

EN

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# European Innovation Council (EIC) Work Programme 2026

European  
Innovation  
Council



European Innovation Council (EIC) established by the European Commission, under the Horizon Europe programme (2021-27)

## Who should read this document?

This document presents the 2026 European Innovation Council (EIC) Work Programme funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. It sets out how the EIC will allocate its funding of over EUR 2.024 billion for the year 2026 and has been prepared following the advice of the EIC Board.

The Work Programme defines the calls for applications targeting innovative researchers, startups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), scale up companies, and funders and other organisations and individuals interested in innovation. The focus is on breakthrough technologies and game-changing innovations which are high risk and with a high potential for impact and to scale up internationally and become market leaders.

A broad range of support is available, ranging from grants, investments through the EIC Fund, prizes to Business Acceleration Services (including access to coaching and mentoring, expertise and ecosystem partners). The Work Programme sets out the type of support available, how to apply, and how selection decisions are taken.

It's important for those seeking funding opportunities through the EIC to carefully read and understand the Work Programme to ensure they align with the objectives and meet the eligibility criteria as well as understand each *step* of the process.

**Potential applicants**, and those interested in the EIC in general, can find more information, including background to the EIC mission, organisation and practical guidance (e.g. challenge guides, frequently asked questions), on the EIC website: <https://eic.ec.europa.eu>.

**Support and advice** for potential applicants is available in each EU Member State and Associated County, through **National Contact Points of Horizon Europe** (Funding & tenders (europa.eu)) and through the **Enterprise Europe Network** (<https://een.ec.europa.eu/>).

**Applications** can be submitted through the Funding & Tenders Portal (<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home>), which can also be accessed via the EIC website (<https://eic.ec.europa.eu/>).

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# I. Introduction

## Strategic goals and Key Performance Indicators

The EIC was established to identify, develop and scale up breakthrough technologies and companies, to achieve the green and digital transition.

The EIC Board provides strategic advice for the EIC Work Programme<sup>1</sup> For the period 2021-27 the EIC Board has recommended six strategic goals, with associated Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), providing clear direction, track progress, and guide implementation and potential new actions<sup>2</sup>. The baselines and progress against KPI targets will be included in the annual EIC impact reports. The KPIs represent mid to long term targets.

### Six Strategic Goals for the EIC:

1. To be the investor of choice for those with visionary ideas: The EIC must have continent-wide recognition and traction with high potential start-ups, entrepreneurs and innovative researchers, in particular from underrepresented groups such as women innovators and those from less developed ecosystems.
2. To crowd in EUR 30-50 billion investment into European deep tech<sup>3</sup>: The EIC must bridge a critical financing gap faced by deep tech companies and leverage the EIC Fund to influence the allocation of private assets in their support.
3. To pull through high-risk technologies in critical areas for society and open strategic autonomy: The EIC must take risks and support the most promising deep tech opportunities from the earliest stage to commercial scale-up, delivering relevant innovations for society and safeguarding against dependencies for key technologies.
4. To increase the number of European unicorns and scale ups: The EIC must support the growth and scaling up of European start-ups and SMEs to match and ultimately surpass the performance of the USA and Asia.
5. To catalyse innovation impacts from European public research and innovation: The EIC must build partnerships to draw on, and commercialise, the best ideas from the research base across the EU, and scale-up start-ups funded under other EU or national initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> In line with Article 12 (1) (b) Council Decision 2021/764

<sup>2</sup> European Innovation Council (EIC) Board (E03823) at <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups?lang=en>

<sup>3</sup> As defined in the Glossary

6. To achieve operational excellence: The agility and speed of EIC operations and decision making must align with the expectations of applicants, investors and market norms.

In addition, the EIC Board has published a set of recommendations to improve the participation of innovators from widening countries in the EIC.<sup>4</sup> The recommendations are taken forward in the implementation of the EIC Work Programme, for example in the outreach activities and selection of EIC experts and jury members.

## Overview of the 2026 Work Programme

The funding and support available in 2026 is organised into five main funding schemes:

1. the EIC Pathfinder for advanced research to develop the scientific basis to underpin breakthrough technologies (Section II);
2. the EIC Transition to validate technologies and develop business plans for specific applications (Section III);
3. The EIC Advance Innovation Challenges to solve demand-driven specific, ambitious societal or technological problems quickly through funding milestones (section IV)
4. the EIC Accelerator to support companies (SMEs, start-ups, spin-offs and in some cases small mid-caps) to bring their innovations to market and scale them up (Section V); and
5. the EIC Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) Scale Up which provides high amounts of investments to scaleup companies in critical areas<sup>5</sup> (SMEs, start-ups, spin-offs and small mid-caps) (Section VI).

In each case, the direct financial support for visionary researchers and innovators is complemented with access to a range of Business Acceleration Services (Section VII) providing access to leading expertise, corporates, investors and ecosystem actors.

Pathfinder, Transition and Accelerator provide for "Open" funding which can support technologies and innovations in any field without any predefined priority areas. In the case of the Pathfinder and Accelerator, this Open funding is complemented by a set of "Challenges" which target specific technologies and innovations of strategic interest for the Union. The EIC STEP Scale Up call targets technologies and innovations within the fields of digital technologies, clean and resource efficient technologies, including net-zero technologies; and biotechnologies. Outside of the

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<sup>4</sup> [https://eic.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-08/EIC\\_Board\\_Statement\\_Widening\\_final31072023.pdf](https://eic.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-08/EIC_Board_Statement_Widening_final31072023.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Regulation - EU - 2024/795 - EN - EUR-Lex

calls, a budget is also set aside to support follow on investments to companies selected under previous EIC Work Programmes.

The 2026 Work Programme introduces a contribution for the Scaleup Europe Fund to be established as a new compartment of the EIC Fund to attract private investors to provide larger investments in the scaleup and growth stage of companies (see Section IX). The Scaleup Europe Fund was announced as a flagship initiative under the EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy to help close Europe's late-stage funding gap.

The Work Programme also supports a number of innovation prizes (Section VIII), and additional supporting actions allowing the functioning of the EIC such as expert contracts, data management, communication and IT (Section IX).

Linkages between the main funding schemes will be maximised through proactive management (see below) and approaches, such as additional 'Booster' grants to EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition projects (Annex 5), the Fast Track scheme to accelerate the access of successful projects from EU programmes to the EIC Accelerator (Annex 3) and the Plug in for access of projects stemming from national programmes (Annex 4).

**Table 1. Summary of main calls in 2026<sup>6</sup>**

Call	Who can apply	What for	EIC Open		EIC Challenges		
			Deadlines	Indicative Budget (EUR million)	EIC Challenge	Deadlines/ Cut-offs	Indicative Budget (EUR million)
<b>EIC Pathfinder</b>	Open call: only consortia can apply. Challenges call: smaller consortia (at least two eligible entities) or single applicants as well as larger consortia.	Grants up to EUR 4 million. Higher amounts if duly justified. Projects to achieve the proof of principle and validate the scientific basis of breakthrough technologies (starting from early TRLs aiming at achieving TRL3 or 4)	12/05/2026	166	II.2.1 Advanced Materials for Miniaturised Energy Harvesting Systems II.2.2 Biotechnology for Healthy Ageing II.2.3 DeepRAP: Deep Reasoning, Abstraction & Planning towards trustworthy Cognitive AI Systems	28/10/2026	96
<b>EIC Transition</b>	Single applicants (SMEs, spin-offs, start-ups, research organisations, universities) or small consortia (minimum 2, maximum 5 eligible entities).	Grants of up to EUR 2.5 million to validate and demonstrate technology in application-relevant environment (starting at TRL 3 achieved or 4 aiming at achieving TRL 5 or 6) and develop business and market readiness.	16/09/2026	100			
<b>EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges</b>	Single applicants (SMEs, spin-offs, start-ups, research organisations, universities) or small consortia (minimum 2, maximum 3 eligible entities).	First stage grants up to €0.3m to validate and benchmark potential solutions (starting at TRL 4) followed by larger grants up to €2.5m to develop, validate and user test selected solutions (aiming to reach TRL 6/7)			IV.1 Accelerating Physical AI: Embodied Intelligence for the Next Frontier of AI-Powered Robotics IV.2 Translating Disruptive New Approach Methodologies (NAMs) into Practice	26/02/2026 18/06/2027	6 in 2026; 25 in 2027 <sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> This table provides a simplified overview. All applicants need to read the relevant sections for the full information on eligibility and conditions for funding, including Annex 2. As affiliated entities do not sign the grant agreement, they do not count towards the minimum eligibility criteria for consortium composition (if any). The Director-General responsible for the call may decide to open the calls up to one month prior to or after the envisaged date(s) of opening. The Director-General responsible may delay the call deadline(s) by up to two months.

<sup>7</sup> The 2027 call will be budgeted and fully funded from EIC 2027 budget

<b>EIC Accelerator</b>	Single start-ups and SMEs (including spin-offs), individuals (intending to launch a start-up/ SME) and in some cases small mid-caps (fewer than 499 employees).	Grant component below EUR 2.5M for innovation activities (TRL 6 to 8) Investment component of EUR 1M up to 10 million for scaling up and other activities. Grant only and investment only component under certain conditions.	Continuous with batches 7/01/2026; 04/03/2026; 06/05/2026; 08/07/2026; 02/09/2026; 04/11/2026	414	V.2.1 Advanced Materials for Renewable Energy and Energy Storage System V.2.2 Alternative Concepts and Key Enabling Technologies for Fusion Power Plants V.2.3 Biotech for Regenerating Agricultural Soils V.2.4 Boosting the European Critical Raw Materials value chain V.2.5 Deep Tech for Climate Adaptation	Continuous with batches 7/01/2026; 04/03/2026; 06/05/2026; 08/07/2026; 02/09/2026; 04/11/2026	220
<b>EIC- STEP Scale Up</b>	Single startups and SMEs, small mid-caps, investors on behalf of eligible companies	Investment component of EUR 10 up to 30 million for scaling up strategic technologies for Europe.	One batch per quarter: 11/02/2026; 06/05/2026; 09/09/2026; 25/11/2026	300			

## Main changes of the 2026 Work Programme

The 2026 EIC Work Programme introduces a number of changes and simplifications, following advice from the EIC Board, the mid-term review of Horizon Europe, the policy priorities of the EU in particular the Startup and Scaleup Strategy, and experience and feedback from implementation.

Main changes are

- ✦ Introduction of pilot **EIC Advance Innovation Challenges** to reinforce the risk taking and user uptake of innovations. This call will be implemented through two stages of funding, a first stage open to all applicants calls for proposed solutions to the challenge, and a second stage to be funded through a call for 2027 to select a limited number of the first stage projects to proceed to implement their solutions.
- ✦ An increase in the indicative budget size of **EIC Pathfinder** projects to €4 million to enable progress to proof-of-concept stage, along with further introduction of lump sum together with some minor improvements to the evaluation process.
- ✦ The inclusion of research results from Horizon Europe and Horizon 2020 research infrastructures as eligible for the **EIC Transition** call, alongside results from EIC Pathfinder, ERC Proof of Concept, and from Pillar 2 of Horizon Europe.
- ✦ A major simplification and shortening of the **EIC Accelerator** evaluation process with more frequent batching of proposals for evaluation and introduction of more detailed due diligence at the application stage to enable faster investment decisions.
- ✦ **Clarifications for the EIC STEP Scaleup** call, reflecting experience of implementing this call in 2025
- ✦ **Inclusion of a contribution for the Scaleup Europe Fund, to be** established as a dedicated compartment of the EIC Fund, to attract private and investors and deliver larger scaleup and growth investments in strategic technology companies.
- ✦ **Reinforced Business Acceleration Services** for internationalisation and engaging with corporates, in line with the Startup and Scaleup Strategy
- ✦ Support for a regular **Gender and Diversity Innovation index**, building on the recent pilot projects
- ✦ An update of the **Plug-In scheme**, following the completion of the pilot phase in 2023-25.

## Key features of EIC support

### **A combination of financial and non-financial support to accelerate and grow EIC innovations and companies.**

The EIC support goes far beyond funding, and it aims at supporting the emergence, acceleration and growth of EIC innovations and deep tech companies. In order to further leverage the EIC investments, all EIC Awardees will be provided with access to a range of externally contracted, bespoke Business Acceleration Services (BAS) at any stage of development of their activities. The EIC uses its pan-European reach to connect EIC Awardees with partners from all around Europe and beyond, thereby also contributing to further develop the innovation ecosystem in Europe by providing access to and from a deal flow of top-level European innovators.

EIC Awardees will also be offered facilitated or priority access to relevant research and technology infrastructures, including those hosted by the Joint Research Centre and receiving funding from Union programmes including on High Performance Computing and in-orbit demonstration and verification activities.

### **Proactive project and portfolio management by EIC Programme Managers**

Support awarded by the EIC, and in particular by the EIC Pathfinder, is more than a one-off funding of a research project. By covering the full innovation cycle, whenever possible EIC aims to push results to higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRL). Whilst EIC Pathfinder Awardees will bear no obligation regarding the development of innovations as part of their project (beyond the evaluated proposal), the EIC will encourage and stimulate further maturation of preliminary findings and results by providing guidance as well as additional and continuous support, including financial one.

Moreover, EIC takes a proactive approach of project and programme management, performed by EIC Programme Managers,<sup>8</sup> to identify, develop and implement such technology visions and to nurture potential market-creating innovations out of EIC funded projects and activities. This will include leveraging existing networks such as the European Digital Innovation Hubs. Proactive management applies to EIC Pathfinder Challenges, EIC Transition and EIC Accelerator projects and consists of the following:

- ✦ The milestones defined by the proposals for funding will be used to periodically review the progress. Reviews will assess whether the activities foreseen to reach the milestones have been completed and will consider the results and outputs against the overall objectives. The reviews will be undertaken with support of independent

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<sup>8</sup> Appointed in accordance with point 1.2.2. of Pillar III in Annex I to Council Decision 2021/764, EIC Programme Managers are temporary staff employed by the Agency to manage one or more EIC Portfolios.

experts and overseen by EIC Programme Managers for projects within their portfolios.

- ✦ Following the reviews, the EIC support may be continued on the basis of its implementation according to the description of action, amendments to the grant agreements may be requested or, in case a project has not met agreed milestones, it may be suspended/terminated. It can be even terminated if it has completely lost economic or technological relevance (in accordance with the grant agreement). Reviews may also result in requests for amendments to ongoing or planned activities or deployment of some necessary Business Acceleration Services (or other relevant ones, like those from EIT-KICs), including additional coaching days and access to crucial expertise. For EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition projects, reviews may also involve an assessment to submit a proposal directly to the EIC Accelerator under the Fast Track scheme (see Annex 3) or to submit a proposal for additional Booster grants (see Annex 5). In addition to the reviews, the EIC Awardees will be expected to keep the Agency regularly informed of progress and pre-alerted in case of difficulties.
- ✦ The EIC funded projects may be included in one or more thematic or Challenge based portfolios of projects ('EIC Portfolios'), providing the projects with a productive setting in which to advance their ideas. For EIC Challenges, the portfolio will reflect the scope of the challenge ("Challenge Portfolio"). Projects to be funded through EIC Open calls may be requested to join one or more Thematic Portfolios.
- ✦ Projects selected under EIC Pathfinder Challenges will work together with Programme Managers and pursue together as a portfolio a common roadmap for the Challenge. This roadmap is prepared under the guidance of the EIC programme Manager and sets out collective activities, objectives and milestones. In order to take into account relevant changes in science and innovation or the portfolio's achievements or consistency, the objectives and roadmap of an EIC Challenge Portfolio must regularly be assessed and if necessary, revised. Based on any such revision, the Agency may request to amend the projects' activities, milestones and deliverables in accordance with the grant agreement. If a project has been selected under an EIC Challenge topic, and where no amendment can be agreed upon to ensure coherence with the updated objectives of the related Challenge Portfolio, the Agency may suspend or terminate the project in accordance with the grant agreement.
- ✦ EIC portfolio activities are identified and developed by EIC Programme Managers in consultation with the EIC Awardees of the projects in the EIC Portfolio, with relevant Commission services and where appropriate with other interested EIC Community members and third parties such as members of the innovation

ecosystem. They aim at developing cooperation within an EIC Portfolio in order to achieve its objectives, enhance research, prepare transition to innovation and stimulate business opportunities understanding and enhancing of regulatory framework, and strengthen the EIC Community. Such activities may cover participation to conferences, workshops or meetings, experience and data sharing, and participation to any relevant Business Acceleration Services events.

### **A tailored approach to proposal evaluation**

The EIC approach to the evaluation of proposals is tailored to the objectives of each of the EIC funding schemes. For the most mature technologies, when business and market readiness levels are close to market funding, greater emphasis is put on interviews with applicants and a simplified binary scoring (GO/ NO GO).

For the EIC Pathfinder, which supports science-towards-technology breakthrough research, the evaluation follows a peer review method where proposals are evaluated, scored and ranked by experts based on weighted criteria and thresholds (see Section II).

For the EIC Transition, which funds innovation activities that go beyond the experimental proof of concept, proposals will first be evaluated remotely, scored, and ranked based on criteria and thresholds. For the top ranked applicants which are invited to the interview, the jury will decide based on a binary scoring (GO/NO GO, see Section III).

For the EIC Accelerator, which supports high risk/high gain innovations to go to the market and scale up, proposals will be evaluated remotely based on a scoring and the top ranked evaluated at interviews based on a binary scoring (GO/NO GO)<sup>9</sup> (see Section V).

For the EIC STEP Scale Up, which supports promising companies developing critical technologies<sup>10</sup>, to help them secure larger funding rounds for further scaling their businesses, proposals will be evaluated following remote interview based on a binary scoring (GO/NO GO) (see Section VI).

### **Policy of open access and Intellectual Property rights<sup>11</sup>**

For the EIC Pathfinder, provisions will be applied to ensure open access to scientific publications and promote the uptake of research results (see Annex 2 on open science).

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<sup>9</sup> In line with Article 28(3) and Article 29(2) of the Horizon Europe Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2021/695) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1290/2013 and (EU) No 1291/2013, OJ L 170, 12.5.2021, p. 1, (“Horizon Europe Regulation”).

<sup>10</sup> Regulation - EU - 2024/795 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

<sup>11</sup> For the EIC Accelerator, the Intellectual Property rules are included in the contract and/or investment agreement.

Moreover, EIC aims to stimulate the cross-fertilisation and exploitation of results from EIC supported projects. Therefore, EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition projects may be requested at any stage by EIC Programme Managers to actively share information about results (including preliminary findings), within their EIC Portfolio and with other relevant EIC projects and parties, as detailed in Annex 6. The goal is to stimulate and nurture potential innovation out of EIC Pathfinder or EIC Transition results and explore pathways to further development. This exchange of information between EIC Awardees will be without prejudice to their own legitimate interests to exploit the results or findings. To ensure full confidentiality, such sharing will be subject to non-disclosure obligations regarding confidential results, with EIC Awardees retaining the right on a case-by-case basis to fully disclose or not their intellectual property.

Technology transfer and other relevant support is expected to be provided by universities and research organisations for exploiting the results of EIC projects. In the absence of such support and without prejudice to ownership of results, the inventors of results generated by EIC Pathfinder and Transition projects may be entrusted with appropriate access rights for the purpose of further development and exploitation. Exploitation activities may be eligible to additional financial support and services offered by the EIC, as further detailed in Annex 5.

### **Economic security**

Following the Communication on the European Economic Security Strategy<sup>12</sup> and the Commission Recommendation on critical technology areas for the EU's economic security<sup>13</sup> a number of provisions have been made to protect Europe from economic security risks.

These measures are:

- ✦ *Eligibility criteria:* In line with Article 136 of the Financial Regulation<sup>14</sup>, in order to protect the Union's strategic assets, interests, or security also taking into account the technological objectives and expected outcomes, where necessary and duly justified, legal entities which are directly or indirectly controlled by a non-eligible third country<sup>15</sup> or by a legal entity established in a non-eligible third country

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<sup>12</sup> Joint Communication by the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy: European Economic Security Strategy, 26.06.2023, JOIN (2023) 20 final

<sup>13</sup> Commission Recommendation C(2023)6689 of 3 October 2023 on critical technology areas for the EU's economic security for further risk assessment with Member States - European Commission (europa.eu)

<sup>14</sup> EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509

<sup>15</sup> Non-eligible third countries are countries other than countries associated to the Horizon Europe Framework Programme for the purposes of the relevant EIC actions and other countries specified in the call texts.

cannot participate as beneficiaries in Accelerator grant-only actions<sup>16</sup>. This restriction is exceptionally applied under the following calls:

- specific Challenge under the EIC Accelerator related to critical raw materials (see Section V);

★ *Investment safeguards:* The inclusion of economic security safeguards provisions in investment agreements by the EIC Fund for companies selected to receive an investment component under the EIC Accelerator, in order to safeguard the Union's strategic assets, interests, autonomy, or security and to achieve technological objectives and expected outcomes for companies selected under the EIC STEP Scale Up call as well as within the four priority technology areas defined in the Commission Recommendation on critical technology areas, namely: advanced semiconductors technologies, artificial intelligence technologies, quantum technologies and biotechnologies. . The different possible safeguards are described in the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines and will be tailored to each specific investee. Where the need for such safeguard measures is identified in the Commission Award Decision, the EIC Fund will apply at least one of the safeguard measures in the investment agreement.

The requirement for investment-related measures will be introduced in the Commission Award Decision only in the case of projects (i) selected under the STEP Scale up call or falling within the four priority technology areas and (ii) involving specific technologies listed in the second column of the Annex to Commission Recommendation C(2023)6689. Moreover, the safeguard measures will only concern projects whose core purpose is to develop one of these specific technologies and not projects where these technologies are a tool or method that will be applied for a specific application, but without substantial development of the technology itself.

★ *Intellectual Property:* A requirement exists in the grant agreement for all EIC beneficiaries to inform the Agency in cases where the Intellectual Property generated by EIC projects is proposed to be transferred to an entity in a non-associated third country.

Details of the above economic security measures are provided in the call texts below.

## **EIC investments**

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<sup>16</sup> The eligibility criteria do not apply to blended finance actions and to equity-only actions because appropriate controls are implemented for the investment component in the context of the Know Your Customer (KYC) / "Red Flag" report prior to any EIC Fund investment. In addition, Investment safeguards can be introduced, where appropriate, in the investment agreements.

The conditions concerning the list of non-cooperative jurisdictions (as amended from time to time) for tax purposes issued by the Council (OJ C 438, 19.12.2017, p. 5) (the "Council Conclusions") are applied by the EIC in respect of EIC Accelerator investments.

The EIC Fund shall not enter into any contract or maintain a business relationship with any institution or individual listed on sanction lists<sup>17</sup>, and in particular shall not make any funds available directly or indirectly to any institution or individual listed in sanction lists<sup>18</sup>.

The EIC applies the EU rules, policies and procedures, addressing the requirements in respect of money laundering, terrorism financing, tax avoidance, tax fraud, tax evasion contained in Article 158(2)(a) of the Financial Regulation<sup>19</sup> and complies with the prohibition to enter into new or renewed operations with entities incorporated or established in jurisdictions listed under the relevant Union policy on non-cooperative jurisdictions or that are identified as high-risk third countries<sup>20</sup> or that do not effectively comply with Union or internationally agreed tax standards on transparency and exchange of information, as well as the possibility to derogate from this requirement when the action is physically implemented in one of those jurisdictions, contained in Article 158(2)(b) of the Financial Regulation<sup>21</sup>.

The breach of these obligations may lead to the interruption of the equity investment process.

### **EIC-EIT Collaboration**

The EIC is progressively increasing collaboration and synergies with the EIT and its Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) with the overall aim of strengthening the European Innovation Ecosystem. A number of collaboration areas are already in place and will continue to be supported under the current Work Programme facilitating the access to services to European innovators. The Fast Track process by EIT KICs, that allows proposals from companies selected by the EIT KICs to enter the EIC Accelerator evaluation at the second stage will continue; EIC beneficiaries will have access to the services provided by the EIT KICs via the partnerships agreed with the Business Acceleration Services. The "Next Generation Innovation Talents" scheme allows EIT

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<sup>17</sup> Consolidated list of sanctions:

[https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/8442/Consolidated%20list%20of%20sanctions](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/8442/Consolidated%20list%20of%20sanctions)

<sup>18</sup> See Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July 2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine. OJ L 229, 31.7.2014, p.1. , as last amended by Council Regulation [please insert the references of the regulation on the 14th package].

<sup>19</sup> EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

<sup>20</sup> Pursuant to Article 9(2) of Directive (EU) 2015/849 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2015 on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering or terrorist financing, amending Regulation (EU) No 648/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Directive 2005/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Commission Directive 2006/70/EC (OJ L 141, 5.6.2015, p. 73), as may be amended.

<sup>21</sup> EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

Label Masters and Doctoral programmes, EIT Alumni, EIT Jumpstarter beneficiaries to undertake secondments in EIC and EIT supported startups and SMEs. Collaboration will continue to promote women entrepreneurs, with EIT access to the EIC Women Leadership Programme and a joint approach to the women innovator's prizes (see Section VIII).

## Outlook for 2027

The EIC Work Programme for 2027 will be prepared following the advice provided by the EIC Board. It is envisaged that the main calls on Pathfinder, Transition, Accelerator and STEP will continue without major changes. The experience with the Advanced Innovation challenges call will be assessed with a view to the continuation and improvement of this support. The identification of the challenges will draw from the insights of the EIC Programme Managers and reflect the EU policy priorities and continuation of co-funding with Pillar 2. Further pilots and changes may be introduced to bridge with proposals for the future of the EIC under the successor to the Horizon Europe programme.

Subject to the adoption of the legislative changes proposed by the Commission on a defence mini-omnibus<sup>22</sup> an amendment of the EIC Work Programme is envisaged to provide for EIC Accelerator to support to dual-use innovations and equity only investments in defence.

## Glossary<sup>23</sup>

The **Agency** entrusted by the European Commission with the implementation of Horizon Europe EIC activities, except for the EIC Fund, is the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA).

**Deep tech**<sup>24</sup> is technology that is based on cutting-edge scientific advances and discoveries and is characterised by the need to stay at the technological forefront by constant interaction with new ideas and results from the lab. Deep tech innovations are understood to be those that have the potential to deliver transformative solutions, rooted in cutting-edge science, technology and engineering, including innovation that

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<sup>22</sup> Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulations (EU) 2021/694, (EU) 2021/695, (EU) 2021/697, (EU) 2021/1153, (EU) 2023/1525 and 2024/795, as regards incentivising defence-related investments in the EU budget to implement the ReArm Europe Plan

<sup>23</sup> These definitions are complemented by specific definitions regarding provisions concerning management of EIC Portfolios and Intellectual Property for EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition actions detailed in Annex 6.

<sup>24</sup> Deep tech ventures have the following characteristics: positioning at the knowledge frontier with long and uncertain R&I cycles; relates to tangible products and industrialisation processes; linked to the ecosystem and especially higher education institutions, problem orientated, or mission driven, focused on the creation of an option space and a dynamic de-risking cycle.

combines advances in the physical, biological and digital spheres. Deep tech is distinct from 'high tech' which tends to refer only to R&D intensity<sup>25</sup>.

The **EIC Board** oversees the strategy and implementation of EIC activities and provides advice on EIC Work Programmes. It comprises 20 leading innovators and innovative researchers, as well as a full time President of the EIC Board. The EIC Board is appointed by the European Commission following an open call for expressions of interest. The EIC Board members are subject to strict rules concerning conflicts of interest and confidentiality.

The **EIC Awardees** or **EIC recipients** are the beneficiaries identified in an EIC Grant agreement (Pathfinder, Transition and Accelerator), or investees (for EIC Accelerator including EIC Step Scale Up Call), as well as winners of EIC Prizes. The Horizon Europe model grant agreements and contracts are available on the Funding and Tenders Portal<sup>26</sup>.

**EIC Business Acceleration Services (BAS)** are support services provided to the EIC Awardees and other eligible organisations as defined in Section VII to support the innovation development of EIC project results and the commercialisation and scaling up of EIC supported innovations, including access to coaches and training, access to services of the EIC Ecosystem Partners, and access to global partners (leading corporates, investors, procurers, distributors, clients), see Section VII for more detail.

**EIC business coaches** are independent external experts with entrepreneurial and investment backgrounds who provide business development insights and guidance to EIC Awardees and applicants. They are part of the Business Acceleration Services.

**EIC Community platform** is a platform available to all EIC Awardees and Awardees of EIC Seals of Excellence<sup>27</sup>, EIC Pre-Accelerator Seals of Excellence and EIC Sovereignty (STEP) Seals<sup>28</sup> and other eligible entities. It facilitates links to Business Acceleration Services as well as enabling discussions, exchanges and match making. The [EIC Community platform](#) is a virtual meeting place where EIC Awardees and all other eligible entities can access services specifically designed for EIC beneficiaries that connect them with peers, mentors and coaches, inventors, corporates, and innovation procurers. Additionally, the EIC Community platform also facilitate access the EIC Ecosystem Partners.

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<sup>25</sup> Ratio of a firm's R&D investment to its revenue.

<sup>26</sup> HE Model grant agreement

<sup>27</sup> As foreseen in Article 2(23), Regulation (EU) 2021/695 establishing Horizon Europe-the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1290/2013 and (EU) No 1291/2013

<sup>28</sup> As foreseen in Article 4 of Regulation (EU) 2024/795 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 February 2024 establishing the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP), and amending Directive 2003/87/EC and Regulations (EU) 2021/1058, (EU) 2021/1056, (EU) 2021/1057, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) 2021/1060, (EU) 2021/523, (EU) 2021/695, (EU) 2021/697 and (EU) 2021/241 (europa.eu)

**EIC Ecosystem Partners** are high quality, topic, or sector specific services from service providers from all over Europe and internationally that are not only focusing on EIC beneficiaries, that have been selected to provide Business Acceleration Services or other support to EIC Awardees, Awardees of EIC Seals of Excellence<sup>29</sup>, EIC Sovereignty (STEP) Seals and EIC Pre-Accelerator Seals of Excellence and other eligible entities. EIC Ecosystem Partners can include, for example, investors, business angels, mentors and coaches, innovation agencies, business associations, clusters, accelerators, incubators, technology transfer offices, venture builders, etc. They may also include the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) of the EIT, members of the Enterprise Europe Network and Startup Europe, and the European IP Helpdesk.

**EIC Expert Evaluators** are external independent experts in their field who assess proposals for funding against the criteria defined in the Work Programme. The EIC expert evaluators are selected from the Funding & Tenders Portal Expert Database.

**EIC expert monitors** are external independent experts in their field who assist the Agency and, in some cases, EIC Programme Managers in the monitoring of projects' implementation.

**EIC evaluation committees** are panels of **EIC expert evaluators** who evaluate proposals and rank those that have passed the applicable thresholds. In the case of EIC Pathfinder Challenges, EIC Programme Managers participate as members in some evaluation committees as specified in the call texts.

The **EIC Fund** is an alternative investment fund (AIF) that has been established for the specific purpose of investing in companies selected through EIC Accelerator calls. An external alternative investment fund manager (AIFM, the "EIC Fund Manager") manages the EIC Fund. The European Investment Bank (EIB) supports the EIC Fund as Investment Advisor.

The **EIC Fund Manager** makes investment and divestment decisions on the companies selected through the EIC Accelerator call by following a due diligence performed by the EIB according to the EIC Investment Guidelines.<sup>30</sup> The EIC Fund Manager manages the EIC portfolio of invested companies, supported by the EIB, and in close coordination with the grant support provided to investee companies by the European Commission and managed by the Agency, as well as the provision of Business Acceleration Services (including access to other potential investors via the EIC

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<sup>29</sup> As foreseen in Article 2(23), Regulation (EU) 2021/695 establishing Horizon Europe—the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1290/2013 and (EU) No 1291/2013

<sup>30</sup> About the EIC Fund - European Commission (europa.eu)

CoInvestment Platform) and the performance of technology due diligence by the Agency.

The **EIC Forum** brings different innovation drivers and levels of governance closer together to discuss openly and informally relevant policy issues.<sup>31</sup> The policy recommendations and activities of the EIC Forum will aim at supporting and complementing initiatives undertaken in Horizon Europe.

**EIC Juries** are panels of specifically selected EIC expert evaluators (including, for example, independent investors, business angels and entrepreneurs) who conduct face to face interviews with applicants to the EIC Transition, EIC Accelerator and EIC STEP Scale Up calls as part of the evaluation procedure. EIC Programme Managers and, in the case of the EIC Accelerator representatives of the EIB as Investment Adviser to the EIC Fund, may participate in jury interviews as observers, but will not be members of the jury and will not take part in the jury's decisions. **Interviews** with EIC Juries may take place in either a physical or virtual setting.

**EIC Portfolio is a set of actions presenting** thematic similarities (Thematic Portfolio) or contributing to the same EIC Challenge (Challenge Portfolio). Further information can be found in the proactive project and portfolio management by EIC Programme Managers section. **EIC Programme Managers** are high-level experts in specific fields of technology, business and innovation and who manage one or more **EIC Portfolios**. They are appointed to work in the Agency for a limited duration, in order to develop visions for breakthrough technologies and innovations, and to proactively manage portfolios of projects to achieve these breakthroughs. They are supported by EIC Project Officers as well as by EIC Tech to Market advisers. The EIC Programme Managers are subject to strict rules concerning conflicts of interest and confidentiality.

**EIC Plug-In scheme** provides that certified national or regional programmes may submit applications directly to the full application stage of the EIC Accelerator evaluation. Further details are provided in Annex 4.

