



Widening in Horizon Europe

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Horizon Europe Widening Strategy

- Low success rates and participation in the EU Framework Programmes notably Horizon 2020 is symptomatic for the innovation divide but not a strict causality. Financial return to EU 13 countries has gradually risen from 4.2 % under FP7 to recently 5.1% in Horizon 2020 but still is considered suboptimal. Participation success is lagging likewise and there is still a relevant lack of consortia led by co-ordinators from widening countries.
- The future Widening Programme under Horizon Europe are embedded in a new encompassing ‘Widening Strategy’ that considers other parts of the Framework Programme and covers also actions to be undertaken by MS and regions themselves with the possible guidance by the Commission. This fully reflects the Inclusiveness dimension of the new European Research Area (ERA) in all its facets.
- The Widening Programme related initiatives for excellence will address the three different dimensions: centres of excellence, European universities and innovation ecosystems.
- The use of open science practices will be promoted in a cross-cutting manner whenever modernisation and transformation is on the agenda.
- In Horizon Europe, **EIT RIS activities shall become mandatory and an integral part of the KIC’s multi-annual strategy**. In addition, the Commission’s proposal for the EIT foresees a significant **increase of the budget** allocated to the EIT RIS.

The Widening Strategy six key objectives and intervention areas

The objectives of the Widening Strategy are:

- ✓ Incite **reforms and transformation processes of the R&I system at institutional, national and regional level** in widening countries in line with ERA principles;
- ✓ **Mobilise national investments** in R&I capacity in widening countries;
- ✓ **Raise the bar for excellence** of R&I actors in widening countries in partnership with outstanding European and international institutions ('win win situation');
- ✓ Increase **number of participations and success rates** of widening actors in research and innovation projects in other parts of Horizon Europe (notably in pillars 2 and 3);
- ✓ Promote the creation and upscaling of **innovation ecosystems** by place based and international; collaboration between academia and business in widening countries;
- ✓ Foster **brain circulation** and inter-sectorial **mobility** for researchers and innovators and turn it into brain gain for widening countries.

• Areas of intervention of the Widening Strategy are:

- ✓ Institutional development, transformation, policy reforms and national investments;
- ✓ Connectivity;
- ✓ Capacity building and Inclusiveness;
- ✓ Brain Circulation and Talent attraction;
- ✓ Linking science and business for innovation and excellence;
- ✓ Synergies with other policies.

Financial Aspects and Key Performance Indicators

- ▶ The Advancing Europe package actions **will be fully funded under the ring-fenced budget of the widening part of Horizon Europe**. For the entire portfolio under the ring-fenced budget we aim at global distribution key of 70:30 for widening countries vs. other countries (e.g. participating as ‘advanced partners’). This will be used as a key performance indicator (KPI) for the programme monitoring.
- ▶ For the non-ring fenced part of the entire Horizon Europe we expect a financial return to widening countries in the order of magnitude of their financial contribution. A respective KPI will be established with some flexibility margin once the final budget is known.
- ▶ There will be also some co-ordination activities without financial impact

1. Interventions: Institutional development, transformation and policy reforms

- **Teaming for excellence** (*HE part fully funded under widening part*) is one of the **core Widening Programme instruments**. It will support the creation of **new centres of excellence** or upgrading the existing ones in eligible countries in a chosen scientific domain in partnership with an outstanding institution in another country. Compared to the H2020 scheme, the new Teaming under Horizon Europe will facilitate access to co-financing by enabling a joint evaluation **with the ERDF** funded part;
- The **European Excellence Initiative** (the ring-fenced budget of the widening part of Horizon Europe), HE support would aim at the transformation of academic sector and their surrounding ecosystems including non-university research centres. The Excellence Initiative would thereby complement the **Erasmus+ support**, and mobilise local and regional government's investments in academic sector (in its broadest sense) It will also include research activities in strategically relevant domains with a centre of gravity in widening countries. The widening dimension and relevance will be closely monitored on the grounds of the overall distribution KPI (70:30).
- Through **the ERAdvance initiative** the relevant Commission services (DG R&I, REGIO and REFORMS together) will offer this support by engaging in regular bilateral dialogue with the Member States, complementary and linked to the Cohesion policy negotiation process, by developing together with the MS a common understanding on R&I policy reforms needed to address the challenges identified in the European Semester and deploy the adequate means
- **The Policy Support Facility 2.0 (PSF 2.0)** (*funded under ERA part*) will be at a higher political level. Every Member State needs to look critically at its performance and at its policies and, on the basis of that analysis, implement ambitious policy reforms. Through the PSF, the Commission assists Member States in making such analysis and in developing and implementing those reforms.

2. Connectivity

Connecting knowledge and actors across Europe will continue to be at the root of the ERA:

- **COST** (European **Co-operation in Science and Technology**) (*fully funded under widening part*) is a EU funded programme that enables researchers to set up their interdisciplinary research networks in Europe and beyond. COST provides a unique **low entry mechanism** for researchers from less performing countries in the EU and its Eastern and Southern periphery
- **The Twinning Actions** (*fully funded under widening part*) are **focussed and strategic networking activities** between the research institutions of the Widening countries and at least two internationally-leading counterparts at EU level. For Horizon Europe a stronger emphasis on **strengthening the research management capacities and administrative skills is foreseen**. In addition, according to the new legislative package a **research activity** will be integrated. The research package will also help to attract and **motivate excellent advanced partners**.

