

**EN**

**Annex XI**

**Horizon Europe**

**Work Programme 2026-2027**

*11. Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area*

**DISCLAIMER**

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## Introduction

This part of the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2026-2027 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<sup>1</sup>. The **Communication on the implementation of the ERA** (2024) takes stock of the progress made since 2020 and highlights areas further actions to achieve ERA's objectives<sup>2</sup>.

In this context, 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. 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 promotes inclusive gender equality, ethics, mobility, skills and career development opportunities within the European Union.

**The Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe** (Pact for R&I, 2021) demonstrates Member States' commitment to the ERA<sup>3</sup>. 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 calls and other actions in the 2026-2027 WIDERA work programme 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;

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<sup>1</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0628&from=EN>.

<sup>2</sup> [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/1bde0a38-7c86-4e6c-a4b8-7f9605d9e7e7\\_en?filename=com\\_2024\\_490\\_en.pdf](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/1bde0a38-7c86-4e6c-a4b8-7f9605d9e7e7_en?filename=com_2024_490_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021H2122>.

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 bottom-up but applicants are encouraged to take into account key aspects of the political guidelines of the European Commission published in July 2024<sup>4</sup> and the Competitiveness Compass<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup>, 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 component **“Strengthening the European Research Area by reforming and enhancing the European research and innovation system”** is designed to support the implementation of the second **ERA Policy Agenda**, which outlines ERA structural policies and ERA Actions for the period 2025-2027<sup>7</sup>. It aims to build R&I capacity at the level of institutions and ecosystems to foster 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 and inclusiveness.

The WIDERA work programme also supports the key strategic orientations 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<sup>8</sup>. 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.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648\\_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029\\_EN.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> [EU Compass to regain competitiveness](#)

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> To be adjusted according to the final list of structural policies and ERA actions, which will be adopted by the Council in Q2 2025.

<sup>8</sup> <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/092911>.

## Calls

### Call - Teaming Synergies

***HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-01***

#### Overview of this call<sup>9</sup>

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

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million)	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million) <sup>10</sup>	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
		2026		
Opening: 23 Apr 2026 Deadline(s): 24 Sep 2026				
Destination: Widening participation and spreading excellence				
HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-WIDENING-01: Teaming Synergies	CSA			1
Overall indicative budget				

General conditions relating to this call	
<i>Admissibility conditions</i>	The conditions are described in General Annex A.
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	The conditions are described in General Annex B.
<i>Financial and operational capacity and exclusion</i>	The criteria are described in General Annex C.
<i>Award criteria</i>	The criteria are described in General Annex D.

<sup>9</sup> 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 2026 and 2027

<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

<i>Documents</i>	The documents are described in General Annex E.
<i>Procedure</i>	The procedure is described in General Annex F.
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	The rules are described in General Annex G.

## Call - Twinning

**HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-02**

### Overview of this call<sup>11</sup>

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

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million)		Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million) <sup>12</sup>	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
		2026	2027		
Opening: 08 Jan 2026 Deadline(s): 09 Apr 2026					
Destination: Widening participation and spreading excellence					
HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-WIDENING-02: Twinning	CSA				Not relevant
Overall indicative budget					

### General conditions relating to this call

<i>Admissibility conditions</i>	The conditions are described in General Annex A.
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	The conditions are described in General Annex B.
<i>Financial and operational capacity and exclusion</i>	The criteria are described in General Annex C.

<sup>11</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.



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

## Call - Excellence Hubs

***HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-03***

### Overview of this call<sup>13</sup>

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

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million)	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million) <sup>14</sup>	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
		2027		
Opening: 02 Sep 2026 Deadline(s): 04 Mar 2027				
Destination: Widening participation and spreading excellence				
HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-WIDENING-03: Excellence Hubs	CSA			25
Overall indicative budget				

### General conditions relating to this call

- <sup>13</sup> 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 2026 and 2027
- <sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

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

## Call - Hop-on Facility

***HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-04***

## Overview of this call<sup>15</sup>

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

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million)	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million) <sup>16</sup>	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
		2026		
Opening: 13 Jan 2026 Deadline(s): 24 Sep 2026				

<sup>15</sup> 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 2026 and 2027  
<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

Destination: Widening participation and spreading excellence				
HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-WIDENING-04: Hop-On Facility	RIA			60
Overall indicative budget				

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

## Call - Research Management Facility

***HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-05***

### Overview of this call<sup>17</sup>

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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<sup>17</sup> 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 2026 and 2027

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		2026	per project (EUR million) <sup>18</sup>	projects expected to be funded
<p style="text-align: center;">Opening: 23 Apr 2026 Deadline(s): 24 Sep 2026</p>				
Destination: Widening participation and spreading excellence				
HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-WIDENING-05: Research Management Facility	CSA			1
Overall indicative budget				

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

**Call - ERA Fellowships**

***HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-06***

<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

## Overview of this call<sup>19</sup>

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

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million)	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million)	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
		2026		
Opening: 15 Apr 2026 Deadline(s): 16 Sep 2026				
Destination: Widening participation and spreading excellence				
HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-WIDENING-06: ERA Fellowships	TMA Postdoctoral Fellowships - European Fellowships			50
Overall indicative budget				

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

<sup>19</sup> 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 2026 and 2027

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

## Call - Enhancing the European R&I system

***HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07***

### Overview of this call<sup>20</sup>

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

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million)	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million) <sup>21</sup>	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
		2026		
Opening: 08 Dec 2025 Deadline(s): 24 Mar 2026				
Destination: Reforming and enhancing the European research and innovation system				
HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-01: Pillar I: Transforming institutions: Open access and research assessment reforms	CSA			2
HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-02: Pillar I: Building Capacity for responsible, equitable, inclusive and ethical ERA	CSA			6
HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-03: Pillar II: Strengthening ecosystems for sustainable and inclusive ERA	CSA			4

<sup>20</sup> 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 2026 and 2027

<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

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HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-04: Pillar II: Piloting innovative knowledge valorisation practices for market and policy uptake	CSA			2
HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-05: Pillar III: Citizen engagement for more responsible and democratic R&I	CSA			2
HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-06: Pillar III: European Citizens' Hackathon Championship	CSA			1
HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-07: Pillar III: Science comes town 2028	CSA			1
HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-08: Pillar IV: Advancing Knowledge for ERA	CSA			8
Overall indicative budget				

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

**Call - EIC Pre-accelerator - Widening**

***HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-01***

## Overview of this call<sup>22</sup>

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

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million)	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million) <sup>23</sup>	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
		2027		
Opening: 06 May 2027 Deadline(s): 18 Nov 2027				
Destination: Widening participation and spreading excellence				
HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-WIDENING-01: EIC Pre-accelerator - Widening	CSA			90
Overall indicative budget				

General conditions relating to this call	
<i>Admissibility conditions</i>	The conditions are described in General Annex A.
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	The conditions are described in General Annex B.
<i>Financial and operational capacity and exclusion</i>	The criteria are described in General Annex C.
<i>Award criteria</i>	The criteria are described in General Annex D.
<i>Documents</i>	The documents are described in General Annex E.
<i>Procedure</i>	The procedure is described in General Annex F.

<sup>22</sup> 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 2026 and 2027

<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.



<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	The rules are described in General Annex G.
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## Call - ERA Chairs

***HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-02***

### Overview of this call<sup>24</sup>

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

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million) 2027	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million) <sup>25</sup>	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
Opening: 06 Apr 2027 Deadline(s): 14 Sep 2027				
Destination: Widening participation and spreading excellence				
HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-WIDENING-02-01: ERA Chairs	CSA			80
HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-WIDENING-02-02: ERA Research Managers	CSA			30
Overall indicative budget				

General conditions relating to this call	
<i>Admissibility conditions</i>	The conditions are described in General Annex A.
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	The conditions are described in General Annex B.

<sup>24</sup> 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 2026 and 2027  
<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

<i>Financial and operational capacity and exclusion</i>	The criteria are described in General Annex C.
<i>Award criteria</i>	The criteria are described in General Annex D.
<i>Documents</i>	The documents are described in General Annex E.
<i>Procedure</i>	The procedure is described in General Annex F.
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	The rules are described in General Annex G.

## Call - ERA Fellowships

**HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-03**

### Overview of this call<sup>26</sup>

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

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million)	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million)	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
		2027		
Opening: 13 Apr 2027 Deadline(s): 14 Sep 2027				
Destination: Widening participation and spreading excellence				
HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-WIDENING-03: ERA Fellowships	TMA Postdoctoral Fellowships - European Fellowships			50
Overall indicative budget				

<sup>26</sup> 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 2026 and 2027

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

## **Call - Enhancing the European R&I system**

***HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04***

### **Overview of this call<sup>27</sup>**

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

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million)	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million) <sup>28</sup>	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
		2027		
Opening: 07 Dec 2026				

<sup>27</sup> 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 2026 and 2027  
<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

**Horizon Europe - Work Programme 2026-2027**  
**Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area**

Deadline(s): 11 Mar 2027				
Destination: Reforming and enhancing the European research and innovation system				
HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-ERA-01: Collaborative actions for ERA policy implementation	CSA			16
HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-ERA-02: Talent Ecosystems for attractive early research careers	CSA			12
HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-ERA-03: Science comes to town 2029	CSA			1
Overall indicative budget				

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

## **Destination: Widening participation and spreading excellence**

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 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 deploy a portfolio of complementary actions to build up R&I capacities in widening countries enabling 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. In addition, particular attention will be paid to cross-cutting objectives set for Horizon Europe, such as gender equality and open science practices.

### Expected impact

1. Increased science and innovation capacities for all actors in the R&I system in widening countries
2. Structural changes leading to modernised and more competitive R&I systems in eligible countries with increased attractiveness and retention of research talents
3. Mobilisation of national and European resources for strategic investments
4. Higher participation success in Horizon Europe and more consortium leadership roles
5. Stronger linkages between academia and business and improved career permeability and effective institutional reforms in research institutions
6. Greater involvement of regional actors in the R&I process
7. Excellent talents attracted to institutions and research infrastructures
8. Balanced circulation of R&I talents including intersectoral mobility, and improved gender balance
9. Improved linkages and increased mobility between academic and business, notably by overcoming sectoral barriers
10. Free circulation of knowledge and expertise in line with ERA priorities

Proposals are invited against the following topic(s):

## **HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-WIDENING-01: Teaming Synergies**

<b>Call: Teaming Synergies</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>In order to achieve the expected outcomes, participation as coordinators to the call is limited to legal entities established in Widening countries, as defined in the Horizon Europe regulation.</p>

Expected Outcome: The new Synergy action for Teaming Centres of Excellence (CoE) responds to the need to ensure the sustainability of CoE funded under the Teaming calls <sup>29</sup>. The establishment of CoE in widening countries, supported by a significant investment in Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, has created new opportunities for scientific, societal, and economic impact. However, to fully capitalize on this investment and enhance the sustainability and international competitiveness of these CoE, it is essential to facilitate stronger collaboration and strategic joint initiatives among them. This contributes to the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of the Teaming CoE, reinforcing Europe's position as a global leader in research and innovation while driving impactful structural change in the widening region.

Projects are expected to contribute to all the following outcomes:

- Stronger long-term collaboration among Teaming CoE through structured joint initiatives and clustering efforts to enhance knowledge exchange, resource sharing, and collective research and innovation capacity;
- Encouragement of the strategic transformation of R&I systems in widening countries by enhancing institutional cooperation and supporting structural reforms at national and regional levels;
- Promotion of multidisciplinary and transnational cooperation that will enable CoE to address critical European and global challenges, contributing to EU policy priorities;

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<sup>29</sup> In June 2022, the European Court of Auditors in its report recommended the Commission to ensure the sustainability of the Teaming Centres of Excellence.

- Promote technology transfer, responsible AI usage, innovation exploitation, commercialization, and entrepreneurial activities, such as SMEs and start-ups, within the CoE to maximize economic and societal impact;
- Stronger visibility of CoE and their recognition at national, regional, and European levels through structured engagement with industry, policymakers, and society;
- Improved synergies between CoE and other national and EU programme, such as ERDF, ESF, and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, to leverage additional funding opportunities and policy support;

Scope: The call topic aims at fostering collaboration among CoE and the increased collaboration, including on thematic strands; setting up common R&I strategies and mutual learning about exploitation of results, linking up with business; using synergies with other regional, national and EU programmes.

The action is expected to include at least the following activities:

**Strategic Clustering and Thematic collaboration:** Conducting an in-depth analysis of CoE' capacities, research domains, innovation potential, and their role in national and regional quadruple helixes. The aim is to define strategic clusters addressing common research and innovation challenges, supporting EU missions, and contributing to policy reforms.

**Pilot Implementation of thematic clusters:** Establishing and testing clusters of CoE focused on joint research objectives, technological advancements, policy engagement, and economic impact. Examples of clusters include geographically distributed research infrastructures, interdisciplinary research collaborations, policy support clusters for national and/or institutional R&I reform, and entrepreneurship-focused clusters.

**Capacity building for knowledge valorisation:** Offering specialized training, peer learning, expert coaching, and workshops to improve CoE' expertise in knowledge valorisation.

**Networking and matchmaking:** Organising dedicated matchmaking events, policy forums, and startup pitching events to connect CoE with industry, investors, and policymakers, supporting their market outreach and strategic partnerships.

**Teaming club online platform:** Developing a digital networking platform to improve cooperation between CoE, provide access to shared resources, showcase success stories, and facilitate continuous interaction between research institutions, industry, and policymakers.

**Teaming club conference:** Establishes the conference as an internationally recognized event, stimulating cross-fertilization of scientific ideas, promoting industry-academia collaborations, attracting international talents and rewarding early-career researchers through Teaming Club awards.

**Entrepreneurship and tech transfer support:** Encouraging the creation of spin-offs, licensing opportunities, and investment-readiness initiatives to ensure CoE' research outputs lead to marketable innovations.

The duration of this action should be 4 years.

## **HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-WIDENING-02: Twinning**

<b>Call: Twinning</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The following additional eligibility criteria apply:</p> <p>In order to achieve the expected outcomes, participation as coordinators to the call is limited to legal entities established in Widening countries, as defined in the Horizon Europe regulation.</p>
<i>Procedure</i>	<p>The procedure is described in General Annex F. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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.</p>
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	<p>The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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</p>



	Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2021-2025) <sup>30</sup> .
<i>Other conditions</i>	This action is open for participation of the JRC that can contribute specific expertise, where relevant, for the development of R&I strategies depending on the R&I domain chosen by the project, technology transfer and IPR management as well as linking up to regional smart specialisation strategy.

Expected Outcome: This Twinning call adopts a directional approach allowing proposals in line with the [Competitiveness Compass](#) <sup>31</sup>.

Twinning aims to enhance networking activities between the research institutions of the Widening countries acting as co-ordinators and top-class leading counterparts at European Union level by linking it with at least two research institutions from two different Member States or Associated Countries. Twinning actions intend to help raise the research profile of the institution from the Widening country as well as the research profile of its staff including a special focus on strengthening the research management and administrative skills of the coordination institution from the Widening country.

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

- Improved excellence capacity and resources in Widening countries closing the research and innovation gap within the European Union;
- Enhanced strategic collaboration between the research institutions or higher education establishments of the Widening countries and at least two internationally-leading research institution or higher education establishments at European Union level;
- Raised reputation, research profile and attractiveness of the coordinating institution from the Widening country and the research profile of its staff;
- Strengthened research management capacities and administrative skills of the staff working in institutions from the Widening country;

Improved creativity supported by development of new approaches in Research and Innovation collaboration, increased mobility (inwards and outwards) of qualified scientists.

Scope: Twinning proposals should clearly outline the strategy for stepping up and stimulating scientific excellence and innovation capacity in a defined area of research and innovation as well as the scientific excellence of the partners involved. This strategy should include

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<sup>30</sup> 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](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/10017eb1-4722-4333-add2-e0ed18105a34\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/10017eb1-4722-4333-add2-e0ed18105a34_en)

arrangements for formulating new (or ongoing) joint research / innovation project(s) in the scientific area of choice and describe how Twinning will take this research to a new level.

This should be supported by a comprehensive set of activities such as but not limited to short-term staff exchanges; expert visits and short term on-site or virtual training; workshops; conference attendance; organisation of joint summer schools; dissemination and outreach activities. As far as appropriate these activities should take into account the gender equality plans of the participants.

Proposals should also focus on strengthening the research management and administration skills of the coordinating institution from the Widening country. This should take the form of a dedicated work package or task, placing emphasis to specific activities, in view of helping the staff of the coordinating institution to improve their broader research management capacities as defined in the European Competence Framework for Research Managers <sup>32</sup>, including establishing/upgrading a dedicated team within the coordinating institution. This will be achieved by fully utilising the experience and best practices of the internationally leading partners and is expected to be a concrete deliverable of the Twinning exercise.

A research / innovation component not exceeding 30% of the total Horizon Europe grant (including the indirect costs) may include a research / innovation project which should be presented in a dedicated workpackage entitled 'Research component'. At least 50% of the budget for this component should be allocated to the coordinator. A research / innovation project involves the development and implementation of new ideas, methods, or technologies and advances the current state of the art in a particular field by pushing the boundaries of knowledge and creating novel solutions.

The proposals should illustrate quantitatively and qualitatively the expected impact of the twinning exercise within the coordinating institution (and possibly at regional/national level) based on indicators such as expected future publications in peer reviewed journals, collaboration agreements with businesses, intellectual property developed, new innovative products or services, number of international students, number of women scientists and their roles in the research institutions.

The proposal should demonstrate how the leading scientific institutions in the partnership will contribute in terms of provision of access to new research avenues, creativity and the development of new approaches, as well as acting as a source for increased mobility (inwards and outwards) of qualified scientists and young researchers including doctoral candidates.

Specific attention should be paid to Competitiveness Compass objectives. Proposals should demonstrate their alignment with its strategic thematic priorities.

The duration of the Twinning project should be up to 3 years.

