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D3.1 Funding Matrix

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Executive Summary

The *Funding Matrix (D3.1)* provides a structured mapping and analysis of EU, national, and regional funding instruments with a special focus on synergies between Horizon Europe and Cohesion Policy, and their operationalisation in Widening countries and Outermost Regions (ORs).

Anchored in the state-of-the-art, this work addresses long-standing concerns over the fragmented research and innovation funding landscape and aligns with the EU's policy drive to establish funding synergies as a strategic principle for the 2021–2027 programming period and beyond. By aligning excellence-based (Horizon Europe) and place-based (ESIF) programmes, D.3.1 addresses one of the ERA's central challenges: ensuring inclusiveness while advancing competitiveness.

The methodology adopted, followed a three-tier approach:

- **Tier 1 – Structural Mapping:** of EU-level programmes (organized under the 2021–2027 Multiannual Financial Framework) and of national/regional programmes, combining bottom-up data collection (surveys) and top-down desk research;
- **Tier 2 – Prioritisation:** of the most impactful EU and ESIF instruments in each country and region, determined through survey-based rankings and the reported frequency by stakeholders;
- **Tier 3 – Thematic Categorisation:** of the mapped programmes according to the six Horizon Europe Pillar II clusters, resulting in a consolidated funding matrix relevant to end users.

The mapping exercise revealed a complex but structured funding landscape. **Tier 1** identified 44 EU-level programmes relevant to research and innovation, complemented by 201 national and regional instruments, with the highest concentration of programmes under Cohesion Policy (ERDF, ESF+, Interreg, CAP) and the centrally managed Horizon Europe framework. Each programme was described using a common set of descriptors, ensuring comparability and integration into consolidated datasets.

Tier 2 highlighted the most impactful programmes across widening countries and ORs. While Horizon Europe dominates (87% of survey respondents), other instruments such as Erasmus+ (54%), LIFE (47%), Digital Europe (39%), and Creative Europe (33%) reflect a diversified portfolio of strategic investments. Among ESIF instruments, ERDF (65%) and ESF+ (58%) lead in visibility and relevance, underscoring their central role in cohesion policy and territorial, social, and sectoral priorities. The prioritisation exercise also revealed recurring challenges, including fragmentation of instruments, administrative complexity, limited coordination, and restricted access to ESIFs in peripheral regions.

Tier 3 consolidated the identified funding instruments into a structured matrix organized according to the six Horizon Europe Pillar II clusters. This categorization enabled a systematic cross-country comparison of funding opportunities, highlighting sectoral strengths and gaps. Key insights from Tier 3 showed that Digital, Industry & Space (Cluster 4) and Climate, Energy & Mobility (*Cluster 5*) dominate the funding landscape, reflecting strong EU policy focus on digital transformation, industrial competitiveness, and green transition priorities. In contrast, Health (*Cluster 1*) and Culture, Creativity & Inclusive Society (*Cluster 2*) are underrepresented, revealing structural gaps that may limit R&I uptake in these critical domains.

The results reveal important patterns in how funding instruments are mobilised and perceived across Widening countries and ORs. Three main insights emerge:

- **Excellence vs. cohesion trade-offs:** Coexistence of excellence-driven instruments (Horizon Europe) and cohesion-oriented funds (ERDF, ESF+) creates complementarities but also administrative burdens, especially in regions with weaker absorptive capacity;
- **Multidimensional funding strategies:** institutions often combine Horizon Europe with ERDF, ESF+, CAP, and Interreg, either independently or through synergies, to simultaneously pursue research excellence and territorial development goals;
- **Uneven representation:** gaps remain in participation and evidence coverage, particularly in the Baltic States, parts of the Balkans, and several ORs (e.g. Madeira, French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte, and Saint-Martin,) underlining the need for complementary desk research.

For users of the WiderAdvance Facility, these findings underline the strategic value of the Funding Matrix (D.3.1). Beyond mapping, it provides practical guidance to navigate a fragmented funding landscape, identify complementary resources, and support the dissemination and exploitation of research and innovation results.

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List of Acronyms

AMIF – Asylum and Migration Fund
BMVI – Border Management and Visa Instrument
CAP – Common Agricultural Policy
CF – Cohesion Fund
CORDIS – Community Research and Development Information Service
D – Deliverable
DG – Directorate-General
D&E – Dissemination and Exploitation
EAFRD – European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EIC – European Innovation Council
EMFAF – European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund
ERA – European Research Area
ERDF – European Regional Development Fund
ESF+ – European Social Fund Plus
ESIF – European Structural and Investment Funds
EU – European Union
HE – Horizon Europe
IPA III – Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance III
ISF – Internal Security Fund
MFF – Multiannual Financial Framework
NCP – National Contact Point
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OP – Operational Programme
OR – Outermost Region
R&I – Research and Innovation
REC – Research & Education Community/Network
RIS3 / S3 – Research and Innovation Smart Specialisation Strategy
RRF – Recovery and Resilience Facility
SME – Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

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1. General Landscape of R&I Funding in the EU

Research and Innovation (R&I) are cornerstones of the European Union's (EU) strategy to enhance competitiveness, address global societal challenges, and support sustainable growth. The European Research Area (ERA) represents the policy framework for aligning national, regional, and European research systems, ensuring that resources are mobilised collectively towards common objectives (European Commission, 2020).

The current **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021–2027** dedicates unprecedented resources to R&I through both centrally managed programmes, such as Horizon Europe (HE), Digital Europe Programme, LIFE, and shared management instruments, including the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), Interreg, and Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Altogether, these programmes represent close to one third of the MFF (Bachtroegler-Unger & Doussineau, 2020; European Parliament, 2025). However, the multiplicity of funding instruments makes it clear that synergies and coordination across programmes are critical to enhance efficiency and strategic coherence.

This strategic investment signals the EU's recognition that excellence in R&I is fundamental for both internal cohesion and global positioning. It also underlines the political ambition to ensure that no territory, especially less developed regions or outermost regions, is left behind in Europe's innovation trajectory.

Despite the scale of investments, the R&I funding landscape remains highly fragmented and difficult to navigate. Beneficiaries often face multiple, heterogeneous eligibility rules, variations in co-financing rates, different reporting frameworks, and complex application procedures, which substantially increase administrative burden and reduce accessibility, particularly for smaller research institutions, local universities, and emerging innovation actors (Kuhlmann et al., 2021). This institutional complexity often privileges organisations with higher absorptive capacity and professionalised grant management structures, thereby reinforcing existing asymmetries in participation across the ERA. In less developed regions and among smaller institutions, the lack of specialised administrative staff and financial flexibility can transform funding opportunities into barriers, rather than enablers, of innovation.

Moreover, overlaps between thematic areas are frequent and often lack coordination across programmes and funding streams. Strategic areas such as digitalisation, the green transition, or health are simultaneously targeted by HE, the Digital Europe Programme, the Connecting Europe Facility, LIFE, EU4Health, and multiple ESIF-funded regional initiatives. While this multiplicity reflects the transversal and urgent nature of these challenges, it also signals possible competitiveness unbalance and duplication of efforts, diluting impact and reducing the overall strategic coherence of EU action (European Commission, DG CONNECT, 2023 - *Digital Transformation Funding Overview*). For instance, digitalisation projects may receive fragmented support from ERDF-funded regional programmes and Horizon Europe partnerships without sufficient alignment, leading to parallel infrastructures or knowledge silos. Likewise, climate and energy initiatives may be financed, for example, under LIFE, ERDF, and Horizon Europe without integrated monitoring or shared evaluation frameworks, complicating impact assessment and policy learning.

Fragmentation and complex R&I funding landscape challenges, is especially pronounced in Widening countries and ORs, which face structural disadvantages such as geographical peripherality, constrained institutional capacity, and persistently lower participation rates in excellence-driven frameworks (Rodríguez-Pose, 2020; Holstein, Tarnus, & Taglioni, 2025).

In these contexts, the value of synergies extends beyond efficiency: they are a matter of equity and territorial cohesion, ensuring that all EU regions can both contribute to and benefit from Europe's innovation leadership.

Consequently, fostering synergies and complementarities across funding streams has become a strategic imperative, both to overcome fragmentation and complexity in the R&I funding landscape and to promote coherence, efficiency, and strategic alignment across programmes. Mechanisms such as the Seal of Excellence, cumulative funding approaches, and the alignment of Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) with EU-level excellence-based instruments aim to bridge the gap between centrally managed and place-based funding. By enabling sequential, complementary, or co-funded actions, these instruments can reduce duplication, maximise impact, and promote a more coherent European R&I ecosystem. They also provide an avenue for widening countries and ORs to better connect with cutting-edge European projects, reinforcing inclusiveness and cohesion within the ERA.

1.1. The Dual Funding Architecture of EU R&I: Excellence-Based and Place-Based Instruments

Horizon Europe: Excellence and Centralised Management

HE is the EU's flagship programme for R&I, designed to *foster scientific excellence, accelerate technological development, and address major societal challenges*. It is centrally managed by the European Commission, primarily through the DG for Research and Innovation (DG RTD), with implementation delegated to a network of executive agencies and more than 20 specialised bodies (European Commission, 2021a – *Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027*).

The programme operates based on in the multiannual work programmes that define strategic priorities across six thematic clusters, five Missions, and multiple partnerships. Funding is allocated through competitive calls for proposals, assessed on the basis of excellence, impact, and implementation quality, independent of applicants' geographical location. This excellence-driven and non-place-based orientation distinguishes Horizon Europe from cohesion policy funds, in particular for the R&I. Project data and outputs are made publicly available through **CORDIS**¹ and the **Horizon Dashboard**², which constitute key platforms for transparency, monitoring, and evidence-based policy learning (European Commission, 2022a - *Synergies between Horizon Europe and ERDF programmes*).

Cohesion Policy and Shared Management Funds

By contrast, Cohesion Policy funds (including the ERDF, the ESF+, and the CF pursue the overarching objective of reducing economic, social, and territorial disparities across the EU (European Commission, 2021b - EU Digital Decade 2030 targets). These instruments are implemented under shared management between the European Commission, particularly the DG for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO), and national or regional managing authorities.

