EN

Horizon Europe

Work Programme 2025

11. Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area

(European Commission Decision C(2025) 2779 of 14 May 2025)

Table of contents

Introduction

This part of the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2025 addresses the area "Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area" (WIDERA). The work programme includes two components:

I: Widening participation and spreading excellence;

II: Strengthening the European Research Area (ERA) by reforming and enhancing the European research and innovation system.

The European Commission adopted **the Communication on a New ERA for Research and Innovation** (2020) to improve the European research and innovation (R&I) landscape, to accelerate the European Union's transition towards climate neutrality and digital leadership, to support recovery from the coronavirus crisis, and to strengthen resilience against future crises[1]. **The Communication on the implementation of the ERA** (2024) takes stock of the progress made since 2020 and highlights areas for further action to achieve the objectives of the ERA[2].

Complementing the ERA Communication, **the Commission Communication on a New European Innovation Agenda** (2022) aims at mastering the twin green and digital transitions by fostering innovation in rapidly evolving fields, bridging the innovation gap between Member States and between regions, and harnessing the potential of all actors in innovation ecosystems while developing and attracting talents[3]. Furthermore, **the European strategy for universities** (2022) stresses that excellent education, research and innovation environments are an enabler for developing high-level skills, creating breakthrough knowledge and translating it into practical applications[4].

Aligned with the **Competitiveness Compass** (2025), the ERA sets sights on a single, borderless market for research, innovation and technology across the European Union, that fosters Europe's competitiveness and accelerates the green and digital transitions[5]. It helps Member States to act more effectively together by aligning their research policies and programmes. The free circulation of researchers and knowledge enables better cross-border cooperation, building of critical mass and continent-wide competition. It also promotes inclusive gender equality, ethics, mobility, skills and career development opportunities within the European Union.

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[1]   https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0628&from=EN.
[2]   https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/1bde0a38-7c86-4e6c-a4b8-7f9605d9e7e7_en?filename=com_2024_490_en.pdf
[3]   https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022DC0332.
[4]   https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-01/communication-european-strategy-for-universities.pdf.
[5]   https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025DC0030.

The Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe (Pact for R&I, 2021) demonstrates Member States' commitment to the ERA[6]. It defines priority areas for joint action, sets out ambitions for investments and reforms, and introduces simplified coordination and monitoring. It also outlines common values and principles to guide research and innovation in the European Union and its collaboration with the rest of the world.

The 2025 WIDERA work programme calls and other actions are designed to contribute toward the implementation of the four priority areas of the Pact for R&I:

Priority I: Deepening a truly functioning internal market for knowledge;

Priority II: Taking up together the green transition and digital transformation and other challenges with impact on society, and increasing society's participation in the ERA;

Priority III: Enhancing access to R&I excellence across the Union and enhancing interconnections between innovation ecosystems across the Union;

Priority IV: Advancing concerted R&I investments and reforms.

The component **"Widening participation and spreading excellence"** aims to tackle the R&I gap to move towards a truly integrated and cohesive R&I ecosystem in the European Union, addressing especially the third priority area of the Pact for R&I. Disparities between leading and less advanced countries in terms of R&I performance should be tackled through structural policy reforms at national and regional level aimed at, for example, improving the attractiveness of research careers, internationalisation, effectiveness of management and governance of R&I institutions or matching activities with EU initiatives (e.g., Seals of Excellence). Call topics are in principle bottom-up but applicants are encouraged to take into account key aspects of the political guidelines of the next European Commission published in July 2024[7], such as the Clean Industrial Deal, the Energy Union, digital tech diffusion, artificial intelligence, the upcoming European Life Science strategy, Union of Skills and/or start ups.

In this component, the less advanced countries eligible for hosting coordinators of widening actions are Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and all Associated Countries with equivalent characteristics in terms of R&I performance (Albania, Armenia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Georgia, Kosovo[8], Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine, and once associated Morocco), as well as the Outermost Regions (defined in Art. 349 TFEU). Hereinafter, these countries, including the Outermost Regions, will be named 'widening countries'.

The overall policy objectives of this component of the work programme are the following:

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[6]   https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021H2122.
[7]   https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf.
[8]   This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

1. Encourage institutional reforms and transformation processes of the R&I system at national and regional level in widening countries in line with ERA principles;

2. Mobilise national investments in R&I capacity in widening countries;

3. Raise the bar for excellence of R&I actors in widening countries in partnership with outstanding European and international institutions ('win-win situation');

4. 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);

5. Promote the creation of new innovation ecosystems, interconnect and scale up existing ones by a set of measures, which include place-based and international collaboration between academia and business in widening countries;

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

The component **"Strengthening the European Research Area by reforming and enhancing the European research and innovation system"** is designed to support the implementation of the first **ERA Policy Agenda**, which outlines 20 concrete 'ERA Actions' for the period 2022-2024, to advance in the four priority areas defined in the Pact for R&I[9].

This component pertains to the destination "Reforming and enhancing the European research and innovation system", aiming to build R&I capacity at the level of institutions and ecosystems by supporting the implementation of the different 'ERA Actions'. It also fosters the adoption of shared EU values and principles outlined in the Pact for R&I, such as evidence-informed policymaking, freedom of scientific research, societal responsibility, gender equality, equal opportunities, diversity and inclusiveness.

The WIDERA work programme also supports the key strategic orientations of Horizon Europe presented in the **Horizon Europe strategic plan 2025-2027** by building up Europe's R&I capacity to address global challenges and boost its competitiveness[10]. Synergies with national, regional and other European programmes, in particular under the cohesion policy, will increase the impact of actions implemented under this work programme.

It is recalled that selected calls and other actions funded by 2025 budget are also included in the work programme 2023-2025 (amendments adopted in April 2024) in order to ensure continuity of support[11]. In the component "Widening participation and spreading excellence", this included the 2025 Teaming call under the destination "Improved access to excellence" and the 2025 ERA Fellowships call under the destination "Attracting and mobilising the best talents". In the component "Strengthening the ERA by reforming and enhancing the European research and innovation system", a small number of actions not subject to calls for proposals

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9   https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf.
10   https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/092911.
11   https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2023-2024/wp-11-widening-participation-and-strengthening-the-european-research-area_horizon-2023-2024_en.pdf

were included, such as the 2025 edition of the EU Award for Gender Equality Champions and the 2025 edition of the European Union Contest for Young Scientists[12].

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[12] The amended work programme 2023-2024 included the 2024 Horizon Impact Award contest, which was cancelled and therefore no prizes were awarded.

Calls

Call - European Excellence Initiative (EEI)

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-01

Overview of this call[13]

Proposals are invited against the following Destinations and topic(s):

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million) 2025	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million)[14]	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
Opening: 08 May 2025 Deadline(s): 20 Nov 2025				
Destination: Improved access to Excellence				
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-01-ACCESS-01: European Excellence Initiative (EEI)	CSA	80.00	2.00 to 5.00	27
Overall indicative budget		80.00		

General conditions relating to this call	
Admissibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex A.
Eligibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex B.
Financial and operational capacity and exclusion	The criteria are described in General Annex C.

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[13]   The Director-General responsible for the call may decide to open the call up to one month prior to or after the envisaged date(s) of opening.
The Director-General responsible may delay the deadline(s) by up to two months.
All deadlines are at 17.00.00 Brussels local time.
The budget amounts are subject to the availability of the appropriations provided for in the general budget of the Union for 2025.

[14]   Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

Award criteria	The criteria are described in General Annex D.
Documents	The documents are described in General Annex E.
Procedure	The procedure is described in General Annex F.
Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements	The rules are described in General Annex G.

Call - EIC pre-accelerator - Widening

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-02

Overview of this call[15]

Proposals are invited against the following Destinations and topic(s):

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million) 2025	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million)[16]	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
Opening: 12 Jun 2025 Deadline(s): 18 Nov 2025				
Destination: Improved access to Excellence				
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-02-ACCESS-01: EIC pre-accelerator - Widening	CSA	20.00	0.30 to 0.50	50
Overall indicative budget		20.00		

General conditions relating to this call

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[15] The Director-General responsible for the call may decide to open the call up to one month prior to or after the envisaged date(s) of opening.
The Director-General responsible may delay the deadline(s) by up to two months.
All deadlines are at 17.00.00 Brussels local time.
The budget amounts are subject to the availability of the appropriations provided for in the general budget of the Union for 2025.

[16] Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

Admissibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex A.
Eligibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex B.
Financial and operational capacity and exclusion	The criteria are described in General Annex C.
Award criteria	The criteria are described in General Annex D.
Documents	The documents are described in General Annex E.
Procedure	The procedure is described in General Annex F.
Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements	The rules are described in General Annex G.

Call - Hop-on facility

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-03

Overview of this call[17]

Proposals are invited against the following Destinations and topic(s):

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million) 2025	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million)[18]	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
Opening: 06 May 2025 Deadline(s): 04 Sep 2025				

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[17] The Director-General responsible for the call may decide to open the call up to one month prior to or after the envisaged date(s) of opening.
The Director-General responsible may delay the deadline(s) by up to two months.
All deadlines are at 17.00.00 Brussels local time.
The budget amounts are subject to the availability of the appropriations provided for in the general budget of the Union for 2025.

[18] Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

Destination: Improved access to Excellence				
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-03-ACCESS-01: Hop-on facility	RIA	40.00	0.20 to 0.60	90
Overall indicative budget		40.00		

General conditions relating to this call	
Admissibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex A.
Eligibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex B.
Financial and operational capacity and exclusion	The criteria are described in General Annex C.
Award criteria	The criteria are described in General Annex D.
Documents	The documents are described in General Annex E.
Procedure	The procedure is described in General Annex F.
Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements	The rules are described in General Annex G.

Call - Support for R&I policy making in the EU enlargement countries

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-04

Overview of this call[19]

Proposals are invited against the following Destinations and topic(s):

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million)	Expected EU contribution	Indicative number of

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[19] The Director-General responsible for the call may decide to open the call up to one month prior to or after the envisaged date(s) of opening.
The Director-General responsible may delay the deadline(s) by up to two months.
All deadlines are at 17.00.00 Brussels local time.
The budget amounts are subject to the availability of the appropriations provided for in the general budget of the Union for 2025.

		2025	per project (EUR million)[20]	projects expected to be funded
Opening: 06 May 2025				
Deadline(s): 16 Sep 2025				
Destination: Improved access to Excellence				
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-04-ACCESS-01: Support for R&I policy making in the EU enlargement countries	CSA	3.00	Around 3.00	1
Overall indicative budget		3.00		

General conditions relating to this call	
Admissibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex A.
Eligibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex B.
Financial and operational capacity and exclusion	The criteria are described in General Annex C.
Award criteria	The criteria are described in General Annex D.
Documents	The documents are described in General Annex E.
Procedure	The procedure is described in General Annex F.
Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements	The rules are described in General Annex G.

Call - Implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys in widening countries

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-05

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[20]   Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

Overview of this call[21]

Proposals are invited against the following Destinations and topic(s):

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million) 2025	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million)[22]	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
Opening: 14 May 2025 Deadline(s): 15 Oct 2025				
Destination: Improved access to Excellence				
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-05-ACCESS-01: Implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys in widening countries	COFUND	24.00	5.00 to 8.00	4
Overall indicative budget		24.00		

General conditions relating to this call	
Admissibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex A.
Eligibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex B.
Financial and operational capacity and exclusion	The criteria are described in General Annex C.
Award criteria	The criteria are described in General Annex D.
Documents	The documents are described in General Annex E.

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[21] The Director-General responsible for the call may decide to open the call up to one month prior to or after the envisaged date(s) of opening.
The Director-General responsible may delay the deadline(s) by up to two months.
All deadlines are at 17.00.00 Brussels local time.
The budget amounts are subject to the availability of the appropriations provided for in the general budget of the Union for 2025.

[22] Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

Procedure	The procedure is described in General Annex F.
Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements	The rules are described in General Annex G.

Call - Enhancing the European R&I system

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06

Overview of this call[23]

Proposals are invited against the following Destinations and topic(s):

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million) 2025	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million)[24]	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
Opening: 15 May 2025 Deadline(s): 18 Sep 2025				
Destination: Reforming and enhancing the European research and innovation system				
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-01: Rolling out the ERA Policy Agenda results	CSA	26.00	1.50 to 2.00	13
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-02: Enable sustained coordination and guidance at the European level on institutional non-profit open access publishing	CSA	2.00	Around 2.00	1
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-03: Research and innovation to provide evidence that support reforms of research assessment	RIA	2.00	Around 2.00	1

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[23] The Director-General responsible for the call may decide to open the call up to one month prior to or after the envisaged date(s) of opening.
The Director-General responsible may delay the deadline(s) by up to two months.
All deadlines are at 17.00.00 Brussels local time.
The budget amounts are subject to the availability of the appropriations provided for in the general budget of the Union for 2025.

[24] Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-04: Investigating and addressing career barriers faced by underrepresented and marginalised researchers	RIA	2.00	Around 2.00	1
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-05: Programme-level collaboration	CSA	4.00	Around 2.00	2
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-06: Strengthening of the European Science for Policy Ecosystem	CSA	2.00	Around 2.00	1
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-07: Science comes to town 2027	CSA	6.00	Around 6.00	1
Overall indicative budget		44.00		

General conditions relating to this call	
Admissibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex A.
Eligibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex B.
Financial and operational capacity and exclusion	The criteria are described in General Annex C.
Award criteria	The criteria are described in General Annex D.
Documents	The documents are described in General Annex E.
Procedure	The procedure is described in General Annex F.
Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements	The rules are described in General Annex G.

Destination: Improved access to Excellence

Introduction

The ERA Communication established the need to improve access to excellence as one of the four main strategic goals. Striving towards excellence requires a stronger R&I system where best practice is disseminated faster across the European Union.

The European Union's R&I system needs to promote a more inclusive approach in which all can participate and from which all can benefit. Existing disparities between R&I leading and lagging countries should be tackled by introducing structural policy reforms. Closer links between research and innovation and institutional cooperation to produce high-quality knowledge are key to help bridge these disparities. By building on their excellence pockets and connecting them to broader networks of excellence less R&I advanced countries will be able to upgrade their R&I systems, making them stronger and allowing the European Union as a whole to advance together.