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[RM Comp: The European Competence Framework for Research Managers - European Commission](#)

## **HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-WIDENING-03: Excellence Hubs**

<b>Call: Excellence Hubs</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR N/A and N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>In order to achieve the expected outcomes, participation as coordinators to the call is limited to legal entities established in Widening countries as defined in the Horizon Europe regulation.</p> <p>Proposals must involve at least two R&amp;I ecosystems from two different Widening countries.</p> <p>Each Widening country R&amp;I ecosystem must comprise four different categories of actors i.e. a) academic institutions (universities and/or non-university research centres or labs), b) business entities, c) public authorities or authorised agencies operating at regional or local level and d) societal actors (e.g. civil society organisations, citizens, end users, media, cultural actors etc.).</p> <p>A proposal may demonstrate involvement of a Widening country R&amp;I ecosystem by either:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The participation, as a beneficiary, by one or more umbrella organisations, whose membership comprises the four different categories of Widening country R&amp;I actors for the relevant Widening country; or</li> <li>2. The participation, as beneficiaries, of individual legal entities representing each of the four categories of actors for the relevant Widening country. In the case of representative individual entities, at least one of the business entities per R&amp;I ecosystem needs to be an established firm with turnover. More specifically, such business entities must at the time of the submission of the proposal be established for already at least two consecutive years.</li> </ol>

<i>Procedure</i>	<p>The procedure is described in General Annex F. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The procedure is described in General Annex F. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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 by a more highly ranked proposal. 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.</p>
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	<p>The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The funding rate is 70 % of the eligible costs.</p>
<i>Grant Conditions</i>	<p>For grants awarded under this topic beneficiaries may provide support to third parties as described in <a href="#">part K of the General Annexes of the Work Programme</a>. The support to third parties can only be provided in the form of grants. The respective options of Article 15.1 and Article 15.3 of the <a href="#">Model Grant Agreement</a> will be applied.</p>

**Expected Outcome:** Excellence hubs are part of the European Excellence Initiative and they will focus on innovation by allowing innovation ecosystems in widening countries and beyond, to team up and create better linkages between academia, business, government and society. This will foster a real place-based innovation culture in widening countries based on a strategic agenda aligned with regional or national smart specialisation strategies. Projects should contribute to the following outcomes:

- Excellent and sustainable place-based R&I ecosystems in widening countries and beyond in relevant domains of cutting-edge science and innovation;
- Long term joint R&I strategies underpinned by concrete action plans of European relevance;
- Common investment plans for R&I including infrastructures leveraging national, regional and European funds as well as private capital in a synergetic manner;

- R&I pilot projects alongside a joint strategy and in line with regional and national strategies, notably regional innovation strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3) taking into account the new Innovation Agenda for Europe;
- New competencies and skills for researchers, entrepreneurs and professionals in R&I intensive domains;
- Strengthened linkages between science and business;
- Improved knowledge transfer and development of entrepreneurial skills;
- New business opportunities especially for SMEs, university spin-offs and start-ups, especially deep tech given by innovative business models, services and/or products.

Scope: The projects will foster a place-based innovation culture in widening countries, aligned with regional or national smart specialization strategies. Synergies will be sought with European Innovation Ecosystems, EIC Pathfinder, the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT), and the JRC's 'Partnerships for Regional Innovation.' Excellence hubs will be the foundation of the pan-European Innovation Ecosystem for the new Innovation Agenda for Europe. Proposals should demonstrate the win-win effects of the partnerships and their benefits for employment and post-crisis recovery. This action supports the ERA's third priority of translating R&I results into the economy, aiming to enhance European competitiveness in the global technology race while improving the environment for business R&I investment, technology deployment, and the uptake of research results in society.

The action targets regions as R&I actors, as they are where innovation and industrial ecosystems thrive, connecting Europe with businesses, SMEs, start-ups, research centers, and citizens. Regionally developed ecosystems across the EU will drive new European strategic value chains. These ecosystems are considered place-based if there's an existing collaboration framework, like INTERREG or EURegio. Unlike Teaming projects, Excellence Hubs are networks of innovation ecosystems in widening countries, involving larger communities based on the quadruple helix principle. Other EU Member States, Associated Countries, and international partners may join if needed. The call includes financial support for start-ups and SMEs. Individual participants and ecosystems from other EU Member States, Associated Countries and international co-operation partners may join in duly justified cases e.g., given by a specific expertise needed or the involvement in a relevant value adding chain. The call allows to provide financial support to third parties in the form of grants for the support of start-ups and SMEs.

Projects should include a coherent package with core components:

- Cross-border joint R&I strategy aligned with regional smart specialization strategies and European priorities like the green and digital transition;
- R&I project consolidating academia-business linkages and providing evidence for strategy building and investment. The research component should be developed through joint pilot research projects, closing knowledge gaps and advancing science and technology with

market potential. The description of R&I content should include a long-term vision beyond the state of the art of the chosen R&I domain. The R&I project must be presented in a distinct work package in the proposal. The R&I project should not constitute the dominant part of the project;

- Action and investment plans to implement the strategy, including business models for sustainable products and services, leveraging national, regional, and European funds, as well as private capital;
- Pre-planning for pilots and demonstrators in line with the strategy, with realisation to be financed by other sources like ERDF, INTERREG, or IPA. The proposal should outline how to access co-funding at a later stage;
- Complementary activities to promote knowledge transfer, visibility, mutual learning, skills development, and citizen engagement. Secondments and staff exchanges should foster long-term collaboration.

Excellence hubs differ from initiatives like Digital Hubs or EIT RIS due to their strategic focus, broader scope, and alignment with widening eligibility criteria. Proposals should clearly illustrate the expected impact of the project, including new local and international partnerships, institutional changes, increased R&I intensity (new publications, intellectual assets, marketable products), and other relevant indicators for measuring impact.

The expected duration of the project is up to 4 years.

#### **HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-WIDENING-04: Hop-On Facility**

<b>Call: Hop-on Facility</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR N/A and N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Research and Innovation Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The following additional eligibility criteria apply:</p> <p>1. The proposal must include only:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One legal entity, as a beneficiary, established in a Widening country.</li> <li>• One legal entity which is the coordinator of an 'eligible already funded action'.</li> </ul> <p>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.</p> <p>An 'eligible already funded action' refers to an action stemming from a Horizon Europe grant agreement that also meets the following conditions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No legal entity established in a Widening Country is already a beneficiary, affiliated entity or associated partner in the Horizon Europe grant agreement.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>3. The Horizon Europe grant agreement was awarded to Horizon Pillar II 'main' Work Programme or EIC Pathfinder collaborative R&amp;I actions.</li> <li>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.</li> </ol>
<i>Procedure</i>	<p>The procedure is described in General Annex F. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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.</p>

	<p>If the proposal is successful, the next stage of the procedure will be grant agreement amendment preparations.</p> <p>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.</p>
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**Expected Outcome:** The Hop-on Facility allows for legal entities from Widening 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, mobilise excellence in the Widening countries, increase visibility of the beneficiaries from the widening countries, improve knowledge circulation, and boost their participation in specific thematic domains;
- At consortium level, open up established networks to new connections and partnerships, improve research excellence of the Widening country’s institutions in specific fields, enlarge outreach of the participants’ R&I actions and provides access to new talent pools;
- At the level of the Widening beneficiary, develop new competencies and skills for working in transnational projects including research management and dissemination and exploitation.

**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-2026-WIDENING-05: Research Management Facility**

<b>Call: Research Management Facility</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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 or Associated Country; and two of which are established in a Member State.</p>
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	<p>The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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.</p>

**Expected Outcome:** Excellent capacities in research management are essential for institutions and national R&I systems to capitalize on their R&I activities. The Research Management Facility aims provide institutions in Widening countries that want to establish or upgrade their research management capacities with tailored support and advise to develop an implementation strategy for the changes in the institutional set-up, in line with the ERA priorities. The action is not providing support for the implementation of the strategy.

Research management capacities are crucial for research-performing institutions as they enhance efficiency, competitiveness, and impact. Strong research management ensures effective grant acquisition, resource allocation, compliance with funding regulations, and strategic planning. It supports high-quality research by streamlining administrative processes, facilitating collaborations, and optimizing the use of research infrastructure.

The project is expected to contribute to the following outcomes:

- Encourage the establishment of stronger research management capacities in widening countries;

- Support institutional reforms in research institutions and national R&I systems;
- Strengthened human capital with more entrepreneurial and well-trained researchers managers;
- Promote and support multidisciplinary and transnational cooperation in the field of research management;
- Promotion of practices in agreed ERA priorities such as ethics, open science and data, gender equality, thus strengthening the institution's overall research ecosystem;
- Greater contribution of research organisation to the knowledge-based economy and society.

Scope: This action aims at creating a research management and administration facility to provide support services including trainings to institutions and their researcher managers in widening countries that want to establish or upgrade existing capacities and competencies in research management. The project should establish a facility inviting research performing organisations from Widening countries supporting them to assess their needs for excellent research management capacities, and develop implementation plans to improve the institutional capacity.

Proposals are expected to cover at least the following activities:

- Support the assessment of institutional needs in research management, administration and training with the research performing institutions requesting their services;
- Support the development of a tailor-made implementation plans to establish or upgrade research management capacities at institutional level;
- Provide research managers in widening countries with training modules to improve their skill set, in line with the European Competence Framework for Research Managers <sup>33</sup>;
- Provide research managers from widening countries with networking opportunities at European international level to improve their integration in the broader research management community.

Proposals should provide an estimate on the number of institutions and individuals they target during the duration of the action and describe how they plan to prioritise their services if demand exceeds resources of the project. Applicants furthermore should demonstrate in their proposal how they will ensure the full geographical coverage of their services for the Widening countries including Outermost Regions.

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[RM Comp: The European Competence Framework for Research Managers - European Commission](#)

## **HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-WIDENING-06: ERA Fellowships**

<b>Call: ERA Fellowships</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	TMA Postdoctoral Fellowships - European Fellowships
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>To be eligible to this call the host organisation must be located in an eligible Widening country.</p> <p>The proposals submitted under the ERA Fellowships must fulfil all the admissibility and eligibility conditions of the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships 2026 and pass all the thresholds for that call.</p>
<i>Award criteria</i>	<p>The criteria are described in General Annex D. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>For application of the general award criteria, including weighting and thresholds, see the specific conditions at the end of the MSCA Work Programme part.</p> <p>For admissibility, eligibility criteria, procedure and legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreement see exceptions and specific conditions for MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships - European Fellowships in the MSCA Work Programme part.</p> <p>The expected EU contribution depends on the number of person-months requested. For the applicable unit contributions, see specific conditions for MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships - European Fellowships in the MSCA Work Programme part.</p>
<i>Other requirement</i>	The part of the MSCA Work Programme referring to synergies with the Euratom Research and Training Programme 2021-2025 does not apply to the ERA Fellowships.

**Expected Outcome:** This action builds on the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships 2026 action (HORIZON-MSCA-PF-2026). The target group are host organisations located in Widening Countries.

Project results are expected to contribute to the following outcomes:

For supported ERA Fellows:

- Increased set of research and transferable skills and competences, leading to improved employability and career prospects of fellows within academia and beyond;
- New mind-sets and approaches to R&I work forged through international, inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary experience;
- Enhanced networking and communication capacities with scientific peers, as well as with the general public, that will increase and broaden the research and innovation impact;

For participating organisations in the Widening Countries:

- Increased alignment of working conditions for researchers in accordance with the principles set out in the European Charter for Researchers<sup>34</sup>;
- Enhanced quality and sustainability of research training and supervision;
- Increased global attractiveness, visibility and reputation of the participating organisation(s);
- Stronger R&I capacity and output among participating organisations; better transfer of knowledge;
- Regular feedback of research results into teaching and education at participating organisations.

For Widening countries:

- Increased attractiveness for researchers to entities in Widening countries, by providing competitive grants and spreading attractive working and employment practices;
- More postdoctoral researchers attracted to Widening countries.

Scope: Fellowships should be provided to excellent researchers, undertaking cross-border mobility. Applications must be made jointly by the researcher together with a legal entity in the academic or non-academic sector located in a Widening Country.

ERA Fellowships should take place in a Widening Country. Fellowships are open to researchers of any nationality who wish to engage in R&I projects by either coming to the EU from any country in the world or moving within the EU to a Widening Country.

In order to apply for the ERA Fellowships call, applicants must submit their proposal to the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA) Postdoctoral Fellowships 2026<sup>35</sup>. To be eligible to this call the host organisation must be located in an eligible Widening country. The application to the (MSCA) Postdoctoral Fellowships 2026 will be automatically resubmitted to this call in

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<sup>34</sup> Charter for Researchers, annexed to the Council recommendation C/2023/1640 of 18 December 2023 on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe (OJ C, C/2023/1640, 29.12.2023), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C\\_202301640](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C_202301640).

<sup>35</sup> specifically to Topic HORIZON-MSCA-2026-PF-01-01, TMA Postdoctoral Fellowships - European Fellowships

case the proposal fails to reach an adequate place in the ranking to be funded. This simplified submission procedure to the ERA Fellowships call presents applicants moving to Widening countries with an additional funding opportunity but there is the possibility to opt out during the application stage.

The proposals submitted under the ERA Fellowships must fulfil all the admissibility and eligibility conditions of the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships 2026 and pass all the thresholds for that call.

ERA Fellowships will be implemented applying the award criteria, scoring and threshold for Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions. The ranking order for the ERA Fellowships call will follow the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships 2026 call scores and evaluation procedure and proposals will also retain the scores and comments included in the Evaluation Summary Report (ESR) of this call. The MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships 2026 model grant agreement will be used to the ERA Fellowships.

#### *Secondments*

Researchers receiving an ERA Fellowship may opt to include a secondment phase, within the overall duration of their fellowship in any country worldwide. The secondment phase can be a single period or be divided into shorter mobility periods. Secondments cannot exceed one third of the standard fellowship duration and should be in line with the project objectives, adding significant value and impact to the fellowship.

#### *Placements in the non-academic sector*

ERA Fellowships can provide an additional period of up to six months to support researchers opting for a placement at the end of the project to work on R&I projects in an organisation from the non-academic sector established in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country. While this possibility is also available to fellows recruited in the non-academic sector, such a placement should be implemented at a different non-academic host organisation established in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country. The request for such a non-academic placement should be an integral part of the proposal, explaining the added value for the project and for the career development of the researcher, and will be subject to evaluation. This incentive aims at promoting career moves between sectors and organisations and thereby stimulate innovation and knowledge transfer while expanding career opportunities for researchers.

#### *Training activities*

The training activities implemented under the ERA Fellowships should include training for key transferable skills<sup>36</sup>, foster innovation and entrepreneurship, (e.g., commercialisation of results, Intellectual Property Rights, communication, public engagement and citizen science), foster good scientific conduct such as research integrity and promote Open Science practices (open

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<sup>36</sup> As an illustration, Eurodoc published a list of such transferable skills at: <http://eurodoc.net/skills-report-2018.pdf>

access to publications and to other research outputs, including data, FAIR data management, societal engagement and citizen science, etc.).

### *Career Development Plan*

In order to equip ERA Fellows with skills that enhance and expand their career opportunities inside and outside academia, a Career Development Plan should be established jointly by the supervisor(s) and the researcher. In addition to research objectives, this plan should comprise the researcher's training and career needs, including training on transferable skills, teaching, planning for publications and participation in conferences and events aiming at opening science and research to citizens. The Plan has to be submitted as a project deliverable at the beginning of the action and can be updated when needed.

### **HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-WIDENING-01: EIC Pre-accelerator - Widening**

<b>Call: EIC Pre-accelerator - Widening</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR N/A and N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>Applications may only be submitted by one legal entity (mono-beneficiary).</p> <p>The following additional eligibility criteria apply:</p> <p>Beneficiaries must be a small and medium enterprise (SME) established in a Horizon Europe Widening country.</p>
<i>Award criteria</i>	<p>The criteria are described in General Annex D. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The following additions to the general award criteria apply:</p> <p>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<sup>37</sup>. These are:</p>

<sup>37</sup>

[EIC WP25](#).

	<p><b>Excellence (Threshold: 4/5)</b></p> <p><b>Technological breakthrough:</b> 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?</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b> 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?</p> <p><b>Methodology:</b> Is the timing right for this technology/innovation (i.e., feasibility, minimum technological readiness level (TRL), unique selling points)?</p> <p><b>Impact (Threshold: 4/5)</b></p> <p><b>Credibility of the impacts:</b> To what extent the expected commercial impact(s) described in the proposal are credible and substantial within the project and beyond (e.g., one or several sectors, setting new standards, etc.)?</p> <p><b>Economic and/or societal benefits:</b> 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.)?</p> <p><b>Investment readiness and go to market strategy:</b> 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?</p> <p><b>Quality and efficiency of the implementation (Threshold 3/5)</b></p> <p><b>Quality and motivation of the team:</b> 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?</p>
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	<p><b>KPIs and Milestones:</b> 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?</p> <p><b>Workplan and allocation of resources:</b> How appropriate and effective is the allocation of resources (person-months and equipment) between work packages?</p> <p>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.</p>
<i>Procedure</i>	<p>The procedure is described in General Annex F. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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.</p>
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	<p>The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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)<sup>38</sup>.</p> <p>The funding rate is 70 % of the eligible costs.</p>

**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

<sup>38</sup> This [decision](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf) 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](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf)



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.

In the framework of this call, **deep-tech**<sup>39</sup> 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<sup>40</sup>.

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)<sup>41</sup>, 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;

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<sup>39</sup> 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.

<sup>40</sup> Ratio of a firm's R&D investment to its revenue.

<sup>41</sup> 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](#).

- 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 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**;
- 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<sup>42</sup>, 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<sup>43</sup> for submissions to the Accelerator programme following a project review in the second half of the project.

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<sup>42</sup> See EIC Work Programme 2027. More information is available also here: [https://eic.ec.europa.eu/eic-funding-opportunities/business-acceleration-services\\_en](https://eic.ec.europa.eu/eic-funding-opportunities/business-acceleration-services_en).

<sup>43</sup> See Annex 3 Fast Track scheme to apply for the EIC Accelerator, [EIC Work Programme 2027](#).

## **HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-WIDENING-02-01: ERA Chairs**

<b>Call: ERA Chairs</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR N/A and N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>In order to achieve the expected outcomes, participation as coordinators to the call is limited to legal entities established in Widening countries, as defined in the Horizon Europe regulation.</p> <p>The following additional eligibility criteria apply:</p> <p>To allow for the assessment of the commitment of the future ERA Chair holder and of the coordinator institution, proposals must include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) a letter signed by the prospective ERA Chair holder expressing their commitment to the proposal corresponding to at least 50% of time commitment for the duration of the project, and their willingness to take on the underlying tasks and obligations and agreed contractual arrangements including salary and on-site presence at the host institution</li> <li>2) a letter from the head of the coordinator institution committing to the proposal and support to the ERA Chair holder with adequate support for their tasks and duties including, for example, access to research facilities, supervision of researchers, teaching duties (if any) and freedom to apply to national and international funding.</li> </ol>
<i>Procedure</i>	<p>The procedure is described in General Annex F. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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</p>

	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.
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:  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) <sup>44</sup> .

