

Action 16: Improve EU-wide access to excellence

Contact point: Unit A.2, DG RTD

1. Description

The work strand for this action should be a structured dialogue between the EC and the member states on the subject explained below. This could take place in the format of webinars, workshops and discussion convened on demand.

The continuous disparity between countries and regions in the EU in terms of R&I performance calls for fully mobilising research, innovation and technological capacities in less developed countries and regions. Structural R&I policy reforms plus better national, regional and institutional cooperation in the production and diffusion of high-quality knowledge are vital, more and better links between R&I actors across Europe are needed in order to capitalise on excellence from across the continent. Also, the EU's R&I system needs to promote a more inclusive approach in which all can participate and from which all can benefit.

Addressing these problems, a package of means under action Nr.16 aims at improving EU-wide access to excellence mainly through raising capabilities of targeted EU countries in research management, networking and institutional cooperation, in upgrading the R&I systems.

The package is tailor-made for 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 and the Outermost Regions (defined in Art. 349 TFEU) (so-called 'widening countries').

The key objectives of the package are the following:

1. Encourage institutional reforms and transformation processes of the R&I system at national and regional level in line with ERA principles,
2. Mobilise national and regional investments in R&I capacity
3. Raise the bar for excellence of R&I actors in partnership with outstanding European and international institutions ('win-win situation')
4. Increase number of participations and success rates of widening actors in cooperative research and innovation projects
5. Promote creation of new innovation ecosystems and scale up existing ones, supporting synergies with smart specialisation strategies and comparable innovation policy instruments at the regional level.

The package consists of several instruments under the Horizon Europe programme, like Teaming, Twinning, Excellence hubs, European Excellence Initiative, Support for R&I policy making in the

	<p>Western Balkans, Hop-on facility. Some of them (Teaming, Twinning) continue updated as in Horizon 2020, others are newly proposed in</p>
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	<p>line with the new ERA priorities especially for Horizon Europe (calls are being launched). In the upcoming Work Programmes there might be additional instruments included, in response to the feedback from the ongoing activities. The intervention logic under the package is designed to work points at a multitude of scales ranging from individual researcher through focussed networks, institutional development to a systemic impact on national R&I systems. The work programmes 2021-2022 and the draft for 2023-2024 include a dedicated destination 1 titles 'Improved access to excellence' that mirrors the related ERA policy priority.</p> <p>The entire package under this action Nr.16 is designed to act in interplay and synergy with national R&I strategies as well as complementary investment from the structural funds or other (national, regional, private) sources, since investing smartly as well as undertaking the necessary reforms remain primarily the responsibility of Member States. And Smart specialisation strategies are a place-based response to closing the innovation divide through Cohesion Policy. The regional level will be supported in its efforts to ensure synergies between the EU funds and programmes in the context of implementing the Horizon missions</p> <p>Within the widening package COST plays a key role as a pre-portal to the EU Framework programme not only for widening countries but also especially for young and female researchers in line with ERA policy priorities. In its strategic planning COST has committed to get engaged with ERA policy and through its networks it is an important player. COST also plays an important role for supporting R&I in the context of the EU neighbourhood policy because it helps to mobilise the research communities e.g. in the Western Balkans, Eastern Neighbourhood and the Mediterranean partner countries by providing them access to excellent researchers networks in Europe. The contribution to access to excellence is proven by the fact that research proposals under H2020 emanating from COST networks were almost three times more successful than the average of all proposals. In addition to COST Horizon Europe partnerships could play an instrumental role in this context.</p>
<p>2. Actors</p>	<p>The main targeted actors implementing this action are widening countries. The European Commission through REA is providing financial support and organising both selection and monitoring processes for projects. The list of widening countries is the following - 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 and the Outermost Regions (defined in Art. 349 TFEU).</p> <p>As for Member States, they make 15 out of 27, and they are eligible to host coordinators for these targeted measures. The list of widening countries was agreed in the Council during the Horizon Europe programme negotiations.</p> <p>Majority of instruments in this package involve also partner countries for certain activities, however, the role of those countries is different</p>

