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## Abbreviations

CECs	Contaminants of Emerging Concern
CSIC	Institute of Environmental Assessment and Water, Research of the Spanish National Research Council
DN	Doctoral Network
EGD	European Green Deal
EU	European Union
EUTA	European Training Academy
FAIR	Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, and Reusability
GA	Grant agreement
HE	Horizon Europe
HRMS	High-resolution mass spectrometry
IP/IPR	Intellectual property/ Intellectual property rights
IRIS	Innovation Research and Impact Strategy Office at UNL, NOVA School of Sciences and Technology
MSCA	Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
NCP	National Contact Point
PF	Postdoctoral fellowship
TFNS	University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Technology of Novi Sad
TRLs	Technology Readiness Levels
UNL	NOVA University of Lisbon
UNS	University Novi Sad
WP	Work Package

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## 1. Executive summary

This document provides an overview of the efforts undertaken in the second reporting period of the TwINSol-CECs project to strengthen the research capacities of the Faculty of Technology Novi Sad (TFNS), with the aim of enabling more competitive and successful participation in EU research and innovation projects. It constitutes the public project deliverable D5.3, planned for submission at the end of the project. The activities described here are part of Work Package (WP) 5 – *Strengthening the research management and administration capacities of TFNS*, Task 5.1. They are based on trainings in various soft skills that are important for enhancing researchers' competences, and were organized either within TwINSol-CECs or in the framework of other twinning projects, as well as through other opportunities in which TFNS researchers gained valuable inputs for strengthening their transversal knowledge.

Through WP5 activities, TwINSol-CECs aims to leave a lasting legacy for TFNS by enhancing creative skills for writing project proposals, creating budgets for Horizon Europe projects, the communicate research results to target groups, improve entrepreneurship capacities, and strengthen project financial governing. These efforts are expected to strengthen the research involvement in international projects, expand collaborations with various stakeholders, and improve skills for communication aimed at raising public awareness.

Following the introductory part of the deliverable, which briefly presents the background of WP5 and Task 5.1, the document provides an overview of project activities dedicated to empowering TFNS researchers' soft skills. It summarizes the training sessions delivered within TwINSol-CECs, as well as those attended outside the TwINSol-CECs consortium.

## 2. Introduction

The main goal of the TwINSol-CECs project is to raise the TFNS scientific and innovation excellence in various aspects of research on Contaminants of Emerging Concern (CECs) integrated in broader EU networks of excellence, contributing to national and regional scientific and economic growth and well-being and to the harmonization of advanced research and innovation efforts important for the overall faster and sustainable transition of whole Europe foreseen by European Green Deal (EGD) towards zero-pollution, toxic free environment.

To achieve this goal, it is necessary for TwINSol-CECs team to be committed to WP5 and the strengthening of the research management and administration capacities of TFNS, since this is one of the specific objectives of the TwINSol-CECs project. Meeting and advices from partner institutions, CSIC and UNL, two top-class leading research institutions at EU, are mostly valuable. The leader of WP5 is UNL, a public higher education institution highly ranked at international levels, known for dedication to specialized and interdisciplinary research, aligned with the European Agenda for Knowledge and Innovation and with the Sustainable Development Goals, nurturing an entrepreneurial culture, and promotion of professionals (teachers, researchers, and non-teachers).

The WP5 started in the 1<sup>th</sup> project month and lasts during the whole project lifetime. In the frame of WP5, there are two tasks, 5.1. and 5.2, with the former being dedicated to the trainings on the TFNS researchers' soft skills, under the leadership of UNL. The related milestone "Completed researchers' soft skills trainings" is expected to be accomplished till the end of the project, while the activities are planned to start in the first reporting period.

### 3. Overview of the trainings for boosting the TFNS soft skills

#### 3.1 Trainings (co)organized within TwINSol-CECs

Within the TwINSol-CECs project, several trainings and info events were organized to strengthen researchers' transversal and soft skills in areas such as research communication, intellectual property, EU funding schemes and the gender dimension in research.

The first activity in this reporting period was the training "Clear Communication of Researchers in Technological Sciences", held on 29 November 2023, in the Blue Hall of the Faculty of Technology Novi Sad (TFNS), delivered by Prof. Dr Petar Vrgović (Figure 1). The workshop focused on the importance of using clear, everyday language when presenting complex research results, avoiding unnecessary jargon, and effectively communicating technological innovations and their implications to non-expert audiences. At the end of the training, a special interactive session was organized, in which participants were asked to prepare and deliver a brief explanation tailored to a randomly assigned combination of a research topic and a specific target audience.