**EIC Tech to Market Advisers** are agents employed by the Agency to assist primarily the EIC Transition projects, in agreement with EIC Programme Managers and in cooperation with EIC Project Officers, with the design and the execution of the transition plan and to facilitate access to, and follow-up of, the relevant Business Acceleration Service offerings.

**EIC Project Officers** are officials and other agents appointed by the Agency to manage an action.

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<sup>31</sup> The EIC Forum is supported under the 'European Innovation Ecosystems' part of the Horizon Europe work programme.

The **Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)** is a network of business intermediary organisations (chambers of commerce, technology poles, innovation support organisations, universities and research institutes, regional development organisations) that help Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) innovate and grow internationally.

The **Innovation Radar experts** are a diverse group of professionals whose expertise lies in identifying, evaluating high-potential innovations for inclusion in the Innovation Radar platform<sup>32</sup>, helping to determine which EU-funded research outputs have the greatest market potential and scalability.

**National Contact Points (NCPs)** are appointed by Member States and Associated Countries to provide guidance, practical information and assistance to applicants on all aspects of participation in Horizon Europe.

**Next Generation Innovation Talents** scheme supports EU funded researchers (from European Innovation Council (EIC), European Research Council (ERC), European Institute of Technology (EIT), Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA) to carry out an innovation internship in a startup funded by the EIC or EIT. The aim is on the one hand to enable researchers and aspiring innovators to better understand and gain direct experience of real-world innovation and entrepreneurship while allowing innovative start-ups to access new ideas and insights from cutting edge of research.

**Seal of Excellence:** is a quality label awarded to excellent proposals which could not be funded due to lack of available budget and meeting the conditions set out in the call text, in order to facilitate access to funding from other sources<sup>33</sup>. Awardees of the Seal of Excellence also have access to relevant Business Acceleration Services. Member States may decide to transfer budget from European Regional Development Fund Programmes to the Agency to fund directly Seal of Excellence proposals.

**Sovereignty (STEP) Seal:** is awarded to all proposals that meet the evaluation thresholds in calls contributing to the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP). It concerns both those proposals selected for funding (to support access to complementary funding sources) and those not selected for funding due to a lack of budget (to support access to alternative funding sources). It provides access to Business Acceleration Services. For proposals not selected for funding, Member States may decide to transfer budget from European Regional Development Fund Programmes to the Agency to fund directly Sovereignty (STEP) Seal proposals.

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<sup>32</sup> <https://innovation-radar.ec.europa.eu/>

<sup>33</sup> Information on public funding bodies that recognise and support Seal of Excellence projects is available at <https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/seal-excellence>.

**Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)** is a category of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. It consists of enterprises that employ fewer than 250 persons and have either an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 43 million. A full definition is provided in Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC.<sup>34</sup> Under the EIC, this category includes start-ups.

**Small mid-cap** means an enterprise employing up to 499 employees.<sup>35</sup>

**Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs)** provide a guide to the stage of development. TRLs are used in the Work Programme for guidance, but do not preclude support for non-technological innovations. A strong degree of importance will also be given to market readiness and business readiness,<sup>36</sup> as described in the award criteria of the call texts. The following definitions of TRLs apply, recognising that there are important differences between technological fields<sup>37</sup>:

TRL1 - Basic principles observed

TRL2 - Technology concept formulated

TRL3 - Experimental proof of concept

TRL4 - Technology validated in lab

TRL5 - Technology validated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies)

TRL6 - Technology demonstrated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies)

TRL7 - System prototype demonstration in operational environment

TRL8 - System complete and qualified

TRL9 - Actual system proven in operational environment (competitive manufacturing in the case of key enabling technologies, or in space)

**Women-led SMEs** (including start-ups) means companies where the position of either the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Technology Officer (CTO) or Chief Scientific

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<sup>34</sup> Commission Recommendation of 6 May 2003 concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (2003/361/EC), OJ L 124, 20.5.2003, p. 36. and the User Guide to SME Definition: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/756d9260-ee54-11ea-991b-01aa75ed71a1>

<sup>35</sup> Where the staff headcount is calculated in accordance with Articles 3, 4, 5 and 6 of Title I of the Annex of Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC.

<sup>36</sup> Further information on market readiness and business readiness will be provided in the guidance documents. <sup>38</sup> See for instance: <https://horizon.europa.eu/store/trl-assessment> and <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/career-development/researchers/manual-scientific-entrepreneurship/major-steps/trl>

<sup>37</sup> See for instance for health: <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/career-development/researchers/manual-scientific-entrepreneurship/major-steps/trl>

Officer (CSO) is held by a woman at the time of application, interview and award of the EU financial support.

**Women-led consortia** means consortia where the consortium coordinator is a woman and at least 50% of Work Package leaders, including the consortium coordinator, are women at the time of application, interview and award of the EU financial support.

## II. EIC Pathfinder

The overall objective of the EIC Pathfinder for advanced research is to develop the scientific basis to underpin breakthrough technologies. It provides support for the earliest stages of scientific, technological or deep tech research and development. Pathfinder projects aim to build on new, cutting-edge directions in science and technology to disrupt a field and a market or create new opportunities by realising innovative technological solutions through:

- ✦ 'EIC Pathfinder Open', open to support projects in any field of science, technology or application without predefined thematic priorities.
- ✦ 'EIC Pathfinder Challenges' to support coherent portfolios of projects within predefined thematic areas with the aim to achieve specific objectives for each Challenge.

### II.1 EIC Pathfinder Open

- ✦ Do you have an ambitious vision for a novel future technology that could make a real difference to our lives?
- ✦ Do you see a plausible way of achieving the scientific breakthrough that will make this technology possible?
- ✦ Can you imagine collaborating with an interdisciplinary team of researchers and innovators to validate the scientific basis of the future technology, realise a proof of principle, and explore paths to impact?

If the answer to each one of these questions is 'yes', then EIC Pathfinder Open may be the right call for you.

#### Why should you apply?

You should apply if you are looking for support from EIC Pathfinder Open to realise an ambitious vision for radically new technology, with potential to create new markets, respond to societal needs and/or to provide solutions for global challenges. EIC Pathfinder Open supports early-stage development of such future technologies (e.g., various activities at low Technology Readiness Levels from 1 to 4), based on high-risk/high-gain science-towards-technology breakthrough research ( 'deep tech'). This research must provide the foundations of the technology you are envisioning.

EIC Pathfinder Open may support your work, especially if it is highly risky: you may set out to try things that will not work; you may be faced with questions that nobody knows the answer to yet; you may realise that there are many aspects of the problem that you

do not master. On the contrary, if the approach you want to follow is incremental by nature or known, EIC Pathfinder Open will not support you.

Before applying to this call, you should verify that your proposal meets all the following essential characteristics ('Gatekeepers'):

- ✦ Convincing long-term vision of a radically new technology that has the potential to have a transformative positive effect to solving a challenge in our economy and society.
- ✦ Concrete, novel and ambitious science-towards-technology breakthrough, providing advancement towards the envisioned technology.
- ✦ High-risk/high-gain research approach and methodology, with concrete and plausible objectives.

EIC Pathfinder Open involves interdisciplinary research and development. By bringing diverse areas of research together, often with different perspectives, terminologies and methodologies, within individual projects and within a portfolio of projects, really new things can be generated, and entirely new areas of research can be opened up. It is up to you to compose the team that you need, that you can learn from, and that you can move forward with.

The expected output of your project is the proof of principle that the main ideas of the envisioned future technology are feasible, thus validating its scientific and technological basis. Project results should include top-level scientific publications in open access. While your vision is expected to be worthwhile because of its potential for future impact, for instance to create new markets, improve our lives, or provide solutions for global challenges, these are not expected to be achieved in the course of your EIC Pathfinder Open project. However, you are expected to take the necessary measures in the course of the project to allow future uptake to take place. This includes: an adequate formal protection of the generated Intellectual Property (IP)<sup>38</sup>, a plan for future exploitation and an assessment of relevant aspects related to regulation, certification, and standardisation.

In addition, you are encouraged to involve and empower in your team key actors that have the potential to become future leaders in their field such as excellent early-career researchers or promising high-tech SMEs, including start-ups. Your project should reinforce their mind-set for targeted research and development aimed at high impact applied results. This will strengthen Europe's capacity for exploiting the scientific discoveries made in Europe throughout the steps to market success or for solving

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<sup>38</sup> IP includes industrial property (patents, trademarks, designs and geographic indications of source) and copyright. See also Section I and Annex 6 for more information on the EIC policy of Open Access and IP rights.

global challenges. You are particularly encouraged to empower female researchers in your project and to achieve gender balance among your work package leaders.

### **Can you apply?**

This call is open for collaborative research. Your proposal must be submitted by the coordinator, on behalf of a consortium including as beneficiaries, at least three legal entities, independent from each other and each established in a different country as follows:

- ✦ at least one legal entity established in a Member State; and
- ✦ at least two other independent legal entities, each established in different Member States or Associated Countries.

The legal entities may for example be universities, research organisations, SMEs, startups, industrial partners or natural persons.

The standard admissibility and eligibility conditions and the eligibility of applicants from third countries are detailed in Annex 2. The eligibility of associated countries and third countries is detailed in Annex 2.

Research proposals within the scope of Annex I to the Euratom Treaty, namely those directed towards nuclear energy applications, must be submitted to relevant calls under the Euratom Research and Training Programme.

Applications with elements that concern the evolution of European communication networks (5G, post-5G and other technologies linked to the evolution of European communication networks) will be subject to restriction for the protection of European communication networks (see Annex II – Section B1)

### **What support will you receive if your proposal is funded?**

The total indicative budget for this call is EUR 166 million.

You will receive a grant for a Research and Innovation Action to cover the eligible costs, necessary for the implementation of your project. For this call, the EIC considers proposals with a requested EU contribution of up to EUR 4 million as appropriate. Nonetheless, this does not preclude you to request larger amounts, if duly justified. The funding rate of this grant will be 100% of the eligible costs.

Eligible costs will take the form of a lump sum, and the amount will be determined during the evaluation process. Applicants must therefore propose the amount of the lump sum based on their estimated project costs as defined in the Decision of 7 July 2021 authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027) –

and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (20212025).<sup>39</sup>

In addition to funding, successful applicants will receive tailor-made access to a wide range of Business Acceleration Services (see Section [VII](#)) and interactions with EIC Programme Managers (see Section I).

Projects funded through EIC Pathfinder (including grants resulting from certain EIC pilot Pathfinder, FET-Open and Proactive calls) may be eligible:

- ✦ to receive Booster grants of a fixed amount not exceeding EUR 50 000 to undertake complementary activities to explore potential pathways to commercialisation or for portfolio activities (see Annex 5);
- ✦ to submit an EIC Transition proposal (see section III for more information about the eligibility conditions);
- ✦ to submit an EIC Accelerator proposal via the Fast Track scheme (see Annex 3);
- ✦ to participate in the 'Next Generation Innovation Talents' scheme (described in the glossary). The personnel costs of researchers participating in this scheme are eligible under your Pathfinder grants.

The Model Grant Agreement<sup>40</sup> can be found on the EU Funding & Tenders Portal.

### **How do you apply; how long does it take?**

The deadline for submitting your proposal is **12 May 2026 at 17h00 Brussels local time**.<sup>41</sup>

You must submit your proposal via the Funding & Tenders Portal before the deadline.

Sections 1 to 3 of the part B of your proposal, corresponding respectively to the award criteria Excellence, Impact, and Quality and Efficiency of the Implementation, must consist of a maximum of 22 format A4 pages.

You will be informed about the outcome of the evaluation within 5 months from the call deadline (indicative) and, if your proposal is selected for funding, you can expect your grant agreement to be signed by 8 months after the call deadline (indicative).

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<sup>39</sup> This decision is available on the Funding & Tenders Portal, in the reference documents section for Horizon Europe, under 'Simplified costs decisions' or through this link: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/fundingtenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/lc-decision\\_he\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/fundingtenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/lc-decision_he_en.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> [general-mga\\_horizon-euratom\\_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#), [general-mga\\_horizon-euratom\\_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>41</sup> The call will open on 05 February 2026. The Director-General responsible for the call may decide to open the call up to one month prior to or after the envisaged date(s) of opening. The Director-General responsible may delay the deadline(s) by up to two months.

## How does the EIC decide if your proposal will be funded?

Your proposal will be first evaluated and scored individually by at least three EIC expert evaluators with respect to the award criteria. The score for each award criterion will be the average of the evaluators' scores. The overall score from this individual evaluation phase will be the weighted sum of the three average scores from the three award criteria.

The evaluation committee, which will be composed of EIC expert evaluators different than those who evaluated the proposals individually, will decide on the final score on the basis of the score from the individual evaluation phase and the outcome of its consensus discussions.

The Evaluation Summary Report will comprise the final score, comments that summarises the assessment by the evaluation committee as well as any additional comments, possibly including advice not to resubmit the proposal.

Proposals will be assessed (Table 2) and the evaluation scores will be awarded for the criteria in accordance with the table. Each criterion will be scored out of 5. Proposals that pass the individual threshold, will be considered for funding, within the limits of the available call budget. Other proposals will be rejected.

Table 2. Award criteria for EIC Pathfinder Open
<b>Excellence (Threshold: 4/5, weight 50%)</b>
<b>Long-term vision:</b> How convincing is the vision of a radically new technology and relevant potential solutions, towards which the project would contribute in the long term?
<b>Science-towards-technology breakthrough:</b> How concrete, novel, and ambitious is the proposed science-towards-technology breakthrough with respect to the state-of-the-art? What advancement does it provide towards realising the envisioned technology?
<b>Objectives:</b> How concrete and plausible are the proposed objectives to reach the envisaged proof of principle? To what extent is the high-risk/high-gain research approach appropriate for achieving them? How sound is the proposed methodology, including the underlying concepts, models, assumptions, alternative directions and options, appropriate consideration of the gender dimension in research content, and the quality of open science practices?
<b>Interdisciplinarity:</b> How relevant is the interdisciplinary approach from traditionally distant disciplines for achieving the proposed breakthrough?

<b>Impact (Threshold: 3.5/5, weight 30%)</b>
<b>Long-term impact:</b> How significant are the potential transformative positive effects that the envisioned new technological solution would have to our economy, environment and society?
<b>Innovation potential:</b> To what extent does the envisioned new technology have potential for generating disruptive innovations in the future and for creating new markets? How adequate are the proposed measures for protection of results and any other exploitation measures to facilitate future translation of research results into innovations? How suitable
are the proposed measures for involving and empowering key actors that have the potential to take the lead in translating research into innovations in the future?
<b>Communication and Dissemination:</b> How suitable are the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts, including scientific publications, communication activities, for raising awareness about the project results' potential to establish new markets and/or address global challenges?
<b>Quality and efficiency of the implementation (Threshold 3/5, weight 20%)</b>
<b>Work plan:</b> How coherent and effective are the work plan (work packages, tasks, deliverables, milestones, timeline, etc.) and risk mitigation measures in order to achieve the project objectives?
<b>Allocation of resources:</b> How appropriate and effective is the allocation of resources (comprising person-months and other cost items) to work packages and consortium members?
<b>Quality of the consortium:</b> To what extent do all the consortium members have the necessary capacity and high-quality expertise for performing the project tasks?

For proposals with the same final score, priority will be based on the following factors, in order: higher score under the criterion Excellence; higher score under the criterion Impact; gender balance among the work package leaders as identified in the proposal; number of applicants that are SMEs; number of Member States and Associated Countries represented in the consortium; other factors related to the objectives of the call to be determined by the evaluation committee.

## II.2 EIC Pathfinder Challenges

EIC Pathfinder Challenges aim to build on new, cutting-edge directions in science and technology to disrupt a field and a market or create new opportunities by realising

innovative technological solutions grounded in high-risk/high-gain research and development.

With each specific Challenge, a portfolio of projects will be established that explore different perspectives, competing approaches or complementary aspects of the Challenge. The complexity and high-risk nature of this research will require multidisciplinary collaborations.

A dedicated Programme Manager, who establishes a common roadmap and proactively steers the portfolio towards the goals of each Challenge, oversees a specific EIC Pathfinder Challenge. The projects in a Challenge portfolio are expected to interact and exchange, remaining flexible and reactive in the light of developments within the portfolio or in the relevant global scientific or industrial community. They will progress together towards common goals and create new opportunities for radical innovation.

This section refers to common criteria for all EIC Pathfinder Challenges. Please refer to the description below of each Challenge for specific information and requirements.

### **Why should you apply?**

You should apply if you have a potential cutting-edge project proposal that would contribute to the specific objectives of the respective Challenge. Specifically, your proposed project must aim to deliver by its end the expected outcomes defined in the respective Challenge. In general, the starting point of a proposal is early TRL (e.g., 2) to up to proof of concept or validation in the lab (e.g., TRL 3 or 4). Project results should also include top-level scientific publications, adequate formal protection of the generated intellectual property (IP) as well as an assessment of relevant aspects related to regulation, certification and standardisation.

In addition, you are encouraged to involve and empower in your team key actors that have the potential to become future leaders in their fields such as excellent early-career researchers or promising high-tech SMEs, including start-ups. Your proposed project should reinforce the mind-set for targeted research and development aimed at high impact applied results. This will strengthen Europe's capacity for exploiting the scientific discoveries made in Europe throughout the steps to market success or for solving global challenges. You are particularly encouraged to empower female researchers in your project and to achieve gender balance among your work package leaders.

Before you decide to apply, you are strongly encouraged to read the respective EIC Pathfinder Challenge Guide that will be published on the EIC website and the EU Funding & Tenders Portal. The Challenge Guide will provide you with more information about the objectives of the Challenges, technical information underpinning the

objectives and portfolio considerations used for the final selection of proposals to be funded.

### **Can you apply?**

In order to apply, your proposal must meet the general eligibility requirements (see Annex 2) as well as specific eligibility requirements for the Challenge (if applicable). Please check for particular elements (e.g., specific application focus or technology) in the respective Challenge chapter below.

The EIC Pathfinder Challenges can support projects from consortia or from single legal entities. In case of a consortium your proposal must be submitted by the coordinator on behalf of the consortium. Consortia of two entities must be comprised of independent legal entities from two different Member States or Associated Countries.

Consortia of three or more entities must include as beneficiaries at least three legal entities, independent from each other and each established in a different country as follows:

- ✦ at least one legal entity established in a Member State; and
- ✦ at least two other independent legal entities, each established in different Member States or Associated Countries.

If the proposal is from one single legal entity, this entity must be established in a Member State or an Associated Country (unless stated otherwise in the specific Challenge chapter).

The legal entities may for example be universities, research organisations, SMEs, startups, natural persons. In the case of single beneficiary projects, mid-caps and larger companies will not be permitted.

Applications with elements that concern the evolution of European communication networks (5G, post-5G and other technologies linked to the evolution of European communication networks) will be subject to restriction for the protection of European communication networks (see Annex II – Section B1).

The standard admissibility and eligibility conditions and the eligibility of applicants from third countries are detailed in Annex 2.

### **What support will you receive if your proposal is funded?**

The total indicative budget for this call is EUR 96 million which is expected to be allocated in approximately equal shares across the Challenges.

You will receive a grant for a Research and Innovation Action to cover the eligible costs, necessary for the implementation of your project, including the portfolio activities. For

this call, the EIC considers proposals with an EU contribution of up to EUR 4 million as appropriate. Nonetheless, this does not preclude you to request larger amounts, if duly justified or stated otherwise in the specific Challenge.

The funding rate of this grant will be 100% of the eligible costs. Eligible costs will take the form of a lump sum and the amount will be determined during the evaluation process. Applicants must therefore propose the amount of the lump sum based on their estimated project costs as defined in the Decision of 7 July 2021 authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027) – and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (20212025).<sup>42</sup> It is advised to include a work package dedicated to portfolio activities and allocate at least 10 person-month to it.

In addition to funding, successful applicants will receive tailor-made access to a wide range of Business Acceleration Services (see Section VII) and interactions with EIC Programme Managers and other actions in the portfolio of projects selected (see Section I) to help them with the protection and exploitations of the results of the project.

Projects funded through EIC Pathfinder (including grants resulting from certain EIC pilot Pathfinder, FET-Open and Proactive calls) may be eligible:

- ✦ to receive Booster grants of a fixed amount not exceeding EUR 50 000 to undertake complementary activities to explore potential pathways to commercialisation or for portfolio activities (see Annex 5);
- ✦ to submit an EIC Transition proposal (see Section III for more information about the eligibility conditions);
- ✦ to submit an EIC Accelerator proposal via the Fast Track scheme (see Annex 3);
- ✦ to participate in the 'Next Generation Innovation Talents' scheme (described in the glossary). The personnel costs of researchers participating in this scheme are eligible under your EIC Pathfinder grant agreements.

The Model Grant Agreement can be found on the Funding & Tenders Portal.

### **How do you apply; how long does it take?**

The call deadline for submitting your proposal is **28 October 2026 at 17h00 Brussels local time.**<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> This decision is available on the Funding & Tenders Portal, in the reference documents section for Horizon Europe, under 'Simplified costs decisions' or through this link: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/fundingtenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/lc-decision\\_he\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/fundingtenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/lc-decision_he_en.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> The call will open on 28-July-2025. The Director-General responsible for the call may decide to open the call up to one month prior to or after the envisaged date(s) of opening. The Director-General responsible may delay the deadline(s) by up to two months.

You must submit your proposal via the Funding & Tenders Portal before the deadline.

Sections 1 to 3 of the part B of your proposal, corresponding respectively to the award criteria Excellence, Impact, and Quality and Efficiency of the Implementation, must consist of a maximum of 30 format A4 pages.

You will be informed about the outcome of the evaluation by 5 months after call deadline (indicative), and, if your proposal is accepted for funding, you can expect your grant agreement to be signed by 8 months after the call deadline (indicative).

**How does the EIC decide if your proposal will be funded?**

After the submission of your proposal, it will be evaluated in two steps:

- 1. The EIC expert evaluators will assess each proposal separately against the award criteria and the EIC evaluation committee will ensure consistency across scores.
- 2. The EIC evaluation committee will consider all proposals passing the first step together in order to assess the best portfolio of projects to achieve the specific objectives of the Challenge (so called portfolio considerations). The evaluation committee will be composed of EIC expert evaluators and EIC Programme Managers.

Step 1 (assessment of each proposal separately):

Your proposal will be first evaluated and scored individually by at least three EIC expert evaluators with respect to the award criteria. After the individual evaluation, these evaluators will get together in a consensus group to agree on a common position on comments and scores.

After the consensus phase, the evaluation committee will check consistency across the evaluation of each individual proposal and finalise the scores and comments for all proposals.

For step 1, proposals will be assessed according to the following award criteria (Table 3).

Table 3. Award criteria for EIC Pathfinder Challenges
<b>Excellence (Threshold: 4/5; weight 50%)</b>
<b>Objectives and relevance to the Challenge:</b> How clear are the project’s objectives? How relevant are they in contributing to the overall goal and the specific objectives of the Challenge?
<b>Novelty:</b> To what extent is the proposed work ambitious and goes beyond the state-of-the-art?

**Plausibility of the methodology:** How sound is the proposed methodology, including the underlying concepts, models, assumptions, appropriate consideration of the gender dimension in research content, and the quality of open science practices?

**Impact (Threshold: 3.5/5; weight 30%)**

**Potential Impact:** How credible are the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts of the Challenge? To what extent would the successful completion of the project contribute to this?

**Innovation potential:** How realistic is the proof of principle for demonstrating the potential impact of the technology for the challenge? How adequate are the proposed measures for protection of results and any other exploitation measures to facilitate future translation of research results into innovations with positive societal, economic or environmental impact? How suitable are the proposed measures for involving and empowering key actors that have the potential to take the lead in translating research into innovations in the future?

**Communication and Dissemination:** How suitable are the proposed measures, including communication activities, to maximise expected outcomes and impacts for raising awareness about the project results' potential to establish new markets and/or address global challenges?

**Quality and efficiency of the implementation (Threshold 3/5; weight 20%)**

**Work plan:** How coherent and effective are the work plan (work packages, tasks, deliverables, milestones, timeline, etc.) and risk mitigation measures in order to achieve the project objectives?

**Allocation of resources:** How appropriate and effective is the allocation of resources (comprising person-months and other cost items) to work packages and consortium members?

**Quality of the applicant/consortium** (*depends if mono or multi-beneficiaries*): To what extent does the applicant / do all consortium members have the necessary capacity and high quality expertise for performing the project tasks?

All proposals that meet the thresholds defined in the award criteria will be considered in step 2.

Step 2 (portfolio considerations):

In step 2, the evaluation committee will consider each proposal's contribution to setting up a consistent Challenge Portfolio of projects.

First, the evaluation committee will map the proposals in a number of categories stemming from the overall goal and specific objectives of the Challenge. Examples of possible categories are: building blocks or subsystems, technical areas and/or competing technologies, platforms, applications areas, risk level, stage of technology readiness level, size, etc.

Following this mapping of proposals against categories, a suitable portfolio of proposals will be selected by the evaluation committee by applying portfolio considerations in order to propose for funding a coherent set of projects that will achieve the expected outcomes and impacts of the Challenge and maximise their impact.

Further information and details about the categories and the portfolio considerations will be provided in EIC Pathfinder Challenge Guides<sup>44</sup>, which will be topic and domain specific.

The evaluation committee may also propose some minor adjustments to the proposals as far as needed for the consistency of the portfolio approach. These adjustments will be in conformity with the conditions for participation and comply with the principle of equal treatment.

You will receive feedback in the Evaluation Summary Report which will comprise the final score and the comments endorsed by the evaluation committee as well as any additional comments. If your proposal was either retained for funding or not retained for funding while it received a score that was higher than other proposals retained for funding under the same Challenge, then you will also be informed about the underlying portfolio considerations. Comments on the detailed lump sum budget table will be provided in the Evaluation Summary Report only for proposals invited to grant agreement preparation or placed in the reserve list or rejected (possibly in part) due to significant overestimation or underestimation of costs.

### **What happens after a proposal is evaluated and retained for funding?**

The applicant/coordinator of the proposal will receive a letter announcing the proposal has been retained for funding and the next steps regarding grant agreement signature. Grant agreement preparation and signature is expected to be completed within three months, but shorter timelines may be specified.

The EIC Project Officer and relevant EIC Programme Manager will contact applicants and provide support during the grant agreement preparation to plan the portfolio activities which you will be expected to entail collaboration between projects within the

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<sup>44</sup> To be published in the EIC website, European Innovation Council - European Commission (europa.eu)

Challenge Portfolio, and to start the preparation of the Challenge roadmap which will define the collective deliverables, activities and objectives of the portfolio of projects selected.

During the execution of the project, you will interact continuously with the EIC Project Officer assigned to your project and the EIC Programme Manager, assigned to the Challenge Portfolio of your project, who will oversee all the portfolio projects.

## II.2.1 Advanced Materials for Miniaturised Energy Harvesting Systems

### Background and Scope

The exponential rise in the development and deployment of IoT (Internet of Things) systems and of connected objects (~100 billion by 2025 and ~250 billion by 2030<sup>45,46</sup>) will in turn increase the number of sensor networks required to provide data on the ground, with estimates pointing to ~1Trillion by 2025 and ~10 trillion by 2040

A consequence of such an expansion is a commensurate increase in energy consumption coupled with detrimental impacts on environmental sustainability: studies point to the total electricity consumed by IoTs in 2040, equalling total global energy consumption at present. Moreover, the sensor networks, generally powered by batteries, will result in 80 million batteries having to be changed each day, with knock-on effects on the wider environment.

Mitigating the impact of a rising number of such devices calls for solutions that will reduce energy consumption and increase the energy autonomy of connected sensors such as Wireless Sensor Networks (WSN) and of the IoT systems integrating such sensors.

This Challenge therefore focuses on the development of a new generation of advanced materials<sup>47</sup> to deliver miniaturised integrated energy harvesting devices, with significantly enhanced performance compared to the state of the art, that will give rise to highly effective energetically autonomous devices and systems.

This Challenge supports the ambitions of the European Commission Communication "Advanced Materials for Industrial Leadership<sup>48</sup>", which identified an urgent need to boost the development of advanced materials to enhance the EU's strategic autonomy in strategic fields while addressing sustainability, circularity and safety issues.

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<sup>45</sup> [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-15-5584-8\\_3](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-15-5584-8_3)

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/471264/iot-number-of-connected-devices-worldwide/>

<sup>47</sup> Advanced materials are understood as materials that are rationally designed to have (i) new or enhanced properties, and/or (ii) targeted or enhanced structural features with the objective to achieve specific or improved functional performance. This includes both new emerging manufactured materials (high tech materials), and materials that are manufactured from traditional materials (low tech materials). OECD working description on advanced materials [https://one.oecd.org/document/ENV/CBC/MONO\(2022\)29/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/ENV/CBC/MONO(2022)29/en/pdf)

<sup>48</sup> [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/chemicals-and-advanced-materials/advanced-materials-industrial-leadership\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/chemicals-and-advanced-materials/advanced-materials-industrial-leadership_en)

## **Specific Objectives**

Applicants to this Challenge must address all of the following objectives:

- ✦ The identification and development of innovative advanced materials for energy harvesting, harnessing new physical/ chemical phenomena, leading to a radical shift in application range and performance while reducing the reliance on Critical Raw Materials (CRMs)
- ✦ The implementation of the advanced materials in a miniaturised energy harvesting module, such as, but not limited to, miniaturised solar cells, thermoelectric generators (e.g. TEG), nanotribological/ piezoelectric devices, electromagnetic wave harvesting devices
- ✦ Integration of the miniaturised energy harvesting modules in energetically autonomous systems (e.g. wireless integrated sensors) and
- ✦ Benchmarking the harvesting modules in a representative use case in a laboratory environment (TRL 4) with a view to demonstrating significant efficiency improvements, in terms of energy harvested, compared to the state of the art.

Leveraging digital tools such as AI to accelerate the process of identifying, designing, fabricating, and characterising these new materials is encouraged.

All proposals should also identify potential markets and the associated impacts of their innovations.

## **Expected Outcomes**

Ambitious proposals put forward under this call will:

- ✦ identify a new generation of advanced materials for miniaturised energy harvesting modules, and
- ✦ achieve TRL 4 for the resulting energetically autonomous systems.

## **Portfolio Approach**

The portfolio of selected projects should lead to the development of a variety of advanced materials applied to a range of miniaturised energy harvesting modules and final integrated systems.

To achieve this objective, the following factors will inform the choice of projects in the portfolio:

- ✦ Phenomena exploited to harvest energy from the environment (e.g. solar, thermoelectric, piezoelectric, nanotribological etc.)
- ✦ Composition of the proposed advanced materials, and
- ✦ Field of application (e.g. agriculture, automotive, health monitoring, wearables, smart city management, energy management, industrial monitoring etc.).

The selected projects will be assigned to lead and/or engage in portfolio activities centred on the following priorities:

- ✦ benchmarking to compare proposed technologies, phenomena exploited, advanced materials used and approaches
- ✦ sharing scientific considerations, results on the different physical/chemical phenomena studied to advance the knowledge and foster new disclosures in the field with potential shifts in the paradigm
- ✦ sharing insights on integration of the modules to solve potential issues and help advance towards delivering effective operational energetically autonomous systems
- ✦ developing an integrated approach with different complimentary energy harvesting modules for specific use-cases and to enhance the final energy harvested, and
- ✦ communicating to target audiences such as corporates, investors, alongside the broader public to raise awareness on the topic with a view to accelerating the adoption of these radical innovations.

### **Expected Impacts**

The main impacts of this Challenge will be:

- ✦ A new generation of energetically autonomous systems enabling new services that will improve the life of European citizens through applications in areas such as point of care diagnostics, smart sustainable cities etc.
- ✦ Supporting sustainability in energy consumption and production in keeping with the ambitions of RePowerEU<sup>49</sup> and the Green Deal<sup>50</sup>, and
- ✦ Enhancement of the sustainability of IoTs and energetically autonomous systems in general.

## **II.2.2 Biotechnology for Healthy Ageing**

### **Background and Scope**

Ageing, the gradual decline of organismal homeostasis and of physiologic functions throughout the body and mind, is a critical shared risk factor for many ageing-related chronic diseases. The EU also has an ageing society - by 2050, the share of 85+ year-olds in the EU is expected to more than double, but extended life expectancy is not matched with years spent in good health, which currently stands at 70.5 years. This will present significant social, economic and healthcare challenges and thus calls for interventions that will promote healthy longevity, as well as tools that will enable the adoption of these interventions.

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<sup>49</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/topics/energy/repowereu\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/topics/energy/repowereu_en)

<sup>50</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en)

Over the past decades basic research has identified hallmarks and cellular mechanisms of ageing, creating the basis for biotechnology-based or pharmaceutical therapeutic interventions, such as targeting cellular maintenance pathways, stem cell exhaustion, cellular senescence or metabolic fitness. Nonetheless, translating these insights into clinical interventions has had a low success rate, partially due to the difficulty of:

- ✦ Translating approaches from model systems
- ✦ Identifying when to intervene
- ✦ Rigorous validation, and
- ✦ End-to-end considerations of implementation (i.e. the delivery of an intervention).

