

Position of Corvinus University of Budapest

on the Widening Approach in the
Future European Framework Programmes
for Research and Innovation

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Introduction

Corvinus University of Budapest (Corvinus) has evolved into one of the leading universities in economics, business management, and social sciences in Central Europe, offering a wide range of undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programmes. The university is distinguished by its commitment to high academic standards, innovative research, and international collaboration, with strong engagement and track record in research collaborations under the Horizon Europe Programme and the previous Framework Programmes. The university hosts one of Hungary's [RM Roadmap](#) Ambassadors and participates in the [RM Framework](#) project, which aims to strengthen the research management profession across Europe.

Corvinus welcomes the [joint statement of 15 member states](#) to advocate the Widening Participation and Spreading Excellence component in the next EU Framework Programme for R&I. In line with the [vision for FP10](#) published by EUA and the [Act Accelerate Align](#) recommendations of the High-level group we put forward the following recommendations.

Corvinus agrees that reinforcing national R&I investments and providing targeted EU level support to countries with lower R&I capacity through the R&I Framework Programme is crucial to bridging the R&I divide among countries and maximizing excellence across Europe.

The lower participation of researchers from widening countries in Framework Programmes does not reflect a shortage of talent in certain geographic areas; rather, it stems from limited and unequal access to information and support within the R&I ecosystem. Although the efficiency of the Widening Programme needs to be evaluated, it should not be dismissed but improved to harness the untapped potential of underrepresented scientists, whose marginalization in the ERA is driven by circumstances rather than capability. In an era where inclusion is paramount, the funding programmes must provide equal opportunities to all talents and more effectively integrate researchers from all parts of Europe, including widening countries.

The following comments and suggestions are based on our long-term experience, incorporating insights from the Corvinus community as well as from Eötvös Lóránd University and Pannon University, and are intended to contribute to the improvement of the next Framework Programme.

Recommendations for Optimized Widening Approach

1. Support actions for ERC grants

Widening aspects should be introduced in Pillar I. The underrepresentation of widening participants, especially in ERC grants remains a critical issue. Following the example of the ERA Fellowship, a similar tool could support ERC applicants from widening countries who had strong applications but did not receive the ERC grant.

2. Balanced Research and Capacity Building in WIDERA Calls

More research-oriented calls – or calls that allocate a higher percentage of funding to joint bottom-up research activities, in addition to capacity building – are needed. Currently the majority of WIDERA calls are CSA grants, while additional RIA calls would be highly beneficial. Networking activities, training, and other general measures should be balanced with direct research support for talented and ambitious individuals and teams performing high-quality research in widening countries. Researchers from widening institutes require direct research-oriented opportunities to collaborate with more experienced partners.

3. Promoting Mutual Benefits in WIDERA Collaborations

The WIDERA programme should be communicated not only as a support tool for widening participants but also as beneficial for non-widening contributors. To foster engagement, we recommend avoiding the “leaders vs followers” narrative. Instead, we encourage framing collaborations as mutually beneficial, where knowledge sharing evolves into knowledge exchange that enriches all participants.

4. Maintaining Twinning, Teaming and ERA Chair, ERA Fellowship and ERA Talents Actions

These programmes play a pivotal role in strengthening the international embeddedness of widening institutions and enhancing global research mobility. They improve the submission and management of new domestic and international grant applications while facilitating the acquisition of new skills and research management know-how from experienced partner organizations. Additionally, they accelerate essential institutional changes, contribute significantly to internationalization by attracting international researchers to widening institutions and create new pathways for research. By diversifying research activities and fostering new research directions, these programmes drive sustainable, long-term impact.

5. Predictable schedule of calls

ERA Chair, Teaming and Excellence Initiative require institutional changes within universities and research institutions. To gain full support from the management for these reforms, applicants need a predictable timeline for the opening of the calls. We suggest providing an annual, predictable schedule of calls well in advance of the application opening.