**Figure 1.** Details from training "Clear Communication of Researchers in Technological Sciences" by Prof. Petar Vrgović, 29 November 2023

On 25 February 2025, a one-day seminar “Introduction to Intellectual Property Rights and Patent Protection of Inventions” was organized at TFNS, also in the Blue Hall, within WP5 – Strengthening the research management and administration capacities of TFNS, Task 5.1, and in synergy with the TwINSol-CECs “daughter” project WaDES, funded by the Serbian Fund for Science under the call Proof of Concept, coordinated by Dr. Mirjana Petronijević, a member of TFNS team of TwINSol-CECs. The seminar was delivered by Ms Jelena Tešić and Ms Ivana Krdžić from the Intellectual Property Office of the Republic of Serbia; both lecturers are patent researchers in the field of chemistry and chemical technology, both fields of significant interest for TFNS researchers. During the seminar topics covered were as follows: different forms of intellectual property, conditions for patent protection, employee inventions, and specific aspects of patents in chemistry, technology and biotechnology, with practical guidance on drafting patent applications. There were a total of 32 participants attending the meeting, mainly those were researchers from TFNS and limited number of pre-registered researchers from other institutions. Of the total number of attendees, 31 participants were from the University of Novi Sad, including 24 from TFNS, 3 from Faculty of Sciences, 2 from Biosense Institute, and 2 from Institute of Food Technology Novi Sad. One attendee was from the University of Belgrade, Institute of Chemistry, Technology and Metallurgy.

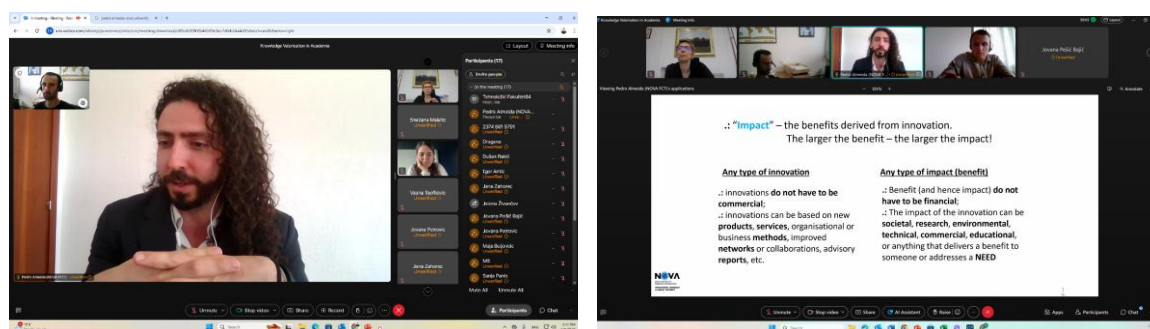


**Figure 2.** Details from the seminar “Introduction to Intellectual Property Rights and Patent Protection of Inventions”, Febr 25, 2025: Welcome of Prof. Jelena Pejčin, Vice-Dean for Science of TFNS; presentations of Jelena Tešić and Ivana Krdžić, Intellectual Property Office of the Republic of Serbia

As part of the TwINSol-CECs collaboration TFNS and UNL under the frame of TwINSol-CECs, an online webinar titled “Knowledge Valorisation in Academia” was organised on 6 May 2025. The training was delivered by Pedro Almeida, Coordinator of the Technology Transfer and Intellectual Property Office at IRIS, NOVA School of Science and Technology, UNL, and focused on key aspects of intellectual property and knowledge transfer in an academic context, Figure 3. After an opening and moderation by Dr. Nikola Maravić (TwINSol-CECs Communication Coordinator), and a welcome address highlighting the TFNS-IRIS collaboration by Prof. Nataša Đurišić-Mladenović (TwINSol-CECs Project



Coordinator), Mr. Almeida presented a realistic view of IP, going beyond patents to discuss a broader range of protectable research outputs and practical pathways for valorizing scientific results. Through real-life examples and concrete advice, he aimed to raise awareness among participants on how to translate research into societal and economic value and how to interact effectively with technology transfer structures. The lecture concluded with an interactive discussion of about 15 minutes, during which the 17 participants from the University of Novi Sad (TFNS and the Faculty of Science) shared their experiences and asked questions related to IP management and cooperation with industry.