This destination will address "improving access to excellence" through a portfolio of complementary actions that aim to build up R&I capacities in widening countries, as well as through national and regional R&I reforms and investments, to enable them to advance to the competitive edge at European and international level. It will contribute to the development of a pan European innovation ecosystem and thus to innovation.

The **European Excellence Initiative (EEI)** addresses disparities in the performance of the European university sector by raising the overall level of excellence of research undertaken in higher education entities in European University alliances and beyond with a centre of gravity in widening countries.

The EIC Pre-accelerator call aims to boost the innovation potential of early-stage deep-tech startups in widening countries by enhancing their business, investor, and technology readiness to secure funding from the EIC Accelerator or other sources. The goal is to increase the competitiveness and investment appeal of these startups, facilitating their scale-up and market entry.

A call on **Implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys in widening countries** will improve the engagement of widening actors with the New European Innovation Agenda's flagship on *accelerating and strengthening innovation in European Innovation Ecosystems across the EU and addressing the innovation divide*. This action is intended to create connected regional innovation valleys across the European Union, with special focus on regions within the country group with lower research and innovation performance (widening countries).

The **Hop-on Facility** will open the opportunity for new participants from widening countries to join ongoing RIA projects under pillar 2 and the EIC pathfinder projects of Horizon Europe that have not yet any partner from a widening country.

The **Policy Platform for enlargement countries** will ensure continuation of the ongoing initiative for policy support to the Western Balkan countries and extend its geographical scope to enlargement countries.

In addition, particular attention will be paid to cross-cutting objectives set for Horizon Europe, such as gender equality and open science practices, through the different funded actions.

Expected impact

Proposals for topics under this destination should set out a credible pathway to contributing to improved access to excellence, and more specifically to one or several of the following impacts:

- Increased science and innovation capacity for all actors in the R&I system in widening countries;

- Mobilisation of national and EU resources for strategic investments;

- Higher participation success in Horizon Europe;

- Raised excellence of research undertaken in the higher education sector in widening countries;

- More inclusive consortia under pillar 2 and EIC pathfinder;

- Improved business opportunities for deep tech SMEs and start ups in widening countries Interconnected, inclusive, and more efficient innovation ecosystems across the European Union;

- Greater involvement of regional actors in the R&I process;

- Improved outreach to international level for all actors;

- Improved innovation culture and opportunities for start-ups and SMEs in widening countries.

Proposals are invited against the following topic(s):

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-01-ACCESS-01: European Excellence Initiative (EEI)

Call: European Excellence Initiative (EEI)	
Specific conditions	
Expected EU contribution per project	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR 2.00 and 5.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

Indicative budget	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 80.00 million.
Type of Action	Coordination and Support Actions
Eligibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply: In order to achieve the expected outcomes, participation as coordinators to the call is limited to legal entities established in Widening countries. Applications must be submitted by a consortium, including as beneficiaries, at least three independent legal entities, in three different EU Member States or Horizon Europe Associated Countries.
Procedure	The procedure is described in General Annex F. The following exceptions apply: The following rules for dealing with ex-aequo applications apply: in the first place, ex-aequo proposals will be prioritised according to geographical diversity criteria, defined as proposals with coordinators established in a Widening Country, not otherwise represented as coordinator higher up the ranking list. The method described in Points 1), 2), 3) and 5) of General Annexes Part F (Procedure/Evaluation procedure and ranking) will then be applied to the remaining equally ranking proposals in the group. This rule establishing the priority order serves to better spread the impact of the action and to strengthen the efficiency of the 'Widening participation and spreading excellence' programme.

Expected Outcome: According to the recent report on the future of European competitiveness by Mario Draghi (published in September 2024)[25], 'the EU boasts an excellent university system on average, but its presence among the top world-leading research universities is limited'. The EU higher education system is quite inclusive and provides a high level of education and training to a significant portion of its young people. However, there are very large differences among European universities, and some perform very well in many respects. This action addresses this challenge by dedicated measures to reduce these disparities by raising the overall level of excellence of research undertaken in higher education entities.

Furthermore, this action contributes to the implementation of the European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe[26] of 5 April 2022 and the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-24[27]; ERA action 13: Empower higher education institutions to develop in line with ERA, and in synergy with the European Education Area.

The objectives of this action are to:

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[25] https://commission.europa.eu/topics/strengthening-european-competitiveness/eu-competitiveness-looking-ahead_en
[26] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC_2022_167_R_0003
[27] https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14308-2021-INIT/en/pdf

- Raise excellence in science and in knowledge valorisation through deeper and geographically inclusive strategic cooperation in alliances of higher education institutions, such as – but not limited to – European Universities alliances selected under Erasmus+, with a center of gravity in Widening countries;

- Improve global competitiveness and visibility of Europe's higher education institutions, creating critical mass in key strategic areas stipulated in the political guidelines for the next European Commission published in July 2024[28] such as the Clean Industrial Deal, the Energy Union, digital tech diffusion, artificial intelligence, the upcoming European Life Science strategy, Union of Skills, etc.;

- Improve researchers career opportunities in line with the ERA policy agenda 2022-24, promoting a balanced circulation of talents, fair and modern research assessment practices in line with the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment[29], diversity, gender equality and inclusiveness, use of open science practices as well as the acquisition of transferable skills.

Proposals are expected to contribute to the following <u>outcomes</u>:

- Modernisation and upgrade of higher education institutions in the R&I dimension, through integrated collaboration between institutions and with other actors in local ecosystems and/or internationally;

- Mainstreamed culture of excellence in science and knowledge valorisation amongst higher education institutions, and particularly in less research-intensive institutions and countries, in particular Widening countries;

- Accelerated institutional reforms in the R&I dimension and strengthened R&I capacities in higher education institutions, notably those located in Widening countries, in particular leading to better research careers including in non-academic sectors;

- Strengthened digital skills and capacities including artificial intelligence of the R&I dimension of the higher education sector;

- Increased global competitiveness and critical mass of research in the European higher education system;

- Contribution to implementation of the relevant ERA Policy Agenda 2022-24 actions in higher education sector (Action 13: Empower higher education institutions and actions 1 to 9 under the header 'Deepening a truly functioning internal market for knowledge', where relevant).

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[28]   https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf
[29]   https://coara.eu/app/uploads/2022/09/2022_07_19_rra_agreement_final.pdf

Scope: The European Excellence Initiative in its widening dimension aims to raise excellence in science and in knowledge valorisation of Europe's universities through cooperation. The action will engage with universities and empower them further to be actors of change in R&I.

By developing closer cooperation with economic and industrial partners within local and regional innovation ecosystems, academic researchers and support staff will be provided the opportunity to be trained in knowledge valorisation, entrepreneurship, access to finance, at any stage of their careers, and to take into account the variety of academic activities in their career assessment.

Cooperation of universities will be supported to create critical R&I mass and pursue specific objectives that contribute to accelerating key R&I areas of own choice with strategic relevance for the European Union.

The European Excellence Initiative in its widening dimension is, in terms of scope, open to any network or alliance of higher education institutions, such as – but not limited to – European Universities alliances selected under Erasmus+. In case of participation in this call such alliances may be represented by limited number of their members and may include entities outside the alliance for specific themes to pursue the objectives of this call especially in view of industrial co-operation and/or outreach to regional innovation ecosystems. Under this call the centre of gravity of the action is in Widening countries. Applicants are expected to convincingly demonstrate this geographical focus conceptually and by allocation of the major share of the budget (at least 51%) to participants from Widening countries.

Activities need to focus on research and innovation conducted in the higher education sector. Educational activities such as Master or doctoral programmes are out of scope of this call.

Projects should contribute to the implementation of ERA Policy Agenda priorities at the participating higher education institutions, notably the strengthening of research careers in academia and the reform of the assessment system for research and related careers;

Applicants are encouraged to implement the aforementioned European Research Area policy objectives and to consolidate institutional changes by means of a coherent package of activities structured into the following modules (underpinned with non-exhaustive examples of related activities):

1. Institutional modernisation and reforms

- Introduction of modern research assessment practices, in line with the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA);

- Application of modern management practices including improved research management and administration (RMA);

- Promoting interdisciplinary research entities.

2. Upskilling of research, technical and management staff

- Exchange of academic and non-academic staff for sharing good practices;

- Training and capacity building for research and innovation management including IPR and application of open science practices;

- Entrepreneurial and communication training.

3. Development of research excellence

- Sharing R&I capacities including infrastructures;

- Developing joint strategic R&I agendas;

- Seed R&I projects to test R&I agendas, explore new joint research stands and consolidate partnership.

4. Digital transformation

- Introduction of AI techniques in science and management;

- Concept studies for upgrading digital infrastructure;

- Data science and management.

5. Outreach

- Linkages with inspiring local/regional innovation ecosystems including industry;

- Engaging with citizens, cities, regions and other non-academic actors;

- Development of internationalisation strategies and partnerships.

Proposals should address at least four of the above modules and may propose concrete activities different to the examples given in the list above as long as they are in line with the objectives of this call.

Expenditures for research and innovation activities (see third activity under point 3, such as seed funding for collaborative research projects) cannot exceed a maximum of 20% of the total budget and need to be presented in a dedicated and distinct work package in the proposal.

The actions should envisage a duration appropriate to the ambition and complexity of the alliance of higher education institutions. The duration should not exceed 5 years.

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-02-ACCESS-01: EIC pre-accelerator - Widening

Call: EIC pre-accelerator - Widening
Specific conditions

Expected EU contribution per project	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR 0.30 and 0.50 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
Indicative budget	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 20.00 million.
Type of Action	Coordination and Support Actions
Eligibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply: Applications may only be submitted by one legal entity (mono-beneficiary). The following additional eligibility criteria apply: Beneficiaries must be a small and medium enterprise (SME) established in a Horizon Europe Widening country.
Award criteria	The criteria are described in General Annex D. The following exceptions apply: The following additions to the general award criteria apply: The proposals will be evaluated by 3 independent evaluators following the award criteria for EIC Transition Open at first evaluation step, EIC Work Programme 2025[30]. These are: **Excellence (Threshold: 4/5)** **Technological breakthrough:** Does the technology have a high degree of novelty and higher performance compared to other technologies available or in development? Does the technology indicate high commercial potential? **Objectives:** How credible and feasible are the objectives for the planned technology development and maturation? How credible and feasible are the objectives and KPIs for the planned business development process? **Methodology**: Is the timing right for this technology/innovation (i.e., feasibility, minimum technological readiness level (TRL), unique selling points)? **Impact (Threshold: 4/5)** **Credibility of the impacts:** To what extent the expected commercial impact(s) described in the proposal are credible and substantial within

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[30]   EIC WP25.

the project and beyond (e.g., one or several sectors, setting new standards, etc.)?

Economic and/or societal benefits: To what extent does the proposed innovation have scale up potential including high capacity to gain or create new European or global markets? To what extent is the proposed innovation expected to generate positive impacts for the European Union, Member States or Associated Countries (e.g., strategic autonomy, employment etc.)?

Investment readiness and go to market strategy: To what extent the proposal and its activities contribute to make the technology and the team investment ready (including through IP protection and market validation)? Is there a well-defined and convincing go-to -market strategy and pathway, including what regulatory approvals may be needed (if relevant), time to market, possible business and revenue model?

Quality and efficiency of the implementation (Threshold 3/5)

Quality and motivation of the team: To what extent does the (project) team have the necessary high-quality capabilities and high motivation to move decisively towards market. To what extent does the applicant have the necessary expertise to create a unique commercial value from the emerging technology and develop an attractive business and investment proposition?

KPIs and Milestones: Are both milestones and KPIs present, relevant and clearly defined (measurable, timed, comparable etc.) to track progress along the pathway towards objectives? Have the main risks (e.g., technological, market, financial etc.) been identified, together with measures to mitigate in order to achieve the project objectives?

Workplan and allocation of resources: How appropriate and effective is the allocation of resources (person-months and equipment) between work packages?

The following rules for dealing with ex-aequo applications apply: in the first place, ex-aequo proposals will be prioritised according to geographical diversity criteria, defined as proposals with coordinators established in a Widening Country, not otherwise represented as coordinator higher up the ranking list. The method described in Points 1), 2), 3) and 5) of General Annexes Part F (Procedure/Evaluation procedure and ranking) will then be applied to the remaining equally ranking proposals in the group. This rule establishing the priority order serves to better spread the impact of the action and to strengthen the

	efficiency of the 'Widening participation and spreading excellence' programme.
Procedure	The procedure is described in General Annex F. The following exceptions apply:
	Seals of Excellence will be awarded to applications exceeding all of the evaluation thresholds set out in this work programme but which cannot be funded due to lack of budget available to the call.
Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements	The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:
	The funding rate is 70 % of the eligible costs.
	Eligible costs will take the form of a lump sum as defined in the Decision of 7 July 2021 authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027) – and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2021-2025). [31].

Expected Outcome: This call will increase the innovation potential of deep-tech startups in the widening countries and enable them to better attract private investments and scale up. It will further strengthen the innovation dimension of the widening component and increase the overall competitiveness of these countries.

The specific outcome expected of this action is increased business, investor, and technology readiness of high potential deep-tech startups in widening countries to a level where they will:

1. be successful in applying and attracting the EIC Accelerator funding and/or;

2. manage to secure other private investment and/or;

3. attract successfully national or regional funding as alternative funding sources (e.g. through Seal of Excellence programmes).

Scope: This action focuses on early-stage deep-tech startups which 1) have high-impact innovation technology, product, service, or business model that could create new markets or disrupt existing ones, and 2) have the ambition and commitments to scale up.

The successful applicants need to work on deep tech innovation. Such companies often struggle to attract financing because the technology and investment risks are too high.

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[31]   This decision is available on the Funding and Tenders Portal, in the reference documents section for Horizon Europe, under 'Simplified costs decisions' or through this link: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf

In the framework of this call, **deep-tech**[32] is technology that is based on cutting-edge scientific advances and discoveries and is characterised by the need to stay at the technological forefront by constant interaction with new ideas and results from the lab. Deep-tech innovations are understood to be those that have the potential to deliver transformative solutions, rooted in cutting-edge science, technology, and engineering, including innovation that combines advances in the physical, biological and digital spheres. Deep-tech is distinct from 'high-tech' which tends to refer only to R&D intensity[33].