¹ CORDIS - EU research results. <https://cordis.europa.eu/>

² Horizon Dashboard: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/horizon-dashboard>

Unlike Horizon Europe, Cohesion Policy is explicitly place-based, with resource allocation determined by geographical and socio-economic criteria, such as Gross Domestic Product per capita, unemployment rates, or regional development challenges (Rodríguez-Pose, 2020). The bulk of funding is delivered through national or regional Operational Programmes (OPs), which are negotiated with and approved by the Commission. OPs translate territorial development priorities into concrete actions and funding streams, often combining infrastructure, skills, and innovation investments (European Court of Auditors, 2022). Project-level information is increasingly accessible through the **KOHESIO**³ platform, which provides a comprehensive overview of cohesion-funded projects.

Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) as a Strategic Bridge

S3 have become the cornerstone of cohesion policy R&I investments since their integration into the 2014–2020 programming period. S3 are designed to enable Member States and regions to identify their competitive advantages, prioritise specific innovation domains, and align public investments with business needs and societal challenges through an entrepreneurial discovery process (Foray, 2018; Regulation (EU) 2021/1058, Recital 14).

In the 2021–2027 period, S3 served as an important enabler to receive ERDF support in R&I-related investments, ensuring that resources are channelled strategically and territorially. Importantly, S3 also act as a bridge to Horizon Europe, linking excellence-based and place-based instruments and enabling complementarities between regional investment priorities and European Missions or partnerships (European Commission, 2022b - *New European Innovation Agenda*).

Operational Programmes as Instruments of Synergy

Operational Programmes (OPs) constitute the core implementation tools of cohesion policy at national and regional level (down-scale level). They embed R&I objectives within broader development frameworks that include infrastructure, capacity building, human capital, and innovation ecosystems. The integration of R&I into OPs reflects the Commission's emphasis on fostering "A Smarter Europe" through innovative and smart economic transformation (European Commission, 2021b - *EU Digital Decade 2030 targets*).

Because OPs are territorially tailored, they are particularly significant for Widening countries and ORs, where R&I systems often face structural disadvantages and development specificities. By combining infrastructure and capacity-building investments with complementary Horizon Europe projects, OPs seem play a decisive role in creating balanced participation and inclusiveness on the ERA.

1.2. Mechanisms to Enhance Synergies

WiderAdvance Facility understand the synergies as the coordinated and complementary use of financial resources to maximise impact (European Commission, 2022a - *Synergies between Horizon Europe and ERDF programmes*). Horizon Europe and Cohesion Policy have been explicitly mandated to foster synergies. Accordingly, the European Commission has established a range of operational mechanisms designed to bridge both streams, enhancing coherence between excellence-driven research and place-based development. These mechanisms aim to mobilize resources more

³ KOHESIO platform: <https://kohesio.ec.europa.eu/en/>

efficiently and inclusively (European Commission, 2022a - *Synergies between Horizon Europe and ERDF programmes*; 2022b). The operationalization of synergies include:

- **Seal of Excellence**⁴: a quality label awarded to high-calibre Horizon Europe proposals that were not funded due to budget constraints. This seal enables such proposals to access support from ERDF or national/regional CFs, recognizing their merit and directing attention to their potential;
- **Transfers from ERDF to Horizon Europe**⁵: Member States may transfer up to 5% of their ERDF envelope toward Horizon Europe activities. This mechanism was first operationalized by Malta, which transferred €5 million to enable five additional ERA fellowships, thereby strengthening national R&I capacity;
- **Cumulative / Combined Funding**⁶: enables joint resourcing from Horizon Europe and CFs within a single project, provided there is transparent accounting of cost items. This promotes coordinated co-funding or sequencing (e.g., infrastructure by ERDF followed by research funding from Horizon Europe);
- **European Partnerships**⁷: these frameworks facilitate collaborative investments across Horizon Europe's partnerships, structural funds, and other instruments to support large-scale innovation goals and strengthen territorial embedding;
- **Upstream–Downstream Synergies**: this modality aligns early-stage investments (e.g., skills, infrastructure via ERDF/ESF+) with downstream Horizon Europe-supported R&I activities, creating seamless chains of support.

Beyond these mechanisms, the **Sovereignty Seal**⁸ (STEP), granted to projects in strategic domains like digital and defence, also facilitates access to CFs without additional competition, enhancing cumulative funding paths.

The above listed mechanisms are especially relevant for Widening and ORs, where structural constraints make access to Horizon Europe more challenging. When effectively mobilised, they enable complementary use of EU and regional resources, reduce duplication, and reinforce the inclusiveness of the ERA.

The operationalization of these synergies currently benefits from strong policy support under post-2021 regulatory frameworks. The EC Communication on Synergies between Horizon Europe and Cohesion Policy Programmes (European Commission, 2022, COM(2022) 332 final – *Communication on Synergies between Horizon Europe and Cohesion Policy Programmes*), together with relevant legal instruments, clearly defines implementation modalities, making them accessible to managing authorities and R&I stakeholders. These instruments provide concrete pathways for the integration of

⁴ Seal of Excellence: https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/seal-excellence_en

⁵ Transfers from ERDF to Horizon Europe: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/synergies-between-european-regional-development-fund-erdf-and-horizon-europe-2024-02-16_en

⁶ Cumulative / Combined Funding: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/publications/communications/2022/synergies-between-erdf-programmes-and-horizon-europe_en

⁷ European Partnerships: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/european-partnerships-horizon-europe_en

⁸ **Sovereignty Seal**: https://strategic-technologies.europa.eu/index_en

programmes, funding streams, and policy objectives, ensuring that synergies are operationalized effectively across different levels of R&I governance.

Evidence from the European Court of Auditors (2022) indicates that well-implemented synergies enhance research capacities, strengthen innovation ecosystems, improve knowledge transfer, and foster sustainable collaboration networks, thereby reducing fragmentation and boosting institutional resilience.

Synergies in the Next MFF (Post-2027)

The negotiations for the **post-2027 MFF** provide a critical window to rethink how R&I synergies are institutionalised. Current fragmentation across headings and subheadings often obscures strategic coherence, while overlaps across digital, green, and innovation objectives reveal the need for stronger integration (European Parliament, 2025). Embedding synergies *ex ante* in programme regulations, rather than retrofitting them through guidance, will be essential for the post-2027 cycle.

Cross-Cutting Synergies Across the EU Funding Landscape

Synergies cut across multiple thematic clusters, domains and policy priorities, reflecting the inherently transversal nature of R&I. Many of the EU's most pressing challenges (i.e. climate neutrality, energy security, health resilience, food systems transformation, and social inclusion), require the simultaneous mobilisation of diverse funding streams spanning research, infrastructure, skills, and market uptake.

The operationalisation of cross-sectoral synergies across EU funding instruments is crucial to support systemic transitions and ensure that investments are mutually reinforcing rather than siloed. Key thematic clusters for synergies, include:

- **Twin Transition (green and digital):** integration of sustainability and digitalisation objectives across Horizon Europe, Digital Europe Programme, LIFE, ERDF, and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (European Commission, 2022a - *Synergies between Horizon Europe and ERDF programmes*; European Court of Auditors, 2022). Coordinated investments facilitate the decarbonisation of industries, digital infrastructure deployment, and the scaling of green technologies;
- **Health and Societal Resilience:** complementary use of Horizon Europe Cluster 1, EU4Health, ESF+, and ERDF investments strengthens regional healthcare systems, infrastructure, and preparedness (European Commission, 2022b - *New European Innovation Agenda*). This alignment enhances research translation, healthcare delivery, and crisis responsiveness;
- **Energy Security and Strategic Technologies:** strategic coordination of investments in renewable energy, hydrogen, and critical raw materials via Horizon Europe partnerships, Connecting Europe Facility, ERDF, and InvestEU advances energy independence and strategic industrial capacities (European Commission, 2022c - *Outermost Regions Strategy 2022*; InvestEU, 2021);

- **Food Systems and Bioeconomy:** alignment of CAP Strategic Plans with Horizon Europe Cluster 6 and LIFE programmes fosters sustainable agriculture, biodiversity protection, and circular bioeconomy development (European Commission, 2022d). This integrated approach enhances resource efficiency and ecological resilience;
- **Skills and Human Capital:** synergies between Erasmus+, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, ESF+, and regional programmes build the talent base essential for R&I ecosystems (European Commission, 2021a - *Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027*). Place-based skills development ensures the territorial embedding of innovation capabilities;
- **Innovation and Market Deployment:** leveraging combined funding from Horizon Europe's EIC, InvestEU, and cohesion instruments accelerates technology transfer, scale-up of innovations, and market uptake (European Commission, 2021b - EU Digital Decade 2030 targets). This promotes competitiveness while bridging the innovation gap across regions;
- **Crisis Response and Security:** integration of civil protection mechanisms (rescEU), Horizon Europe security research, and regional resilience funds addresses emergencies such as pandemics, natural disasters, or cyber threats (European Commission, 2022e). Coordinated action strengthens societal resilience and adaptive capacity.

These cross-cutting synergies ensure that European investments are mutually reinforcing, amplifying impact and accelerating the continent's response to systemic challenges (European Court of Auditors, 2022).

This approach underscores the importance of place-based complementarities, where centrally managed programmes provide frontier knowledge and excellence, while cohesion and regional instruments enable territorial diffusion, capacity building, and long-term integration into the ERA.

Synergies provide a pathway for inclusive growth in Widening countries and ORs, which often underperform in Horizon Europe due to structural barriers yet benefit from significant CFs. Aligning these funding streams ensures that excellence-based and place-based approaches are mutually reinforcing.

The recent study Holstein et al. (2025) confirms that ORs remain marginal in EU R&I, despite unique assets in biodiversity, maritime economy, and renewable energy. Developing targeted synergy strategies is therefore a political and technical imperative to integrate ORs into the ERA, safeguarding their long-term competitiveness.

