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**Direction générale de
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supérieur et l'insertion
professionnelle**

**Direction générale
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Widening the participation to Horizon Europe – Open calls 2023 - 2024

Context :

The « Widening Participation and Spreading Excellence » programme, also known as the « Widening programme », is implemented by the European Commission as part of the Horizon Europe Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027).

Through research support and networking activities (CSA, Coordination and Support Actions), this cross-cutting pillar aims to strengthen the research and innovation potential of those states and regions considered to be less successful according to the criteria set out in the European Commission's report¹.

Within the framework of this scheme, **only entities located in a country with a low performance in terms of R&I, the so-called "Widening country", are eligible to submit single-beneficiary projects or to be coordinators of collaborative projects**. Entities located on the territory of other countries can also participate in the programme but only as partners in a collaborative project.

« Widening » States and Outermost regions :

Member states : Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Roumania, Slovakia, Slovenia.

Associated countries : Albania, Armenia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldavia, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine.

Outermost regions : Guadeloupe, Guyane Française, Martinique, Mayotte, La Réunion, Saint-Martin, Madeira, Açores, Canarias.

Calls for projects:

Destination 1 : Improved access to excellence

This destination aims to improve access to excellence within a portfolio of complementary actions to develop the R&I capabilities of the Widening countries. By initiating investments and reforms at national and regional levels, the objective is to contribute to the development of a pan-European ecosystem in R&I.

This destination supports the following activities :

¹ *Research and Innovation Performance*, 2013.

- **Teaming** (HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-01)

Creation or strengthening of centres of excellence in Widening countries/regions as models for stimulating excellence, new investment and reforms of national research and innovation systems.

Eligibility criteria: one Widening institution (coordinator) + at least one recognised institution in another Member State or associated country.

Mandatory complementary source of funding (ERDF, ESF, national, regional, private funds, etc.).
- **Twinning** (HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-02-01/02)

Twinning programme between a Widening institution and at least two other institutions recognised for their scientific excellence located in other Member States and Associated Countries aiming at increasing the visibility of the institutions and improving the skills of their staff.

Eligibility criteria: one Widening institution (coordinator) + at least two recognised institutions in two different Member States or Associated Countries.

2 themes: Twinning Bottom-up and Twinning Green Deal. Proposals must fall within one or other of these themes.
- **European Excellence Initiative** (HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-03)

To support for the creation of university networks aiming at the eventual establishment of an alliance of European universities or a similar network.

Eligibility criteria: one Widening institution (coordinator) + at least three institutions in three different Member States or Associated Countries, of which at least one is established in a Widening country.
- **Pathways to Synergies** (HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-04)

Enhancing and improving synergy between the Horizon Europe and Horizon 2020 programmes and the structural funds (ERDF, ESF, INTERREG, etc.). The actions financed should make it possible to remove the obstacles to real synergy between the funds (inadequacy of regional/European approaches; consortia/mono-beneficiaries; priorities of Horizon Europe's S3/themes, etc.).

Eligibility criteria : one Widening institution (coordinateur) + consortia

 - Pathway a (upstream) : Consortium consisting of a group of at least three public or private research institutions established in at least two different Widening countries benefiting from structural funds or similar R&I investments
 - Pathway b (downstream) : consortium involved in one or two completed or ongoing RIA projects in the same field funded by Horizon Europe or Horizon 2020 and which has generated scientific results that have been valorised thanks to the structural funds
- **Dissemination & Exploitation Support Facility** (HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-05)

To strengthen or build D&E capacities in Widening countries. It will provide beneficiaries of the ongoing portfolio of projects funded mainly under the programmes: Spreading excellence and Widening Participation under Horizon 2020

and the widening component of Horizon Europe with further opportunities for scaling up their research results and improve the sustainability of their actions.

Eligibility criteria : Consortia of at least three entities who should have a proven track record of success in D&E and related training, communication and networking.

- **Hop On Facility** (HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-06)

To offer the possibility to join a consortium already constituted in the framework of the Pillar 2 calls for projects (thematic clusters) and the EIC Pathfinder, in order to limit the silo effect of some European consortia and to allow actors from Widening countries/regions to access projects of excellence.

Eligibility criteria: only one Widening partner can join a consortium for which a grant agreement has been signed. The applicant must contact the consortium, which will submit the application to the Hop On Facility on its behalf. The decision to integrate, or not, the Widening applicant is up to the members of the existing consortium.

The Hop On Facility only allows the integration of RIA projects funded by the Pillar 2 and the EIC Pathfinder.