This EIC Pre-accelerator - Widening call is designed to enable promising deep-tech startups to develop further their innovations (from TRL 4 to TRL 5/6)[34], attract the investment amounts needed for scale up in a shorter timeframe and successfully apply and attract funding from EIC Accelerator or other sources.

The applicants are expected to demonstrate in their application that they:

- have developed technology validated in the lab (at least TRL 4);

- possess the necessary Intellectual Property Rights to ensure freedom to operate and adequate protection of the idea;

- have a clear vision on the intended pathway and route to market. This includes specific milestones together with concrete and verifiable KPIs to assess progress towards the market.

The support will be in awarded by grants max at 70% funding of the eligible costs. 30% co-funding to be covered by the beneficiary through its own resources.

An amount between EUR 300.000 and max EUR 500.000 in the form of a lump sum for a period of up to 2 years is considered appropriate.

Seal of Excellence will be awarded to all proposals that meet the evaluation thresholds but are not funded due to lack of available budget.

The requested grant is expected to be used for:

- addressing the investor and market readiness towards commercialisation and deployment (market research, value proposition, business case and business model, prospects for growth, intellectual property protection, competitor analysis etc.) and if relevant, aspects of regulation, certification and standardisation, aimed at getting both the technology and the business idea investment ready **and/or;**

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[32] Deep-tech ventures have the following characteristics: positioning at the knowledge frontier with long and uncertain R&I cycles; relates to tangible products and industrialisation processes; linked to the ecosystem and especially higher education institutions, problem orientated, or mission driven, focused on the creation of an option space and a dynamic de-risking cycle.

[33] Ratio of a firm's R&D investment to its revenue.

[34] Completed TRL 5 (Technology validated in relevant environment – industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies) or TRL6 (Technology demonstrated in relevant environment - industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies). For more information, see EIC Work Programme 2025.

- the maturation and validation of novel technologies beyond proof of concept to viable demonstrators of the technology in the intended field of application (i.e., from minimum TRL 4 up to TRL 6).

At the end of the EIC Pre-accelerator project, it needs to:

- demonstrate that the technology component of their innovation has been tested and validated in a laboratory and other relevant environment (e.g. at least completed all aspects of TRL 5);

- be ready to apply for EIC Accelerator and/or to seek other investors or sources of funding, to enter licensing or collaboration agreements with third parties, or other routes to market deployment.

Successful applicants and those awarded the Seal of Excellence will be granted free access to the EIC Business Acceleration Services[35], such as coaching and specific events tailored to their needs (e.g. for improving investor and market readiness).

This will be complemented by access to the EIC Accelerator Fast Track[36] for submissions to the Accelerator programme following a project review in the second half of the project.

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-03-ACCESS-01: Hop-on facility

Call: Hop-on facility	
Specific conditions	
Expected EU contribution per project	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR 0.20 and 0.60 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
Indicative budget	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 40.00 million.
Type of Action	Research and Innovation Actions
Eligibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply: The following additional eligibility criteria apply: 1. The proposal must include only: • One legal entity, as a beneficiary, established in a Widening country. • One legal entity which is the coordinator of an 'eligible already

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[35]   See EIC Work Programme 2025. More information is available also here: https://eic.ec.europa.eu/eic-funding-opportunities/business-acceleration-services_en.

[36]   See Annex 3 Fast Track scheme to apply for the EIC Accelerator, EIC Work Programme 2025.

	funded action'. 2. The proposal must be submitted by the coordinator of the 'eligible already funded action'. No more than 10% of the maximum grant amount can be allocated to the coordinator as a coordination fee for the integration of the new widening beneficiary. No less than 90% of the max grant amount must be allocated to the Widening beneficiary. An 'eligible already funded action' refers to an action stemming from a Horizon Europe grant agreement that also meets the following conditions: 1. No legal entity established in a Widening Country is already a beneficiary, affiliated entity or associated partner in the Horizon Europe grant agreement. 2. At the time of submission of the proposal (and for any grant agreement signature), the granting authority of the Horizon Europe grant agreement is the European Commission or an Executive Agency. 3. The Horizon Europe grant agreement was awarded to Horizon Pillar II 'main' Work Programme or EIC Pathfinder collaborative R&I actions. 4. *The first reporting period of the Horizon Europe grant agreement is ongoing at the submission deadline. Furthermore, the ongoing grant agreement is between 1 to 12 months from its starting date by the submission deadline.*
Procedure	The procedure is described in General Annex F. The following exceptions apply: In the first place, ex-aequo proposals will be prioritised according to geographical diversity criteria, defined as proposals with the additional beneficiary established in a Widening Country, not otherwise represented as a beneficiary higher up the ranking list. The method described in Points 1), 2), 3) and 5) of General Annexes Part F (Procedure/Evaluation procedure and ranking) will then be applied to the remaining equally ranking proposals in the group. This rule establishing the priority order serves to better spread the impact of the action and to strengthen the efficiency of the 'Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area' programme. If the proposal is successful, the next stage of the procedure will be grant agreement amendment preparations. If the outcome of amendment preparations is an award decision, the coordinator of the consortium of the eligible already funded action will be

	invited to submit an amendment to the grant agreement, on behalf of the beneficiaries.

Expected Outcome: The Hop-on Facility allows for legal entities from low R&I performing countries to join already funded Horizon Pillar II 'main' Work Programme and EIC Pathfinder collaborative R&I actions, subject to the agreement of the respective consortium and provided that legal entities from such countries are not yet participating as beneficiary, associated partner, or affiliated entity. The scheme aims to improve the inclusiveness of Horizon Europe. Selected consortia will be invited to submit a grant agreement amendment request of the eligible already funded action.

Project results are expected to contribute to the following outcomes:

- At system level, it mobilises excellence in the Widening countries, increases visibility of the beneficiaries from the widening countries, improves knowledge circulation, and reduces lack of participation of the widening countries in specific thematic domains;

- At consortium level, it opens up established networks to new connections and partnerships, improves research excellence of the Widening country's institutions in specific fields, enlarges outreach of the participants' R&I actions and provides access to new talent pools;

- At the level of the Widening beneficiary, new competencies and skills for working in transnational projects including research management and dissemination and exploitation are acquired.

Scope: The Hop-on Facility integrates one additional beneficiary from a Widening country to an ongoing project under Pillar 2 or the EIC pathfinder scheme who contributes a relevant task, work package or another visible and distinguishable activity.

Applications must demonstrate the R&I added value of the new beneficiary for the eligible already selected action. The proposal should include a detailed description of the profile of the new beneficiary and its R&I role and complementarity in the existing project.

The additional beneficiary and activities should be presented in a dedicated proposal template with the Description of the Action (DoA) of the ongoing action uploaded as an annex. In case of a successful evaluation, the consortia (coordinator) of the eligible already funded action (i.e. relevant existing grant agreement) will be invited to submit an amendment request for accession of the Widening beneficiary, modification of the description of the action. If budget is reserved for the coordinator, the proposal should justify the amounts in terms of integration efforts for the new participant.

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-04-ACCESS-01: Support for R&I policy making in the EU enlargement countries

Call: Support for R&I policy making in the EU enlargement countries	
Specific conditions	
Expected EU contribution per project	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 3.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
Indicative budget	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 3.00 million.
Type of Action	Coordination and Support Actions
Eligibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply: The following additional eligibility criteria apply: The coordinator must be a legal entity established in a Widening country. At least 50% of the budget must be allocated to beneficiaries establieshed in Widening countries.
Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements	The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply: Beneficiaries may provide financial support to third parties. The support to third parties can only be provided in the form of grants. The maximum amount to be granted to each third party is EUR 60 000.

Expected Outcome: The actions funded under this topic will provide support to national and regional R&I and education [37] initiatives in line with the objectives of the Widening programme component by pooling resources and contributing to the alignment of national and regional research, innovation, and education policies for the countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo[38], Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye, and Ukraine hereinafter named enlargement countries[39].

Project results are expected to contribute to the following expected outcomes:

- If relevant, support the Western Balkans Steering Platforms for Research and Innovation, Education and Training, and Culture as valuable instruments of policy

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[37]   Education initiatives refer to those that contribute to further deepening and integrating in the ERA and NEIA.

[38]   This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

[39]   https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy_en: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine.

dialogue with the region (incl. support to the annual Ministerial meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platforms);

- If relevant, facilitate the implementation of the Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, in line and through synergies with the Growth plan for the Western Balkans[40], the Growth Plan for Moldova[41] and and the Ukraine Plan [42] as regards human capital development, including research and innovation;

- Foster the further integration of the enlargement countries into the European Research Area and into the European Innovation Area:

  o Highlight the strategic importance of the enlargement countries and facilitating actions aiming to support the region's EU integration process, in the area of research and innovation;

  o Aim to promote regional economic growth and prosperity through planned investments, to be directed towards game-changing innovations and actions that create a sustainable and human centric development and digital future. Support the ongoing process of reforming research and innovation eco-systems with more and better opportunities for capacity building;

  o Contribute to the closer integration of the enlargement countries with the EU's priorities, most notably the Green Deal, the digital transformation, including, if relevant, the enhancement of ICT and digital skills along the lines of the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans and the renewed Digital Education Action Plan with an emphasis on research and innovation, and knowledge transfer;

  o Contribute to reducing the divide in the innovation performance with the EU through targeted actions aiming at increasing the countries' performance in the European Innovation Scoreboard;

- Provide support to the accession process and facilitate the further integration of enlargement countries into relevant European programmes;

- Identify common priorities agreed among the participating national and regional R&I eco-systems, taking into account international developments where relevant;

- Contribute to joint initiatives, resulting in the funding of regional innovation actions, design/implement a portfolio of complementary actions which would enable stakeholders from enlargement countries and policy makers to better internationalise and integrate into EU R&I actions and policy making;

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[40]   COM(2023) 691 final https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2023:691:FIN
[41]   COM (2024) 470 final https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52024DC0470
[42]   OM (2022) 233 final IMMC.COM%282022%29233%20final.ENG.xhtml.1_EN_ACT_part1_v6.docx

- Implement and financially support other joint activities supporting R&I, regulatory or societal uptake of results.

Scope: Research and innovation play an important role in tackling challenges but also in ensuring a sustainable and inclusive growth while boosting the resilience of production sectors, the competitiveness of economies, and the transformation of the socio-economic systems across Europe. The enlargement countries are trying to advance in the fields of Research, Development and Innovation (RDI). Closer links between research and innovation, and institutional cooperation to produce high-quality knowledge, underpinning economic and societal solutions are paramount to help bridging the R&I gap between the EU Member States and enlargement countries. Actions stemming from this call will foster capacity building efforts in enlargement countries to advance R&I eco-systems, improve the Technology Transfer Process, promote networking of and access to excellence, thus optimising the participation in and impact of Horizon Europe (and successor programme) across the region. Activities from this call will strengthen and foster the development of the human capital base in the region, they will promote the establishment of open, inclusive and responsible national research and innovation eco-systems, support institutional reform through the development of inclusive gender equality plans in line with Horizon Europe and the ERA objectives, as well as support evidence-based policy making.

Underpinning the Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, this action will foster a comprehensive policy approach, while seeking synergies across the entire Horizon Europe and related EU funding programmes. An action funded under this call will support the coordination and synchronised interaction among a multitude of instruments and programmes targeting enlargement countries in the fields of R&I. This should not only facilitate an increased participation of entities from enlargement countries in relevant European funding programmes, but also create economies of scale, complementarity, synergies, and avoid overlapping of actions.

An action stemming from this topic will support a platform for the co-ordination of various services addressing research, and innovation in enlargement countries in their programming and implementation. All these areas are key for finding new solutions to the challenges we are facing across the region. The actions should also aim to support the implementation of people-to-people cooperation projects with and within enlargement countries, supporting partnerships between higher education institutions as well as creative professionals and industries and European incubation networks for creativity-driven innovation.

This action aligns with ERA and Widening objectives in that it aims to strengthen links with EU partners and opens EU networks, contributes to improving research and innovation management capacities in enlargement countries, and it supports national policy reforms through targeted actions. A key element in this is the support to the development and implementation of Smart Specialisation Strategies and macro-regional strategies in cooperation with the JRC and the Policy Support Facility.

Initiatives in the fields of research, innovation, and skills development create new opportunities, reduce the skills mismatch, support sustainable economic growth, the

competitiveness of businesses and industries and the intercultural dialogue, help to tackle climate change, enable digital transformation, and provide better public services for all Europeans.

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-05-ACCESS-01: Implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys in widening countries

Call: Implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys in widening countries	
Specific conditions	
Expected EU contribution per project	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR 5.00 and 8.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
Indicative budget	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 24.00 million.
Type of Action	Programme Co-fund Action
Eligibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply: This action requires the participation, as beneficiaries, of at least three (3) national or regional authorities, from at least three (3) different Member States or Associated Countries, of which at least (2) two from a widening country and one (1) from a non-widening country. The action also requires that among the national or regional authorities participating as beneficiaries, at least one (1) is from a 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovator region and at least one (1) is from a 'strong' or 'innovation leader' region. The co-ordinator of the project must be established in a widening country and the major share of the budget has to be allocated to participants from widening countries. The Regional Innovation Scoreboard is taken as a reference, and in the case of national authorities, the EuropeanInnovation Scoreboard. The applicants must use as a reference the latest version of the documents mentioned above at the time of the call opening. Associated Countries which are not included in the European Innovation Scoreboard and are ranked below 25 on the latest GlobalInnovation Index are considered as 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovators. In cases of Associated Countries not included in any of the previously mentioned references, the participation rank of the country in the Horizon Europe programme

	(Horizon Europe country profile) will be taken as a reference and countries ranked below the average will be considered as 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovators.
	The consortium must allocate at least 50% of their total eligible costs to financial support to third parties and/or to the implementation of the PCP or PPI procurements.
	The consortium must provide a single letter of intent at the moment of submission of the proposal indicating the source of the required 50% of complementary funding (e.g. national and/or regional funding, EU funding, or private investments).
	Subject to restrictions for the protection of European communication networks.
Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements	The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:
	Beneficiaries may provide financial support to third parties. The support to third parties can only be provided in the form of grants.
	The maximum amount to be granted to each third party is EUR 600.000. This amount is justified since the cascading grants will support concrete interregional projects to be undertaken by research and innovation entities. Due to the nature of these projects (e.g. development or deployment of technological innovations) a threshold lower than EUR 600.000 would constitute an obstacle to establishing effective collaborations.
	The funding rate is 50% of the total eligible costs.
	Grants awarded under this topic will have to submit the following deliverable(s): Annual work plans subject to approval by the Commission. For the first year, the annual work plan needs to be submitted together with the respective proposal.