This deliverable, *Funding Matrix* (**D.3.1**) aims to respond directly to the identified challenges by:

1. Mapping EU, national, and regional funding programmes (Tier 1);
2. Prioritising the funding programmes according to their impact (Tier 2);
3. Categorising the funding programmes into a consolidated matrix aligned with Horizon Europe Pillar II clusters (Tier 3).

The consolidated *Funding Matrix* allow to feed the *Best Practices Report* (**D.3.2**) and the *Funding Opportunities Calendar*, enabling an interactive dashboard for *WiderAdvance Facility* users and stakeholders. By bridging top-down and bottom-up programmes to finance R&I, this work contributes

to advancing the implementation of funding synergies, thereby strengthening the resilience, accessibility, and inclusiveness of the European R&I ecosystem.

2. Objective

Work Package 3 (WP3) – *Synergies on D&E* enhances the activities of the *WiderAdvance Facility Dissemination and Exploitation (D&E) Service* by emphasizing the pivotal role of funding synergies, shaping effective policy mixes for research investments, and fostering advancements beyond the state-of-the-art. Task 3.1 plays a key role in achieving these objectives, delivering a structured mapping of funding opportunities, in addition a compilation of best practices in funding synergies. This provides *WiderAdvance Facility* users with the resources needed to strengthen their projects and secure sustainable funding beyond their initial grants.

Specifically, Task 3.1 focuses on identifying and mapping funding opportunities across cohesion and regional funds, supporting Widening countries, including ORs, in their D&E efforts. Through the consolidation of information from multiple sources (such as the Kohesio Platform, NCP databases, and CORDIS) and leveraging the expertise of project partners, this task will develop a comprehensive and continuously updated *Funding Matrix (D.3.1)*.

Beyond identifying funding opportunities, Task 3.1 will also analyse successful synergy practices derived from investment plans and strategies of projects funded under Excellence Hubs and Teaming for Excellence calls (**D.3.2**). These best practices will be compiled into a structured repository, reinforcing access to funding and fostering stronger synergies within the R&I ecosystem.

A Funding Dashboard is a consolidated outcome of Task 3.1, integrating its milestones and deliverables, each contributing a distinct perspective to the overall Task objectives:

- A *Funding Matrix (D.3.1)*, continuously updated with relevant funding opportunities;
- A *Best Practices Report (D.3.2)*, capturing and structuring effective strategies for leveraging synergies;
- A *Funding Opportunities Calendar*, dynamically published on the project website to ensure timely visibility;
- An *Initiatives Repository*, collecting dissemination and outreach materials to reinforce the coaching activities under Task 3.3.

3. Methodology for the Mapping, Prioritization, and Thematic Classification of EU and National Funding Programmes

The construction of the *Funding Matrix (D.3.1)* follows a multi-tiered approach designed to ensure structure, thematic coherence, and practical relevance of all Task 3.1 outputs. It enables the integration and comparative analysis of funding opportunities across different governance levels, from

EU-level programmes to national and regional instruments, supporting the D&E of R&I results in Widening countries and ORs.

For the analysis, a mapping of a total of 37 widening entities (including ORs), were considered. They were divided into three groups, according to their territorial and political status: 15 EU Member States, 9 ORs, and 13 Associated Countries (**Table 1**).

Table 1 - WiderAdvance Facility partner representation by country/region. Legend: NCP = National Contact Point; REC = Research & Education Community/Network; SME = Small and Medium-sized Enterprise.

WiderAdvance Facility Partner				
	No	No, but represented by an ambassador	Yes, represented by an NCP	Yes, represented by other entity type
EU WIDENING COUNTRIES (15)				
Bulgaria		X (FORTH, Greece)		
Croatia		X (IPPT PAN, Poland)		
Cyprus		X (FORTH, Greece)		
Czech Republic				X (UNICO, SME)
Estonia		X (LMT, Lithuania)		
Greece			X (FORTH, NCP)	
Hungary				X (EM, SME)
Latvia		X (LMT, Lithuania)		
Lithuania			X (LMT, NCP)	
Malta			X (SM, NCP)	
Poland				X (IPPT PAN, REC)
Portugal		X (FRCT, Azores)		
Romania		X (IPPT PAN, Poland)		
Slovakia			X (CVTI SR, NCP)	
Slovenia		X (CVTI SR, Slovakia)		
OUTERMOST REGIONS (9)				
France: - French Guiana - Guadeloupe - Martinique - Mayotte - Réunion - Saint-Martin				X (RUI, Private limited company)
Portugal: - Azores - Madeira				X (FRCT, Regional Agency)
Spain: - Canary Islands				X (ACIISI, Regional Agency)
WIDENING ASSOCIATED COUNTRIES (13+1*)				
Albania		X (SM, Malta)		
Armenia			X (SIPAC, NCP)	
Bosnia and Herzegovina		X (SM, Malta)		
Faroe Islands		X (SM, Malta)		
Georgia		X (SIPAC, Armenia)		
Kosovo		X (SM, Malta)		

Marocco*		X (MHESR, Tunisia)		
Moldova		X (SM, Malta)		
Montenegro		X (SM, Malta)		
North Macedonia	**			
Serbia		X (IPPT PAN, Poland)		
Tunisia			X (MHESR, NCP)	
Türkiye		X (MHESR, Tunisia)		
Ukraine		X (IPPT PAN, Poland)		

* Morocco is an Associated or Partner Country in some EU programs through bilateral agreements or regional partnerships.

** Not represented in the project consortium but included in the Mapping exercise (*Tier 1*).

3.1. Task 3.1 Internal Survey

As an initial step to define the methodology underpinning **D.3.1**, an internal survey was designed to collect key information on funding opportunities and successful projects supported by EU programmes, ESIF, and national or regional instruments across the WiderAdvance Facility countries and regions.

Task 3.1 internal survey (ANNEX I) was first circulated among project partners, namely the NCPs and ambassadors representing each widening country/region. At a subsequent stage, it was disseminated more broadly to all NCPs from the identified target countries and regions (**Table 1**), as well as to additional stakeholders able to provide additional information and consolidated insights regarding their respective national and regional R&I ecosystems. This approach ensured the collection of information enriched both by the direct knowledge of project partners and by inputs from relevant actors embedded in the R&I funding landscape.

The primary objective of the survey was to complement the *Structural Mapping* exercise (methodology *Tier 1*), by offering a contextualized national and regional perspective on available funding instruments, as well as by capturing reflections on the interaction between different levels of funding programmes. The survey therefore focused on collecting information related to:

- National and regional funding programmes supporting D&E of R&I results;
- Managing and intermediate authorities involved in ESIF implementation;
- Examples of successful projects leveraging synergies across multiple funding sources (e.g., Horizon Europe combined with national/regional funds);
- The top five EU funding programmes most frequently used in each country/region;
- The most significant ESIF programmes in each country/region, identified either by volume of projects funded or by budgetary impact;
- Contact details of relevant NCPs;
- Reported challenges and good practices in establishing and sustaining funding synergies.

The information collected through the survey underpins the identification of the most relevant EU funding programmes and ESIF instruments for each widening country/region. This evidence base supports the selection of high-impact programmes and directly informs the *Prioritization* exercise (methodology *Tier 2*) developed within the Mapping, Prioritization, and Thematic Classification of EU and National Funding Programmes (**Figure 1**). The survey results also provide critical input to *Best*

Practices Report on Synergies (D.3.2, M12, December 2025), thereby ensuring continuity and alignment across the work package's strategic objectives.

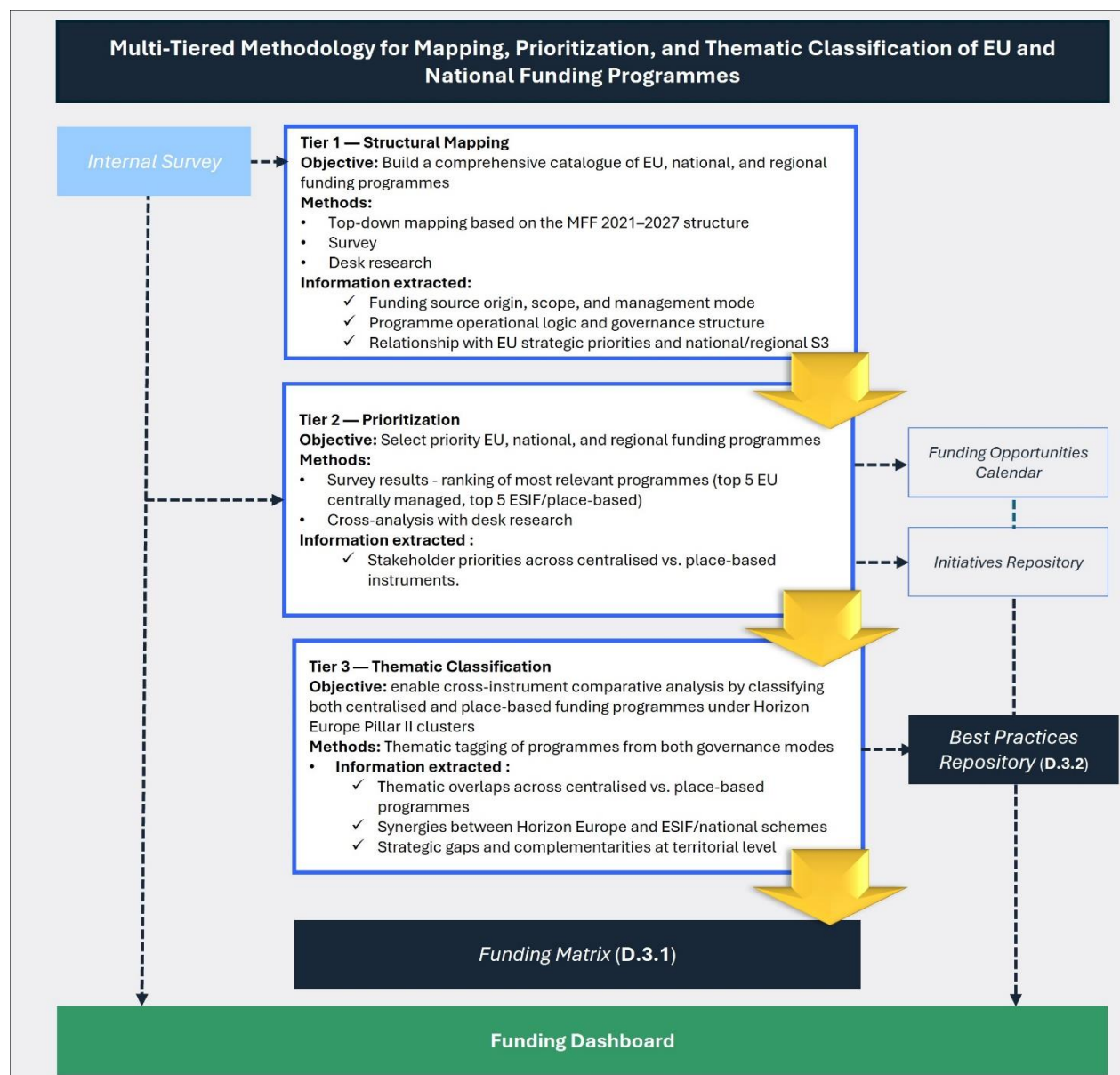


Figure 1 - Multi-tiered methodology for mapping, prioritization, and thematic classification of EU and national funding programs.