3. Capacity building and inclusiveness

This is a package of **supportive actions ranging from NCP services** to improve capacities e.g. for proposal writing, incentives for the integration of partners from widening countries into consortia and a **soft mainstreaming** approach to stimulate the participation from widening countries in regular R&I projects under pillar 2:

- **Professionalization of NCPs services** (*fully financed under widening part*): To **reduce disparities in research performance** and participation success, actions to facilitate the **trans-national co-operation between NCPs** will be strengthened by the following actions: **info days, training and joint workshops; tailored consultations and advice; contribution to an electronic match-making platform; proposal pre-screening** ('hard' and 'soft' checks) and actions dedicated to networking and matchmaking activities
- **Analysing actions: HoP on**: In the compromise package on Horizon Europe agreed by the legislators on 19 March 2019 originally **hop on-calls** were mentioned as a dedicated tool for widening to improve the **inclusiveness** for research institutions from less research performing countries in the Framework Programme into collaborative R&I projects and to **open up closed networks and silos**.
- **Analysing actions: Widening-friendly calls** (*co-ordination only*): There has been a long debate about **enforcing the participation** and success of widening countries by **mainstreaming** and/or imposition of quota, geographic selection criteria or ring- fenced budgeting
- **Analysing actions: ERC Widening European Participation policy** (*coordination only*). The ERC aims to capitalize on the full potential for frontier research all over Europe without departing from the principle of excellence. In 2014, the ERC Scientific Council established a Working Group on Widening European Participation to contribute to a truly inclusive European culture of competitiveness in science by encouraging the participation of researchers in ERC calls from Europe less research-performing regions. This is done through a number of measures spanning from policy dialogue and raising awareness with key research stakeholders in regions with a weak ERC participation, to the 'Visiting research fellowships to ERC grantees' scheme. The scheme allows selected candidates to strengthen their research profile in an internationally competitive research environment before applying for an ERC grant³. ERC communication strategy targeting widening countries will be launched including promotion of success stories and instructional information relevant to applicants from these countries and political roundtables
- **Analysing actions: Seal of Excellence** (*coordination only*): launched in 2015, the Seal of excellence initiative has the double purpose to support excellent proposals that were not funded not Horizon to find alternative support to develop their project, and at the same time provide an indication to MS and regions of pre-screened proposals worthy of funding. As the main source of alternative funding is Structural Funds, the Widening countries and their R&I actors are those that most can benefit from this initiative.

4. Brain circulation and talent attraction

Facilitating full engagement of Europe's talent pool is one of Horizon Europe's objectives.

- **New scheme: The ERA4You initiative** will implement a toolbox of measures in support of brain circulation (*fully funded under widening part under conditions*). Within the ERA4You policy initiative, Brain Circulation Grants will focus support to early career talents to explore unknown personal territories for professional development and training, by being mobile in the European Research Area in other sectors and in less obvious knowledge hubs across Europe, notably in widening countries. Two options for implementation of the ERA4You Brain Circulation Grant are proposed: (i) a restricted action, incentivising excellent MSCA researchers to move or to return to widening countries with an additional fellowship; (ii) a combination of the restricted action under with a more open action, together incentivising any early career researchers to move to widening countries.
- The **intervention point of the ERA Chairs** (*fully funded under widening part*) actions is rather the more local level of institutes, faculties or departments attracting in a sustainable manner **outstanding scientists and their teams** as **game changers** to universities or research organisations in catching up countries and regions. This measure of “brain gain” and **creation of pockets of excellence** will have a decisive and positive impact on the culture and performance of the host institutions. The creation of permanent and excellent research group in the chosen scientific field with a spill-over effect on the institution will improve the competitiveness of the research funding and incite institutional reforms in line with **ERA priorities** compliance.

5. Linking science and business towards innovation and excellence

- The objective 5 propose a package of actions to strengthen the links between scientists and innovators in widening countries.
- **New scheme HE:** The **Excellence Hubs instrument** (*HE part fully financed under widening part*) will help to qualify excellent research and innovation ecosystems for the ERA Hub label. It aims at developing competencies and skills in **promising interdisciplinary R&I domains** mobilising the internal potential of the hosting countries/regions. Hubs will build **long-term strategic partnership** exploiting the R&I potential of the science and innovation ecosystem within widening countries. They will **create poles of attraction** for talents to revert brain drain and stimulate institutional reforms and systemic change. It will be linked to the **umbrella initiative ERA Hubs** proposed under ERA Communication that will help to mobilise national investment in R&I and cohesion funds (possibly including REACT-EU). In the context of the **European Innovation Council EIC**, and in particular with regard to the Accelerator, the results obtained by “widening countries” are very imbalanced and concentrated. In response the following actions are proposed to redress the situation e.g. a **specific EIC Accelerator (“Widening Scale-up”)** pilot call could be set up. In addition, **vouchers to support innovative start-ups and SMEs from widening countries to prepare applications to the EIC** could be issues with a first test in a pilot call. (*seed funding from widening to be considered*)

