regarding the travel to verify the eligible cost.
- If you or the participants have any doubts or cannot find any travel options at the price range of the travel unit cost, also when it can be foreseen that the travel cannot be scheduled without staying an extra night, please **contact us before booking**.
- The precondition of the reimbursement is to **sign all the attendance sheets** at the event (there will be at least one sheet every day). After the event, the participants will get an e-mail with the reimbursement form. They will need to fill it out and send it back to ERA within 15 days, signed and scanned, and attach a 'print screen' of the travel distance calculation. The payment will be transferred to the bank account after having been checked by the financial department.
- No payment of unit costs is possible if the registered participants **cancel their participation for any reason**. The European Commission will not reimburse this cost to us, either. In case the event must be cancelled by ERA after the confirmation of travel bookings, any actual costs incurred by participants will be reimbursed (not the unit cost) if travel tickets cannot be cancelled, but only if the cost incurred before we informed participants about the cancellation of the event. In this case we ask the participants to present the invoice and the purchased ticket.

Further information will be available for each event in the call for registration, which will be launched at least 6 weeks before the event.

This will apply for events implemented after 1 January 2023. For all events implemented in 2022, ERA will reimburse the actual costs in the same method as before (invoice, boarding pass, travel ticket will be needed).

Kind regards,



Viktor Vadász
Deputy Director
Director of Programmes