3.2. Tier 1 – Structural Mapping

EU funding programs

The mapping of EU funding programmes and initiatives for R&I was conducted applying the architecture of the MFF 2021–2027 (European Commission, 2021). This approach provides a systematic and policy-driven methodology that aligns financial resources with the EU's overarching strategic priorities. Adopting the MFF as a guiding structure for the EU funding programmes mapping exercise ensured a clear, hierarchical, and logically consistent organization of funding opportunities,

moving from broad policy headings to specific programmes and initiatives. The use of the MFF structure allowed:

- **Alignment with EU strategic priorities**, ensuring that R&I funding is categorized in coherence with the EU's long-term objectives;
- **Clarity and accessibility**, offering WiderAdvance Facility users a structured overview of available funding, facilitating intuitive navigation (including keyword searches) across different programmes and initiatives;
- **Coherence across policy areas**, highlighting the interaction between funding instruments across sectors, thereby increasing the potential for interdisciplinary research and the identification of synergies between programmes.

This mapping exercise delivers a horizontal and programmatic perspective, situating each programme within its financial origin, management mode, and alignment with EU policy objectives. Its hierarchical architecture is structured as follows: **Headings** → **Clusters** → **Programs/Initiatives**:

- **Headings**: the first level corresponds to the six Headings of the MFF, each representing a major EU policy domain. These define the overarching frameworks under which R&I funding is structured (European Commission, 2021).

– **Heading 1 - SINGLE MARKET, INNOVATION AND DIGITAL**

– Supports research, innovation, digital transformation, and space programs.

– **Heading 2 - COHESION AND VALUES**

– Focuses on regional development, economic cohesion, and social resilience.

– **Heading 3 - NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT**

– Covers agriculture, rural development, fisheries, and environmental protection.

– **Heading 4 - MIGRATION AND BORDER MANAGEMENT**

– Addresses migration policies, asylum, border security, and management.

– **Heading 5 - SECURITY AND DEFENCE**

– Supports internal and external security, including defense cooperation.

– **Heading 6 - NEIGHBOURHOOD AND THE WORLD**

– Funds external action, humanitarian aid, development cooperation, and partnerships with neighboring countries.

- **Clusters**: the second level comprises the Clusters, which group related policy objectives and funding instruments within each Heading. For example, under *Heading 1 – Single Market, Innovation, and Digital*, clusters focus on R&I, European Strategic Investments, the Single Market, and Space.
- **Programs & Initiatives (specific funding instruments)**: at the most detailed level, specific funding instruments provide financial support for R&I activities. Each programme or initiative is characterized by a common set of descriptors:
 - Summary – a brief description of the program or initiative.

- About – more detailed information on the scope, objectives, and strategic alignment of the program/initiative.
- Eligibility criteria – an outline of specific eligibility rules, including the types of beneficiaries (e.g., SMEs, research institutions, public bodies).
- Lead DG –European Commission department responsible for managing the program/initiative.
- Budget –total allocated budget for the program/initiative within the 2021-2027 funding period.
- Funding Opportunities – direct access to open calls or application portals.
- Program/Initiative Webpage – a reference webpage providing comprehensive details about the funding mechanism.
- Contact – relevant contact details (email, official webpage, or other communication channels).
-

National and Regional funding programs

The identification and mapping of national and regional funding programmes followed a structured multi-step methodology designed to ensure comparability and alignment with the framework already applied to EU funding programmes. This approach combined bottom-up data collection through the *Task 3.1 internal survey* with complementary top-down desk research, thereby establishing a coherent and foundation for subsequent analysis.

- 1. Internal survey as primary input:** the first layer of evidence was derived from the internal survey circulated among consortium partners. Emphasis was placed on responses to the question: *“Are there any national or regional funding programmes in your country/region that specifically support the dissemination, exploitation, or uptake of research and innovation results (in addition to core R&I funding)? If yes, please specify the programme, the name of the entity, and provide the link.”* The responses offered direct, context-specific knowledge of national and regional ecosystems and served as the foundational dataset for programmes identification.
- 2. Complementary desk research:** to address potential information gaps and ensure balanced coverage across all Widening countries and ORs, structured web-based desk research was conducted. The desk research was structured as follows:
 - Thematic focus areas: “proof of concept funding”, “innovation voucher”, “early-stage start-up support”, “smart specialisation”, “technology transfer funding”, “collaborative innovation”, “public funding for R&I exploitation”, “national innovation funding programmes”, “regional innovation support schemes”, “start-up grants for innovation”.
 - Programme typologies: “national programme”, “regional programme”, “government funding”, “public grant”, “call for proposals”, “open call”, “subsidy”.
 - Geographical scope: targeted searches were conducted for each Widening country and ORs listed in Table 1, ensuring systematic territorial coverage.

Note: *no temporal restriction was applied. All programmes identifiable through official and reliable online sources were considered, regardless of whether they were currently open or closed, with particular emphasis placed on those with ongoing calls.*

3.3. *Tier 2* – Prioritization

The prioritization stage was informed by the *Task 3.1 Internal Survey*, in which respondents ranked the most significant EU funding programmes within their national or regional ecosystems. Prioritization was based on the relative ranking and frequency of mentions provided by respondents. The survey included targeted questions to identify both EU funding programmes and ESIF most relevant in each national and regional context, such as:

- “Which EU funding programmes (excluding ESIF) are the most significant in your country or region? By ‘significant,’ we mean those with the greatest impact in terms of number of projects funded or total budget. Please list the top five most commonly used EU funding programmes.”
- “Which European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) are the most significant in your country or region? By ‘significant,’ we mean those with the greatest impact in terms of number of projects funded or total budget. Please list the top five most commonly used ESIF.”

This process allows the identification of a set of priority programmes for each country and region, reflecting the context-specific relevance of funding opportunities as perceived by local actors. The ranked programmes form the basis for the *Tier 3* analysis, which will focus exclusively on the prioritized programmes in addition to those mapped from the national and regional landscape, in each country and region.

3.4. *Tier 3* – Thematic Categorization

Building on the programmes identified at *Tier 1* (EU, national, and regional levels) and consolidated through the *Tier 2* prioritization process, the final set of priority instruments was integrated into a single matrix. This exercise was conducted individually for each Widening country and OR listed in **Table 1**, ensuring that the resulting matrix reflects the specific funding landscape of every national and regional context.

This **Consolidated Funding matrix** serves as the analytical backbone of the methodology, providing a structured categorization of funding programmes according to the six Horizon Europe Pillar II Clusters, plus an additional “Other” category:

1. Health
2. Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society
3. Civil Security for Society
4. Digital, Industry and Space
5. Climate, Energy and Mobility
6. Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment
7. Other

This categorization mirrors the EU’s overarching societal challenges and strategic priorities and is consistently applied across European R&I frameworks such as CORDIS, the Funding & Tenders Portal, and NCP support tools. The addition of “Other” category allows the covering of programmes that do not align with the predefined six Clusters, including instruments of primarily administrative, infrastructural, or cross-cutting nature, whose objectives are not directly linked to R&I in the defined thematic areas.

The *Consolidated matrix* enables:

- Systematic thematic filtering of funding opportunities across instruments and countries;
- Identification of overlaps and complementarities between Horizon Europe and ESIF;
- Strategic alignment with regional S3/RIS3;
- Coherent and comparable inputs into the *Best Practices Report (D3.2)* and the forthcoming *Funding Opportunities Calendar*.

The **Consolidated Funding Matrix** is designed as a working basis for an interactive dashboard tool, transforming raw survey data into an accessible, operational instrument. This ensures that the outputs of *Tiers 1 and 2* are directly usable for strategic planning, benchmarking, and capacity-building across widerAdvance services users.

This approach aligns with the European Commission guidance, notably the 2022 document *Synergies between Horizon Europe and European Regional Development Fund programmes*, which underscores the added value of aligning investments around shared thematic and Smart Specialisation priorities.

4. Results & Discussion

4.1. Task 3.1 Internal Survey analysis

The internal survey was conducted between April and September 2025, yielding a total of 24 responses. Respondents represented a diverse spectrum of entities (**Figure 2**), including national/regional governments, funding agencies, universities & research centres, NGOs, private entities and, others (public institutions, foundations, etc.), thereby providing a representative overview of stakeholder perspectives within the WiderAdvance context.

The survey insights reinforce the two-fold methodological rationale of WiderAdvance:

- 1. Bottom-up prioritisation (Tier 2)** – by capturing the perceived significance of programmes at national and regional level, the methodology respects the principle of subsidiarity and ensures contextual relevance. The prioritised programmes reflect not only EU policy design but also local absorptive capacities and funding ecosystems.
- 2. Top-down classification (Tier 3)** – the subsequent categorisation into Horizon Europe clusters ensures comparability and strategic alignment across countries, facilitating aggregation into a single interactive matrix. This dual lens is consistent with the latest guidance on multi-level governance for R&I policy (OECD, 2022; European Commission, 2022).