**Expected Outcome:** Progress in strengthening links between research and innovation actors across the European Research Area (ERA) is essential for Europe to capitalize on excellence. ERA Chairs aim to sustainably attract outstanding scientists and innovators to universities or research organizations in widening countries, fostering brain circulation and creating pockets of excellence that enhance institutional culture and performance.

The ERA Chair holder’s leadership and the establishment of a permanent, high-quality research group will boost excellence, visibility, and integration within the ERA, improving competitiveness in research funding and promoting institutional reforms aligned with ERA priorities.

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

At system level:

- More R&I talent moving to Widening countries;
- Increased international, interdisciplinary, and intersectoral mobility;
- Institutional reforms in research institutions and national R&I systems;
- Strengthened human capital with more entrepreneurial and well-trained researchers;
- Better communication of R&I results to society;
- Enhanced research capacity, competitiveness, and economic growth;
- Closing the research and innovation gap within Europe.

<sup>44</sup> This [decision](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf) 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](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf)

At organisation level:

- Strengthened research excellence in ERA Chair fields;
- Increased attractiveness to top international researchers;
- Establishment of a lasting, high-performing research group with institutional benefits;
- Improved success in EU and global competitive funding;
- Greater contribution to the knowledge-based economy and society.

Scope: Research organizations in Widening countries seeking to establish an ERA Chair should submit a proposal with a prospective ERA Chair holder—an outstanding researcher or innovator in any scientific domain. The research institution will act as the sole applicant (monobeneficiary), and ERA Chair holders may be from any country.

Proposals should include a Curriculum Vitae in Europass form<sup>45</sup> detailing their scientific and technical contributions and how activities will enhance the institution. The CV should be uploaded as an additional document to the proposal.

Proposals should also describe any relevant investments of the coordinator in research projects, facilities and infrastructures and how those will be achieved and/or a better use of the installed research capacity (in particular of EU co-funded research infrastructures & facilities). Existing or foreseen arrangements for compliance with ERA priorities<sup>46</sup> including the European Charter for Researchers & Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers<sup>47</sup> are to be outlined in the proposal.

ERA Chair holders should be excellent researchers and/or innovators in the chosen field of research<sup>48</sup>. They should establish a research team fully integrated in the coordinator's institution to significantly improve its research performance in the scientific domain of choice and to be more successful in obtaining competitive funding. The team's recruitment will be led by an international panel chaired by the ERA Chair. The Chair should hold a position within the organization, allowing resource allocation, supervision, and funding applications. Teaching duties may be included where appropriate.

To allow for the assessment of the commitment of the future ERA Chair holder and of the coordinator institution, proposals must include:

1. a letter signed by the prospective ERA Chair holder expressing their commitment to the proposal and willingness to take on the underlying tasks and obligations;

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<sup>45</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/en/create-europass-cv>.

<sup>46</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2012:0392:FIN>

<sup>47</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reco/2005/251/oj>

<sup>48</sup> Corresponding to profiles R3 or R4 of researchers careers as set out in the “European Framework for Research Careers” provided at [https://cdn5.euraxess.org/sites/default/files/policy\\_library/towards\\_a\\_european\\_framework\\_for\\_research\\_careers\\_final.pdf](https://cdn5.euraxess.org/sites/default/files/policy_library/towards_a_european_framework_for_research_careers_final.pdf)

2. a letter from the head of the coordinator institution committing to the proposal and support to the ERA Chair holder with adequate support for their tasks and duties including, for example, access to research facilities, supervision of researchers, teaching duties (if any) and freedom to apply to national and international funding.

ERA Chair holders may relocate permanently or temporarily, with secondments, sabbaticals, or part-time arrangements possible. A minimum 50% full-time equivalent (FTE) commitment, including on-site presence, must be specified. Proposals should outline all contractual arrangements including salary, travel, daily allowances and other benefits. If employment is the preferred option, contractual details must be provided.

The leader of the newly created research group should be appointed on a permanent basis within the institution within the first three years through an open recruitment process monitored by the European Commission.

To ensure long-term sustainability, the ERA Chair research team should be structured for continuity beyond Horizon Europe funding. The proposal should detail team composition, researcher levels, salaries, and recruitment timelines. At least 20% of permanent team members should have tenure (not including the team leader), and no more than 50% having prior contractual links to the institution.

The grant covers salaries, recruitment, travel, research costs (up to 20% of the EU contribution presented in a single work package), and administrative expenses. Structural reforms should be outlined, such as improving working conditions, career prospects, HR policies, research governance, grant management, knowledge transfer, and simplifying procedures like IPR. Gender equality should be addressed in alignment with ERA objectives and institutional commitments.

Proposals should quantify expected impacts, including new research partnerships, institutional changes, increased research output (publications, IPR protection), and improved research management. Additional relevant impact indicators are encouraged.

The expected duration of the project is 5 years.

#### **HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-WIDENING-02-02: ERA Research Managers**

<b>Call: ERA Chairs</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR N/A and N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.

<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>In order to achieve the expected outcomes, participation as coordinators to the call is limited to legal entities established in Widening countries, as defined in the Horizon Europe regulation.</p>
<i>Procedure</i>	<p>The procedure is described in General Annex F. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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.</p>

**Expected Outcome:** Excellent capacities in research management are essential for institutions and national R&I systems to capitalize on their R&I activities. ERA Research Managers aim to attract experienced research managers to universities or research organisations in widening countries, establishing or upgrading institutional capacities for research management, fostering brain circulation and creating pockets of excellence that enhance institutional culture and performance.

Research management capacities are crucial for research-performing institutions as they enhance efficiency, competitiveness, and impact. Strong research management ensures effective grant acquisition, resource allocation, compliance with funding regulations, and strategic planning. It supports high-quality research by streamlining administrative processes, facilitating collaborations, and optimizing the use of research infrastructure.

The ERA Research Manager’s leadership and the establishment of a permanent, high-quality research management group will boost excellence, visibility, and integration within the ERA, improving competitiveness in research funding and promoting institutional reforms aligned with ERA priorities.

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

At system level:

- More R&I talent moving to Widening countries;
- Increased international, interdisciplinary, and intersectoral mobility;

- Institutional reforms in research institutions and national R&I systems;
- Strengthened human capital with more entrepreneurial and well-trained research managers;
- Better communication of R&I results to society;
- Enhanced research capacity, competitiveness, and economic growth;
- Closing the research and innovation gap within Europe.

At organisation level:

- Strengthened research management capacities;
- Increased attractiveness to top international research managers, and subsequently researchers;
- Establishment of a lasting, high-performing research management group with institutional benefits;
- Fosters innovation, knowledge transfer, and institutional reforms;
- Improving the institution's global visibility and success in securing competitive funding;
- Promote practices in agreed ERA priorities such as ethics, open science and data, gender equality, thus strengthening the institution's overall research ecosystem;
- Greater contribution to the knowledge-based economy and society.

Scope: Research organisations in Widening countries seeking to establish an ERA Research Manager should submit a proposal aimed at establishing or upgrading research management capacities in the institution and ensuring that the conditions are in place to foster excellent research management aligned with ERA priorities.

Proposals should include a self-assessment of the institutional capacities and needs in research management and administration. An implementation strategy should be designed enhancing the institutional capacities, with targeted actions and trainings. This strategy may be continuously adapted along the project duration. This plan will include all necessary measures to introduce institutional changes in research management. These measures should be realistic and feasible within the duration of the project. Proposals should also describe any relevant investments in research management capacity building, projects, staffing, facilities and infrastructures and how those will be achieved.



ERA Research Managers should be excellent research managers with international experience<sup>49</sup>. The appointment of the ERA Research Manager must follow an open and merit-based recruitment process and will be subject to monitoring by the European Commission. The appointment will be undertaken by the host institution at the beginning of the action. The position of the ERA Chair holder must be open to all EU and non-EU nationals without prior contractual relationships with the coordinator institution.

Once appointed, the ERA Research manager will establish/expand a research management team fully integrated in the coordinator's institution to significantly improve its overall performance in R&I. The team's recruitment will be led by an international panel chaired by the ERA Research Manager. The Research Manager should hold a position within the organisation, allowing resource allocation, supervision, and funding applications. Teaching duties may be included where appropriate. ERA Research Manager holders may relocate permanently or temporarily, with secondments, sabbaticals, or part-time arrangements possible. A minimum 50% full-time equivalent (FTE) commitment, including on-site presence, must be specified.

Proposals should outline all contractual arrangements including salary, travel, daily allowances and other benefits. If employment is the preferred option, contractual details must be provided.

The permanent leader of the newly created or reinforced research management group should be appointed on a permanent basis within the first three years through an open recruitment process monitored by the European Commission.

To ensure long-term sustainability, the ERA Research Managers team should be structured for continuity beyond Horizon Europe funding. The proposal should detail team composition, research management levels, salaries, and recruitment timelines. No more than 50% of the team should have prior contractual links to the institution.

The grant covers salaries, recruitment, travel, trainings, and administrative expenses. Structural reforms should be outlined, such as improving working conditions, career prospects, HR policies, research governance, grant management, knowledge transfer, and simplifying procedures like IPR. Gender equality should be addressed in alignment with ERA objectives and institutional commitments.

Proposals should quantify expected impacts, including institutional changes, increased research output (publications, IPR protection, knowledge valorisation), and improved research management. Additional relevant impact indicators are encouraged.

### **HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-WIDENING-03: ERA Fellowships**

<b>Call: ERA Fellowships</b>
<b>Specific conditions</b>

<sup>49</sup> Corresponding to advanced or expert level of research managers careers as set out in the "European Competence Framework for Research Managers" provided at [RM Comp: The European Competence Framework for Research Managers - European Commission](#)

**Horizon Europe - Work Programme 2026-2027**  
**Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area**

<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	TMA Postdoctoral Fellowships - European Fellowships
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>To be eligible to this call the host organisation must be located in an eligible Widening country.</p> <p>The proposals submitted under the ERA Fellowships must fulfil all the admissibility and eligibility conditions of the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships 2027 and pass all the thresholds for that call.</p>
<i>Award criteria</i>	<p>The criteria are described in General Annex D. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>For application of the general award criteria, including weighting and thresholds, see the specific conditions at the end of the MSCA Work Programme part.</p> <p>For admissibility, eligibility criteria, procedure and legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreement see exceptions and specific conditions for MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships - European Fellowships in the MSCA Work Programme part.</p> <p>The expected EU contribution depends on the number of person-months requested. For the applicable unit contributions, see specific conditions for MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships - European Fellowships in the MSCA Work Programme part.</p>
<i>Other requirement</i>	The part of the MSCA Work Programme referring to synergies with the Euratom Research and Training Programme 2021-2025 does not apply to the ERA Fellowships.

## **Destination: Reforming and enhancing the European research and innovation system**

The guiding policy framework of this destination is the Communication "A New ERA for Research and Innovation"<sup>50</sup>, the Council Recommendation on the Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe (Pact for R&I)<sup>51</sup>, and the European Research Area (ERA) Policy Agenda (2025-2027)<sup>52</sup>. Aligned with the Competitiveness Compass (2025)<sup>53</sup>, the destination will support the development of the ERA, fostering the fifth freedom of movement of researchers, scientific knowledge and technology, to be better able to address global challenges and boost Europe's competitiveness. More information on the ERA policy context can be found in the introduction to the WIDERA work programme 2026-2027.

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<sup>54</sup>, which identifies concrete ERA actions (new, time-limited initiatives) and structural policies (long-term policies) that address specific challenges faced by R&I communities in Europe. The WIDERA work programme is designed to support in this process. The funded actions will build capacities at the level of institutions and ecosystems to adopt reforms and practices, contributing to the achievement of the ERA priorities.

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)<sup>55</sup>.

The destination includes two calls with 11 topics in total and other actions. The **2026 call** includes targeted interventions that address the ERA actions and structural policies. The call topics are organised around four pillars that share the overall approach to supporting the ERA. In a concerted and comprehensive effort, the projects funded under the pillars will strengthen capacities of R&I stakeholders across complementary dimensions. The pillars include: Pillar I: Institutional changes in the ERA; Pillar II: ERA ecosystems; Pillar III: Citizens and science for ERA; Pillar IV: New knowledge for ERA. Pillars I-III include coordination and support actions, Pillar IV includes research and innovation actions. The **2027 call** includes bottom-up topics that address the ERA structural policies. The topics focus on collaborative action, capacity-building, and sharing knowledge on ERA achievements.

The effective contribution of social sciences and humanities (SSH) disciplines is welcomed under this destination, including the involvement of SSH experts, institutions, and the inclusion

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<sup>50</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0628&from=EN>.

<sup>51</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021H2122>.

<sup>52</sup> Subject to the adoption by the Council in Q2 2025.

<sup>53</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025DC0030>.

<sup>54</sup> Link to be added after adoption.

<sup>55</sup> 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>.

of relevant SSH expertise, to produce meaningful and significant effects that enhance the societal impact of the related project activities.

[ERA Platform](#) highlights how projects funded under the WIDERA work programmes have contributed to the ERA. 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 ERA policy areas.

**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 concrete ERA priorities, and more specifically to several of the following impacts:

- Effective structural and sustainable institutional changes in line with ERA priorities;
- Strong ecosystems and partnerships built around ERA priorities with enhanced institutional cooperation, coordination and alignment in the ERA and beyond;
- Increased trust in science and alignment of R&I with society's needs, expectations and values;
- Strengthened monitoring and evaluation of progress and evidence-based policy-making by creating new information and knowledge for the implementation of ERA policies.
- Enhanced adoption, harmonisation, and alignment of Open Science practices and FAIR management of research digital objects, both in Europe and globally;
- Positioning the EOSC as Europe's contribution to a Global Open Research Commons, thereby enhancing the ability to tackle scientific, research, and societal challenges on a global scale;
- Increased reproducibility, trustworthiness and transparency of scientific research;
- Increased equity, diversity and inclusivity in open science practices;
- Increased institutional capacity to conduct open science through sustainable non-profit open access publishing;
- Increased capacity in the EU R&I system to conduct open science and establishing it as the prevailing approach in modern research approaches;
- A more open, equitable and inclusive research and innovation system;
- Strengthened gender equality and inclusiveness across the ERA, leading to increased innovativeness, research excellence and economic growth;
- Increased representation of women and underrepresented groups in R&D intensive private firms;

- More innovative and socially relevant R&I outcomes and more equitable allocation of R&I funding and resources, ensuring that research priorities and investments proactively address gender inequalities and intersectional considerations, fostering a more diverse and inclusive research ecosystem;
- Robust theoretical and empirical knowledge addressing the previous knowledge gap on research careers in the private sector and supporting policy making through better understanding of the labour structure and dynamics of the R&I system;
- New concepts, methods, tools and evidence for assessing the relevance of global research collaboration networks for the EU R&I ecosystem in particular for shaping research careers and research agendas;
- Enhanced understanding of the scientific and socio-political impact and relevance of global research collaboration networks;
- Systemic reform of research assessment through the recognition of the diverse outputs, practices, and activities. which maximise the quality and impact of research;
- Strengthened ecosystems for knowledge valorisation;
- High ethics and integrity standards protecting and promoting EU values are well-embedded into institutional policies and mainstreamed in all EU policies impacted by digital governance and transition. The consistent application of these standards ensures a responsible uptake of AI and safeguards that researchers/research institutions effectively address the ethics challenges, notably those stemming from the involvement of digitally vulnerable populations, including children;
- The research community, including research ethics committees and relevant networks in the EU and beyond, benefit from a reinforced and supportive research ethics and integrity ecosystem, based on a coherent policy framework that has led to an increased uptake of robust methodologies advancing benefit sharing and preventing ‘ethics dumping’;
- An improved ethical knowledge and expertise among researchers, ethics experts and policy makers in the field of space exploration/exploitation and neurotechnology enables an effective protection and promotion of EU values and fundamental rights and creates a sustainable competitive advantage at global level for the Union’s ground-breaking technologies;
- Increased engagement of citizens in research and innovation;
- Enhanced democratisation of science-policy interface;
- Improved capacity within the European Research Area to tackle societal challenges.

Proposals are invited against the following topic(s):

**HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-01: Pillar I: Transforming institutions: Open access and research assessment reforms**

<b>Call: Enhancing the European R&amp;I system</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR N/A and N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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.</p>
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	<p>The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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.</p>
<i>Evaluation Procedure</i>	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.

Expected Outcome: This topic aims to foster the adoption of ERA policies and practices within R&I organisations by providing cascading grants and improving availability and accessibility of tools, skills and resources, thereby enabling institutional reforms. Applicants are invited to select one of the areas outlined below.

All successful proposals will deliver on the overall expected impact: Effective structural and sustainable institutional changes in line with ERA policy priorities.

Project results are expected to contribute to the expected impacts and outcomes relevant for the area selected and identified by the applicants in their proposal, as outlined below.

### **Area 1: Supporting scholarly societies transition to non-profit open access publishing models**

Projects will contribute to the ERA Action “Equity in Open Science” and to the following impact: Increased equity, diversity and inclusivity in open science practices.

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

- Publishing activities (e.g., in journals/books/monographs) of scholarly societies in a range of disciplines and scientific fields have transitioned into non-profit open access publishing models, ensuring broader dissemination of research without author fees;
- Improved capacities, skills and resources for scholarly societies through lessons learnt on the processes, requirements and sustainable business models that are essential for transitioning scientific publishing venues of scholarly societies into non-profit open access publishing models;
- Greater awareness of and commitment to open science principles and practices by scholarly societies.

### **Area 2: Sustainable institutional reforms to improve research assessment systems**

Projects will contribute to the ERA Structural Policy “Research Assessment” and to the following impact: Systemic reform of research assessment through the recognition of the diverse outputs, practices, and activities which maximise the quality and impact of research.

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

- Increased awareness and trust among researchers and research organisations about reforms of research assessment;
- Action Plans of signatories of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment have been implemented;
- Institutional changes in research performing and funding organisations (including accreditation and quality assurance agencies) in favour of more responsible research assessment systems.

