Excellence Hubs 2027: more money, harder terms

The Commission has put €100 million behind the next Excellence Hubs call, up from €60 million. For the first time since the scheme started, it will not pay the whole bill.

HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-WIDENING-01 Opens 2 September 2026, closes 4 March 2027 August 2026

The 2027 conditions set the funding rate at 70% of eligible costs. The proposal has to say where the other 30% comes from and how it is split between the partners. Neither of the two closed rounds said anything about a funding rate, because a Coordination and Support Action is funded at 100% by default. Both rounds paid the full amount. Across all 25 Excellence Hubs funded so far, the Commission's contribution matches the total project cost to the euro.

For a consortium the size of the last two rounds, the new rate works out at roughly €1.4 million the partners have to raise themselves. This is the biggest change to the scheme since it started. It sits in section 6 of the conditions. The scope text, which is where most people start reading, says nothing about it.

> Excellence Hubs has never had this much money behind it, and it has never been this hard to put together a consortium that can take it.

Twice as many applied, the same number won

Two rounds have closed so far. In March 2022, 102 proposals produced 13 grants, a success rate just under 13%. In March 2024, submissions doubled to 205 and the Commission funded 12, which took the rate below 6%. The budget went up over the same period, but nowhere near fast enough to keep pace with the queue.

The money has grown steadily. The odds have not.

EXCELLENCE HUBS, THREE ROUNDS	2022	2024	2027
Proposals submitted	102	205	—
Grants signed	13	12	**30 planned**
Success rate	12.7%	5.9%	**~10% projected**
Budget	€50M	€60M	**€100M**
Grant ceiling	€5.0M	€6.0M	**€4.5M**
Average grant awarded	€4.82M	€5.41M	—
Funding rate	**100%**	**100%**	**70%**

Submission counts come from the Commission's published topic updates. Grants and contributions come from CORDIS. The 2024 evaluation notice records 11 proposals retained for funding. A twelfth grant was later signed from the reserve list, and that is the figure used here. The 2027 projection is ours.

The 2027 budget appears on the portal as two tranches, €15 million against the 2026 appropriation and €85 million against 2027. This is how the Commission books the money across financial years. There is one call, one deadline and one €100 million envelope. Nothing about the first year is capped at €15 million.

Thirty grants looks unlikely

Divide €100 million by the thirty grants the Commission expects and you get an average of €3.33 million per project, about 74% of the €4.5 million ceiling. No Excellence Hubs cohort has ever shown that kind of budgetary restraint.

Applicants to this scheme build their budgets right up to the ceiling. The evidence is not subtle.

WHAT APPLICANTS ACTUALLY ASK FOR ROUND	CEILING	MEAN GRANT	SHARE OF CEILING	WITHIN 2% OF CAP
2022	€5.00M	€4.82M	**96.5%**	9 of 13
2024	€6.00M	€5.41M	**90.2%**	5 of 12
2027, if behaviour holds	**€4.50M**	**€4.06–4.34M**	**90–96%**	—

Four of the 2022 grants land within €500 of the €5 million ceiling. The 2024 distribution splits in two: five projects at the new €6 million cap, and six clustered between €4.69 and €5.00 million, which suggests half the field was still anchored on the old ceiling.

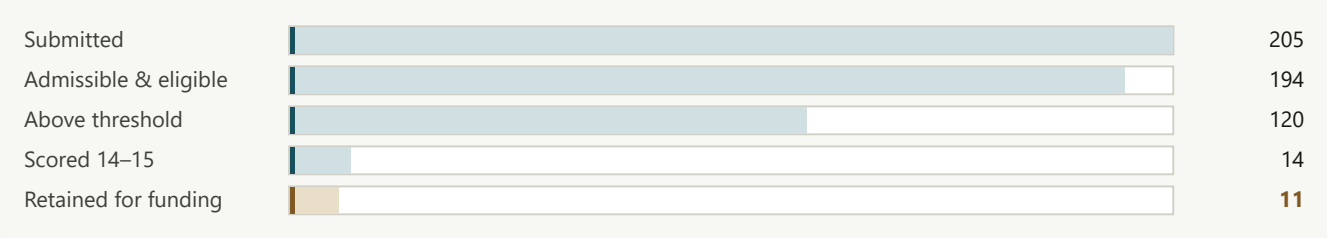
At €4.5 million each, €100 million pays for 22 grants. At the 90 to 96% ceiling utilisation both cohorts showed, it pays for 23 to 25. We would plan against roughly 24. That puts the projected success rate near 10%, well short of the 15% you would get by taking thirty grants at face value. Even so, 10% is close to double the 2024 outcome, and it is the strongest single argument for bidding this time.

