

# Horizon Europe – Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area

## What is Horizon Europe?

Horizon Europe is the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation with a budget of €95.5 billion for the period 2021-2027. It tackles climate change, helps to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and boosts Europe's competitiveness and growth.

The programme facilitates collaboration and strengthens the impact of research and innovation in developing, supporting, and implementing EU policies while tackling global challenges. It supports the creation and better sharing of knowledge and technologies.

It also creates jobs, fully engages Europe's talent pool, boosts economic growth, promotes industrial competitiveness, and optimises investment impact within a strengthened European Research Area.

For information on UK participation in the programme see UKRO's [dedicated factsheet](#).

## What is the 'Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area' priority in Horizon Europe?

In addition to the three 'pillars', Horizon Europe includes a fourth 'transversal' element that supports the overall objectives of the **European Research Area (ERA)**. Central to the ERA are the twin objectives of making the European Union the best and most successful environment for Research and Innovation, as well as ensuring that all Member States and their regions have the same opportunities to develop and access funding. Notably, 3.3% of the total Horizon Europe budget is ringfenced for widening opportunities.

This fourth element is divided into two areas:

1. Widening Participation and Spreading Excellence; and
2. Reforming and Enhancing the European Research and Innovation System.

**Widening Participation and Spreading Excellence**, builds upon the success of the 'Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation' (SEWP) part of Horizon 2020, providing actions targeted at reducing existing disparities between R&I leading and lagging countries to enable the ERA to advance as a whole. This area is designed to specifically respond to the second policy priority of the **ERA communication**, improving access to excellence as well as developing stronger R&I systems across the whole of the EU. It also builds on complementarities with the **smart specialisation strategies** under the **Cohesion Policy** and synergies with other Horizon Europe measures.

The key objectives of this area include:

- Encouraging institutional reforms and transformation processes of the R&I system at the national and regional level in widening countries in line with ERA principles.
- Mobilising national investments in R&I capacity in widening countries.
- Raising the bar for the excellence of R&I actors in widening countries in partnership with outstanding European and international institutions ('win-win situation').
- Increasing the 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).
- Promoting the creation of new innovation ecosystems and the scaling up of existing ones, by a set of measures, which include but are not limited to place-based and international collaboration between academia and business in widening countries.

- Fostering brain circulation, including inter-sectoral mobility for researchers and innovators and turn it into brain gain for widening countries.

**Reforming and enhancing the European Research and Innovation system** will address themes such as ‘Responsible Research and Innovation’ (RRI), Gender Equality and Open Science, which were found in the ‘Science with and for Society’ (SWAFs) part of Horizon 2020. This area sets out to reform and enhance the EU R&I system in line with the objectives of the **ERA Communication** which include prioritising investment and reforms, improving access to excellence, translating R&I results into the economy, and deepening the ERA.

These two areas of interventions, **Widening Participation and Spreading Excellence** and **Reforming and enhancing the European Research and Innovation system**, are reflected in the three destinations included in the 2023-2025 Work Programme:

1. Improved Access to Excellence
2. Attracting and Mobilising the Best Talents
3. Reforming and Enhancing the EU Research and Innovation System

## What will be funded under this part of Horizon Europe?

To help reduce existing disparities between research and innovation-leading and lagging countries, structural policy reforms are needed as well as strengthened links between research and innovation and institutional cooperation. In addition, building on existing pockets of excellence and connecting them to broader networks of excellence, less research and innovation advanced countries (‘Widening Countries’) will be able to upgrade their research and innovation systems, making them stronger and enabling the EU to advance.

The Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area (WIDERA) 2023-2025 work programme covers a wide range of activities including enhancing research and innovation capacity, supporting national reforms, facilitating brain circulation, measures to promote excellence, support for the creation of new collaborative networks across the EU and support to open established networks to applicants from widening countries. The aim is to increase the research and innovation profile of widening countries and enhance their participation in other actions under Horizon Europe.

The work programme will also directly contribute to achieving the Horizon Europe expected impacts along the four key strategic orientations set in the Horizon Europe Strategic Plan. It will also directly contribute to supporting the implementation of key policy objectives of the European Commission particularly the [European Green Deal](#) and the [EU’s digital strategy](#).