The results of *Task 3.1 Internal Survey*, presented in **ANNEX II**, provide a critical foundation for the *Tier 2* and *Tier 3* exercises (prioritisation and categorisation). Beyond descriptive statistics, the survey reveals regional patterns of funding reliance and perceived synergies, offering valuable insights to inform the overall Task 3.1 roadmap.

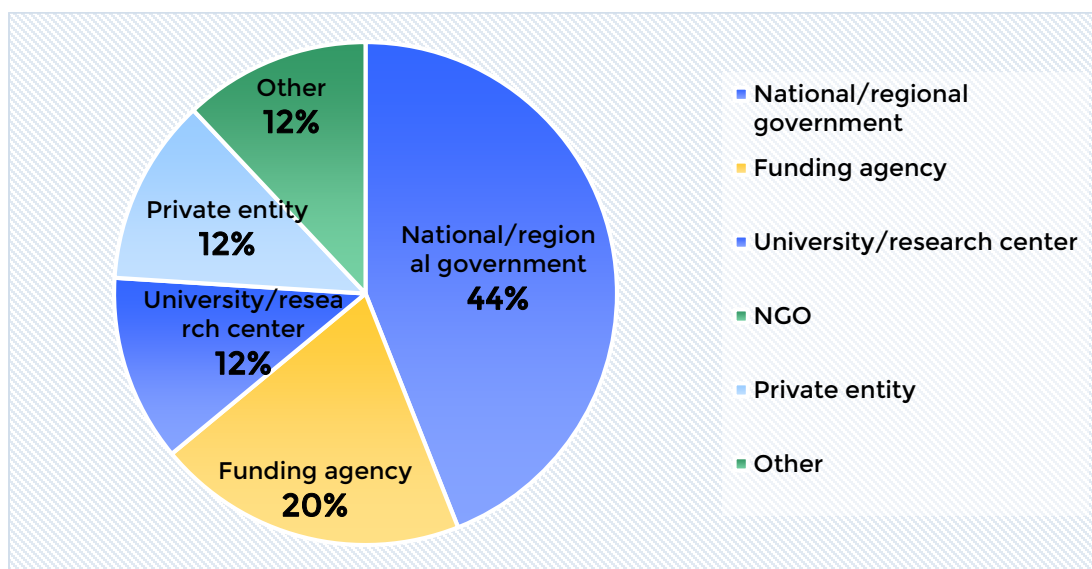


Figure 2 - Pie chart illustrating the distribution of survey respondents by institutional typology.

Geographically, responses covered 18 distinct countries and regions: Malta, Poland, Croatia, Slovakia, Czechia, Bulgaria, Portugal (mainland and Azores), La Réunion, Canary Islands, Armenia,

Tunisia, Montenegro, Georgia, Serbia, Moldova, Türkiye, Ukraine, and the Faroe Islands; covering 46% of Widening EU MS, 64% of the Associated Countries and 33% of the ORs entities considered for this exercise (Table 1). Despite the effort to engage directly the NCPs and other relevant actors, no replies were received from the following:

- **Widening EU Member States:** Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia;
- **ORs:** French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte, Saint-Martin, Madeira;
- **Associated Countries:** Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Morocco, North Macedonia.

The underrepresentation of certain countries and regions partially limits the completeness of the bottom-up evidence available for the prioritisation (*Tier 2*) and subsequent categorisation (*Tier 3*) steps. This also highlights the variability of institutional engagement across regions, emphasizing the need for complementary desk research, specifically under *Tier 1* - Mapping of National and Regional funding programs, to ensure the mapping of all entities within national and regional funding programs. In addition, it should be noted that some ambassadors, who covered the representation of multiple Widening countries and/or ORs, may not have responded on behalf of all the regions under their responsibility, as they were unable to fully consolidate or aggregate the available information.

Synergies perception

The concept of synergies, as defined by respondents, can be understood as the strategic combination of multiple EU funding instruments to achieve more ambitious objectives or to maximize regional spillovers, and has emerged as a central theme in the survey. Respondents recognize that leveraging synergies is not merely a technical exercise, but a strategic imperative for enhancing the impact, coherence, and sustainability of public investment.

Respondents articulated synergies in two dominant ways:

- **Strategic alignment:** coordinating objectives and timelines across programmes (e.g., Horizon Europe and ERDF) to support long-term transformation;
- **Operational integration:** using complementary funding streams to support different phases of a project (e.g., research via Horizon Europe, infrastructure via ERDF, skills via ESF+).

This reflects a shift from parallel programming to integrated investment strategies, consistent with the European Commission's vision for place-based innovation (EC, 2022).

Barriers to Synergy Implementation

Across regions, several recurring challenges were identified and can be summarized as follows:

- Fragmentation of instruments and thematic overlap, leading to duplication and inefficiencies;
- Administrative complexity, including mismatched eligibility criteria and reporting requirements;
- Lack of institutional knowledge and coordination mechanisms, especially in multi-level governance contexts;
- Limited access to ESIFs for associated and peripheral regions, constraining the scope of synergy.

These barriers echo findings from the European Court of Auditors (2022), which warned that without structural reforms, the potential of synergies will remain underutilized.

Success stories

The survey responses highlighted several successful projects and initiatives that exemplify how synergies between EU funding instruments can be operationalized to deliver high-impact outcomes. The replies collected from this survey serve as strategic entry points for further analysis, benchmarking, and policy refinement, which will be undertaken for **D.3.2 - Best Practices Report**.

4.2. Tier 1 – Structural Mapping

EU funding programs

The *Structural Mapping of EU Funding Programmes for R&I*, based on the 2021–2027 MFF, identified a total of 44 EU-level instruments relevant to R&I (**ANNEX III**). A simplified factsheet of EU funding Programmes is presented in **ANNEX IV**.

These were distributed across the six MFF policy headings as follows:

– **Heading 1 - SINGLE MARKET, INNOVATION AND DIGITAL** - 11 programmes.

– **Heading 2 - COHESION AND VALUES** - 15 programmes

– **Heading 3 - NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT** - 7 programmes.

– **Heading 4 - MIGRATION AND BORDER MANAGEMENT** - 2 programmes

– **Heading 5 - SECURITY AND DEFENCE** - 4 programmes

– **Heading 6 - NEIGHBOURHOOD AND THE WORLD** - 5 programmes

Management Type

The portfolio illustrates the coexistence of centrally managed programmes (~ 60% of the total, e.g., Horizon Europe, Digital Europe Programme, LIFE) and shared management instruments (~ 40%, e.g., ERDF, Interreg, CAP Strategic Plans) implemented via Member States and regions (**ANNEX III**). This duality reflects both top-down policy steering by the European Commission and bottom-up place-based implementation through Cohesion Policy.

Patterns and Gaps

The mapping highlighted:

- A strong emphasis on Horizon Europe, particularly Pillar II (Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness), which clusters investments in climate, food, biodiversity, and digitalisation,
- Cohesion Policy instruments (notably ERDF and Interreg) as powerful enablers of territorial R&I ecosystems, with relevance for Widening and OR beneficiaries;
- Limited explicit innovation orientation under some policy domains (e.g., agriculture, fisheries, and maritime policy), suggesting either underutilisation of R&I potential or less explicit integration of innovation priorities;
- Cross-sectoral instruments (e.g., InvestEU, LIFE, Digital Europe) which cut across multiple areas, underscoring the need for a transversal reading of the funding landscape in addition to the hierarchical MFF headings.

At the same time, the EU R&I budget has become increasingly fragmented, with overlapping objectives across programmes, risks of duplication, and inefficiencies in implementation (European Commission, 2022; European Court of Auditors, 2022). For example, funding for digital transformation is dispersed across Horizon Europe, the Digital Europe Programme, the Connecting Europe Facility, and ESIF-funded initiatives, without an integrated coordination mechanism (European Commission, DG CONNECT, 2023 - *Digital Transformation Funding Overview*).

National and Regional funding programs

In addition to the EU-level instruments, the exercise systematically mapped *National and Regional funding programmes for R&I*, across all Widening countries and ORs. In total, 201 national and regional programmes were identified (**ANNEX V**), complementing the 44 EU-level programmes and leading to a consolidated dataset of 245 instruments.

The mapping was carried out individually for each of the following countries and regions:

- Widening EU Member States (15): Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia.
- ORs (9):
 - France: French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte, Réunion, Saint-Martin
 - Portugal: Azores, Madeira
 - Spain: Canary Islands
- Widening Associated Countries (13 + 1*): Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine, and Morocco* (*political association status under definition).

This granular coverage ensured that the mapping captured the full multi-scalar spectrum of R&I funding opportunities, from centrally managed EU programmes to national, regional, and outermost territories. The result is a comparable dataset across geographies, allowing end-users of the WiderAdvance Facility to intuitively navigate funding opportunities from the European to the regional level.

The variability in eligibility rules, co-financing rates, and reporting requirements across the 245 mapped instruments creates administrative burdens and opacity (Kuhlmann et al., 2021). These barriers are particularly acute for Widening and OR regions, where institutional capacity is often more constrained. Without targeted simplification and technical assistance, participation gaps risk being perpetuated (European Court of Auditors, 2022).

Recent EU and OECD analyses converge on several recommendations to address these challenges:

- **Programmatic clustering and strategic alignment:** consolidating instruments around thematic clusters linked to policy priorities increases coherence and reduces overlaps (European Commission, 2021, 2022);
- **Integrated governance mechanisms:** stronger coordination between EU, national, and regional authorities ensures alignment of priorities and maximises the impact of public investment (OECD, 2022);
- **Capacity building for beneficiaries:** Simplified procedures and dedicated support are essential to unlock participation in Widening/OR contexts (European Court of Auditors, 2022);

- **Mission-oriented approaches:** EU missions (e.g., climate-neutral cities, soil health, oceans, cancer, adaptation to climate change) exemplify the cross-cutting nature of R&I priorities, requiring funding instruments to operate beyond traditional silos (European Commission, 2021);
- **Synergies with recovery and resilience facility (RRF):** the RRF adds substantial investment capacity but also introduces further risks of overlap without careful coordination (European Commission, 2021).

