

UKRO Horizon 2020 Condensed

Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation

What is 'Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation'?

The Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation programme contains a range of actions open to different types of stakeholders: advanced/leading institutions, emerging institutions, underperforming institutions and entire regions.

Activities in this strand aim to close the research and innovation (R&I) divide in Europe, thereby widening participation in Horizon 2020 and contributing to the realisation of the European Research Area (ERA). Where appropriate, the actions aim to be complementary to policies and actions of Cohesion Policy funds. For example, Twinning and Teaming calls aim to close the innovation divide by nurturing a culture of excellence in the regions of Europe that are currently less research and innovation intensive. Applications are expected to show a level of integration with relevant Smart Specialisation frameworks.

There are three main streams of funding: 'Teaming', 'Twinning' and 'ERA Chairs'. For full details of calls in each of these areas, please consult the Work Programme, which is available on the European Commission's Participant Portal. Funding from this part of the Work Programme also goes to the Policy Support Facility, which aims to improve the design, implementation and evaluation of national/regional research and innovation policies; to the COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) Association, which provides funding for networks of researchers and stakeholders; and to the Joint Programming Initiative (JPI) Urban Europe for efforts to extend the participation of low R&I performing Member States in JPI Urban Europe.

Teaming



The Teaming call is for the creation of 'Centres of Excellence' in low Research & Innovation performing regions/countries or the upgrade of those which already exist. Proposals need to involve two parties – an internationally leading institution and the recipient region (or national authority) from a low-performing Member State. The call is in two stages, with most successful applications funded for the first stage only.

The first stage is an open call in which consortia are asked to present a long-term strategy for the future 'Centre of Excellence' based on a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis. The project deliverable of those funded will be a robust business plan for the future centre. Projects last 12 months and should cost around €0.4M.

In the second stage, first stage projects will compete to receive seed funding for the implementation phase (up to €15M for 5-7 years).

Twinning



Twinning aims to strengthen a defined field of research in an 'emerging institution' by linking it with at least two internationally leading counterparts from two different Member States or Associated Countries. The aim is that the twinning will enhance the science and technology capacity of the emerging institution and also help to raise the profile of its staff. Activities to be funded might include: short-term staff exchange; expert visits and on-site or virtual training; workshops; conference attendance; organisation of joint summer schools; dissemination and outreach activities. There is no support for infrastructure, equipment and research costs such as consumables. Twinning projects last up to three years with a budget of around €1M per project.

ERA Chairs

UK institutions are not eligible to apply to the ERA Chairs calls.

ERA Chairs provide support for universities and research institutions in low-performing Member States to host a leading researcher for a period of five years and make the structural changes needed to achieve excellence on a sustainable basis. The ERA Chair holders should be outstanding researchers/research managers, and will be expected to help the host institution build capacity/excellence in a particular field and compete more effectively for funding. Interaction with external stakeholders at regional level will be crucial, and the plans for development should align with relevant regional and national strategies for smart specialisation.

For the ERA-Chair action under the 2018-2020 work programme, new rules have been introduced to allow the Chair to work part-time on the project via secondment to the host institute and therefore not necessarily have to relocate to the host country.

Funding, eligibility and project details

Both Twinning and Teaming are funded as Coordination and Support Actions at a rate of 100% of eligible coordination costs.

The eligibility criterion for participants from a 'low-performing Member State' is based on whether the Member State is ranked below 70% of the EU 28 average of the composite indicator on Research Excellence. As a result, the eligible countries in this category are:

- Member States: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.
- Associated Countries (subject to valid association agreements of third countries with Horizon 2020): Albania, Armenia*, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.

*will become eligible as and when Association Agreement comes into force

Participants (regions, institutions, etc.) from these countries will be able to apply in the ERA Chairs call, and participate as partners from 'Low-performing countries' in the 'Twinning' and 'Teaming' calls.

Participants from other Member States will not be eligible for the ERA Chairs call, but will be able to participate as 'high-performing' or 'excellent' partners in the 'Teaming' and 'Twinning' calls, as long as they have partners from the above group of countries.

2018-2020 Work Programme

For the 2018-20 Work Programme, there will be new calls for two out of the three main 'Widening' instruments:

- I. **Twinning:** Two changes for the next Twinning call are being examined. The first is the inclusion of a strong orientation towards young researchers in 'Widening' countries. The second change (in line with the relevant Slovak Presidency priorities) is the requirement of partners to include a proposal for a joint research project (to be funded from other sources) in the scientific area of choice that will run in a parallel and complementary manner to the networking activities covered by the Twinning exercise.
- II. **ERA Chairs:** This action aims toward supporting universities or research organisations in their maintaining and attracting high quality researchers under the direction of an outstanding researcher and research manager (the EA Chair Holder). Under the new work programme, the possibility of including an "Advanced" Partner from which the ERA Chair holder on a secondment basis (full-time or part-time), should the proposal be funded, is being explored.

For the 'Teaming' action there will not be a new Phase one call due to the restricted funding available.

COST related actions will continue to be funded with the COST Association being the implementing entity and contribute to closing the divide in research and innovation performance in Europe. The WIRE XI conference will take place in Croatia in 2020.

The revised work programme, containing calls for 2020 has now been published.

'Widening Fellowships' within Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA) – Individual Fellowships

For the 2018-2020 work programme, budget has been allocated to a new 'Widening Fellowship' scheme under the Individual Fellowships of the MSCA actions. These fellowships will provide specific support to researchers to undertake their research in a 'widening' country, help spread excellence and close the research and innovation gap within Europe.

Although applications to the fellowship will be made via the usual route under MSCA, they will be funded through the Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation programme. Currently, the work programme has allocated €5m per year for 2018 and 2019 and €7m for 2020 to the scheme.

Further details can be found in the [MSCA factsheet](#).

Relevant EU policy areas and developments

The main policy background in this area is the ERA Communication, which states that *"A key aim for ERA is also to reduce both brain drain, notably from weaker regions, as well as the wide regional variation in research and innovation performance, aiming at excellence across the Union through smart specialisation."*

The EU's focus on smart specialisation, a policy which aims to boost regional innovation in order to achieve economic growth and prosperity by enabling regions to focus on their strengths, is also

important. Proposals in these schemes will need to show how funding will contribute to the smart specialisation strategy of the relevant region.

More information:

- European Commission Research and Innovation Participant Portal for:
 - **Calls for proposals**
 - **Work programmes**
- The European Commission's '**Regional Dimension of Innovation**' web pages
- The European Commission's '**regional policy**' web pages
- European Commission **Horizon 2020 website**
- The **ERA Communication**
- The Commission's '**ERA Chairs**' website
- **JPI Urban Europe** website
- **COST** website
- Work programme (updated July 2019) -
http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2018-2020/main/h2020-wp1820-sewp_en.pdf
- Sign up to the **UKRO Portal** to stay up to date on Horizon 2020 general developments, calls, events and results:
- For specific questions, contact your UKRO European Advisor