

Action 16:

Improve EU-wide access to excellence

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Member State/associated country/stakeholder¹: UAS4EUROPE

Lead entity at national level and contact person¹: Vereniging Hogescholen, Annelie Kohl, International policy advisor, <kohl@vh.nl>

The action includes the following types of activities:

[These are examples of activities, in which the country or organisation could participate in. For more detailed information, including the objectives, please refer to the explanatory document(s) of this action.]

- Encourage reforms of the national research and innovation system towards more competitiveness as well as inclusiveness
- Make research institutions in the country more attractive to international talents
- Support initiatives for excellence in research and innovation
- Create framework conditions for better co-operation and structured dialogue between business and academic institutions, including RTOs

Comments, planned or ongoing activities regarding the implementation of the action¹:

[Activities at the level of countries or organisations can be shared in this box. The activities could include national measures (e.g. reforms, initiatives, studies), the participation in EU-level activities, which are described in the explanatory document, and the engagement in transnational activities with other Member States, associated or third countries. Moreover, any other comments can be added.]

As Higher Education Institutions with mandates to support regional development and focus on impact-oriented research, we strongly support the objective of addressing the disparity between countries and regions in the EU in terms of R&I performance. We hope to contribute to fully mobilizing research, innovation and technological capacities in all regions across Europe, including the less developed countries and regions.

We commit to

- Provide guidance and support for the reform of national research and innovation systems,
- Provide support and feedback for ‘initiatives for excellence in research and innovation’,
- Provide guidance for European and national efforts aimed at empowering research institutions to be more attractive to international talents.

¹ Please fill in these boxes.

This document is a working document and should not be considered as representative of the European Commission's official position.

EXPLANATORY DOCUMENT

Action 16: Improve EU-wide access to excellence	
Contact point: Unit A.2, DG RTD	
1. Description	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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').</p> <p>The key objectives of the package are the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">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 capacity3. 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 projects5. Promote creation of new innovation ecosystems and scale up existing ones, supporting synergies with smart specialisation strategies and comparable innovation policy instruments at the

	<p>regional level.</p> <p>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 Western Balkans, Hop-on facility. Some of them (Teaming, Twinning) continue updated as in Horizon 2020, others are newly proposed in 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.</p> <p>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>
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<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 (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>
<p>3. Timing and milestones</p>	<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>
<p>4. Funding</p>	<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>

<p>5. Expected impact</p>	<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
<p>6. Monitoring</p>	<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>