Council of the European Union
General Secretariat

PUBLIC

Interinstitutional files:
2025/0543 (COD)

Brussels, 13 March 2026

WK 4017/2026 INIT

LIMITE

RECH	**CLIMA**
COMPET	**AGRI**
IND	**TRANS**
MI	**SAN**
EDUC	**BIOTECH**
TELECOM	**CADREFIN**
ENER	**CODEC**
ENV	**IA**

This is a paper intended for a specific community of recipients. Handling and further distribution are under the sole responsibility of community members.

CONTRIBUTION

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Working Party on Research
Subject:	Horizon Europe approach to widening participation: Common position of BG, CZ, EL, HR, HU, LT, MT, PL, PT, RO, SI and SK

Dear Research Working Party Members,

Please find attached a common position of BG, CZ, EL, HR, HU, LT, MT, PL, PT, RO, SI and SK on Horizon Europe's approach to widening participation with a view to the Research Working Party meeting on Monday 16 March 2026.

Horizon Europe approach to widening participation: common position of BG, CZ, EL, HR, HU, LT, MT, PL, PT, RO, SI and SK

The Member States sharing this position recall that the *Widening participation and spreading excellence* component of Horizon Europe is designed to address structural imbalances in the EU R&I landscape, stemming from historically different developments of R&I systems, capacities and investment patterns and continue to hamper the realisation of the European Research Area, especially in the current economic and geopolitical climate.

We understand Widening measures as structural instruments for unlocking Europe's full R&I potential, rather than as temporary support for lower-performing systems.

Bottlenecks limiting the performance of R&I systems differ significantly across our countries and may include, among others, limited institutional capacity, insufficient integration into European networks, talent circulation challenges, weak knowledge-transfer ecosystems, unequal reimbursement system within the Framework Programme, or structural funding constraints. In this context, we take note of the proposal to further tailor the Widening approach, including by differentiating countries into two categories. We acknowledge the need for strong action at national level in different forms, including stable and attractive research frameworks. At the same time, we stress the opportunity to refine European level support for deeper cooperation patterns and unlocking the Union's full R&I potential.

However, focusing support instruments only on selected challenges through restricted access to the instrument portfolio risks weakening the objective of upward convergence. We thus emphasise the need for a systemic and comprehensive policy response addressing the full spectrum of structural challenges affecting our R&I ecosystems. The future framework should incentivise progress and convergence by recognising and encouraging sustained national commitment to strengthening R&I systems. Tailoring should therefore respond to specific national needs while preserving broad and effective access to Widening instruments within a coherent and inclusive policy framework.

The future framework programme must consistently uphold the widening principle as currently established in the Horizon Europe Regulation.

We stand ready to engage in discussions on how to modernise the widening instruments and to make them work for the purpose of improving R&I collaboration, spreading excellence across the Union, and boosting the EU's competitiveness.

We call on the Presidency to allow for an honest and substantive discussion at Research Working Party on these key issues, given how deeply embedded widening is in the entire programme.

In this respect, we propose the following elements for the future approach to Widening:

1. **Access to instruments**: Both core Widening and Transition Member States retain full access to all instruments under the Widening participation and spreading excellence part of Horizon Europe throughout its duration.
2. **Budget reservation**: each Teaming & ERA Chairs call budget should reserve 10 % of funding, to be used for supporting reserve list proposals from core widening MSs only.
3. **Widening criteria and mid-term review**: The applicability and pertinence of Innovation Scoreboard Index and the relative financial return per GNI for dividing Widening MSs as core Widening and Transition is contested. Criteria should be based on transparent methodology and objective indicators, in consultation with the Member States. Notwithstanding these criteria, at the mid-point of the programming period, the

Commission should check the validity of categorisation of MSs into Widening and Transition categories and make corresponding adjustments if justified.

4. **Widening conditionality**: Access to widening instruments based on public investment in R&D is not acceptable in a climate where Member States must deal with extra budgetary challenges.
5. **New and existing schemes**: to boost effectiveness of the Widening approach, new solutions should be considered: a) top-up support to collaborative projects coordinated by participants from Widening or Transition MS; b) New schemes modelled after the existing ERA Fellowship scheme; c) experience sharing between Transition and Widening countries; d) lower national co-financing rates in NRPP for instruments implemented in synergy with Horizon Europe; e) strengthened and structured outreach to the widening countries, aimed at increased participation in ERC and EIC calls. Existing schemes with a strong widening dimension, such as, but not limited to, the EIC pre-accelerator and the EIT RIS must be maintained and further strengthened.