

Widening in Horizon Europe: new elements, new instruments

Instruments supporting Widening Countries in Horizon Europe (HE), the 9th EU framework programme for research and innovation (2021-2027), are grouped into the Advancing Europe package comprising the set of classical instruments under the Horizon Europe part “Widening Participation and Spreading Excellence” (TEAMING, TWINNING, ERA Chairs), three new ones: Excellence Hubs, European Excellence Initiative (EEI), and ERA Fellowships; and specific measures targeting applicants from Widening Countries across the entire Horizon Europe (Hop On Facility, Recognition of Participation, Matchmaking and Proposal review). This article briefly describes the three core Widening instruments as well as two of the new ones, with an emphasis on the new components. For more information on the evolution of the Widening instruments under H2020, we recommend reading the relevant article in issue 8 of our e-Bulletin, published in December 2020 (available on the [NCP_WIDE.NET project website](https://www.ncpwidenet.eu)).

Eligibility of research and innovation costs

The most important and very welcome change compared to H2020 is that research and innovation costs are eligible in the Widening instruments, even though the project type is still a Coordination and Support Action (CSA); maximum percentage of these costs is specified in individual calls. It ranges from 10% (TEAMING, ERA Chairs) to 30% (TWINNING) of the HE grant. At present, the percentage for these costs remains undefined for Excellence Hubs and EEI.

Proposal ranking

In the first place, ex aequo proposals will be prioritised according to the geographical diversity criterion with the aim of making the impact of the projects better spread and strengthening the efficiency of the Widening instruments. This procedure is valid for TEAMING, TWINNING, ERA Chairs and Excellence Hubs; for EEI it is not foreseen as not many applications are expected.

TWINNING

The main aim of the TWINNING actions remains the same: to use institutional networking to enable the transfer of knowledge and skills and the exchange of best practices in order to help the Widening institution to raise its research profile and the research profile of its staff. A special focus is on

strengthening the management and administrative skills related to research. The minimum number of partners (1 + 2) and the maximum project duration (three years) also remain unchanged. In the 2021 call, the budget per project can be up to 1.5 million euros, which is a substantial increase compared to H2020. The research costs cannot exceed 30% of the grant and at least 70% of the budget for research activities must be allocated to the coordinator based in a Widening country. The research part should be presented in a dedicated work package and plan and should include scientific objectives, tasks and roles of the partner, as well as arrangements for formulating new (or ongoing) joint research project(s).

TEAMING FOR EXCELLENCE

The main aim of the TEAMING instrument also remains the same: it means institution-building as the projects create new or substantially upgrade the existing centres of excellence (CoE) in Widening countries by coupling with at least one leading scientific institution. The project was set to last a maximum of six years with a budget of up to 15 million euros. The two-phase approach, as we knew it from H2020, has been abolished; to replace it, a two-stage evaluation process has been established. The other elements remain valid (e.g. complementary funding from other sources in a sum at least equal to the requested HE grant). In the second stage, the project proposals will undergo a joint evaluation of both project parts funded under Horizon Europe and under any chosen complementary funding source. Therefore, an additional panel of experts with specific knowledge on these sources could be involved. The research component (maximum 10%) may include small preparatory research projects.

ERA CHAIRS

ERA Chairs projects continue to bring outstanding academics with proven research excellence and management skills to universities and research institutions in Widening countries, just as it was in H2020. The budget also remains unchanged at a maximum of 2.5 million euros. A very important change is that the coordinator can opt between a joint application with the legal entity currently employing the future ERA Chair (this partner institution can be located in any country, even outside the EU) or make a proposal as a single applicant with the commitment and CV of the future ERA Chair, who can be a citizen of any country. High flexibility has been introduced regarding the ERA Chair holders: they can move on a temporary or permanent basis to the coordinator's premises and secondments. Any other legal arrangements (e.g. leave without pay, sabbatical licences) are possible, including part-time work and multiple stays. Research costs are eligible up to 10% of the EU contribution and the costs to be claimed by a partner institution should be mainly linked to personnel seconded to the coordinator.

EXCELLENCE HUBS

The aim of this new Widening instrument is to strengthen regional innovation excellence in place-based innovation ecosystems by cross-border collaboration on a common strategy and alongside value adding chains. In the consortium of this CSA type of project with a duration of up to four years and a total budget of a maximum of 5 million euros, there should be at least two different R&I ecosystems in at least two different Widening countries (regions as R&I actors are addressed). Each ecosystem needs to include four different categories of actors: academic institutions, business entities, public authorities or authorised agencies and societal actors. Applicants can choose between a more regional orientation, e.g. proven by a common denominator in their RIS3, or a more global orientation towards EU policy priorities such as the green or digital transition. Projects must have a dedicated innovation component and a research component should be developed by joint pilot research projects.

EUROPEAN EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE

EEl aims at capacity-building to strengthen the networks of higher education institutions (HEIs) and cooperation with the surrounding ecosystems, including non-university research centres, businesses, societal actors or other non-academic entities. Projects should mobilise the investments of local and regional government, prepare the networks towards the full roll-out of the European Universities Initiative in the future and facilitate future synergies between the European Education Area and the ERA. At least two organisations from higher education sector in a Widening country (or different WCs) and at least two internationally-leading institutions from two different Member States or Associated Countries can form the consortium of these CSA-type projects. Entities who are already benefiting from the European Universities Initiative pilot funding of Horizon 2020 can participate, but are excluded from receiving funding. The project budget can be up to 2 million euros and the project should last up to three years (no final decision has been made yet). An accompanying document with more detailed information including examples of activities that can be supported has already been published by the EC on the Funding & Tenders portal, see https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2021/information_horizon-widera-2021-access-05-01_en.pdf

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