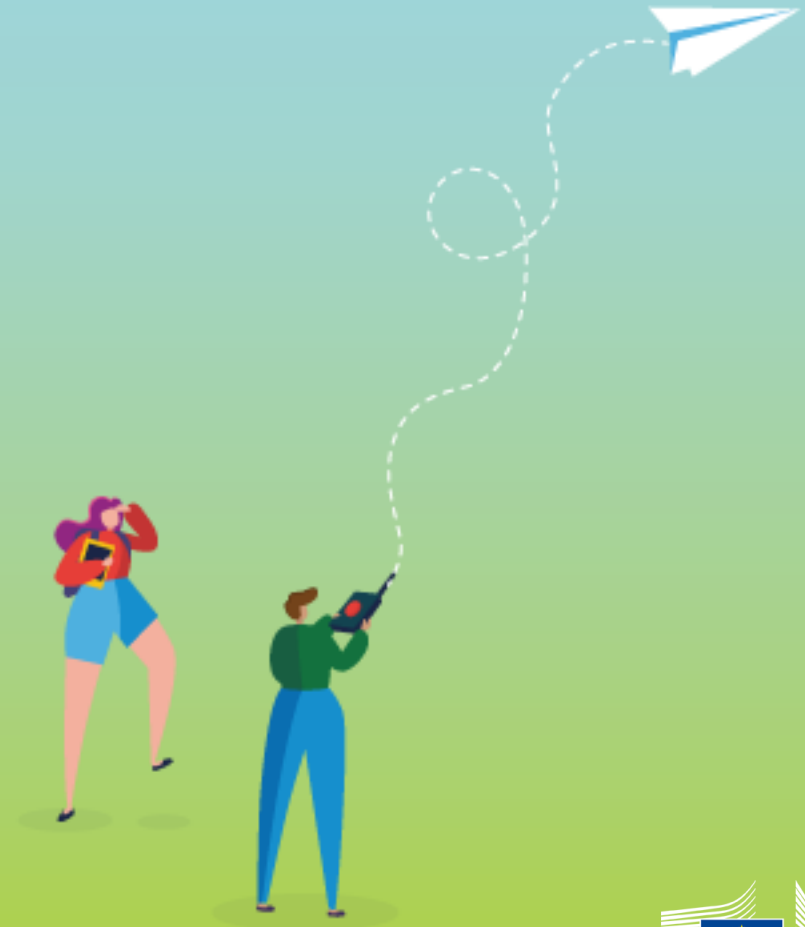


European Startup and Scaleup Hubs pilot call

- European Startup and Scaleup Hubs pilot call – policy context
- European Startup and Scaleup Hubs pilot call – practical details