Scope: This topic contributes toward the implementation of the European Research Area (ERA), by supporting institutional changes in two policy areas: research assessment and open science.

This topic enables progress in the implementation of the ERA structural policy “Research Assessment” and the ERA action “Equity in Open Science”. This is achieved by supporting institutional changes through cascading grants, which will enable a variety of capacity building activities, including providing tools, resources and guidelines, training, quality assurance programmes, mentoring, and certification.

Proposals should select and clearly identify one area being addressed, choosing from the two areas outlined under the expected outcomes and scope of this 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 consider complementarities and synergies with other areas, both in this topic and in other topics funded under this call. For example, proposals that choose area 1 on non-profit open access publishing models may develop links with activities on research assessment (this topic, area 2), peer review (HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-02, area 4), or reproducibility in research (HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-08, area 1).

In all project activities, particular attention should be paid to promoting inclusive gender equality and addressing gender-specific challenges.

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.

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

### **Area 1: Supporting scholarly societies transition to non-profit open access publishing models**

This area addresses the ERA Action “Equity in Open Science” that aims to build capacities in terms of open science skills, promote equitable access to open science infrastructures, and support high-quality not-for-profit open access scholarly publishing services across the ERA.

Scholarly societies across Europe, of national and European remit, are vibrant arenas that promote the various scientific disciplines, as well as gatekeepers of multilingualism and bibliodiversity. The objective of this action is to support, through cascading funding, the transition of journals/books/monographs of national and/or European scholarly societies into non-profit open access publishing models without author fees. The large majority of the funding should be allocated to calls for pilot actions targeting scholarly societies that fall under all six [Frascati](#) fields of science and technology. Projects should aim to distribute at least one-third of the grants to scholarly societies in the Humanities/Arts and Social Sciences fields.

Project activities may involve, amongst others, actors such as research performing organisations, research funding organisations, libraries, scholarly societies, non-profit scholarly publishers and other research-relevant organisations. They should engage in at least the following activities, targeting scholarly societies:

- Launch open call(s) for pilot actions for transitioning at least 30 scholarly societies across Europe;



- Produce guidelines, training materials and lessons learnt to support capacity-building for such transitions of scholarly societies in the future;
- Develop business models to support sustainable non-profit open access publishing for scholarly societies beyond the project.

## **Area 2: Sustainable institutional reforms to improve research assessment systems**

This area addresses the ERA Structural Policy on Research Assessment which aims to support institutional changes, raise awareness and assess the level of progress made in terms of reforming research assessment.

The objective of this area is to support the implementation of institutional changes in research organisations, through cascading funding, in line with the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment. The cascading funding is expected to contribute to changes in a significant number of institutions (e.g. 60-70 individual organisations involved, of different types and across different geographical areas). The action should build on any previous or ongoing relevant initiatives and projects at European or national level<sup>56</sup>. Funded activities may require support services to be developed and provided to the beneficiary by third party organisations.

Project activities should target actors such as higher education institutions, research centres, research funding organisations, research infrastructures, research evaluation agencies, accreditation and quality assurance agencies, notably those engaged in the CoARA approach. At least the following activities should be included:

- Reform research assessment and evaluation criteria and processes in alignment with the CoARA Agreement commitments;
- Implement reforms aiming to establish qualitative peer-review at the centre of research assessment practices and to move away from the inappropriate uses of journal and publication-based metrics (in particular inappropriate uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index);
- Implement institutional changes in the assessment of research which recognise the diversity of activities, practices and roles of researchers;
- Analyse outcomes of changes implemented through research assessment reform using cascading grants and identify barriers.

## **HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-02: Pillar I: Building Capacity for responsible, equitable, inclusive and ethical ERA**

<b>Call: Enhancing the European R&amp;I system</b>
<b>Specific conditions</b>

<sup>56</sup> Including projects funded under [HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ERA-01-07](#), [HORIZON-INFRA-2022-EOSC-01-01](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-45](#).

<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR N/A and N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	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.
<i>Evaluation Procedure</i>	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.

**Expected Outcome:** This topic aims to foster adoption of ERA policies and practices within institutions in ERA through capacity building in four ERA policy areas: inclusive gender equality, research ethics and integrity, equity and inclusion in open science, and peer-review for scientific publishing. Applicants are invited to select one of the areas outlined below.

All successful proposals will deliver on the overall expected impact: Effective structural and sustainable institutional changes in line with ERA policy priorities.

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

### **Area 1: Capacity booster for ethics and integrity: addressing digital transition and ensuring digital inclusion for all**

Projects will contribute to the ERA Action “A harmonised framework to support integrity and ethics in R&I in the face of emerging challenges” and to the following impact: High ethics and integrity standards protecting and promoting EU values are well-embedded into institutional policies and mainstreamed in all EU policies impacted by digital governance and transition. The consistent application of these standards ensures a responsible uptake of AI and safeguards that researchers/research institutions effectively address the ethics challenges, notably those stemming from the involvement of digitally vulnerable populations, including children.

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

- A reinforced ethics and integrity institutional framework based on standard operating procedures and a clear set of living ethics guidelines for researchers as well as ethics and integrity bodies that supports researchers in addressing ethics and integrity challenges arising out of the rapid spread of AI and the digitalisation of research;
- Robust operational guidance for researchers and research ethics committees ensuring a high level of protection for children, adolescents, seniors, as well as effective mitigation of new digital vulnerabilities (such as privacy, data protection, online harm, deception, screen addiction, lack of digital skills);
- Multidisciplinary networks/communities of practice are established, fostering responsible and ethical research in the digital domain, while undertaking targeted communication and dissemination actions about the ethical challenges of digital research and the strategies/best practices needed to overcome them.

## **Area 2: Mutual learning and mentoring for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of inclusive gender equality plans**

Projects will contribute to the ERA Structural Policy “Strengthening inclusive and intersectional gender equality in the ERA” and to the following impact: Strengthened gender equality and inclusiveness across the ERA, leading to increased innovativeness, research excellence and economic growth.

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

- Increased capacity of R&I organisations to design, implement, monitor and evaluate inclusive gender equality plans through the availability of new or updated methods, guidance and tools for less advanced organisations;
- Increased uptake, quality and effectiveness of inclusive gender equality plans and policies in organisations that are less advanced in their implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

## **Area 3: Address equity and inclusion in capacities for Open Science**

Projects will contribute to the ERA Action “Equity in Open Science” and to the following impacts: Increased capacity in the EU R&I system to conduct open science and establishing it as the prevailing approach in modern research approaches; Increased equity, diversity and inclusivity in open science practices.

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

- Implementable pathways in research organisations for including researchers with diverse profiles in Open Science practices;
- Support to the practice of Open Science by providing relevant training materials, sharing best practices and raising awareness;
- Consolidated evidence base on equity and inclusion in Open Science.

#### **Area 4: Improving quality, efficiency and equity in peer-review for scientific publishing**

Projects will contribute to the ERA Action “Equity in Open Science” and to the following impacts: A more open, equitable and inclusive research and innovation system; Increased capacity in the EU R&I system to conduct open science and establish it as the prevailing approach in modern research approaches.

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

- Improved quality and increased transparency, recognition, equity and non-bias in the peer review process and editorial review system in different disciplines amongst publishers (including non-profit, institutional, scholarly societies, commercial publishers) and editors/editorial boards;
- Increased awareness, among for example, researchers, research institutions, scholarly societies, editors/editorial boards and publishers, of the need for a transparent and equitable peer review process as an integral part of high-quality research.

Scope: This topic contributes toward the implementation of the European Research Area (ERA) by supporting capacity building in four policy areas: inclusive gender equality, research ethics and integrity, equity and inclusion in open science, and peer-review for scientific publishing.

This topic enables progress in the implementation of selected ERA actions and structural policies in organisations, broader R&I ecosystems and at national level, through a variety of capacity building activities, including providing tools, resources and guidelines, training and skills building, quality assurance programmes, peer mentoring, and certification.

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 or structural policy.

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 1 on equity and inclusion in Open Science may develop links with activities foreseen under peer-review for scientific publishing (this topic, area 2), non-profit open access publishing models (HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-01, area 1), and reproducibility in research (HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-08, area 1).

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.

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.

Proposals are expected to envisage a duration of 2-3 years without prejudice to a longer duration if duly justified.

### **Area 1: Capacity booster for ethics and integrity: addressing digital transition and ensuring digital inclusion for all**

This area addresses the ERA Action that aims to support the uptake of research ethics and integrity principles in an increasingly digitalised world, to induce institutional change to prevent breaches and address barriers to implementing ethical guidelines in the EU and beyond.

The objective of this area is to: 1) build a robust framework supporting researchers in addressing ethical challenges and uncertainties related to the rapid spread of AI and the digitalisation of research while ensuring the protection of children and other vulnerable populations in the digital domain; and 2) supplement the European Commission's activities in the domain of digital transition, including the EU-wide inquiry on the broader impacts of social media on well-being and the Commission's upcoming Action Plan against Cyberbullying<sup>57</sup>.

The area should build on the results of previous or ongoing projects at European and/or national level addressing ethics-related aspects.<sup>58</sup> Cooperation with ongoing projects is encouraged. Proposals should include structured cooperation with the e-platform [Embassy of Good Science](#) as well as relevant European networks.<sup>59</sup> Project activities should target the following actors: researchers, research integrity/ethics committees, European networks in research ethics, research management/integrity offices, ethics officers in research performing organisations, as well as policymakers. At least the following activities should be included:

- Develop a robust ethics and integrity institutional framework based on standard operating procedures and operational guidance;
- Develop toolkits and expertise to prevent and/or mitigate ethical risks of digital exclusion and vulnerability and ensure fairness and well-being, considering the ever-increasing integration of digital tools and methodologies, including AI, in all domains of scientific research;
- Develop training programmes, including a quality assurance system, for researchers, ethics experts, and local ethics bodies /committees to safeguard responsible and

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<sup>57</sup> Link to be added once the action plan is adopted.

<sup>58</sup> Including projects funded under [H2020 SwafS-27-2017](#), [H2020 SwafS-03-2018](#), [H2020 SwafS-29-2020](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-90](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-91](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2022-ERA-01-91](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ERA-01-12](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2024-ERA-01-12](#); See also Cordis Results Pack: [Ethics and integrity: Building bridges for trust and excellence in research and innovation](#).

<sup>59</sup> For instance, the European Network of Research Ethics Committees and Research Integrity Offices ([ENERI](#)), the Network of Education on Research Quality ([NERQ](#)).

trustworthy research in a digital context, focusing on the latest socio-ethical challenges arising from new and emerging technologies;

- Raise awareness on the ethical challenges in the digital domain to protect the most vulnerable parts of the society.

## **Area 2: Mutual learning and mentoring for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of inclusive gender equality plans**

This area addresses the ERA structural policy to strengthen inclusive and intersectional gender equality in the ERA. Its objective is to support the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of inclusive gender equality plans (GEPs) in R&I organisations through a peer-mentoring scheme.

Project activities should target research organisations, higher education institutions, and public bodies, as well as advanced organisations that will mentor less advanced organisations. The action should build on existing knowledge, expertise and tools developed by relevant previous and ongoing projects, networks and initiatives<sup>60</sup>.

The partners involved in the action are expected either to focus on a specific thematic area or to be composed of partners with similar national/regional background, for a better contextualisation. At least the following activities should be included:

- Implement specific actions in the less advanced organisations, including those addressing intersectionality and diversity, targeting underrepresented or socially disadvantaged groups, as well as the integration of gender dimension into R&I content, including intersectional approach;
- Ensure update or set-up of thorough monitoring and evaluation of inclusive GEPs in less advanced organisations;
- Exchange good practices and materials, tailored to individual organisations' needs for the development, monitoring and evaluation of inclusive GEPs;
- Build capacities, through activities such as on-site visits, training, and workshops;
- Network with relevant projects, initiatives and stakeholders in the area of gender equality and inclusiveness beyond the project consortia.

## **Area 3: Address equity and inclusion in capacities for Open Science**

This area addresses the ERA Action “Equity in Open Science” that aims to build capacities in terms of open science skills, promote equitable access to open science infrastructures, and support high-quality not-for-profit open access scholarly publishing services across the ERA.

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<sup>60</sup> [GEAR Tool](#); Projects funded under [H2020 SwafS-13-2018](#), [H2020 SwafS-08-2017](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-80](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-81](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2024-ERA-01-11](#), and [HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-04](#) (link to be added once WP 2025 is published).

The objective of this area is to generate actionable recommendations and toolkits in order to support capacities for open science by prioritising an equitable contribution to, and benefits from, open science through policy and institutional practice.

The action should build on any previous or ongoing relevant initiatives and projects at European or national level<sup>61</sup>. Project activities should target actors such as research performing organisations, research funding organisations, universities, researchers and innovators, policymakers. At least the following activities should be included:

- Take stock of equity and inclusion barriers in relation to Open Science capacities and accessibility, notably in connection to barriers related to scientists' career stage, employment stability and contract type, financial circumstances, country of origin or residence, and factors such as gender, ethnicity etc.
- Develop and disseminate shared tools, training methods and services with a view to boosting capacities in terms of Open Science skills in collaboration with stakeholders.
- Provide recommendations for developing common ERA approach towards equity in Open Science in its different practices.

#### **Area 4: Improving quality, efficiency and equity in peer-review for scientific publishing**

This area addresses the ERA Action “Equity in Open Science” which aims to build capacities in terms of open science skills, promote equitable access to open science infrastructures, and support high-quality not-for-profit open access scholarly publishing services across the ERA.

The objective of this area is to affect change in scientific publishing by improving the quality, efficiency, transparency, equity and non-bias in the peer-review process. Proposals should cover disciplines from at least two of the six fields of science and technology as classified by the [Frascati manual](#).

Project activities should involve actors such as editors/editorial boards, scholarly societies, research performing organisations and national research evaluation agencies. At least the following activities should be included:

- Pilot policies and processes in different scientific areas that will improve the peer-review process in line with the objective of the action;
- Draft recommendations on how scholarly publishing in different disciplines can transition to improved, more efficient, transparent, equitable and non-biased peer-reviewed processes;

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<sup>61</sup> Including project [ON-MERRIT](#), funded under [H2020 SwafS-20-2018-2019](#), and projects funded under [HORIZON-WIDERA-2022-ERA-01-44](#).

- Consider new forms of peer-review such as open peer-review, as well as address innovative publishing models, including “publish-review-curate” models, where review is conducted over publicly available preprints;
- Address attitudes to and effectiveness of the peer review process in different disciplines;
- Discuss models of peer review in terms of geography, gender, and career stage.

**HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-03: Pillar II: Strengthening ecosystems for sustainable and inclusive ERA**

<b>Call: Enhancing the European R&amp;I system</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	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.
<i>Evaluation Procedure</i>	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.

**Expected Outcome:** This topic aims to build new and reinforce existing ecosystems to foster broad uptake of policies/practices within and beyond the ERA in four ERA policy areas: inclusive gender equality, research ethics and integrity, environmentally sustainable science, and open science. Applicants are invited to select one of the areas outlined below.

All successful proposals will deliver on the overall impact: Sustainable ecosystems and partnerships that advance ERA policy priorities through strengthened institutional cooperation, coordination and alignment in the ERA and beyond.



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

**Area 1: Policy coordination to enhance the inclusive and intersectional gender equality in the ERA**

Projects will contribute to the ERA Structural Policy “Strengthening inclusive and intersectional gender equality in the ERA” and to the following impact: Strengthened gender equality and inclusiveness across the ERA, leading to increased innovativeness, research excellence and economic growth.

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

- Policy coordination of Member States and Associated Countries to achieve the ERA objectives on inclusive gender equality, including stakeholder and citizen engagement and mainstreaming other ERA priority areas, is enhanced;
- Member States, Associated Countries, and relevant ERA stakeholders increase their knowledge and capacities for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of inclusive and intersectional gender equality policies across the ERA;
- Increased uptake of inclusive gender equality policies in R&I through strategic policy advice and supporting materials, such as guidelines and tools, by Member States, Associated Countries, the European Commission, and relevant ERA stakeholders.

**Area 2: Partnerships for equitable, sustainable, and ethical research**

Projects will contribute to the ERA Action “A harmonised framework to support integrity and ethics in R&I in the face of emerging challenges” and to the following impact: The research community, including research ethics committees and relevant networks in the EU and beyond, benefit from a reinforced and supportive research ethics and integrity ecosystem, based on a coherent policy framework that has led to an increased uptake of robust methodologies advancing benefit sharing and preventing ‘ethics dumping’.

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

- A reinforced research ethics and integrity ecosystem to support, in a digitalised world impacted by AI, long-term equitable research relationships between partners in lower-income and high-income settings, based on the values of fairness, respect, care, honesty, and justice;
- Enhanced expertise on benefit sharing and on how to practically and effectively prevent exporting outside the EU research practices non-compliant with the highest ethical standards (‘ethics dumping’) that would not be accepted in the Union;
- Creation of an international network /community of practice fostering equitable, sustainable and ethical research to support researchers and research staff, research

participants and local communities, ethics and research integrity bodies and committees (local / national), as well as other key stakeholders.

### **Area 3: Network for environmentally sustainable science**

Projects will contribute to achieving greater environmental impact of research and supporting the green transition, as set out in the Pact for R&I in Europe, and to the following impact: Increased uptake, effectiveness and impact of environmentally sustainable research.

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

- Established network of R&I stakeholders, fostering knowledge sharing and supporting the implementation of sustainable research practices and policies;
- Strengthened culture of environmental sustainability in the scientific community;
- More environmentally sustainable planning and execution of European and national research funding programmes.

### **Area 4: Global cooperation for the uptake of Open Science practices**

Projects will contribute to the ERA Structural Policy “Enabling open science via sharing and re-use of data, including through the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC)” and to the following impacts: Enhanced adoption, harmonization, and alignment of Open Science practices and FAIR management of research digital objects, both in Europe and globally; Positioning the EOSC as Europe's contribution to a Global Open Research Commons, thereby enhancing the ability to tackle scientific, research, and societal challenges on a global scale.