**Figure 3.** Details from webinar “Knowledge Valorization in Academia” held by Pedro Almeida, Coordinator of the Technology Transfer and Intellectual Property Office at IRIS, NOVA School of Science and Technology, UNL,

On 17 July 2025, an MSCA Info Day was held at TFNS aimed at researchers, PhD candidates, and teaching staff interested in participating in Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) under Horizon Europe, Figure 4. The event was initiated to support the preparation of an MSCA Staff Exchanges (SE) proposal being developed by TwINSol-CECs researchers. The programme included an introduction to MSCA calls (Vanja Katić, from a newly established Research Management and Administration Unit at TFNS), detailed presentations on Postdoctoral Fellowships (PF) by Dr Jana Zahorec and on Staff Exchanges (SE) by Dr. Jovana Petrović, who both were previously attendees of the EUTA training on MSCA in Belgrade, as well as experience-sharing talks by successful MSCA beneficiaries from TFNS (Dr. Jelena Vladić (UNL) via Zoom; Dr. Vesna Teofilović and Dr. Tamara Erceg (TFNS)). The event concluded with practical information on partner search, the role of faculty administration in proposal preparation, and available support and consultations, followed by a Q&A and open discussion.



**Figure 4.** Details from MSCA Info Day held at TFNS, 17 July 2025

On 26 September 2025, a dedicated training session on financial rules in Horizon Europe was organized for the staff of the Financial Department of TFNS. The training was delivered by Marija Šola Spasić, MSc, the National Contact Point (NCP) for Serbia for financial issues in Horizon Europe, who presented the key financial principles, rules, and procedures applicable to Horizon Europe projects. The aim of the training was to strengthen the internal administrative and financial capacities of TFNS in order to ensure compliant and efficient management of ongoing and future EU-funded projects.

Finally, on 16 October 2025, a thematic lecture “Gender dimension in research: what it means for Horizon Europe projects in chemistry, biotechnology and technological sciences” was organized at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Chemistry, Figure 5. The event was hosted by the PFAStwin project (GA 101059534), with TwINSol-CECs, TwinSubDyn (GA 101059546), and NEXT-GENDER (COST CA20137) as co-organizers. The idea for this event was initiated during a meeting of representatives of TwINSol-CECs, TwinSubDyn, and PFAStwin at the MSCA Forum 2025 (June 2025, Belgrade), where the project teams had the opportunity to attend a presentation of Dr. Jelena Grahovac. On that occasion, and in agreement with the lecturer, it was jointly recognized that organizing a similar lecture tailored to the needs of research groups at TFNS, the Faculty of Chemistry in Belgrade, and the Faculty of Sciences (PMF) in Novi Sad would be highly valuable. In her lecture, Dr. Grahovac (Institute for Oncology and Radiology of Serbia) presented the concept of the gender dimension as a mandatory element of Horizon Europe proposals, clarifying that it refers not only to gender balance in teams but primarily to analyzing and integrating potential differences between women and men in research content, illustrated through examples from chemistry, biotechnology, and technological sciences.



**Figure 5.** Details from a lecture “Gender dimension in research: what it means for Horizon Europe projects in chemistry, biotechnology and technological sciences” at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Chemistry, Belgrade, October 16, 2025, co-organized by the PFAS<sub>twin</sub> project (GA 101059534), TwINSol-CECs, TwinSubDyn (GA 101059546), and NEXT-GENDER (COST CA20137)

Taken together, these activities form a coherent package of trainings organized within or co-organized by TwINSol-CECs, directly contributing to the enhancement of TFNS researchers’ soft skills and capacities for successful participation in competitive European research and innovation programmes.

### 3.2 Trainings organized outside the TwINSol-CECs consortium attended by the TFNS researchers

TFNS researchers also took part in external capacity-building activities organized by EUTA (Belgrade, Serbia), an independent training and advisory organization specialized in Horizon Europe:

- On 7-8 May 2025, TFNS representatives, including Prof. Nataša Đurišić-Mladenović, TwINSol-CECs Project Coordinator, together with one academic staff member from another research group from TFNS, and one financial officer from TFNS, participated in the two-day “Training on the management and financial administration of Horizon Europe projects” in Belgrade. The programme, led by Marija Šola Spasić, covered financial management principles, preparation of realistic project budgets, calculation of personnel costs, eligibility of costs, alignment of EU rules with national legislation, use of timesheets, financial reporting, and preparation for financial audits, with numerous practical exercises on budgeting and cost justification,
- TFNS researchers, including Prof. Đurišić-Mladenović, attended the MSCA Forum 2025 “Preparation for the new calls” in Belgrade on 18 June 2025, which focused on upcoming MSCA 2025 calls (DN, PF, SE), funding opportunities, and best practices. The event combined a policy overview and presentation of new calls with case studies of successful MSCA projects, insights from experienced evaluators on evaluation criteria and proposal quality, and sessions

on engaging companies in MSCA projects and positioning institutions as attractive hosts for MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships. The forum also served as a meeting point for three sister twinning projects, PFAS twin, TwinSubDyn, and TwiNSol-CECs, where the project team representatives agreed to collaborate on the joint organisation of a dedicated training on gender issues in research, specifically tailored to projects in chemistry, technology and biotechnology (described in chapter 4.1),