One thing cuts the other way, and we treat it as a hypothesis. Because the grant now covers 70%, a €4.5 million award corresponds to a €6.4 million project, bigger than anything Excellence Hubs has funded so far. If consortia size their projects around what they can co-finance instead of around the grant ceiling, average awards could fall and thirty becomes reachable. Two rounds of evidence point the other way, so we would not build a plan on it.

Passing the quality bar was never the hard part

The 2024 round is the only one with a full published evaluation breakdown. It repays close reading, because the eligibility rules carried over into 2027 almost unchanged.

Of 205 proposals, more than half cleared the quality bar. Twelve were funded.



Published evaluation notice for HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07. The funding cut-off fell at 14 out of 15, inside the top band, so even a 14 was no guarantee.

The 120 proposals above threshold asked for €622.6 million between them, against a budget of €60 million. The call was ten times oversubscribed. A hundred and nine proposals were judged good enough to fund and got nothing. Quality was necessary and it was nowhere near sufficient.

Twenty-four grants would reach further down the ranking than twelve did. In 2024 the 13 to 14 band held 22 proposals, so we would expect a 2027 cut-off somewhere around 13.5. The bar comes down a little. It still means a proposal has to land in roughly the top fifteen per cent on quality alone before the money question comes into it.

The 30% decides who can be in the consortium

The instinct on reading a co-financing requirement is to treat it as a budgeting question. In this scheme it is closer to a design question, because of what the eligibility rules force the consortium to contain.

Every Excellence Hub has to involve at least two regional innovation ecosystems in two different Widening countries. Each ecosystem needs four categories of actor: academic institutions, business entities, public authorities working at regional or local level, and societal actors such as civil society organisations or citizen groups. That rule has been in place since 2022. In the

2024 cohort, public bodies and societal actors together held 80 of 209 partner positions, 38% of the consortium.

Those are the organisations least likely to have 30% of their budget sitting free. A municipal planning region or a small environmental association does not carry unallocated capital, and the rules do not let you leave them out. So the requirement does more than discourage weaker consortia. It limits which organisations can hold a normal-sized share of the work.

> Co-financing capacity now has to be settled before the partner list is, because it decides who can be on the list at all.

Partner budgets have been stable across both rounds at around €310,000 of project cost per organisation. At that rate a €4.2 million grant supports a project of about €6 million and close to 19 partners, which is more than the 2024 median of 17. Consortium size is not where the pressure sits. It sits on each of those 19 partners finding about €93,000.

Who comes back in 2027

There was no Excellence Hubs call in 2025 or 2026. The 109 above-threshold consortia that lost in March 2024 have had three years with nowhere to take the proposal. That backlog is the best single predictor of the 2027 field, and it points up.

The co-financing rule points down, and it is the sharper of the two forces, because it removes applicants instead of discouraging them. Our reading is that the two roughly cancel out. We would expect a field of 200 to 280, flat to slightly up on 2024.

What the field is made of matters more than how big it is. The consortia that come back will be the ones that scored highest and can raise the money, and they will come back holding an evaluation summary report that told them exactly where they lost points. Anyone applying for the first time in March 2027 is competing against a group that has already been through this evaluation once and knows what to fix.

What changed in the call text

The 2027 topic description runs to 631 words. The 2024 one ran to 1,203. Almost half the text is gone, which reads at first like a relaxation. The modal verbs say something else. *Should* appears 14.3 times per thousand words in 2027 against 9.1 in 2024, a 57% jump in obligation density. The conditions text meanwhile grew by 30% and picked up a new binding rule. Obligation has moved out of the narrative and into eligibility, which is where it is easiest to miss.

One change carries most of the operational weight. The research component now has to sit in its own work package and must not be the dominant part of the project. It is the only *must* in the whole 2027 description, and it reverses what won in 2022 and 2024, both of which rewarded research-heavy hubs.

Two other conditions deserve a look, though neither is new. Cascade grants to third parties are limited to SMEs and start-ups and capped at €60,000 each, which is the standard Horizon Europe ceiling carried into this call rather than anything it invented. The qualifying business partner in each ecosystem also has to evidence two years of trading with balance sheets or business reports. That requirement goes back to 2022, when the text asked for significant and proven operational income verifiable by those documents. The 2024 wording compressed it to an established firm with turnover. What 2027 adds is the instruction to submit the evidence as annexes in an official EU language. All of it is admissibility. A missing or untranslated annual report gets the proposal rejected, it does not just cost points.

