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BSB Dialogue
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Practical Outline

HORIZON EUROPE

*Opportunities for Research and Innovation Collaboration in the Black Sea
Innovation Ecosystem*

Black Sea Innovation Platform DialogueInnoHub

www.dialogueinnohub.com

Project BSB 1104

DIALOGUE: Dialogue for innovation and better governance"
co-funded by the INTERREG NEXT Black Sea Basin programme



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Introduction

Research and innovation are essential drivers of economic competitiveness, technological progress and sustainable development. To strengthen Europe's scientific leadership and address major societal challenges, the European Union launched Horizon Europe, its flagship research and innovation programme for the period 2021–2027.

With a total budget of approximately €95.5 billion, Horizon Europe supports research and innovation activities across a wide range of sectors, including digital technologies, climate action, health, energy, mobility and sustainable industry.

For stakeholders in the Black Sea Basin, Horizon Europe represents an important opportunity to strengthen research capacity, develop innovative solutions and participate in international research collaborations. By engaging in Horizon Europe projects, organisations can gain access to European networks, funding resources and cutting-edge knowledge.

How this outline matters to the quadruple helix actors

Public authorities & regional agencies

Participate in Coordination and Support Actions and use their results to inform regional research and innovation policy.

Businesses & SMEs

Join consortia for Innovation Actions to bring new technologies to market with EU co-funding.

Academia & research institutions

Lead or partner in Research and Innovation Actions, and access ERC and MSCA funding for researchers.

Civil society & business associations

Contribute to societal-challenge clusters (health, security, inclusion) and help ensure research addresses community needs.



Overview of the Programme

Horizon Europe builds upon previous EU research and innovation programmes such as Horizon 2020, aiming to reinforce Europe's scientific excellence while supporting innovation and competitiveness.

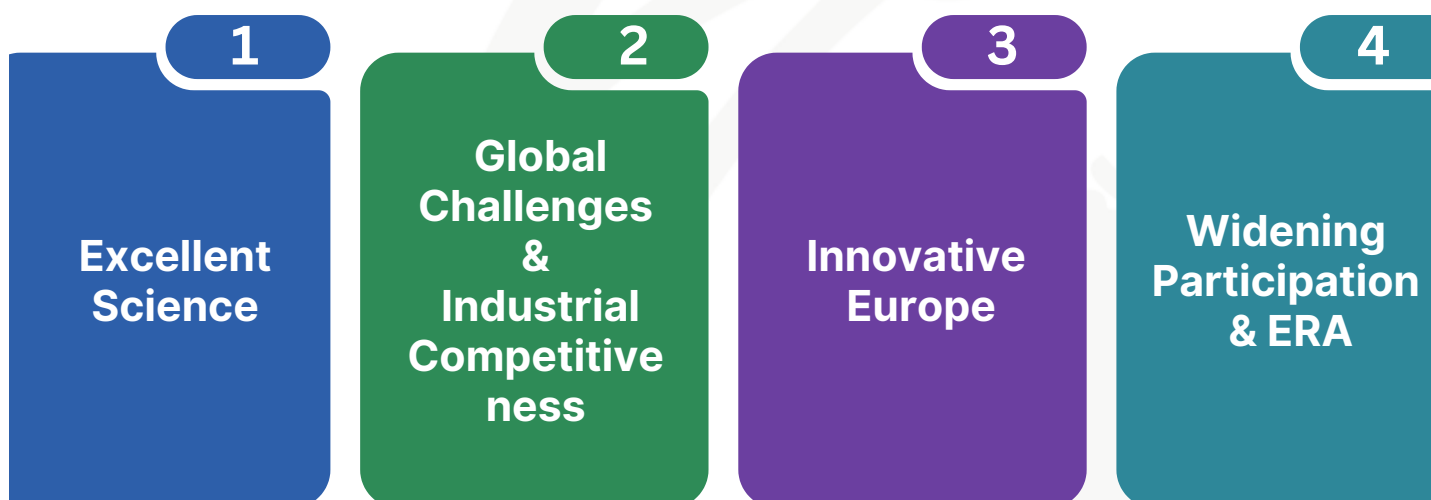
The programme supports projects that contribute to addressing key global challenges, including climate change, digital transformation, health and sustainable economic development.