6. Synergies with other policy domains

- **Regional policy:** The close co-ordination and collaboration with **regional policy** will be instrumental for the success of the widening strategy. The key intervention points in this respect are the regional strategies for **smart specialisation (RIS3)** as enabling conditions for ERDF investments in R&I and new opportunities for synergetic funding in the CPR and GBER. (*co-ordination only*) Close cooperation with relevant services aim to ensure coherence between different programmes and simplified possibilities for support from **ERDF/ESF+ for excellent Horizon projects** through recognized compliance **with State Aid rules**, in particular for **the Seal of Excellence** (see above) for the **EIC Accelerator, MSCA, Teaming and ERC Proof of Concept** as well as programme co-fund, European Partnerships, teaming projects incl. related infrastructure investments. The voluntary transfer of funds from shared to central-management Programmes up to a limited amount is also a possibility offered under both Regulations 'ERDF/ESF+ and Horizon Europe. However, the conditions for this **transfer of funds** needs still to be defined, as well as details on the use of ERDF in Horizon partnerships. A transfer from shared management programmes (such as ERDF, ESF+, JTF) to Horizon Europe can represent an important opportunity to invest in R&I, in case a country/region does not have high management capacity to implement R&I calls and to follow projects (especially in Widening countries) or as a boost to its learning and R&I performance/participation.
- **Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy:** The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), launched in 2004 and revisited in 2015, seeks to build effective partnerships between the EU and its neighbours. Six of the ENP countries are associated to Horizon 2020: Armenia; Georgia; Israel; the Republic of Moldova; Tunisia and Ukraine. Under the Eastern Partnership leg of the ENP, the EU4Innovation Initiative has been designed to showcase and coordinate the EU financial and political support in the field of research and innovation to achieve the integration of Armenian, Georgian, Moldovan, Ukrainian and EU R&I systems and programmes as one of the key Deliverable to be reached by 2020. Discussions are under way to reinforce this dimension under Horizon Europe. The new widening strategy and the proposed actions will contribute to a closer integration of these partners with the new Commission priorities, most notably the Green Deal, Digital transformation and an Economy that works for and connects people.

Communication actions

- **Large-scale conferences** will be the annual **R&I days**, **WIRE conference** and the biannual **ESOF** conference.
- **Medium scale workshops and seminars** will complement the communication strategy. A typical example are the annual **widening days** and the **Teaming club** gathering the co-ordinators of the projects in order to exchange best practices on common challenges and opportunities. In addition, events are co-organised with stakeholder organisations e.g. COST Association, the Guild, IGLO etc. where widening topics are addressed.
- **Attendance of the Commissioner or the senior management** of DG R&I to key events such as the opening of flagship projects of strategic importance are important communication means since they attract a strong media coverage and public attention.
- **Press releases and publications** are regular communication tools typically related to key milestones such as launch ceremonies of flagship projects or new calls announced in science magazines etc.
- **Studies and programme evaluation reports** provide evidence for policymaking but are also important elements for communications because they are absorbed by a large community of stakeholders.
- **NCPs events and info days** are organised on a regular basis at least once a year in a central mode in Brussels or virtually and are focussed on the operational modalities of the calls and the needs of the applicants.
- **Success stories** harvested in the future systematic and generalised policy feedback process in collaboration with the EAs will be a key element of communication, too.
- Last but not least, **electronic media are instrumental for any successful communication**. A dedicated web site is hosted by DG R&I and provides updated information about widening including a FAQ list related to the calls.

Summary

- **Traditional Scheme: Teaming for excellence** (*HE part fully funded under widening part*) is one of the **core Widening Programme instruments**. It will support the creation of **new centres of excellence** or upgrading the existing ones in eligible countries in a chosen scientific domain in partnership with an outstanding institution in another country.
- **Traditional Scheme: The Twinning Actions** (*fully funded under widening part*) are **focussed and strategic networking activities** between the research institutions of the Widening countries and at least two internationally-leading counterparts at EU level.
- **Traditional Scheme: The ERA Chairs** (*fully funded under widening part*) actions is rather the more local level of institutes, faculties or departments attracting in a sustainable manner **outstanding scientists and their teams** as **game changers** to universities or research organisations in catching up countries and regions.
- **New scheme HE: The Excellence Hubs instrument** (*HE part fully financed under widening part*) will help to qualify excellent research and innovation ecosystems for the ERA Hub label. It aims at developing competencies and skills in **promising interdisciplinary R&I domains** mobilising the internal potential of the hosting countries/regions.
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- **Support scheme: Professionalization of NCPs services** (*fully financed under widening part*): To **reduce disparities in research performance** and participation success, actions to facilitate the **trans-national co-operation between NCPs . & other scheme**