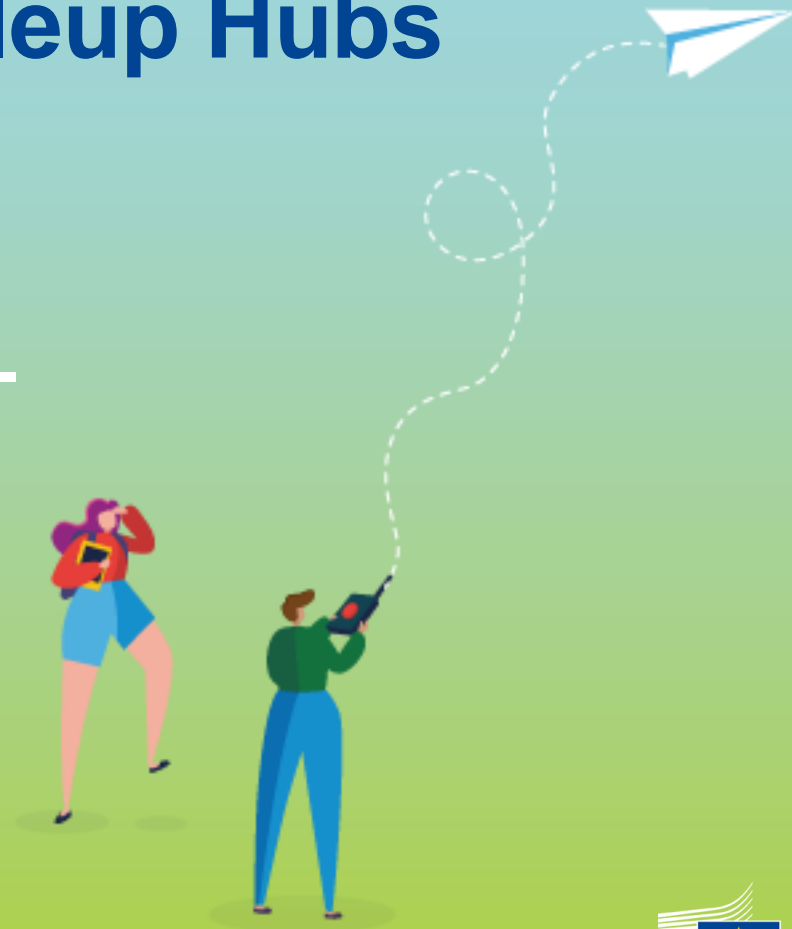


ESSH (HORIZON-EIE-2026-02-CONNECT-01) – **basic info**

| Type of Action | Co-Fund (50% EU funding) |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Call opening date | 11 December 2025 |
| Call closing date | 10 March 2026 |
| Total Indicative EU budget | EUR 20 M |
| Expected EU contribution | EUR 20 M |
| Expected grants to be signed | 1 |
| Expected project duration | 2 years |

European Startup and Scaleup Hubs (ESSH) pilot call

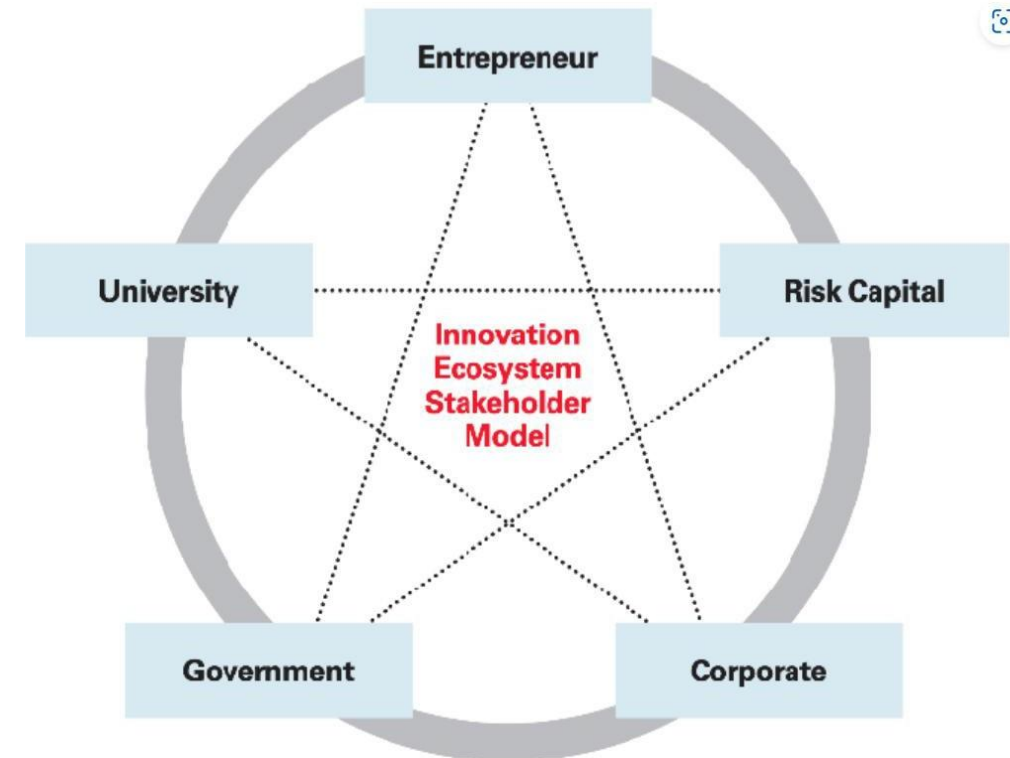
– policy context –



Policy objectives of ESSH

Overall objectives:

- Reinforce and interconnect 10 to 18 leading and emerging startup and scaleup hubs rooted in strong research ecosystems
- Emulate the creation and growth of European deep tech startups through increased access to essential resources: infrastructures, venture capital, talents, mentors, collaboration opportunities, etc.
- Create bridges to supporting schemes in Europe: European Innovation Council (EIC), EIC Scaling Club, Enterprise Europe Network, etc.



Budden & Murray, 2019

Policy rational



Develop innovation capabilities

- Compared to the US, Europe had a relatively static economy over the past 25 years leading to a significant productivity gap
- Entrepreneurs didn't seize the opportunities of the digital revolution
- To remain competitive in the global economy Europe will need to do better with upcoming innovation waves

Support startups and innovation

- As emphasised by the literature on innovation and economic growth new entrants especially startups play an important role in commercialising disruptive technologies
- But startups often fail to successfully growth in Europe

Policy rational



Building on innovation hubs

- Startup flourish mainly in hubs providing the appropriate resources to develop, while favouring similar locations for expansion
 - Research capabilities
 - Funding and finance
 - Support systems
 - Talent pools
 - Accessible markets
- The EU has numerous innovation clusters, but they are less developed and generate less value than those of the US and China

Improve competitiveness in complex technologies

- Publication and patenting activities show that European innovation hubs are less interconnected than their US counterparts
- Europe's lack of interconnectivity is a competitive disadvantage for developing complex technologies

Practicalities: What is a startup hub



Strong research capabilities:
Cutting edge infrastructures and excellent research teams



A talent pool:
relevant graduate programmes, management and entrepreneurship specific trainings, etc



Dedicated startup and scaleup support: Incubator, accelerator, mentoring, etc



Network density:
entrepreneurs, investors, mentors, academic and corporate researchers, etc



Professional services: legal and regulatory advice, real estate, accounting, etc

Practicalities



What should a successful project aim for?