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

- Strengthened international collaboration for aligning policies and strategies that enable open access, sharing, and re-use of digital research objects and tools in line with the FAIR principles;
- New standards, recommendations, and methodologies necessary for applying the FAIR principles and supporting the EOSC ecosystem in alignment with global best practices;
- Improved interoperability of digital research objects, tools, and services across various thematic, discipline-specific, and national data and research infrastructures worldwide

Scope: This topic contributes toward the implementation of the European Research Area (ERA) by supporting ecosystem building in four policy areas: inclusive gender equality, research integrity and ethics, environmentally sustainable science, and open science.

This topic enables progress in the implementation of selected ERA policy areas in organisations, broader R&I ecosystems and at national level, through a variety of activities focusing on building new and reinforcing existing ecosystems, including conferences, seminars, trainings and quality assurance systems, collaborative projects, consensus building, and policy

advice. In building new or reinforcing existing ecosystems, proposals should consider the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity<sup>62</sup> and the principles of the TRUST Code<sup>63</sup>.

Proposals should select and clearly identify one area being addressed, choosing from those set out under the expected outcomes and scope of this action. Proposals should develop activities outlined for the selected area, as well as additional activities contributing to the expected outcomes for the same area. In all project activities, particular attention should be paid to promoting inclusive gender equality and addressing gender-specific challenges.

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.

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

#### **Area 1: Policy coordination to enhance the inclusive and intersectional gender equality in the ERA**

This area addresses the ERA structural policy on strengthening inclusive and intersectional gender equality in the ERA.

It aims to further develop the network of representatives from EU Member States and Associated Countries, both from national authorities (e.g., R&I ministries) and from national research funding organisations, to support the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of inclusive gender equality policies in the ERA.

The project activities should target research performing and funding organisations, higher education institutions, and public bodies. Actions should build on existing knowledge, expertise and tools developed by relevant previous and ongoing projects, networks and initiatives<sup>64</sup>, and closely cooperate with relevant stakeholders, especially the ERA Forum sub-group on inclusive gender equality in the ERA<sup>65</sup> (sub-group). At least the following activities should be included:

- Further develop transnational network of R&I funding organisations and national authorities;

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<sup>62</sup> [european-code-of-conduct-for-research-integrity\\_horizon\\_en.pdf](#)

<sup>63</sup> TRUST (2018) The TRUST Code - A Global Code of Conduct for Equitable Research Partnerships, DOI: 10.48508/GCC/2018.05

<sup>64</sup> Projects funded under [H2020 SwafS-19-2016](#), [H2020 SwafS-08-2017](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-80](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2024-ERA-01-11](#).

<sup>65</sup> See the Register of Commissions expert groups and other similar entities: <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?lang=en&groupID=103813>.

- Build capabilities and enhance expertise between network members, representatives of ERA Forum and their sub-groups, and develop activities to mainstream inclusive gender equality in other ERA priority areas through the network and stakeholder engagement;
- Devise a monitoring and evaluation approach for the effective implementation of inclusive GEPs through co-creation with the sub-group by the end of 2027;
- Develop guidelines for implementing intersectionality in R&I policy, including recommended indicators through co-creation with the sub-group by the end of 2027;
- Conduct monitoring and evaluation of the ERA structural policy on strengthening inclusive gender equality in the ERA implementation in cooperation with the sub-group;
- Provide advice for the national and European level to advance inclusive gender equality in the ERA.

## **Area 2: Partnerships for equitable, sustainable, and ethical research**

This area addresses ERA Action that aims to support the uptake of research ethics and integrity principles in an increasingly digitalised world, to prevent breaches and address barriers to implementing ethical guidelines in the EU and beyond.

The objective of this area is: 1) to build diverse and inclusive partnerships to reinforce an ecosystem able to support a long-lasting approach to benefit sharing, also considering the increasing prevalence of AI; 2) to address both historical and current imbalances in research, especially in difficult, high-risk or highly contingent settings, ensure human rights and environmental responsibility, and incorporate the principles of due diligence and beneficence for research participants and local communities.

The area should build on the results of previous or ongoing relevant initiatives and projects at European and/or national level addressing ethics-related aspects.<sup>66</sup> Proposals should include structured cooperation with the e-platform [Embassy of Good Science](#), as well as relevant European networks.<sup>67</sup> Valorising results beyond the community of ethics and integrity experts and promoting them for students and young researchers is fundamental. Cooperation with large university/research networks<sup>68</sup> to enrich ethics-related curricula with the materials produced by the action is desirable.

The project activities should target the following actors: researchers, research integrity and ethics committees (local/national), European networks of (early career) researchers and

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<sup>66</sup> Including projects funded under [H2020 SwafS-27-2017](#), [H2020 SwafS-03-2018](#), [H2020 SwafS-29-2020](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-90](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-91](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2022-ERA-01-91](#), [HORIZON-HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ERA-01-12](#), [HORIZON-HORIZON-WIDERA-2024-ERA-01-12](#); See also Cordis Results Pack: [Ethics and integrity: Building bridges for trust and excellence in research and innovation](#).

<sup>67</sup> For instance, the European Network of Research Ethics Committees and Research Integrity Offices ([ENERI](#)), the Network of Education on Research Quality ([NERQ](#)) and Volunteers in Research and Ethics ([VoIREthics](#)).

<sup>68</sup> For example, EUA, YERUN, LERU, CESAER, EARMA.

educators in the field of research ethics, research management and research integrity offices, ethics officers in research performing organisations, as well as policymakers. At least the following activities should be included:

- Develop toolkits to facilitate responsible, equitable and sustainable research and innovation partnerships, to guarantee the premise of ‘do no harm’, to maximise beneficence, as well as fair and just practice, from conception to the implementation of the action in a global context;
- Develop training programmes, including a quality assurance system, for young and experienced researchers, research staff, as well as ethics experts and committees to promote coherence of the ethics review process in the EU and beyond;
- Disseminate and increase awareness and knowledge of ethical values and norms for responsible R&I, including by engaging stakeholders at the local level.

### **Area 3: Network for environmentally sustainable science**

This area contributes toward achieving greater environmental impact of research and supporting the green transition, in line with the Pact for R&I in Europe. Environmental impact of research can be reduced through a range measures, for example, energy-efficient, low-waste laboratories, sustainable data storage and computing facilities, and adapted research methodologies.

The objective of this area is to establish a European network dedicated to driving the transformation of research across disciplines, promoting sustainability, and reducing the environmental footprint of research activities and organisations.

It should build on any existing approaches and methodologies and collaborate with relevant projects, networks and initiatives<sup>69</sup>. The project activities should target actors such as higher education institutions, research performing and funding organisations, industry, policymakers, and grassroots initiatives. At least the following activities should be included:

- Map existing approaches and methodologies for assessing and reducing the environmental footprint of research.
- Develop sustainability guidelines and pathways adapted to different disciplines and contexts of research organisations.
- Facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration on sustainable research practices, methodologies, management and policies, including through an online platform.

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<sup>69</sup> See for example, [Green Labs](#), [MSCA Green Charter](#), [Sustainable European Laboratories](#), [Science Europe Working Group on Greening Research](#), [Heidelberg Agreement](#); ALLEA (2022), “[Towards Climate Sustainability of the Academic System in Europe and beyond](#)”; Nature (2024), “[Spotlight on Green Labs](#)”; EC (2024) “Greening research: Decarbonisation and beyond”

- Provide training on sustainable research, including by mobilising existing resources and know-how for training programmes.
- Raise awareness to foster a culture of environmental sustainability in the scientific community.
- Provide evidence-based policy recommendations to integrate sustainability into research funding and evaluation criteria.

#### **Area 4: Global cooperation for the uptake of Open Science practices**

This area addresses ERA structural policy “Enabling open science via sharing and re-use of data, including through the European Open Science Cloud” that aims to ensure that open science practices and skills are rewarded and taught, becoming the ‘new normal’.

The main goal of this area is to foster a global ecosystem that promotes cooperation and alignment on Open Science practices. It will facilitate the development of standards, tools, and services that empower researchers to find, access, re-use, and combine research findings, especially through the European Open Science Cloud as a federated, community-driven infrastructure. Additionally, it aims to position Europe as a leader in establishing a network of FAIR research data, linked to other data spaces.

It should build on activities by related projects<sup>70</sup> and activities in the context of the EOSC Partnership aimed at fostering the international dimension of EOSC.

The project activities should target actors such as research organisations and associations thereof, research community-driven associations, service providers, higher education institutions etc. At least the following activities should be included:

- Implement initiatives to facilitate cooperation, consensus-building, and connections between developments within the European context, especially the European Open Science Cloud, and international initiatives and organisations that promote the reusability of digital research outputs globally;
- Participate in crafting and utilising globally recognised data practices and standards through active engagement with international stakeholders;
- Provide support for defining and developing EOSC policies and technical specifications by aligning with global, community-driven initiatives and scientific best practices;
- Promote knowledge sharing and capacity building: Enable researchers, institutions, and organisations to actively contribute to Open Science and the development of global research commons.

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<sup>70</sup> Projects funded under [HORIZON-INFRA-2022-EOSC-01-04](#) and [HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-41](#).

**HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-04: Pillar II: Piloting innovative knowledge valorisation practices for market and policy uptake**

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

**Expected Outcome:** This action aims to build new and reinforce existing ecosystems to foster broad uptake of policies/practices within and beyond ERA, in different ERA policy areas, including knowledge valorisation and policy experimentation. Applicants are invited to select one of the areas outlined below.

All successful proposals will deliver on the overall impact: Sustainable ecosystems and partnerships that advance ERA policy priorities through strengthened institutional cooperation, coordination and alignment in the ERA and beyond.

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

**Area 1: Piloting innovative knowledge valorisation practices for market and policy uptake**

Projects will contribute to the ERA Structural Policy “Upscaling knowledge valorisation capacities and activities” and to the following impacts: Strengthened ecosystems for knowledge valorisation and innovation through piloting and sharing new practices to support, at early-stage, university spin offs and startups improve their technologies and innovative solutions for

market uptake through engagement with societal actors and end users; Strengthened ecosystems for knowledge valorisation through experimentation to inform policy making in different fields of public policy.

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

- Upgraded guidance and tools and shared innovative best practices for supporting early stage university spinoffs and startups that can benefit from end user feedback to bring their innovative solutions to market
- Upgraded guidance and tools and shared innovative best practices for supporting researchers and innovators that engage in experimentation to better inform policy makers

Scope: This topic contributes toward the implementation of the European Research Area (ERA) with targeted interventions in selected policy areas focused on ecosystem building to support the second ERA Policy Agenda (2025-2027). It addresses actions to upscale knowledge valorisation.

The topics enables progress in the implementation of the structural policy on knowledge valorisation in organisations, broader R&I ecosystems and at national level, through a variety of activities focusing on building new and reinforcing existing ecosystems, including conferences, seminars, trainings, collaborative projects, consensus building, policy advice.

The target groups for this action are research performing organisations (RPO), research funding organisations (RFO), universities, researchers and innovators, university startups and spin offs, intermediary organisations facilitating the uptake of innovations such as science and technology parks, living labs, hubs etc, innovation offices, policymakers

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.

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 the ERA structural policy on knowledge valorisation.

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.

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.

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.

Proposals are expected to envisage a duration of up to 2 years without prejudice to a longer duration if duly justified.

### **Area 1: Piloting societal engagement activities to support university spinoffs and startups**

The objective of this area is to strengthen ecosystems for knowledge valorisation and innovation through supporting end-user and societal engagement activities. These activities will support university spin offs and technology startups to link up to local communities, municipalities, citizens and others stakeholders to integrate end-user feedback and improve their innovative solutions for market uptake.

University spin offs and technology startups need access to excellent support services to commercialise their research and bring their innovations to the market. Beyond the validation of the technologies, there is a need to test the desirability of their products and services with a broader public, learn from citizens' feedback, adapt and improve their value propositions to improve their prospects to collaborate with industrial partners, attract investors and grow locally and internationally.

A variety of organisations such as science parks, technology parks, living labs, hubs, and practitioners in citizen engagement for knowledge valorisation engage societal actors in experimentation practices that aim to support, at early stage, the market uptake and growth of university spin offs and start ups. To be effective, such practices need to align to the fast pace of innovation and integrate skills and methods from different areas, drawing also from the social sciences and humanities, the arts and design. At least the following activities should be included:

- At least 20 pilot actions across Europe enabling university spin offs and technology startups to link up to end-users, municipalities, civil society organisations and other stakeholders to boost up potential for market uptake and growth.
- Development of guidance and tools, including methodologies and best practices for sharing on how to support spin offs and start ups, where it is important to test and validate their innovative solutions to be better fit for society and the market.

### **Area 2: Policy experimentation for enhancing policy uptake**

This action will apply policy experimentation methods to valorise knowledge and research results through informing policy making, thereby leading to increased policy uptake of knowledge and better policies. It will foster collaboration among Member States' public authorities, societal stakeholders, innovation facilitators, academia, research organisations, and businesses to identify policy relevant research outcomes and run experimentation pilots to inform public policies .

Through the experimentation pilots, the action will produce practical guidance, tools, and best practices to help policymakers design policies better informed by research results, creating favourable conditions for knowledge to translate into scalable innovations and policy reforms. At least the following activities should be included:

- At least 20 experimentation pilots in regional, national and transnational level to provide evidence on policy measures that support the uptake of research results, ensuring that knowledge translates into innovation, market adoption, and societal impact.
- Development of guidelines and training programmes for policy makers, businesses, researchers, and intermediaries on applying policy experimentation to enhance knowledge valorisation for policy uptake. A knowledge-sharing interactive platform will disseminate best practices, validated methodologies, and lessons learned.

**HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-05: Pillar III: Citizen engagement for more responsible and democratic R&I**

<b>Call: Enhancing the European R&amp;I system</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	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.
<i>Evaluation Procedure</i>	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.

**Expected Outcome:** This topic aims to connect R&I with citizens and other stakeholders in order to increase trust in science and enhance the relevance and impact of science in ERA, by way of citizen engagement, participation, and science communication.

Applicants are invited to select one of the two areas outlined below, both supporting the implementation of the ERA structural policy “Enhancing Trust in Science through Citizen Participation, Engagement and Science Communication”.

Successful proposals will deliver on the overall expected impact: Increased trust in science and alignment of R&I with society’s needs, expectations and values through greater citizen engagement, participation and science communication.

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

### **Area 1: Citizen science for policy making**

Projects are expected to contribute to the following impacts: Increased engagement of citizens in research and innovation; Enhanced democratisation of science-policy interface.

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

- Improved framework conditions for integrating citizen science into policy-making, including protocols and working modalities fostering the use of citizen science data in policy;
- Improved data practices employed by researchers and experts in citizen science initiatives;
- Awareness raising as regards the contribution of citizen science in tackling societal challenges.

### **Area 2: Guiding principles for inclusive engagement in R&I**

Projects are expected to contribute to the following impacts: Make the R&I ecosystem more participatory and democratic; Improved capacity within the European Research Area to tackle societal challenges.

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

- Improved engagement and cooperation of civil society with researchers, policy makers, communicators, and journalists;
- Common ERA approaches for researchers, policy makers, communication experts in terms of public engagement and science communication;
- Actionable pathways for strengthening the co-creation of R&I by society, and evidence of their effects.

Scope: This topic contributes toward the implementation of the European Research Area (ERA) with targeted interventions in selected areas focused on connecting R&I with citizens and other stakeholders in order to increase trust in science and enhance the relevance and impact of science in ERA, in support of the second ERA Policy Agenda (2025-2027).

This topic addresses the ERA structural policy that aims at enhancing trust in science through citizen participation, engagement and science communication. The structural policy aims to bolster public engagement in R&I and improve science communication through commonly developed guidelines; it equally aims to build more effective mechanisms for including citizen science in policy making and help make socially responsible research and innovation an integral element of research ecosystems.

The topics enable progress in the implementation of this structural policy in organisations, broader R&I ecosystems and at national level, through a variety of activities, including programmes, events, policies and guidelines that implement/promote participatory approaches, co-creation, citizen science and science communication. Proposals should develop activities outlined for the selected area, as well as additional activities contributing to the expected outcomes for the same area.

Proposals should select and clearly identify one area being addressed, choosing from those set out under the expected outcomes and scope of this action.

In all project activities, particular attention should be paid to promoting inclusive gender equality and addressing gender-specific challenges, where relevant.

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: Citizen science for policy making**

The objective of this area is to improve framework conditions and provide adequate standards and working modalities with a view to improving the links between citizen science and policy making.

It should build on the findings of the Mutual Learning Exercise on Citizen Science<sup>71</sup> and on any previous or ongoing relevant initiatives and projects at European or national level<sup>72</sup>. Project activities should target actors such as research performing organisations, research funding organisations, universities, researchers and innovators, and policymakers.

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<sup>71</sup> Funded under the Policy Support Facility, <https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/statistics/policy-support-facility/psf-challenge/mutual-learning-exercise-public-engagement-ri>.

<sup>72</sup> Including projects funded under [HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ERA-01-08](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-60](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-61](#).

At least the following activities should be included:

- Evidence-based recommendations on how to set up policies and protocols supporting data quality (including validation mechanisms), comparability and inter-operability in citizen science for policy making.
- Recommendations in relation to building institutional set-ups (in governmental settings) open to interlinking with Citizen Science. Show how the application of citizen science can be achieved through greater coherence across different levels of governance.
- Evidence of the impact of citizen science on policy change.
- Analysis of differences in regulations and previous engagements with citizens across different ERA member states which can act as barriers to change.
- Raise awareness among researchers and administrators and provide recommendations regarding the provision of incentives for the research community to engage in Citizen Science for policy making. Build relevant communities of practice working on specific societal challenges.

## **Area 2: Guiding principles for inclusive engagement in R&I**

The objective of this area is to develop common ERA approaches for public engagement in R&I and science communication with a view to making open and responsible research and innovation an integral element of research ecosystems.

The action should build on the findings of the Mutual Learning Exercise on Public Engagement in R&I<sup>73</sup>, the [code of practice](#) on citizen engagement for knowledge valorisation, and any previous or ongoing relevant initiatives and projects at European or national level<sup>74</sup>.

The target groups for this action are research performing organisations, research funding organisations, universities, researchers and innovators, policymakers, science communicators, and journalists.

At least the following activities should be included:

- Actionable recommendations for the development of mechanisms (guidelines, funding schemes etc.) for sustainable citizen participation and engagement in R&I in the ERA.
- Evidence base as regards the effectiveness and impact of public engagement in R&I, and science communication.