Expected Outcome: In line with the New European Innovation Agenda's[43] flagship on *accelerating and strengthening innovation in European Innovation Ecosystems across the EU and addressing the innovation divide*, this action is intended to create connected regional innovation valleys across the European Union (EU), involving regions with lower innovation performances, by building on strategic areas of regional strength and specialisation (defined in their smart specialisation strategies), in support of key EU priorities. Regions represented by successful applicant national or regional authorities under this call will be recognised as "regional innovation valleys".

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[43]   A New European Innovation Agenda COM(2022) 332 final

Projects results are expected to contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

- Efficient, inclusive and interconnected innovation ecosystems across the EU in line with the New European Innovation Agenda, building on their diversities and complementarities, enhancing the joint definition of visions and strategies, involving actors from across the quadruple helix [44], based notably on their respective national/regional smart specialisation strategies, and strengthening their efficiency and potential to innovate;

- Enhanced synergies, complementarities and cooperation among European innovation ecosystems around strategic areas, technologies and challenges of common European interest, designing projects building on Smart Specialisation Strategies and, where applicable, on the, participation in, for example, Excellence Hubs[45], Digital Innovation Hubs[46], Hubs for Circularity[47], Circular Cities and Regions Initiative[48], Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission[49], Hydrogen Valleys[50], Renewable Energy Valleys[51] and Industry 5.0 System Innovation Hubs[52];

- The creation of common knowledge assets within regional innovation valleys, and support to their cross- border connectedness; including, for example, competitive advantages to strengthen their capacity for enhanced quality of their R&I ecosystems[53], (e.g. biotech health security and biotech for food systems, applicability of bioeconomy sustainability principles in regional case studies, as described in the concept note on Regional Innovation Valleys for Bioeconomy and Food Systems[54]);

- Increased innovation capabilities, including in deep tech, in Member States and Associated Countries, allowing innovators to bring their ideas to the market and enable innovations to be scaled up at EU level, and facilitating the link with the private sector, public and private buyers of innovative solutions and other research and innovation actors;

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[44] Ecosystem quadruple helix model requires the collaboration of academia, business, regional government and societal actors.

[45] Available online: Excellence Hubs - European Commission (europa.eu)

[46] Available online: European Digital Innovation Hubs Network (europa.eu)

[47] Available online: Hubs4Circularity (h4c-community.eu)

[48] Available online: Circular Cities and Regions Initiative (europa.eu)

[49] Available online: Climate-neutral and smart cities - European Commission (europa.eu)

[50] Available online: H2Valleys | Mission Innovation Hydrogen Valley Platform

[51] Available online: Renewable Energy Valleys to increase energy security while accelerating the green transition in Europe (europa.eu)

[52] Check upon HE adoption: HORIZON-CL4-INDUSTRY-2025-01-HUMAN-65: Network of Industry 5.0 system innovation hubs in connected Regional Innovation Valleys (IA)

[53] Available online:

[54] To check at finalization: Reference to HORIZON-CL6-2025-03-GOVERNANCE-04: Operationalisation of bioeconomy sustainability principles and Concept of Regional Innovation Valleys for Bioeconomy and Food Systems

- Better links between innovation 'leaders' and 'strong' innovator regions with 'moderate' and 'emerging' innovator regions across the EU and Associated Countries[55];

- More innovation co-investments, mobilising other funding instruments, including European, national or regional public funds and/or other private funds, to complement Horizon Europe support;

- Increased participation of all innovation ecosystems actors across EU territories in technology and industrial value chains (existing and emerging ones) relevant to the EU twin green and digital transition to achieve broader sustainability, the EU's open strategic autonomy and competitiveness[56].

Scope: The aim of this topic is to foster the creation of efficient, open, inclusive and interconnected European innovation ecosystems in line with the New European Innovation Agenda, notably in thematic/technological areas (including deep tech) that will be critical for EU value chains.

It will also contribute to the twin green and digital transition and a resilient society, and to the net-zero objective[57], particularly in the areas of reducing reliance on the fossil fuels, increasing global food security, mastering the digital transformation (including cybersecurity and Artificial Intelligence), improving healthcare, and achieving circularity.

The topic will support strategically oriented long-term programmes of activities (Annual Work Programmes) to enable authorities in charge of public national or regional innovation policies or programmes with the participation of the private sector and research and innovation actors, to implement joint activities towards innovation development and deployment, possibly including innovation procurement, aimed at tackling challenges at EU, national and regional level.

The applicants are encouraged to consider a project duration of three to five (3-5) years and proposals should:

- Present the applicants' respective commitment to enhance the coordination and directionality of their research and innovation (R&I) investments and policies, their joint strategic visions, and their proposed joint innovation programme of activities; before the proposal submission the participants should have already selected a thematic/technological area and reached an agreement on what they want to achieve, in order to be able to present concrete action plans; the plans can be further detailed on an annual basis during the implementation of the projects;

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[55] References available online: Regional Innovation Scoreboard (RIS),European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS),GlobalInnovation Index (GII).;

[56] Aligned with the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "The 2024 Annual Single Market and Competitiveness Report", COM(2024)77: EUR-Lex - 52024DC0077 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

[57] Available online: The Green Deal Industrial Plan (europa.eu)

- Describe the activities necessary, the process that will be followed, and the research and innovation assets that will be mobilised; activities should be open, clear, realistic, impact-oriented and ensure:

  o Participation of private actors, either for the joint implementation of proposed activities, and/or their possible co-funding; for example, via links and cooperation with innovative SMEs, start-ups, industry, private entities supporting innovation and innovators, including clusters, associations, as well as investors and foundations;

  o Complementarity and synergies with other funds (EU, public, and/or private) and innovation-related strategies/policies/programmes/plans at national and/or regional level, including their smart specialisation strategies, and where relevant, the participation in other relevant programmes. Applicants should outline the scope for synergies and/or additional funding, in particular, where this makes the projects more ambitious or increases their impact and expected results.

- Explain the need and the reasons for selecting the proposed Annual Work Programmes that should be scalable at European level and demonstrate their strong EU added value; Annual Work Programmes should:

  o Include clear steps: (1) capacity building activities, including information exchange and common guidelines; (2) setting common strategy and joint work/action plans; (3) concrete joint activities (including staff exchange, visits, etc.); leading to (4) concrete joint innovation actions (design and implementation of joint funding programmes/calls to select interregional innovation projects).

  o Include the provisions and modalities for the competitive selection and funding (joint open calls implemented via financial support to third parties - FSTP) of at least three interregional innovation projects in the selected thematic/technological area, including deep tech, linked to key EU priorities:

    – These interregional projects are expected to be similar to HE Innovation Actions or close to market actions (TRL 6-8) and should focus on the development and/or deployment of technologies and innovations, including breakthrough and disruptive, through cooperation between research and innovation actors from the participating regions;

    – These interregional projects can also involve the implementation of a Pre-Commercial Procurement (similar as in Horizon Europe PCP grant actions, arriving also to TRL 8) or a Public Procurement of Innovative solutions (similar as in HE PPI grant actions, arriving to TRL 8). In this case the procurements should be implemented in cooperation between public procurers from the participating regions;

‒ Each of these interregional projects should aim to deliver concrete and tangible outcomes during the project implementation, and ensure their dissemination and exploitation;

‒ These interregional projects should be managed in a coordinated manner, as a portfolio of projects, and should identify and establish links among the projects and with other relevant EU, national or regional projects in similar thematic/technological area (horizontal integration) or complementary areas (vertical integration) with a view to integrate into and contribute to existing or emerging value chains.

o Include a consistent set of core collaborative activities, for example: networking and coordination structures and tools to facilitate innovation development and access to and sharing of best practices, resources, research/technology infrastructures, talents, markets, expertise, services or knowledge, including open and collaborative knowledge bases and common knowledge assets (methods, data, processes);

‒ Support to interconnections between innovation hubs/local pockets of excellence; market analysis, development and activities towards better access to new markets and finance for innovative SMEs and start-ups;

‒ Training and skills development; interconnection of open innovation infrastructures; supportive activities towards scale up, exploitation and dissemination of innovative solutions;

‒ Reinforcing public and private buyers' capacity to procure innovative solutions; Networking of and assistance to public and private procurers to facilitate the implementation of joint or coordinated innovation procurement initiatives;

‒ Enhancing place-based social cohesion across EU territories, through networks such as European Social Economy Regions initiative[58], including social innovators and civil society integration, as interlocutors for society and important inputs to the development of innovations and promotion of gender equality and diversity[59].

- Explain the reasons for selecting the proposed strategic areas of cooperation, and how this cooperation will improve the efficiency and performance of the EU's innovation ecosystems. The joint innovation activities should focus on a specific thematic/technological area, in line with the smart specialisation strategies of the participating regions, and should highlight how it will contribute to innovation priorities of common interest, EU strategic priorities (including green, digital and social transitions, and open strategic autonomy) and, where appropriate, Horizon Europe

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[58]   Available online : The European Social Economy Regions (ESER) (europa.eu)
[59]   Horizon Europe guidance on gender equality plans - Publications Office of the EU (europa.eu)

Missions. It should clarify the potential for growth and competitiveness foreseen in the targeted sector and/or expected impact on EU challenge(s);

- Present and explain how the consortium plans to design and coordinate the implementation of these joint activities (e.g. resources to be mobilised, assets to be used, involvement of innovation stakeholders, such as innovation hubs, business associations, clusters, industry, startups, scaleups and SMEs);

- Include set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in line with the proposed objectives to measures/activities underpinned by verifiable indicators (e.g. referring to the Sustainable Development Goals, European Commission Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025[60], or other relevant policy frameworks);

- Ensure their long-term commitment towards engaging in the cooperation activities set up in the frame of their projects (a letter of intent as part of the proposal).

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[60]   Available online: Gender equality in research and innovation - European Commission (europa.eu)

Destination: Reforming and enhancing the European research and innovation system

The guiding policy framework of the destination "Reforming and enhancing the EU research and innovation system" is the Communication "A New ERA for Research and Innovation"[61], the Council Recommendation on the Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe (Pact for R&I)[62], and the first European Research Area (ERA) Policy Agenda (2022-2024)[63]. More information on the policy context of the ERA can be found in the introduction to the WIDERA work programme 2025.

This destination focuses on building R&I capacities at the level of R&I institutions and ecosystems, with all expected outcomes and impacts explicitly addressing the four priority areas of the Pact for R&I and the ERA Policy Agenda and its 'ERA Actions', as presented below. It also supports the uptake of shared EU values and principles outlined in the Pact such as evidence-informed policymaking, freedom of scientific research, societal responsibility, gender equality, equal opportunities, diversity and inclusiveness. The ERA Platform highlights how projects funded under previous work programmes have contributed to the ERA policy priorities. Applicants to the current work programme are invited to propose outputs that can be showcased on the ERA platform, such as tools, resources and visual material, which can help broad stakeholder groups make progress in selected ERA policy areas.

The destination includes one call with 7 call topics and other actions that are designed to contribute to the Pact priorities and the related 'ERA Actions'.

Priority area I (Deepening a truly functioning internal market for knowledge) is addressed with actions that target policy areas such as reproducibility of scientific results, open access publishing, research assessment reform, research careers and researchers' mobility, gender equality and inclusiveness, academic freedom, and knowledge valorisation, corresponding to ERA Actions 1-7.

Priority area II (Taking up together the green transition and digital transformation and other challenges with impact on society and increasing society's participation in the ERA) is addressed with actions that focus on connecting stakeholders, local communities and citizens around R&I policies and solutions, corresponding to ERA Action 14.

Priority area III (Enhancing access to research and innovation excellence across the Union and enhancing interconnections between innovation ecosystems across the Union) is addressed with actions that support capacity-building in research management and recognition and uptake of research management profession, corresponding to ERA Action 17.

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[61] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0628&from=EN.
[62] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021H2122.
[63] https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf.

Priority area IV (Advancing concerted research and innovation investments and reforms) is addressed with actions that support analysis and evidence on the implementation of the ERA through the ERA monitoring mechanism and that facilitate cooperation between national and European R&I systems, corresponding to ERA Actions 19 and 20.

The destination will be implemented in synergies with the European Higher Education Area and the European Education Area, especially in relation to R&I careers and institutional changes in universities and research organisations. Several call topics and other actions will also contribute to the Council Recommendation on a "European Framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talent in Europe" (2023)[64].

The topics under this destination welcome the effective contribution of social sciences and humanities (SSH) disciplines and the involvement of SSH experts, institutions as well as the inclusion of relevant SSH expertise, in order to produce meaningful and significant effects enhancing the societal impact of the related project activities.

In line with the ERA-policy driven approach, the current work programme 2025 completes the contribution of this destination "Reforming and enhancing the European research and innovation system" to the first ERA Policy Agenda (2022-2024). The second ERA Policy Agenda (2025-2027) will be supported by the next work programme 2026-2027.

Expected impacts:

Proposals under this destination should set out a credible pathway to contributing to reforming and enhancing the EU research and innovation system, and more specifically to one or several of the following impacts across the four priority areas of the Pact for R&I:

Priority area I. Deepening a truly functioning internal market for knowledge

- Increased capacity in the EU R&I system to conduct open science and establishing it as the prevailing approach in modern research approaches;

- Sustainable high quality institutional non-profit open access publishing services indexed in research information systems adhering to national research assessment standards;

- More responsible assessment of researchers, research projects and research organisations based on a broader range of research outputs, practices and activities than publications and publishing;

- Improved quality, performance and impact of research, researchers and institutions due to more responsible research assessment systems;

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[64]   Council Recommendation of 18 December 2023 on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/C/2023/1640/oj.

- Researchers benefit from attractive and sustainable careers, including better working conditions for early-career researchers, resulting from the implementation of the European framework for research careers and the Charter for Researchers[65];

- Reinforced mobility of researchers across sectors and balanced geographical mobility;

- More people are aware of diverse career opportunities in R&I;

- Strengthened gender equality and inclusiveness in the European Research Area;

- Greater quality of scientific production and stronger translation of R&I results into society and economy.