This Challenge therefore looks to translate decades of ageing research into tangible biopharmaceutical solutions for healthy ageing

### **Specific Objectives**

Applicants to this Challenge will be expected to develop a proof of concept in one of the following three areas:

1. **An innovative preventative or therapeutic biotechnology-based or pharmaceutical intervention** that prevents, delays or reverts the onset of a specific age-related disease. Such projects must address all of the following objectives:
  - ✦ develop an intervention that targets a fundamental molecular or cellular process of ageing, such as the hallmarks of ageing
  - ✦ assess the generalisability of the intervention (showing that it is applicable more broadly to ageing-related traits beyond the primary indication targeted) by assessing the impact of the intervention on another distinct trait related to ageing
  - ✦ demonstrate proof of concept by carrying out an interventional study in a vertebrate animal model of ageing that is physiologically aged. Projects are also encouraged to include small-scale interventional clinical studies but must at a minimum anticipate how the intervention could be feasibly tested in a clinical setting, and
  - ✦ develop a plan for exploitation, which considers ethical and societal perception, economic viability and regulatory approval. At least two of these areas, considered most relevant for the intended application, must be assessed in greater depth, suitably informing the project's technology development and contributing to the portfolio activities.

2. **A biomarker<sup>51</sup> based tool** to enable the responsible deployment of ageing-related interventions, taking into consideration the following:

- ✦ The tool should be based on previously identified potential biomarker candidates or ageing clocks. All types of biomarkers are welcome, for example digital, molecular or physiological biomarkers (such as frailty measurements), combinations of biomarkers and multimodal biomarkers); as well as biomarkers for different applications (e.g. predictive, diagnostics). Biomarker discovery is explicitly excluded
- ✦ The tool should integrate different measurements of multiple molecular, anatomic, physiologic, biomechanical or biochemical traits, as appropriate, to comprehensively capture the ageing process (i.e. it should not exclusively measure a single parameter/hallmark of ageing)
- ✦ The above selected biomarker signature should enable a clear linkage between clinical features and the mechanisms of ageing to be shown
- ✦ The signature should be robust to inter-individual and intra-individual variability in ageing to provide actionable, personalised insights
- ✦ The tool should be assessed in an initial retrospective study to establish proof-of-concept. Applicants must therefore convincingly demonstrate that they have access to suitable longevity cohorts, and
- ✦ The selection of the biomarkers and the development of the tool should prioritise deployment feasibility and actively incorporate feedback from potential users.

3. **A New Approach Methodology (NAM)<sup>52</sup>** that goes beyond the current state-of-the-art to enable the future development of interventions for healthy ageing. The NAM should:

- ✦ robustly capture the aged status of the system and the systemic/integrative nature of ageing (i.e. it should capture more than 1 molecular or cellular aspect of ageing, and more than 1 tissue type)
- ✦ be benchmarked against a relevant animal model of ageing, and
- ✦ be tested in the setting of a clearly specified use case (e.g. development of an intervention; as pre-clinical model in a regulatory setting).

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<sup>51</sup> Biomarkers are biological characteristics, which can be molecular, anatomic, physiologic, or biochemical. These characteristics can be measured and evaluated objectively. They act as indicators of a normal or a pathogenic biological process. They allow the assessment of the pharmacological response to a therapeutic intervention. A biomarker shows a specific physical trait or a measurable biologically produced change in the body that is linked to a disease or a particular health condition. A biomarker may be used to assess or detect a specific disease as early as possible (diagnostic biomarker), the risk of developing a disease (susceptibility/risk biomarker), the evolution of a disease (prognostic biomarker) – but it can also predict response to a given treatment including potential toxicity (predictive biomarker)

<sup>52</sup> New approach methodologies (NAMs) represent potential alternatives to animal testing in the non-clinical development phase of new medicines. They may include human organoids or microphysiological systems (e.g. organ-on-chip, disease-on-chip), in chemico methods, digital twins, virtual patient simulations, AI-enhanced predictive models, mechanistic or integrated in silico platforms, 3D-advanced human tissue model

Precision nutrition, the development of novel ageing clocks and wellness applications fall outside the scope of this Challenge.

All proposals should consider biological sex and gender-specific health determinants<sup>53</sup> in their development, with reproductive ageing also in scope.

### **Expected Outcomes**

Ambitious proposals put forward under this call will deliver:

- ✦ Proof-of-concepts (TRL3 completed) of biotechnology-based or pharmaceutical interventions that prevents or delays the onset of, or reverts, an age-related disease in a vertebrate model system, based on the hallmarks of ageing, taking into consideration practical challenges of implementing such an intervention
- ✦ Tools to facilitate development or adoption of the interventions above, such as proof-of-concept validation of biomarker signatures or suitable pre-clinical models, and
- ✦ Approaches to address the shared regulatory hurdles and societal challenges linked to ageing-related interventions, thereby facilitating their adoption.

### **Portfolio approach**

The portfolio of projects selected under this Challenge will ensure a coverage of projects developing interventions, biomarkers and NAMs, considering the following guidelines for portfolio composition:

- ✦ Interventions: no more than 5 projects. The portfolio of selected projects should collectively address a variety molecular and cellular processes related to ageing, and a variety of different age-related diseases.
- ✦ Biomarkers: no more than 3 projects. Projects will be selected to capture different application areas (diagnostic, predictive, prognostic biomarker), with preference to the inclusion of at least one diagnostic biomarker).
- ✦ NAMs: No more than 2 projects. Projects will be selected to capture a diversity of approaches to assess aged status in NAMs, different tissues or cell types and different use cases.

The selected consortia will benefit from mutual learning, and the exchange of expertise. Consortia will be encouraged to collaborate to address the following shared challenges faced by all ageing interventions:

- ✦ Scientific: preclinical models; Biomarkers of healthy/unhealthy ageing
- ✦ Path to Market: Defining suitable regulatory pathways, and

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<sup>53</sup> Sex: Refers to biological characteristics (including genetic, hormonal, physiological, anatomical) that distinguish between male, female, and intersex (in humans) or hermaphrodite (in non-human animals). Gender: Refers to socio-cultural norms, identities and relations that, together, shape and sanction what are considered “feminine” and “masculine” behaviours, and structure societies and organisations. From Gender In EU Research and Innovation ([https://rea.ec.europa.eu/gender-eu-research-and-innovation\\_en](https://rea.ec.europa.eu/gender-eu-research-and-innovation_en))

- ✦ Societal: Acceptance and role of preventative / therapeutic interventions, Need for improved longevity literacy.

### **Expected Impacts**

This Challenge looks to accelerate the development and uptake of clinically validated interventions that target the root cause of multiple age-related morbidities. It will:

- ✦ Deliver biotechnology-based interventions for healthy ageing
- ✦ Accelerate the implementation of personalised care in ageing based on molecular phenotyping
- ✦ Provide recommendations for regulatory pathways addressing ageing as a target to inform developers, regulators, and other decision makers, and
- ✦ Improve citizen literacy on longevity.

## **II.2.3 DeepRAP: Deep Reasoning, Abstraction & Planning towards trustworthy Cognitive AI Systems**

### **Background and Scope**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems have achieved remarkable progress as evidenced by the ability of Generative AI to recognise patterns and generate contextually relevant outputs based on ever larger models and associated datasets. However, despite the remarkable strides made over the past decade, there remains a significant gap between the capabilities of the human brain and machine intelligence, which must be overcome to achieve robust performance and enable effective interactions with users and stakeholders.

Current Generative AI models can release very accurate outputs and even solve some mathematical problems but might struggle with some complex reasoning benchmarks and to understand the real world. These models frequently fail to reliably solve logic tasks and long-term planning, even when provably correct solutions exist, limiting their effectiveness in critical applications where precision is essential.

Inspired by the human brain's ability to process information at multiple levels of abstraction—enabling perception, reasoning, and goal-directed planning—the goal of this Challenge is to move beyond the current state-of-the-art in traditional AI approaches, whether symbolic (e.g., rules, decision trees, symbolic regression, etc.) or connectionist, neural (e.g., deep learning, large language models, reinforcement learning). The goal is to significantly improve the Reasoning, Abstraction, and Planning (RAP) capabilities of AI systems.

This will overcome the limitations of current deep learning models, which despite their strengths, have limitations in critical cognitive functions for abstraction,

contextualisation, causality, explainability, and intelligible reasoning — competencies that are fundamental to move towards human-like intelligence.

### **Specific Objectives**

Innovative ideas put forward under this Challenge must explore novel approaches, including combinations of existing techniques (i.e. neuro-symbolic AI), or the creation of entirely new frameworks that go beyond current, traditional, deep learning and reinforcement learning paradigms. These could be inspired by developments in diverse fields such as neuroscience, biology, physics, philosophy and more.

The proposals should address one or more of the following cognitive capabilities:

1. **Deep Reasoning:** Moving beyond statistical pattern matching to support causal inference, logical reasoning, and context-aware or commonsense decision-making in complex, unstructured environments. This requires shifting from purely data-driven correlations to AI systems capable of understanding why patterns emerge, identifying underlying causes, and drawing valid conclusions through both deductive and inductive processes. Neuro-symbolic approaches, which combine the learning power of neural networks with the structured inference of symbolic reasoning are particularly encouraged to advance these capabilities. Integrating contextual and commonsense knowledge enables AI to interpret information more holistically, adapt decisions dynamically, and handle ambiguity and uncertainty. Deep reasoning systems should be able to reconcile multiple sources of information, provide transparent and explainable rationales for their outputs, and align with human values and expectations, ensuring trustworthy and accountable operations in demanding real-world scenarios.
2. **Deep Abstraction:** Enabling AI systems to generalise insights from limited data by forming, manipulating, and refining high-level concepts, analogies, and representations that can be transferred across diverse application domains. This includes the development of internal world models to support abstraction, foster commonsense understanding, and integrate semantic and contextual awareness. Approaches that combine symbolic reasoning, analogical mapping, and representation learning are particularly encouraged, as they empower AI to interpret meaning, intent, and relationships within complex environments. Progress in deep abstraction is essential for achieving cognitive flexibility, robust transfer learning, and adaptive reasoning in dynamic, data-scarce, or rapidly evolving settings.
3. **Deep Planning:** Developing robust, adaptive, and scalable planning algorithms/models capable of operating in open-world, agentic, or uncertain real-time environments. This involves leveraging advanced deep learning techniques such as deep reinforcement learning and architectures tailored for planning tasks to enable AI systems to autonomously devise, optimise, and adjust complex strategies

in dynamic settings. Neuro-symbolic approaches integrating neural networks with symbolic reasoning are particularly encouraged to address uncertainty, provide formal guarantees, and enable explainable, dependable decision-making. Emphasis is placed on long-term, flexible planning that incorporates cognitive timing and predictive modelling, enabling systems to anticipate and adapt within dynamic contexts. Approaches should explore hierarchical planning across multiple temporal levels, contingency planning for effective fallback strategies, and continual re-planning to dynamically update plans as environments evolve. These advancements will underpin resilient, coordinated, and trustworthy AI planning in complex, unpredictable scenarios.

### **Expected Outcomes**

Ambitious proposals put forward under this call will deliver:

- ✦ Models and/or architectures that handle multimodal data and knowledge, uncertainty, and can be trained and deployed with constrained computational resources
- ✦ Provable trustworthiness mechanisms ensuring explainability, transparency, fairness, risk evaluation, security and alignment with ethical and legal standards, including fundamental rights and the EU AI Act, and
- ✦ Demonstrate the developed capabilities integrated in a cognitive AI system (reaching TRL4) performing complex real-world tasks (e.g., scientific discovery, decision support, problem solving) as well as simulations at a scale.

In addition, proposals will:

- ✦ Propose new methods and metrics for evaluating and certifying reasoning and trustworthiness in AI as well as the use of the computational resources
- ✦ Follow the FAIR principles ensuring all data, models, and results are Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable to maximise transparency, reproducibility, and impact, and
- ✦ Develop synergies with EU initiatives such as TEFs (AI Testing and Experimentation Facilities)<sup>54</sup>, eBrains<sup>55</sup>, Resource for AI Science in Europe (RAISE)<sup>56</sup>, AI-on-demand Platform (AIoD)<sup>57</sup> and the Quantum Flagship<sup>58</sup>.

### **Portfolio approach**

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<sup>54</sup> [Sectorial AI Testing and Experimentation Facilities under the Digital Europe Programme | Shaping Europe's digital future](#)

<sup>55</sup> [EBRAINS: Europe's Research Infrastructure for Brain Research - EBRAINS](#)

<sup>56</sup> [Researchers and innovators invited to shape Europe's AI Strategy in Science | Shaping Europe's digital future](#)

<sup>57</sup> [Home Page | AI-on-Demand](#)

<sup>58</sup> [Introduction to the Quantum Flagship | Quantum Flagship](#)

The composition of the portfolio of projects to be funded under the DeepRAP Challenge will ensure comprehensive coverage across the following categories with a view to ensuring breadth and enabling synergies between the projects:

- ✦ Category 1 – Cognitive Function Capability: Reasoning, abstraction, and planning should be covered by the selected portfolio.
- ✦ Category 2 – Technological Approach: The selected projects are expected to use a variety of technological approaches, including but not limited to, neuro-symbolic AI, deep learning, reinforcement learning, and novel frameworks inspired by interdisciplinary fields, and
- ✦ Category 3 – Use Case and Application Domain: The selected projects will cover a variety of real-world domains, such as industry, mobility, civil security, scientific discovery, health, cybersecurity, justice and human-robot interaction.

The selected projects will also be assigned to lead and/or engage in portfolio activities centred on the following priorities:

- ✦ Interoperability: Establishing common standards and protocols to ensure seamless alignment between projects
- ✦ Benchmark Development: Co-creating a DeepRAP benchmark with shared tasks and an open evaluation platform for transparent assessment
- ✦ Common Pilots: Delivering joint pilot demonstrations addressing complex real-world problems to showcase DeepRAP capabilities
- ✦ Multiagent Integration: where feasible, combining project outcomes into modular, multiagent AI systems demonstrating collective reasoning and planning through structured interactions among multiple agents
- ✦ Application Shaping: Defining impactful use cases and engaging stakeholders to guide the development and adoption of innovative cognitive AI systems, and
- ✦ Ethical and Societal Alignment: Proactively addressing ethical, legal, and societal considerations, including fundamental rights, transparency, privacy, safety, and fairness of cognitive AI systems.

### **Expected Impact**

The resulting portfolio will not only advance the scientific state-of-the-art but also build a robust, interoperable, and application-driven community, positioning Europe at the forefront of trustworthy cognitive AI. It should also lay the foundations for future European leadership in safe, human-centric cognitive AI, supporting sovereignty and competitiveness in key sectors. It will support the ambitions of the AI Act<sup>59</sup> and the European approach to Artificial Intelligence<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup><https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-launches-ai-innovation-package-support-artificial-intelligence-startups-and-smes>

<sup>60</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_24\\_383](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_383) 150 AI Act | Shaping Europe's digital future (europa.eu)

### III. EIC Transition

Have you identified EU-funded project result(s) with promising commercial potential that could be the basis for ground-breaking innovations and promising new businesses?

- ✦ Is this novel promising technology ready for the next steps towards its maturation and validation, to be further developed and validated for some specific, high potential, commercial applications?
- ✦ Have you conducted a preliminary market research to identify potential markets for your innovation and explored potential competitors?
- ✦ Do you envisage building a motivated and entrepreneurial team with a mix of skills, including researchers, business people, marketers etc. to develop and drive the idea towards commercial success?

If the answer to each and every of these questions is a clear 'yes', then EIC Transition may be the right call for you.

#### Why should you apply?

EIC Transition funds innovation activities that go beyond the experimental proof of principle in laboratory (applications must have completed all elements of Technology Readiness Level 3). It supports both the maturation and validation of your novel technology from the lab to the relevant application environments (by making use of prototyping, formulation, models, user testing or other validation tests) as well as explorations and development of a sustainable business plan and business model towards commercialisation into high potential markets.

Your proposed activities must include further technology development on the results achieved in a previous project and follow user-centric methodologies to increase chances of the innovation's future commercial success in the market<sup>61</sup>. EIC Transition projects should address, in a balanced way, both technology and market/business development, possibly including iterative learning processes based on early customer or user feedback. These activities should include, subject to the level of maturity of the technology, a suitable mix of technology development and validation activities to increase the maturity of the technology beyond proof of concept to viable demonstrators of the technology in the intended field of application (i.e., applications must have completed all elements of Technology Readiness Level 3 up to TRL 5 to 6 at the end of the project). The activities must in all cases address improving market readiness towards commercialisation and deployment (market research, value

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<sup>61</sup> If relevant, this might also include novel technologies for the public sector

proposition, refine incipient business plan<sup>62</sup> and validate incipient business model<sup>63</sup>, intellectual property protection, etc.) and aspects of regulation, certification and standardisation (if relevant), aimed at getting both the technology and the business idea investment ready.

EIC Transition aims at maturing both your technology and business idea thus increasing its technology and market/commercial readiness. The expected outcomes of your EIC Transition project are a) a technology that is demonstrated to be effective for its intended application and b) a validated business model and a business plan for its development to market. It is also expected that the intellectual property generated by your EIC Transition project is formally protected in an adequate way (Annex 6).

EIC Transition can support several different pathways beyond fundamental research, from technology development and product design to business modelling and commercialisation strategy to reach the market. Some non-exhaustive illustrative examples could be the following pathways:

- ✦ A focused collaborative project to further develop strategic and high impact technologies towards specific applications while improving also the market readiness towards a promising market application. This pathway is likely to require a collaboration among several applicants ('multi-beneficiary' approach) including SMEs, research performers, technology transfer offices and potential users/ customers.
- ✦ An individual SME (including start-ups, spin-offs) identifies a market opportunity to apply the results of an eligible project towards a specific market application. This pathway is likely to require, or lead to, a licensing arrangement with the SME and could also involve a collaboration between the result owner(s) of the eligible project and the interested SME;
- ✦ A team of entrepreneurial researchers within a research or technology organisation who want to turn selected project results into a viable product by looking for a suitable business model or creating a start-up or spin-off company, and which may involve collaboration with the host research or technology organisation, as well as their technology transfer offices.

Technology Transfer Offices or business schools are encouraged to actively participate in the EIC Transition project, as they can play a key role in enabling and supporting researchers with the development and commercialisation of their research results.

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<sup>62</sup> Usual components are products or services provided, market analysis, competition analysis, marketing strategy, organisation & management, financial projections.

<sup>63</sup> It usually includes value proposition, target market(s), revenue streams, cost structure, channels. <sup>81</sup> Business model is a key component of the business plan.

At the end of your EIC Transition project, you should be ready for the next stage, which can be to apply for EIC Accelerator<sup>64</sup> (if you are a SME, including start-ups or spin-offs), and to seek other investors or sources of funding, to enter licensing or collaboration agreements with third parties, or other routes to market deployment. In case your project is not led by an SME or commercial partner, the formation and spin out of a new company can be included as part of the activities. You will be expected to describe the intended pathway and route to market in your proposal and must include specific milestones together with concrete and verifiable KPIs during the implementation of your project to assess progress towards the market.

The EIC Transition project is expected to mature your innovation both in its TRL and market and business readiness<sup>65</sup> from the beginning of the project and with both tracks going in parallel and interacting between them.

Applicants to EIC Transition can submit proposals through an EIC Transition Open call which has no predefined thematic priorities and is open to proposals in any field of science, technology or application.

### Can you apply?

In order to apply, your proposal must meet the general eligibility requirements (see Annex 2) as well as specific eligibility requirements described in this section.

Your proposal must build on results already achieved within an eligible project that are, at least, at experimental proof of concept (applications must have completed all elements of Technology Readiness Level 3) and should not be beyond TRL4, i.e. that all elements of TRL4 have already been completed<sup>66</sup>. Proposals building on project results at other TRLs level are not eligible.<sup>67</sup>

EIC Transition is restricted to proposals based on results generated by the following eligible projects:

- ✦ EIC Pathfinder projects (including projects funded under the Horizon 2020 EIC pilot Pathfinder, FET-Open, FET-Proactive, CSA and CSA Lump sum FET Innovation Launchpad, and FET Flagships calls<sup>68</sup>).
- ✦ European Research Council Proof of Concept projects funded under Horizon 2020 or Horizon Europe.

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<sup>64</sup> Minimum TRL for Accelerator is, since 2025, TRL 6.

<sup>65</sup> Business plan and business model will have to be further refine and validate during the project lifetime.

<sup>66</sup> If the proposal consist of different technologies the relevant TRL will be assessed as the lowest TRL of its core technological components/subsystems.

<sup>67</sup> At any time during the evaluation, additional checks to verify that the application is within the scope of the call (and in particular whether the application is built upon results at TRL 3 or 4) may be conducted.

<sup>68</sup> The indicative list of eligible project whose results can be used in EIC Transition application will be published at the opening of the call. The published list does not constitute proof of eligibility and is provided as indication only and subject to further requirements indicated in the Work Programme.

- ✦ Research and Innovation Actions <sup>69</sup> funded under Horizon 2020 Societal challenges and Leadership in Industrial Technologies <sup>70</sup> and under Horizon Europe pillar II, with an eligible TRL<sup>71</sup>. European Defence Fund (EDF), including the Preparatory Action on Defence Research, research projects, but only for proposals which are focused on civil applications (including dual use)<sup>72</sup>.
- ✦ Research and Innovation Actions funded under the Horizon Europe or Horizon 2020 Research Infrastructures part.

If you are applying on the basis of an eligible project for which the grant is still ongoing<sup>73</sup>, you may apply if the start date of the grant is more than 18 months before the cut-off date of the relevant EIC Transition call with the exception of ERC Proof of Concept where the start date should be more than 6 months before the cut-off date of the call.

If you are applying on the basis of an eligible project which has already been completed, you may apply within 24 months of the completion of the project (i.e. the end date of the grant for the eligible project is less than 24 months from the cut-off date of the relevant EIC Transition call).

You do not need to be a participant, Principal Investigator or result owner of the previous projects; on the contrary, new participants including start-ups, SME or other innovation actors are welcome and encouraged to apply:

- ✦ If you (applicant (s) eligible for funding) were part of the eligible project whose results are further developed in the EIC Transition proposal, you need to confirm in your proposal that you are the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) owner or holder and have the necessary rights to commercialise the results of the project for the whole duration of the EIC Transition project.
- ✦ If you (applicant(s) eligible for funding) were not part of the eligible project whose results are further developed in the EIC Transition proposal, you (the applicant/coordinator) need to include in your proposal a commitment letter from the owner(s) of the relevant result(s), which confirms the commitment of the latter to negotiate with you fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory access

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<sup>69</sup> Grants funded via financial support to third parties e.g., ERA NETs/ co-funded partnerships, EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities) will not be eligible as it is not possible to verify if the result was generated by such projects.

<sup>70</sup> including projects funded under the cross-cutting activities part of the Horizon 2020 Work Programmes drawing from budgets of Pillar II and III

<sup>71</sup> Applicants must prove the grant from which the result was generated was funded by Horizon 2020 or Horizon Europe (including JUs unless they implement FSTP grants) by specifying the relevant grant number and acronym as indicated in the Funding & Tenders Portal.

<sup>72</sup> Applications under the EIC Transition Funding scheme must focus exclusively on civil applications.

<sup>73</sup> The goal of EIC Transition is to mature and validate your novel technology you developed in your base project as well as improve its market readiness. As the duration of this base project can vary greatly it is strongly advised that applicants apply to Transition only well into the 2nd part of their project and only when they are sure they can give a clear yes to the 3 questions mentioned in the beginning of the Transition WP text.

to such results, including IPR, for the purpose of future commercial exploitation for the whole duration of the EIC Transition project.

- ✦ In all cases you need to specify in your application the grant number and acronym of the eligible project(s) which generated the result together with reference to where the result has been reported (in the periodic reporting, the Horizon results platform, EIC Transition 'innovation discovery' tool<sup>74</sup> powered by the Innovation Radar or CORDIS).

You can apply for EIC Transition either as:

- ✦ A single legal entity established in a Member State or an Associated Country ('mono-beneficiary') if you are a start-up, SME or research performing organisation (university, research or technology organisation, including teams, individual Principal Investigators and inventors in such institutions who intend to form a spin-off company).<sup>75</sup> Larger companies (i.e. which do not qualify as SMEs) are not eligible to apply as a single legal entity; or
- ✦ A small consortium of two independent legal entities from two different Member States or Associated Countries, or
- ✦ A consortium of minimum three and maximum five eligible (for funding) independent legal entities ('multi-beneficiary') following standard rules i.e. must include at least one legal entity established in a Member State and at least two other independent legal entities, each established in different Member States or Associated Countries (see Annex 2).<sup>76</sup>

Only one proposal can be submitted per eligible originating ERC Proof of Concept funded in Horizon 2020 or Horizon Europe and FET Innovation Launchpad project<sup>77</sup>.

Consortia may for example include start-ups, SMEs, research organisations, or larger companies, user/customer organisations or potential end users (e.g., hospitals, utilities, industry, regulatory and standardisation bodies).

The applicant must specify which path to market will explore and pursue during the execution of the EIC Transition project: direct exploitation by coordinator or beneficiary, creation of a spin-off company in a Member State or an Associated Country, licensing to an established company (not part of the consortium) or other path to be described.

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<sup>74</sup> EIC Transition innovation discovery tool: <https://innovation-radar.ec.europa.eu/eic-transition> For results already listed on the Innovation Radar platform the unique id of that innovation / result (available on the innovation's page of the Innovation Radar platform) should be provided in the proposal submission.

<sup>75</sup> A spin-off from research performing organisation (university, research or technology organisation) having a legal (e.g., contractual cooperation not limited to the action, e.g., a collaboration agreement for research in a particular field) or capital (research performing organisation owning a controlling share in the capital of the spin -off) can be considered as an affiliated entity according to Article 8 of the Grant Agreement.

<sup>76</sup> Consortia of more than 5 eligible independent entities will be deemed ineligible.

<sup>77</sup> this does not affect resubmission of the same (improved) proposal in subsequent calls in case it was not selected. Of course, resubmission must respect all eligibility criteria notably regarding time since end of the project.

Individual SMEs (including Startups, Spinoffs) or those in consortia who are the main partners for bringing the innovation to market must be actively involved in the research, development and commercialization of innovative products or services.

### **Participation restrictions.**

Applications with elements that concern the evolution of European communication networks (5G, post-5G and other technologies linked to the evolution of European communication networks) will be subject to restriction for the protection of European communication networks (see Annex II – Section B1)

### **What support will you receive if your proposal is funded?**

The total indicative budget for this call is EUR 100 million.

If successful, you will receive a grant for a Research and Innovation Action to cover the eligible costs, necessary for the implementation of your project. For this call, the EIC considers proposals with a requested EU contribution of more than EUR 0.5 million and less than EUR 2.5 million and duration between 1 and 3 years as appropriate.

The funding rate of this grant will be 100% of the eligible costs. Eligible costs will take the form of a lump sum and the amount will be determined during the evaluation process. Applicants must therefore propose the amount of the lump sum based on their estimated project costs as defined in the Decision of 7 July 2021 authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027) – and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2021-2025).<sup>78</sup>

The projects funded through EIC Transition are eligible:

- ✦ to receive Booster grants of a fixed amount not exceeding EUR 50 000 to undertake complementary activities to explore potential pathways to commercialisation or for portfolio activities (see Annex 5).
- ✦ to submit an EIC Accelerator proposal via the Fast Track scheme (see Annex 3).

In addition to funding, projects will receive tailor-made access to a wide range of Business Acceleration Services (BAS) and matchmaking events (see Section VII). Transition projects who receive EIC funding are expected and strongly encouraged to apply for Tech2Market BAS services. Coaching for Transition projects is mandatory unless well justified (e.g. if already provided by other ecosystem players). Transition

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<sup>78</sup> This decision is available on the [Funding & Tenders Portal](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf), in the reference documents section for Horizon Europe, under 'Simplified costs decisions' or through this link: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/fundingtenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision\\_he\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/fundingtenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf)

projects are expected to follow up on recommendations from Programme Managers as well as from Innovation Radar experts.

The Model Grant Agreement can be found on the Funding & Tenders Portal.

### **How do you apply; how long does it take?**

The deadline for submitting your proposal is 16 September 2026 at 17h00 Brussels local time.<sup>79</sup>

You must submit your proposal via the Funding & Tenders Portal before the given deadline using the provided template.

Sections 1 to 3 and the cover page (that includes the information about the related project on which the current EIC Transition proposal is built on) of part B of your proposal must consist of a maximum of 22 format A4 pages.

Your proposal will be evaluated first by EIC expert evaluators. You will be informed about the result of this evaluation, including feedback on your proposal, indicatively within 9 weeks after the call deadline. If your proposal successfully passes this first evaluation phase (see details below), you will be invited for an interview, which will be organised approximately between 11-13 weeks after the deadline. At the interview, you will be assessed by a panel of maximum 6 EIC Jury members. You will be informed about the result of the interview indicatively within 4 weeks from the start of the interviews.

If you are successful, you can expect your grant agreement to be signed within 6 months from the call deadline (indicative) and you are expected to start your project within 2 months after signing the grant agreement.

### **How does the EIC decide if your proposal will be funded?**

In a first step, at least three EIC expert evaluators will evaluate and score your proposal against each award criterion (see below). The overall score for each evaluation criterion will be the average of the corresponding scores attributed by the individual evaluators. The total score of your proposal will be the sum of the overall scores from the three evaluation criteria.

Starting with the highest scoring proposal and in descending order, a pool of the best ranked proposals (highest scoring) requesting an aggregated financial support equal to approximately 2.2 times the budget available, will be invited to the next step. If in that pool:

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<sup>79</sup> The call will open on 22-April-2025. The Director-General responsible for the call may decide to open the call up to one month prior to or after the envisaged date(s) of opening. The Director-General responsible may delay the deadline(s) by up to two months.

- ✦ at least 30% of the applications are submitted by women-led SMEs or consortia (see definitions in the Glossary), only the applications of that pool will be invited to interviews;
- ✦ less than 30% of the applications are submitted by women-led SMEs or consortia,<sup>80</sup> the pool will be expanded to subsequent best ranked applications (starting with the highest scoring in descending, sequential order and at least equal score under Excellence criterion) submitted by women-led SMEs or consortia until reaching, if possible, a composition of the pool of at least 30% of applications submitted by women-led SMEs or consortia. All such applicants invited to interview must have met all evaluation criteria thresholds from the remote evaluation (Table 4).

The Agency will seek assistance from the European Patent Office to analyse the technological novelty, the inventive merit and the proposed future strategy of EIC proposals shortlisted for EIC Jury interview. EPO experts will not participate directly in the evaluation process but will provide their assessment to the EIC Jury as material 'for information'. The assessment will not be binding and the Jury appointed by the EIC will have complete freedom to decide on its relevance.

The second step is an interview with an EIC jury. At the interview your proposal may be represented by a maximum of five persons.<sup>81</sup> Only individuals mentioned in the proposal and involved in the future project implementation can represent your proposal at the interview.

The EIC Jury will be composed of between four and six members and may additionally include one EIC Programme Manager with expertise in your area or managing one of the EIC Portfolios your project could be allocated to. The Agency may provide the EIC Jury with information related to the original project from which the result was generated. During the interview you should convincingly pitch your proposal to the EIC Jury, who will ask you questions aimed at clarifying various aspects of your proposal in line with the award criteria (in particular those regarding the quality of the team, the different elements already developed within the incipient business plan and incipient business model, the milestones and KPIs). The EIC Project Manager may also ask questions related to the implementation, and KPIs<sup>82</sup>. The EIC Jury will recommend your proposal for funding, place it on a reserve list or not ('GO', 'GO Reserve' 'NO GO'). If the jury recommends a proposal to be placed in a reserve list ('GO Reserve') the

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<sup>80</sup> The definition of women-led SMEs and consortia is provided in the Glossary in the Introduction.

<sup>81</sup> The number of participants to the interview must however be limited to the minimum necessary.

<sup>82</sup> In case the EIC Programme Manager is not available, or has several proposals in evaluation in the same time, it can be replaced by a Project Officer with relevant experience who will align with the PM.

proposal may then be funded if additional budget becomes available. The remote evaluation score will be used to rank the proposals in the reserve list<sup>83</sup>.

Proposers who succeed in securing EIC Transition funding will be strongly encouraged to undertake in the project's first year, the "Investor Readiness training" (including business plan development and / or investor pitch preparations) provided by EIC Business Acceleration Services.

Proposals will be assessed according to the following award criteria (Table 4). For the interviews, the jury may ask questions concerning any of the award criteria.

Table 4. Award criteria for EIC Transition Open at first evaluation step
<b>Excellence (Threshold: 4/5)</b>
<b>Technological breakthrough:</b> Does the technology have a high degree of novelty and higher performance compared to other technologies available or in development? Does the technology indicate high commercial potential?
<b>Objectives:</b> How credible and feasible are the objectives for the planned technology development and maturation? How credible and feasible are the objectives and KPIs for the planned business development process?
<b>Methodology:</b> Is the timing right for this technology/innovation (i.e., feasibility, minimum technological readiness level (TRL), unique selling points)? <sup>84</sup>
<b>Impact (Threshold: 4/5)</b>
<b>Credibility of the impacts:</b> To what extent the expected commercial impact(s) described in the proposal are credible and substantial within the project and beyond (e.g., one or several sectors, setting new standards, etc.)?
<b>Economic and/or societal benefits:</b> To what extent does the proposed innovation have scale up potential including high capacity to gain or create new European or global markets? To what extent is the proposed innovation expected to generate positive impacts for the European Union, Member States or Associated Countries (e.g., strategic autonomy, employment etc.)?

<sup>83</sup> If two proposals with the same remote evaluation score are on the reserve list, the one with smaller budget will be ranked first.