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<sup>73</sup> Funded under the Policy Support Facility, <https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/statistics/policy-support-facility/psf-challenge/mutual-learning-exercise-public-engagement-ri>.

<sup>74</sup> Including projects funded under [HORIZON-WIDERA-2022-ERA-01-40](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2022-ERA-01-60](#).

- Identify relevant sets of evaluation indicators which can be tailored to fit different policy settings.
- Propose concrete pathways for tackling issues of equity and inclusion in relation to public engagement in R&I.
- Consolidate and disseminate evidence on how to build and enhance trust through open and responsible research and innovation.

**HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-06: Pillar III: European Citizens' Hackathon Championship**

<b>Call: Enhancing the European R&amp;I system</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR N/A and N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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.</p>
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	<p>The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>Beneficiaries must provide financial support to third parties. The financial support to third parties can only be provided in the form of prizes. The maximum amount to be awarded to each third party is EUR 20 000.</p> <p>Subcontracting is not restricted to a limited part of the action.</p>

**Expected Outcome:** Successful proposals will deliver on one or several impacts:

- Raising awareness on societal challenges and research and innovation for new solutions to address them; increased trust in science and broader use of participatory and citizen engagement approaches to create value for market and society;

- Upgrading skills for innovation and entrepreneurship in researchers and citizens across Europe, promoting business mindsets and contributing to new business starts ups that are given exposure at European level and opportunities to grow.

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

- Hundreds of innovative solutions resulting from the co-creation in multidisciplinary teams of researchers and citizens and supported through mentoring, business and technical advice and training to enter the market.

Scope: This action contributes toward the implementation of the European Research Area (ERA) with targeted interventions in selected areas focused on connecting R&I with citizens and other stakeholders in order to upscale knowledge valorisation and enhance the relevance and impact of science in ERA, in support of the second ERA Policy Agenda (2025-2027).

This call topic will address the ERA structural policy that aims at upscaling knowledge valorisation. It will enable researchers and citizens from across Europe to work together in transnational multidisciplinary teams to address societal challenges through existing research results and create new business to take their innovative solutions to the market. The call topic invites a small number of partners including municipalities, regional and city councils, research organisations, business and innovation centres and other organisations, to jointly implement for three consecutive years (2027-2029) an annual, yearlong competition, with the label and methodology of the “European citizens’ hackathon Championship” with impact at local, regional and European level.

The annual competitions will consist of a first-phase of hackathons taking place as physical meetings in a number of locations (cities and communities) across Europe addressing issues that affect peoples’ lives. The theme of the annual competition will be proposed within the first two months of the contract and agreed with the Contracting Authority (for each year). The themes will reflect EU policy priorities.

The winning teams of these first-phase hackathons will then compete at the European level for 3 European Champion teams. The total amount of financial support to the winning teams (in the form of a financial award for winning the competition) cannot exceed €60 000 per year. The final event would also engage broader communities of citizens, researchers, industry, public authorities, investors, business developers and other stakeholders.

Proposals should further develop the concept and brand of the “European citizens’ hackathon Championship”<sup>75</sup> and describe the plan for rolling out the competition for 3 consecutive years and supporting winning teams with the uptake of their solutions.

The 3 cities which will host the final, European level, hackathons should be partners of the consortium or have agreed to associate with the action. The first-phase hackathons should take place in at least 14 physical locations across Europe, and be open to participating teams from all member states and Horizon Europe Associated countries. The detailed programme of

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<sup>75</sup> Provide link to the summary report on the methodology as tested by EU SPARKS (forthcoming)

activities must be delivered within 3 months of contract start and be approved by the Contracting Authority.

Applicants must provide with their proposal commitment letters from the organisations hosting the first-phase hackathons (if not consortium members). Wherever possible, synergies should be sought with other programmes such as “ Science comes to town”, the European Researchers’ Night, the New European Bauhaus festival and others at every step of the championship.

In all project activities, particular attention should be paid to promoting inclusive gender equality and addressing gender-specific challenges, where relevant.

### **HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-07: Pillar III: Science comes town 2028**

<b>Call: Enhancing the European R&amp;I system</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The participating city that the proposal designates as host for EUCYS 2028 must provide as part of the proposal the commitment from its respective National EUCYS Organiser to run the 2028 competition as part of the project (EUCYS National Organiser must either participate as a beneficiary or associated partner or provide a commitment letter).</p>
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	<p>The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>Subcontracting is not restricted to a limited part of the action.</p> <p>Beneficiaries must provide financial support to third parties. The 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.</p>



Expected Outcome: The successful proposal will deliver on the following impact: Increased alignment of research with society's needs, expectations and values.

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.

The action supports a small group of cities to co-organise and host a joint 1-year programme “Science comes to town 2028”, 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) 2028 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) 2028 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 2028, customarily in September. More information can be found on the contest websites (see also specific organisational aspects in the respective background notes)<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup>.

Programmed activities should create a link with the preceding<sup>78</sup> 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 Member 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:

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<sup>76</sup> [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/eucys\\_en](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](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/eu-talenton_en).

<sup>77</sup> <https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/actions/msca-citizens>.

<sup>78</sup> See "Science comes to town 2027" in WIDERA work programme 2025, link to be added.

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 2028”, 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:

EUCYS: €70 000

EU TalentOn: €100 000

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

#### **HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-08: Pillar IV: Advancing Knowledge for ERA**

<b>Call: Enhancing the European R&amp;I system</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR N/A and N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Evaluation Procedure</i>	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.

Expected Outcome: This topic aims to create new knowledge to support design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of ERA policy areas, including inclusive gender equality, research careers, research ethics and integrity, and open science. Applicants are invited to select one of the areas outlined below.

All successful proposals will deliver on the overall expected impact: Strengthened monitoring and evaluation of progress and evidence-based policy-making by creating new information and knowledge for the implementation of ERA policies.

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

**Area 1: Assessing reproducibility in research by direct replication of scientific findings**

Projects will contribute to the ERA Structural Policy “Enabling open science via sharing and re-use of data, including through the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC)” and to the following impact: Increased reproducibility, trustworthiness and transparency of scientific research.

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

- New knowledge and methodologies through independent, direct replication studies of selected high-impact research findings are available to researchers, citizens and policy makers;
- New innovative approaches are available to researchers and open science experts to conduct and incentivise the replication of scientific findings;
- Sustainable engagement and collaboration in replication of scientific findings have been established across research communities.

**Area 2: Ethics of new and emerging technologies with high socio-economic impact: space exploration/exploitation and neurotechnology**

Projects will contribute to the ERA Action “A harmonised framework to support integrity and ethics in R&I in the face of emerging challenges” and to the following impact: An improved ethical knowledge and expertise among researchers, ethics experts and policy makers in the field of space exploration/exploitation and neurotechnology enables an effective protection and promotion of EU values and fundamental rights and creates a sustainable competitive advantage at global level for the Union’s ground-breaking technologies.

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

- Researchers and ethics professionals have explored, analysed and identified new knowledge in relation the ethical and societal impact of emerging technologies in the fields of space exploration/exploitation and neurosciences;
- A robust ethics and integrity framework supports researchers, ethics experts and policy makers in addressing the ethical concerns in an effective manner in line with research integrity and responsible governance for emerging technologies and their applications in space exploration/exploitation and neurosciences;

- Improved communication and dissemination actions have raised awareness and understanding of key stakeholders, e.g. policy makers, researchers, innovators, and the general public, about the ethical aspects of emerging technologies in the field of space exploration/exploitation and neurosciences.

### **Area 3: Mapping and promoting the inclusive gender equality and policies in R&D intensive firms**

Projects will contribute to the ERA Structural Policy “Strengthening inclusive and intersectional gender equality in the ERA” and to the following impacts: Strengthened gender equality and inclusiveness across the ERA, leading to increased innovativeness, research excellence and economic growth; Increased representation of women and underrepresented groups in R&D intensive private firms.

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

- Better understanding by researchers, research organisations, ERA stakeholders and policy-makers of the current state of inclusive gender equality in R&D intensive firms thanks to a mapping of existing policies, measures, and initiatives;
- Researchers, research organisations, ERA stakeholders, and policy-makers have access to effective methods, strategies, and tools to promote and support the adoption of inclusive gender equality policies in R&D intensive firms;
- R&D intensive firms are provided with tailored support, including capacity building, resources, guidance and tools to implement inclusive gender equality policies and practices.

### **Area 4: Advancing gender-responsive R&I through budgeting, expenditure tracking, and monitoring and evaluation of the integration of gender dimension in R&I content**

Projects will contribute to the ERA Structural Policy “Strengthening inclusive and intersectional gender equality in the ERA” and to the following impacts: Strengthened gender equality and inclusiveness across the ERA, leading to increased innovativeness, research excellence and economic growth; More innovative and socially relevant R&I outcomes and more equitable allocation of R&I funding and resources, ensuring that research priorities and investments proactively address gender inequalities and intersectional considerations, fostering a more diverse and inclusive research ecosystem.

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

- Research performing and funding organisations, as well as policy makers at national and EU level, have improved capacity to systematically monitor, evaluate, and strengthen the integration of gender dimension, in R&I content, including intersectional perspective;

- Standardised principles, methodologies and tools for gender-responsive budgeting and expenditure tracking for research performing and funding organisations, as well as for national and EU level are developed;
- Stakeholders and policy-makers benefit from improved access to high-quality disaggregated data and transparent reporting on gender dimension in R&I content, including intersectional perspective, and R&I expenditure, facilitating more informed and inclusive decision-making, and the development of more inclusive and socially relevant innovations.

#### **Area 5: Assessing research careers in the private sector and trends of inter-sectoral research careers, along with their effects on the EU R&I ecosystem**

Projects will contribute to the ERA Structural Policy “Making research careers more attractive and sustainable” and to the following impact: Robust theoretical and empirical knowledge addressing the previous knowledge gap on research careers in the private sector and supporting policy making through better understanding of the labour structure and dynamics of the R&I system.

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

- All actors of the R&I ecosystem have access to improved knowledge regarding the structure and deployment of research careers in the private business and industrial sector and of careers that deploy across various sectors;
- All actors of the R&I ecosystem are better aware of the types of knowledge flows that inter-sectoral mobility and careers trigger;
- Stakeholders and policymakers benefit from an improved set of tools to conceptualise, measure and assess research careers in the private business sector and careers that deploy across various sectors.

#### **Area 6: Mapping and assessing knowledge and researchers flows within global research networks**

Projects will contribute to the ERA Structural Policy “Making research careers more attractive and sustainable” and to the following impacts: New concepts, methods, tools and evidence assessing the relevance of global research collaboration networks for the EU R&I ecosystem in particular for shaping research careers and research agendas; Enhanced understanding of the scientific and socio-political impact and relevance of global research collaboration networks.

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

- All actors in the R&I system have access to improved knowledge regarding the establishment, development and functioning of research collaboration networks that span across the EU and the rest of the world and of the effects of these networks in the configuration of research careers and research fields;

- Stakeholders and policymakers benefit from a better understanding of the knowledge and talent that flow throughout the global research collaboration networks in which the EU is involved.

Scope: This topic contributes toward the implementation of the European Research Area (ERA) with targeted interventions in selected policy areas focused on creating new knowledge that supports design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of ERA policies. It addresses areas including inclusive gender equality, research careers, ethics and integrity, and open science, and the global approach to research and innovation.

This topic will enable progress in the implementation of selected ERA Actions and structural policies in organisations, broader R&I ecosystems and at national level. This call topic supports a wide variety of activities to enable progress in the implementation of the ERA actions and structural policies by enabling a wide array of research and innovation activities, including to develop and improve research approaches, concepts, methodologies, processes, solutions, technical specifications, testing/demonstration.

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 or structural policy. Proposals should develop activities outlined for the selected area, as well as additional activities contributing to the expected outcomes for the same area.

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

### **Area 1: Assessing reproducibility in research by direct replication of scientific findings**

This area aims to contribute to the objectives of the ERA Structural Policy on open science for what concerns practices for open sharing, seamless access, and reliable re-use of research data, centred on the FAIR principles. Practices that increase the reproducibility of scientific results<sup>5</sup> contribute to higher reuse of these results and to increased efficiency, trustworthiness, and overall quality of research.

The area aims to support the replication of significant findings across different scientific fields, addressing both technical and societal challenges related to research reproducibility. Proposals must build on prior art in replication practices and demonstrate their capacity and ability to perform and conclude the independent direct replication of the findings of the identified studies within the means and duration of the project. Funded actions are expected to adhere to best practices in open science and reproducibility, and to develop policy recommendations based on their activities for advancing reproducibility of scientific results.

The project activities should involve the relevant actors, including researchers, scientific service and infrastructure providers and open science experts. At least the following activities should be included:

- Conduct independent, direct replication of the findings of specified high-impact, influential studies from selected research domains, using state-of-the-art methodologies. These should include both experimental and computational studies, including cases where the original findings have been controversial, or where replication studies are needed to confirm or refine the results.
- Develop innovative, systematic approaches to replication studies, considering different scientific fields' unique challenges. This includes both novel experimental methods and improved computational or simulation-based approaches.
- Assess the findings of the replication studies, and develop and disseminate best practices and concrete, field-specific recommendations for increased reproducibility of scientific findings based on their activities.
- Examine the common challenges that cut across the selected research domains and develop solutions that can be generalized or adapted to multiple fields.
- Develop and test innovative models to incentivise researchers to participate in replication studies.
- Foster community-building activities and networking to support the establishment of long-term collaborations on replication practices.

## **Area 2: Ethics of new and emerging technologies with high socio-economic impact: Space exploration/exploitation and neurotechnology**

This area addresses the ERA Action that aims towards increased knowledge and understanding of an 'ethics-by design' approach to research and innovation and an efficient use of ethics integrity and values for emerging technologies in the field of space exploration/exploitation and neurosciences.

The objective of this area is to define related challenges and design a robust ethical framework that encompasses tools for training and capacity building while increasing awareness and knowledge to identify the ethical and societal impact of the new and emerging technologies and safeguard fundamental values while increasing EU competitiveness and benefits for all EU citizens.

The action should build on the results of previous or ongoing relevant initiatives and projects at European and/or national level addressing ethics-related aspects.<sup>79</sup> Proposals should include structured cooperation with the e-platform Embassy of Good Science,<sup>80</sup> as well as relevant

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<sup>79</sup> Including for example, projects funded under [H2020 SwafS-18-2016](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2024-ERA-01-12](#). See examples of how Horizon Europe supports the ERA policy priorities, <https://european-research-area.ec.europa.eu/era-horizon-europe>.

<sup>80</sup> The Embassy of Good Science is the one-stop-shop platform supported by the European Commission for sharing knowledge and training tools on ethics and research integrity, [https://embassy.science/wiki/Main\\_Page](https://embassy.science/wiki/Main_Page).



European networks.<sup>81</sup> The project activities should target relevant actors, including researchers, ethics experts, members of national and local ethics committees/bodies, policy makers, the general public. At least the following activities should be included:

- Identify and study the ethical challenges and implications to be addressed by researchers, ethics experts, national and local ethics committees/bodies in relation to the R&I on emerging technologies, including:
  - o Space exploration and exploitation, e.g., What are the risks and benefits for the integrity and dignity of human beings? How to minimise harm and maximise beneficence? How to ensure a responsible and sustainable use of space resources?
  - o Neurotechnology, e.g., What are the risks to autonomy, privacy and human dignity, cognitive liberty and mental integrity in relation to neurotechnology and AI integration?
- Engage with relevant stakeholders to improve understanding of the risks to fundamental rights and ethical aspects.
- Develop a robust ethics and integrity framework and training materials to support the EU, national and local level actors to apply an ‘ethics by design’ principle in the fields studied.
- Develop and implement communication and citizen engagement tools to provide open and transparent information on the studied ethical aspects to enable public trust.

### **Area 3: Mapping and promoting the inclusive gender equality and policies in R&D intensive firms**

This area addresses the ERA structural policy on strengthening inclusive and intersectional gender equality in the ERA. It aims at increasing knowledge, successful policies and strategies addressing persistent gender and diversity gaps in R&D intensive firms<sup>82</sup>.

The project activities should target research performing organisations, higher education organisations, and other R&I stakeholders (networks, etc.). Participation of private sector organisations, including R&D intensive firms, in the projects is encouraged. Proposals should build on and complement outcomes of any previous or ongoing relevant initiatives and projects at European or national level<sup>83</sup>.

Projects are invited to focus on selected thematic areas, including small and medium-sized enterprises, start-ups, scale-ups, specific R&I performance fields, economic sectors, or a certain

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<sup>81</sup> E.g., European Network of Research Ethics Committees ([EUREC](#)), European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities ([ALLEA](#)).

<sup>82</sup> See, e.g. [The 2024 EU Industrial R&D Investment Scoreboard | IRI](#).

<sup>83</sup> Including projects funded under [HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-80](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2022-ERA-01-80](#), and [SwafS-26-2020](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-04](#) (link to be added once WP 2025 is adopted).

geographic scope, facing persisting gender and diversity gaps. At least the following activities should be included:

- Comprehensively map inclusive gender equality policies and practices in R&D intensive firms, involving a literature review, data collection and analysis to identify current gaps, challenges, needs, and conditions that enable their successful implementation;
- Explore methods and strategies to increase engagement R&D intensive firms, including participation of women and underrepresented groups;
- Develop and disseminate tailored capacity building, tools and resources for R&D intensive firms to facilitate adoption and implementation of inclusive GEPs and policies and practices.

#### **Area 4: Advancing gender-responsive R&I through budgeting, expenditure tracking, and monitoring and evaluation of the integration of a gender dimension in R&I content**

This area addresses the ERA structural policy on strengthening inclusive and intersectional gender equality in the ERA. Its objective is to define principles and develop a methodology for gender-responsive budgeting and expenditure tracking in R&I, and to develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation approach to assess the integration of a gender dimension in R&I content, including the intersectional perspective. The scope of the outcomes will target research organisations, funding bodies, as well as national and EU level.