Priority area II. Taking up together the green transition and digital transformation and other challenges with impact on society, and increasing society's participation in the ERA

- Institutional change in line with the ERA priorities through targeted transformations in higher education, research, and innovation;

- Increased engagement of citizens with research and innovation;

- Increased alignment of research with society's needs, expectations and values.

Priority area III. Enhancing access to research and innovation excellence across the Union and enhancing interconnections between innovation ecosystems across the Union

- Increased inter-sectoral mobility/flow-through of R&I talents between sectors;

- Transformation of universities and their access to excellence and talent, including a better management of mobility of researchers to and from academia;

- Greater recognition and uptake of research management profession.

Priority area IV. Advancing concerted research and innovation investments and reforms

- A comprehensive, robust and quality tested monitoring system on the implementation of the ERA;

- Improved access to and exchange of information on the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda and contribution to the principles and priorities set out in the Pact for R&I;

- Reformed national R&I policies and systems in line with the ERA;

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[65] Council Recommendation of 18 December 2023 on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/C/2023/1640/oj.

- Common priority setting and sustainable joint activities and funding programmes among national and regional R&I programmes.

Contribution to principles set out in the Pact for R&I

- A more robust and interconnected European Science for Policy ecosystem that better supports evidence-informed policymaking across sectors and governance levels.

Proposals are invited against the following topic(s):

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-01: Rolling out the ERA Policy Agenda results

Call: Enhancing the European R&I system	
Specific conditions	
Expected EU contribution per project	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR 1.50 and 2.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
Indicative budget	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 26.00 million.
Type of Action	Coordination and Support Actions
Eligibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply: Applications must be submitted by a consortium including participation, as beneficiaries, of at least three independent legal entities: • Each established in a different Member State or Associated Country; and • Two of which are established in a Member State.
Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements	The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply: Beneficiaries may provide financial support to third parties. The financial support to third parties can only be provided in the form of grants. The maximum amount to be granted to each third party is EUR 60 000.
Evaluation Procedure	To ensure a balanced portfolio covering different ERA policy areas, as outlined in the expected outcomes and scope, grants will be awarded to proposals not only in order of ranking, but at least also to proposals that are the highest ranked within each ERA area, provided that proposals pass all thresholds.

<u>Expected Outcome</u>: This action aims at increased uptake by broad communities of R&I stakeholders of results developed in different ERA policy areas, including open science, research assessment, research careers, knowledge valorisation, and research management. Applicants are invited to select <u>one</u> of the areas outlined below.

Successful proposals will deliver on one or several impacts outlined in the introduction to the work programme destination "Reforming and enhancing the European research and innovation system".

Project results are expected to increase uptake of ERA policy results and contribute to the outcomes specifically relevant for the area selected and identified by the applicants in their proposal, as listed below.

Area 1: Strengthen uptake of solutions for the reproducibility of scientific results

- Wider implementation of interventions in research performing organisations to increase the reproducibility of research results;

- Better understanding by researchers, policymakers, research institutions and scientific service providers of the effectiveness of policies, practices and tools for increasing the reproducibility of research results;

- Higher proportion of reproducible results from publicly funded research.

Area 2: Advance reforms to research assessment

- Increased awareness and trust among researchers and research organisations about reforms of research assessment;

- Increased uptake of good practices and recommendations from the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) and other initiatives by researchers and research organisations;

- Increased knowledge by researchers, research organisations and policymakers about limiting factors and enablers of research assessment reforms.

Area 3: Establish communities of practice to strengthen research careers

- Inventory of good practices and lessons learnt for stakeholders at organisational level on the implementation of the various dimensions of the new European framework for research careers[66], including the Charter for Researchers;

- Increased number of academic and non-academic organisations implementing the new framework for research careers, resulting in stronger research careers for researchers;

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[66]   Council Recommendation of 18 December 2023 on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/C/2023/1640/oj.

- Better working conditions and employability for researchers, with a special focus on early-career researchers.

Area 4: Establish a European network of knowledge valorisation intermediaries

- A network of European intermediaries is established, connecting academia, industry, society and policymakers, that provides increased recognition of the various profiles and different roles of knowledge valorisation intermediaries;

- New or improved shared resources and tools for knowledge valorisation intermediaries to support the uptake of the EU Guiding Principles for Knowledge Valorisation and the accompanying codes of practice[67];

- Enhanced capacities and skills of knowledge valorisation intermediaries to connect industry, academia, society and policymakers.

Area 5: Upgrade services of Knowledge and Technology Transfer professionals in universities and research performing organisations

- Enhanced capacities and skills for knowledge transfer professionals in Knowledge Transfer Offices/Technology Transfer Offices (KTO/TTO) (or similar) in universities and research performing organisations to detect the potential market and societal value of R&I results;

- Upgraded services of KTO/TTOs in universities and research performing organisations made freely available for R&I actors to facilitate multi-stakeholder business development activities, knowledge transfer and valorisation, including societal and policy uptake.

- New curricula and training modules for students and researchers by KTO/TTOs to be offered in universities and research performing organisations across Europe to facilitate greater uptake of R&I results, including for skills development and fostering an entrepreneurial mindset.

Area 6: Strengthen capacities and recognition for research management

- A collaborative network is established that enables research managers and their employers to exchange information and best practices with a view to develop better quality and more consistent research management practices across the ERA;

- Enhanced professional recognition and career progression and mobility for research managers by offering specialised training and mentorship programmes, coupled with robust career development tools and reinforced by communication and outreach activities;

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[67] https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/eu-valorisation-policy/knowledge-valorisation-platform/guiding-principles-knowledge-valorisation-and-implementing-codes-practice_en.

- Increased availability and access to research management training and to good institutional practices on research management for a diverse range of organisations and staff within the ERA, with a focus on providing support to those that lack resources.

Scope: This action contributes toward the implementation of the European Research Area (ERA) with targeted interventions in selected policy areas focused on a broad roll-out of the results developed under the first ERA Policy Agenda (2022-2024)[68]. It addresses areas including open science, research assessment, research careers, knowledge valorisation, and research management.

The EU Member States, Associated Countries, R&I stakeholders, and the Commission work in partnership to implement the ERA. This work is structured by the ERA Policy Agenda that identifies concrete 'ERA Actions', which address specific challenges faced by R&I communities in Europe. The first ERA Policy Agenda (2022-2024) has delivered many tools, practices, recommendation, and guidelines to help advance the ERA Actions, resulting from different EU, national, regional or local initiatives and projects. A number of results stem from projects funded under Horizon Europe. In particular, the WIDERA work programme has funded a range of coordination and support activities designed to support the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda[69].

This action aims at a broader roll-out of these results to diverse ERA communities, including research performing organisations (RPO), research funding organisations (RFO), universities, researchers and innovators, policymakers, and many other actors in the European R&I ecosystem. Proposals should demonstrate the involvement of actors who have not yet partaken in those Horizon Europe-funded actions that specifically address the ERA Policy Agenda. The action supports a wide variety of activities that make use of existing results to enable progress in the implementation of selected ERA Actions in organisations, broader R&I ecosystems and at national level.

Proposals should select and clearly identify one area being addressed, choosing from those set out under the expected outcomes and scope of this action. Each area is designed to contribute toward the implementation of an ERA Action. Proposals should develop activities outlined for the selected area, as well as additional activities contributing to the expected outcomes for the same area. While focusing on one area, proposals may also consider complementarities and synergies with other areas. For example, proposals that choose Area 3 on research careers may develop links with Area 2 on research assessment or Area 6 on research management.

In all project activities, particular attention should be paid to promoting inclusive gender equality and addressing gender-specific challenges. Projects are expected to coordinate and collaborate with other projects funded under this action during implementation, including by way of annual status seminars where project work plans are presented to ensure complementarities and synergies across the areas.

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[68]   https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf.
[69]   See examples of how Horizon Europe supports the ERA policy priorities, https://european-research-area.ec.europa.eu/era-horizon-europe.

The funded projects should reach large communities of stakeholders (either a group of individual organisations, networks or alliances of organisations, or surrounding ecosystem actors), ensuring their needs are considered and addressed over the course of the project. Proposals should describe their target group in terms of its scope and size. A wide geographical coverage, inclusivity and broad participation should be ensured. The funded projects should remain open to new stakeholders and interested parties. The funded projects should provide open access to all relevant results, in a timely manner.

Proposals are expected to envisage a duration of up to 3 years without prejudice to a longer duration if duly justified.

Area 1: Strengthen uptake of solutions for the reproducibility of scientific results

This area addresses ERA Action 1 that aims to support open sharing, seamless access, and reliable re-use of research data, centred on the FAIR principles. Practices that increase the reproducibility of scientific results [70] contribute to higher reuse of these results and to increased efficiency, trustworthiness, and overall quality of research.

The area supports the uptake of state-of-the art tools, practices and methodologies that can increase the reproducibility of research results, drawing on activities and results of any relevant projects, networks and initiatives [71]. The project activities should involve actors such as RPOs, RFOs, researchers, scientific publishers, and scientific service and infrastructure providers. At least the following activities should be included:

- Deploy, demonstrate and upscale interventions in real-life environments to increase reproducibility of scientific results, targeting cross-discipline and discipline-specific factors that contribute to lack of reproducibility. Interventions may include the application of policies, engagement in practices, or mainstreaming the utilisation of tools, services and infrastructures that enable reproducibility of research results.

- Monitor and analyse the effects of the implemented interventions on the efficiency of research processes, the trustworthiness of results, the reuse of results in further research and/or innovation, and the overall quality of scientific production. Deployment and demonstrations should be of sufficient duration and scale to assess their effects.

- Support mutual learning, and exchange and dissemination of best practices across organisations in Europe and develop evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and research organisations.

Area 2: Advance reforms to research assessment

This area addresses ERA Action 3 that aims to support reform of research assessment toward recognising the diversity of research practices, activities and outputs, moving away from

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[70] Practices that enable researchers and the scientific community at large to obtain confirming results as the originators of a research finding.

[71] Including projects funded under HORIZON-WIDERA-2022-ERA-01-41 and HORIZON-WIDERA-2024-ERA-01-09.

relying mainly on the quantity of publications or the prestige of their publishing venues, to achieve higher quality and impact of research.

The area supports the uptake of good practices and recommendations that facilitate implementation of research assessment reform, building on activities and results of any relevant projects [72] and initiatives, especially the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment[73], the [Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment](#) (CoARA), and the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment](#) (DORA). The project activities should involve diverse research organisations like universities, RPOs, RFOs, academies and learned societies, as well as researchers' organisations, researchers and support staff, from diverse disciplines and at various career stages. At least the following activities should be included:

- Identify and discuss barriers and enablers to reform at national level and shared implementation avenues, and maximise the roll-out of reforms through engagement with CoARA Working Groups and National Chapters[74] and other communities of practice.

- Support the development of change management strategies within organisations to facilitate the implementation of reforms and to build trust towards reformed research assessment systems.

- Develop and coordinate actions to raise awareness about good practices and support the implementation of reforms via workshops, training and associated materials, and/or dedicated conference(s) targeting researchers.

Area 3: Establish communities of practice to strengthen research careers

This area addresses ERA Action 4 that aims to strengthen research careers in all sectors, tackling aspects such as precarity and working conditions, skills, inter-sectoral and inter-disciplinary mobility, career development and progression.

The area supports the wide uptake by organisations of the provisions of the framework established by the Council Recommendation on research careers and the Charter for Researchers[75], and builds on the results and recommendations from the Mutual Learning Exercise on research careers[76] and any previous or ongoing relevant initiatives and projects at European or national level contributing to the implementation of the new framework[77]. The project activities should involve universities, RPOs, RFOs, researchers' organisations,

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[72] Including projects funded under [HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ERA-01-07](#) and [HORIZON-INFRA-2022-EOSC-01-01](#).

[73] [https://coara.eu/app/uploads/2022/09/2022_07_19_rra_agreement_final.pdf](#).

[74] CoARA operates several working groups and national chapters that identify good practices and recommendations.

[75] Council Recommendation of 18 December 2023 on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/C/2023/1640/oj](#).

[76] Funded by Horizon Policy Support Facility, [https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/statistics/policy-support-facility/mutual-learning-exercise-research-careers](#).

[77] Including projects funded under [HORIZON-WIDERA-2022-ERA-01-50](#) and [HORIZON-WIDERA-2024-ERA-02-03](#).

governmental organisations, and other employers of researchers in the public and private sector. At least the following activities should be included:

- Establish an intersectoral consortium of at least 15 partners with the objective of creating an inclusive community of practice that supports cooperation and exchange of good practices to implement the new framework to strengthen research careers at European, national, regional and organisational level. The consortium should demonstrate in the proposal how and to what extent it will involve stakeholders outside the consortium in the community of practice, with a view to maximising the impact of activities on strengthening research careers.

- Map challenges, exchange good practices, including by developing relevant platforms, organise mutual learning events, intra- and extra-consortium cooperation with stakeholders, and networking.

- Develop and disseminate recommendations for peers and for policymakers in relation to aspects covered by the new framework to strengthen research careers, on the basis of internal exchanges and practices, as well as significant outcomes from other projects.

Area 4: Establish a European network of knowledge valorisation intermediaries

This area addresses ERA Action 7 that aims to enhance knowledge sharing and valorisation in Europe. Intermediaries[78] are crucial for valorisation as they help connect researchers with actors who can drive economic and societal value from research results, data and knowledge.

The area supports the uptake of the new Guiding Principles Knowledge Valorisation and Codes of Practice[79] through upgrading the capacities of intermediaries. By improving their skills and services in line with the new guidelines, intermediaries can effectively increase connections between all R&I actors when it comes to intellectual assets management, standardisation, industry-academia co-creation and citizen engagement. The project activities should involve entities that typically act as intermediaries. At least the following activities should be included:

- Set up a European network of intermediaries to activate intensive and inclusive multi-actor collaboration and networking.

- Develop trainings and a knowledge valorisation toolbox based on the codes of practice, to be made freely available for all R&I actors.

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[78] Intermediaries provide support services in various forms, such as guidance, networking, training and mentoring, to stimulate market and societal uptake. A broad range of institutions can act as intermediaries, e.g., incubators, science parks, European, national and regional innovation hubs or clusters, IP experts, consultants and innovation support professionals, science communication and policy engagement teams, and knowledge for policy and citizen engagement professionals.