### Destination 1: Improved Access to Excellence

- **Teaming** – These projects provide funding for the creation of ‘Centres of Excellence’ in low R&I performing regions/countries or the upgrade of those which already exist.
- **Twinning** – These projects provide funding to strengthen a defined field of research in an ‘emerging institution’ by linking it with at least two internationally-leading counterparts through short-term staff exchanges; expert visits and short-term on-site or virtual training; workshops; conference attendance; and organisation of joint summer school type activities.
- **European Excellence Initiative** – These projects will increase cooperation in and between alliances of higher education institutions, such as, but not limited to, the European Universities alliances selected under Erasmus+, with a particular focus on Widening countries.
- **Pathways to Synergies** – These projects will improve the synergies between Horizon Europe and Horizon 2020, and ERDF, IPA (instrument for pre-accession assistance), RRF, INTERREG or similar funding instruments through internationalisation, valorisation, and technology uptake. Thereby, strengthening the research and innovation competitiveness in Widening countries.
- **Dissemination and Exploitation Support Facility** – These projects will help beneficiaries in their dissemination and exploitation of results as well as to expand their knowledge transfer and

IP management skills. This will help beneficiaries better fulfil their Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement obligations.

- **Hop-On Facility** – Designed to improve the capacities of low research and innovation-performing countries by enabling them to join already selected collaborative projects funded under Pillar 2, provided that there are no current widening countries participating in it.
- **Excellence Hubs** – These Hubs provide funding to develop competencies and skills in promising interdisciplinary research and innovation domains by mobilising the internal potential of the hosting countries/regions; and to establish long-term strategic partnerships between and within innovation ecosystems.

## Destination 2: Attracting and Mobilising the best Talents

- **ERA Chairs** – This involves support for research institutions in widening countries to host a leading researcher for five years and make the structural changes needed to achieve excellence on a sustainable basis.
- **ERA Fellowships** – This call provides specific support to researchers to undertake their MSCA Post-Doctoral Fellowship in a widening country. Fellowships are open to researchers of any nationality who wish to engage in research and innovation projects by either coming to Europe from any country in the world or moving from Europe to a widening country.
- **ERA Talents** – The call promotes innovative intersectoral research and innovation collaborations through cross-sectoral exchange of staff. The aim is to enhance the interoperability of careers and employability of researchers (talents) across sectors with a specific focus on widening countries.

## Destination 3: Reforming and Enhancing the EU Research and Innovation System

- **Enhancing the European R&I system** – The projects will help to coordinate national and regional research and innovation funding programmes, by bringing together national resources and contributing to the alignment of national research and innovation policies.
- **Deepening the European Research Area** – The projects will support efforts to reform and enhance the EU research and innovation system. Individually the projects will directly contribute to the objectives of the European Strategy for Universities, enhance open science practises, support gender equality, and improve the knowledge and skills related to ethics.

## Other Actions

In addition to the specific research activities, the work programme will also support direct grants to identified beneficiaries, prizes, and external contracts. These include but are not limited to:

- Horizon Impact Award
- EU Award for Gender Equality Champions
- Support to the further operation of cOAlition S
- European Union Contest for Young Scientists (EUCYS) 2023
- Monitoring experts for Horizon 2020 legacy
- Development, maintenance, and promotion of the ERA Talent Platform, including
- EURAXESS and associated websites and tools + IS Coordinators

## Widening Countries

Bulgaria	Croatia	Cyprus	Czechia	Estonia
Greece	Hungary	Latvia	Lithuania	Malta
Poland	Portugal	Romania	Slovakia	Slovenia

Associated Countries with equivalent characteristics in terms of R&I performance and the Outermost Regions

## Relevant EU policy areas and developments

The ERA Communication is a key policy area which underpins the Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area work programme, and the WIDERA calls will directly contribute to its four key objectives. Moreover, the work programme will contribute to achieving Horizon Europe's expected impacts along the four key strategic orientations set in the strategic plan and support the implementation of key policy objectives of the European Commission notably the European Green Deal and the EU's digital strategy. The widening participation work programme will contribute de facto to all SDGs, but directly to the following: SDG 4 - Quality Education; SDG 5 - Gender Equality; SDG 9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; SDG 17 - Partnership for the Goals. Projects should also actively seek synergies with other relevant EU, national or regional programmes.

## More information

- [Horizon Europe website](#)
- [Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area Work Programme 2023-2025](#)
- [The European Research Area \(ERA\)](#)
- [European Strategy for Universities](#)
- [WIDERA NCP project \(NCP WIDERA.NET\)](#)

Horizon Europe's legal basis:

- [Regulation establishing Horizon Europe](#)
- [Decision establishing the Specific Programme of Horizon Europe](#)
- [First Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe \(2021-2024\)](#)
- [Second Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe \(2025-2027\)](#)

UKRO Portal

- [UKRO Portal](#) (subscriber access required)
- [WIDERA UK NCP](#)