- TFNS researchers from TwiNSol-CECs were also invited to the event “My first Horizon project in collaboration with EUTA” (Belgrade, 21 May 2025), structured around panel discussions on key success factors for first Horizon projects, building partnerships and project consortia, data management and open science, drafting a strong Impact section, and preparing project budgets, complemented by short one-to-one consultations with EUTA experts. This invitation further broadened the support environment available to TFNS researchers preparing future Horizon Europe proposals, and, thanks to the contacts established during this event, enabled them to connect with colleagues in Serbia who have practical experience with different Horizon Europe programmes, in particular the Widening calls, thus opening additional perspectives for peer learning and future collaboration.

TwINSol-CECs researchers also participated online in two capacity-building events organized within the twinning project SPECTRA (GA 101158453), following a personal invitation from the SPECTRA coordinator Prof. Dimitra Lambropoulou (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki). The invitation was extended after successful contact initiated by Prof. Nataša Đurišić-Mladenović, who had invited Prof. Lambropoulou to give a lecture at the final TwiNSol-CECs conference, opening the way for closer collaboration between the two twinning projects. The first event was the SPECTRA Summer School “Advanced MS approaches for water quality & food safety” (14–16 July 2025), organized in hybrid format at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research and Innovation (CIRI), Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The programme covered the following topics: high-resolution mass spectrometry (HRMS), LC-MS/MS, suspect screening and non-target analysis, applications of MS for emerging contaminants (pharmaceuticals, PFAS, nanoplastics), food authenticity and traceability, as well as data processing and AI-assisted workflows. This provided an excellent opportunity for members of the HRMS research group at TFNS involved in TwiNSol-CECs to follow state-of-the-art presentations by leading European experts and to deepen their understanding of advanced analytical strategies directly relevant to their research. Immediately afterwards, TwiNSol-CECs researchers also joined, again online, the SPECTRA Exploratory Workshop “Providing training in science, RRI, IPR, open access principles, entrepreneurship, project formulation & management” held at CIRI on 17–18 July 2025. This hybrid workshop targeted master and PhD students, early-career researchers and technical staff, and addressed a broad set of topics supporting responsible and impactful research: responsible research and innovation (including ethics, gender equality, and public engagement), intellectual property rights, open access and FAIR data principles, entrepreneurship and innovation pathways from lab to market, and practical aspects of project formulation and management under Horizon Europe (from proposal design and budgeting to risk management, communication and reporting). Participation in this workshop offered TwiNSol-CECs-TFNS researchers valuable insights into research management and soft skills that complement their technical expertise, reinforcing the project's efforts to build sustainable capacities for competitive participation in European research programmes.



TFNS researchers also participated online in a webinar “Capacity building of UNSPMF staff towards leadership and scientific excellence to improve research management and administration capacity at UNSPMF” organized within the TwINSubDyn twinning project (GA 101059546), following an invitation from the TwINSubDyn project coordinator. Participation in this event offered TwINSol-CECs-TFNS researchers an additional opportunity to familiarize themselves with the scientific focus and structure of a HE project needed for its impactful outcomes.

## 4. Conclusions

The activities implemented under WP5, Task 5.1 in the second reporting period have significantly contributed to strengthening the research management and soft skills capacities of TFNS. A diversified portfolio of trainings and events was put in place, combining in-house workshops and seminars at TFNS, joint activities with the TwINSol-CECs partners (UNL and CSIC), as well as participation in external capacity-building opportunities and sister twinning projects. Together, these actions targeted key competence areas such as research communication, intellectual property and knowledge valorisation, financial management of Horizon Europe projects, gender dimension in research, and preparation and implementation of competitive EU proposals.

The report demonstrates that TFNS researchers and administrative staff were systematically exposed to both general and highly specialized training formats: from practical seminars on intellectual property and financial rules, through info days and webinars on MSCA calls, to advanced summer schools and workshops on analytical methods, research management and responsible research and innovation. Cooperation with sister projects (PFAStwin, TwinSubDyn, SPECTRA) and with organizations such as EUTA further expanded the learning environment, helped establish new professional networks and fostered exchange of good practices, particularly in the context of Widening and twinning actions.

As a result, the milestone “Completed researchers’ soft skills trainings” has been effectively achieved. The knowledge and experience gained by TFNS staff and researchers constitute an important legacy of TwINSol-CECs and provide a solid foundation for sustained improvement of research support structures (including the emerging Research Management and Administration Unit), increased participation in Horizon Europe and other international programmes, and stronger integration of TFNS into European research networks beyond the lifetime of the project.