[79] https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/eu-valorisation-policy/knowledge-valorisation-platform/guiding-principles-knowledge-valorisation-and-implementing-codes-practice_en.

- Support mobility and outreach, including cross-border secondments between intermediary organisations, replication of best practices, and novel awareness and outreach activities.

Area 5: Upgrade capacities of knowledge and technology transfer professionals in universities and research performing organisations

This area addresses ERA Action 7 that aims to enhance knowledge sharing and valorisation in the ERA, reaching large communities of stakeholders. Knowledge and technology transfer offices (KTO/TTO) in universities and RPOs require a broader range of skills to deliver fit-for-purpose services for R&I actors to achieve greater uptake of economic and societal value.

The area supports the uptake of the new Guiding Principles and Codes of Practice[80] through upgrading skills and services provided by KTO/TTOs. The action should involve KTO/TTOs, societal and industrial actors, and policymakers and contribute to closing the gender gap through the design of activities. By improving their skills and services in line with the new guidelines, KTO/TTOs can effectively increase connections between all R&I actors when it comes to intellectual asset management, standardisation, industry-academia co-creation and citizen engagement. At least the following activities should be included:

- Develop and coordinate actions for expanding and strengthening skills and capacities of KTO/TTOs, for example, through trainings, peer learning and workshops.

- Develop new services and adaptation of existing services in line with the Guiding Principles, as well as support new training needs, so that KTO/TTOs can respond to the requirements of researchers and students by designing and delivering high quality curricula for greater knowledge valorisation.

- Engage societal and industrial actors, as well as policy makers to ensure the new and adapted services correspond to the needs of these stakeholders, while developing appropriate links with other parts of the work programme, such as EU Missions and EIC Business Acceleration Services.

Area 6: Strengthen capacities and recognition for research management

This area addresses ERA Action 17 that aims to enhance capacities and professional recognition of research managers in the ERA and address their challenges, such as a lack of professional accreditation, uneven distribution of expertise, and a constant need for new skills.

The area supports the uptake of good practices, recommendations and results stemming from any relevant projects[81] and initiatives. The action should involve current and aspiring research managers and their employers, human resource departments, career advisors, educational institutions, and policymakers. At least the following activities should be included:

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[80]   https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/eu-valorisation-policy/knowledge-valorisation-platform/guiding-principles-knowledge-valorisation-and-implementing-codes-practice_en.

[81]   Projects funded under HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-20.

- Create a centralised online hub for networking, collaborative learning and information sharing among research managers and their employers to standardise and enhance research management across the ERA.

- Provide research managers with tailored training programmes and career guidance services, from workshops to online courses, aligned with the development of the careers and competency framework for research managers (RM Comp), enhancing their skill sets and career progression opportunities.

- Execute a strategic communication plan that includes outreach activities, promotional campaigns, support to evidence-based policymaking, and advocacy efforts to raise the profile and recognition of research management as a vital and distinct profession within the R&I ecosystem, including developing and disseminating recommendations for RPOs and policymakers.

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-02: Enable sustained coordination and guidance at the European level on institutional non-profit open access publishing

Call: Enhancing the European R&I system	
Specific conditions	
Expected EU contribution per project	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 2.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
Indicative budget	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 2.00 million.
Type of Action	Coordination and Support Actions
Eligibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply: Applications must be submitted by a consortium including participation, as beneficiaries, of at least three independent legal entities: - Each established in a different Member State or Associated Country; and - Two of which are established in a Member State.
Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements	The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply: Beneficiaries may provide financial support to third parties. The financial support to third parties can only be provided in the form of grants. The maximum amount to be granted to each third party is

	EUR 60 000.

Expected Outcome: The successful proposal will deliver on the following impacts: *"Sustainable high quality institutional non-profit open access publishing services indexed in research information systems adhering to national research assessment standards"* and *"Increased capacity in the EU R&I system to conduct open science and establishing it as the prevailing approach in modern research approaches"*.

Projects are expected to contribute to all of the following outcomes:

- Broader range of services for developing skills and competencies of institutional non-profit publishers, centrally offered at European and national level, providing access to relevant tools and technologies and supporting capacity-building in institutional non-profit publishing;

- Increased alignment of institutional non-profit open access publishing services across Europe to commonly agreed quality standards regarding aspects such as ownership/governance, editorial/publishing policies and practices, research integrity, open science, and technical service efficiency;

- Well-connected and effective European network focused on institutional non-profit open access publishing, with broad recognition across academic disciplines.

Scope: The conclusions on 'high quality, transparent, open, trustworthy and equitable scholarly publishing' that the Council of the European Union adopted in May 2023[82] highlight the importance of equitable scholarly open access publishing models where authors can publish their work irrespective of their institutional affiliation or funding source, with no fees to them or their readers. EU Member States also called for supporting the development of publishing models led by public research organisations. In recent years, universities, research institutions and other organisations relevant to research have increasingly engaged in setting up their own open access publishing activities and services. This trend has been driven by technological advancements and a growing desire for open access, usually on a non-profit basis. As a result, new mission-driven and bottom-up institutional, non-profit open access publishing models have emerged in Europe and beyond. However, such publishing services have largely evolved without clear strategies for coordination, governance, or sustained funding, and without commonly agreed quality standards. Additionally, the research institutions and universities that host open access publishing services, in particular non-profit ones, often do not perceive them as core activities. As a result, researchers who are faced with a rich but fragmented landscape of institutional non-profit open access services often prefer more familiar and trusted publishing venues.

Therefore, it is essential to provide coordinated and ongoing central support to enhance the quality of the services offered by these institutional non-profit publishers. This support should

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[82] Council Conclusions on 'high quality, transparent, open, trustworthy and equitable scholarly publishing' 23 May 2023, 9616/23, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9616-2023-INIT/en/pdf.

offer services, resources, activities, toolkits and coordination at the European level. It should visibly enhance the quality of services, align with commonly agreed publishing and technical standards, improve staff skills and competences, and foster network-building among institutional non-profit publishers.

The action supports the ERA Policy Agenda Action 1 – Enable Open Science, including through the European Open Science Cloud[83].

Proposals should address at least the following:

- Provision of services to institutional non-profit publishing initiatives, including guidance and support for quality assessment, access to tools and technology, and support in meeting technological standards (e.g., interoperability standards). Complementarity between activities at European, national, and institutional level provided by different types of actors must be ensured.

- Organisation of training programmes for all stakeholders in institutional non-profit open access publishing to support the further development of skills and competences, and facilitation of exchanges of electronic publishing specialists across the European Research Area. The activities should aim to achieve support for such publishing services within institutions and help embed them in national research assessment systems.

- Coordination of services and practices with the aim of exploiting synergies and creating efficiencies, including the pooling of resources at European level. Activities should aim to ensure that resources developed are available to all those who are managing institutional non-profit open access publishing in Europe, with attention to equitable access to and distribution of these resources.

The action may build on and valorise the results of earlier projects, in particular projects focused on capacity-building and global cooperation for institutional non-profit open access publishing, as well as of relevant national and European initiatives[84]. The action should address articles, as well as monograph/book publishing.

The duration of this action should not exceed 3 years.

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-03: Research and innovation to provide evidence that support reforms of research assessment

Call: Enhancing the European R&I system
Specific conditions
Expected EU contribution per   The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 2.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately.

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83   https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf.
84   Projects funded under HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-43, HORIZON-WIDERA-2022-ERA-01-42, HORIZON-INFRA-2022-EOSC-01-02, and HORIZON-WIDERA-2024-ERA-01-08.

project	Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
Indicative budget	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 2.00 million.
Type of Action	Research and Innovation Actions

Expected Outcome: The successful proposal will deliver on the following impacts: *"More responsible assessment of researchers, research projects and research organisations based on a broader range of research outputs, practices and activities than publications and publishing"* and *"Improved quality, performance and impact of research, researchers and institutions due to more responsible research assessment systems"*.

Project results are expected to contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

- Increased scientific knowledge on assessment tools and methods, their potential biases and limitations, and corresponding solutions;

- Increased scientific knowledge on methods to reform research assessment;

- Evidence supporting the implementation of the commitments of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment available to policy makers and research organisations involved in research assessment.

Scope:

A global movement is underway to significantly enhance the evaluation process for researchers, research projects and research institutions. The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), the Leiden Manifesto, the Latin American Forum on Research Assessment (FOLEC-CLACSO), and the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment[85] and the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) under Action 3 of the European Research Area Policy Agenda 2022-2024[86] are the main initiatives that strive to shift away from inappropriate reliance on metrics such as the Journal Impact Factor. Instead, they acknowledge the diverse range of research practices, activities and outputs that go beyond publications. They aim to reward practices, activities and outputs that contribute to a higher quality and impact of research, while also recognising and mitigating systemic biases, particularly gender biases, within traditional assessment metrics.

CoARA Working Groups carry out in-depth work to enable signatories of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment to exchange experiences, learn from each other and identify good practices, thus supporting their efforts to reform research assessment.

The identification of good practices and the implementation of changes to research assessment require solid scientific evidence. This concerns evidence about assessment tools and methods, and exploring issues across disciplines and types of research organisations, such

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[85]   https://coara.eu/app/uploads/2022/09/2022_07_19_rra_agreement_final.pdf.
[86]   https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf.

as: best practices in qualitative assessment; making peer review practices less bias-prone and more transparent; lessons learned from pilots with narrative CVs; inappropriate uses of metrics and alternatives for different levels of assessment (of research, of researchers and of research institutions); relevant indicators (that are open) for developing new assessment frameworks; infrastructures and tools needed to base research assessment on FAIR research digital objects (e.g., publications, data, software); ensuring that assessment methods promote diversity and inclusion across genders and underrepresented groups. This also concerns evidence about reform methods and about institutional changes and culture, investigating issues, such as: ensuring readiness and engagement of the scientific community and research organisations to changes; including different disciplinary perspectives; piloting actions that can lead to new assessment practices.

The action aims to provide the evidence needed for the practical implementation of research assessment reforms. It will gather and evaluate existing evidence and carry out additional research activities to support the implementation of the commitments of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment, in line with the 10 principles for reforms. The action consists of three parts, all of which must be addressed:

- Review existing literature, data and evidence on research assessment practices and evaluate their validity and robustness for implementing the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment.

- Identify gaps in knowledge and prioritise areas that require further research activities to support reforms of research assessment in line with the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment.

- Implement research activities in the prioritised areas.

The proposals should ensure synergies and complementarities, develop close cooperation, and share knowledge and evidence with CoARA and its Working Groups, the CoARA Boost project, DORA, and other relevant initiatives. The proposals should provide open access to all relevant results as early as possible, with specific efforts to ensure that these results are accessible and relevant to diverse and underrepresented groups.

This action may require the effective contribution of SSH disciplines and the involvement of SSH experts, institutions as well as the inclusion of relevant SSH expertise, in order to produce meaningful and significant effects enhancing the societal impact of the related research activities[87].

The duration of this action should not exceed 3 years.

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[87] https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/social-sciences-and-humanities/ssh-integration_en.

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-04: Investigating and addressing career barriers faced by underrepresented and marginalised researchers

Call: Enhancing the European R&I system	
Specific conditions	
Expected EU contribution per project	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 2.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
Indicative budget	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 2.00 million.
Type of Action	Research and Innovation Actions

Expected Outcome: The successful proposal will deliver on the following impact: *"Strengthened gender equality and inclusiveness in the European Research Area"*.

Project results are expected to contribute to all of the following outcomes:

- Policy makers, research funding organisations, higher education and research performing organisations, researchers and other research and innovation stakeholders are more aware of the barriers faced by researchers from underrepresented groups and marginalised communities and have more knowledge at their disposal;

- Policy makers, research funding organisations, higher education and research performing organisations, researchers and other research and innovation stakeholders are equipped with concrete tools and measures to support fair career advancement of disadvantaged researchers from underrepresented and marginalised groups.

Scope:

Researchers from underrepresented groups and marginalised communities – including, e.g., racialised researchers, researchers with disabilities, LGBTIQ or refugee researchers – encounter structural, material, and cultural inequalities. The challenges and barriers they face include, but are not limited to, more working precarity, higher rates of gender-based violence and harassment, epistemic injustice and lack of recognition, unequal access to resources, mentorship and support networks, and other obstacles stemming from cultural or social stereotypes leading to conscious and unconscious biases. These disparities are furthermore often exacerbated due to the compounded effects of multiple and intersecting discriminations. Despite increasing efforts, there is still limited understanding of how these intersectional inequalities manifest themselves and how they can be and are being addressed at EU and national level and in research performing organisations and funding organisations.

Intersectionality has been put forward as a cross-cutting approach of the Commission's Union of Equality strategies[88]. Gender equality and inclusiveness have been recognised as core values and principles of the European Research Area (ERA)[89], as reflected in Action 5 of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024[90], and further reiterated in the new European framework for research careers and the new European Charter for Researchers[91], stressing also the inclusiveness for researchers from all backgrounds including under-represented and marginalised groups.

This action supports the objectives of ERA Action 5, as well as of ERA Action 4 focusing on strengthening inclusive research careers in Europe. Therefore, a close cooperation with relevant ERA stakeholders, including the subgroup of the ERA Forum dedicated to ERA Action 5[92], is required, as is the involvement of researchers from concerned underrepresented and marginalised groups and the involvement of community support networks.

Conducting research, carried out in dedicated work packages with specific objectives and tasks, should be the core component of the action. The action should also take into account national legal and policy frameworks, institutional practices as well as individual levels, and aim to contribute to promoting the inclusion of researchers from under-represented and marginalised groups in the EU research and innovation system.

Proposals are expected to address all of the following:

- Investigate the specific barriers faced by researchers from at least three underrepresented and marginalised groups at different stages of their careers, starting from the gender perspective and considering other discrimination grounds. This should build on existing research, as well as on other relevant sources[93], and be based on quantitative and qualitative data, including personal testimonies that should be gathered by the project in at least 10 Member States and Associated Countries.

- Develop tools (e.g., toolkits, guidance, training and dissemination materials) and deliver evidence-informed recommendations on how to design and implement inclusive, intersectional, and human-centred gender equality plans and shape policies in the ERA at the level of higher education and research performing organisations, research funding organisations, and national and EU research and innovation policy makers. Proposals

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[88]   Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2022-2025, the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion, and participation 2020-2030, LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025, Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/union-equality_en.

[89]   Council Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13701-2021-INIT/en/pdf.