Tier 1 delivered a comprehensive, policy-aligned overview of 245 R&I funding programmes across EU, national, and regional levels. The analysis reveals both the strategic breadth of funding opportunities and the systemic fragmentation that undermines efficiency, transparency, and equity of access. These insights not only highlight the need for consolidation, alignment, and simplification, but also establish the baseline for *Tier 2* prioritisation. The structured mapping ensured that subsequent steps could be built on a clearly defined funding landscape.

4.3. Tier 2 – Prioritization

Ranking of EU Funding programs

The survey results reveal a clear hierarchy in programme visibility and relevance among respondents. Horizon Europe stands out as the most frequently identified **EU programme**, mentioned by over 82% of participants. This confirms its dominant role in shaping the European R&I landscape, consistent with recent policy literature (European Commission, 2023). Beyond Horizon Europe, the next most cited EU programmes reflect a mix of sectoral focus, territorial cooperation, and innovation support mechanisms (see **Table 2**):

Table 2 – Most cited EU programs, based on Task 3.1 results.

EU Programme	%	Key Focus Area
Horizon Europe	82%	Research & innovation
Erasmus+	54%	Education, mobility, skills
LIFE Programme	47%	Environment, climate action
Digital Europe	39%	Digital transformation, AI, cybersecurity
Creative Europe	33%	Culture, media, audiovisual

The distribution of responses across EU funding programmes reveals a layered landscape of institutional priorities and sectoral engagement. While Horizon Europe dominates, other programmes such as Erasmus+ (54%), LIFE (47%), Digital Europe (39%), and Creative Europe (33%) reflect a broader diversification of strategic interests. Erasmus+ stands out for its role in mobility and skills development, particularly among universities and training institutions, especially in Associated countries. LIFE's prominence signals a growing institutional focus on climate action and environmental sustainability, while Digital Europe's visibility highlights the increasing relevance of digital transformation across regions. Creative Europe, though more niche, demonstrates the cultural sector's active participation in EU funding ecosystems.

This hierarchy suggests that while excellence-driven R&I remains a top priority, institutions are also actively engaging with programmes that support societal resilience, digital capacity, and cultural innovation, indicating a multidimensional approach to European funding strategy. For widening countries and ORs, the challenge is access and strategic integration: leveraging diverse EU programmes to build institutional strength, foster inclusive development, and embed local priorities within European frameworks. Achieving this requires enhanced coordination, capacity-building, and policy coherence to ensure that funding delivers transformative, place-based impact.

The survey responses reveal a clear pattern in the visibility and perceived relevance of **ESIF** programmes among participating institutions. The ERDF leads with 65% of respondents, followed closely by the ESF+ at 58%. These two funds form the backbone of EU cohesion policy, supporting infrastructure, innovation, and social inclusion across regions (**Table 3**).

Table 3 – Strategic relevance of ESIF Instruments Based on Task 3.1 Survey Results

ESIF Instrument	%	Strategic Focus
ERDF – European Regional Development Fund	65%	Infrastructure, innovation, regional development

ESF+ – European Social Fund Plus	58%	Employment, education, social inclusion
EAFRD – European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development	33%	Rural infrastructure, agri-innovation
CF – Cohesion Fund	~25%	Environmental infrastructure, transport in less-developed regions
EMFAF – European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund	~18%	Sustainable fisheries, coastal development
AMIF – Asylum and Migration Fund	~12%	Migration management, integration policies
ISF – Internal Security Fund	~9%	Border security, crime prevention
BMVI – Border Management and Visa Instrument	~6%	Visa systems, border control modernization
Other	~5%	Includes national co-financing, regional instruments, or thematic pilots

The prominence of **ERDF and ESF+** reflects their foundational role in enabling both hard and soft investments, ranging from regional infrastructure to human capital development. Their widespread citation suggests that institutions view them not only as funding sources but as strategic levers for territorial transformation, particularly in regions facing structural challenges.

EAFRD, mentioned by 33% of respondents, highlights the importance of rural development and agri-innovation, especially in peripheral and island regions such as the Azores. Respondents emphasized the need for integrated approaches to sustainability and resilience, aligning with EU priorities on climate adaptation and rural diversification.

The **CF**, cited by approximately 25%, demonstrates continued relevance for environmental infrastructure and transport, particularly in less-developed regions. Its visibility suggests that institutions still rely on CF to address foundational territorial imbalances.

Lower-frequency instruments such as **EMFAF** (18%), **AMIF** (12%), **ISF** (9%), and **BMVI** (6%) were primarily mentioned by public authorities and specialized agencies. Their inclusion reflects a more targeted engagement with sectoral priorities, such as maritime sustainability, migration management, and border security.

Although Interreg and CAP Strategic Plans were not listed as standalone ESIF instruments in the survey, they were frequently referenced by respondents. This reflects their operational distinctiveness and strategic relevance:

- **Interreg**, funded through ERDF, emerged as a prominent reference due to its role in fostering transnational and cross-border cooperation, especially in regions with shared socio-economic challenges;
- **CAP Strategic Plans** were often cited in relation to EAFRD, underscoring the territorial importance of agricultural policy and its alignment with national implementation frameworks.

This distribution underscores the dual importance of competitive and structural funding streams in shaping regional development strategies. While programmes like Horizon Europe target innovation and excellence, ESIFs provide the territorial and social scaffolding necessary to ensure inclusive, place-based growth. The survey results suggest that institutions increasingly seek to combine these

instruments, aiming for synergistic outcomes that align with both EU-wide priorities and local development needs.

The prominence of the top five ESIF instruments (ERDF, ESF+, EAFRD, CF, and EMFAF) reveals a balanced mix of territorial, social, and sectoral priorities that are particularly pertinent to widening countries and ORs. These areas often face structural challenges such as limited infrastructure, demographic pressures, geographic isolation, and lower research intensity. The survey results suggest that institutions in these regions are increasingly aligning their strategies with EU-wide objectives, such as cohesion, climate resilience, digital transition, and inclusive growth, while tailoring interventions to their unique territorial contexts.

For widening countries, the visibility of ERDF and ESF+ underscores their role in bridging development gaps, supporting both physical infrastructure and human capital. In ORs like the Azores, EAFRD and EMFAF are especially relevant, enabling rural diversification, agri-innovation, and blue economy development. The CFs continued use reflects the need for large-scale environmental and transport investments in regions with limited fiscal capacity.

This distribution reinforces the understanding that ESIFs are not merely financial instruments but strategic policy tools. They shape how regions invest in their futures, build institutional capacity, and participate in European innovation ecosystems. The survey points to a growing trend of strategic bundling, where institutions combine structural and competitive funds, such as Horizon Europe with ERDF or EAFRD, to maximize impact, reduce fragmentation, and ensure place-based, integrated development. For widening countries and ORs, this bundling is not just a technical exercise, it is a pathway to policy coherence, territorial empowerment, and long-term resilience within the broader European framework.

Importantly, ERDF plays a direct role in supporting Widening participation instruments, including Teaming, Twinning, ERA Chairs, and Seal of Excellence initiatives, which aim to strengthen research capacities, institutional excellence, and networking. By providing co-funding for infrastructure, research capacities, and networking activities, ERDF enables institutions to meet the eligibility and competitiveness criteria for Horizon Europe actions. This synergy not only facilitates access to Horizon Europe funding but also reinforces local R&I ecosystems, building sustainable capacities that support long-term participation in European innovation programmes.

Some insights from data collected

The analysis presented in this section is based primarily on bottom-up evidence collected through the survey responses received from National NCPs and ambassadors, in addition to national and regional stakeholders, across the 18 respondent countries and regions. These inputs constituted core material for the comparative insights and discussions that follow, reflecting the perspectives and experiences of actors directly engaged in the design or implementation of R&I funding instruments. To ensure both completeness and contextual accuracy, the survey findings were complemented, where necessary, by desk research and relevant literature. This was particularly important in cases where responses required clarification or additional framing to be situated within the broader EU policy landscape (synthesis information provided on **Table 4**).

Central and Eastern Europe

In Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries (Poland, Croatia, Slovakia, Czechia and Bulgaria), respondents consistently highlighted the pivotal role of ESIF, particularly the ERDF and the ESF+ in financing R&I activities. Horizon Europe was acknowledged as an important funding source; however, it was frequently described as complementary rather than as a primary driver of systemic development and consolidation of R&I ecosystems. This pattern underscores a path dependency on Cohesion Policy funds, a phenomenon well-documented in the literature [Maucorps, A., Jestl, S., & Römisch, R. (2020)].

This reliance on ESIF reflects a broader trend where regions with lower R&I performance leverage Cohesion Policy funds to build foundational capacities, such as infrastructure and skills, which are prerequisites for effective participation in Horizon Europe consortia. The European Parliament's study on synergies between Horizon Europe and the EU Cohesion Policy (Segal et al., 2025) identifies several barriers to the uptake of these synergies, including administrative complexity, lack of awareness, and insufficient coordination between managing authorities. However, the study also highlights drivers that can facilitate synergies, such as the alignment of S3 with Horizon Europe priorities and the use of instruments like the Seal of Excellence and Teaming actions.

To enhance participation in Horizon Europe, future synergies should focus on leveraging ERDF investments in infrastructure and skills. This approach aligns with the findings of Dimitri (2023), who emphasizes the importance of multi-level governance and place-based strategies in fostering synergies between Cohesion Policy and Horizon Europe. By aligning regional strengths with Horizon Europe priorities, CEE regions can overcome existing disparities and contribute more effectively to EU-wide innovation objectives.

Southern Europe and Outermost Regions

In Southern European regions and the ORs of the EU [Portugal (mainland and Azores), Spain (Canary Islands), France (La Réunion)], respondents consistently identified Interreg, the CAP Strategic Plans, and the LIFE programme as central funding instruments. These programmes reflect the unique geographical and environmental challenges of these territories, as well as their focus on bioeconomy and territorial priorities.