<sup>84</sup> The technology must be developed in a safe, secure and reliable manner. Proposals which involve the development, use or deployment of AI based systems/techniques must be technically robust (e.g., resilient to attack, secure and safe, having fallback plan, accurate, reliable and reproducible). To a degree matching the type of research being proposed (from basic to precompetitive) they must demonstrate that they comply with the Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence Principles (see Annex 2).

**Investment readiness and go to market strategy:** To what extent the proposal and its activities contribute to make the technology and the team investment ready (including through IP protection and market validation)? Is there a well-defined and convincing go-to-market strategy and pathway, including what regulatory approvals may be needed (if relevant), time to market, possible business and revenue model?

**Quality and efficiency of the implementation (Threshold 3/5)**

**Quality and motivation of the team:** To what extent does the (project) team have the necessary high-quality capabilities and high motivation to move decisively towards market. To what extent do the applicant(s) have the necessary expertise to create a unique commercial value from the emerging technology and develop an attractive business and investment proposition?

**KPIs and Milestones:** Are both milestones and KPIs present, relevant and clearly defined (measurable, timed, comparable etc.) to track progress along the pathway towards objectives? Have the main risks (e.g., technological, market, financial etc.) been identified, together with measures to mitigate in order to achieve the project objectives?

**Workplan and allocation of resources:** How appropriate and effective is the allocation of resources (person-months and equipment) between work packages and between project partners? Is the number of project partners well justified?

The following award criteria are applied coherently with the level of technological and business maturity expected from an EIC Transition proposal as described in this Work Programme.

**Table 5. Award criteria for EIC Transition Open at second evaluation step (Jury interview)**

**Excellence (GO/NO GO)**

**Technological breakthrough:** Does the technology/innovation – through its degree of novelty/disruptiveness and/or added value/value proposition for the users/customers – compared with competing technologies - have the scaleup potential including potential to create important new markets or significant impact in existing ones at European or global level?

**Objectives:** How ambitious yet credible and feasible are the objectives for the planned technology development and maturation? How credible and feasible are the objectives (and KPIs) for the planned business development process?

<p><b>Methodology:</b> Is the timing right for this technology/innovation (i.e., feasibility, minimum technological readiness level (TRL), unique selling points)?</p>
<p><b>Impact (GO/NO GO)</b></p>
<p><b>Credibility of the impacts:</b> Is the incipient proposed business model sound and promising? To what extent the expected commercial impact(s) described are realistic and substantial within the project and beyond?</p>
<p><b>Market and economic impacts:</b> Have potential markets/ use cases and users of the innovation been identified? Does the proposed innovation have high impact potential for the European Union, Member States or Associated Countries including high capacity to gain or create new European or global markets?</p>
<p><b>Investment readiness and go to market strategy:</b> Are the plans to ensure the subsequent financing of the technology/ innovation (e.g., applying for EIC Accelerator, private investment, patenting/licensing, etc.) appropriate?</p>
<p><b>Quality and efficiency of the implementation (GO/NO GO)</b></p>
<p><b>Quality and motivation of the team:</b> Does the team have the capability, capacity and motivation to mature the proposed technological innovation and implement market-related activities?</p>
<p><b>Risk assessment:</b> Have the risk that might prevent the validation of the innovation in relevant application environment and/or its market success been appropriately considered (i.e. assessed then reduced and/or mitigated)?</p>
<p><b>Workplan and allocation of resources:</b> How appropriate and effective is the allocation of resources (person-months and equipment) between work packages and between project partners? Is the number of project partners well justified, and do they all have the operational capacity to execute well the project?</p>

You will receive as feedback of the evaluation an Evaluation Summary Report from the first evaluation step. If you have been invited for an interview, you will also receive feedback from the jury.

If you meet all evaluation criteria thresholds at the first step but are not selected for funding (including from a No-GO recommendation from the jury), you will be awarded a Seal of Excellence. If the proposal is submitted by a consortia, Seal of Excellence will be awarded to the coordinator of the proposal, listing the other participating legal entities.

## IV. EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges- Pilot

*DISCLAIMER :The call introduces a new pilot scheme with staged funding and closer integration of user and demand perspectives inspired by the ARPA-style approach but adapted to the Horizon Europe legal and operational framework. This EIC Work Programme (2026) provides the provisions for the implementation of Stage 1 support for this pilot. It also sets out indicative provisions for Stage 2 which is anticipated to be funded under the 2027 EIC Work Programme and is subject to the adoption of this Work Programme.*

**EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges** aim to support high-risk, demand-driven deep tech innovation with transformative potential especially in areas where there is extensive research but lack of commercial uptake.

This pilot aims to assess whether competitive, stage-gated support can accelerate the path to market for high-risk deep tech innovations, and whether early integration of demand-side actors can enhance the relevance, validation, and ultimately the uptake of breakthrough solutions. The pilot will provide evidence on whether these mechanisms lead to more efficient innovation cycles and broader market adoption than other instruments within Horizon Europe.

The EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges are shaped and steered by EIC Programme Managers, in collaboration with users and ecosystem actors, to ensure strong alignment between cutting-edge science, demand, and policy priorities.

### Key features of the EIC Advanced Innovation Challenge:

- ✦ **Stage-gated funding:** Two-stage model with:
  - **Stage 1:** €300,000 lump sum<sup>85</sup> for up to nine months to prepare and benchmark breakthrough solutions and explore their feasibility and viability.
  - **Stage 2:** Up to €2.5 million lump sum<sup>86</sup> for up to 2.5 years to further develop the most promising solutions and test them in real world environments and with the involvement of users.
- ✦ **Demand-side integration:** commercial users (e.g. industry, public sector) and/or end-users and/or other major stakeholders like regulators should be involved from the outset to validate use cases, enhance market relevance, and facilitate uptake.

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<sup>85</sup> Lump sum based on their estimated project costs as defined in the Decision of 7 July 2021 authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027) – and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (20212025).

<sup>86</sup> Lump sum based on their estimated project costs as defined in the Decision of 7 July 2021 authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027) – and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (20212025).

- ✦ **Single entity or small consortia:** Open to mono-beneficiaries for the first stage and mono-beneficiary or small consortia (2–3 partners) for the second stage.
- ✦ **Proactive portfolio management:** Each challenge is overseen by a Programme Manager who will guide and support projects throughout Stage 1, foster synergies and the potential formation of consortia between selected initiatives and play a leading role in the selection process for Stage 2. The Programme manager will ensure strategic alignment, cross-project learning, and coherent portfolio development.

The EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges pilot will be implemented through:

In 2026, an open call for Stage 1 inviting applications from all entities that meet the established admissibility and eligibility criteria. You can apply for EIC Advanced Innovation Challenge Stage 1 under this WP 2026 as:

- ✦ A single legal entity established in a Member State or an Associated Country ('mono-beneficiary') if you are a start-up, SME or research performing organisation (university, research or technology organisation, including teams, individual Principal Investigators and inventors). Larger companies (i.e. which do not qualify as SMEs) are not eligible to apply as a single legal entity.

In 2027, the EIC anticipates a restricted call for Stage 2 which would be open exclusively to the proposals participating in Stage 1<sup>87</sup>. For 2027, it is anticipated that you will be able apply for EIC Advanced Innovation Challenge Stage 2 as:

- ✦ A single legal entity established in a Member State or an Associated Country ('mono-beneficiary') if you are a start-up, SME or research performing organisation (university, research or technology organisation, including teams, individual Principal Investigators and inventors in such institutions who intend to form a spin-off company).<sup>88</sup> Larger companies (i.e. which do not qualify as SMEs) are not eligible to apply as a single legal entity; or
- ✦ A small consortium of two independent legal entities from two different Member States or Associated Countries, or
- ✦ A consortium of maximum three eligible independent legal entities ('multi-beneficiary') following standard rules i.e. must include at least one legal entity established in a Member State and at least two other independent legal entities,

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<sup>87</sup> The entity participating in the Stage 1 action must be the applicant or member of a consortia applying to Stage 2, or the applicant entity/ consortia must demonstrate that it has the rights to use the relevant technology and results if the entity from Stage 1 is not a participant.

<sup>88</sup> A spin-off from research performing organisation (university, research or technology organisation) having a legal (e.g., contractual cooperation not limited to the action, e.g., a collaboration agreement for research in a particular field) or capital (research performing organisation owning a controlling share in the capital of the spin -off) can be considered as an affiliated entity according to Article 8 of the Grant Agreement.

each established in different Member States or Associated Countries (see Annex 2).<sup>89</sup>

### **What support will you receive if your proposal is funded?**

The total indicative budget for this call is EUR 6 million under 2026 Work programme for Stage 1 projects and EUR 25 million under 2027 EIC work programme<sup>90</sup> in the restricted call for Stage 2 projects.

**Stage 1 call (solution validation and benchmarking):** If successful, you will receive a lump sum grant for a Research and Innovation Action to cover the eligible costs, necessary for the implementation of your project. For this call, the Commission expects proposals with an EU contribution of EUR 300.000 and duration of maximum 9 months.

During a Stage 1 project, you are expected to demonstrate feasibility of your solution and validate your solution through benchmarking which will be used as the basis of your Stage 2 application. You will also be expected to participate in a user Workshop to be organised by the Agency bringing together the different Stage 1 projects with external experts and potential users.

Throughout Stage 1, EIC Programme Managers will provide strategic guidance and support to the projects, encourage collaboration and learning across funded teams, experts and stakeholders.

Each project should allocate resources of at least 1 person month for such pro-active management activities.

**Stage 2 restricted call (development and user testing):** If successful, you will receive a lump sum grant for a Research and Innovation Action to cover the eligible costs, necessary for the implementation of your project. For this call, the Commission foresees that it will consider appropriate proposals with an EU contribution of up to EUR 2.5 million and duration of maximum 2.5 years.

The funding rate of the grants for Stage 1 and Stage 2 is 100% of the eligible costs.

In addition to funding, projects will receive tailor-made access to a wide range of Business Acceleration Services (BAS).

The Model Grant Agreement can be found on the Funding & Tenders Portal.

### **How do you apply; how long does it take?**

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<sup>89</sup> Consortia of more than 3 eligible entities will be deemed ineligible.

<sup>90</sup> Subject to the Commission Decision on the 2027 EIC WP.

**Stage 1 (solution validation and benchmarking):** The deadline for submitting your proposal is **26 February 2026 at 17h00 Brussels local time.**<sup>91</sup>

You must submit your proposal via the Funding & Tenders Portal before the given deadline.

Sections 1 to 3 and the cover page of part B of your proposal must consist of a maximum of 11 format A4 pages.

Your proposal will be evaluated by a committee consisting of EIC expert evaluators and chaired by an EIC programme manager responsible for the Challenge. A portfolio approach will be used to get a variety of potential solutions.

You will be informed about the result of this evaluation, including feedback on your proposal, soon after the end of the evaluation.

If you are successful, you should expect your grant agreement to be signed within very short time after being informed about the result of the evaluation and no later than 5 months from the call deadline (indicative).

To accelerate the grant agreement preparation process, applicants are strongly encouraged to work with their National Contact Point (NCP) to gather all necessary documentation in advance. This includes financial identification forms, bank account validation, and validation of the Participant Identification Code (PIC), among others required for grant finalisation.

Given the nature of the pilot, all projects should start immediately after the signature of the Grant, and not later than 1<sup>st</sup> October 2026.

**Stage 2 restricted call (development and user testing):** The indicative deadline for submitting your proposal is **18<sup>th</sup> June 2027 at 17h00 Brussels local time**

You must submit your proposal via the Funding & Tenders Portal before the given deadline.

Sections 1 to 3 and the cover page of part B of your proposal must consist of a maximum of 22 format A4 pages.

Stage 2 proposals will be evaluated through a live pitch before an independent expert jury, chaired by the EIC Programme Manager responsible for the Challenge.

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<sup>91</sup> The call will open November 15th 2025. The Director-General responsible for the call may decide to open the call up to one month prior to or after the envisaged date(s) of opening. The Director-General responsible may delay the deadline(s) by up to two months.

The evaluation will assess the readiness of the solution for real-world deployment, and the potential for scale-up and market uptake.

Applicants will be informed of the outcome within approximately six weeks after the submission deadline.

**How does the EIC decide if your proposal will be funded in the first stage?**

Each proposal will be evaluated by at least three independent expert evaluators. They will assess the proposal against the EIC award criteria as indicated in Table 6. Each criterion is scored on a scale from 0 to 5.

Proposals that meet all thresholds will be subject to a **portfolio-based selection**. The goal is to fund a diverse and strategically coherent set of projects that best address the objectives of the Challenge.

The final funding decision is taken by the portfolio- based selection on the basis of:

- The scoring of the proposal against the evaluations criteria;
- Considerations of portfolio balance across technologies, use cases, and application domains.

<b>Table 6. Award criteria for EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges Stage 1</b>	
<b>Excellence (Threshold: 4/5)</b>	
<b>Clarity and relevance of the innovation idea:</b>	Is the problem it addresses clearly defined and is the proposed innovation solving the problem in a compelling way?
<b>Breakthrough nature and novelty:</b>	Is the innovation novel compared to the state of the art? Is there disruptive potential in the specific use case?
	Are expected performance improvements (qualitative/quantitative) realistic and credible?
<b>Impact (Threshold: 4/5)</b>	
	Does the innovation have the potential to develop new markets or significantly transform existing ones? Does the innovation show potential for wider adoption and scale-up?
	Is the innovation bringing sufficient added value to demonstrate attractiveness to investors, industry, or procurers?
	To what extent the expected commercial impact(s) described in the proposal are credible and substantial within the project and beyond?

<b>Quality and efficiency of the implementation (Threshold 3/5)</b>
<b>Work Plan:</b> Is the work plan realistic within the budget and timeline?
<b>Allocation of resources:</b> How appropriate and effective is the allocation of resources ?
<b>Quality of the applicant:</b> To what extent has the applicant the necessary capacity and high-quality expertise for performing all the project tasks and move decisively towards the market?

**How does the EIC decide if your proposal will be funded in the second stage?**

Only proposals that were selected for funding under Stage 1 of the Advanced Innovation Challenges pilot will be eligible to submit a proposal to the Stage 2 call.

Stage 2 aims to support a limited number of projects with the highest potential for breakthrough impact and readiness for real-world deployment.

All eligible proposals will be invited to present their Stage 2 proposal on a pitch session (virtual or physical) before an independent expert jury and the assigned EIC Programme Manager/s.

During the session, each team will deliver a short project presentation, focusing on the progress and key achievements made during Stage 1 and Stage 2 plan. This will be followed by a structured question-and-answer segment, allowing the jury to probe further into the technical, commercial, and strategic aspects of the proposal.

The jury will make a final recommendation on projects to be funded, based on a comprehensive assessment of the proposal against the following award criteria.

<b>Table 7. Award criteria for EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges Stage 2</b>
<b>Excellence (Threshold: 4/5)</b>
Does the proposal show advances in operational, technological or strategic objectives compared to its competitors?
Is the proposal sufficiently credible and robust to serve as a strong foundation for successful implementation and scaling?
Does the proposal reflect ambition, novelty, and breakthrough potential?
<b>Impact (Threshold: 4/5)</b>

Does the innovation have the potential to create or transform markets?
Has the proposal successfully attracted potential users or customers (e.g procurers)?
Is the technology attractive to investors?
<b>Quality and efficiency of the implementation (Threshold 3/5)</b>
<b>Work Plan:</b> Is the work plan clear, credible, and feasible within the proposed timeline and budget?
Does the team demonstrate the capacity to execute under conditions of uncertainty and speed?
Are risks appropriately identified and mitigated?

The evaluation aims to be completed within short time after the call deadline, with applicants aiming to be informed no more than 6-8 weeks **after the call deadline**. The Agency will aim to sign grant agreements as quickly as possible following this information reusing where relevant the information about applicants already provided for the Stage 1 grants.

To enable rapid continuity, the start date of the Stage 2 grant may be retroactively aligned with the day they will be informed about the results of the Stage 2 evaluation, allowing projects to begin implementation without delay.

## IV.1 Accelerating Physical AI: Embodied Intelligence for the Next Frontier of AI-Powered Robotics

### Background and Scope

The integration of AI into physical systems is accelerating apace. Such integration will enable machines and systems to perceive, act, and interact autonomously in complex, real-world settings.

This Challenge aims to accelerate the development towards integration, deployment and commercialisation of breakthrough Physical AI solutions that will enhance Europe's technological sovereignty, sustainability, and global competitiveness.

This Challenge seeks proposals for developing disruptive Physical AI innovations that demonstrate at least two of the following characteristics:

- ✦ **Intelligent Perception and Cognition** - Encompasses robust sensing, understanding, and real-time reasoning capabilities.
- ✦ **Adaptive Learning and Optimisation** - Focuses on continuous improvement, domain-specific adaptation, and intelligent resource management.
- ✦ **Autonomous Decision-Making and Collective Intelligence** - Combines real-time problem-solving with autonomous action and swarm coordination in dynamic environments.
- ✦ **Human-AI Collaboration and Interaction** - Encompasses safe, intuitive interfaces and collaborative robotics for human-AI teamwork.
- ✦ **Physical Integration and Innovation** - Focuses on developing novel sensors, actuators, and materials that advance embodied AI capabilities.

The solutions must also focus on addressing pressing needs in at least one of the following application areas:

- ✦ **Disaster response and civil security physical agents:** AI-powered robotic systems designed to act before, during, or immediately after disasters (natural or man-made), with the aim of saving lives, ensuring safety, and restoring normalcy in hazardous, unpredictable environments.
- ✦ **Autonomous labs for Scientific Discovery:** self-directed scientific environments where AI and robotics design, execute, and analyse experiments with minimal human intervention.
- ✦ **Personal or professional robot assistants:** AI-powered robots designed to support individuals or professionals by automating repetitive, menial, or complex tasks in homes, workplaces, or industrial settings.

The Physical AI solutions that will be designed and developed under this Challenge should be in accordance with principles of Responsible AI, Trustworthiness, Security and Human-Centrism, ensuring transparency, accountability, privacy, safety, and ethical alignment.

## Entry requirements

Applicants must demonstrate the interest of potential end users and integrators with a view to supporting the application and testing of the proposed solutions in a real-world environment. To enable this, they should have:

- ✦ an initial physical AI system prototype tested in the lab
- ✦ access to an appropriate infrastructure for data collection and testing, and
- ✦ a challenging use case formulated by a potential end-user, supported by a letter of intent or a letter of intent from a robotics integrator, confirming their interest aligned to the needs of the application domain.

## Specific Objectives

This is a two-stage Challenge competition of which the ultimate ambition is to deliver scalable prototypes, validated in a relevant real-world environment. Solutions supported under the Challenge are expected to demonstrate both the novelty and applicability of the proposed Physical AI technology, while mitigating associated risks.

Applicant to Stage 1 must also have a clear outlook on the potential longer-term impact(s).

### Stage1- Solution validation and benchmarking

Applicants with disruptive physical AI systems that have achieved a prototype (i.e. at least TRL 4) will be invited to:

- ✦ Refine and validate the prototype in a relevant environment to demonstrate the core innovation (e.g., new perception (multimodal), actuation, continual learning, or autonomy capability, etc.). in the end use case
- ✦ Develop a methodology for performance assessment
- ✦ Assess ethical, data governance and scalability considerations
- ✦ Identify challenges to integration such as safety, certification or scalability with view to identifying risks and exploring options for overcoming barriers for adoption including in cases where products' risks are not covered by the AI Act<sup>92</sup>.
- ✦ Conduct initial performance benchmarking, and
- ✦ Develop an initial market analysis, business plan and model.

The outputs of Stage 1 will be assessed for progress against the following milestones:

- ✦ Evidence of technical viability with initial performance data that benchmarks performance and disruptive potential against the state-of-the-art in at least one pilot case within the specified application area, and
- ✦ Clear commitment from end users and stakeholders to further develop the physical AI solution in Stage 2.

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<sup>92</sup> The General Product Safety Regulation applies in this case

- ✦ To maximise impact, foster collaboration, and accelerate learning across funded teams, Progress to Stage 2 will be contingent on delivering a full proposal which will be assessed alongside the milestones achieved under Stage 1.

## **Stage 2 - Development and user testing**

Applicants for Stage 2 will be expected to further develop and validate a Physical AI system through the following activities:

- ✦ Build and test (ensure at least two deployments loops) a robust, integrated solution capable of autonomous operation in complex or semi-structured environments (e.g., pilot deployment in real world environment, etc.) to reach TRL 6-7
- ✦ Address scalability and manufacturability: show that the solution can be scaled or adapted for broader integration and deployment
- ✦ Conduct necessary testing, documentation, and compliance activities towards certification or regulatory approval of the adapted solution
- ✦ Organisation of consultation meetings/workshops with industrial end users, regulators, standard setting bodies or other relevant stakeholders to gather further needs and feedback, and
- ✦ Develop a roadmap to commercialisation: refine market analysis, and validate business plan including stakeholder engagement, and identification of scaling strategies

At the end of Stage 2, projects will be expected to have:

- ✦ Delivered a robust, integrated solution capable of autonomous operation in complex or semi-structured environments i.e. capable of pilot deployment in real world environment
- ✦ Demonstrated reliability, adaptability, energy/resource efficiency, and safe human-AI interaction, and
- ✦ Provided evidence of necessary testing, documentation, and compliance activities towards certification or regulatory approval for the adapted solution.

## **Expected Impact**

This Challenge will support the ambitions of the AI Act<sup>93</sup>, Apply AI Strategy<sup>94</sup>. The AI powered robotics models developed under this Challenge are expected to comply with the EU concept for Trustworthy AI and the relevant ethical principles with due attention paid to data quality, transparency and accountability, privacy, security and safety. In the medium to longer term, it is expected to reduce European dependencies and support end users in

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<sup>93</sup> <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-launches-ai-innovation-package-support-artificial-intelligence-startups-and-smes>

<sup>94</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_24\\_383](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_383) 150 AI Act | Shaping Europe's digital future (europa.eu)

leveraging advances in AI to enhance their products and develop new capabilities that will contribute to:

- ✦ Strengthened European leadership in physical AI, reducing reliance on non-European technology providers, and
- ✦ Contribution to EU priorities in sustainability, resilience, digital transformation, and industrial competitiveness.

## IV.2 Translating Disruptive New Approach Methodologies (NAMs) into Practice

### Background and Scope

New Approach Methodologies (NAMs) have the potential to replace, reduce or refine animal use in the testing<sup>95</sup> of medicinal products. Scientific progress in recent decades has delivered several animal-free NAMs that have the potential to transform how we understand human biology and assess the safety, efficacy, and quality testing in the health sector. However, a lack of knowledge, experience and confidence in the use of such novel methodologies has limited their adoption by end users, including, for example, industry and regulators.

This Challenge competition therefore looks to accelerate the adoption of NAMs in biomedicine and support companies that want to bring NAMs to the market.

Applicants should propose innovative and disruptive NAMs addressing one or both of the following areas:

- ✦ Preclinical biomedical research
- ✦ Testing of medicinal products and medical technologies for safety, efficacy, or quality.

Human organoids or microphysiological systems (e.g. organ-on-chip, disease-on-chip), in chemico methods, digital twins, virtual patient simulations, AI-enhanced predictive models, mechanistic or integrated in silico platforms, 3D- advanced human tissue model are in scope.

Applicants to this Challenge call should already have:

- ✦ Proven the viability of their proposed solution in a lab environment at TRL 4 (lab or in silico);
- ✦ Have letters of intent of at least one of the following stakeholders: an industrial end-user or regulatory body interested in the proposed project; and

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<sup>95</sup> 3Rs principle: replacement, reduction and refinement of animal studies

- ✦ Have access to an appropriate infrastructure to carry out the planned activities in Stage 1 and 2.

### **Specific Objectives**

This is a two-stage Challenge competition with the ultimate ambition to deliver robust, validated NAMs that constitute a representative model or prototype system i.e. achieve TRL 6 after Stage 2. Applicants should apply to Stage 1 only where there is an outlook of the potential impact in the longer term.

### **Stage 1 – Solution validation and benchmarking**

Applicants should:

- ✦ Take forward preliminary engagement with regulatory authorities, notified bodies and industry stakeholders
- ✦ Map regulatory, clinical, standardisation (where applicable) and industrial needs, and use this to develop a roadmap for adoption
- ✦ Develop a methodology for performance assessment
- ✦ Deliver small-scale feasibility experiments or modelling
- ✦ Conduct initial performance benchmarking (human relevance, reproducibility, transferability of the approach)
- ✦ Assess ethical, data governance and scalability considerations, as applicable to the given NAM under development.

The following milestones need to be achieved at the end of Stage 1:

- ✦ Evidence that the NAM is viable for human relevant biomedical innovation, and addresses the needs of the identified use cases, and
- ✦ Clear commitment from industrial end-users and a well-defined regulatory plan to further develop the NAM in Stage 2.

Progress to Stage 2 will be contingent on delivering a full proposal which will be assessed alongside the milestones achieved under Stage 1.

### **Stage 2 – Development and user testing**

Applicants selected for Stage 2 will further develop and validate a functional, scalable NAM prototype ready for regulatory, industrial, or clinical uptake. Activities must cover a number of the following elements:

- ✦ Benchmarking the NAMs against state-of-the-art animal models and/or human trials
- ✦ Demonstration in relevant application, such as disease modelling, or testing of medicinal products and medical technologies for safety, efficacy, or quality
- ✦ Organisation of consultation meetings/workshops with industrial end users, regulators, CROs (Contract Research Organisations), standard setting bodies or other relevant stakeholders to gather further needs and feedback

- ✦ Engagement with infrastructures for testing and data collection as testing and validation of the NAM outside the developer's lab
- ✦ Development of regulatory-grade data packages suitable for submission to relevant agencies (e.g. EMA, FDA, OECD), and
- ✦ Documentation on scalability, standardisation, and potential barriers to uptake.

During the project's implementation phase, beneficiaries will be encouraged to consider using the EU Reference Laboratory for alternatives to animal testing (EURL ECVAM) of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre for aspects of standardisation, automation and validation of in vitro methods. These facilities operate and provide support at the interface between pre-normative research, regulatory sciences and innovation.

### **Expected Impact**

This Challenge supports ambitions to maintain and strengthen the health sector in Europe. It will:

- ✦ Accelerate the development and validation of disruptive NAMs for biomedical applications, including medicinal products and medical technologies
- ✦ Support regulatory innovation by providing evidence-based recommendations for the assessment of safety, efficacy, and quality of human health products using NAMs.
- ✦ Enable citizens to benefit from novel technologies that have been assessed through rigorous NAMs that have been validated to can predict potential effects in humans, and
- ✦ Provide industry with a harmonised and standardised NAM-based assessment toolkit that is faster and more flexible.

## V. EIC Accelerator

- ✦ Do you have a high-impact innovative technology, product, service or business model that could create new markets or disrupt existing ones in Europe and even worldwide?
- ✦ Are you a start-up or a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) with the ambition and commitment to scale up?
- ✦ Are you looking for substantial funding, but the risks involved are too high for private investors alone to invest the full amount needed?

If your answers to the above questions are 'yes', then the EIC Accelerator may be the right funding scheme for you.

### Why should you apply?

The EIC Accelerator supports companies (principally SMEs, including start-ups) to scale up high impact innovations with the potential to create new markets or disrupt existing ones. The EIC Accelerator provides a unique combination of grant and investment funding and Business Acceleration Services (see Section [VII](#)).

The EIC Accelerator focuses in particular on innovations building on scientific discovery or technological breakthroughs ('deep tech') and where significant funding is needed over a long timeframe before returns can be generated ('patient capital'). Such innovations often struggle to attract financing because the risks and time period involved are too high. Funding and support from the EIC Accelerator is designed to enable such innovators to attract the full investment amounts needed for scale up in a shorter timeframe.

The EIC Accelerator supports the later stages of technology development as well as scale up. The technology component of your innovation must therefore have been tested and validated in a laboratory and other relevant environment (e.g., at least Technology Readiness Level 5 completed). The EIC Accelerator looks to support companies where the EIC support will act as a catalyst to crowd in other investors necessary for the scale up of the innovation.

Applicants to EIC Accelerator can submit proposals through:

- ✦ EIC Accelerator Open, which has no predefined thematic priorities and is open to proposals in any field of technology or application<sup>96</sup>; EIC Accelerator Challenges in predefined areas of emerging and strategic technologies.

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<sup>96</sup> In line with the Do Not Significant Harm principle, see Introduction. Proposals with potential nuclear applications including those within the scope of Annex I to the Euratom Treaty are eligible for funding.

## Can you apply?

To be an eligible applicant to EIC Accelerator, you must apply as one of the following eligible entities:

- ✦ a single company classified as a SME, and established within a Member State or an Associated Country (see Annex 2); or
- ✦ a single company classified as a small mid-cap (up to 499 employees) established in a Member State or an Associated Country, but only for "investment component only" support or for "blended finance" in exceptional cases for rapid scale up purposes; or
- ✦ one or more natural persons<sup>97</sup> (including individual entrepreneurs) or legal entities, which are either:
  - a. from a Member State or an Associated Country intending to establish an SME or small mid-cap (as defined above) in a Member State or Associated Country by the time of signing the EIC Accelerator grant agreement or, in case the equity only is awarded, at the latest at the date of signature of the investment agreement;
  - b. intending to invest in an SME or small mid-cap established in a Member State or an Associated Country; they may submit a proposal on behalf of that SME or small mid-cap, provided that a prior agreement exists with the company. The grant agreement and/or the investment agreement will be signed with the beneficiary/ final recipient of funding company only, subject to the "Approach in specific cases relating to a parent or holding company and an operating company" (see below); or
  - c. from a non-associated third country intending to establish an SME (including start-ups) or to relocate an existing SME to a Member State or an Associated Country. The company must prove its effective establishment in a Member State or an Associated Country at the time of submission of the full proposal.

The standard admissibility and eligibility conditions are detailed in Annex 2.

There are limitations on the number of times you can submit a proposal described in the section on application submission limits as explained below.

If you are currently a participant in an eligible project funded by Horizon Europe or Horizon 2020 then you may be able to apply through your existing project under the Fast Track scheme (see Annex 3). This scheme is managed by the funding body responsible for the existing project and applies to funding bodies listed in Annex 3. Applicants may also be able to apply if they have a project financed by an eligible

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<sup>97</sup> In such cases, the applicant must use the same identification (PIC number) when submitting the full application in order to eligible.

programme managed by a Member State or an Associated Country under the Plug-in scheme (see Annex 4).

Concurrent submissions to both the EIC Accelerator and EIC STEP Scale Up calls -before the evaluation feedback has been provided for the earlier submission - are not permitted; in the event of multiple submissions, only the proposal submitted most recently will be evaluated, and it will be assessed according to the merits and evaluation criteria of its respective call (Accelerator or STEP).

### **What support will you receive if your proposal is funded?**

The total indicative budget for this call is EUR 634 million. EUR 414 million of the total indicative budget will be allocated to EIC Accelerator Open and EUR 220 million to EIC Accelerator Challenges. The breakdown of the indicative budget for the Accelerator Challenges is provided in Challenge descriptions below.

The indicative budget for the investment components is EUR 380 million and is managed by the EIC Fund. This budget may be increased by unused amounts allocated to the EIC Fund under previous EIC Work Programmes<sup>98</sup>.

Member States may decide to transfer budget from ERDF Programmes to Horizon Europe to support EIC Seals of Excellence and EIC STEP Seals. In this case the Seals will be directly funded by the Agency for the grant component and the EIC Fund for the investment component; in case the transfer is restricted by the relevant Member State to grant funding only, then applicants will receive “grant only” support even if they were evaluated for blended finance.

Indicatively, the budget for grant components will be allocated approximately equally between the interview sessions. In case the amount allocated to GO applicants is less than the budget available for that interview session, or additional budget becomes available, then the remaining available budget will be allocated to the subsequent interview session. The EIC Accelerator provides:

**a) grant component only ('Grant Only')** that will take the form of a lump sum contribution<sup>99</sup> via a grant agreement. Grant only shall be provided only once to any legal entity for the duration of the Horizon Europe programme (2021-27) and under the following cumulative conditions:

- ✦ the project shall include information on the capacities and willingness of the applicant to scale up;

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<sup>98</sup> See Annex 1 for full information about the budget.

<sup>99</sup> Decision authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027) – and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2021-2025)

- ✦ the beneficiary shall be a start-up or an SME;
- ✦ a grant-only support under the Accelerator shall be provided only once to a beneficiary during the period of implementation of the Programme for a maximum of EUR 2.5 million.

**b) *blended finance*** support which is composed of<sup>100</sup>:

- ✦ An investment component usually in the form of direct equity or quasi-equity such as convertible loans via an investment agreement.
- ✦ A grant component, that will take the form of a lump sum contribution<sup>101</sup> via a grant agreement.

**c) *investment component only (Equity-Only)*** usually in the form of direct equity or quasi-equity such as convertible loans via an investment agreement

All successful proposals will receive, in addition to funding, tailor-made access to a wide range of Business Acceleration Services (see Section [VII](#)).

The 30% co-funding of the work packages to be covered by the grant component has to be financed by the beneficiary through its own resources.

The EIC Accelerator model grant agreement can be found on the Funding & Tenders Portal<sup>102</sup>.

#### *EIC Accelerator investment component (for blended finance and equity only proposals)*

The minimum investment component is EUR 1 million and the maximum is EUR 10 million<sup>103</sup>. Higher amounts are available under the EIC STEP Scale Up call.

The investment component is intended to finance market deployment and scale up and it can be requested in parallel to the grant (and may be used for co-financing innovation activities) or at a later stage during the lifetime of their grant agreement. Within the maximum budget awarded by the Commission, the terms of investment will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis<sup>104</sup> in accordance with the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines<sup>105</sup>.