Two things came out, and both of them closed a route in. The optional mentoring module for emerging ecosystems in rural areas, the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries including Ukraine has gone from the expected outcomes. So has the permission for those partners to join without a complete four-actor ecosystem. The verb *mentor* appears four times in the 2024 text and never in 2027. Every ecosystem now has to stand on its own.

Applicant discretion narrowed alongside it. *May* drops from four occurrences to one, and *encouraged* from three to none. The 2024 text let applicants choose between a regional and a global orientation. The 2027 text does not offer the choice.

The same team can win in a different field

Excellence Hubs sets no thematic priority. Applicants pick the domain themselves, and the 25 funded projects barely repeat one between them. The list runs from cybersecurity and glass-ceramics through coal-region transition, solar energy, isotope generation, cultural heritage, marine technology, laser technology, water in the circular economy and agri-bioeconomy. Health is the most represented cluster with six of the 25, and it was not crowded out.

The clearest evidence that a method travels is Universidade de Coimbra, the only organisation to have coordinated in both rounds. It led CHAngeing in 2022, on ageing and cerebrovascular health, and GeneH in 2024, on gene therapy. Related field, genuinely different domain, €5.00 million and €4.89 million respectively. Two other organisations climbed instead of repeating. FORTH in Greece and TÜBİTAK in Türkiye both took part in 2022 and coordinated in 2024.

Three qualifications go with that. The ex-aequo rule ranks tied proposals first by geographical diversity, so a coordinator from a country already represented by a higher-ranked proposal loses the tiebreak. That bites inside a round, not across rounds. The 2027 demotion of the research component means a 2024 winner's work-package structure is now wrong whatever sector you point it at. And the alignment with regional smart specialisation strategy has to be real in each participating region, which is what separates a credible domain switch from an opportunistic one.

Which countries count as Widening

The Widening category is fixed in the Horizon Europe Regulation for the whole 2021 to 2027 programme. It is a legislative classification. It does not track the European Innovation Scoreboard and it does not update as countries improve. Estonia is rated a Strong Innovator on the Scoreboard and is still a Widening country for this call. The two classifications have nothing to do with each other.

The funded record shows it plainly. Coordination is limited to entities established in Widening countries, so every country that has coordinated a funded Excellence Hub is inside the category by definition. Greece has coordinated eight of the 25. Czechia and Türkiye have three each, Cyprus and Portugal two each, and Bulgaria, Slovenia, Slovakia, Croatia, Poland, Ukraine and Estonia one apiece. Estonia's is MarTe, led by SA Keskkonnainvesteeringute Keskus.

The EU Member States in the category are Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, along with the outermost regions. The associated Widening countries are Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Faroe Islands, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tunisia, Türkiye and Ukraine. Partners from outside the category have been admitted sparingly, 16 of 204 positions in 2022 and 12 of 209 in 2024. The 2027 test is tighter. Where 2024 asked for *duly justified cases*, 2027 wants a demonstration that the participation is necessary to achieve the expected impacts.

Latvia's record so far

Latvia took no part at all in the 2022 round. In 2024 it held 13 partner positions across two funded projects worth €3.64 million, which put it seventh among all participating countries by position count, ahead of Slovenia, Lithuania and Romania.

Neither project is Latvian-led. Latvia has never coordinated an Excellence Hub. AGRI-BIOCIRCULAR-HUB is coordinated by Lviv Polytechnic National University in Ukraine, and MarTe by SA Keskkonnainvesteeringute

Keskus in Estonia. On both occasions the way in was an invitation into a consortium that had been put together somewhere else.

Two Latvian clusters have been through evaluation and grant agreement, one in agri-bioeconomy and one in Kurzeme marine technology.

LATVIAN PARTICIPATION, 2024 ROUND

ORGANISATION	PROJECT	CONTRIBUTION
Agroresursu un ekonomikas institūts	AGRI-BIOCIRCULAR-HUB	€591,603
SIA FNG Invest	AGRI-BIOCIRCULAR-HUB	€519,039
Latvijas Investīciju un attīstības aģentūra	AGRI-BIOCIRCULAR-HUB	€217,789
SIA Egg Energy	AGRI-BIOCIRCULAR-HUB	€191,539
Zemnieku Saeima	AGRI-BIOCIRCULAR-HUB	€140,914
Latvijas Biogāzes asociācija	AGRI-BIOCIRCULAR-HUB	€95,539
Ventspils brīvostas pārvalde	MarTe	€369,450
Ventspils Augstskola	MarTe	€335,275
Latvijas Hidroekoloģijas institūts	MarTe	€304,775
Biedrība Baltijas Krasti	MarTe	€274,875
Latvijas Investīciju un attīstības aģentūra	MarTe	€248,665
Kurzemes plānošanas reģions	MarTe	€241,033
Pasaules Dabas Fonds	MarTe	€110,150
13 positions, 2 projects		**€3,640,646**