The ORs face specific challenges due to their extreme remoteness, small size, and low Gross Domestic Product, which can impede access to centralised EU funding instruments. For instance, the European Commission's 2022 strategy for the ORs highlights the need to address administrative capacity issues and improve participation in research consortia. Consequently, these regions often rely heavily on shared management instruments, such as Interreg and CAP, which are more accessible and tailored to their needs.

The prioritization of these funding instruments (i.e., Interreg, CAP Strategic Plans, and the LIFE programmes) reflects a deliberate alignment with the territorial, environmental, and socio-economic priorities these regions. Interreg facilitates cross-border cooperation, allowing ORs to overcome structural and geographical limitations by promoting regional innovation, sustainable development, and environmental protection, directly addressing the regions' specific challenges (European Commission, 2022a - *Synergies between Horizon Europe and ERDF programmes*). Similarly, CAP Strategic Plans provide tailored support for rural development, enhancing farm incomes, promoting sustainable land management, and strengthening socio-economic structures in peripheral territories, while embedding climate action and biodiversity objectives that align with local priorities (European Commission, 2022b - *New European Innovation Agenda*). The LIFE programme complements these efforts by funding environmental and climate action projects, supporting biodiversity conservation,

climate change mitigation, and sustainable resource management; key dimensions of the bioeconomy and territorial strategies of these regions (European Commission, 2022c - *Outermost Regions Strategy 2022*). Collectively, these instruments offer a coherent framework that both addresses the distinctive challenges of the ORs and Southern Europe and enables the strategic deployment of EU funding in line with regional development and innovation priorities.

Given the specific challenges faced by the ORs, future funding strategies should place a stronger emphasis on tailored instruments that address their unique needs. This approach aligns with the European Commission's 2022 strategy for the ORs, which calls for enhanced support to improve administrative capacity and participation in research consortia European Commission.

Potential synergies could be achieved through mechanisms such as the Seal of Excellence, which recognises high-quality project proposals that could not be funded under Horizon Europe, allowing them to be considered for funding under other EU programmes. Additionally, embedding R&I actions into CAP rural development measures could enhance the impact of these interventions and foster greater integration of R&I into rural development strategies.

Baltic States

No direct responses were received from the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania). To address this gap, the analysis integrates evidence from literature, policy reviews, and the outputs of the WIDERA.NET project⁹, including national questionnaires on synergies and a regional Mutual Learning Exercise (Baltic States). These sources provide insights into governance arrangements, implemented synergy instruments, and systemic challenges in aligning structural funds with Horizon Europe.

Evidence indicates that the Baltic States are active participants in Horizon Europe, particularly in clusters related to digitalization, cybersecurity, and advanced technologies. ERDF and RRF investments play a strategic role in developing national digital ecosystems and foundational capacities, which complement Horizon Europe projects. For instance, Lithuania has documented complementarities between ERDF-funded digital hubs and Horizon Europe initiatives under Cluster 4 (Digital, Industry, and Space), demonstrating how targeted regional investments can catalyze broader European engagement (European Commission, 2023; OECD, 2022).

Governance arrangements are central to enabling synergies. In Estonia, coordination is facilitated by the RDIE Steering Committee, which brings together representatives from universities, research institutions, ministries, industry associations, and independent experts. Lithuania relies on continuous dialogue between the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the Central Project Management Agency (CPMA), and the Research Council of Lithuania, which also hosts Horizon Europe NCPs. These structures support the implementation of a range of synergy instruments, including co-funding of European Partnerships, Seal of Excellence support for MSCA and ERC projects, transfers of ERDF funds to Horizon Europe, Teaming initiatives, capacity-building measures, and support for mono-beneficiary actions such as EIC grants.

Despite these mechanisms, several barriers persist. In Estonia, strict alignment of ERDF with smart specialization areas limits support for projects outside predefined priorities, while conflicting or late guidance from EU DGs complicates implementation. Lithuania faces challenges in aligning financial rules, evaluation procedures, and state aid regulations, particularly when co-funding projects that achieved Seal of Excellence status but were not initially funded. Both countries emphasized the need

⁹ WIDERA.NET project - <https://www.ncpwideranet.eu/>

for political commitment, multi-level governance, and clearer guidance from the European Commission to operationalize synergies effectively.

Overall, this evidence demonstrates how the Baltic States leverage Smart Specialization Strategies (RIS3) to align regional priorities with EU innovation objectives, enhance absorptive capacity, and ensure that structural funds and Horizon Europe mutually reinforce each other (Foray, 2018; McCann & Ortega-Argilés, 2016).

Western Balkans and Associated Countries

Survey responses from Serbia, Montenegro, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine, and Türkiye revealed a dual challenge in accessing EU R&I funding. On one hand, these countries have limited direct access to centralised EU funds such as Horizon Europe. On the other hand, there is a strong dependency on the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) and national funding mechanisms (European Commission, 2022). This combination constrains both the scale and scope of R&I activities, particularly in frontier technologies and cross-border innovation collaborations.

Respondents emphasised the critical role of capacity-building initiatives, twinning mechanisms, and knowledge-sharing networks to bridge these gaps. Twinning projects, which pair less-experienced institutions with leading EU research organizations, have been highlighted in the literature as effective tools to transfer expertise, improve managerial and technical capacities, and enhance participation in Horizon Europe consortia (Maucorps & Römisch, 2020).

Other respondents

Malta

Being a small island state, Malta's respondent, emphasises the strategic importance of targeted ERDF and ESF+ interventions to strengthen its R&I base, complemented by active participation in Horizon Europe, particularly in niche areas such as digitalisation and marine sciences. Synergies between these funding streams are pursued to maximise impact, although the country faces challenges including limited national knowledge of available funding opportunities and the need for improved coordination at the institutional level. To fully situate Malta's approach within the broader EU policy landscape, further clarification could be provided on specific ERDF/ESF+ OPs and how Malta leverages instruments like the Horizon Results Booster. Malta is also one of the first countries to implement the 'Transfer to Horizon' synergies which allows it to fund additional projects who have been ranked high in Horizon Europe calls. Malta highlights that this instrument can be amplified further for it to maximise its impact. Relevant references include the European Commission's Cohesion Policy reports and Horizon Europe Work Programmes.

Tunisia

Tunisia, as a Southern Neighbourhood partner country, highlights the role of bilateral cooperation instruments and capacity-building schemes in supporting R&I. While Horizon Europe is valued as a platform for international collaboration, Tunisia faces structural challenges, including governance of national funding mechanisms, administrative barriers, and limited institutional capacities. Synergies are understood as the amplification of impact through combining different programmes, yet additional framing would be useful to clarify how these initiatives interact with EU neighbourhood policies and instruments such as the Horizon Europe International Cooperation part, the EU Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), or other regional programmes. References to specific ENP or Horizon Europe guidance documents could strengthen this contextualisation.

Faroe Islands

As a non-EU associated territory, the Faroe Islands focus on niche participation in Horizon Europe projects, particularly in marine and environmental research, while relying primarily on national and Nordic funding mechanisms. The respondent highlighted that the pursuit of synergies is framed around using complementary funding sources to enhance research impact, but the islands face limitations due to restricted direct access to EU funding and dependence on national and Nordic mechanisms. To better situate the Faroe Islands' approach within the EU policy landscape, clarification on associated country arrangements, the specifics of Horizon Europe participation rules for non-EU territories, and potential links to regional EU-Nordic initiatives would be useful. References could include Horizon Europe association agreements and EU Nordic cooperation documents.

Table 4 - Comparative overview of regional engagement with EU funding programmes, highlighting key survey findings, policy implications, and potential synergies to support place-based, integrated development.

Region	Key Survey Results	Implications for Policy & Practice	Potential Synergies & Funding Opportunities
Central & Eastern Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dominant role of ESIF (ERDF & ESF+) for R&I infrastructure, digitalisation, and human capital development. - Horizon Europe acknowledged but seen as complementary rather than core. - Path dependency on Cohesion Policy funds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leverage ERDF-funded infrastructure and skills to enhance participation in Horizon Europe. - Align regional capacities with Pillar II clusters. - Strengthen multi-level governance and coordination between Cohesion Policy and Horizon Europe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ERDF investments in R&I infrastructure. - ESF+ support for human capital development. - Horizon Europe Pillar II participation, including collaborative projects in research-intensive sectors. - Seal of Excellence and Teaming projects as bridging tools.
Baltic States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Horizon Europe highly relevant, especially in digitalisation and security clusters. - ERDF supports development of national digital ecosystems. - Lithuania: complementarities between ERDF-funded digital hubs and Horizon Europe Cluster 4 projects. - RIS3 strategies aligned with EU priorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote thematic alignment between ESIF and Horizon Europe priorities. - Embed R&I measures in CAP rural development to extend reach. - Continue aligning RIS3 strategies with evolving Horizon Europe clusters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ERDF for digital infrastructure and innovation ecosystems. - Horizon Europe Cluster 4 (Digital, Industry, Space). - CAP rural development measures integrating R&I actions. - Multi-level policy alignment to enhance strategic impact.
Western Balkans & Associated Countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited direct access to Horizon Europe. - High dependency on IPA III and national instruments. - Strong need for capacity-building and twinning mechanisms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reinforce Widening measures and capacity-building programs. - Promote twinning and mobility schemes to transfer expertise. - Strategically align IPA and national funds with Horizon Europe priorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Horizon Europe Teaming, Twinning, and Widening measures. - IPA III and national R&I instruments. - Synergy pilots combining Horizon Europe and IPA funding. - Multi-level governance approaches to improve absorptive capacity.
Malta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong emphasis on ERDF and ESF+ interventions to strengthen R&I base. - Horizon Europe participation in niche areas such as digitalisation and marine sciences. - Limited national knowledge of funding opportunities; need for improved institutional coordination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen institutional capacity for multi-level coordination between ERDF/ESF+ and Horizon Europe. - Target Horizon Europe participation in areas aligned with national priorities and niche strengths. - Enhance awareness of funding instruments such as Horizon Results Booster. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ERDF investments in R&I infrastructure. - ESF+ support for human capital and skills development. - Horizon Europe collaborative projects in digital and marine research. - Horizon Results Booster as a bridging instrument.
Tunisia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Horizon Europe valued for international collaboration. - Structural challenges include governance of national funding mechanisms, administrative barriers, and limited institutional capacities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen national administrative and governance structures to facilitate participation in Horizon Europe. - Align bilateral cooperation programmes with Horizon Europe priorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Horizon Europe international cooperation projects. - Bilateral cooperation and capacity-building instruments. - Potential pilot initiatives linking EU programmes with national R&I support schemes.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on bilateral cooperation and capacity-building schemes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote capacity-building schemes to enhance R&I performance. 	
Faroe Islands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Niche participation in Horizon Europe, particularly in marine and environmental research. - Heavy reliance on national and Nordic funding mechanisms due to limited direct access to EU funds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support strategic alignment between national/Nordic funding and Horizon Europe participation. - Identify niche areas with high potential for international collaboration. - Clarify legal and administrative frameworks for non-EU associated territories engaging in Horizon Europe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Horizon Europe collaborative projects in marine and environmental research. - Complementary funding from national and Nordic sources. - Strategic synergy pilots combining Horizon Europe and regional Nordic R&I initiatives.