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<sup>100</sup> The blended finance is a single type of support which combines two components intrinsically interlinked. Consequently, any issue affecting one component may impact on the other component and put into question the decision to award this single type of support (e.g. the Agency may terminate the grant component if the EIC Fund rejects the investment component or the applicant declines the EIC Fund's offer, among others).

<sup>101</sup> Decision authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027) – and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2021-2025)

<sup>102</sup> Funding & tenders (europa.eu)

<sup>103</sup> In certain cases, investments can be made in holding structures of the beneficiary company, subject to the provisions of the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines

<sup>104</sup> In the case of the investment component, the financial support may exceptionally be revised following a periodic or final review of an EIC Accelerator project (in line with Article 48(12), second sub paragraph of the Horizon Europe Regulation), also in light of the terms and conditions established in the investment agreement. The EIC Investment Guidelines are available on the EIC website.

<sup>105</sup> 220301 EIC Investment Guidelines - Horizon Europe March 2022 FINAL (1)\_0.pdf (europa.eu)

The investment component of the EIC is designed to fill the funding gap for high-risk innovations to a stage where they can be fully co-financed or financed under the InvestEU programme or by private investors alone. As the EIC Accelerator is designed to bear the risk of potential breakthrough market creating innovations in order to attract private investors in a second stage, the lack of such investors at the initial stage does not prevent the EIC investment to be agreed.

When implementing investments, the EIC Fund will ensure that supported companies keep most of their value, including their IP, in the EU or in the Associated Countries in order to contribute to their economic growth and job creation. Where necessary to protect European interests in strategic areas, the EIC Fund will be requested to take appropriate safeguard measures for individual companies on a case-by-case basis in order to protect European interests as defined in the Investment Guidelines (*see Introduction, section on economic Security*).

#### *EIC Accelerator grant component (for blended finance and grant-only proposals)*

Eligible costs for the grant component are reimbursed up to a maximum of 70% within the ceiling of the maximum grant amount, i.e. EUR 2 499 999), but for blended finance the grant component may be for a higher amount in exceptional and well justified cases.

EIC Accelerator grant funding covers innovation activities, including demonstration of the technology in the relevant environment, prototyping and system level demonstration, R&D and testing required to meet regulatory and standardisation requirements, intellectual property management, and marketing approval (e.g. at least TRL 6<sup>106</sup> to 8).

Eligible costs will take the form of a lump sum and the amount will be determined during the evaluation process. Applicants must therefore propose the amount of the lump sum based on their estimated project costs as defined in the Decision of 7 July 2021 authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027) – and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2021-2025).<sup>107</sup>

The innovation activities to be supported should normally be completed within 24 months but may be longer in well justified cases. The proposed duration should

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<sup>106</sup> To be interpreted as all applicants has completed all aspects of TRL 5: validation in relevant environment.

<sup>107</sup> This decision is available on the Funding & Tenders Portal, in the reference documents section for Horizon Europe, under 'Simplified costs decisions' or through this link: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/fundingtenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision\\_he\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/fundingtenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf)

genuinely reflect your current TRL and the nature of the technology to be developed and demonstrated. The grant component may be used for subcontracting including, only if justified, for activities which are essential for the objectives of the project. The Agency may object to a transfer of ownership or the licensing of results under certain conditions in accordance with the provisions set out in the grant agreement.

### **How do you apply; how long does it take?**

The application process consists of three main steps:

1. **Short proposals** which may be submitted at any time and will be evaluated remotely by EIC expert evaluators; Successful short-proposal applicants will be invited to prepare a full proposal. Applicants will have access to dedicated support from an EIC business coach (non-mandatory) to refine their case.
2. **Full proposals** are reviewed by a technology expert evaluator and assessed by an evaluation panel. The technology expert conducts an in-depth assessment — including an online meeting with the applicants to clarify questions from the proposal. The evaluation panel assesses the proposals in the batch and provides a score and ranking of proposals to invite to interview **Interview with an EIC jury** for selected applicants as the final step in the selection process.

If selected for funding, you will be invited to prepare a grant agreement for the requested grant component (if you have applied for it) and to start the due diligence for the investment component (if you have applied for it).

#### *1. Submission of short proposals*

You may submit a short proposal at any time via the Funding & Tenders Portal<sup>108</sup>. The short proposal consists of:

- ✦ A short 12-page form where you summarise your proposal and respond to questions on your company and team, your innovation and the potential market;
- ✦ A pitch-deck of up to ten slides in pdf format;
- ✦ A video pitch of up to three minutes where the core members of your team (up to three people) should provide the motivation for your proposal.

The content of your short proposal is designed to be reusable in later stages of the application process should you advance.

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<sup>108</sup> Funding & tenders (europa.eu)

All personal data and information in your proposal will be kept strictly confidential.<sup>109</sup> However, before submitting your full proposal, you will be offered the opportunity to share basic data and information with your Member State or Associated Country National Contact Point and other relevant bodies so that they can provide additional support. National Contact Points and other relevant bodies operate under strict confidentiality rules and will only receive the basic information about your proposal (e.g. abstract, funding request, contact details).

Short applications will be batched and sent for evaluation the first Tuesday of every month at 17h00 Brussels time. From the date of the batching, you will be informed within approximately 4-6 weeks, and you will receive the evaluation result of your short proposal and whether you are successful to proceed to submit a full proposal. Whether successful or not, you will receive feedback from four expert evaluators.

If your proposal is successful, you may submit a full proposal to any of the cutoffs in 2026 (see below) or 2027 (dates to be established in the 2027 EIC Work Programme).

If your short proposal is successful, you will be entitled to receive coaching support from one of the business coaches from the Business Acceleration Services<sup>110</sup>. You can only receive this support once for a proposal.

The optional coaching support is designed to improve the value proposition, business case and investor pitch. However, it is your decision how to respond to the feedback and support, and the content of your proposal is your sole responsibility.

## *2. Submission of full proposals*

If you succeeded with your short application under the 2025 or 2026 Work programme<sup>111</sup>, your full proposal can be submitted to any of the following batches during 2026:<sup>112</sup>

- ✦ 7/01/2026;
- ✦ 04/03/2026;
- ✦ 06/05/2026;

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<sup>109</sup> All personal data will be processed in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data.

<sup>110</sup> It is nevertheless up to the applicants to decide if and when to use the coaching services.

<sup>111</sup> This concerns all short applications submitted after the adoption of the 2025 Work Programme on 29 October 2024. Proposals which received a GO under the 2024 work programme and have already submitted a full proposal will be eligible to submit a full proposal in 2026 as long as they remain within their submission limitations.

<sup>112</sup> Proposals will be batched at 17h00 Brussels time. This call is continuously open, and applications can be submitted at any time. From the day of the opening of the call the conditions detailed in this work programme become applicable. The Director-General responsible may delay the cut-off(s) by up to two months. Applicants will be invited to select an EIC business coach out of a dedicated database and may receive 3 days of remote coaching.

- ✦ 08/07/2026;
- ✦ 02/09/2026;
- ✦ 04/11/2026

After each second batch, an interview session will be organised. The tentative dates of these interview sessions will be published on the EIC website.

The budget available will be distributed approximately equally over the cutoffs and within each cutoff to the two batches and evaluation panels.

The full proposal consists of:

- ✦ **A form** of up to a maximum of **20 pages**, with a template aligned with the short application for the relevant questions (you may reuse the same information as in short proposal stage or you may update or revise it based on feedback received).
- ✦ **A pitch-deck**<sup>113</sup> in pdf format and video pitch of up to three minutes (you may choose to reuse or update these from your short proposal)
- ✦ **Additional data annexes** on:
  - ✦ Financial data and company structure (cap-table)
  - ✦ IP strategy (including a Freedom to operate (FTO) analysis if available)
  - ✦ Implementation plan (including proposed milestones) for proposals requesting a grant component (grant only, blended finance)
  - ✦ Lump Sum budget table for proposals requesting a grant component (grant only, blended finance).

All personal data and information in your proposal will be kept strictly confidential. However, before submitting your full proposal, you will need to give agreement to share necessary information with the EIC Fund, if you are requesting an investment component. You will also be requested to give agreement to the Agency and the EIC Fund partners to share the necessary information, including personal and proposal data, to support the search for suitable investment partners. Approximately 8-9 weeks of from the batching date, you will be informed of the results of the evaluation panels.

### *3. Interview with an EIC Jury.*

If your company is included in the selection established by the Evaluation Panel, you will be invited to an interview with EIC Juries.

Interview sessions with EIC juries will be organized three times per year (indicative dates will be published on the EIC website) and you will be invited at least 2 weeks in advance.

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<sup>113</sup> There are no limits on the number of slides at full application stage, but the applicant must be able to present at the Jury interview

Detailed information about the format of the interview will be communicated to you in the invitation.

The Agency will inform you about the result of the interview within approximately two to three weeks after the finalisation of the interviews. In case your application is not successful you will receive an official rejection letter (and your Seal of Excellence and Sovereignty (STEP) Seal, if awarded).

#### *4. Invitation to prepare a grant agreement and due diligence process for investment component*

If you are selected for funding, the next steps are as follows depending on the type of support.

**Grant component (grant only, blended finance):** you will be invited to prepare the grant agreement. Once the grant agreement preparations are concluded, and subject to the adoption of the award decision, you will be invited to sign the EIC Accelerator grant agreement. You will then receive, a first pre-financing payment in accordance with the relevant provisions of the grant agreement.

**Equity component (blended finance, equity only):** A single award decision will be adopted by the Commission covering both grant and investment components. The maximum amount for the investment component set in the Single Award Decision will follow the amount requested by the applicant, with an additional flexibility amount of maximum EUR 2 million per proposal. The flexibility amount is to enable the EIC Fund to make an investment decision for a higher amount than requested if justified to take account of developments of the company since the date of application and the opportunity of catalysing a larger overall funding round with co-investors. The additional flexibility amount may only be used if there are sufficient amounts available on the EIC Fund accounts (e.g. due to unused budget from other investments) and will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

The relevant information from your proposal will be transmitted to the EIC Fund and its investment advisor (the European Investment Bank), to structure the potential investment agreement (compliance checks<sup>114</sup>, syndication of potential co-investors, tranches of investment and related objectives and milestones, etc.). The EIB will reuse the Technology Due Diligence report from the evaluation stage for the purpose of its investment recommendation. It will assess with you the relevant timing and urgency of your needs for the investment component which may be immediate, or at a later stage, or in a number of tranches.

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<sup>114</sup> Such as KYC (Know Your Customer), AML/CTF (Anti-Money Laundering / Combating the Financing of Terrorism), Tax compliance, Sanctions, etc.

During this stage and, in particular, if you have not yet secured other investors, the EIC Fund or the Business Acceleration Services provided by the Agency will support you in the search for other investors.

At the end of this process, which should usually take approximately between two to six months since the selection for funding<sup>115</sup>, an investment component will be decided by the EIC Fund. The decision to invest as well as the amount and the terms of the investment component will be made by the EIC Fund in compliance with the EIC Investment Guidelines.<sup>116</sup> The investment amount decided by the EIC Fund will be within the maximum set by the Single Award Decision, as well as within the total amount available to the EIC Fund for investments. In some cases, the investment decision may lead to amendments to the grant agreement, for example in order to align the timing and definitions of milestones.

Lack of progress in the negotiations of the investment component by the beneficiary (and, in particular, insufficient proactive efforts from the beneficiary to attract potential co-investors to invest alongside the EIC Fund or refusal of the beneficiary to include the EIC Fund in investment round without a duly justified reason) may trigger a suspension of the payment deadlines as per Article 29.1(c) of the Model Grant Agreement and/or the termination of the grant agreement as per Annex 5 of the Model Grant Agreement.

Should the outcome of the due diligence conclude that the innovation or your company is not yet mature for investment, the EIC Fund may recommend to the Commission that you start with the grant component first (if blended finance), and that the investment component will be subject to reaching defined milestones. In such cases, the EIC Fund will re-examine the due diligence once the defined milestone has been achieved and may then proceed to taking an investment decision. The investment decision must be taken during the grant agreement or within one year after the end of the duration of the grant. If no investment decision is taken during this period, you may subsequently apply for equity-only support.

As an outcome of the due diligence process, the investment may be rejected, notably due to the results of the due diligence, compliance checks, existence of irregularities, in cases of misrepresentation by the applicant or in the case of a manifest error in any

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<sup>115</sup> If an investment round is not foreseen within the six-month period, you will be taken out of the investment process and be able to re-enter when you intend to raise an investment round, within a limit of the period of the grant agreement plus 12 months, or a maximum period of 12 months from the Award Decision in cases of equity only.

<sup>116</sup> The investment decisions will also be reported to the Programme Committee in accordance with Article 14 of Council Decision (EU) 2021/764.

previous assessments, in accordance with the EIC Investment guidelines. In such a case, the Agency may suspend and/or terminate your grant agreement

## **How does the EIC decide if your proposal will be funded?**

The EIC Accelerator is highly selective and only the very best proposals can be funded. Your proposal will be assessed on its merits by leading experts and the Commission will ensure open and fair competition to all eligible proposals submitted.

### *1. Evaluation of short proposals*

Short proposals will be evaluated by four EIC expert evaluators. These four evaluators' competences will match the area of technology and market application of your innovation. The EIC expert evaluators will look at the innovativeness/disruptiveness of your idea, its impact and your team using the evaluation criteria specified below.

Each evaluator will assess whether your short proposal meets each of the evaluation elements and give a GO or NO GO:

- ✦ If at least three out of the four evaluators give a GO, then your short proposal will be successful, and you will be invited to prepare a full proposal.

If at least two out of the four evaluators give a NO GO, then your proposal is considered unsuccessful and will be rejected. You may resubmit your proposal, according to applicant submission limits (see below section 3). You will be expected to make improvements to your proposal.

### *2. Evaluation of full proposals*

For each evaluation batch, each proposal is assigned to one technology expert evaluator as well as to an evaluation panel (for each batch a limited number of thematic panels will be established):

1. **A highly qualified external technology expert** will conduct a comprehensive assessment of each proposal's technical merits, market potential, financial viability, team and implementation plan looking particularly at the nature of the technology (deep tech element), the TRL, the IP strategy, in line with the award criteria and assessing claims made in your proposal. The technology expert evaluator will provide preliminary comments and scores and will draft a report responding to the award criteria.
2. **An Evaluation Panel** of at least three independent experts will be appointed for each batch based on thematic area. The panel members will read and assess all the proposals allocated to the panel, along with the preliminary assessment and scoring provided by the technology expert. The evaluation panel will agree a final score based on their own assessment and taking into account the input

from the technology expert. Applicants reaching the thresholds set for the award criteria but not invited to interview will receive a Seal of Excellence, and if submitted under a relevant challenge also a STEP Seal.

The evaluation panel's report will be part of the Evaluation Summary Report which the applicants will receive at the end of the evaluation process. Each panel assigned to a batch will be allocated an approximately equal number of proposals and an approximately equal allocation of budget. A number of proposals requesting approximately 2.5 times<sup>117</sup> the available grant budget will be invited to interview.

The **EIC jury** will have access to your full proposal and the evaluation panel's report. During your interview you will be requested to present your proposal and interact with the Jury on a number of questions. Based on your interview and their overall assessment, the Jury will recommend your proposal for

- ✦ **A GO and recommended for funding** within the budget available. The EIC Jury may recommend providing a lower grant amount than the one requested, for example if some activities are beyond TRL 8. For the investment component, the EIC jury will not recommend an amount different than the one requested by the applicant but may make observations for consideration by the EIC Fund. The EIC Jury will not change the form of support (blended, grant only equity only). The EIC Jury may also make recommendations to be taken into account when preparing the grant or negotiating the investment component, including for example on the milestones, and on proposed coaching activities.
- ✦ **A NO GO but awarded a Seal of Excellence** if the Jury confirms the assessment of the evaluation committee that the criteria are met, but it is not recommended for funding within the budget available.

If your proposal is submitted under one of the STEP-relevant Challenges calls, your project will also be awarded the Sovereignty (STEP) Seal, if it is recommended as a GO or a NO-GO with Seal of Excellence. The Sovereignty (STEP) Seal complements the Seal of Excellence in facilitating alternative or complementary support from other programmes. Seals of Excellence and Sovereignty (STEP) Seals may be funded by national or European programmes for both grant and investment components and may also be supported for only the grant component (even if selected for blended finance).

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<sup>117</sup> The number of proposals invited may be lower if there are insufficient quality proposals. In the case of ex-aequo score, female led companies will be given priority.

## Accelerator Award Criteria

The EIC Accelerator evaluation criteria are shown below. A subset of the criteria will be assessed at the short application stage and the full set of criteria assessed at the full application stage by the external technology expert, the evaluation panel and then the Jury. At the full proposal stage, the technology expert will assess the claims made in the proposal against third party information and through a meeting with the applicant. The assessment of the technology expert and the Evaluation Panel will be included in the Evaluation Summary Report which will be made available to applicants at the end of the evaluation process, and if successful for investment support, to the European Investment Bank in its role as investment adviser to the EIC Fund.

<b>Table 8: Award criteria for EIC Accelerator (Overall Threshold 13 out of 15 for full proposal stage)</b>		
<b>Award criteria</b>	<b>Short Proposal Stage</b>	<b>Full Proposal Stage</b>
<b>EXCELLENCE (Threshold 4/5 for full proposal stage)</b>		
<b><u>Innovation – Deep tech and breakthrough nature</u></b>	Is the proposed innovation deep tech in nature stemming from cutting-edge scientific or technological advances; does it represent a significant improvement in cost or performance compared to existing or alternative solutions?	Is the proposed innovation deep tech in nature stemming from cutting-edge scientific or technological advances; does it represent a significant improvement in cost or performance compared to existing or alternative solutions?
<b><u>Technology Readiness – TRL</u></b>	Is there sufficient demonstration that the innovation has completed all aspects of TRL 5 (validation in a relevant environment for the application of the technology)?	Is there sufficient demonstration that the innovation has completed all aspects of TRL 5 (validation in a relevant environment for the application of the technology)?
<b><u>Intellectual Property</u></b>	Does the innovation have adequate IP protection and a sound IP strategy to enter the market to be addressed?	Does the innovation have adequate IP protection and a sound IP strategy to enter the market to be addressed?
<b>IMPACT (Threshold 4/5 for full proposal stage)</b>		
<b><u>Market Opportunity</u></b>	What and how big is the total market addressed? What is the realistic expectation of the share of the total market?	What and how big is the total market addressed? What is the realistic expectation of the share of the total market?

<b><u>Business model</u></b>	<i>Not assessed</i>	Are the detailed business model and revenue strategy sound? are the financial projections realistic?
<b><u>Broader Impact</u></b>	<i>Not assessed</i>	Will the proposed innovation contribute to European technological leadership and/or reduce dependencies on other regions? Will the innovation have broader environmental or social impacts?
<b><u>Challenge Alignment (FOR CHALLENGES ONLY)</u></b>	<i>Not assessed</i>	Does the innovation contribute to the expected Challenge outcomes?
<b><u>STEP Impact (ONLY FOR CHALLENGES WITHIN SCOPE OF STEP)</u></b>	<i>Not assessed</i>	Does the innovation have a clear and measurable positive impact either by:  Bringing to the Union's internal market an innovative, emerging and current-edge innovation with significant economic potential; or  Reducing or preventing strategic dependencies of the Union.  <i>(Note: applicants from Associated Countries will need to demonstrate contributions to the EU internal market or strategic dependencies)</i>
<b>LEVEL OF RISK, IMPLEMENTATION AND NEED FOR UNION SUPPORT (Threshold 4/5 for full proposal stage)</b>		
<b><u>Team Capability</u></b>	Does the company have the necessary team in terms of skills and competences to develop the innovation and scale the company?  Have any skills/ competence gaps been identified, including adequate gender balance, with a credible plan to fill the gaps?	Does the company have the necessary team in terms of skills and competences to develop the innovation and scale the company?  Does the company have adequate governance and is the team sufficiently incentivised?  Have any skills/ competence gaps been identified, including adequate gender balance, with a credible plan to fill the gaps?
<b><u>Risk Management</u></b>	<i>Not assessed</i>	Have the main risks (technological, market, financial, regulatory) been comprehensively identified, together with specific measures to mitigate them?

<p><b><u>Implementation Plan</u></b></p>	<p><i>Not assessed</i></p>	<p><i>For Grant Only and Blended Finance -</i></p> <p>Is there a clear implementation plan with defined milestones, work packages and deliverables, together with realistic resources and timings? Are the milestones measurable and appropriate for tracking progress?</p> <p><i>For Grant Only and Blended Finance - LUMP SUM:</i> Are the estimated costs in the work packages reasonable and non-excessive?</p>
<p><b><u>Risk level of the investment and leverage effect</u></b></p>	<p>Has the company demonstrated early traction with investors?</p> <p>Is the financing requirement to be internationally competitive significantly higher than the amount that market actors can finance alone?</p>	<p>Has the company demonstrated early traction with investors?</p> <p>Is the financing requirement to be internationally competitive significantly higher than the amount that market actors can finance alone?</p> <p><i>For blended finance and equity only:</i> Will EIC Fund investment be able to catalyse other public and private investments with a period of 6 months to 2 years.</p> <p><i>FOR GRANT-ONLY:</i> Can the applicant demonstrate access to the resources needed to commercialise and scale-up the innovation?</p> <p><i>FOR GRANT ONLY:</i> Can the company demonstrate the need for EIC grant support?</p>

### *Application submission limits*

The EIC Accelerator applies limitations on the number of unsuccessful submissions of the same/improved proposal by the same legal entity. These limitations apply equally to applicants submitted via the Fast Track or Plug In schemes.

As from 1 January 2024, after three unsuccessful submissions of the same/improved proposal by the same legal entity to the EIC Accelerator call for Challenges or Open, which can be at any stage of the process (Short Proposal, Full Proposal) and for any form of support (Grant-Only, Blended finance, Equity-Only), an applicant may not apply again to the EIC Accelerator under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme.

In all cases, applicants are expected to take into account the feedback on their previous submission and only reapply if they have made significant improvements.

## **Additional information concerning investments by the EIC Fund**

### *Strategic investments*

Investments may be considered strategic where they fall within the scope of the sectors set out in Article 2(1)(a) of the STEP Regulation<sup>118</sup> as further detailed in Guidance note C(2024)3148 of 8 May 2024<sup>119</sup>. The Commission Award Decision will specify cases which are considered strategic.

### *Approach for listed companies*

Investments in listed companies may be made only in cases where these companies are considered strategic (see “Strategic investments” above), and in accordance with the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines.

### *Approach for follow-on investments by the EIC Fund*

The EIC Fund may provide follow on investments in companies that have already been selected and awarded equity support. Such follow-on investments consist of amounts additional to the original maximum amount laid down in the Award Decision or the decision on investment, within a maximum of EUR 10 million<sup>120</sup> and subject to availability of budget. Such follow-on investments will be subject to a project review by external experts (to ensure the evaluation criteria for Accelerator are met), and an amended Award Decision by the European Commission, as well as a renewed assessment (due diligence) by the EIB as investment adviser to the EIC Fund.<sup>121</sup>

Such follow-on investments will be limited to the following exceptional categories of cases<sup>122</sup>:

- i) Where necessary to secure EU interests which cannot be otherwise protected or in the case of strategic investments (see above), or
- ii) If subsequent funding rounds would not proceed or would proceed at significantly less favourable terms without the EIC Fund’s follow-on investment.

### *Budget for follow-on investments and for “Grant first” companies*

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<sup>118</sup> Regulation (EU) 2024/795 of 29 February 2024 establishing the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP), and amending Directive 2003/87/EC and Regulations (EU) 2021/1058, (EU) 2021/1056, (EU) 2021/1057, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) 2021/1060, (EU) 2021/523, (EU) 2021/695, (EU) 2021/697 and (EU) 2021/241.

<sup>119</sup> Communication from the Commission: Guidance note concerning certain provisions of Regulation (EU) 2024/795 establishing the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP).

<sup>120</sup> Higher amounts for follow on investments are available by applying under the EIC STEP Scale Up call.

<sup>121</sup> In accordance with Article 48(12), second subparagraph of the Horizon Europe Regulation. The Programme Committee shall be informed of such cases.

<sup>122</sup> These cases stem from the advice of the EIC Board.

The EIC Fund may also provide investments to companies that received “Grant first” support under the EIC Work Programmes 2021 to 2023, subject to these companies achieving the milestones set for proceeding with the investment component.

The budget for follow on investments and the investment component subsequent to “Grant first” support will come with priority from the follow-on reserve budget as indicated in Annex 1 or from returns generated by EIC Fund investments. In case these budgets are exhausted, available amounts from the budget of this call or from previous amounts allocated to the EIC Fund may be used. In case the budget reserved for follow on investments is not fully used for the above cases, the remaining amount will be transferred to the Accelerator Open call.

#### *Approach in specific cases relating to a parent or holding company and an operating company*

In some cases of EIC Accelerator it may be necessary for the EIC Fund to invest in the parent or holding company and not in the company that applied for EIC Accelerator support and is the beneficiary of the grant component. This includes cases where the parent or holding company is where all other investors have invested and will invest in the future and where any potential upside will take place.

Applicants should already indicate in their application if they have a parent or holding company for the purposes of the investment component. In such cases the EIC Fund may decide to invest not in the beneficiary but in its parent or holding company if the following conditions are fulfilled:

- the parent or holding company fulfils all relevant criteria, including SME status, non-bankability for the purpose of the EIC Accelerator, and establishment in an EU Member State or Associated County, and
- the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines are followed.

In these cases, and where there is a grant component of support, the grant agreement with the beneficiary will include the parent or holding company as an affiliated entity in its role as investee.<sup>123</sup>

#### *Indirect management of the investment component of the EIC Accelerator*

In line with Article 11(3) of Council Decision 2021/764/EU establishing the Specific Programme implementing Horizon Europe, the Commission has entrusted tasks related to the implementation and management of the investment component of the EIC Accelerator to the European Investment Bank as the implementing partner for an indicative budget for investment amounts as shown in Annex 1.

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<sup>123</sup> Where necessary, via an amendment to the grant agreement.

## V.1 EIC Accelerator Open

EIC Accelerator Open has no predefined thematic priorities and is open to proposals in any field of technology or application.

If an application to the Open call falls within the scope of the Challenges topics below, grant-only funding is subject to eligibility in accordance with the specific conditions applicable to those topics:

- Boosting the European Critical Raw Materials value chain

Furthermore, in case of an investment support for applications in the areas of AI, quantum, semiconductors and biotechnology, specific safeguards will be introduced in the investment agreement (see Introduction, section on Economic Security as well as Annex 2).

## V.2 EIC Accelerator Challenges

The total indicative budget for EIC Accelerator Challenges is EUR 220 million. However, in case of underutilisation, the budget will be transferred to support projects submitted under the Open call aligned with the scope of the relevant Challenge.

The Accelerator Challenges have been identified in areas where breakthrough technologies or game-changing innovations developed by start-ups or SMEs can have a major impact on EU objectives. In 2026, these objectives include *[include list of most relevant policy objectives to be pursued by 2026 challenges]*

All Challenge applicants are encouraged to develop synergies with relevant activities under other Horizon Europe Work Programmes.

All Challenges fall within the scope and objectives<sup>124</sup> of the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) legislation. Hence, applicants to all Challenges will be awarded the Sovereignty (STEP) Seal in accordance with the provisions in Section V.

### V.2.1 Advanced Materials for Renewable Energy and Energy Storage Systems

#### Background and Scope

The share of renewables in electricity generation in the EU rose to 47% in 2024 compared to 34% in 2019<sup>125</sup> and this has also underpinned an exponential increase in the EU's demand for base metals, battery materials, rare earths and other materials for renewable energy generation and storage systems. However, most of these materials are not currently sourced or processed in Europe.

The European Commission Communication "Advanced Materials for Industrial Leadership"<sup>126</sup> identifies an urgent need to boost the development of advanced materials, such as their design, scale-up and manufacturing capacity (from lab to fab) to enhance the EU's strategic autonomy in key sectors such as energy, while addressing sustainability, circularity and safety issues.

The absence of a common European approach will pose a considerable risk to the EU's future energy strategic autonomy and requires investments. These target both developers and producers of advanced materials.

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<sup>124</sup> For further information on the scope and objectives of STEP, see the Guidance Note concerning certain provisions of Regulation (EU) 2024/795 establishing the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP). C(2025)3148 of 8 May 2024.

<sup>125</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20250319-1#:~:text=In%202024%2C%2046.9%25%20of%20net%20electricity%20generated,in%20the%20EU%20came%20from%20renewable%20energy%20sources.>

<sup>126</sup> [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/chemicals-and-advanced-materials/advanced-materials-industrial-leadership\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/chemicals-and-advanced-materials/advanced-materials-industrial-leadership_en)

This Challenge competition thus aims at scaling startups and SMEs developing advanced materials with added functionalities and improved performance specifically designed for energy storage or energy generation/harvesting systems. The targeted systems cover solar cells, wind turbines, mid-long term energy storage and energy harvesting technologies exploited across Europe.

### **Specific Objectives**

The start-ups and SMEs to be supported under this Challenge must focus on the development of advanced materials<sup>127</sup> for renewable energy or energy storage systems, encompassing the design, synthesis, characterisation, up-scaling, and production of such materials.

The materials and associated processes must be developed with a view to minimising the use of resources, including strategic and Critical Raw Materials (CRMs). They must have their performance benchmarked, minimisation of resource use proven with respect to the state of the art and the use-case considered. In-silico methods of design and testing developed materials should be considered to speed-up the design process and decrease the cost of development.

The environmental footprint of the developed advanced materials should also be measured with a life-cycle analysis that includes an evaluation of the cost and social impact. Applicants are also encouraged to consider the potential impact of emerging environmental markets<sup>128</sup> on their business, and to explore the strategic opportunities these markets may unlock when paired with innovative business models.

The projects selected under this Challenge will become part of the wider advanced materials ecosystem to be fostered by the actions set out in the Commission Communication on Advanced Materials including the new co-programmed partnership IAM4EU<sup>129</sup>.

### **Expected outcomes and impacts**

This Challenge aims to scale advanced material technologies that will enhance the EU's strategic autonomy in energy generation and mid-long energy storage, while addressing sustainability, circularity and safety issues.

This will:

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<sup>127</sup> Advanced materials are understood as materials that are rationally designed to have (i) new or enhanced properties, and/or (ii) targeted or enhanced structural features with the objective to achieve specific or improved functional performance. This includes both new emerging manufactured materials (high tech materials), and materials that are manufactured from traditional materials (low tech materials). OECD working description on advanced materials [https://one.oecd.org/document/ENV/CBC/MONO\(2022\)29/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/ENV/CBC/MONO(2022)29/en/pdf)

<sup>128</sup> For example, emerging environmental market-based mechanisms - carbon markets, payments for ecosystem services, nature credits ([eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0374](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0374))

<sup>129</sup> IAM-I | The Innovative Advanced Materials Initiative: <https://www.iam-i.eu/>

- ✦ Develop along the value chain, and support the integration of new advanced materials with improved functionalities in renewable energy sources and mid-long term energy storage systems
- ✦ Enable a more diversified, digitally driven, and risk-aware configuration of the European advanced materials value chain and associated processes and technologies for energy harvesting/generation and mid-long term energy storage systems
- ✦ Accelerate market uptake of innovative advanced materials with added functionalities in the energy sector
- ✦ Address the EU's industrial dependency on the import of materials for the energy sector, and
- ✦ Strengthen the European value chain of advanced materials for the energy sector.

**Indicative budget: EUR 50 million**

## V.2.2 Alternative Concepts and Key Enabling Technologies for Fusion Power Plants

### Background and scope

The global demand for clean, abundant, and sustainable energy has never been greater. Fusion energy holds the potential to revolutionise energy production by providing a near-limitless, carbon-free power source that minimises radioactive waste. It has been broadly recognised as a promising path to producing affordable electricity, according to numerous strategies, reports, such as Draghi<sup>130</sup>, and roadmaps unveiled worldwide<sup>131</sup>.

However, despite significant scientific and technological advancements, commercial fusion energy faces a number of technological, material, and economic barriers. These include:

- ✦ Achieving and maintaining the extremely high temperatures and pressures required for sustained fusion reactions
- ✦ Engineering materials that can withstand extreme neutron flux and thermal loads over long operational periods
- ✦ Developing critical components such as breeding blankets, gyrotrons, first walls, and divertors
- ✦ Designing high-power, efficient and high-repetition rate laser systems for inertial confinement fusion, and
- ✦ Designing cost-effective and scalable fusion reactors that compete with existing energy sources.

Europe has a competitive advantage in fusion with highly skilled scientists and engineers, leading experimental facilities and, is also the primary contributor and host of ITER<sup>132</sup>, the

<sup>130</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-competitiveness/draghi-report\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-competitiveness/draghi-report_en)

<sup>131</sup> For instance: China, Japan, South Korea, US, UK.

<sup>132</sup> <https://www.iter.org/>

world's first fusion experimental device of "power plant level". Europe is also beginning to see growing private investor interest in fusion energy, particularly in emerging companies beyond publicly led initiatives, with a strong push towards commercially viable solutions.

This Challenge, supported by a transfer of budget from Euratom Research and Training Programme<sup>133</sup>, will therefore support SMEs and start-ups advancing new fusion reactor concepts and key enabling technologies for fusion power plants.