The project activities should target research performing and funding organisations, higher education institutions, public bodies. The action should build on existing projects and activities, and other relevant initiatives<sup>84</sup>. At least the following activities should be included:

- Review existing knowledge, frameworks and practices employed by relevant stakeholders.
- Develop principles for gender-responsive budgeting and expenditure tracking, including a standardised methodology that incorporates an intersectional perspective in collaboration with the ERA Forum sub-group on inclusive gender equality in the ERA<sup>3</sup> (subgroup) by 2027.
- Create guidelines, criteria, and metrics to assess and guide the integration of gender dimension in R&I content, including the intersectional perspective, through co-creation with the sub-group by 2027.
- Design monitoring and reporting mechanisms, such as a publicly accessible database, that provide disaggregated data on gender equality and intersectional characteristics in R&I expenditure and showcase related outcomes.

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<sup>84</sup> Including projects funded under [SwafS-02-2016](#), [SwafS-08-2017](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-80](#), [HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-81](#); projects [BUDGET IT](#) (funded under [HORIZON-WIDERA-2022-ERA-01-81](#)) and [LeTSGEPs](#) (funded under [SwafS-09-2018-2019-2020](#)); [GEAM tool](#).

- Cooperate with key stakeholders and use engagement activities and participatory approaches to involve under-represented groups, where relevant.
- Build capacity and foster mutual learning among relevant stakeholders through targeted workshops, seminars, and training sessions.

#### **Area 5: Assessing research careers in the private sector and trends of inter-sectoral research careers, along with their effects on the EU R&I ecosystem**

The topic aims to support the ERA structural policy on ‘[Making research careers more attractive and sustainable](#)’. This structural policy aims to foster the interoperability and comparability of research careers across sectors and countries; to strengthen researchers’ skills to foster careers; to broaden the spectrum of career opportunities; and work towards a more balanced circulation of talents, including intersectoral flows.

To support the achievement of these goals new knowledge is needed regarding researchers working in the business enterprise sector, which employs almost half of the researchers (48%)<sup>85</sup> working in the EU. The objective of this area is to collect empirical and conceptual knowledge on the specific characteristics and trends of the EU population of researchers working for the private business sector. In addition, the area is expected to provide new insights on the logics underpinning research careers.

Universities and other research performing organisations are expected to implement the action, in cooperation with relevant business sector actors where relevant. Results should benefit policy makers, as well as research organisations and individual researchers. At least the following activities should be included:

- Conduct quantitative and qualitative analyses of characteristics and trends of the EU population of researchers working in the private business sector.
- Analyse the logics underpinning research careers in the private sector, as well as across private sector and other R&I performing sectors.
- Analyse the role played by private sector research careers and by the intersectoral mobility of researchers in the diffusion and valorisation of knowledge across the EU R&I ecosystem.
- Provide recommendations for action at European, national and stakeholders level to improve the attractiveness of careers in the public and private sectors.

#### **Area 6: Mapping and assessing knowledge and researchers flows within global research networks**

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<sup>85</sup> EUROSTAT Data, Researchers by sectors of performance – head count. Latest data available from 2021. [Database - Eurostat](#).

This topic contributes to ERA structural policies on ‘Making research careers more attractive and sustainable’ and ‘Global approach to research and innovation’ which looks into the ERA’s international dimension.

European researchers are key contributors to international research communities and collaboration networks. This action aims at increasing empirical and conceptual knowledge regarding the relevance of such networks in the shaping of research fields and research careers in the EU, in encouraging knowledge flows across the EU and the rest of the world, and in tackling societal challenges and opening up spaces for international cooperation that go beyond the performance of scientific research.

Universities and other research performing organisations are expected to implement the action, in cooperation with additional stakeholders where relevant. Results should benefit policy makers in national and supranational administrations, as well as research organisations and individual researchers. At least the following activities should be included:

- Analyse the relevance of global research collaboration networks in the shaping of research fields and research careers in the EU.
- Analyse the relevance of global research collaboration networks in encouraging knowledge flows across the EU and the rest of the world.
- Analyse the functions and relevance of global research collaboration networks in tackling societal challenges and opening-up spaces for international cooperation that may go beyond the performance of scientific research, including the sphere of scientific diplomacy.
- Provide recommendations for action at European, national and stakeholders level to improve the attractiveness of research careers.

**HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-ERA-01: Collaborative actions for ERA policy implementation**

<b>Call: Enhancing the European R&amp;I system</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR N/A and N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions

<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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.</p>
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Expected Outcome: 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 contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

- Increased number of R&I organisations with policies, practices and skills aligned with ERA policy agenda;
- Stronger buy-in and ownership of the ERA policies and practices, reflecting stakeholder needs and increasing their commitment.
- Evidence-based adjustments to policies and practices through pilots and experimentation.

Scope: This topic invites different types of actors in the European R&I ecosystem to propose activities that support the implementation of the structural policies of the ERA Policy Agenda, including:

- Enabling open science via sharing and re-use of data, including through EOSC;
- Strengthening inclusive and intersectional gender equality in the ERA;
- Making research careers more attractive and sustainable;
- Reforming Research Assessment;
- Upscaling knowledge valorisation capacities and activities;
- Enhancing trust in science through citizen participation, engagement and science communication.

The action supports a wide variety of activities to enable progress in the implementation of these structural policies in organisations, broader R&I ecosystems and at national level. Project activities should reach large communities of stakeholders (either a group of individual organisations, networks or alliances of organisations, or surrounding ecosystem actors), including for example, research performing organisations, research funding organisations, universities, researchers and innovators, and policymakers. Stakeholder needs should be 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.

In all project activities, particular attention should be paid to promoting inclusive gender equality and addressing gender-specific challenges. Proposals are expected to envisage a duration of up to 3 years without prejudice to a longer duration if duly justified.

Proposals should consider activities that complement the topics planned under the call HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07, focusing on the uptake of ERA structural policies, and may include:

- Capacity-building activities: organisation of workshops, training, and mentoring to develop the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to adopt new policies and practices;
- Stakeholder engagement and consultation: discussions with researchers, policymakers, and all other stakeholders; this may include co-creation and participatory design to ensure inclusion and broad uptake;
- Knowledge sharing and best practices: showcasing applications and achievements ERA policies and practices, building partnerships and networks;
- Pilots and experimentation: testing new approaches for ERA policy implementation, for example, in thematic contexts.

**HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-ERA-02: Talent Ecosystems for attractive early research careers**

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

Expected Outcome: The 2020 Commission Communication on ‘A New ERA for Research and Innovation’ underlined the importance of adequate framework conditions to support research

careers in Europe. Action 4 of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 – “Promote attractive and sustainable research careers, balanced talent circulation and international, transdisciplinary and inter-sectoral mobility across the ERA” - annexed to the November 2021 Council Conclusions on the ‘Future governance of the European Research Area’ foresees the development of a European framework for research careers, together with the upgrade of existing instruments and initiatives, including the revision of the Charter for Researchers. It also includes amongst its expected outcomes the development of new instruments to support research careers, such as the one proposed with this call topic.

This action will promote implementing the standards for attractive careers as laid down in the new Charter for Researchers and the Council recommendation on a European framework for research careers<sup>86</sup>, responding to the political call for “labour market players to join forces for attractive careers”. It will support cooperation between academic, private and public sector entities at organisational level to create ecosystems that ensure attractive early research careers perspectives, provide researchers with skill sets that match labour market requirements, thus providing the talent pool needed for a truly functioning internal market for knowledge. Projects are expected to contribute to the following outcomes:

- Establishment of ecosystems for research positions, in particular for early stage researchers, in academia, R&I performing institutions and businesses, connecting research training providers (in particular academia) and the researchers’ labour market (such as businesses, universities, research and technology organisations and government entities), supplying employers with skilled research talent that match labour market needs, including skills needs from the Green Deal, digital transition, and deep tech;
- Wide implementation of the standards for attractive researcher careers as laid out in the new Charter for Researchers, leading to more attractive, more diverse and more interoperable careers for researchers across all sectors, contributing to a better-balanced and sustainable circulation of skilled and entrepreneurial workforce;
- Improved early careers researchers’ competences and employability within and beyond academia, as well as career interoperability between sectors.

Scope: The action supports consortia to create ‘talent ecosystems’ with a large pool of research and innovation positions operating under good training and working conditions in line with the new Charter for Researchers and the Council recommendation on a European framework for research careers, providing non-academic organisations, particularly businesses, with well-skilled researchers and other R&I talents, thereby increasing employability of early career researchers and improving interoperability of their careers between sectors.

This action particularly supports whole organisations and innovation ecosystems to implement the standards for attractive research careers laid down in the Charter for Researchers. A special

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<sup>86</sup> Charter for Researchers, annexed to the Council recommendation C/2023/1640 of 18 December 2023 on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe (OJ C, C/2023/1640, 29.12.2023), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C\\_202301640](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C_202301640).

focus is placed on organisational change in support of early career researchers<sup>87</sup>, to offer them more and better career opportunities, including through strengthened coordination of measures at European, national, and regional level and increased cooperation between academia, industry, government and public sector.

The action is expected to be implemented by consortia consisting of both training providers (in particular academia) and employers of researchers (academia and organisations from non-academic sector, in particular businesses<sup>88</sup>) from across the European Research Area, creating connected “talent ecosystems” that allow the free flow of talents and create attractive perspectives for researchers’ careers within this ecosystem and beyond. A talent ecosystem for researchers is to be understood as a cohesive and interdependent system that encompasses various elements related to HR management of research talent. It can be thematic (e.g., targeted to R&I on climate, pharma, automotive, music industry) or have a more comprehensive target. It is designed to adapt to the evolving needs of the researcher labour market and the different occupations for researchers across sectors along the R1-R4 profiles, ensuring more customised training, career development and talent flowthrough. Such ecosystem is built around delivering a better employee experience and aligning with frequently changing priorities; it is agile and flexible to environmental shifts in the R&I system, such as changing labour market dynamics and skills needs. It provides distinct strategies for managing different research profiles, essential for competing in the global labour market, while delivering skilled research talent that match European labour market needs.

Consortia are expected to mainstream the Charter’s principles and good working conditions across all participating organisations, which need to demonstrate in the application a high ambition as to the number of (new or existing) research positions that will benefit from the organisational change within the duration of the grant, ultimately leading to coverage of all its research staff. Participating organisations are expected to have received the HR Excellence in Research Award (HRS4R<sup>89</sup>) or commit to apply the new Charter for Researchers and commit to its implementation (i.e., start the HRS4R process) within the grant duration, as far as relevant for their operations linked to the employment of researchers.

This action does not support salaries and mobility of individual researchers or teams of researchers. Instead, this action supports activities that lead to organisational change for more

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<sup>87</sup> Early career researchers: First Stage Researchers, doing research under supervision up to the point of a PhD or equivalent level of competence and experience, and Recognised Researchers, with a PhD or equivalent level of competence and experience who are not yet fully independent in their ability to develop their own research, attract funding, or lead a research group; R1 and R2 profiles in the Council recommendation ([https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C\\_202301640](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C_202301640)). R1 and R2 profiles should be considered early-career researchers.

<sup>88</sup> *Non-academic sector* means any socio-economic actor not included in the academic sector e.g., industry, SMEs, independent research infrastructures (e.g., ERICs), government, non-academic public bodies, private research organisations, civil society organisations, international organisations, cultural institutions, hospitals, etc. *Academic sector* means public or private higher education establishments awarding academic degrees, public non-profit research organisations for whom one of the main objectives is to pursue research or technological development, and International European Research Organisations (IERO).

<sup>89</sup> HR Excellence in Research Award: <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/hrs4r>.



attractive research careers in line with the needs of R&I labour market players, towards the creation of sustainable talent ecosystems.

Funding will support implementation of good working conditions and reinforce flowthrough of talents between sectors, towards better employability of talent trained as researcher and increased interoperability of research careers between academia and non-academic sector entities. Activities can include (non-exhaustive list) the mapping of challenges, the development of action plans to bring the organisations in line with the new Charter for Researchers, scaling excellence in HR, and networking and relationship building for connecting the talent ecosystem partners. On a more practical level, activities could include the roll out of ResearchComp<sup>90</sup> in the organisational training and career development activities, the establishment of career services and training systems for early career researchers, the involvement of non-academic sector in the training of researchers, and relationship building between sectors for talent circulation.

This action is a pilot, testing the principles for a future investment strategy for attractive research careers at whole organisation and ecosystem level. Actions are therefore expected to provide policy feedback to the European Commission and Member States on the progress made, the success generated, and the obstacles encountered. Grants can have a duration of up to 3 years; a longer duration is possible if duly justified.

#### **HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-ERA-03: Science comes to town 2029**

<b>Call: Enhancing the European R&amp;I system</b>	
<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR N/A million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR N/A million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The participating city that the proposal designates as host for EUCYS 2029 must provide as part of the proposal the commitment from its respective National EUCYS Organiser to run the 2029 competition as part of the project (EUCYS National Organiser must either participate as a beneficiary or associated partner or provide a commitment letter).</p>

<sup>90</sup> ResearchComp: skills and competencies framework for researchers ([https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/jobs-research/researchcomp-european-competence-framework-researchers\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/jobs-research/researchcomp-european-competence-framework-researchers_en)).

	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.
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	<p>The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>Subcontracting is not restricted to a limited part of the action.</p> <p>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.</p>

Expected Outcome: The successful proposal will deliver on the following impact: Increased alignment of research with society's needs, expectations and values.

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.

The action supports a small group of cities to co-organise and host a joint 1-year programme "Science comes to town 2029", 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) 2029 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) 2029 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 2029, customarily in September. More information can be found on the contest websites (see also specific organisational aspects in the respective background notes)<sup>91</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup>.

Programmed activities should create a link with the preceding<sup>93</sup> 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 Member 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

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<sup>91</sup> [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/eucys\\_en](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](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/eu-talenton_en).

<sup>92</sup> <https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/actions/msca-citizens>.

<sup>93</sup> See "Science comes to town 2026" in WIDERA work programme 2023-2025 and "Science comes to town 2027" in WIDERA work programme 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](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).

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 2029”, 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:

EUCYS: €70 000

EU TalentOn: €100 000

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

## **PRIZES**

### **1. EU Award for Gender Equality Champions 2026-2027**

#### Expected Outcomes:

- Enable the development of a European community of academic and research champions in institutional transformation towards inclusive gender equality;
- Strengthening of the inclusiveness and connectivity objectives under the new European Research Area.

The “EU Award for Gender Equality Champions” is a recognition prize scheme meant as a booster and a complement to the requirement for higher education establishments, research organisations and public bodies applying to Horizon Europe to have in place a Gender Equality Plan (GEP)<sup>94</sup>, and as a tool for advancing inclusive gender equality plans and policies in the framework of the new European Research Area (ERA) Policy Agenda.

The Award is also an enabler for the transformation agenda for universities set forth in the new ERA, in synergy with the European Education Area (EEA) and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA, Bologna process), and in line with the Communication on a European Strategy for Universities adopted on 18 January 2022.

The Prize will be awarded to four academic or research organisations, and contestants can apply to one among the following three prize categories:

- Sustainable Gender Equality Champions: Organisations that can demonstrate a significant and sustained record of activity and a high level of achievement through the implementation of their GEP(s);
- Newcomer Gender Equality Champions: Organisations that have recently finalised the implementation of their first GEP and can demonstrate the most progress achieved through its implementation;
- Inclusive Gender Equality Champions: Organisations that have developed the most innovative inclusive GEP – i.e. a GEP addressing intersections between gender and at least two other social categories, such as racial or ethnic origin, social origin, sexual orientation and gender identity (LGBTIQ) or disability – and can demonstrate concrete results obtained through its implementation.

Each prize winner will receive EUR 0.1 million.

Contestants can only apply to one of the three prize categories.

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<sup>94</sup> See General Annexes to the Horizon Europe Work Programme (Gender equality plans and gender mainstreaming in Annex Part B – Eligibility)

In addition to the complete application, contestants may be asked at a later stage for further documents (*for legal entity validation, bank account validation, ethics review, declaration of honour, etc.*) or for a short video message on their achievements in the chosen Prize category. This video will be used for communication purposes only.

Essential award criteria: Eligible applications will be evaluated in each category by a jury consisting of a group of independent experts.

Eligibility criteria: The contestant must be a public or private research performing organisation, including a higher education establishment, located in an EU Member State or a country associated to Horizon Europe<sup>95</sup>.

Applicants that have already received an EU or Euratom prize cannot receive a second prize for the same activities.

The specific rules of the contest will be published each year by the European Commission (on the [Funding & Tenders Portal](#) but also actively publicised elsewhere to maximise participation), which will directly launch and manage the contest and award the prize based on the judgement of independent experts.

Form of Funding: Prizes

Type of Action: Recognition Prize

Indicative budget: N/A

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<sup>95</sup> In accordance with the Horizon Europe Rules for participation, due to the specific policy requirements, to the nature and objectives of the action, the type of legal entity and the place of establishment are limited to research performing organisations among legal entities falling under the eligibility criterion on the requirement to have a Gender Equality Plan in place (see General Annexes to the Horizon Europe Work Programme).

## **GRANTS TO IDENTIFIED BENEFICIARIES**

### **1. COST (European Co-operation in Science and Technology)**

The European Commission funds almost the entire programme under a Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) with underlying Specific Grant Agreements (SGAs). In the FPA and the SGAs the beneficiary COST Association commits to a mandatory conditionality to spend at least 50% of the budget at the benefit of researchers from Widening countries and to run 80% of the activities with a significant widening dimension. This specific grant agreement covers the expenditures for a duration of two years. The primary purpose of this grant is the implementation of the COST networking actions. Other services may be implemented as far as complementary and appropriate.

COST will reinforce and intensify its services and value adding activities to foster the career development of young researchers by dedicated activities such as COST Academy, leadership roles in COST networks, cross-cutting actions and potentially new initiatives in line with the general objectives and rules of the COST Framework. In particular, COST will update the training catalogue with new elements about ERA priorities, upskilling researchers to meet ERA policy objectives, and regularly communicate ERA policy developments to the COST scientific community in collaboration with the EC. This will be followed up by dedicated KPIs still to be defined.

The personnel costs operations incurred by the COST Association as the implementing structure are eligible as direct cost up to a maximum of 14,7 million Euro as far as they are necessary for the implementation of the COST networking actions and related other support activities. For the same purpose cost for other goods and services and subcontracting are eligible up to a cumulated maximum of 2,3 million Euro. COST networking actions will be implemented by third party grant holders using financial support to third parties.

The beneficiary may provide financial support to third parties in the form of grants. The maximum amount to be granted to each third party must be necessary to meet the objectives of the SGA and will be fixed in the grant agreement in line with the COST Vademecum. It will be used for the implementation of networking tools defined in a closed list that is fixed in the description of the action.