Taken together, the *Tier 2* findings confirm that institutions in widening countries and ORs navigate a multidimensional funding landscape that balances excellence-driven instruments (e.g., Horizon Europe) with cohesion-oriented funds (e.g., ERDF, ESF+). While structural funds remain central in addressing territorial gaps, competitive programmes are increasingly perceived as complementary pathways to international collaboration and excellence. From the perspective of D&E, this prioritization analysis provides a comparative evidence base for identifying which instruments are most visible and relevant to stakeholders. For the users of the WiderAdvance Facility, these insights help position *Tier 3* mapping not just as a catalogue of opportunities, but as a strategic tool to guide the search for follow-up funding and to inform future activities under **D.3.2 – Best Practice Report**.

4.4. Tier 3 – Thematic Categorization

Building on the Tier 1 mapping and Tier 2 prioritization, Tier 3 consolidates the identified funding instruments into a structured matrix organized by the six Horizon Europe Pillar II clusters: Health; Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society; Civil Security for Society; Digital, Industry and Space; Climate, Energy and Mobility; Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment; and Other (see *Consolidated Matrix*, **ANNEX VI**). This classification enables a systematic, cross-country comparison of funding emphases, highlighting sectoral strengths and gaps across the 37 countries and regions.

The analysis of the results reveals the following trends:

- **Cluster 4 (Digital, Industry and Space)** dominates with 42 % of mapped instruments, reflecting the strong EU policy focus on digital transformation and industrial competitiveness through mechanisms such as the Digital Europe Programme, national Industry 4.0 grants, and regional Digital Innovation Hubs (European Commission, 2022);
- **Cluster 5 (Climate, Energy and Mobility)** represents 23 %, aligned with the EU Green Deal and the Recovery and Resilience Facility's green transition goals;
- **Cluster 6 (Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment)** accounts for 12 %, driven by CAP Strategic Plans and regional bioeconomy initiatives, particularly relevant in island ORs where agriculture and fisheries remain central economic pillars;
- **Health (Cluster 1)** and **Culture (Cluster 2)** each constitute less than 10 %, indicating their underinvestment outside of flagship EU programmes such as Horizon Europe and Creative Europe;
- The “**Other**” category, including capacity-building, infrastructure, and administrative support, makes up the remaining 5 %.

The *Tier 3* thematic categorisation highlights both opportunities and structural gaps in the engagement of Widening countries and ORs with EU funding programmes. Opportunities clearly emerge in clusters where EU and national/regional investments converge *Digital, Industry & Space (Cluster 4)* and *Climate, Energy & Mobility (Cluster 5)*. These areas strongly align with the European Green Deal, the Digital Decade objectives, and national Cohesion Policy priorities, creating fertile ground for scaling research outputs into innovation ecosystems (European Commission, 2022a - *Synergies between Horizon Europe and ERDF programmes*; OECD, 2022).

Conversely, persistent gaps are visible in *Health (Cluster 1)* and *Culture (Cluster 2)*. Their underrepresentation risks slowing the dissemination and uptake of R&I results in domains critical to resilience and inclusiveness, revealing structural bottlenecks in absorptive capacity and cross-sectoral linkages (European Court of Auditors, 2022).

From a D&E perspective, these findings suggest three key actions:

1. **Strategic concentration** – leverage existing strengths in digitalisation and the green transition to achieve tangible and replicable impact across multiple domains;
2. **Bridge gaps** – design complementary measures to unlock participation in underrepresented clusters and enhance absorptive capacity for EU R&I results;

3. **Synergy mobilisation** – actively linking cohesion policy and Horizon Europe instruments to embed R&I results into regional development strategies and generate sustained value (OECD, 2022; Segal, Smith, & Brown, 2025).

When benchmarked against overarching EU strategies, the *Tier 3* trends reveal a close alignment with the EU's overarching frameworks. The strong concentration of funding opportunities in Cluster 4 (Digital, Industry and Space) directly aligns with the EU Digital Decade 2030 targets, particularly the objectives of ensuring 75 % of EU enterprises use cloud, AI, and big data, and doubling the number of EU unicorns by 2030 (European Commission, 2021a - *Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027*). Similarly, the significant weight of Cluster 5 (Climate, Energy and Mobility) mirrors the priorities of the European Green Deal, where investments in clean energy, sustainable mobility, and carbon-neutral infrastructures are positioned as both environmental imperatives and economic growth drivers (European Commission, 2019 - *The European Green Deal*). Conversely, the low representation of Health (Cluster 1) and Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society (Cluster 2) illustrates a divergence from the New European Innovation Agenda, which emphasises inclusive innovation ecosystems and health resilience as key pillars of Europe's future competitiveness (European Commission, 2022b - *New European Innovation Agenda*).

Ultimately, the added value of *Tier 3* lies in its usability for users of the WiderAdvance Facility, who need to secure follow-up financing to sustain the D&E of their R&I results. By situating mapped instruments within the broader European policy landscape, the *Tier 3* database provides a practical tool to identify funding pathways that are not only locally relevant but also strategically aligned with EU-level objectives, while highlighting opportunities for funding synergies. In this way, *Tier 3* acts as an analytical bridge between mapping and practice, ensuring that the WiderAdvance Facility can deliver targeted support for D&E activities and extend the lifecycle of research results beyond the initial project. It also establishes the evidence base upon which **D.3.2 – Best Practices Report** will build, by translating mapped opportunities into best practice examples that reinforce sustainable pathways for R&I impact.

5. Final Remarks

This deliverable (**D.3.1**) aimed to develop a structured Funding Matrix of EU, national, and regional instruments relevant to R&I in Widening countries and ORs. The work followed a three-tier methodology:

- **Tier 1:** mapped EU, national, and regional programmes across the 2021–2027 MFF;
- **Tier 2:** applied a stakeholder survey to capture perceptions of the most impactful instruments and gather qualitative insights on local and regional R&I ecosystems;
- **Tier 3** categorised prioritised programmes into Horizon Europe clusters to enable cross-country comparison and thematic analysis.

Together, these steps provide a balanced overview that combines top-down policy alignment with bottom-up perspectives, providing a knowledge baseline for subsequent project outputs.

The analysis suggests that funding opportunities are strongly concentrated in digital transformation (42%) and climate and energy transitions (23%), reflecting current EU policy priorities. Instruments linked to food, bioeconomy, and natural resources (12%) are particularly relevant in ORs, where agriculture and fisheries retain a central role. In contrast, clusters such as health and cultural innovation (<10%) appear less represented, indicating possible areas where further investment or targeted support may be beneficial. Representation gaps, notably in the Baltic States, parts of the Balkans, and ORs such as French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte, Saint-Martin, and Madeira, highlight the need for complementary desk research to ensure balanced coverage.

Beyond sectoral distribution, the results also point to two transversal tendencies. First, the coexistence of multiple instruments with heterogeneous eligibility rules and reporting frameworks can be administratively demanding, especially for smaller institutions or those with limited capacity. Second, while mechanisms to operationalize synergies (e.g. Seal of Excellence, ERDF transfers, cumulative funding, or upstream–downstream linkages) are available, their practical uptake varies across regions, which may influence the extent to which complementarities are fully realized. In this sense, fostering synergies can be understood not only as an efficient measure but also as a way to strengthen inclusiveness and cohesion within the ERA.

For the WiderAdvance Facility users, the Funding Matrix is more than a static catalogue. It functions as a diagnostic and navigation tool, allowing users to filter opportunities by thematic area, compare funding strategies across regions, and identify complementary resources.

As a living resource, the Funding Matrix will be continuously updated throughout the project's implementation. The purpose of these updates is to monitor the relevance and impact of the mapped instruments and to adapt the Matrix annually, in line with new framework programmes and emerging opportunities for Widening Countries and ORs. These updates will be directly supported by project partners, particularly NCPs and Ambassadors.

Moreover, the regular updates will be complemented by an annex of good practices, drawn from the use of the Matrix during WP2 and WP3 activities, notably the Mutual Learning Events, through a user's

survey. Finally, the Funding Opportunities Calendar, to be published on the project, will ensure users' timely information and access to up-to-date relevant opportunities.

At project level, the outputs of D.3.1 directly support the next steps:

- *Best Practices Report (D.3.2)*: identifying which instruments and combinations may be most relevant for documenting replicable synergies.
- *Funding Opportunities Calendar*: aligning mapped instruments with upcoming calls in a user-friendly format.
- *The interactive dashboard*: enabling intuitive access to programmes and synergies across EU, national, and regional scales.

Overall, D.3.1 provides a comprehensive overview of the EU, national, and regional funding landscape, highlighting patterns and gaps, and opportunities for strategic intervention. It establishes a solid foundation for subsequent WP3 activities, offering to policymakers, practitioners and WiderAdvance users, guidance to navigate a complex funding system and to explore complementarities between excellence-driven and cohesion-oriented instruments, supporting more effective and balanced participation across Widening countries and ORs, in line with broader European objectives.

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