### **Specific Objectives**

The start-ups and SMEs to be supported under this Challenge must focus on one or more elements of the fusion value chain including:

- ✦ Alternative concepts: magnetic, inertial and magneto-inertial fusion, either at the system level (conceptual or engineering design) or the design of core components and technologies
- ✦ Advanced materials: these encompass materials for components that must withstand extreme conditions of e.g. temperature, heat flux, plasma particle flux and neutron load, corrosion, and mechanical stress
- ✦ Sustainable and stable fuel production: innovative concepts for enabling tritium production and a closed tritium fuel cycle in fusion power plants
- ✦ New laser technologies: high-power, high-repetition-rate laser systems, along with allied optics, to enable fuel compression and ignition in inertial confinement fusion
- ✦ New components /systems for Plasma: innovative components/systems for effective plasma heating and current drive
- ✦ Magnets: innovative components and design approaches for magnets capable of operating under fusion power plant conditions, including high heat and radiation tolerance and structural strength
- ✦ Advanced Digital Technologies: includes the use of AI and machine learning techniques as well as digital twins to facilitate the design, control, monitoring and operation of future fusion power plants, and
- ✦ Targets for inertial confinement fusion: Advancing target design and materials to address current limitations in target performance and target insertion into the experimental/reactor chamber.
- ✦ Other key enabling technologies for fusion power plants not mentioned above will also be considered.

### **Expected outcomes and impacts**

The Challenge aims to accelerate the transition from achieving fusion energy gain to the full commercialisation of fusion energy, positioning Europe as a global leader in the field. It

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<sup>133</sup> [Euratom Research and Training Programme - European Commission](#)

supports the Competitiveness Compass for the EU<sup>134</sup> by helping fusion energy start-ups and SMEs deploy and scale up their innovative technologies and concepts. Aligned with the Clean Industrial Deal<sup>135</sup> roadmap, the Challenge contributes to a decarbonised energy mix and strengthens EU funding for the next generation of clean energy technologies. It also contributes towards establishing an innovation ecosystem that fosters investment and promotes growth in the fusion sector.

By developing and scaling up breakthrough innovations for fusion energy, the Challenge is expected to:

- ✦ Keep technology leadership in the field of nuclear fusion and build a value chain for the commercialisation of nuclear fusion, expected in 2040
- ✦ Enhance competitiveness and nurture the ecosystem of European companies;
- ✦ Attract new deep tech startups and SMEs to the sector;
- ✦ Facilitate the scaling up of technologies that address critical bottlenecks for the feasibility of commercially viable fusion power plants
- ✦ Contribute to the emergence of globally competitive European fusion energy leaders
- ✦ Develop new skills and create jobs within the EU, and
- ✦ Raise awareness about the potential of nuclear fusion in the private and public sector.

### **Specific conditions**

Fusion systems require the integration of several different technologies<sup>136</sup>, which stand at varying stages of maturity, from advanced sub-systems to early-stage components. The TRLs of applicants can therefore vary from 4 to 6 at the point of application for support. Regardless of the area(s) addressed, candidate companies should clearly demonstrate how the proposed innovation advances the TRL or address one or more of the critical bottlenecks, including cost-effectiveness, that affect the design, construction, and operation of commercially viable fusion power plants.

**Indicative budget: EUR 20 million in 20<sup>137</sup>**

In view of the contribution transferred to EIC from Euratom for this challenge, it is expected that at least 50% of the indicative budget will be provided to legal entities established in Member States or countries associated to both Euratom and Horizon Europe

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<sup>134</sup> [Competitiveness compass - European Commission](#)

<sup>135</sup> [Clean Industrial Deal - European Commission](#)

<sup>136</sup> [IAEA-TECDOC-2047](#)

<sup>137</sup> EUR 10 million will be allocated in 2027 subject to the adoption of the 2027 EIC Work programme

## V.2.3 Biotech for Regenerating Agricultural Soils

### Background and Scope

Soils are essential ecosystems that deliver valuable services such as the provision of food, energy and raw materials, nutrient regulation, and water purification and infiltration<sup>138</sup>. Healthy soils are thus a key enabler supporting the objectives of the European Green Deal<sup>139</sup>.

However, about 60% of EU soils are considered unhealthy<sup>140</sup>, losing their capacity to support agricultural production of food, feed and biomass. According to recent estimates, fourteen European countries saw land area highly sensitive to desertification nearly double to 400 000 km<sup>2</sup> in the period 2008 to 2017. In addition, agricultural soils in the EU are depleted in soil organic carbon, which could impact EU climate change mitigation efforts<sup>141</sup>. Furthermore, EU soils are under increasing pressure from various sources, including contamination by microplastics<sup>142,143</sup>, heavy metals and persistent organic pollutants, as well as the inappropriate use of fertilizers, pesticides, and antibiotics<sup>144</sup>. These activities harm soil health and fertility, reduce biodiversity and threaten the sustainability and resilience of agricultural production.

In line with the ambitions of the Commission Communications on Building the future with nature: Boosting Biotechnology and Biomanufacturing in the EU<sup>145</sup>, (a critical technology identified under the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)<sup>146</sup>, the EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy<sup>147</sup>, the EU Soil Strategy for 2030, the Vision for Agriculture and Food<sup>148</sup> and the objectives of the EU Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe'<sup>149</sup>, this Challenge focuses on reinforcing soil-based agricultural production, encompassing food, feed and biomass, through biotech driven deep tech solutions that will:

- ✦ Improve soil health and enhance the quality of agricultural products, by for example increasing their micronutrient content and availability, while supporting biodiversity and ecosystem services
- ✦ Address soil pollution to restore, enhance and protect soil health, including the extraction, degradation or transformation of pollutants, and the restoration of soil biodiversity, thus enabling sustainable agriculture on degraded and contaminated lands, and

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<sup>138</sup> [Soil Strategy for 2030 - European Commission](#)

<sup>139</sup> [The European Green Deal - European Commission](#)

<sup>140</sup> [EUSO Dashboard](#)

<sup>141</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-025-57355-y>

<sup>142</sup> <https://www.papillons-h2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/PA-8-17-2.pdf>

<sup>143</sup> <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC137600>

<sup>144</sup> [https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/how-science-shaping-eu-action-reduce-pollution-2025-03-03\\_en](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/how-science-shaping-eu-action-reduce-pollution-2025-03-03_en)

<sup>145</sup> [Actions to boost biotechnology and biomanufacturing in EU \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>146</sup> [Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform - European Union \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>147</sup> [EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy - European Commission](#)

<sup>148</sup> [Vision for Agriculture and Food - European Commission](#)

<sup>149</sup> [What is the Mission Soil? | Mission Soil Platform](#)

- ✦ Reduce dependency on hazardous chemicals, enhance soil fertility and health while minimising environmental impacts.

## Specific Objectives

The start-ups and SMEs to be supported under this Challenge must focus on developing biotech driven solutions in one (or more) of the following areas:

- ✦ **Bioremediation technologies:** focused on restoring and enhancing soil health enabling sustainable agriculture in contaminated lands. Proposals could include solutions such as, but not limited to, phyto or mycelial extraction or degradation of pollutants. Solutions that will extract, degrade or transform pollutants must go beyond the state of the art and put forward innovations that demonstrate improvements to the nutritional profile of food and feed, and the quality of the biomass produced
- ✦ **Soil and soil microbiome management technologies:** covers solutions that will increase the soil's organic carbon stock and its structure to enhance biodiversity, improve water retention and boost fertility and nutrient availability
- ✦ **Renewable fertilizers and bio stimulants:** targets materials that could be produced from waste and residue streams and biomass in innovative, sustainable and circular ways with the help of microorganisms or their biological components, enabling a virtuous cascading approach from agricultural operations or from bio-based industrial processes.

Regardless of the specific area addressed, companies are encouraged to leverage digital tools such as AI and monitoring technologies such as sensors, as appropriate, to facilitate the identification or the development of processes and to reliably assess the evolution of soil health conditions to make the resulting products and services suitable for integration into existing production systems. All projects must provide a lifecycle assessment (LCA) considering environmental, social and economic consideration. Proposals are also expected to consider regulatory aspects alongside issues surrounding consumer acceptance and articulate suitable strategies to support market entry within and beyond the EU. Applicants are encouraged to consider the potential impact of emerging environmental markets<sup>150</sup> on their business, and to explore the strategic opportunities these markets may unlock when paired with innovative business models.

The startups and SMEs supported under this Challenge will be connected through the EIC's Business Acceleration Services with stakeholders engaged in the EU Mission Soil<sup>151</sup> and with

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<sup>150</sup> For example, emerging environmental market-based mechanisms - carbon markets, payments for ecosystem services, nature credits ([eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0374](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0374))

<sup>151</sup> [EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe](#)

Horizon Europe Cluster 6, including its public-private partnership Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking (CBE JU) to support the accelerated uptake of breakthrough solutions.

### **Expected Outcomes and Impact**

This Challenge aims to scale deep tech solutions that will improve soil health and the sustainability, efficiency, and resilience of the European agricultural sector, which spans food, feed and biomass. Their entry into the market will reverse the declining health of agricultural soils resulting in an enhanced production of high quality, sustainable crops.

By targeting breakthrough solutions, it will also support Europe's future strategic autonomy and enhance the competitiveness of the sector by helping it overcome challenges linked to climate change and environment stresses including soil biodiversity loss and pollution as well as contributing to boosting biotechnology in the EU.

**Indicative budget: EUR 50 million**

## **V.2.4 Boosting the European Critical Raw Materials value chain**

### **Background and Scope**

Europe's technological sovereignty and capacity to deliver on the twin green and digital transitions is contingent on access to Critical Raw Materials (CRMs)<sup>152</sup> along all stages of the value chain. A subset of these CRMs also classified as "strategic raw materials"<sup>153</sup> due to their use in strategic technologies and strong projected demand growth. Secure access to such materials will reduce Europe's dependence on unreliable suppliers and integrating circularity is crucial to making the most of the EU's limited resources. Actions foreseen under the EU's Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA)<sup>154</sup> adopted in 2024 aim to strengthen the supply security of CRMs by:

- ✦ Setting benchmarks by 2030 for domestic capacities of strategic raw materials<sup>155</sup>
- ✦ Creating secure and resilient supply chains
- ✦ Enhancing supply risk preparedness and mitigation
- ✦ Improving sustainability and circularity of critical raw materials on the EU market
- ✦ Diversifying suppliers of raw materials imported in the EU.

Deep tech start-ups and scale-ups can make an important contribution to achieving the 2030 EU benchmarks defined in the CRMA, in particular, those companies driving forward

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<sup>152</sup> Annex II, Regulation (EU) 2024/1252

<sup>153</sup> Annex I, Regulation (EU) 2024/1252

<sup>154</sup> [Critical Raw Materials Act - European Commission](#)

<sup>155</sup> A list of strategic and critical raw materials is provided in Annexes I and II of the CRMA

Strategic Projects<sup>156</sup> under the CRMA. Start-ups and SMEs could contribute to developing and commercialising new deep tech innovations that address the entire spectrum of activity from exploration via extraction and refining to the recycling of CRMs with a view to:

- ✦ Strengthening the supply of primary critical and strategic raw materials in the EU
- ✦ Increasing the recovery rate of critical and strategic raw materials as set out in the CRMA, and
- ✦ Improving the competitiveness of secondary raw materials production by ensuring cost effectiveness and also enhancing sustainability in terms of energy, resource and water use, waste and emissions (including Green House Gases and air pollutants) footprint.

### **Specific Objectives**

The start-ups and SMEs to be supported under this Challenge must look to develop and deploy deep-tech innovations that contribute to the CRMA and European domestic capacity in one or more of the following areas:

- ✦ Exploration of critical and strategic raw materials: this includes precision drilling, remote sensing, and the use of AI and big data to access and assess previously sub-economic resources, retired mines, and re-assess mine tailings and post-processing waste heaps, whilst reducing costs and waste.
- ✦ Extraction, processing and metallurgy refining for the supply of primary critical and strategic raw materials: this includes approaches such as hydrometallurgical, bioleaching, phytomining and nano-filtration. A holistic approach to economical and sustainable mining operations is essential for the ambitions of the CRMA. Deep tech innovations that enable electrified autonomous operation of mining equipment are within scope.
- ✦ Recycling from end-of-life products for the supply of secondary critical and strategic raw materials: this includes urban mining and the use of battery black mass and electronic waste as CRM feedstock.

The deep tech innovations must improve the sustainability of the EU's sources for critical and strategic raw materials in line with the EU principles for sustainable raw materials and must clearly justify the relevance and business case for all targeted minerals and metals.

The environmental footprint of the proposed innovations should also be measured with a life-cycle analysis that includes an evaluation of the cost and social impact. Applicants are

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<sup>156</sup> [https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/raw-materials/areas-specific-interest/critical-raw-materials/strategic-projects-under-crma/selected-projects\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/raw-materials/areas-specific-interest/critical-raw-materials/strategic-projects-under-crma/selected-projects_en)

encouraged to consider the potential impact of emerging environmental markets<sup>157</sup> on their business, and to explore the strategic opportunities these markets may unlock when paired with innovative business models.

Deep-sea mining does not fall within the scope of this call.

### **Expected outcomes and impacts**

By targeting breakthrough innovations, the Challenge is expected to contribute to the secure supply of sustainably produced primary and secondary critical and strategic raw materials for EU industrial value chains and strategic sectors and help strengthen the EU mining value chain.

### **Specific conditions**

In order to achieve the expected outcomes, and safeguard the Union's strategic assets, interests, autonomy, and security, it is important to avoid a situation of technological dependency on a non-EU source, in a global context that requires the EU to take action to build on its strengths, and to carefully assess and address any strategic weaknesses, vulnerabilities and high-risk dependencies which put at risk the attainment of its ambitions.

For this reason, and in line with Article 136 of the Financial Regulation<sup>158</sup>, beneficiaries<sup>159</sup> of grant-only Accelerator funding must not be directly or indirectly controlled by a non-associated third country or a legal entity established in a non-associated third country other than such third countries or legal entities established in Member States, associated countries, OECD countries, African Union Member States, MERCOSUR, CARIFORUM, Andean Community and countries with which the EU has concluded strategic partnerships on raw materials<sup>160</sup> as well as trade agreements (or association/economic partnership or equivalent agreements, including the new Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships) containing raw materials cooperation provisions (i.e. Energy and Raw materials chapters)<sup>161</sup>.

**Indicative budget: EUR 50 million**

## **V.2.5 Deep Tech for Climate Adaptation**

### **Background and Scope**

Europe is warming faster than any other continent in the world<sup>162</sup>. As the Earth continues to warm, climate change is increasingly affecting humans, economic activities and natural

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<sup>157</sup> For example, emerging environmental market-based mechanisms - carbon markets, payments for ecosystem services, nature credits ([eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0374](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0374))

<sup>158</sup> EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509

<sup>159</sup> i.e., the legal entities which sign the grant agreement.

<sup>160</sup> [https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/raw-materials/areas-specific-interest/raw-materials-diplomacy\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/raw-materials/areas-specific-interest/raw-materials-diplomacy_en)

<sup>161</sup> [https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/negotiations-and-agreements\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/negotiations-and-agreements_en)

<sup>162</sup> European Environment Agency (2024) *European climate risk assessment (EUCRA)*, EEA report no 1/2024

systems across the globe including in Europe<sup>163</sup>. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) identified 4 key risks for Europe<sup>164</sup>, which will become more severe as the world continues to warm:

- ✦ Mortality and morbidity of people and changes in ecosystems due to heat
- ✦ Heat and drought stress on crops
- ✦ Water scarcity, and
- ✦ Flooding and sea level rise

As policies and actions are not keeping up with the rapidly growing climate risks, the need for adaptation solutions will only become more pressing.

Start-ups and scale-ups are already developing deep tech solutions to address these climate risks. On the other hand, the European Commission - through its EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change<sup>165</sup> – is supporting climate adaptation efforts on the ground, uniting more than 400 regional and local authorities across Europe towards climate resilience by 2030.

The aim of this Challenge is to improve Europe's Climate resilience by scaling up companies and solutions and connect them to the Mission's regions and local authorities.

This Challenge competition focuses on deep tech solutions including nature-based solutions (NbS)<sup>166</sup> and engineering approaches reinforced by AI and other Key Enabling Technologies (KET).

### **Specific Objectives**

The start-ups and SMEs to be supported under this Challenge must look to develop and deploy deep-tech innovations that will address one of the following priorities:

- ✦ **Combating extreme heat in urban environments:** climate-neutral solutions that address urban heat island effects and urban cooling by for example reducing heat transfer, heat accumulation and cooling costs in urban areas. Proposals could include solutions such as, but not limited to, temperature-responsive and reflective materials, insulation, coating that regulate building temperatures, biomimetic nano-structured metamaterials that selectively/adaptively reflect or absorb light bandwidth, novel green-roof and green-façade systems integrating nature and materials for new build and retrofit.

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<sup>163</sup> Bednar-Friedl et al (2022), [Europe](#). In: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

<sup>164</sup> See [Europe factsheet](#)

<sup>165</sup> [Adaptation to climate change - European Commission](#)

<sup>166</sup> Defined by the United Nations Environment Assembly as 'actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems, which address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services and resilience and biodiversity benefits.'

- ✦ **Climate Smart Agriculture:** this includes scalable climate smart crops, nature-based solutions, agroecology, integrated pest management with increased resilience to several simultaneous climate threats as well as microbial solutions, and bio stimulants enhancing climate resilience. Deep tech solutions for indoor food production such as, but not limited to, variable transparency solar glass which could be applied to industrial and residential buildings also fall within scope;
- ✦ **Combating Water scarcity:** this includes the reuse of water through wastewater processing and water filtration solutions sensitive to emerging pollutants and could include biotech solutions such as, but not limited to, bacterial, mycelial or plant extraction or degradation and nature-based solutions. These solutions must be suitable for large and small-scale applications in urban and/or rural regions
- ✦ **Flood and coastal protection:** includes solutions for new (temporary) buildings / (green) infrastructure and retrofit to help infrastructure withstand damage from storm waters, coastal and river flooding alongside novel/ targeted predictive systems or early warning systems.

### **Expected outcomes and impacts**

By targeting deep tech including nature-based solutions, this Challenge looks to develop and commercially scale timely solutions needed across Europe to adapt to key climate risks. Applicants are encouraged to consider the potential impact of emerging environmental markets<sup>167</sup> on their business, and to explore the strategic opportunities these markets may unlock when paired with innovative business models. Furthermore, the EIC will, through its Business Acceleration Services, especially the innovation procurement programme, connect the startups and SMEs supported under this Challenge with the network of regions and local authorities engaged in the Mission on Climate Adaptation (leveraging the Mission Implementation Platform), to facilitate the accelerated uptake of breakthrough solutions for climate adaptation. The solutions stemming from this Challenge will be part of the portfolio of solutions developed by the Adaptation Mission.

**Indicative budget: EUR 50 million**

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<sup>167</sup> For example, emerging environmental market-based mechanisms - payments for ecosystem services, nature credits ([eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0374](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0374))

## VI. EIC Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) Scale Up Call<sup>168</sup>

- ❖ Does your company have a game-changing innovative technology focused on the development and commercialisation of a **strategic technology** for Europe in digital and deep tech, cleantech or biotech?
- ❖ Has your company already secured an **initial investment**, and is now looking to raise a major funding round to **scale up rapidly** and become a **global leader**?
- ❖ Does the successful commercialisation and scaling of your technology/ innovation **represent significant risks** which mean that it cannot be sufficiently financed from the market investors?

If you answered **yes** to all questions, then the EIC Strategic Technology for Europe Platform (STEP) Scale Up call could be your launchpad to success. This call provides significant funding to fuel groundbreaking innovation in **strategic technologies**<sup>169</sup>, propelling Europe's economic, industrial, and technological competitiveness. This is a new call that has been introduced as a pilot action following the STEP Regulation<sup>170</sup> to address an important market gap in financing deep tech scale up companies in Europe and to inform decisions on future support.

### Why should you apply?

The EIC STEP Scale Up call presents a unique opportunity for ambitious scale up companies (SMEs and small mid-caps) with game-changing innovations **in Europe's critical technology areas**. It offers a powerful combination of financial and strategic support designed to propel your groundbreaking solution to the forefront of these sectors.

The companies selected under the EIC STEP Scale Up call shall receive **investments ranging from EUR 10 to EUR 30 million**. This investment can significantly accelerate the development and market launch of your technology, product, or service. With this funding, you'll gain the power to disrupt established markets and forge new ones across Europe, potentially achieving significant global impact. Crucially, this investment

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<sup>168</sup> EIC STEP Scale Up call is a specific call as part of the EIC Accelerator as defined under Article 48 of the Horizon Europe Regulation - 2021/695 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu) following its amendment by Article 17(2) of the STEP Regulation . The same provisions on indirect management and on parent and holding companies as set out under the Accelerator call apply.

<sup>169</sup> Guidance Note concerning certain provisions of Regulation (EU) 2024/795 establishing the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)

<sup>170</sup> Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP), and amending Directive 2003/87/EC and Regulations (EU) 2021/1058, (EU) 2021/1056, (EU) 2021/1057, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) 2021/1060, (EU) 2021/523, (EU) 2021/695, (EU) 2021/697 and (EU) 2021/241, OJ L, 2024/795, 29.2.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/795/oj>.

is designed to **catalyse major funding rounds**, e.g. in the range of EUR 50 to 150 million, and at least 3-5 times the EIC investment.

This call is part of the implementation of the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP))<sup>171</sup> which supports the development or manufacturing of critical technologies throughout the Union or safeguarding and strengthening their respective value chains. Besides, support from the EIC, the projects may be eligible for support under other EU programmes included in STEP.

In 2026 support for start-ups in semiconductor technologies and quantum technologies will be pursued in particular through the STEP Scale Up call which foresees larger investments targeting strategic technologies including in support of the Chips Act. The EIC Accelerator Open call remains available in general for startups and SMEs including for quantum and semiconductor technologies.

### Can you apply?

In order to apply, your innovation must be within the scope of the priority sectors defined in the STEP regulation<sup>172</sup>, which includes Critical Raw Materials, and further developed in the Guidance note<sup>173</sup>

- a. **Digital technologies**<sup>174</sup>, and deep tech innovations. This includes: advanced semiconductor technologies; artificial intelligence technologies; quantum technologies; advanced connectivity, navigation and digital technologies; advanced sensing technologies; robotics and autonomous systems; Deep tech innovations (see Glossary).
- b. **Clean and resource efficient technologies**, including net-zero technologies. This includes: solar technologies; onshore wind and offshore renewable technologies; energy storage technologies; heat pumps and geothermal technologies; hydrogen technologies; sustainable biogas and biomethane technologies; carbon capture and storage technologies; electricity grid technologies; nuclear fission technologies, sustainable alternative fuel technologies; hydropower technologies; other renewable technologies; energy system -related energy efficiency technologies; renewable fuels of nonbiological origin technologies; biotech climate and energy solutions; transformative industrial technologies for decarbonisation; CO2 transport and utilisation technologies; wind and electric propulsion technologies; other nuclear

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<sup>171</sup> [https://strategic-technologies.europa.eu/index\\_en](https://strategic-technologies.europa.eu/index_en)

<sup>172</sup> Regulation - EU - 2024/795 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu), Article 2(1), point (a) of the STEP Regulation

<sup>173</sup> Guidance Note concerning certain provisions of Regulation (EU) 2024/795 establishing the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP). C(2025)3148 of 8 May 2024.

<sup>174</sup> Including those contributing to the targets and objectives of the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030, multi-country projects as defined in Article 2(2) of Decision (EU) 2022/2481

technologies; advanced materials<sup>175</sup>, manufacturing and recycling technologies, technologies vital to sustainability such as water purification and desalination; and circular economy technologies.

- c. **Biotechnologies**, including medicinal products on the Union list of critical medicines and their components. Including DNA/RNA; proteins and other molecules; cell and tissue culture and engineering; process biotechnology techniques; Gene and RNA vectors; bioinformatics; and nanobiotechnology.

These technologies are deemed critical where they meet either of the following conditions:

- a. they bring to the internal market an innovative, emerging and cutting-edge element with significant economic potential;
- b. they contribute to reducing or preventing strategic dependencies of the Union.

The Commission [Guidance Note](#), concerning certain provisions of STEP Regulation adopted on May 2024, provides detailed information on the criticality conditions.

This call targets companies raising significant funding rounds and you must demonstrate an initial market interest such that the EIC investment acts as a catalyst for larger funding rounds.

You will therefore need to demonstrate that the company **already has a precommitment**<sup>176</sup> for an equity investment which meets the following elements:

- ❖ The pre-commitment comes from a single qualified investor<sup>177</sup> with demonstrable know-how and experience in the relevant market, technology and jurisdiction and subject to KYC by the EIC Fund or the EIF.<sup>178</sup> The pre-committed investor may be an existing investor in the company and does not necessarily need to be the investor who intends to lead the investment round.
- ❖ The pre-commitment represents at least 20% of the total target funding round you are aiming to raise.

The following entities are eligible to apply:

- ❖ A single company classified as a SME or small mid-cap (up to 499 employees) established within a Member State or an Associated Country (see Annex 2).

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<sup>175</sup> According to the guidance note, this includes critical raw materials

<sup>176</sup> The pre-commitment is non-legally binding in nature and will be assessed at the time of proposal evaluation.

<sup>177</sup> Qualified Investor is an investor — public or private — with demonstrable know-how and experience in the relevant market, technology and jurisdiction, and which has been subject to KYC/AML screening and not considered high-risk. In case of high risk, such an investor can be exceptionally considered qualified if duly justified to protect against risks to economic security

<sup>178</sup> Investors who have not undergone a KYC by the EIC Fund or EIF may also provide pre-commitments, but this will be subject to the completion of a KYC during the eligibility checks.

The company may have a holding entity for the purposes of the investment, and this holding company must also be established in a Member State or an Associated Country.

- ❖ An investor may submit a proposal on behalf of an eligible SME or small midcap as defined above, provided that a prior agreement exists with the company. The investment agreement will be signed with the selected SME or small mid-cap.

The applicable admissibility and eligibility conditions are detailed in Annex 2 unless otherwise stated in this call. Furthermore, in case of investment support, specific safeguards may be introduced in the investment agreement (see Introduction, section on Economic Security).

Concurrent submissions to both the EIC Accelerator and EIC STEP Scale Up calls are not permitted; in the event of multiple submissions, only the proposal submitted most recently will be evaluated, and it will be assessed according to the merits and evaluation criteria of its respective call (Accelerator or STEP).

### **What support will you receive if your proposal is funded?**

The EIC STEP Scale Up call offers a total indicative budget of EUR 300 million for 2026, which is expected to rise to EUR 900 million for the period 2025-2027<sup>179</sup>. Any unused amount from this budget will be allocated with priority to the EIC Accelerator Open call.<sup>180</sup>

The support will be in the form of **equity-only investments** managed by the EIC Fund. Applicants to this call will not receive a grant component. It provides significant financial support, and applicants should apply for an **investment of a minimum of EUR 10 million<sup>181</sup> and maximum of EUR 30 million**, to co-invest in a funding round<sup>182</sup> in the range of EUR 50 to 150 million, and at least three to five times the amount of the requested EIC contribution. The specific terms of each investment are considered and negotiated on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines. This ensures the investment is tailored to your company's needs while aligning with EIC's objectives.

EIC STEP Scale Up is designed to fill the funding gap for companies to invest in the scale up of high-risk innovations and where the amount needed for the scale up cannot

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<sup>179</sup> This includes the EUR 300 million allocated under the EIC 2025 Work Programme and which may be reused in this call if there are unused amounts.

<sup>180</sup> If applicants have been selected for funding under the Accelerator Open call. Otherwise, any remaining amounts may be allocated to other calls within the general flexibility of the Work Programme.

<sup>181</sup> Applicants wishing to apply for lower investment amounts may apply to the EIC Accelerator call.

<sup>182</sup> The EIC Fund may join the round when relevant ongoing/upcoming /past.

be fully financed by other investors, including InvestEU direct and indirect financial products provided by implementing partners. Applicants are encouraged to consider in particular complementarity with Venture Debt from InvestEU implementing partners in order to meet their financing needs.

When implementing investments, the EIC Fund will ensure that supported companies keep most of their value, including their IP, in the EU or in the Associated Countries in order to contribute to their economic growth and job creation. Where necessary, the EIC Fund will be requested to take appropriate safeguard measures for individual companies on a case-by-case basis in order to protect European interests as defined in the Investment Guidelines.

Beyond funding, your company will benefit from a strong support system that fosters your continued growth within Europe through Business Acceleration Services (details available in Section VII). Applicants to the EIC STEP Scale Up call who meet the evaluation thresholds will also be **awarded a Sovereignty (STEP) Seal**, to facilitate and provide possibility of the access to funding and support from other EU programmes and other funders and investors.

### **How do you apply; how long does it take?**

You may submit an application to the EIC STEP Scale Up call at any time. The evaluations of applications submitted will be organised with one batch per quarter (11/02/2026; 06/05/2026; 09/09/2026; 25/11/2026)<sup>183</sup>. You must submit your proposal via the Funding and Tenders Portal.

#### *1. Submission of proposals*

To be deemed admissible and eligible, proposals must consist of:

- ❖ a full business plan, including information on the company's ownership and financial structure and a justification on the STEP related objectives (maximum 50 pages);
- ❖ a pitch-deck (maximum 15 pages) in pdf format (this version will be presented to the jury if invited to interview);
- ❖ a pre-commitment from a single qualified investor (according to the official template on the Funding and Tenders Portal and also available on the EIC website); The pre-commitment must represent at least 20% of the total target funding round, which must range between EUR 50 to 150 million, and be at least 3-5 times the EIC investment);

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<sup>183</sup> Proposals will be batched at 17h00 Brussels time.

- ❖ a financial plan and agreement document (according to the template available on the EIC website).
- ❖ Results of the freedom to operate (FTO) analysis. If you do not have one, please upload a note of maximum 2 pages outlining your freedom to operate and providing as much information as possible on this issue. In cases where the FTO is not relevant (e.g. software), please upload a simple statement.
- ❖ CVs of key personnel

All personal data and information in your proposal will be kept strictly confidential. However, before submitting your full proposal, you will need to give agreement to share necessary information with the EIC Fund.

In addition, you will be asked as part of your application whether your company would be interested in Venture Debt support from InvestEU implementing partners, if your company is awarded a Sovereignty (STEP) Seal <sup>184</sup>.

Upon submission, your proposal will be assessed if it meets the eligibility criteria set out above in terms of whether it falls within scope of the STEP technologies; the pre-commitment from a single investor; and the eligibility of the applicant entity.

The investment adviser to the EIC Fund, may be requested to support the eligibility assessment regarding the pre-commitment from an investor.

In cases where a Technology Due Diligence report is not already available, this will be conducted by a suitably qualified external expert.

If your application meets these requirements, you will be invited to attend a jury interview. It is expected that you will be informed about the interview within approximately 4-6 weeks from the start of the evaluation process following the relevant batching date.

## *2. Interviews with an EIC Jury*

At the interview, you will be assessed by a Jury of maximum six members (see Glossary). Detailed information about the format of the interview will be communicated to you in the invitation.

You will be informed about the result of the interview within approximately two weeks from the end of the interview session.

An award decision will be adopted by the Commission, which will authorise a maximum amount of investment by the EIC Fund, which will follow the amount requested in the application, with an additional flexibility amount of maximum EUR 5 million per

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<sup>184</sup> InvestEU Implementing partners - European Union (europa.eu)

proposal. The flexibility amount is to enable the EIC Fund to make an investment decision for a higher amount than requested if justified to take account of developments of the company since the date of application and the opportunity of catalysing a larger overall funding round with co-investors. The additional flexibility amount may only be used if there are sufficient amounts available on the EIC Fund accounts (e.g., due to budget available from other investments).

The relevant information from your proposal will be passed to the investment adviser for the EIC Fund, to proceed with the detailed due diligence and subject to a positive due diligence and subsequent EIC Fund Investment Committee decision, the investment agreement. Should the investment due diligence result in a lower investment amount the released amount will be made available for additional funding under the EIC STEP Scale up call.

If you have expressed an interest and given agreement and your company has been awarded a Sovereignty (STEP) Seal following the evaluation, the relevant information from your proposal will be passed to the relevant InvestEU implementing partners to consider for Venture Debt support.

### **How does the EIC decide if your proposal will be selected for a potential investment by the EIC Fund?**

Your proposal will be assessed on its merits by leading experts and the Commission will ensure open and fair competition to all eligible proposals submitted.

The EIC STEP Scale Up call utilizes a "first come, first served" approach to evaluate proposals. However, juries will be asked to take account of overall budget availability for the full year and will be limited to recommend proposals amounting to no more than 70% of the available budget for the calendar year within the first six months of the year. The Jury will be informed about budget availability, including additional amounts that may be available due to previous amounts awarded that were not fully used.

Proposals will be assessed according to the following award criteria (Table 8). The EIC Jury may focus the interview on any element of your proposal based on its own assessment.

The EIC Jury members, based on your interview and their overall assessment, will recommend one of three outcomes for your proposal:

#### **❖ GO and Sovereignty (STEP) Seal:**

Your proposal meets all of the evaluation criteria (see below) and is recommended for a potential equity investment. The Jury may provide observations for consideration by

the EIC Fund regarding the investment amount or other considerations for the investment decision or management. The Jury may recommend a different investment amount than requested by the applicant in line with the call's requirements. It is important to remember that investment amounts authorised in the Commission Award Decision are subject to successful completion of the due diligence and negotiation by the EIC Fund according to the Investment Guidelines, and investment amounts may be reduced or rejected by the EIC Fund for justified reasons.

