



**ILIANA IVANOVA**  
**MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Dear Ministers,

Dear Signatories of the joint statement,

I would like to sincerely thank you for your considered reflections in the “*Joint statement on Widening participation and spreading excellence component in the next EU framework programme for R&I*”. Your active involvement and the insights you have shared are most welcome as we collectively shape the future of European research and innovation under the Multiannual Financial Framework. Our shared vision for ensuring EU’s current and future competitiveness and wellbeing can only be realised through such open and constructive dialogue among and with Member States.

In the past year, I have spared no efforts to ensure we improve Horizon Europe based on solid evidence. The Horizon 2020 ex-post evaluation recommendations highlighted the need to broaden participation, further simplify, reinforce the dissemination, exploitation and deployment of results and reinforce the synergies with other investments. As a result, I took actions to make the programme simpler, more accessible and attractive to newcomers, with in parallel reinforced complementary funding from the public and private sector.

The recently revamped Funding & Tenders Portal now offers better AI-based search and recommendation features, making it easier for users to navigate EU funding opportunities. As part of our ongoing efforts to enhance accessibility, we are also developing a mobile application to ensure EU grants are more connected and accessible than ever, bringing these opportunities directly to stakeholders’ smartphones. We have also further pushed for simplified cost options, which benefit newcomers, SMEs and less experienced beneficiaries especially. Not only have we introduced a new unit cost for personnel costs in the first half of 2024 – we have also continued to increase the use of lump sum funding in Horizon Europe, and we remain committed to further increase them. In order to mobilise all the forces that we have in the EU and build on the diversity of the European talent pool in terms of scientific disciplines, sectors or geographies, we introduced experimental initiatives in the 2024 Horizon Europe annual work programmes to test new avenues to broaden the participation to new players.

Ms Heidi Paju  
Counsellor for Scientific Affairs  
Permanent representation of Estonia to the EU



More generally, since the introduction in Horizon 2020 of a “Widening participation and spreading excellence” part in the Framework Programme, we have significantly strengthened widening measures to ensure that research and innovation opportunities are broadly taken across Europe. Horizon Europe has, in fact, tripled the budget for this component of the programme compared to Horizon 2020, increasing it to 3% of the total programme budget. This reflects our shared commitment to a more inclusive and balanced European Research Area. We are already seeing tangible improvements in participation from Widening countries in the whole framework programme (from 15.1% participation and 9.5% of grants received in Horizon 2020, to 19.6% participation and 13.6% of grants received in Horizon Europe), and the gap in success rates between “widening” countries and others is narrowing: 1 in 5 applications from widening Member States is successful, which represents a 6 percentage point increase in relation to Horizon 2020. High-quality (above evaluation thresholds) applications from widening Member States increased 10 percentage points from Horizon 2020. Compared to other country groups in the programme, widening Member States show the highest relative increase in both high-quality applications and their success rates. On top of these trends, the number of applicants coming from the Widening Member States has also been improving: they now represent 20% of all the applicants, 19% of all applications, and 16% of the requested EU contribution. These figures are higher compared to Horizon 2020 (18%, 16%, and 12% respectively).

We recognize that disparities still exist (in application, participation and success rates), but it is encouraging to see that the rate of newcomers in widening Member States is 48%, which is greater than in non-widening ones (45%). This demonstrates the tremendous potential that exists throughout the Union when we create the right conditions for success. We have taken steps to boost the participation of Widening countries in the Horizon Europe programme by strengthening National Contact Point support. To achieve this, we have offered targeted assistance, such as training, networking opportunities, and access to best practices, aimed at providing high-quality services to applicants.

I encourage you to continue investing in your national capacities for research and innovation and carrying out structural reforms. Strengthening these efforts alongside your participation in European projects will ensure that we all continue to drive excellence and competitiveness within the European Research Area.

Thank you once again for your valuable input.

Yours sincerely,  
Iliana Ivanova