Horizon Europe promotes collaboration between a wide range of stakeholders:

- universities and research institutions
- small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
- large companies and industrial partners
- public authorities
- civil society organisations.

These collaborations help accelerate the development and deployment of innovative solutions.

The Four Pillars of Horizon Europe



Horizon Europe Key Targets

Horizon Europe's budget of approximately €95.5 billion is distributed across its four components, each with a distinct focus.

Excellent Science

- Frontier research funded through the European Research Council
- Researcher mobility and training via Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
- Advanced research infrastructures

Global Challenges & Industrial Competitiveness

- Six thematic clusters, from health to climate, energy and food
- Collaborative research addressing major societal challenges

Innovative Europe

- European Innovation Council support for high-risk, high-impact innovation
- European Innovation Ecosystems
- Support for start-ups and scale-ups

Widening Participation & ERA

- Closing the research and innovation gap across the EU
- Teaming, Twinning and ERA Chairs instruments
- The Hop-on Facility for joining existing consortia

A significant share of the programme budget is dedicated to **addressing climate-related challenges** and **supporting digital transformation**.



The Four Pillars of Horizon Europe

Horizon Europe is organised into **three main pillars**, complemented by a cross-cutting programme supporting widening participation.

Across all three pillars, projects take one of three main forms:

- Research and Innovation Actions (RIA), generating new knowledge and technologies;
- Innovation Actions (IA), bringing technologies closer to market through demonstration and piloting; and
- Coordination and Support Actions (CSA), supporting networking, policy coordination and dissemination — particularly relevant for initiatives such as the Black Sea Innovation Platform - DialoguennoHub.

1. Pillar I – Excellent Science

This pillar strengthens Europe's scientific leadership and supports high-quality research through initiatives such as:

- European Research Council (ERC) – funding frontier research
- Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) – supporting researcher mobility and training
- Research infrastructures – development of advanced research facilities.

These instruments contribute to strengthening Europe's scientific capacity and developing highly skilled researchers.

Bulgaria and Romania illustrate how quickly this can pay off: Bulgaria's success rate on Marie Skłodowska-Curie staff-exchange proposals rose from 0% to 22% between the first and second years of Horizon Europe, while Romania's rose to 28% in 2022 and 32% in 2023 — both well above typical historical levels for the region.



2. Pillar II – Global Challenges and Industrial Competitiveness

This pillar supports collaborative research projects addressing major societal challenges.

Activities are organised into six thematic clusters:

	Cluster	Focus
	Health	Medical research and health systems
	Culture, creativity and inclusive society	Social innovation and cultural research
	Civil security for society	Security and resilience
	Digital, industry and space	Digital technologies and industrial innovation
	Climate, energy and mobility	Sustainable energy and transport
	Food, bioeconomy, natural resources, agriculture and environment	Sustainable agriculture and environmental protection

These clusters encourage multidisciplinary collaboration between research institutions, industry and public organisations.

Opportunities for the Black Sea Innovation Ecosystem



Several of these clusters map directly onto Black Sea Basin priorities — from the Climate, Energy and Mobility cluster and the Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources and Environment cluster, both highly relevant to the region's marine and agricultural profile (see the companion outline on the EU Green Deal), to the Health and Civil Security clusters.

3. Pillar III – Innovative Europe

This pillar focuses on supporting breakthrough innovations and strengthening Europe's innovation ecosystem.

Key instruments include:

- European Innovation Council (EIC) – supporting high-risk, high-impact innovations
- European Innovation Ecosystems – strengthening cooperation between innovation actors
- support for start-ups and scale-ups.

These initiatives aim to facilitate the transition from research results to market-ready innovations.

Regional uptake is accelerating here too: Bulgaria and Romania together signed 25% more grant agreements in the first two years of Horizon Europe than during the previous three years combined under Horizon 2020

4. Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area

This cross-cutting component funds measures specifically designed to close the research and innovation gap between Member States, helping institutions in 'widening countries' — including Bulgaria and Romania — connect with centres of excellence elsewhere in Europe.

Key instruments include:

- Teaming — pairing an institution in a widening country with a leading European partner to build a new Centre of Excellence
- Twinning — networking and knowledge-transfer partnerships between institutions
- ERA Chairs — attracting outstanding researchers and managers to widening institutions
- the Hop-on Facility — letting an entity from a widening country join an already-selected consortium.