Your project will also be awarded the Sovereignty (STEP) Seal and will have access to Business Acceleration Services.

**❖ NO GO and Sovereignty (STEP) Seal:**

Your proposal meets the main elements of the award criteria, including the contribution to the STEP objectives, but is not recommended for funding based on the jury's overall consideration of the submitted proposals and due to the lack of budget availability.

Your project will be awarded the Sovereignty (STEP) Seal and access to Business Acceleration Services.

**❖ NO GO:**

Your proposal does not meet all the evaluation criteria required for funding. You will receive detailed feedback outlining the areas where your proposal fell short to help you improve for future applications.

The Jury may also provide recommendations regarding a potential resubmission, or not, of your application and improvements needed.

<b>Table 9. Award criteria elements for EIC STEP Scale Up proposals</b>	
<b>Excellence</b>	
<b>Innovation – Deep tech and breakthrough nature:</b>	Is the proposed innovation deep tech in nature stemming from cutting-edge scientific or technological advances? Does it represent a significant improvement in cost or performance compared to existing or alternative solutions?
<b>Technological feasibility:</b>	Has the technology been developed in a safe, secure and reliable manner? Has it been adequately assessed, validated or certified?
<b>Intellectual Property:</b>	Does the innovation have adequate IP protection and sound IP strategy to enter the market to be addressed?
<b>Impact</b>	

<p><b>Market opportunity:</b> What and how big is the market addressed? What is the realistic expectation of the share of the total market?</p>
<p><b>Business model:</b> Are the detailed business model and revenue strategy sound? Are the financial projections realistic?</p>
<p><b>STEP Impact:</b> Does the innovation have a clear and measurable positive impact either by: Bringing to the Union’s internal market an innovative, emerging and current-edge innovation with significant economic potential; or reducing or preventing strategic dependencies of the Union. (Note: applicants from Associated Countries will need to demonstrate contributions to the EU internal market or strategic dependencies)</p>
<p><b>Level of risk, implementation, and need for Union support</b></p>
<p><b>Team capability:</b> Does the company have the necessary team in terms of skills and competences to develop the innovation and scale the company? Does the company have adequate governance and is the team sufficiently incentivised? Have any skills/competence gaps been identified, including adequate gender balance, with a credible plan to fill the gaps?</p>
<p><b>Risk level of the investment:</b> Does the nature and level of risk of the investment in your innovation mean that European market actors are unwilling to commit the full amount that is needed without an investment from the EIC Fund?</p>
<p><b>Investment leverage:</b> Does the proposal provide a convincing and realistic plan for raising an equity financing round using the EIC Fund investment to attract 3-5 times the amount from other investors? What is the anticipated timeline for concluding the financing round? How many investors have committed or are engaged in advanced discussions? How pressing is the timeline for finalising this deal?</p>
<p><b>Risk management:</b> Have the main risks (e.g., technological, market, financial, regulatory) been comprehensively identified, together with measures to take to mitigate them?</p>

### *Application submission limits*

The EIC STEP Scale Up call applies limitations on the number of unsuccessful submissions of the same/improved proposal by the same legal entity.

As from 1 January 2026, after **three** unsuccessful submissions of the same/improved proposal by the same legal entity to the EIC STEP Scale Up call which can be at any stage of the process (eligibility check, interviews), an applicant may not apply again to the EIC STEP Scale Up call under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme.

In all cases, applicants are expected to take into account the feedback on their previous submission and only reapply if they have made significant improvements.

## VII. Business Acceleration Services

The Business Acceleration Services (BAS) provide EIC Awardees and other eligible entities with services aiming at:

- ✦ gaining the skills, knowledge and contacts they need to bring their innovations to the market and grow their businesses
- ✦ getting access to testing/scaleup facilities
- ✦ matching with European and international customers and business partners
- ✦ matching with potential (co-)investors
- ✦ support to enter new markets

BAS is a distinctive feature of the EIC that enables it to provide not only “money”, but “smart money”.

The BAS services are also used by EIC Programme Managers and EIC Project Officers to proactively manage the EIC portfolios.

The eligible entities and the BAS services available for each group are:

Eligible entity	BAS services available
<p><b>EIC Awardees</b> that have been assessed under an <b>EIC call within Horizon Europe (2021-2025)</b>, EIC Accelerator, EIC Transition, EIC Pathfinder, EIC STEP Scaleup, and EIC Prizes including associated partners of EIC grants.</p>	<p>12 days of coaching and more if justified</p> <p>Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)</p> <p>1-to-1 investment readiness and outreach support for startups, SMEs</p> <p>Up to 50% co-funding of services from EIC ecosystem partners to a maximum value of €60.000 per beneficiary</p> <p>Up to €60.000 support for pilots and testing with public and private buyers</p>
<p><b>EIC Awardees</b> that have been assessed under the Horizon 2020 EIC Pilot (2018-2020) <sup>185</sup> including beneficiaries and associated partners of EIC grants and recipients of EIC Fund Investments.</p>	<p>12 days of coaching and more if justified</p> <p>Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)</p> <p>Up to 50% co-funding of services from EIC ecosystem partners to a maximum value of €60.000 per beneficiary</p>

<sup>185</sup> Except Phase 1 beneficiaries

Horizon Europe <b>Seal of Excellence</b> and <b>Sovereignty (STEP) Seal</b> holders awarded under EIC calls, and the EIC Pre-Accelerator call	3 days of coaching Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply) Up to 50% co-funding of services from EIC ecosystem partners to a maximum value of €60.000 per beneficiary
Companies selected under the <b>EIC Scaling Club</b> initiative	Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)
Companies selected for investments under the <b>Scaleup Europe Fund</b> that comply with the eligibility conditions applicable to EIC support.	Possibility to apply to all BAS activities
<b>Recipients of support under Women TechEU</b>	Can join EIC Women Leadership Programme including 3 days of coaching, training and mentoring. Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)
<b>Awardees of the call 'Support for the Ukrainian Tech SMEs and startups' under the EIC 2025 Work Programme</b>	3 days of coaching Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)
<b>EIC Pre-Accelerator call</b> Awardees <sup>186</sup>	12 days of coaching Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply) 1-to-1 investment readiness and outreach support
Beneficiaries who have been assessed under an <b>EIC call within Horizon Europe (2021, 2022, 2023)</b> , successfully meeting all award criteria, and subsequently receiving funding through alternative schemes based on this evaluation	3 days of coaching Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)
<b>Beneficiaries and recipients of support</b> under calls from other parts of Horizon Europe which foresee budget contributions to enable provision of EIC BAS services	12 days of coaching Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply) 1-to-1 investment readiness and outreach support

<sup>186</sup> Pre-Accelerator call included in the 2025 Horizon Europe widening work programme (WIDERA)

<b>Applicants</b> to the EIC Accelerator who have succeeded at the short application stage, and those submitted through a Fast Track or certified Plug In scheme	3 days of coaching
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The BAS service offering consists of core services funded through the work programmes, and a larger portfolio of services available from EIC Ecosystem partners.

The BAS services funded through the work programmes are specifically tailored to EIC Awardees and seal-of-excellence holders needs and the changing nature of markets and overall economic environment. The flexibility for piloting new services and approaches and adapting or even stopping the ones that are not efficient is built in all BAS implementing contracts.

Unless otherwise specified in the specific calls, the eligible entities can apply to EICs BAS services through open calls published on the [EIC Community Platform](#). The selection is done based on assessment from business partners or market experts or on a first come first served basis.

The BAS services funded through the EIC work programmes cover among other things:

- ✦ **Coaching**
- ✦ support to attend European and international **business trade fairs and** expand business in new global markets (see Global Business Expansion below;
- ✦ Support to pilot and **close deals with corporates** (EIC Corporate Partnership 4.0 below)
- ✦ Training and support for start-ups and SMEs in winning contracts from **public and private sector innovation procurement** tenders and funding to test products with innovation procurers (EIC Innovation Procurement )
- ✦ Strengthen skills, knowledge and network needed to **scale up** (EIC Scaling Club 2.0, see below)
- ✦ Dedicated support for **female founders and researchers** (EIC Women Leadership <sup>187</sup>)
- ✦ Dedicated **Business and Innovation Acceleration Services** to EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition beneficiaries<sup>188</sup> supporting transition from lab to market. (Tech2Market)

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<sup>187</sup> The action will accept up to 20% of participants coming from EIT supported entities, providing them with EIC coaching, mentoring and training in exchange for the reciprocal treatment for women from EIC supported projects and companies accessing relevant EIT female entrepreneurship support schemes.

<sup>188</sup> In certain cases (e.g., available places, etc.) eligibility for Tech2Market BAS may be extended to Horizon Europe beneficiaries eligible to apply to EIC Transition. Pathfinder and Transition beneficiaries will have priority.

- ✦ **Visibility of beneficiaries and one-to-one services to find co-investors** through a [digital platform](#) listing all EIC Accelerator, Transition, EIC STEP Scaleup and EIC Pre-Accelerator companies.
- ✦ Support in **Environmental, Social and Governance** related reporting.

Additional to the BAS services funded through the EIC work programmes the services provided by **EIC Ecosystem partners** (see Glossary) offer eligible entities access to an even larger portfolio of **high quality, topic, or sector specific services** from service providers from all over Europe. The services are for example incubation and acceleration actions, legal and IP expertise, access to testing and research infrastructure, matchmaking with large corporates and investors, and many more. The services from EIC Ecosystems partners can be accessed through the [EIC Service Catalogue](#). The catalogue provides information of the services, conditions to apply and eventual costs.

The EIC BAS services and the infrastructure to provide access to EIC Ecosystem partners are funded through multi-year procurements<sup>189</sup>, expert contracts (coaching) and Coordination and Support Actions (CSA) some of which were financed through previous Work Programmes. The following actions pertaining to BAS services will be funded in 2026.

## VII.1 EIC business coaches (direct EIC services)

**Business coaching** focuses on providing insights on business development and guidance to improve business performance. EIC coaching is mandatory part of EIC funding. Beneficiaries are encouraged to choose their coach/coaches early in their project to maximise the benefits.

Coaching topics cover the entire entrepreneurial and innovation endeavour from challenging the value proposition and business model, IP management, data protection, improving strategy and investor business case, building the team and leadership, to international expansion. EIC business coaching is provided to eligible entities:

- ✦ At full proposal application stage for EIC Accelerator, three days of remote coaching.<sup>190</sup>
- ✦ For EIC Awardees, business coaching is accessible via an EIC Ecosystem Partner or directly from the EIC if no suitable alternative is available. Twelve days of

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<sup>189</sup> BAS contractors implementing BAS services will receive access to EIC data and business workflow infrastructure and EIC and EIC Fund relevant data like equity amount and co-investment information on a needs-to-know basis.

<sup>190</sup> Applicants are encouraged to use the EIC coaching services. It is nevertheless up to the applicants to decide if and when to use the coaching services.

remote coaching<sup>191</sup> are offered to EIC Awardees, EIC Pre-Accelerator Awardees. In exceptional cases (e.g., scaling up), this can be extended beyond the 12 days.

- ★ Other entities eligible to receive BAS services receive three days of remote coaching. Exceptionally, coaching can be offered to beneficiaries of other EIC or Horizon Europe actions.

The eligible companies/teams will receive an invitation to use the Coach Matching Tool. Beneficiaries can use this tool to find and select coaches that suit their needs.

In all cases the EIC will request to the coach and coachee a structured coaching report/survey after the coaching has been provided, to ensure the services are of the highest quality.

The EIC coaching services are provided by highly qualified business coaches selected against strict evaluation criteria included in the continuously open call for expression of interest in accordance with Article 242 of the Financial Regulation<sup>192</sup>, and new coaches are selected when necessary. The selected coaches register their profile and expertise in the Commission's corporate database.

Applicants to provide EIC coaching services must have: at least five years of professional experience as investor, board advisor or in managerial positions with responsibilities in developing business innovation; and at least five years of coaching experience supporting new business development within a corporate's departments or with start-ups. The fields of new business development include technical expertise as well as practical involvement on go-to-market processes, building/acquisition of strategic partnerships and organizational and financial development.

EIC business coaches have the task to support the recipients of BAS depending on their needs, assess with them improvement opportunities and assist them in their process of learning and solving complex business development issues. As highly qualified specialized business coaches, their fees will be proportionate to their high-level strategic support, and it will closely mirror the international level of fees for experts performing tasks of similar nature. In this respect, EIC business coaches will receive EUR 1 000 per day of coaching (corresponding to EUR 500 per half day), which is considered to be proportionate to the specific services that EIC business coaches will provide, which are more complex than the standard tasks of experts evaluators.

**Type of action:** Expert contracts action.

**Indicative budget:** EUR 2 million

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<sup>191</sup> Coaching involving travel may take place in duly justified cases when the physical presence of the coach is expected to bring significantly better results, mainly for coaching to EIC awardees. Coaching 2025 budget may also be used for the Horizon 2020 EIC legacy projects.

<sup>192</sup> EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509

**Indicative timetable:** Q1 2026

## VII.2 International Trade Fairs 4.0

This action will allow to select EIC Awardees and eligible entities that are SMEs that have market ready solutions to attend European and international business trade fairs. The aim is to support their commercialisation strategy in European and foreign markets, and to strengthen the EU innovation brand around the world. The action will also support for strategic priorities for international outreach following the Startup and Scaleup Strategy and other relevant Union policies. The provided business services will include exhibition space within the 'EIC Pavilion' in relevant fairs, market training sessions for the participating companies, organisation of business meetings at the fair, company promotion, the organisation of side events and sessions at the fair.

**Type of action:** Public procurement.

**Indicative budget:** EUR 7 million

**Indicative timetable:** Q1 2026

## VII.3 Financial support to access services from Ecosystem partners

The EIC seeks partnerships with EIC Ecosystem Partners (see Glossary). The goal is to provide all EIC Awardees and other eligible entities with access to existing or bespoke services from the best service providers around Europe for the incubation, acceleration, growth and scale up of innovative tech companies, such as for instance: pitching and networking events, matchmaking to customers and investors, specialised trainings (e.g. on intellectual property protection, technology due diligence etc.), innovation boot camps and summer schools, support to validate/accelerate a technology, mentorship, business coaching, co-investment opportunities, data mining or mapping services e.g. of tech infrastructures, piloting plants, testbeds etc.

This action covers the financial support in the form of lump sum grants to EIC Awardees aiming at co-funding access to services from Ecosystem Partners. It is complemented by a procurement of services (awarded under a different Work programme) to support the Agency with the selection and quality control of ecosystem partners and managing the catalogue of services.

### **Scope of the action – financial support to third parties**

The standard admissibility and eligibility conditions for Coordination and Support Actions (CSAs), as outlined in Annex 2, will apply to this call. The CSA Beneficiary will provide financial support to EIC Awardees in the form of lump sums, covering up to 70% of the cost of access to R&D infrastructure, prototyping and IP and legal support and up to 50% of the cost of all other types of services received from EIC Ecosystem Partners. A continuously open

call will be implemented for the selection of EIC Awardees, ensuring timely and flexible access to support. Applications should propose a limited number of maximum lump sum amounts, corresponding to different categories of services, as defined in the EIC Service Catalogue.

The EIC Awardees having access to this support are as defined in the Glossary and for the purposes of this action include also Awardees selected through calls under the H2020 EIC Pilot (2018-2020)<sup>193</sup> and entities awarded a Seal of Excellence under the EIC Work Programmes and the EIC Pre-Accelerator call under WIDERA Work Programme under Horizon Europe.

The CSA Beneficiary will launch a continuously open call, inviting eligible entities to apply for a fixed-amount lump sum<sup>194</sup> under this action. Applications of the eligible entities submitted to the CSA beneficiary must reference a specific partner from the online EIC Ecosystem Partner Catalogue, and a prove of approval from this Partner. The application may concern a service to be still implemented or already delivered services (no later than 6 months from the accomplishment of the service). Lump sum grants will be awarded by the CSA beneficiary on a “first-come, first-served” basis, determined by the electronic timestamp of the successful application submission, and subject to eligibility checks and confirmation of the absence of double funding. In addition, the CSA Beneficiary will be responsible for disseminating information about the call and establishing a dedicated helpdesk to reply to the questions from EIC Awardees and other eligible entities. The application system put in place should be lean and should not request to create a full profile on already existing platforms.

The CSA Beneficiary will be responsible for monitoring the services received by the EIC Awardees, run the quality survey directly after the end of the service and impact survey 6 months after the end of the service. Both surveys should be validated with the Agency.

The maximum size of cumulative support allocated to a recipient (or third party) under this action is EUR 60,000.

The CSA Beneficiary needs to put in place a real-time reporting and monitoring system about applications received and funding awarded per EIC Awardee and other eligible entities as well as aggregated data displayed in dashboards, including but not limited to geographical distribution, type of service, financial support received (value of the lump sums, type and geographical distribution of partners, results of the quality and impact surveys etc). The exact content of the dashboard will be defined at the beginning of the project. By the end of the project all data gathered during its implementation will be made available to the Agency following template provided by the Agency.

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<sup>193</sup> Except Phase 1 beneficiaries

<sup>194</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision\\_he\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf)

The CSA Beneficiary will be required to work in close coordination with the Agency and the contractor responsible for implementing the call for Ecosystem Partners and EIC service catalogue, as well as with other EU services as necessary. This collaboration will include participation in regular coordination meetings and the timely provision of relevant information to support the effective implementation of the action. In addition, the CSA Beneficiary will contribute, in cooperation with the Agency, to the preparation of an “uptake and impact report” summarising the overall activities and outcomes of the EIC Ecosystem Partnership Action.

The CSA Beneficiary must ensure sound financial management and applicants must clearly outline in their proposals the mechanisms that will be put in place for the effective and efficient administration of financial support, including measures to prevent misuse or abuse. If admissible and eligible, the proposals for the Coordination and Support Actions will be evaluated and ranked against the criteria as described in Annex 2.

The funding rate of the CSA is 100% of the eligible costs.

At least 80% of the total budget to be funded by the EIC must be allocated to financial support to third parties (the EIC Awardees and other eligible entities). An effective duration of around 2-3 years would enable the project to achieve the desired objectives.

### **Expected outcomes and impacts**

This action should facilitate for EIC Awardees and other eligible entities to access the best competence, ecosystems and infrastructure in Europe for their specific need, and at the same time provide the conditions for ecosystems to build critical mass to provide highly specialised and excellent ecosystem services.

This action should:

- ✦ Increase access of EIC Awardees and other eligible entities to new partners and services with sector specific knowledge, expertise, equipment/R&I infrastructure, networks or markets;
- ✦ Enable faster transition of innovations from lab to market and scale up of EIC companies, increasing the chances for return on EIC investments;
- ✦ Create synergies and further spread excellence within the European Innovation Ecosystem
- ✦ Allow EIC Ecosystem Partners access to a deal flow of top-level European innovators (i.e. EIC awardees).

The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that will be used to monitor the action shall include as a minimum:

- ✦ “Time to inform” measuring time from application of an EIC Awardee and other eligible entity to the notification of the confirmation about lump sum award;
- ✦ “Time to pay” the lump sum (from reception of the service to payment); and
- ✦ EIC Awardees using the lump sum scheme (target at least 20% of eligible group)
- ✦ 90% of entities receiving financial support evaluating application system as lean and easy.

Further KPIs can be developed in the proposal for this action and will be taken into consideration during the evaluation stage.

**Type of action:** Coordination and Support Action (CSA). This action will be evaluated partially or fully by representatives of Union institutions or bodies, according to Article 29 paragraph 1 of Horizon Europe Regulation. The conditions are described in Annex 2.

**Number of projects expected to be funded:** 1

**Call opening:** Q1 2026

**Deadline for applications:** March 2026

**Indicative budget:** EUR 4.5 million. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of proposals requesting other amounts if duly justified.

## VII.4 EIC Scaling Club 2.0

The focus for EIC Scaling Club 2.0 is to increase success and support the growth of the top deep tech companies in Europe, by strengthen the skills, knowledge and network of peers, investors and customers needed for growth.

EIC Scaling Club 2.0 should support a minimum of 70 deep tech companies with the potential to scale up as global leaders or potential unicorns.<sup>195</sup> Minimum 35 of these companies should come from the EIC portfolio (primarily EIC Fund portfolio) and the remaining deep tech companies should come from similar programmes at Member State and Associated Country level.

The identified companies, ready for series B+ funding rounds, should demonstrate credible high-growth potential and should develop cutting-edge solutions in key technological areas, contributing to Europe’s technological autonomy and supporting EU’s strategic priorities, e.g. AI, advanced materials, quantum, biotech, robotics and space technologies, energy and decarbonisation, as specified in the Competitive Compass for the EU.<sup>196</sup> The cohort of supported companies, active in diverse sectors, should be geographically and

<sup>195</sup> The final list of participating companies will have to be approved by the Commission.

<sup>196</sup> A Competitiveness Compass for the EU, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions, COM(2025) 30 final. January 2025.

gender diverse, engaging companies from across the EU and Horizon Europe Associated countries and a balanced portfolio of women-led companies.

The initiative should provide a package of growth-focused capability building support through bespoke networking and learning among peers and partners, as well as facilitating outreach. The initiative should also enhance visibility of the selected companies and the European scaleup scene.

### **The activities**

The package of growth-focused support to the identified companies, should focus on:

- ✦ strengthening investment readiness
- ✦ strengthening operational excellence
- ✦ facilitate outreach to new customers, business partners and market (e.g. within EU as well as expansion to foreign markets)
- ✦ facilitate access to (late-stage) financing
- ✦ facilitate access to talents.

The initiative should leverage the existing networks and build on the success and methodologies of its predecessor action, [the EIC Scaling Club](#).

For the implementation, the action should:

- ✦ be tailored to the specific needs of Europe's deep tech companies in various sectors. It should be delivered in an agile way while, properly balancing companies' engagement and the action's added value.
- ✦ be implemented in strong conjunction with the EIC Business Acceleration Services, and the network of EIC ecosystem partners, exploiting synergies and cross-promoting relevant actions, such as the international trade fairs, matchmaking with corporates, innovation procurement, investor outreach, etc.
- ✦ support participating companies' engagement in relevant scale-up schemes at EU level (EIC Step Scale Up, InvestEU initiative, EU Innovation Fund, etc.) and national levels (soft-landing schemes).
- ✦ play a proactive role in helping EIC build growth, expertise and leadership in the field of scaling up companies, by contributing to a better understanding of concrete challenges and needs of Europe's deep tech scale-ups and knowledge on the most efficient interventions to overcome the challenges.
- ✦ engage the EIC Scaling Club alumni companies, leveraging their scale-up experience, insights, and networks to strengthen the ecosystem for new cohorts. Alumni companies can act as mentors or peer advisors, providing real-world perspectives and fostering a culture of collaboration. An ongoing engagement of alumni

companies would not only reinforce community ties but also support the alumni's own continued growth through visibility and access to new opportunities.

- ✦ should effectively promote the participating companies as Europe's most promising tech champions and global leaders. The action's branding and visual identity should be closely linked with the EIC, contributing to reinforcement of respective actions and all communication activities should be closely coordinated with EIC communication actions.

The proposal must describe the suggested methodology, both for identifying the supported companies and for scaling them up. The proposal should include the concrete set of proposed scale-up support actions, strengthened by the rationale for their implementation and added-value. It should also suggest a methodology for alumni engagement and visibility enhancement.

### **Expected impact**

The action is expected to generate the following impact:

- ✦ **Strengthening growth skills** through mentoring and curated peer learning on fundamental growth barriers such as inclusive work culture, organisation, talent attraction, international expansion, and funding.
- ✦ **Increase the number and value of investments deals** from strategic European and non-European, co-investments partners, such as public and private investors (including National Promotional Banks and Institutions or/and Regional Banks that provide late-stage investment), including funding through initial public offerings (IPOs) and acquisitions of the participating companies.
- ✦ **Increase the number and value of commercial deals** from customers and through strategic partners, e.g. corporates, buyers, infrastructure and service providers, within EU as well as in foreign markets.
- ✦ Strengthening attractiveness to **attract highly skilled talents**.
- ✦ **Building a strong peer-network** of Europe's top-performing deep tech founders and key mentors.
- ✦ **Strengthen visibility of supported companies** and the image of the European deep tech scaleup scene.

### **Governance**

The implementing consortium should:

- ✦ demonstrate expertise, experience and means to foster substantial growth of European deep tech scaleups.
- ✦ suggest a suitable set of KPIs to measure and report impact. The results should be reported twice a year to the EU commission and the Agency.

- ✦ establish systematic data gathering, that ensures full respect of the applicable data protection legal framework, in order to evaluate impact and refine future actions.
- ✦ establish a steering group. The members of the steering group should be selected in collaboration with the commission and include representatives from all part of the ecosystem, as well as the commission.
- ✦ ensure that all communication is clearly branded as EIC actions and approved by the EIC communication teams.
- ✦ ensure synergies with:
  - other EIC activities (e.g., EIC Innovation Procurement, EIC ecosystem partnership, Corporate Partnership programme 4.0 and Co-investment Support).
  - relevant EU industry alliances, missions, and innovation ecosystems.

**Type of action:** Coordination and Support Action (CSA). This action will be evaluated partially or fully by representatives of Union institutions or bodies, according to Article 29 paragraph 1 of Horizon Europe Regulation.

**Number of projects expected to be funded:** 1

**Call opening:** Q1 2026

**Deadline for applications:** June 2026

**Indicative budget:** EUR 4 million

## VII.5 Strategic access to innovation procurement

Objective:

This action is part of the EIC Innovation Procurement Programme, which provides a comprehensive range of support to EIC awardees in accessing procurement markets across Europe and internationally. It aims to:

- 1) further enhance the capacity of EIC supported innovators to act as potential suppliers in public and private procurements,
- 2) foster their engagement with buyers, and
- 3) accelerate the commercialisation of EU-funded cutting-edge innovations, particularly those developed by EIC's top-notch innovators.

Scope:

Building on the initial EIC Innovation Procurement Programme launched in 2024, this action will strengthen and scale up strategic support to ensure that procurement becomes a viable and sustainable route to market for EIC-backed innovations.

In line with the EU's Start-up and Scale-up Strategy, which recognises innovation procurement as a key instrument to foster the growth of innovative SMEs and modernise public services, the action will address both supply and demand sides of procurement ecosystems.

The support will indicatively include:

Continued provision of training and guidance, including Innovation Procurement Academies and the EIC Innovation Procurement Toolkit, to equip EIC beneficiaries with the skills to engage effectively in procurement markets.

Targeted assistance to public buyers, including cities, agencies, and national authorities, to design and implement innovation-friendly procurement procedures.

Facilitated matchmaking between EIC beneficiaries and public/private buyers through tailored brokerage events and a growing Community of Buyers hosted on the EIC platform.

One-on-one support to EIC innovators, including opportunity scanning, tender preparation assistance, and bid submission support to maximise successful participation in procurement processes.

Pilot support to connect Project Managers and buyers to jointly identify needs and validate EIC-developed solutions, in particular in the areas under Advanced Innovation Challenges.

Exploration of regulatory sandboxes and demand-driven pilots to de-risk the path towards procurement and deployment of innovative solutions.

Reinforcement of synergies with other EIC Business Acceleration Services, including the EIC Global Expansion Programme and international trade fair participation, to position procurement as a global commercialisation channel.

Expected Impact:

Increased participation and success of EIC beneficiaries in procurement processes across strategic sectors and geographies.

Strengthened capacity of public and private buyers to identify and procure innovative solutions.

Greater visibility and commercial traction of EIC-funded innovations through procurement.

Contribution to the development of a more innovation-friendly procurement culture in Europe, aligned with industrial and technological sovereignty objectives.

**Type of action:** Public procurement.

**Indicative budget:** EUR 4 million

**Indicative timetable:** Q1 2026

## VII.6 Corporate partnership 4.0

The EU Startups and Scaleups Strategy has announced that the Commission will create a European Corporate Network to better integrate large companies, corporate venture investors and corporate procurers into the EU's innovation ecosystem and benefit from innovative solutions developed by startups. This network will bridge the gap between established corporations and agile startups and scaleups, fostering mutual benefits and accelerating the adoption of new technologies.

The Network members would advise on related policy, engage in matchmaking with startups and make a voluntary commitment to privilege European startups when they engage, invest and procure innovative solutions, especially when they use public funding or when they operate critical research or technology infrastructures. This commitment aims to establish a preferential environment for European startups, particularly within strategic sectors, thereby reinforcing regional innovation, enhancing economic security, and reducing dependence on non-EU entities, aligning with the "Strategic Open Strategic Autonomy" priority. .

This action aims to support the announcement made in the Startups and Scaleups Strategy. Considering the scope of the EIC, this action includes the following objectives:

- ✦ support the Commission to establish and manage a **European Corporate Network** and to support Fora and working groups of this network to facilitate the development and sharing of best practice; and support the organisation of activities designed following the conclusions of the network and the Commission, notably multicorporate business matchmaking, advanced market commitments from the corporates, tracking of companies progress against voluntary commitments, and challenges from the corporates to the startups to act as lead markets for innovative solutions.
- ✦ Development and upgrade of the **EIC (Multi-)Corporate Days**, bridging the gap between EIC-backed startups and scaleups and large corporations through challenge-based engagements. The EIC Multi-Corporate Days will be organised in priority areas where deep tech innovations can support the transformation of European corporates and in line with the activities of the European corporate network.

These objectives will be implemented in close partnership with the Commission and the Agency.

**Type of action:** Public procurement

**Call opening:** Q1 2026

**Indicative budget :** EUR 4.5 million

## VIII. EIC Prizes

### VIII.1 The European Prize for Women Innovators

#### Objectives and scope

Facing fast-paced developing technologies and science, it is crucial to involve women and girls in the design, development and up-take of innovative solutions. Achieving gender equality and diversity benefits not only individuals, but also increases the performance of business, research and innovation.

Nevertheless, women continue to face multiple barriers, in bringing new ideas to the market and raising capital for their companies. This negatively affects the success rate of women-founded businesses and perpetuates the lack of awareness about the systemic nature of gender inequality. Hence, women's efforts and contributions to science and innovation should be encouraged and supported.

The [Political Guidelines for the European Commission for 2024-2029](#) underscore a strengthened commitment to gender equality. Building on this momentum, the Commission is set to renew its [Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#)<sup>200</sup>, which has been instrumental in promoting equality across all EU policies, and will continue to drive progress towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

Within the first 100 days of the present Commission's mandate, the adoption of the Competitiveness Compass paves a way toward an effective and equal [Union of skills](#), promoting gender equality, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. It aims to harness the full potential of talents in Europe, by diversifying the workforce and thus enhancing the EU competitiveness and more inclusive economy. Additionally, the [EU Roadmap for Women's Rights](#), states a clear objective of promoting gender-equal access to finances and economic opportunities, including entrepreneurship.

As outlined in the New European Innovation Agenda<sup>197</sup>, supporting women innovators strengthens the European research and innovation system and creates gender-equal working environments where all talents can thrive. By integrating a gender dimension in projects, research quality is improved as well as the production of the knowledge, technologies and innovations.

The European Prize for Women Innovators celebrates the women entrepreneurs behind Europe's game-changing innovations, so that they may inspire other women and girls realise their full potential as the EU's future scientists, innovators, and tech leaders.

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<sup>197</sup>[https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/support-policy-making/shaping-eu-research-and-innovation-policy/new-european-innovation-agenda\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/support-policy-making/shaping-eu-research-and-innovation-policy/new-european-innovation-agenda_en)

This prize supports a culture within research and innovation organisations and companies allowing women to become the innovators and entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

The prize is awarded every year to women from across the EU and countries associated to Horizon Europe, who have transformed their ideas into disruptive innovations to benefit people and the planet and who are inspiring leaders.

As for the previous edition, the 2027 European Prize for Women Innovators is organised in coordination between the Agency and the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT). The winners are chosen by an independent expert jury.

There are two EIC prize categories funded under this Work Programme: Women Innovators and Rising Innovators. In the first category, three prizes of EUR 100 000, EUR 70 000 and EUR 50 000 are awarded to the three highest-ranked applications. In the second category, three prizes of EUR 50 000, EUR 30 000 and EUR 20 000 are awarded to the three highest-ranked applications from promising 'Rising Innovators' under the age of 35. (The EIT Women Leadership category will be funded and managed by the EIT in coordination with the above prizes.)

### Eligibility criteria

All applicants must comply with the following eligibility criteria to participate:

1. The applicant<sup>198</sup> must be a woman (natural person);<sup>199</sup>
2. The applicant must be legally residing<sup>200</sup> in an EU Member State, including overseas countries and territories (OCTs) or a country associated to Horizon Europe;
3. The applicant must be the founder or co-founder<sup>201</sup> of the company or organisation<sup>202</sup>;
4. The company or organisation must be established in an EU Member State including overseas countries and territories, (OCTs) or a country associated to Horizon Europe, and registered or incorporated<sup>203</sup> at least one year before the call year<sup>204</sup>.

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<sup>198</sup> The applicant must apply as a natural person and not as a legal entity

<sup>199</sup> This Prize celebrates women in all their diversity. The word 'woman' equates to a cis woman, or a transgender woman who is legally defined as a woman.

<sup>200</sup> A natural person is legally residing in a given country, if she is recognised as a resident under national law in that country, and proof of such recognition can be provided upon request.

<sup>201</sup> A co-founder is somebody who has started the company (i.e. "founded" the company) with at least one other person, and proof of this can be provided upon request.

<sup>202</sup> Self-employment is not acceptable.