	<p>(advanced partners).</p> <p>The COST framework is implemented by an intergovernmental organisation going beyond EU membership since it incorporates 38 different countries also in the periphery of Europe.</p>
3. Timing and milestones	<p>The deadlines to submit applications for majority of actions under the package closed at the end of 2021. The selection of successful projects and the start of implementation will fall to 1Q of 2022. The milestones depend on each of the instrument – they have their specific and clear milestones defined for each of the project.</p> <p>The hop-on instrument has a different timeline – there will be two cut-off dates for selecting and funding the projects during 2022.</p> <p>COST actions are already established under open calls with one or two cut-off dates per year.</p>
4. Funding	<p>It is projected that in total to fund the package of instruments 205 EUR million (in 2021) and 270 EUR million (in 2022) will be used from the EU budget (Horizon Europe programme). Next to it, for Teaming instrument in 2022 there is a requirement to complement the EU funding with the equal amount (appr. 180 EUR million) from other sources (from Cohesion policy programmes, national, regional or private sources). Other instruments may also use additional sources to fund successful projects.</p>
5. Expected impact	<p>It is expected that the package of instruments under this action will improve EU-wide access to excellence, as its main impact, that in particular will materialize through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased science and innovation capacities for all actors in the R&I system in widening countries • Structural changes leading to a modernised and more competitive R&I systems in eligible countries • Mobilisation of national and European resources for strategic investments • Higher participation success in Horizon Europe and more consortium leadership roles • Greater involvement of regional actors in R&I process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access to excellent European research networks for researchers from less performing countries including the periphery of the Union via COST networks
6. Monitoring	<p>For this package of measures several qualitative monitoring elements, among others, are important - advanced reforms and changes within national research and innovation systems triggered, new partnerships, introduction of new scientific curricula encouraged, collaborative networks and established research partnerships extended, more peer reviewed international publications prepared.</p>

	<p>In addition, improving EU-wide access to excellence would also mean expanding country's innovation performance or its success rates in Framework Programmes, and these factors are closely intertwined. The most meaningful success indicator for participation in the framework programme is the percentage of applications funded versus submitted from a specific country in relation to the average success rate of all countries.</p> <p>It is important also to note that the majority of instruments under this action have their defined longer duration (some of them of up to 6 years), and so their impact can only be seen in several years from now.</p> <p>For the COST framework in depth reviews are carried out at mid term and at the end of the framework programme including the monitoring of policy objectives</p>
<p>7. Communication</p>	<p>There are several communication channels possible to promote this action. European Commission is organising general and targeted Info days (also in the framework of R&I days) providing information on the existing instruments and how to best use them. European Commission is also communicating with the established National Contact Points in participating countries. A targeted network of NCPs responsible in particular for instruments under this action is established. National and regional public authorities, through NCPs or other existing channels are communicating with stakeholders, potential applicants nationally, spreading the information about the action, but also passing back to the EC any queries or uncertainties in relation to the action.</p> <p>COST has established its own communication policy run by a dedicated team at the COST association. Activities include conferences, workshops, COST Connect events, COST academy, info days, web site and social media.</p>
<p>8. Additional information</p>	<p>This package of instruments represents a very targeted action towards the objective of improving EU-wide access to excellence. However, other instruments under the Widening part of the HE, as well as several other factors, not necessarily even falling under the ERA policy agenda, are also very influential in achieving the objectives of this action. Consequently, it is rather difficult to eliminate all other factors while evaluating results of this particular action. Among those essential elements, but not exclusively, can be mentioned the organisation/structures of NCPs, their effective work, links to the industry, efficient national/regional administration, collaborative traditions, effectiveness of a certain economy, results of previous international projects, etc.</p> <p>This package of actions also covers the second element (bullet point) of action 15.</p>