Both Bulgaria and Romania are classified as widening countries and are eligible for all of these instruments. While the two countries still rank 21st and 27th respectively among EU Member States on overall Horizon Europe performance, their improving success rates show that sustained engagement can narrow the research and innovation gap over time.



How Stakeholders Can Engage

Horizon Europe's work programmes are co-designed by the European Commission with Member State delegates in Programme Committees, informed by stakeholder consultation ahead of each programme period. **The DIALOGUE Practical Outlines of the mechanisms through which the citizens can engage in the design and future implementation of programs or policies sets out the practical steps of how this can be done.**

In every participating country, a network of National Contact Points offers free, hands-on guidance on finding the right call, understanding the rules, and building a consortium — the first port of call for any organisation new to the programme.

For Bulgaria, Romania and other widening countries, the Widening Participation instruments described in the previous section — Teaming, Twinning, ERA Chairs and the Hop-on Facility — sit alongside the European Research Council and European Innovation Council opportunities covered in section 6, giving organisations several complementary routes into the programme.

Most Horizon Europe calls also require genuine multi-country cooperation: Research and Innovation Actions and Innovation Actions typically need a consortium of at least three legal entities established in three different EU Member States or Associated Countries. This requirement, together with the Widening instruments above, depends on engagement from a broad range of stakeholders — universities, businesses, public authorities and civil society. None of these actors can build a competitive consortium alone; sustained progress depends on partnership and on exchanging know-how across sectors and borders.

The European Commission has also proposed a successor Framework Programme 10 for 2028–2034, with a substantially larger proposed budget — organisations planning multi-year partnerships should monitor official EU channels for its design and updated calls.



Funding Opportunities Supporting Horizon Europe Participation

Three funding routes are especially relevant for organisations across the Black Sea Basin.

01

EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL (ERC)

Funds frontier, investigator-driven research for outstanding researchers of any nationality, working in Europe.

[www://](#)

02

EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL (EIC)

Supports high-risk, high-impact innovation, from breakthrough technologies to scale-up growth funding.

[www://](#)

03

WIDENING PARTICIPATION INSTRUMENTS

Teaming, Twinning, ERA Chairs and the Hop-on Facility, designed to help institutions in Bulgaria, Romania and other widening countries build capacity and connect with European centres of excellence.

[www://](#)



Examples of Horizon Europe Projects Relevant to the Black Sea Region

Example 1 – Climate Adaptation and Environmental Protection

Projects addressing climate resilience, environmental monitoring and sustainable resource management.

Example 2 – Digital Technologies and Smart Cities

Research focused on artificial intelligence, digital infrastructure, smart urban systems and data-driven governance.

Example 3 – Sustainable Energy and Mobility

Projects supporting renewable energy, energy efficiency and sustainable transport systems.

Example 4 – Blue Economy and Marine Research

Research related to marine ecosystems, coastal resilience and sustainable use of marine resources — particularly relevant given the Black Sea's shared marine environment.



Where to Start from?

Follow these five practical steps to move from idea to funded project:

01

EXPLORE

Research Horizon Europe's pillars and priorities (sections 2–4 of this guide) to identify where your organisation's expertise or challenge fits.

02

TRACK

Monitor the EU Funding & Tenders Portal, your National Points Communications and the DialogueInnoHub Black Sea Innovation Platform so you do not miss an open calls that match your idea. Join info days or dedicated webinars for more information.

03

CONNECT

Use the Black Sea Innovation Platform - DialogueInnoHub to find partners across the region and build your consortium.

04

PREPARE

Draft your proposal against the excellence, impact and implementation criteria all Horizon Europe evaluations use, with support from your National Contact Point.

05

APPLY & SHARE

Submit your proposal – and once funded, share your results through DialogueInnoHub Platform so others in the region can build on your progress.

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Get in Touch

This Practical Outline is developed in the framework of the BSB 1104 DIALOGUE project (Dialogue for Innovation and Better Governance), co-funded by the INTERREG NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme.

For questions about this guide, partnership opportunities, or support navigating Horizon Europe funding, contact the Black Sea Innovation Platform - DialogueInnoHub.

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EU Funding & Tenders Portal: ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders



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