The mean Latvian position is €280,000, against an all-country mean of €311,000. LIAA is the only Latvian organisation appearing in both projects. Each project carries three public bodies, so no single organisation holds the public-authority position by default.

Twelve Latvian organisations now have Excellence Hubs experience, which is a real asset. None of it is coordination experience. Coordinating from Latvia in 2027 would be a national first, attempted in the hardest round the scheme has run. The realistic route stays what it has been, a partner position in a consortium led from Greece, Portugal, Türkiye, Ukraine or Estonia. The difference this time is that the Latvian partners need to arrive with their share of the 30% already identified.

This is starting to look like cohesion funding

Read the 2027 changes together and they describe a direction of travel. Co-financing at 70%. Investment plans that now have to carry business models for commercially sustainable products and services. Research pushed below ecosystem-building. None of those is typical of a Horizon Coordination and Support Action. All of them are typical of the Interregional Innovation Investments instrument, i3.

The published text bears the comparison out. The current i3 capacity-building strand describes itself as supporting consortia of innovation actors from quadruple-helix ecosystems. It aims explicitly at reducing the innovation divide, uses smart specialisation strategies as its organising framework, targets less developed and transition regions, and provides for cascade funding to third parties. It is implemented under Cohesion Policy. Excellence Hubs has always shared the quadruple-helix form and the smart specialisation anchor. In 2027 it adds the co-financing and the investment orientation.

We read this as convergence, and we flag it as interpretation. For a consortium the practical upshot is that a 2027 Excellence Hubs proposal should be built more like an investment case and less like a research programme, which is also where the demoted research component points on its own.

WHAT THIS ANALYSIS DOES NOT TELL YOU

The 2022 round published a proposal count but no evaluation breakdown, so its cut-off score is unknown and the two closed rounds are not documented to the same standard. Everything here about score distribution rests on 2024 alone.

The published statistics stop at the round level. Evaluation summary reports go only to the applicants who received them, so no public source explains why one consortium scored 14.5 and another 13.5. This analysis can show you where the cut-off fell. What put individual proposals on either side of it is not in any dataset we hold.

The i3 comparison runs on published topic text only. i3 keeps its eligibility rules and financial terms in a separate call document, so the two instruments' co-financing rates are not compared here and should not be assumed to match.

Where this leaves you

This is the most winnable Excellence Hubs round so far and the hardest one to qualify for. Roughly 24 grants against a field of 200 to 280 gives odds near 10%, against 5.9% in 2024. Those odds only matter to a consortium that can put 30% of a €6 million project on the table and still find room for a municipality and a civil society organisation.

If you are weighing up whether to take part, the first question is no longer thematic fit or partner search. It is whether every intended partner can name its co-financing source. That decides the consortium before anything else does, and getting an answer takes months.

For a Latvian organisation the second question is which of the established coordinating institutions in Greece, Portugal, Türkiye, Ukraine or Estonia is already putting a consortium together. Both closed rounds say that is where the invitation comes from, and those consortia are forming now.

IF THIS IS A LIVE DECISION

We keep the underlying dataset current, covering published evaluation statistics, funded consortia and topic text across the Horizon Europe portfolio, and we use it to test specific call and consortium fits. If you are weighing up whether to join or build an Excellence Hubs consortium for March 2027, we are easy to reach.

Sources. Proposal counts, admissibility and eligibility figures, score distributions and budget requested come from the Commission's published topic updates on the Funding and Tenders Portal. Funded projects, contributions, partner organisations, countries, roles and durations come from CORDIS. Topic descriptions, conditions and budget metadata for all three rounds, and for the i3 comparison, come from the Funding and Tenders Portal topic records, retrieved 6 August 2026.

Derived figures. Success rates, ceiling utilisation, the 22 to 25 grant range, the 200 to 280 field estimate, the projected cut-off score and all co-financing arithmetic are our own calculations from the sources above, and are marked as projections wherever they appear. The Widening country list is quoted from the Horizon Europe Regulation.

Prepared by Plenty Nexus, August 2026.