

HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04 WIDENING-01: Excellence Hubs Çağrısı

EC - Research Enquiry Service Soru ve Yanıtları [Research Enquiry Service - Research and innovation - European Commission](#)

QUESTION 1:

We are seeking clarification regarding the eligibility and strategic alignment requirements for the call HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-WIDENING-01: Excellence Hubs, specifically concerning the alignment with Regional Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3).

In Türkiye, the formal documents explicitly titled "RIS3" are currently in the process of developing. However, regional priorities and innovation strategies are comprehensively defined in "Regional Development Plans" (prepared by regional development agencies) and in "National Strategic Documents" (issued by the Ministry of Industry and Technology and TÜBİTAK).

Given this context, we would appreciate your guidance on the following:

1. Can Turkish applicants use Regional Development Plans or National R&I Priority Documents as valid equivalents to demonstrate alignment with the "regional or national smart specialisation strategies" mentioned in the call text?
2. In the absence of a formal EU-format RIS3, what specific types of evidence or references within the proposal (Part B) would you recommend for applicants to ensure evaluators can verify the "place-based innovation culture" and strategic priority of the chosen domain?

We believe this clarification is crucial for facilitating high-quality applications from the Turkish innovation ecosystem.

ANSWER 1:

As to your question, project objectives and the joint strategy under the project have to be in line with valid national and regional strategies, notably the smart specialisation strategy. In the absence of an adopted RIS3, other national and regional strategies and plans of European relevance and aligned with European priorities should be clearly mentioned.

QUESTION 2:

We are seeking clarification regarding the financial rules for the call **HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-WIDENING-01: Excellence Hubs**, specifically concerning the **Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP)** mechanism.

The call conditions specify that beneficiaries may provide financial support to third parties (limited to SMEs and start-up companies) and that the maximum amount to be granted to each third party is **EUR 60,000**. However, the work programme does not define a **maximum cumulative threshold** (as a percentage of the total project budget) for the FSTP component.

While we note that the **R&I component** (joint pilot projects) must not constitute the **"dominant part"** of the project, we would like to confirm the following to ensure a compliant budget structure:

1. Is there a specific **maximum percentage** of the total EU contribution that can be allocated to FSTP activities?
2. If FSTP is used to fund joint pilot research activities involving SMEs, does the cumulative amount of FSTP fall under the restriction of the "non-dominant" R&I component, or is it treated as a separate category with its own (if any) limitations?
3. In the absence of a hard percentage cap, what criteria do evaluators use to assess whether the FSTP allocation is "well-balanced" within the overall Coordination and Support Action framework?

Official guidance on this matter is crucial for the applicants to plan their budgets and ensure their proposals meet the administrative and strategic requirements of the call.

ANSWER 2:

Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) can be used to attribute grants to certain third-party recipients, which are not partners in the consortium. The rules and conditions to use FSTP are described in the specific conditions of the Call, in the Section B of General Annexes of the HE Work Programme and in the General Model Grant Agreement. Conditions aim to ensure consortia apply an objective and transparent selection procedure of third-party recipients. There is no limitation concerning the percentage of the total project's budget that can be attributed to FSTP, provided that this amount is proportionate to and consistent with the contributions expected from the FSTP recipients and in line with the description of the Call. In relation to this, if FSTP mechanism used for activities that fall within the research component of the project, then the funds allocated to FSTP will count towards the R&I component.

On the other hand, and as per WP Call description, the conceptual design and pre-planning for pilots and demonstrators, if applicable and in line with the R&I strategy, must be financed by sources other than the Union contribution provided by the Excellence Hub grants. Hence the FSTP mechanism should not be used for pilots and demonstrators.

QUESTION 3:

We would like to seek clarification regarding the call **HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-WIDENING-01: Excellence Hubs**.

According to the Work Programme, each Widening country R&I ecosystem must comprise four different categories of actors:

- a) academic institutions (universities and/or non-university research centres or laboratories),
- 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.).

However, we could not find detailed guidance on how these four categories should be interpreted and assessed in practice.

In particular, we would appreciate clarification on the following points:

- What types of organisations are considered “public authorities or authorised agencies operating at regional or local level”?
- Will the categorisation of organisations be determined according to the legal entity information and organisation type registered in the Funding & Tenders Portal (e.g. Public Organisation, Private for Profit Organisation, Research Organisation, etc.)?
- Is there any additional guidance or examples available regarding the classification of organisations under these four categories?

