30 years of Ideal-ist

Celebrating the past and looking ahead

On 5 October 2026, the Ideal-ist network of digital National Contact Points (NCPs) in EU Framework Programmes (FPs) celebrated its 30th anniversary. This was a chance to look back on 30 years of NCP services and NCP projects, but also to talk about the future of NCPs in FP10.

30 years of supporting Digital NCPs

The first Ideal-ist project was funded under the Third Framework Programme (FP3) and started in 1996. Since then, digital NCPs have been supported by consecutive Ideal-ist projects through 6 framework programmes. During the anniversary event, voices from within the former and current Ideal-ist projects (Mohsine Chefki from DLR Projektträger, Judith Bloch and Assaf Shechner from ISERD, Fernando Martín Galende from CDTI and Elena Angiolini from HaDEA) highlighted how the network and its services have evolved over the past thirty years.

The panel "30 Years of Ideal-ist: The Network Journey", moderated by Monica Barbu (ICI) and Stephen O'Reilly (Enterprise Ireland) took a closer look at this. It brought together Kim Davis (former NCP at the Research Council of Norway), Otto Vainio (current NCP at Business Finland), Duska Rosenberg (an experienced Horizon Europe evaluator working at iCOM ICT Research), and Maurizio Toscano (a current NCP coordinator working for FECYT and the Horizon Europe NCP Academy).

These panellists reflected on what has changed in 30 years of NCP network projects and what endures: Pre-Covid face-to-face events such as the ICT Proposers Day are gone, and the rise of AI has also brought new challenges, particularly in maintaining creativity and originality in proposals. Yet Ideal-ist remains indispensable: it demystifies EU programmes for applicants, and its proposal checks, brokerage events, trainings for NCPs and partner search facilities have become hallmarks of the network. As one of the first NCP projects, Ideal-ist played a pioneering role that paved the way for others.

Above all, the personal, trusted relationships built over three decades were singled out as a strength no digital tool can replace. Quoting Assaf Shechner (ISERD), coordinator of the current Idealist2027 project:

"Our secret sauce has never been that we all think alike or come from the same place. Quite the opposite – the strength of this partnership comes from bringing together diverse people and perspectives while always searching for common goals, shared opportunities and collective success."

Edina Németh (HUN-REN SZTAKI) and Shane O'Seasnáin (VITO), representing two organisations that have benefited from Ideal-ist services in the past, highlighted this need for a personal interaction further in their interventions from a proposer's perspective, saying that detailed human feedback on

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project ideas and proposals is very valuable to them, as are the collaborations that Ideal-ist has helped them build.

The role of Digital NCPs in FP10

The second panel of the event, "30 Years of Impact: What Role for NCPs in FP10?", moderated by Alrun Hauke (DLR Projektträger) and Fernando Martín Galende (CDTI), explored Ideal-ist's evolution and future impact through four perspectives: Nuria de Lama (Secretary General at BDVA), Nicholas Deliyanakis (EU Policy officer at DG RTD), André Miodezky (a successful proposer and CEO of VoxelSensors), and Géraud Guilloud (former NCP and now EU funding manager at TNO).

These panellists agreed that while digital technologies continue to change rather rapidly, the commitment of NCPs does not. Yet the environment is more complex than ever, shaped by regulation, global competition, and sovereignty concerns. Large language models can now provide basic information to participants, which means the main asset of NCPs will increasingly lie in services that build personal trust and tackle complex issues.

Looking ahead, the panellists urged Europe to coordinate with the pace of industry rather than risk falling behind, to overcome its aversion to risk in investment, and to allow R&I projects to develop their own lives rather than be governed solely by the European Commission's framework. NCPs should actively support this process with their skills and knowledge, while proposers, project teams and European Commission staff should make more use of the support and resources provided by NCPs.

In their keynote speeches from the institutional side, Jean-Francois Junger (HaDEA), Nicholas Deliyanakis (DG RTD) and Thibaut Kleiner (DG CONNECT) highlighted the continued importance of NCPs in FP10 from the perspective of the European Commission and its agencies. NCPs play a vital role in providing on-the-ground feedback on how the FP is succeeding, what challenges proposers and projects face and how their needs are being addressed in the work programmes.

For digital NCPs in particular, there will also remain the role of supporting proposers in many different areas of FP10 with the digital aspects of their projects. As Nicholas Deliyanakis (DG RTD) puts it:

"Digital is everywhere. [...] The role of digital NCPs in helping proposers - not only those that apply to the dedicated digital topics, but all proposers – understand better the digital side and digital opportunities, is invaluable."

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