- **Excellence hubs** (HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07)

Creation of local innovation ecosystems in at least two Widening countries, involving a wide variety of actors with the aim of developing and implementing joint R&I strategies. The aim is to facilitate and strengthen the links between the academic sector, the business sector, policy makers and civil society, encouraging the transfer of R&I results to the economy.

Eligibility criteria: at least two R&I ecosystems in two different Widening countries/regions. An ecosystem comprises four categories of actors: a) academic institutions (universities and/or research centres), b) companies (at least two years of existence with positive turnover), c) public authorities or agencies operating at a regional or local level, d) societal actors (civil society organisations, associations, citizens, media, cultural actors, etc.).

Destination 2 : Attracting and mobilising the best talents

This destination aims to advance the free flow of knowledge in a more efficient European R&I ecosystem. Actions are deployed at researcher and institutional level, supporting the development of new skills, connecting actors across the EU, attracting and retaining the best talent. Brain circulation aims at reversing the brain drain from the Widening countries.

The programme supports the following actions:

- **ERA Chairs** (HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-TALENTS-01-01)

Action to attract the best talent and their teams on a sustainable basis to institutions in the Widening countries. The ERA Chairholder and the creation of a permanent and excellent research group in the chosen scientific field will ensure excellence, visibility and better integration into the European Research Area, while fostering competitiveness in research funding and promoting institutional reforms in line with ERA priorities.

Eligibility criteria: one Widening host institution (coordinating institution) + ERA Chairholder (researcher) from another institution in the World. Both parties must write letters of commitment. The host institution undertakes to offer the researcher

the best possible conditions for practising and to recruit a permanent team around the holder, no more than 50% of whose members have had contracts with the institution before (brain gain).

- **ERA Fellowships** (HORIZON-WIDERA-2023/2024-01-02)

This TMA (Training and Mobility Action) is part of the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships programme. Its aim is to encourage the mobility of post-doctoral researchers to the Widening countries.

The application will automatically be submitted to this call if the applicant indicates his/her wish to carry out his/her postdoctoral research in a Widening country and if the project passes the minimum score thresholds without reaching a sufficiently high rank to be funded by the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships programme.

Eligibility criteria: one Widening academic or non-academic institution (coordinator) + fellow. The holder must have a PhD, up to 8 years of scientific experience after the PhD. He/she must not have resided, worked or studied in the host country for more than 12 months in the previous 3 years (see MSCA mobility rules). The proposal must meet all the eligibility and admissibility requirements of the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships programme and obtain a score above the minimum selection threshold.

- **ERA Talents** (HORIZON-WIDERA-2024-01-03)

Stimulating the interoperability and employability of R&I talent in different sectors, with a focus on the Widening countries. This action promotes the cross-sectoral flow of talent and collaboration between universities and companies to enhance knowledge transfer. The holders of grants awarded under this theme are intended to collaborate with each other and engage in mutual learning exercises. They cover the expenses of the participating organisations and the staff hosted or provided.

Eligibility criteria: consortium of at least three independent legal entities located in three different Member States or Associated Countries, of which at least two are Widening countries. Coordination is limited to Widening entities.

Participating organisations must belong to the academic and non-academic sector (industry, enterprises, independent research infrastructures, governmental organisations, civil society organisations, cultural institutions, hospitals, etc.), and may include national or regional umbrella organisations and associations.

COST Actions, a powerful tool for European and international networking

The COST (European cooperation in science and technology) programme, managed by the Brussels-based association of the same name, is linked to Horizon Europe, from which it draws its funding. COST Actions aim to fund networking and knowledge sharing activities around a scientific and/or technological theme of excellence. The calls are open to all scientific disciplines, and are based on scientific excellence, with an innovative added value compared to the state of the art. COST pays particular attention to inclusion, as COST Actions aim to foster geographical inclusion, inclusion of young researchers and innovators, and inclusion of women.

Each Action is led by a consortium of academic and non-academic institutions located in the EU and outside the EU. A minimum of 7 different countries (several organisations from the same country count as 1 country) are required to start a COST Action, of which more than half

must be ITCs (Inclusiveness targeted countries). Activities funded by COST Actions should be primarily aimed at young researchers and organisations based in JTIIs.

With a success rate in 2022 of 17.4%, COST Actions are attractive programmes, which allow for the creation of strong European and international networks, facilitating the recruitment of young researchers. It is also a privileged springboard towards Horizon Europe.