- Consolidation of dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystems
- Deep tech R&I collaborations generating new spinoff ventures
- Successful scaling-up of startup companies
- Capacity building in advanced technologies

Activities encouraged by the scope

- Provide access to relevant infrastructures and facilities
- Support connections: pitch days, meet-ups, hackathons, startup week-ends, etc
- Ensure access to funding opportunities and services: EIC, EEN, EIT-KICs, local service providers etc
- Knowledge transfer between hubs

Practicalities: Selection criteria and KPIs



Selection criteria

- Track record in startup and scaleup support
- Research excellence and infrastructures
- Cross-border collaboration capabilities
- Deep tech innovation potential

KPIs

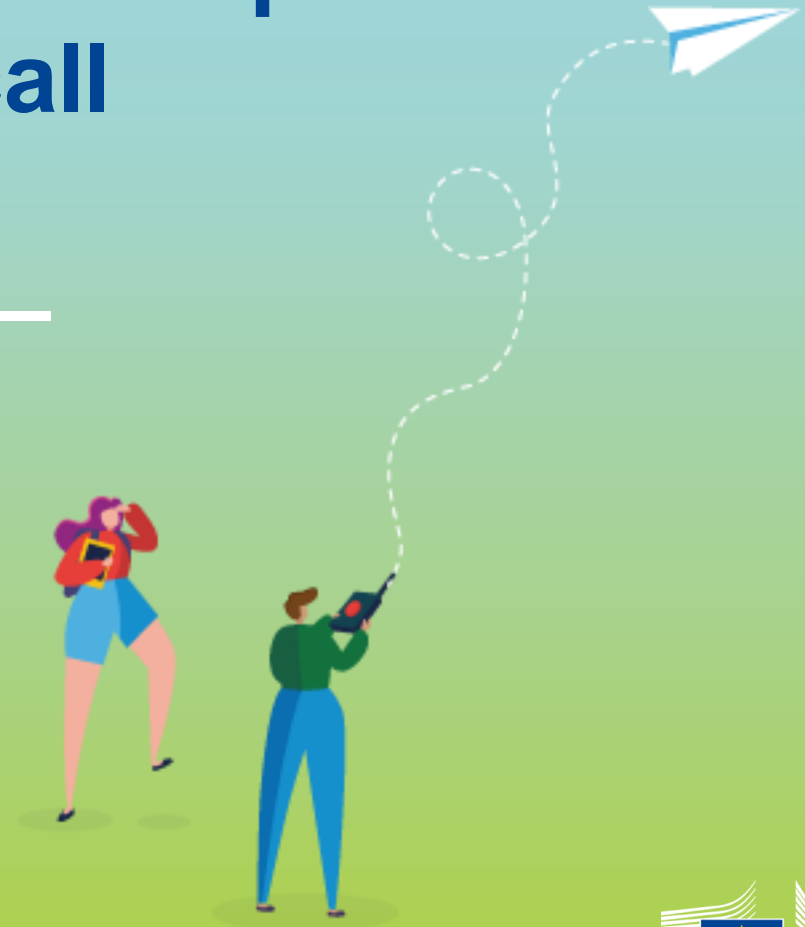
Startups supported
Min: 100

Cross-boarder support
Min: 50

Startups attracting VC funding
Min: 50%

European Startup and Scaleup Hubs (ESSH) pilot call

– practical details –



ESSH – eligibility conditions



Consortium and regional requirements:

- A hub must be represented by a **single legal entity** or **several legal entities** representing the relevant actors of the innovation ecosystem supporting startups
- The consortium should consist of a **network of at least 10 hubs** from at least 10 different Member States or Associated Countries.
- For Member States and Associated Countries with an overall **population not exceeding 35 million**, participation is limited to a **single hub** in the given consortium.
- For Member States and Associated Countries with an **overall population exceeding 35 million**, the participation is limited to two hubs in the given consortium.
- At least 2 participating hub shall be established in a “**widening country**”.

ESSH – eligibility conditions



Letter of intent

- The consortium must provide a single letter of intent at the moment of submission of the proposal indicating the source of the required 50% of complementary funding (e.g. national and/or regional funding, EU funding, or private investments).