ANSWER 3:

In the context of the Excellence Hubs call (HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-WIDENING-01) the Work Programme clearly refers to “public authorities or authorised agencies operating at regional or local level” and defines Excellence Hubs as networks of innovation ecosystems in Widening countries, involving larger communities based on the quadruple helix principle. Taking this into account, public authorities or authorised agencies would represent public entities which have clear role in shaping policies and/or ensuring public support for the implementation of national/regional strategies.

An entity would fall under the category of ‘public authorities or authorised agencies operating at regional or local level’, if it is validated in the Participant Register by the Central Validation Service as a ‘public body’ and would need to provide convincing reasoning and justification in the proposal that it has a clear role in shaping policies and/or ensuring public support for the implementation of national/regional strategies. No formal documentation is required. This would then be assessed by the evaluators during the evaluation process and if the proposal is successful, there could be further follow up and requests for clarification during the grant agreement preparation process.

Legal entity validation is needed only once and will be valid for all ongoing application procedures and signature in the system, irrespective of the specific call/application/tender procedure that triggers

the validation, without the entity having to re-register or be re-validated. Therefore, if an entity is validated as e.g. SME private entity, it has been validated against supporting documents by the Central Validation Service and will participate in all calls with the same private status irrespective of certain definitions under different Calls.

QUESTION 4:

I would like to request a clarification regarding HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-WIDENING-01: Excellence Hubs Call;

1. Can a Widening country R&I ecosystem fulfil the quadruple helix requirement by combining an umbrella organisation (covering two categories) with individual legal entities participating as beneficiaries (covering the remaining two categories)?

As per Work Programme: “A proposal may demonstrate involvement of a Widening country R&I ecosystem by either: 1. The participation, as a beneficiary, by one or more umbrella organisations, whose membership comprises the four different categories of Widening country R&I actors for the relevant Widening country; or 2. The participation, as beneficiaries, of individual legal entities representing each of the four categories of actors for the relevant Widening country.” Page 54

2. **Does the word "either" in the Work Programme text strictly forbid any combination of Option 1 and Option 2?** In other words, must an ecosystem be represented 100% through umbrella organisations OR 100% through individual legal entities, with no possibility of a mixed/hybrid model?

ANSWER 4:

The Work Programme states that involvement of a Widening country R&I ecosystem can be either: 1) The participation, as a beneficiary, by one or more umbrella organisations, whose membership comprises the four different categories of Widening country R&I actors for the relevant Widening country; or 2) the participation of individual legal entities representation each of the four categories of actors. The Work Programme does not provide the possibility of having a combination of the two aforementioned possibilities.

QUESTION 5:

Dear Sir/Madam,

Under the call HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-WIDENING-01: Excellence Hubs the funding rate is 70 % of the eligible costs. I have several questions on how the remaining 30% shall be secured and demonstrated at proposal stage:

1) Possible sources of complementary funding

Could you kindly provide examples of eligible sources for the 30% complementary funding? Could it come from other EU, national, or regional programmes/projects funded by different national or regional authorities, national technology agencies, municipalities, or other public sources? Or is the complementary funding expected to come exclusively from private sources?

2) Complementary publicly funded projects

Could the 30% complementary funding be covered, fully or partially, by a complementary project funded through public sources (e.g. national, regional, or European programmes)?

3) Distribution among beneficiaries

Does the 30% complementary funding need to be shared proportionally among all beneficiaries, or is it possible for some beneficiaries not to contribute financially, with the remaining beneficiaries covering a larger share?

4) Demonstration of the funding commitment

Is a formal financial commitment already required at the proposal stage? If so, what form should this commitment take, and how should the availability of the complementary funding be demonstrated in the proposal?

5) Project-generated income

If the project generates income during its implementation, could this income be considered as part of the 30% complementary funding, or will it reduce the EU contribution?

Thank you very much for your kind assistance.

ANSWER 5:

Under the call HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-WIDENING-01 (Excellence Hubs), beneficiaries will receive reimbursement covering up to 70% of the total requested eligible costs of the project.

Applicants are therefore required to cover the remaining 30% of the project's total eligible costs with own or other resources (public or private) and ensure compliance with the rules that apply to the other funding source(s). It is important to understand that the total amount of eligible costs has to be reported in order to qualify for a 70% reimbursement. It is up to the applicants to agree internally on the allocation of the Union contribution among the beneficiaries. In order to demonstrate that the consortium, as a whole, has understood the requirements and its practical implementation, the proposal should include an explanation on how the remaining 30% will be secured and shared among the beneficiaries, although no formal proof of this financial commitment is required.

The project generated income is not linked to the 30% of the project's total eligible costs that the applicants are required to cover with own or other resources.