6. Improved allocation of deadlines for Calls for proposals

In the interest of fostering a more supportive research environment, we strongly advocate for improved scheduling of research call timelines. Proposal submission deadlines are often set immediately after major holiday periods, imposing a significant workload on researchers and research managers during their time off and making it challenging for consortia to coordinate their actions in the crucial weeks preceding submission.

The simultaneous deadlines of later published programmes can hinder the ability of researchers to prepare competitive proposals. This situation disproportionately impacts young researchers who need to establish new collaborations and seek mentorship to gain experience in proposal writing. Furthermore, the strain on RM offices, which are often understaffed and less experienced in widening countries, is intensified by these uncoordinated deadlines. This situation places an undue burden on these teams, making it even more difficult for them to manage their workload effectively and support their researchers.

To address these issues, we support a more applicant-friendly strategy for the scheduling of publication and closing dates. By aligning deadlines with consideration for holiday seasons and ensuring adequate spacing between calls, widening partners can effectively foster new collaborations and coordinate proposal preparation.

7. Separate and targeted grants for research management improvements

While the Twinning programme's focus on improving research management capacities is welcome, its implementation has proven challenging. Research groups collaborating with widening research teams often work separately from research management departments, which may lack the capacity and engagement to share knowledge aligned with project topics. We suggest creating separate calls where capacity building can be realized through equal experience and knowledge exchange.

8. Improving the Hop-on Scheme

Hop-on calls had positive expectations but low results in our research community. Once a researcher enters a consortium via this scheme, they have more chances of being directly involved in any other funding application afterwards. However, widening researchers face numerous difficulties to find open opportunities to participate. Guidance for coordinators and awareness raising within consortia about the possibilities of this scheme is missing. Eligible projects on the Hop-on list are not always encouraged to use the Facility, as the requests could represent an administrative burden to the coordinator. We would welcome a user friendly, continuously updated Hop-on Facility list that contains only projects open for collaboration. Additional assistance should be provided by the Commission to coordinators to handle administrative issues related to requests coming from widening partners to submit a proposal. Allowing more than one project partner from the widening countries to join a selected proposal – provided that the original budget share of widening countries does not exceed 15% of the requested EU contribution to ensure better balance – and granting additional funding from the Facility for all project partners, not just the coordinator, would further enhance the scheme's effectiveness and feasibility.

9. Enhancing support for pilot initiatives

We welcome the launch of new pilot initiatives supporting researchers and enhancing participation in collaborative research efforts. However, widening partners face challenges in effectively implementing these initiatives. We propose the establishment of comprehensive guidelines and support schemes designed to ensure equitable opportunities for all participants in new initiatives. Additionally, dedicated information and networking events are essential to equip researchers with the knowledge and connections necessary for engaging with the societal readiness pilot.

We advocate for initiatives that promote equitable brain circulation and attract top talent to widening regions as well. It is important to recognize that widening institutions are consistently tackling with wage disparities that hinder their participation i.a. in the Choose Europe programme.

10. European Partnerships

Reducing bureaucracy would improve the efficiency of these programmes. Currently, submissions occur in three rounds, requiring significant time and effort from applicants: two stages at the international level and one at the national funding agency, which can be administration heavy in some widening countries. Unifying and simplifying the eligibility rules among funding agencies, and moreover, standardizing the implementation and governance among different partnerships would allow research teams to focus on research performance rather than on managing excessive paperwork.

By presenting these recommendations, Corvinus University of Budapest aims not only to contribute to the improvement and continuity of the widening approach under the next Framework Programme 10 but also to propose enhanced support strategies for widening countries to bridge the R&I divide, maximize excellence and foster equitable opportunities for researchers throughout Europe.

Finally, in the light of recent developments, it raises concerns that the Competitiveness Compass and other key strategic documents related to the next MFF fail to mention widening measures and priorities. While the ERA is referenced, its development does not receive sufficient attention. Therefore, widening measures and the strengthening of the ERA should be integrated as horizontal priorities across all relevant strategic documents.

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