[90]   https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf.

[91]   Council Recommendation of 18 December 2023 on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/C/2023/1640/oj.

[92]   https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?lang=en&fromMainGroup=true&groupID=103813.

[93]   E.g., Equality data collection, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combatting-discrimination/equality-data-collection_en; The Compendium of Practices on Equality Data, https://fra.europa.eu/en/promising-practices-list.

should develop interventions such as mentorship programmes, intersectional diversity training, policy changes, cultural competency initiatives, or structural reforms.

- Disseminate research results and project outcomes and materials to national and EU policy-makers, research funding organisations, higher education and research performing organisations, researchers, and other relevant ERA stakeholders.

Proposals should build on the knowledge and expertise developed through related actions funded under Horizon 2020 and the Horizon Europe WIDERA Work Programme[94]. Proposals are also encouraged to explore potential synergies with projects funded under Horizon Europe Cluster 2 [95] and by the European Research Council [96], particularly regarding their operationalisation and methodological approach to intersectionality.

The expected duration of this action is 3 years.

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-05: Programme-level collaboration

Call: Enhancing the European R&I system	
Specific conditions	
Expected EU contribution per project	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 2.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
Indicative budget	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 4.00 million.
Type of Action	Coordination and Support Actions
Eligibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply: The following additional eligibility criteria apply: Applications must be submitted by a consortium including participation, as beneficiaries, of at least three independent legal entities: • Each established in a different Member State, Associated Country or non-associated third country; and • Two of which are established in a Member State. Due to the scope of this topic, legal entities established in non-associated third countries are exceptionally eligible for Union funding. If eligible for funding, legal entities established in non-associated third

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	countries may exceptionally participate in this coordination and support action as a beneficiary or affiliated entity.

Expected Outcome: Successful proposals will deliver on the following impact: *"Common priority setting and sustainable joint activities and funding programmes among national and regional research and innovation programmes".*

The proposals funded under this topic should coordinate national and regional research and innovation (R&I) funding programmes by pooling national and regional resources and align national and regional research and innovation policies, with the overall aim to enhance collaborative R&I efforts to address global challenges.

Projects are expected to contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

- Identification of common research and innovation priorities among national and regional R&I programmes, with consideration given to relevant international R&I policy developments and trends, and leading to coordinated R&I funding agendas;

- Implementation of multiannual joint calls, resulting in the funding of transnational collaborative R&I projects;

- Implementation of additional joint activities supporting technology and regulatory policy, and societal and market uptake;

- Contribution to participating states meeting global challenges, including relevant contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Scope: Since the introduction of the European Research Area (ERA) in 2000 and starting with Framework Programme 6 and the introduction of the ERA-NET scheme, programme-level collaboration among EU Member States and Associated Countries and their research and innovation funding programmes has become a cornerstone of the ERA. Hundreds of networks among research funders have been created over time, serving different research needs, but always coordinating public research investments across borders and allowing researchers to apply for calls for transnational research projects funded by the participating states.

Horizon Europe introduces a new approach to incentivise programme level collaboration. Concerted R&I initiatives, which mobilise efforts and resources of public and private actors, are implemented through EU Missions and the co-funded, co-programmed and institutionalised European Partnerships. The ERA part of Horizon Europe complements this new strategic approach by providing the possibility for Member States, Associated Countries, their legal entities, including regional authorities and agencies and civil society organisations, to maintain existing and establish new collaborations on priorities of their choice, thereby continuing the spirit of the successful ERA-NET scheme, funded under Horizon 2020.

This action supports bottom-up initiatives that allow stakeholders to define new collaborations on chosen priorities, align national and regional research funding, pool resources, and ensure complementarity with the Framework Programme activities, European Partnerships, and EU

Missions, thereby supporting the ERA. The action contributes to the objectives of the Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe[97] to increase the share of national public research and development expenditure committed to the European Partnerships and EU Missions.

In order to achieve the expected outcomes, international cooperation is encouraged. The action allows to strengthen collaboration with third countries and promote shared European values and principles for research and innovation, including advancing gender equality and inclusiveness. Involvement of non-associated third countries must be clearly explained and justified in the proposal.

Successful proposals should align national and regional research funding programmes on agreed priorities common to the countries participating in the action and, where appropriate, implement joint calls for transnational R&I projects as well as other joint calls or joint activities.

Applicants should demonstrate clear commitments from participating programmes to pool resources. The necessary resources should be pooled from the participating national or regional research programmes as well as, where appropriate, leveraged from pertinent foundations, charities and transnational initiatives, with a view to implementing calls for proposals, either within the context of this action or in possible follow-up actions, resulting in grants to third parties without EU co-funding in this area.

Proposals should also demonstrate potential impact at national, regional and transnational level. Proposals should demonstrate that activities exclude overlaps with on-going actions co-funded by the EU under Horizon 2020 or Horizon Europe.

Proposals are expected to envisage a duration of up to 3 years without prejudice to a longer duration if duly justified by the ambitions and complexity of the proposed activities.

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-06: Strengthening of the European Science for Policy Ecosystem

Call: Enhancing the European R&I system	
Specific conditions	
Expected EU contribution per project	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 2.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
Indicative budget	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 2.00 million.
Type of Action	Coordination and Support Actions
Eligibility	The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following

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[97] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021H2122.

conditions	exceptions apply:
	The Joint Research Centre (JRC) may participate as member of the consortium selected for funding.
	Applications must be submitted by a consortium including participation, as beneficiaries, of at least three independent legal entities:
	• Each established in a different Member State or Associated Country; and
	• Two of which are established in a Member State.

Expected Outcome: The successful proposal will deliver on the following impact: *"A more robust and interconnected European Science for Policy (S4P) ecosystem that better supports evidence-informed policymaking across sectors and governance levels"*.

Project results are expected to contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

- Increased connectivity of S4P actors and networks that enhances interactions, mutual learning, collaboration, capacity building, and promotion of S4P practices and knowledge, while also strengthening pan-European and international ecosystems.

- S4P approaches are mainstreamed in national R&I policy institutions at all levels of governance through coordinated efforts and mutual learning across Europe.

- The concept of "Science for Policy" is further developed and widely adopted among S4P stakeholders and actors through identification of best practices, guides and frameworks at different levels of governance and across thematic sectors.

Scope: Science for evidence-informed policymaking or Science for Policy (S4P) refers to the use of the best available scientific evidence, knowledge, and expertise to inform policymaking, aiming to achieve better public policies. By integrating science into policymaking, governments and organisations can make better-informed decisions and develop effective strategies that are grounded in a deeper understanding of complex and interconnected issues.

The need for a structured scientific support to policymaking at EU, national and subnational levels is in line with the principle of evidence-based policymaking acknowledged in the Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe[98] and is underscored in several recent EU policy documents and initiatives[99]. The summary conclusions on the Policy Debate "Towards a European S4P ecosystem" adopted in June 2022 by the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC)[100] and the Council conclusions on "Strengthening the role and

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[98] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021H2122.

[99] COM SWD (2022) 346 final of October 2022, Supporting and connecting policymaking in the Member States with scientific research, https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/file/staff-working-document-supporting-connecting-policymaking-member-states-scientific-research_en.

[100] ERAC Summary Conclusions of the Policy Debate 'Towards a European Science for Policy ecosystem', https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13213-2023-INIT/en/pdf.

impact of R&I in the policymaking process in the European Union" adopted in December 2023[101] specifically call upon the Commission to play a key role in coordinating actions in this domain.

In line with what is outlined in the above-mentioned documents, this action aims to pursue the following objectives:

- Further develop the concept of "Science for Policy" and improve the cross-cutting integration of scientific evidence and knowledge in public policies.

- Advance and strengthen the European S4P ecosystem across sectors and governance levels.

- Promote the collaboration of networks of relevant actors and foster the identification and exchange of best practices and mutual learning.

Accordingly, the main focus of the funded project should be to carry out the following activities:

1. **Nurturing and animating a Science for Policy Community of Practice** that, working with other relevant existing networks and communities of practice, will identify and bring together interested S4P actors and stakeholders to enable the identification of common concepts, challenges and approaches, the exchange of information, ways of working and good practices; mutual learning and competence sharing and exchanges, and the promotion of S4P across Europe and beyond. The community of practice must engage and involve S4P stakeholders and actors (scientists, academia, intermediaries and knowledge brokers, science advisors, policymakers/political authorities, civil society organisations, etc.) at all levels of governance. The community of practice should also encompass an international dimension[102].

The community of practice must be facilitated by appropriate digital collaboration tools, including an active online presence. It must remain open to new stakeholders and interested parties all along the process. A dedicated governance body should be set up to coordinate closely with the Commission to ensure good policy alignment and communication. Additionally, and in close collaboration with the community of practice, **events, training and peer learning activities** must be organised to strengthen skills and competences, enable the engagement and collaboration of S4P actors and networks, and to amplify the impact and reach of the community of practice.

2. Providing **operational support to the Network of Science for Policy Correspondents**, to be set up by the Commission in the second quarter of 2025. The network will bring together officials working on S4P in national R&I policy institutions across Europe with the aim to

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[101] Council conclusions on strengthening the role and impact of research and innovation in the policymaking process in the Union, 16450/23, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15118-2023-INIT/en/pdf.

[102] By involving relevant networks, including the European Science Advisors Forum (ESAF), the European Parliamentary Technology Assessment network (EPTA) and the International Network for Government Science Advice (INGSA) amongst others, as well as intergovernmental organisations (e.g., UN, OECD).

coordinate efforts to mainstream S4P approaches in their respective administrations at all levels of governance and foster mutual learning across countries. The support must include **logistical assistance** such as organising key meetings, agenda development, and facilitation of events employing effective participatory and inclusive methods.

3. **Creating an observatory of the European S4P landscape and its practices** with the collaboration of both the network and the community of practice. The exercise should map the institutional landscape by developing or making use of an appropriate taxonomy that builds on relevant existing initiatives, frameworks and Commission activities (see below). In addition, in the first half of the project, a repository of good **S4P practices and use cases** must be established, including a toolkit and an analysis of success factors and common challenges of operating at the science-policy interface, to be kept up to date throughout the project.

4. **Regularly convening the network, the community of practice, and other interested stakeholders** to discuss how to create the necessary conditions to enable effective engagement between research and policy and to support the production and uptake of scientific evidence, knowledge, and expertise in policymaking. This may focus on specific thematic areas to explore how S4P approaches are implemented in specific sectors (e.g., sustainable food systems, energy transition). Such dialogues are encouraged to also take place in alignment with Council presidencies.

5. **Developing publicly available outputs** (policy briefs, factsheets, resources and instruments for practitioners, etc.) in support of the above activities and **promoting and disseminating** the outcomes and results of the action to target groups through the deployment of a comprehensive communication strategy. These materials and tools should be widely disseminated and made available to the network and the community of practice.

Overall, proposals should implement a multi-actor approach and demonstrate a commitment to disciplinary and geographical diversity and gender-sensitive approaches in all activities. It is expected that the applicants have experience in the field of science for policy, as well as in organisation and facilitation of participatory multi-actor processes and events.

To ensure complementarity, proposals should capitalise and build on relevant Commission S4P initiatives, such as the Mutual Learning Exercise '*Bridging the Gap between Science and Policy*'[103] and the work of the Commission's Joint Research Centre on S4P competencies and skills[104] and institutional capacity building[105,] and other relevant initiatives like the Guiding

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[103]   Funded by Horizon Policy Support Facility, https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/statistics/policy-support-facility/psf-challenge/mutual-learning-exercise-bridging-gap-between-science-and-policy.

[104]   https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/evidence-informed-policy-making/topic/learning-development_en.

[105]   See the JRC initiative to build capacity for evidence-informed policymaking in 7 Member States, https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/evidence-informed-policy-making/topic/reforms-science-policy-7-member-states_en.

Principles for Knowledge Valorisation[106]. With its expertise in institutional, individual and community capacity building for S4P, the JRC may support the consortium in delivering the expected outcomes and assure complementarity of the project with public administration reforms conducted in several Member States under the Technical Support Instrument[107].

The duration of this action should not exceed 3 years.

HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-07: Science comes to town 2027

Call: Enhancing the European R&I system	
Specific conditions	
Expected EU contribution per project	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 6.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
Indicative budget	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 6.00 million.
Type of Action	Coordination and Support Actions
Eligibility conditions	The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply: The following additional eligibility criteria apply: The participating city that the proposal designates as host for EUCYS 2027 must provide as part of the proposal the commitment from its respective National EUCYS Organiser to run the 2027 competition as part of the project (EUCYS National Organiser must either participate as a beneficiary or associated partner or provide a commitment letter). Applications must be submitted by a consortium including participation, as beneficiaries, of at least three independent legal entities: - Each established in a different Member State or Associated Country; and - Two of which are established in a Member State.
Legal and financial set-up of the Grant	The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply: Beneficiaries must provide financial support to third parties. The

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[106]   https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/eu-valorisation-policy/knowledge-valorisation-platform/guiding-principles-knowledge-valorisation-and-implementing-codes-practice_en.

[107]   See the JRC initiative to build capacity for evidence-informed policymaking in 7 Member States, https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/evidence-informed-policy-making/topic/reforms-science-policy-7-member-states_en.

Agreements	financial support to third parties can only be provided in the form of prizes.
	The maximum amount to be awarded to each third party (recipient) is EUR 60 000.
	Subcontracting is not restricted to a limited part of the action.

Expected Outcome: One ambition of the European Research Area (ERA) is to increase societal responsibility and trust in science and innovation by engaging stakeholders, local communities and citizens in the design and implementation of R&I policies and by enhancing communication of science to the public. This action provides an opportunity for cities in Member States and Associated Countries to take centre stage in implementing this vision. It invites a small group of cities to design and implement jointly a vibrant and engaging year-long programme of activities under the label "Science comes to town 2027". It thus allows cities to bring together their citizens and R&I communities to showcase how science improves the wellbeing of people, economy and planet.