The COST Association will organise competitive open calls and an independent evaluation and selection procedure according to its own rules in agreement with the European Commission. At proposal stage at least 50% of the participants must be located in Widening countries.

This grant will be awarded without a call for proposals according to Article 195(e) of the Financial Regulation and Article 24(3)(b) of the Horizon Europe Regulation

#### Legal entities:

COST Association, Avenue du Boulevard - Bolwerklaan 21, 1210 Brussels

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: Q2 2026

Indicative budget: N/A

## **2. Futures Hubs for the R&I foresight community**

This action takes place within the broader context of the Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe, particularly the priority given to anticipatory policy making. It supports the continuation of the functioning of the Futures4Europe platform and further development of the EU-wide foresight community, inter alia by expanding its scope and by adding dedicated thematic hubs. It is set to include stronger thematic and capacity-building elements, and to update its delivery methods and media formats. Thematic “Futures Hubs” will be set up, i.e., online platforms to facilitate the interaction between the European R&I foresight practitioners, policymakers and the scientific community, as well as with citizens. Audiovisual and multi-media formats for foresight literacy and dissemination will be pioneered in these Futures Hubs to connect the foresight community with wider segments of society, especially young generations. By financing this additional capacity building in the R&I foresight landscape, it is expected that this action generates sufficient achievements and momentum for Member States and Associated Countries to increasingly support the resulting network and infrastructure.

### Expected outcomes:

- Strengthened cooperation, networking, capacities, and co-creation within the European foresight community (including through roadshows and virtual "Futures Hubs.");
- Improved foresight literacy among policymakers and citizens;
- Increased awareness of foresight as a tool for education, policy, and careers, and engagement of younger generations (through a better access to online training, mutual learning exercises, and audiovisual content for social media);
- More R&I policies and long-term strategies effectively integrate strategic intelligence and foresight.

### Expected impact:

- Strengthened integration of foresight results into R&I policy cycles through enhanced exchanges between decision-makers, researchers, and the European R&I foresight community;



- Stimulated future-oriented discussions on science, technology, and more resilient and future-proof R&I policy;
- Broader adoption of new methodologies and formats for strategic intelligence, tailored to the R&I ecosystem, and the development of context-specific foresight activities.

The evaluation committee will be composed fully by representatives of EU institutions.

Legal entities:

Unitatea Executiva pentru Finantarea Invatamantului Superior, a Cercetarii, Dezvoltarii si Inovarii (UEFISCDI), Str D. I. Mendeleev 21-25, Bucuresti 010362, Romania

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 2026

Indicative budget: N/A

### **3. Promotion and valorisation of the ERA policy agendas results and related activities**

The implementation of the activities of the ERA policy agendas and related ERA policies will be supported with a range of actions under the different parts of the Horizon Europe Work Programme, and in particular, under the WIDERA work programme. Many of these actions will produce results that require a broad uptake by Member States, associated countries and their stakeholders. In addition, the ERA Forum (Commission expert group) and its subgroups are supporting the implementation and coordination of ERA activities. This action will support these activities by wide dissemination of results at national and regional level, facilitate their use and tailor them to the needs of the different communities, and continue to build a community of practitioners that support mutual learning and exchange.

In particular, the implementation and valorisation of the ERA activities will be supported through the following outcomes:

- An engaged and interconnected community of research and innovation practitioners and stakeholders, in particular at national and regional level, aware of the opportunities in the European Research Area and the activities of the ERA policy agendas;
- Increased visibility of the ERA at national level with results of the ERA policy agenda activities being taken up across Member States and associated countries;

- Effective coordination and sharing of information across Member States and stakeholders, through suitable formats, such as mutual learning from their implementation of ERA policy agenda activities;
- A coherent approach to communication on the ERA as a recognisable and lasting concept by contributing to the [ERA Policy Platform](#) as the centralised access point for information and its visual identity;
- Improved availability and access to policy feedback from the ERA community and research and innovation practitioners on the implementation of the ERA policy agendas and related activities.

In order to support the achievement of the ERA objectives across the EU, the beneficiary needs to demonstrate that it covers the Member States in a geographically comprehensive way, as well as the capacity to provide or access expertise related to all relevant ERA activities.

Procedure: The evaluation committee will be fully composed by representatives of EU institutions.

Legal entities:

Consortium coordinated by DEUTSCHES ZENTRUM FÜR LUFT - UND RAUMFAHRT EV,  
Linder Höhe, 51147 Köln

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: Q3 2026

Indicative budget: N/A

#### **4. Project Nexus: Advancing EURAXESS operational excellence**

Project Nexus will transform [EURAXESS](#), an EU initiative that supports researchers by providing information and services on job opportunities, funding, and mobility across Europe and beyond, making it more efficient, responsive, and digitally connected. By streamlining internal processes and strengthening collaboration among network members, EURAXESS will be better equipped to support research professionals and organisations. Continued investment in initiatives that engage network members will be crucial. A well-functioning and responsive EURAXESS contributes to a stronger R&I system and overall competitiveness.

Within the project's scope, new governance and operational models will be explored and implemented in close collaboration with all relevant stakeholders. Simplification will be key, including but not limited to greater digitalisation to increase efficiency.

At the same time, work should continue on crucial areas such as career development, international and intersectoral mobility and integration support, supporting research professionals at risk, and promoting gender equality. While new content should be developed that is aligned with the existing content, clearly defined publication and dissemination channels for new content will ensure maximum impact and it must be clear how this will aligns.

A network-wide outreach strategy will be developed and tested to ensure that efforts across EURAXESS are coordinated and effectively increase its visibility among target audiences.

While the project mainly focuses on internal improvements, the EURAXESS Europe network must also strengthen its collaboration with EURAXESS Worldwide and other initiatives within the [ERA Talent Platform](#), including the HR Excellence in Research Award, RESAVER, ResearchComp, RM Comp, and the European Research and Innovation Careers Observatory.

Furthermore, EURAXESS will explore formal partnerships with other networks that support research professionals and research performing organisations in areas beyond its expertise, such as entrepreneurship and talent attraction.

The project will build on lessons learned from ERA Talent project, but the majority of human and financial resources will be directed towards new elements introduced by Project Nexus.

By the end of the project, EURAXESS will have a modernised way of operating, fit for the decade ahead, ensuring it remains an efficient, well-functioning, and inclusive network that benefits its network members and, ultimately, the research professionals and organisations it serves.

Project results are expected to contribute to the following outcomes:

- New governance and operational frameworks collaboratively implemented, achieved through the streamlining of processes and greater and better support for research professionals and organisations.
- Improved career development, international and intersectoral mobility and integration support, including targeted initiatives for research professionals at risk and promoting gender equality,
- A network-wide outreach strategy effectively piloted, significantly increasing EURAXESS visibility and engagement with target audiences.
- Stronger collaboration between EURAXESS Europe, EURAXESS Worldwide, and other ERA Talent Platform initiatives, including the HR Excellence in Research Award, RESAVER, ResearchComp, RM Comp, and the European Research and Innovation Careers Observatory. In addition, partnerships with other networks supporting research professionals in areas beyond EURAXESS's expertise, will be explored.

Project results are expected to contribute to the following impacts:

- A highly efficient, inclusive and responsive EURAXESS network, benefiting the European research ecosystem, competitiveness and society at large.
- Significantly improved career opportunities and mobility for research professionals, fostering the free flow of knowledge and expertise across Europe and beyond.
- Increased inclusivity and advancement in gender equality, positively impacting the broader research community and society at large.

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.

Procedure: The evaluation committee will be fully composed by representatives of EU institutions.

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: Q1 2026

Indicative budget: N/A

## **5. Support to the operations of CoARA**

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

- Ensure the effective operations of the various bodies of CoARA.
- Raise awareness, disseminate information and promote mutual learning across the members of CoARA, its bodies, and beyond.

Proposals should set out a credible pathway to contributing to the following impacts.

- Accelerate changes towards more responsible research assessment systems which improve the quality, performance and impact of research and researchers and research institutions.
- Enable researchers to benefit from more opportunities for attractive careers through the recognition of a more diverse range of research outputs, practices, contributions and activities than peer-review publishing.

This action aims at continuing the support to the operations of CoARA, after the end of the ongoing Horizon Europe “CoARA Boost” project, at the end of 2026. It is expected to enable the functioning of the various bodies of the coalition, and their interactions. In particular, it will support the work, meetings and dissemination of deliverables of the CoARA General Assembly, Steering Board, Executive Committee, Working Groups, National Chapters, and Secretariat, during the period 2027-2029. It will equally facilitate awareness raising and the dissemination of knowledge, good practices and relevant information to CoARA members, its bodies and relevant external stakeholders.

The European Science Foundation has a proven record of working in a partnership mode with the European Commission, hosting CoARA’s Secretariat.

The evaluation committee will be composed fully by representatives of EU institutions.

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.

Legal entities:

European Science Foundation (ESF), 1, quai Lezay-Marnésia - BP 90015 67080 Strasbourg Cedex – France

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: Q3 2026

Indicative budget: N/A

## **6. Presidency conferences with a European regional dimension - WIRE 2028**

Expected Outcome: Organisation of a two-day conference (WIRE) in 2028, 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.

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 2027

Indicative budget: N/A

## **PUBLIC PROCUREMENT**

### **1. Studies and communication**

Activities should support the Pact for Research and Innovation and the implementation of the second ERA Policy Agenda and may include studies, support and communication activities that are needed to analyse and enhance the EU R&I environment, for example:

- Collection of project feedback, in particular with respect to key exploitable results;
- Organisational support for consulting the R&I stakeholders community on R&I needs;
- Production and dissemination of communication material and organisation of events ;
- Support to Member States ensuring coherent communication activities on ERA;
- Analysis of the expected impacts of the ERA Policy Agenda actions and of potential barriers to their development.

Contracts may be implemented on the basis of framework contracts in order to ensure appropriate and timely analyses. Cooperation with the presidencies of the Council of the European Union and stakeholders is envisaged and could include direct support to ERA-related presidency events.

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

Indicative timetable: Q3 2026-Q3 2027

Indicative budget: N/A

### **2. Euraxess Worldwide - implementation**

The specific contracts implementing the EURAXESS WORLDWIDE Framework Contract cover the continued animation of the network and guarantee the continuity of the operations of the Euraxess Worldwide Hubs in the different locations around the world, allowing for the extension of the activities to new countries and tasks as appropriate.

This action aims to complement the European dimension of EURAXESS with an additional dimension and module addressing international and European researchers living and working outside of the European Union. It is expected to consist of the development of a portfolio of support services and associated tools, designed to create transnational ties with researchers and scientific communities within the global R&I ecosystem.

This action will build on the EURAXESS Worldwide structure of international hubs and it is expected to be a physical and virtual networking, knowledge-sharing and advocacy platform of services and tools. It will serve as a diplomacy asset, will promote European R&I instruments,

and will attract international talents to the European Union and European researchers back home.

The international dimension of EURAXESS should also be fostered through networking events, information sessions or training, as well as online instruments and tools.

EURAXESS WORLDWIDE officers are located in the following countries and regions: Africa, ASEAN, Australia & New Zealand, China, India, Japan, North America, South Korea, and Latin America.

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

Indicative timetable: Q3 2026 and Q3 2027

Indicative budget: N/A

### **3. Administrative management of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers**

The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)<sup>96</sup> is the implementation mechanism of the European Charter for Researchers<sup>97</sup>, and is key to the career development of researchers as well as to generating, transferring, sharing and disseminating knowledge about Human Resources best practices.

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 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-Q4 2026

Indicative budget: N/A

### **4. Horizon Policy Support Facility**

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

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<sup>96</sup> HR Excellence in Research Award, <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/hrs4r>.

<sup>97</sup> 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>.



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. An overview of past activities can be found on a dedicated webpage<sup>98</sup>. The PSF has demonstrated that it serves as an enabler for concrete policy changes.

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

Indicative timetable: Q1 2026 and Q1 2027

Indicative budget: N/A

## **5. Learning labs for value creation**

The aim of the learning labs for value creation is to strengthen knowledge valorisation capacities and skills for university students, researchers, funding organisations and innovators and facilitate sharing and replication of best practices across Europe. This action will provide online courses on intellectual asset management, standardisation, engagement with society, industry-academia co-creation and use of new technologies for fostering knowledge valorisation. It will also include peer-learning, mentoring and exchanges with role models. In-depth modules on effective licencing schemes for greater societal impact focussing on one or two technology areas, such as biotechnology and advanced materials should be included.

The action will include the content development for the learning lab concept, implementation of a series of learning labs with a pan-European outreach and evaluation of the effectiveness of the action. The learning labs will build on the Guiding principles and the Codes of practice on knowledge valorisation developed during the ERA policy agenda 2022-2024<sup>99</sup>.

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

Indicative timetable: Q1 2026

Indicative budget: N/A

## **6. She Figures: Monitoring gender equality in research and innovation - development, implementation and dissemination of indicators**

The EU has progressively strengthened its commitment to gender equality, embracing intersectionality and promoting inclusivity across various sectors, disciplines, and geographical

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<sup>98</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/research-and-innovation/en/statistics/policy-support-facility>

<sup>99</sup> [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](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)

regions. Therefore, there is a need to comprehensively track advancements made towards the individual ERA priorities and inform evidence-based policy-making. In cooperation with the Member States and Associated Countries, the Commission will continue collecting and analysing comparable sex and/or gender disaggregated and intersectional data. This will be accompanied by the development and application of appropriate indicators to monitor the implementation of inclusive gender policies and actions at institutional, national, EU and, where available, global level. The study will update the data collection and introduce new indicators to measure progress towards gender equality and inclusiveness in R&I. It will follow the career trajectories of researchers and innovators – from the completion of doctoral studies to entry into the labor market to the attainment of leadership and decision-making roles. Additionally, it will assess variations in working conditions, career progression, and research output based on gender and, whenever possible, on other intersecting factors, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of systemic inequalities in R&I.

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

Indicative timetable: Q4 2027

Indicative budget: N/A

## **7. Implementation of ERA monitoring**

The Council Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe (Pact for R&I)<sup>100</sup> has requested the Commission to set up an 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<sup>101</sup>.

The purpose of this action is to support the implementation and evaluation of the ERA Monitoring Mechanism, encompassing preparation of the EU-level Reports; 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.

The action supports the development and maintenance of the [ERA Policy Platform](#) that has as its aim a consistent, robust and quality tested national reporting system. Moreover, the Platform provides for easy access to and information on any ERA policy and activity.

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

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<sup>100</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021H2122>.

<sup>101</sup> Link to be added once adopted.

Indicative timetable: Q2-Q4 2027

Indicative budget: N/A

## **8. ERA Talent Platform: Enhancing research careers and mobility in Europe**

The ERA Talent Platform, including but not limited to initiatives of EURAXESS, RESAVER, HR Excellence in Research, ResearchComp, and the European Research and Innovation Careers Observatory, is one of the key initiatives enhancing research careers and is one of the operational instruments of the European Research Area (ERA). In particular, it contributes to removing the barriers to mobility, improving the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers, and making Europe more competitive.

This action will ensure continuous improvement and maintenance of the digital aspects of the ERA Talent Platform. This includes, but is not limited to, technical maintenance and development, and graphical and functional enhancements related to evolving user needs and political developments. Additionally, the creation of materials to increase the visibility of these ERA Talent Platform initiatives will be a key component, ensuring broader engagement and awareness among researchers, institutions, and policymakers. New initiatives part of the ERA Talent Platform, might also be launched if needed by evolving policy context.

Awareness about the ERA and its priorities will be increased through promotion activities, including stakeholder dialogues, events, workshops, or conferences, such as the EURAXESS Conference, the HR Excellence in Research Info Days, and the Conference on Research Careers.

This action requires collaboration with a large group of stakeholders, including EURAXESS Bridgehead Organisations/National Coordinators, national portal administrators, EURAXESS Worldwide, HR Excellence in Research contractors and assessors, OECD, RESAVER. Activities should also include services by external information system provider(s) who, on the basis of inputs provided by the responsible Commission services, guarantee the running of the platform. Online communication and promotion activities should also be implemented.

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

Indicative timetable: Q2 2027

Indicative budget: N/A

## **EXTERNAL EXPERT ACTIONS**

### **1. Use of individual experts for ad hoc tasks related to the implementation of the HE Ethics Appraisal**

This action will support the use of independent experts to advise on or assist with the implementation of the Horizon Europe Ethics Appraisal scheme in view of ensuring and maintaining its quality and effectiveness, including for training.

A special allowance of EUR 450/day will be paid to the experts appointed in their personal capacity who act independently and in the public interest.

Form of Funding: Other budget implementation instruments

Type of Action: Expert contract action

Indicative timetable: Q1 2026 - Q1 2027

Indicative budget: N/A

### **2. Use of individual experts in support of the new ERA's objectives**

This action will support the provision of independent expertise to improve the evidence base and collect advice on various aspects related to the Reforming and Enhancing the European Union Research and Innovation System and the revitalised European Research Area. Individual experts will work in the following domains:

- Experts to contribute to monitoring of progress of the realisation of ERA's objectives;
- Experts on researchers' careers, experts on skills, experts on services for researchers such as those of the EURAXESS services network, experts in legal matters related to research careers and employment-related aspects, and experts in legal matters related to cross-border institutional cooperation, notably higher education institutions and public research organisations;
- Experts to contribute to the analysis of the expected impacts of the ERA Policy Agenda actions, to the development of these actions, and to the analysis of potential barriers.

A special allowance of EUR 450/day will be paid to the experts appointed in their personal capacity who act independently and in the public interest.

Form of Funding: Other budget implementation instruments

Type of Action: Expert contract action

Indicative timetable: Q1 2026-Q4 2027

Indicative budget: N/A

### **3. External expertise for evaluation and monitoring of Widening and ERA actions**

This action will support the use of appointed independent experts for the evaluation and monitoring of actions (grant agreement, grant decision, public procurement actions, financial instruments, evaluation) funded under Horizon Europe and where appropriate, include ethics checks as well as compliance checks regarding the Gender Equality Plan eligibility criterion. A special allowance of EUR 450/day will be paid to the experts appointed in their personal capacity who act independently and in the public interest.

Form of Funding: Other budget implementation instruments

Type of Action: Expert contract action

Indicative timetable: Q1 2026-Q4 2027

Indicative budget: N/A

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