Communication networks

- Subject to restrictions for the protection of European communication networks.

ESSH – expected outcome



- **Accelerate market expansion** for European deep tech startups across EU regions and beyond by fostering collaboration and mutual support among European tech startup ecosystem actors;
- Establish robust, **pan-European alliances of top-tier tech startup and scaleup hubs** embedded in research, technology and higher education ecosystems;
- Enable **cross-border access** to infrastructures, facilities, corporates, investors and talents to deep tech startups and scaleups, including those funded by the European Innovation Council (EIC);
- Enable more European deep tech startups **to succeed scaling into globally competitive companies**;
- **Strengthen less-connected innovation hubs** by integrating them into a Europe-wide collaborative network;
- Mobilise **greater private and public capital** into deep tech ventures across participating innovation hubs

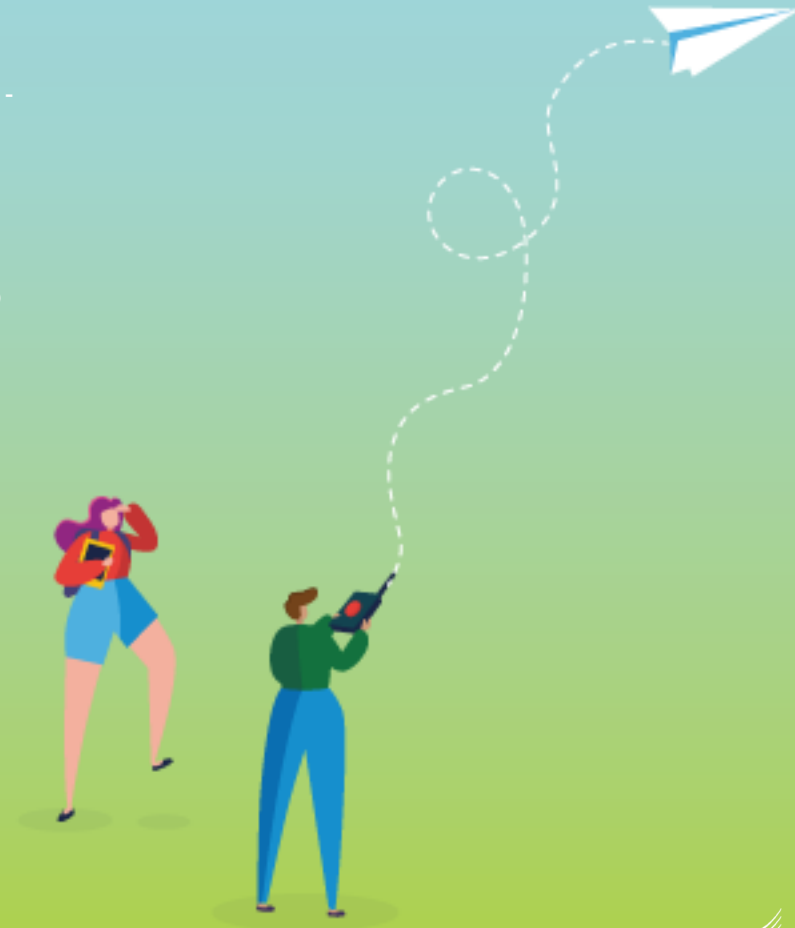
How to apply?



- Applications to be submitted through the Funding & Tenders Portal
- Applicants should submit:
 - Part A - Forms & budget
 - Part B - Technical info (main proposal – max 70 pages for COFUND)
 - Letter of intent (mandatory – eligibility condition)
 - Financial Support to Third Parties (optional)
- **Call** – European Startup and Scaleup Hubs pilot (HORIZON-EIE-2026-02-CONNECT-01:
<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/HORIZON-EIE-2026-02-CONNECT-01?isExactMatch=true&status=31094501,31094502&frameworkProgramme=43108390&programmePart=43121692&order=DESC&pageNumber=1&pageSize=50&sortBy=startDate>

Useful links:

- **EIE Work Programme 2026-2027**
https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2026-2027/wp-10-european-innovation-ecosystems_horizon-2026-2027_en.pdf
- **ESSH pilot call – Info Session, 11 December 2025**
 - Full PPT - <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/circabc-ewpp/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/c1dfd296-ccdf-4593-923c-0ca5c223a77a/download>
 - Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKrvkR5nHas>



Source: EISMEA (2025). *European Startup and Scaleup Hubs Pilot call* [PowerPoint slides]. SlideShare.
https://eisma.europa.eu/events/online-info-session-european-startup-and-scaleup-hubs-pilot-call-horizon-eie-2026-02-connect-01-2025-12-11_en



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