The successful proposal will deliver on the following impacts: *"Increased engagement of citizens with research and innovation", "Increased alignment of research with society's needs, expectations and values",* and *"More people are aware of diverse career opportunities in R&I".*

Project results are expected to contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

- Strengthened capacity, networks and involvement of the participating cities in science communication and citizen engagement in science by showcasing the latest R&I developments, their societal impact, and their benefits to citizens and by experimenting with innovative approaches to engage diverse age and social groups in R&I activities and policies at local, regional, and European levels;

- Enhanced discussion and debate on the future of science and R&I policy in Europe, with emphasis on inclusive and participatory approaches, involving all relevant stakeholders (e.g., researchers, research funders, policy-makers, publishers, citizens, civil society organisations, business) within and outside the EU;

- Improved attractiveness of careers in R&I for younger generations (in academia, industry or starting own business) through organising European-wide science competitions, including the European Union Contest for Young Scientists (EUCYS), the European Union Contest for early-career researchers (EU TalentOn), and other initiatives.

Scope: The engagement of citizens, local communities and civil society are at the centre of the European Research Area (ERA), seeking greater societal impact and increased trust in

science, in line with the ERA Policy Agenda (2022-2024) Action 14 – 'Bring science closer to citizens'[108].

The action supports a small group of cities to co-organise and host a joint 1-year programme "Science comes to town 2027", with a robust concept and brand, that focuses on connecting citizens and scientists in the participating cities and beyond. Various events and activities should be organised, such as lectures, workshops, exhibitions, competitions or prizes, in the spirit of the European Capital of Culture or the European Green Capital, highlighting the contribution of science to society and the results of R&I projects supported by national/regional/EU funds, including the Horizon Europe programme.

In addition, the programme of activities should include the following two components:

- EUCYS (European Union Contest for Young Scientists) 2027 will be a science competition, awarding prizes and awards, for 14- to 20-year-olds who are first prize winners of national science contests for school science projects. The objective is to highlight student achievements in science and attract young people to careers in innovation, science, research and technology.

- EU TalentOn (European Union Contest for Early Career Researchers) 2027 will be a science competition, awarding prizes and awards, bringing together at least 100 early-career researchers, 21-35 of age, to work on scientific solutions to societal challenges. The objective is to promote entrepreneurship and research careers in academia and industry, and facilitate cross-border and cross-sectoral collaboration.

EUCYS and EU TalentOn will take place in the third quarter of 2027, customarily in September. More information can be found on the contest websites (see also specific organisational aspects in the respective background notes)[109].

Proposals should experiment with novel and engaging formats across the programmed activities. Special emphasis should be placed on exploring and supporting citizen science to promote both science education and multiple forms of public engagement with science.

Applicants are encouraged to establish synergies with the European Researchers' Night (Europe's largest science communication and promotion event which brings together over 1.5 million visitors across Europe every year) and with the Researchers at School initiative, funded by Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions[110].

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[108] https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf.
[109] https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/eucys_en;https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/eu-talenton_en.
[110] https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/actions/msca-citizens.

Programmed activities should create a link with the preceding[111] and subsequent edition of "Science comes to town", fostering cohesion and growth of the concept and brand of the initiative.

The programme should take place in a small group of cities (minimum 3 and maximum 6) located in at least 3 different Members States and/or Associated Countries, with the majority being in Member States. Participating cities do not need to be geographically close. The consortium can comprise different types of legal entities that can represent the host cities and/or join them in designing and implementing the activities. Local partners that provide the link to science, research and innovation should be included.

Applicants should provide commitment letters from the public authorities of each participating city, signed by the highest authorities (mayor or equivalent city governance representative), demonstrating a strong commitment for the activities included in the proposal. The proposal should provide a clear explanation of how the city will contribute to the initiative and outline its specific roles, resources, and support.

The proposal should demonstrate the ability of the consortium to mobilise substantial resources beyond the Union contribution, including monetary or in-kind sponsorships, to support and broaden the programmed activities. Proposers may choose to further increase the impact and added value by incorporating additional events and activities, financed by other resources, by engaging 'satellite' cities to reach further communities. The consortium will report on the implementation of the programmed activities and events not covered by the grant, but will not report/declare the related costs to limit the administrative effort.

Proposals should include the overall concept for the programmed activities, including the focus and scope of activities, outreach strategy, and contribution to long-term vision for the cities, specifying clearly:

a) events (including EUCYS and EU TalentOn) and activities (e.g., overall coordination and communication activities) that will be funded partially or fully by the Union contribution;

b) activities and events that will be financed by the participating cities, 'satellite' cities, sponsorship and other resources (activities not funded by the Union contribution).

Proposals should present a breakdown of all additional resources. Annexes should only be used for commitment letters, not for extra budget related details.

Priority activity for the successful applicants will be to prepare the detailed draft programme of activities. This will be a deliverable, due not later than 3 months before the formal launch of the "Science comes to town 2027", subject to the approval of the Granting Authority.

The financial support to third parties can only be provided in the form of prizes to the total amount of:

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[111] See "Science comes to town 2026" in WIDERA work programme 2023-2025, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2023-2024/wp-11-widening-participation-and-strengthening-the-european-research-area_horizon-2023-2024_en.pdf.

EUCYS: €70 000

EU TalentOn: €100 000

The expected duration of the project is between 24 and 30 months.

OTHER ACTIONS NOT SUBJECT TO CALLS FOR PROPOSALS

GRANTS TO IDENTIFIED BENEFICIARIES

1. Presidency conferences with a European regional dimension - WIRE 2026

Expected Outcome: Organisation of a two-day conference (WIRE) in 2026, under one of the Presidencies of the Council of the EU. WIRE - The Week of Innovative Regions in Europe is the main European policy forum for innovation and regional development. The event will gather actors active in the innovation and education ecosystem with the aim of improving science-based competitiveness.

Expected Impact: By bringing together diverse stakeholders, including education and research organizations, start-ups, clusters, and policy makers, the conference will debate knowledge based regional development and will offer potential solutions of streamlining resources aimed for this. The collaborative discussions are expected to advance regional development and improve the overall effectiveness of innovation across users and society at large.

Scope: The event will focus on innovation and regional development, exploring trends, best practices, and future visions. It will serve as a key European policy forum for stakeholders involved in the research and innovation ecosystem.

This grant will be awarded without a call for proposals according to Article 198(e) of the Financial Regulation and Article 24(3)(b) of the Horizon Europe Regulation.

Legal entities:

Responsible government department or ministry, or a government-owned legal entity of the incumbent Presidency of the Council, or a legal entity designated by the responsible government department.

Form of Funding: Grants not subject to calls for proposals

Type of Action: Grant to identified beneficiary according to Financial Regulation Article 198(e) - Coordination and support action

The general conditions, including admissibility conditions, eligibility conditions, award criteria, evaluation and award procedure, legal and financial set-up for grants, financial and operational capacity and exclusion, and procedure are provided in parts A to G of the General Annexes.

Indicative timetable: Q4 2025

Indicative budget: EUR 0.25 million from the 2025 budget

PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

1. Development of new functionalities and maintenance of the one-stop-shop on tackling R&I foreign interference

The need for a one-stop-shop to tackle R&I foreign interference, both direct and through proxies, stems from several factors. Various sets of guidelines and tools currently exist on this topic, developed by different Member States and EEA countries, university associations, Research and Technology Organisations, and universities. This variety of supporting documents makes it difficult and time-consuming for end-users, such as researchers, universities, and research performing organisations, to navigate through all available resources. This situation may also lead to a duplication of efforts, as not everyone working on this topic is aware of what has already been produced. The lack of a clear overview of existing materials increases the risk of conflicting information.

The one-stop shop is a publicly accessible inventory of available reports, tools, and guidelines presented in a user-friendly manner[112]. The user will express its needs, and the platform will provide an overview of all the existing guidance known to the platform. Also, it will make it easier for experts working on this topic to identify gaps in information and focus on them, hopefully avoiding duplication of efforts.

The Council Recommendation on Enhancing Research Security, adopted on 23 May 2024, recommends that the Commission develop and maintain a Union one-stop-shop platform on tackling research and innovation foreign interference[113]. The platform aims to consolidate all pertinent data, tools, reports, and other resources developed at Union, national, regional, organisational level, or outside the Union, while ensuring that they are presented in a manner that is both user-friendly, accessible and secure. Member States are recommended to proactively contribute to the EU's one-stop-shop platform on tackling R&I foreign interference by sharing tools and resources developed through public funding with the aim to facilitate the cross-border uptake of these tools and resources and deliver them in a user-friendly, and accessible and secure manner.

The purpose of this procurement action is to maintain and further develop the one-stop-shop platform. This includes developing new features and functionalities, creating content, and enhancing the platform's stability, performance, and security. Moreover, as the one-stop-shop will be using an open-source Large Language Model (LLM) to provide dynamic answers to a large variety of questions, the platform should be continuously monitored and modernised following the latest LLM developments, with sufficient focus on regulatory compliance, security, reliability of answers and cost-cutting measures.

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[112] The platform will be made available by end of 2024.
[113] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/05/23/council-adopts-a-recommendation-to-enhance-research-security/.

The procurement action supports the ERA Policy Agenda Action 6 – Deepening the ERA through protecting academic freedom in Europe[114].

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

Indicative timetable: Q3 2025

Indicative budget: EUR 0.50 million from the 2025 budget

2. Implementation of ERA monitoring

The Council Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe (Pact for R&I)[115] has requested the Commission to set up a new ERA Monitoring Mechanism to provide European, national and regional policy-makers, R&I practitioners and all interested public with solid, European Union-wide analytical tools to help monitor and evaluate progress towards the ERA objectives (as set out on in the Pact for R&I) and assess the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda Actions[116]. In that sense, the monitoring mechanism shall ensure a proper basis for evidence-informed policy making in the ERA by providing evidence and analysis. In addition, it shall underpin mutual learning and enhanced bilateral and multilateral dialogues between the Commission and the EU Member States. The action supports the ERA Policy Agenda (2022-2024) Action 19 – Establish an efficient and effective ERA monitoring mechanism.

The purpose of this procurement is, first, to support the implementation of the ERA monitoring mechanism, encompassing preparation of an EU-level Report on the state of play of the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda every 18 months; regular reports on the progress in the implementation of the ERA of each Member State as well as, if appropriate, of countries associated to Horizon Europe; and, an ERA Scoreboard to assess the overall consolidation and collective progress of ERA priorities at EU and national levels.

Second, the procurement supports the development and maintenance of the ERA Policy Platform that has as its aim a consistent, robust and quality tested national reporting system. The Pact for R&I defines that the platform should inform on (i) the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda at Union and national level; and on (ii) other relevant investments, reforms and activities supporting the principles and ERA priority areas set out in the Pact for R&I. The Commission, the Member States, and countries associated to Horizon Europe should share information through the online ERA Policy Platform on their current and planned policies and programmes that contribute to implementing the ERA Policy Agenda, and more broadly contribute to the principles and priorities set out by the Pact for R&I. In that sense, the online platform could serve as a "hub" for sharing information around the new ERA and ease exchange between all actors. Moreover, the Platform provides for easy access

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114   https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf.
115   https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021H2122.
116   https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf.

to and information on the priorities areas of the Pact for R&I, the ERA Policy Agenda, including its list of joint actions and their state of implementation, and on Member States and on countries associated to Horizon Europe.

The IT- and communication-related tasks will be implemented through several specific procurement contracts under a framework contract and will cover mainly the further development and maintenance the ERA Policy Platform (including improving the user experience, enhancing the visual appearance of the Platform, adding and efficiently arranging new content, and ensuring the Platform's security and data protection standards).

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

Indicative timetable: Q2-Q4 2025

Indicative budget: EUR 1.25 million from the 2025 budget

3. Administrative management of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)

The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) [117] is the implementation mechanism of the European Charter for Researchers[118], and is key to the career development of researchers as well as to generating, transferring, sharing and disseminating knowledge about Human Resources best practices. HRS4R supports the ERA Policy Agenda (2022-2024) Action 4 by contributing to the development of an attractive, open, and sustainable European labour market for researchers, enhancing the commitment of research organisations' leadership towards human resources as well as improving the researcher-employer relationship.

The HRS4R is a structured and monitored auditing mechanism centred on a continuous assessment in three-year cycles for recognising with the "HR Excellence in Research Award" the institutions that make progress in aligning their human resources policies to the 40 principles of the Charter for Researchers, based on a customised action plan/HR strategy.

To date, over 740 institutions from 39 EU and associated countries have obtained the award and every year several new institutions enter the process.

The contractor will be responsible, in collaboration with the Commission, the applicant institutions and the assessors, for organising the administrative management of the HR Excellence in Research process and for the applications' continuous assessment, including the organisation of desk-based assessments and site visits, the selection of assessors, the administrative validation of assessors' reports and institutions' submissions, as well as

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[117]   HR Excellence in Research Award, https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/hrs4r.
[118]   Charter for Researchers, annexed to the Council Recommendation of 18 December 2023 on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/C/2023/1640/oj.

managing the communication with applicants, promoting the award and providing feedback to the Commission for policy purposes.

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

Indicative timetable: Q2 2025

Indicative budget: EUR 1.50 million from the 2025 budget

4. Implementation of the Horizon Policy Support Facility - Framework contract 2025-2029

In order to make research and innovation deliver on their full potential to be the key drivers of economic growth and of the transition towards a sustainable society, ambitious policy reforms of national R&I systems are necessary. Through the Policy Support Facility (PSF), the Commission assists Member States and countries associated to Horizon Europe in developing and implementing those reforms. It offers, on a voluntary basis, high-level expertise and tailor-made advice to national public authorities. The PSF has demonstrated that it serves as an enabler for concrete policy changes.

A new framework service contract will be concluded for a duration of 4 years, covering the operation of the PSF from 2025 to 2029 with an estimated budget ceiling of EUR 10 million over the whole duration of the framework contract.

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

Indicative timetable: Q2 2025

Budget[119]

	Budget line(s)	2025 Budget (EUR million)
Calls		
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-01		80.00
	from 01.020401	*80.00*
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-02		20.00
	from 01.020401	*20.00*
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-03		40.00
	from 01.020401	*40.00*
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-04		3.00
	from 01.020401	*3.00*
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-05		24.00
	from 01.020401	*24.00*
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06		44.00
	from 01.020402	*44.00*
Other actions		
Grant awarded without a call for proposals according to Financial Regulation Article 198(e)		0.25
	from 01.020401	*0.25*
Public procurement		3.25

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[119]   The budget figures given in this table are rounded to two decimal places.
The budget amounts are subject to the availability of the appropriations provided for in the general budget of the Union for 2025.

	from 01.020402	*3.25*
Estimated total budget		214.50