<sup>203</sup> The company or organisation is formed and registered with the appropriate statutory authority of the country as a 'company or corporation', and proof can be provided upon request.

<sup>204</sup> The company must be registered or incorporated before 1 January 2025.

5. Applicants who have already received an EU or Euratom prize cannot receive a second prize for the same activities.

In addition to the above, those applying for the Rising Innovators category must be aged under 35 at the start of the call year.<sup>205</sup> There is no age limit to apply for the Women Innovators category, though applicants eligible for several prize categories can only apply to one.

Applicants are expected to provide proof of eligibility upon request.

Applicants must support their written application with an inspiring video message about themselves and their achievements, lasting no more than 90 seconds.

The jury's assessment will be based on Parts A and B of the application form, as well as the video submitted by the applicant.

### Award criteria

The prize is awarded to the applicants who in the opinion of the jury best address the following criteria:

1. **Breakthrough innovation** – the company or organisation founded or cofounded by the applicant is developing a breakthrough innovation focusing, among others, on Deeptech and Science Technology Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) fields. In presenting their innovation, the applicant should demonstrate what makes this innovation breakthrough in relation to other existing solutions.
2. **Impact** – this innovation addresses a real need or challenge, with significant benefits for people and/or the planet. The applicant will demonstrate how the company's or organisation's current performance and growth is driving a positive socio-economic and/or environmental impact, among others, in terms of wellbeing, education, profit, or job creation.
3. **Inspiration** – the applicant is an inspiring leader, who has played a pivotal role in the success of the company or organisation and is a role model empowering other women and girls in realising their full potential. The applicant should, for example, highlight her efforts to promote gender balance within the company, organisation or beyond, and/or to advocate for innovative initiatives that have positively contributed to gender equality in, e.g., access to finance, networks, product design, education and contributes to a gender-responsive innovation.

The jury will review and score all eligible applications and invite the shortlisted applicants to a hearing in front of the jury members to defend their application. This hearing may take place remotely.

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<sup>205</sup> Those applying for the Rising Innovator category must be born on or after 1 January 1991.

Further details on the evaluation and award criteria will be specified in the rules for this contest published at the launch of the contest. For the common 'Rules of Contest for Prizes' please see the Funding & Tenders Portal.

### Expected results

The prize will boost public awareness of the potential, importance and contribution of women to the EU innovation ecosystem and create strong role models, inspiring more women to become innovators themselves.

### Type of Action: Recognition Prize

#### Indicative Timetable:

Stages	Indicative period
<b>Opening of the contest</b>	Q1 – Q3 2026
<b>Deadline for submission of proposals</b>	Q3 – Q4 2026
<b>Award of the prize</b>	Q1 – Q2 2027

#### Indicative Budget:

Category	Amount
<b>'Women Innovators' category</b>	
1 <sup>st</sup> prize	EUR 100 000
2 <sup>nd</sup> prize	EUR 70 000
3 <sup>rd</sup> prize	EUR 50 000
<b>'Rising Innovators' category</b>	
1 <sup>st</sup> prize	EUR 50 000
2 <sup>nd</sup> prize	EUR 30 000
3 <sup>rd</sup> prize	EUR 20 000

## VIII.2 The European Capital of Innovation Awards (iCapital)

Cities and/or towns are faced with most severe societal and sustainability challenges but do also have the means to develop, promote, and apply effective innovative

solutions. They are the place where ideas, people, public and private actors meet and engage to improve the quality of life of citizens. They are the natural playground where breakthrough innovations flourish and nourish. They provide ground to experiment new technologies and products in a real environment, their interaction with people and their added value.

## Objectives and Scope

The traditional city innovation ecosystem is opening to new models of innovation engaging citizens, ensuring their involvement in the decision-making process, and reinforcing democracy and rights. An increasing number of cities are acting as test beds for innovation and run people-driven initiatives to find solutions to societal challenges, such as climate change, digitalisation, sustainable growth or social cohesion, including through new endeavours such as nature-based solutions and EU Missions

The public domain is particularly challenged with finding effective ways to ensure the mainstreaming of these practices into the ordinary urban development process. Successful practices are particularly crucial to enhance the city's capacity to attract and retain new resources, funds and talents to stimulate the growth of breakthrough innovations. Moreover, collaboration and strengthening synergies among innovation ecosystems boost cities' development and resilience to tackle urban challenges and inspires many other cities follow a similar path.

The New European Innovation Agenda<sup>206</sup> sets out a vision for harnessing the power of innovation to drive economic growth, social progress, and contribute to the green and digital transition in Europe. The agenda emphasizes the need for strategic investments in key technologies, including deep tech, and for strengthening and better connecting innovation ecosystems through stronger collaboration between regions, to close the innovation divide.

For this reason, the European Capital of Innovation Awards will recognize the cities' role as catalysers of the local innovation ecosystem and will stimulate new activities aimed at boosting game-changing innovation.

## Categories

In this edition, the European Capital of Innovation Awards will feature two categories.

The first one, the **European Capital of Innovation** category, would include cities which have a population of minimum 250 000 inhabitants and, based on the cumulative criteria set out below, would reward the winner (ranked 1st) with EUR 1 million and two runners-up (ranked 2nd and 3rd) with EUR 100 000 each one.

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<sup>206</sup> [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022DC0332](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022DC0332)

The second one, the **European Rising Innovative City** category, would include cities with a population of 50 000 and up to 249 999 inhabitants; and, based on the cumulative criteria set out below, would reward the winner (ranked 1<sup>st</sup>) with EUR 500 000 and the two runners-up (ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>) with EUR 50 000 each one.

Each application must contain a specific endorsement to apply signed by the city Mayor (or the equivalent highest political representative).

### Eligibility criteria

1. The candidate cities <sup>207</sup> must be located in one of the Member States or Associated Countries to Horizon Europe.
2. For the category of the **European Capital of Innovation**, the candidate city must have a minimum population of 250 000 inhabitants. In countries where there are no such cities, the city coming closest to 250 000 inhabitants is eligible to apply for the European Capital of Innovation category, provided that it has a minimum population of 50 000 inhabitants and that the city did not apply for the European Rising Innovative City category. The candidate cities for the **European Rising Innovative City** category must have a population of 50 000 and up to 249,999 inhabitants. In countries where there are no such cities, the largest city by number of inhabitants is eligible.
3. Winners of former European Capital of Innovation Awards editions, as well as runners-up of the edition 2026 are not eligible. This does not apply to previous finalist cities.
4. Applicants that have already received an EU or Euratom prize cannot receive a second prize for the same activities.

### Award criteria

The award is launched and managed by the Agency. For this yearly competition, six prizes will be awarded after closure of the contest to the applicants who, in the opinion of the jury, best address the following cumulative criteria:

1. **Experimenting** – innovative concepts, processes, tools, and governance models proving the city's commitment to act as a test-bed for innovative practices while ensuring the mainstreaming of these practices into the ordinary urban

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<sup>207</sup> A city is a Local Administrative Unit or a group of Local Administrative Units where a majority of the population lives in an urban centre of at least 50 000 inhabitants. Local Administrative Units and their respective population figures should be those set out in the latest available validated or partially validated LAU correspondence table published by Eurostat ([Local administrative units \(LAU\) - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#)) at the time of the submission of the application. Local authorities may represent one city defined as a Local Administrative Unit, or a "greater city" or Metropolitan region, taking account of Functional Urban Areas when relevant. Legal entities with separate legal personality from cities, even if founded and funded by the cities, are not eligible to apply.

development process. The applicant is expected to provide details on concrete results of the showcased initiatives.

- 2. Escalating** – promoting the acceleration of the different actors of the local innovation ecosystem, supporting growth of highly innovative start-ups and SMEs establishing innovation friendly legal framework, creating an environment that stimulates growth and attracts private and public investments, resources, diversity and talents; and driving innovation demand through efficient innovation public procurement.

The applicant is expected to provide details on concrete results of the showcased initiatives.

- 3. Ecosystem building** – unlocking cities potential as local innovation ecosystem facilitators by fostering synergies among different innovation ecosystem players, from public, industry, start-ups, civil society, citizens to academia, to contribute to the development of an innovation ecosystem within the city. The applicant is expected to provide details on concrete results of the showcased initiatives.

- 4. Expanding** – acting as a role model for other cities by supporting the dissemination and replication of tested solutions that boost the local innovation ecosystem; by promoting mutual learning, knowledge transfer and capacity building; and by enhancing cooperation and synergies between cities that are front-runners in driving the local innovation ecosystem, and those that are still exploring and testing their role as innovation enablers.

The applicant is expected to provide details on concrete results of the showcased initiatives.

- 5. City innovative vision** – applicants should demonstrate their long-term strategic vision/plan, highlighting the innovative initiatives that have positively contributed to the transformation of the city and which will further support the development of a sustainable and resilient innovation ecosystem ensuring the green and digital transition.

The applicant is expected to provide details on concrete results of the showcased initiatives. Moreover, the applicant is invited to provide information on how all showcased activities follow the innovative vision/strategy.

- 6. Citizens' rights** – the use of innovation to strengthen democracy, to protect citizens' rights, to foster social cohesion, and ensure integration with a special view on minorities, gender, disability, or race.

The applicant is expected to provide details on concrete results of the showcased initiatives.

The jury will review and score eligible applications and invite the shortlisted applicants to a hearing in front of the jury members to defend their application. This hearing may take place remotely.

Further details on the evaluation process and award criteria, as well as promotional activities will be specified in the rules for this contest published at the launch of the yearly contest.

Moreover, in this edition, the title “Capital of Innovation –iCapital- 2027” or “Rising Innovative city 2027” will be awarded in the respective category. Therefore, to celebrate the year the winning cities (ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in each category) will be invited to sign a declaration of intent<sup>208</sup> to commit on a series of actions to promote iCapital during the year.

For the common rules of contest for prizes, please see the Funding & Tenders Portal.

### **Expected results**

The European Capital of Innovation Awards aim to champion inspiring cases of municipality-enabled innovation flourishing in cities. The Awards are a prestigious recognition for city administrators who are courageous enough to open up their governance practices to experimentation, to boost innovation by all means, to be a role model for other cities, and to push the boundaries of technology for the benefit of their citizens.

In addition to the monetary reward, the prize brings high visibility in the form of renewed public interest and increased media coverage.

The award will raise the profile of the cities that have developed and implemented innovative policies; established frameworks that boost breakthrough innovation; enhanced the city attractiveness towards investors, industry, enterprises and talents; helped to open up connections and strengthen links with other cities, promoting the replication of best practices in the innovation field; enhanced citizens’ involvement in the decision-making process; and supported cities resilience.

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<sup>208</sup> Declaration of intent would be a voluntary document containing detailed information about the use of the iCapital brand, the organization and participation of events such as the opening and / or award ceremonies, info days, or the knowledge sharing with other cities, among other actions.

**Type of Action:** Recognition Prize

**Indicative budget:** the following 2026 budget will be allocated as follows:

<b>European Capital of Innovation winner</b>	<b>EUR 1 000 000</b>
<b>European Capital of Innovation 1<sup>st</sup> runner-up</b>	EUR 100 000
<b>European Capital of Innovation 2<sup>nd</sup> runner-up</b>	EUR 100 000
<b>European Rising Innovative City winner</b>	<b>EUR 500 000</b>
<b>European Rising Innovative City 1<sup>st</sup> runner-up</b>	50 000
<b>European Rising Innovative City 2<sup>nd</sup> runner-up</b>	50 000

**Indicative timetable of contest(s)**

<b>Stages</b>	<b>Date and time or indicative period</b>
<b>Opening of the contest</b>	Q1-Q2 2026
<b>Deadline for submission of application</b>	Q2-Q3 2026
<b>Award of the prize</b>	Q4 2026 – Q1 2027

## IX. Other Actions

### IX.1 Scaleup Europe Fund (SEF)

#### Introduction

Europe has made great progress in generating startup companies in key technology areas from its strong research base. The EIC instruments and particularly Accelerator have supported a larger number of startups to progress their innovations. However, a number of European startups in strategically important areas cannot secure the funding they need, when they reach the growth stage of scaling up, or are reliant on non-European sources of funds creating risks for economic security. This concerns in particular larger financing amounts which are beyond the scope of the EIC Accelerator call and STEP call under this work programme.

**Europe's Startup and Scaleup Strategy**, published on 28 May 2025<sup>209</sup>, aims to address Europe's scaling challenge and make Europe a leading destination in the world for launching and growing global technology-driven companies.

One of the strategy's key flagship actions and introduced as political priority by Commission President is the Scaleup Europe Fund, a new fund aimed at making major investments in fast-growing companies in strategic technology areas.

#### Objective

The objective of the Scaleup Europe Fund will be to invest at growth and scaleup stages in promising European companies in **strategic technology areas** and **across all parts of Europe**, responding to the urgent need for Europe to boost investments in scaleups and contribute to **closing the late-stage funding gap** in Europe. Through providing direct investments in strategically important companies, it will complement other initiatives such as the European Technology Champions Initiative that address the late-stage funding gap through an indirect, Fund of Funds approach. To reach the scale needed for a diversified portfolio of major investments, the Fund will be set up in a way that is attractive for other investors, in particular private investors, such that they can benefit from investing at growth stage.

To achieve these objectives the Scaleup Europe Fund will operate as a market-based, privately managed and privately co-financed growth fund investing in major European-led investment rounds.

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<sup>209</sup> COM(2025) 270 final

The contribution to the Scaleup Europe Fund from the EU budget will be complemented and amplified by investments from a number of other investors that commit to the same objectives. In this way the contribution of EUR 1 billion from the EIC (of which EUR 600 million from this Work Programme and an additional EUR 400 million subject to the 2027 EIC Work programme) to the Scaleup Europe Fund aims to attract EUR 4 billion from other investors to reach a capitalisation of approximately EUR 5 billion<sup>210</sup>. This capitalisation strengthens the capacity to make a diversified portfolio of major investments (detailed below) across technology areas and different countries.

## Scope

The Scaleup Europe Fund will invest in scaleup and growth stage companies active in developing and/ or deploying strategic technology areas, covering three broad thematic domains<sup>211</sup>:

- **Digital and intelligent systems**, including artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, semiconductors, advanced computing, robotics and autonomous systems.
- **Physical and industrial systems**, including clean and secure energy technologies, advanced manufacturing, space and mobility technologies, and advanced materials.
- **Life and health sciences**, including biotechnology, medical technologies and agritech.

The Scaleup Europe Fund will also be able to invest in technologies with **dual-use applications**.

The Scaleup Europe Fund aims to provide direct investments (mainly equity) in eligible companies in the range of EUR 100 million (including follow on). This investment is designed to catalyse major European-led funding rounds e.g. in the range of several hundred million, through co-investments with other investors in the companies.

## Implementation approach

The Scaleup Europe Fund will be established as a dedicated compartment of the EIC Fund, alongside the existing Horizon Europe and EIC Pilot compartments. It will benefit from additional investors in capital and will operate under compartment-specific investment guidelines, governance arrangements and decision-making structures.

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<sup>210</sup> With the possibility to further increase the amount from other investors subject to the demand and agreement of existing investors in the Scaleup Europe Fund compartment.

<sup>211</sup> The Scaleup Europe Fund will contribute to the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) in these domains.

In line with Article 11(3) of Council Decision 2021/764/EU establishing the Specific Programme implementing Horizon Europe and building on the existing set of the EIC Fund, the Scaleup Europe Fund will be implemented through indirect management, with the European Investment Bank acting as the investor of record for Horizon Europe contribution for the Scaleup Europe Fund.

The EIC Fund will identify a suitable investment adviser and portfolio manager<sup>212</sup> for the Scaleup Europe Fund compartment. The appointed entity will be responsible for implementing the investment strategy and guidelines, including sourcing, due diligence, investment recommendations and decisions, investment management and divestments.

When implementing investments, the Scaleup Europe Fund will ensure that supported companies retain the majority of their value creation, including intellectual property, within the EU or Horizon Europe Associated Countries, and give preference to European exits to investments, thereby contributing to technology leadership, economic growth and job creation in Europe. Economic security safeguards, in line with the provisions in the Introduction part of this Work Programme, section "Economic Security", will be addressed through the investment guidelines and the terms of the investments.

Beyond financing, supported companies invested that comply with the eligibility conditions applicable to EIC support will be able to benefit from a broader support ecosystem fostering continued growth within Europe, including access to relevant EIC Business Acceleration Services.

### Identification and decisions on investment cases

Applications for investment support will be submitted directly to the Scaleup Europe Fund and will be assessed and decided by the independent investment adviser and portfolio manager, ensuring an open, transparent and fair selection process.

The specific terms of each investment will be considered and negotiated on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the **Scaleup Europe Fund Investment Guidelines** to be adopted by the EIC Fund prior to the commencement of operations.

Full information on how to apply as well as access to the Scaleup Europe Fund Investment Guidelines will be made available on the EIC website<sup>213</sup>.

The EU contribution to the Scaleup Europe Fund will only be used for investments that comply with the applicable Horizon Europe criteria and conditions. This includes that investments will be limited in all cases to single companies qualifying as SMEs or small mid-

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<sup>212</sup> There are no restrictions on nationality of the leadership team, however for the main CEO/managing director (or equivalent) preference can be given to nationality of an EU Member State or European Economic Area/ European Free Trade Area country.

<sup>213</sup> [European Innovation Council - European Innovation Council](#)

caps (up to 499 employees), established in an EU Member State or in a country associated to the EIC investment component of Horizon Europe. Further, the principles of excellence, impact and level of risk, the quality and efficiency of the implementation, and the need for Union support will also apply. In line, the Commission will reserve the right to refrain from any specific investment where the relevant proposed investment does not comply with applicable Horizon Europe requirements. .

**Type of action:** Indirect management (amendment to contribution agreement for the EIC Fund)

**Legal entity:** European Investment Bank

**Indicative budget:** EUR 1 billion or which EUR [600] million from 2026 and EUR [400] million from 2027<sup>214</sup>

**Indicative timetable:** Q2 for conclusion of contribution agreement

## IX.2 Honoraria and expenses of the EIC Board

As highly qualified, specialised, independent advisors appointed following an open and transparent procedure, the members of the EIC Board will be remunerated for the services they offer from the budget of the EIC work programme.

Remuneration is justified on the grounds of the personal commitment of the members and their work providing high level strategic advice to the Commission and bringing prestige and visibility to the EIC.

Remuneration will be proportionate to the specific tasks to be assigned to EIC Board members, and it will closely mirror compensation schemes for other EU, international or national entities of similar nature. Remuneration will take the form of honoraria for their effective participation at the Board's plenary meetings or any other additional meetings and events where EIC Board members are asked to attend. It will be accompanied by a compensation for travel ('travel allowance') and other expenses ('per diem') for in person meetings on location.

1. The rules on the compensation of the members of the EIC Board (other than its President) are the following: Honoraria of members of the EIC Board other than the President, as well as their travel and subsistence expenses (per diem), will be paid by the Agency. Honoraria will be paid irrespective of the length (i.e. number

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<sup>214</sup> Subject to EIC WP 2027 adoption

of days) of the meeting and will be governed by the provisions of the individual expert contract in accordance with points 2) to 7).

2. The honoraria of the members referred to in point 1 will be: EUR 2 200 for full attendance at a plenary meeting, and EUR 1 100 for partial attendance (up to 50% of the meeting time).
3. Payments will be authorised by the Agency on the basis of an attendance list validated by the EIC Board President and the Director of the Agency or their deputies. The attendance list must indicate if each member attended the entire meeting (full attendance) or only part of it (partial attendance).
4. For other meetings than plenary meetings, and preparatory work for plenary meetings, the Agency will, based on the validated list by the EIC Board President, remunerate those days with an honoraria of EUR 1100 per day and reimburse travel and subsistence expenses necessary for members of the Board to carry out their activities in accordance with their contract and the Commission's rules on the reimbursement of external experts.<sup>215</sup>
5. In the case of participation at plenary meetings through the use of remote communication, the time spent connected through the communication link must count as a physical presence at the meeting for the purpose of establishing the appropriate honoraria.
6. The honoraria and travel and subsistence expenses will be paid from the operational budget indicated in this Work Programme.

These amounts are adapted to high level expert's terms as performed by other entities for similar high-level work. Additional work other than plenary meetings shall be reimbursed based on time spent and at the request of the Commission, of a daily amount of EUR 1100. In accordance with Article 49(2) of the Horizon Europe Regulation, the level of remuneration for EIC Board members is beyond the standard conditions, as the Board consists of high-level experts, their role goes beyond that of normal experts, and a daily reimbursement of an amount of EUR 1100 (EUR 2200 for plenary meetings where attendance and preparation correspond to two days) is in line with relevant market standards and proportionate to the specific tasks attributed to them<sup>216</sup>.

**Type of action:** Expert contract action.

**Indicative budget:** EUR 0.5 million

**Indicative Opening:** From Q1 2026

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<sup>215</sup> Commission Decision C(2007) 5858 of 21 November 2007 on the reimbursement rules of expenses incurred by people from outside the Commission invited to attend meetings in an expert capacity.

<sup>216</sup> As set out in the Horizon Europe Specific Programme

### IX.3 External expertise for monitoring, ethics and policy advice

The EIC uses external independent experts for monitoring of projects<sup>217</sup> and ethics compliance, for other compliance checks (including on Gender Equality Plans), for communication activities, for technology assessments (including where necessary on risks to economic security), for policy advice on the optimal achievement of the EIC objectives, as well as for the implementation of scientific/technological/ innovation intelligence, proactive management of EIC activities (including support to BAS activities and to the EIC Programme Managers) and project reviews for increases in Accelerator support<sup>218</sup>. A special allowance of EUR 450/day will be paid to the experts appointed in their personal capacity who act independently and in the public interest<sup>219</sup>.

**Type of action:** Expert contracts.

**Indicative budget:** EUR 4 million

**Indicative opening:** From Q1 2026.

### IX.4 Communication, outreach, events

The success of the EIC lies in attracting highly innovative and diverse companies and researchers that can generate fast and high growth, as well as co-investors and global corporates that can further maximise the impact of EIC support.

The objective of this action is to prepare and implement the communication and outreach activities for the EIC, following advice from the EIC Board, with an objective to strengthen the reputation of the EIC among its stakeholders, potential applicants, policymakers, investors and the broader EU innovation ecosystem.

The action will include EIC global outreach activities, in particular to raise awareness of the EIC among international investors and innovative researchers.

It also includes activities to the EIC becoming a thought leader within the European (deep) tech community, enhancing the EIC's standing as a leading authority in startups and innovation. This action covers the maintenance and management of the EIC website and its social media channels; the creation of relevant informative content and materials; the preparation and development of thematic communication campaigns; media relations and other outreach and stakeholders engagement activities including with EIC jury members.

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<sup>217</sup> Including projects financed by the EIC pilot, SME instrument, Fast Track to Innovation, FET Open and FET Proactive under Horizon 2020.

<sup>218</sup> Necessary to implement Horizon Europe regulation Article 48.12

<sup>219</sup> Commission Decision C(2007)5858

In addition, this action provides further support to the organisation of the EIC Summit 2026. Furthermore, this action supports the organisation of the EIC Awards Ceremonies, the organisation of the iCapital alumni network awards ceremony, as well as various communication activities around the EIC Prizes.

This action will also support a prominent EIC presence at key European Commission and /or third-party events, ensuring high visibility of the EIC and selected beneficiaries, leading to increased impact in the visibility and branding of the EIC among key audiences. This should allow the EIC to become a prominent voice in the ongoing debates relevant to innovation policy in Europe and globally. communication and outreach should generate awareness and impact at international, European, national, regional and local levels.

**Type of action:** Public procurement actions.

**Indicative opening:** From Q1 2026.

**Indicative budget:** EUR 4 million

## **IX.5 EIC Data management and IT systems integration<sup>220</sup>**

The purpose of this action is to provide to the EIC the technical means to achieve the EIC Programme objectives.

This action covers the entire development lifecycle of the relevant IT tools and methodology including the development of user stories, functional and technical analysis, IT architecture and development of new functionalities, evolutive maintenance of existing IT components, cloud infrastructure architecture and provisioning, automatic /user testing of new features, IT helpdesk and user support while ensuring adequate IT project and team management, ensure security and IT governance compliance.

The focus in 2026, continues to build on the existing work done within the EIC and continues to ensure the evolutive maintenance of existing IT tools in support of the EIC, with the needed technical and usability improvements the EIC IT system, and develop new functionalities and features in response to evolving business processes and user needs. The objective is to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the EIC operations complementing the EC Corporate IT Tools.

The focus will also be on harnessing the data and information coming from internal and third-party sources to enable data-driven / strategic decision-making and strategic

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<sup>220</sup> The code developed to implement the IT components should be released in open source under [code.europa.eu](https://code.europa.eu)

intelligence for the proactive management of EIC activities and the efficient and effective delivery of services to EIC applicants, beneficiaries, and stakeholders.

Considering the above, the EIC IT developments will focus on the following key components:

- ✦ Further harmonise and consolidate data sources into a common data model and infrastructure for EIC. Develop needed webservices to exchange Business Acceleration Services (BAS) data with other EC IT systems and stakeholders including EIT, EIB, EIC Fund etc.
- ✦ Improve and expand the IT tools and interfaces built to support the daily operations management of EIC staff, including Project Officers, Programme Managers, EIC Board Members as well as third parties such as staff of EIC Fund, EIB and service providers for the due diligence process involved in the negotiation, monitoring and other processes of EIC Accelerator projects and companies.
- ✦ EIC IT developments will also complement Corporate IT tools and the IT developments foreseen by EIC Fund, EIB, EIT and relevant third parties to cover the additional EIC actions and other specificities (such as STEP, etc.) .
- ✦ Update, improve and maintain the EIC Community to help EIC funded projects and companies in finding partners, relevant support and services to their activities and projects, facilitate business development, networking activities and the establishment of communities of practice (c.f. chapter V. Business Acceleration Services.) Where applicable, these actions will complement IT developments foreseen through Business Acceleration Services. The objective is also to further integrate the EIC Community with other corporate tools including CORDIS, Horizon Results Platform / EU Innovation platform, Innovation Radar.
- ✦ Update and improve the EIC Coaching system to automate administrative operations, generate statistics automatically and better integrate with the other EIC and EC corporate tools, while serving new business needs and stakeholders (c.f. chapter V. Business Acceleration Services.)
- ✦ Further develop and expand the event management back-office and front-end / communication tools in support of the Business Acceleration Services (BAS) and EIC Communication team.
- ✦ Provide IT support for the organisation of "EIC Prizes" such as iCapital and Women Innovators.
- ✦ Completion EIC data dashboards integrating all information relating to EIC funding, investments, and business acceleration services, and enabling

transparent, real-time and user-friendly access to EIC programme data by internal and external stakeholders, and strengthen feedback to policy.

- ✦ Support capacity development and Learning on all EIC IT tools and methodologies for EIC stakeholders including evaluators, experts and beneficiaries on-line and through EU Academy training events.
- ✦ Update and improve the EIC support service management tool to automate and streamline support workflows for operational activities.
- ✦ Data repatriation, integration and exploitation (including through dashboards) of data collected by service providers and CSAs
- ✦ Operational AI Support : Support the integration and implementation of AI tools to support operational activities. This includes: Developing and deploying AI-powered tools to streamline and automate processes, integrating AI capabilities into existing IT systems and applications, ensuring seamless interaction between AI tools and human stakeholders. Improve usability, integration and seamless user experience across all the above tools, while increasing modularity and configurability of the IT tools developed, to increase their re-usability withing the EC services. Ensure maintenance and proper user support for all the tools made available.
- ✦ Ensure EIC IT Tools developments and IT developments delegated to contracted third parties follow the evolving European Commission infrastructure, application development and security standards while ensuring their compliance with Commission Data and IT governance principles.

The above developments will follow, as much as possible, the principles of open-source code and open data standards ensuring that both the tools and data generated can be reused by other institutions, Member States, Associated Countries and relevant third parties. AI development and implementation will be in accordance with the AI Act, European Commission's guidelines on AI and relevant corporate compliance rules.

**Type of action:** Public procurement action

**Indicative budget:** EUR 3.6 million

**Indicative opening:** From Q1 2026.

## **IX.6 Future-oriented strategic intelligence research to support EIC internal knowledge production and management**

The purpose of this action is to extend the ongoing collaboration between EIC and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC). The goal is to solidify and expand

EIC internal capacity by combining the production and management of future-oriented knowledge with best-in-class data-driven and expert-based inputs.

This is centred on evidence-based support to operational activities such as the proactive management by EIC Programme Managers, support to the EIC Feedback to Policy (F2P) mandate, or support to EIC equity related activities. The main work streams are to:

- ✦ Provide short and medium-term future-oriented evidence-based advice on signals and trends on emerging technologies and breakthrough innovations.
- ✦ Support the development of long-term strategic intelligence, grounded in anticipatory, collective, and hybrid methods, for knowledge transfer and capacity building; and
- ✦ Explore innovative future-oriented methodologies and anticipatory intelligence to support policy feedback and priority setting by the EIC.
- ✦ Assess the impact of EIC support on company development including comparative analysis with companies that have not received EIC support.
- ✦ Analyze and assess the impacts of EIC investments including the role of the EIC in developing European VC networks

**Type of action:** Administrative Agreement implying direct transfer of credits/budget to the JRC due to volume, complexity, and cost of services, including expert engagement

**Indicative timetable:** Q2 2026

**Indicative budget:** EUR 400 000

## IX.7 European innovation gender and diversity index

This action aims to build on the foundational work of the GENDEX Pilot Project (2023–2025) and the European Parliament’s Pilot Project on the Gender Gap in Investments, transforming them into a fully operational, data-driven, and stakeholder-ready Gender & Diversity Index. These pilots have established the basis for a European-wide framework to measure and address gender and diversity disparities—particularly in deep tech, venture capital, and start-up ecosystems.

While SHE Figures remains the Commission’s flagship monitoring tool for gender equality in R&I, this action complements it by addressing underexplored areas such as investment flows, start-up dynamics, and venture ecosystems, offering more practical and actionable insights for funders, investors, and innovators.

### Objectives

- ✦ Establish a bi-annual flagship report tracking key gender and diversity metrics across innovation and investment landscapes, including contextualised KPIs benchmarked against sector-specific baselines
- ✦ Ensure continuity of findings from GENDEX and the EP Pilot Project, and explore synergies with She Figures.
- ✦ Revisit the GENDEX and EP Pilot Project on Gender Gap in Investments methodology, definitions, and data sets to incorporate new best practices and analytics; while also ensuring alignment with the She Figures reports.
- ✦ Provide actionable analytics, exploitation, dissemination and communication tools and frameworks to mainstream diversity;
- ✦ Support informed investment decisions through benchmarking tools and data visualisation dashboards.
- ✦ Align with EU instruments (She Figures, EIC data, Horizon Europe reporting) to improve coherence, definitions and data usability.
- ✦ Provide actionable tools (e.g. country fiches, handbooks, templates for diversity reporting) to support mainstreaming efforts.

### **Expected Deliverables**

The contractor will:

1. Upgrade and operationalise the GENDEX Scorecard into a broader Gender & Diversity Index.
2. Validate and harmonise methodologies and definitions and data sets used in GENDEX and the EP Pilot Project, including integration of sector-specific gender baselines and leadership role disaggregation.
3. Integrate multi-source datasets (public, commercial, EIC primary, surveys), ensuring quality, privacy, and consistency.
4. Develop an interactive user-friendly dashboard for easy access, filtering, and visualisation of data, that allows also for comparison with EIC KPIs and data
5. Create voluntary diversity reporting templates for start-ups, scale-ups, and investors (including API-compatible formats).
6. Produce tailored dissemination products (e.g. reports, infographics) targeting key stakeholder groups.
7. Draft a cross-country comparative index of gender equality performance across the EU.

8. Publish a policy report with 5–6 expert articles and a flagship synthesis report combining data and policy insights.

The implementation of the action will involve interactions with the Commission and an advisory panel, and the contractor is expected to organise workshops involving relevant users from the Commission and other stakeholders (e.g. investors) and engage in data sharing with other relevant initiatives (e.g. She Figures contractor, JRC Indicators Explorer, ERA Subgroup on Gender, INSPIRE).

### **Expected Impact**

- ✦ Enhanced ability to identify and address diversity gaps at multiple levels
- ✦ Inputs to Evidence-based policy and funding decisions at EU, national, and organisational levels.
- ✦ Comparative benchmarking across Member States and Associated Countries.
- ✦ Contribution to ERA Policy Agenda Action 5: Promote gender equality and foster inclusiveness.
- ✦ Complementarity with She Figures, particularly for deep tech and venture finance contexts

**Type of Action:** Public procurement

**Indicative budget:** EUR 700,000

## **IX.8 Fees for the European Investment Bank for tasks related to the investment component of the EIC Accelerator**

In line with Article 11(3) of Council Decision 2021/764/EU establishing the Specific Programme implementing Horizon Europe, the Commission has entrusted tasks related to the implementation and management of the investment component of the EIC Accelerator (which includes the EIC STEP Scale Up and reserve for follow on investments) to the European Investment Bank as the implementing partner for an indicative budget for investment amounts as shown in Annex 1.

The European Investment Bank will receive an annual fee for these tasks.

**Type of Action:** Contribution agreement

**Indicative budget:** EUR 1 million

## **IX.9 Irish Presidency Conference**

In light of the EU's Choose Europe initiative, and the launch of its Startup and Scaleup Strategy in May 2025, the objective of this action is to support the organisation of a conference on the competitiveness and future direction of Europe's startup and scaling

ecosystem and how Europe can further enhance its ecosystem in a global context, including deeptech startups and scale ups. The conference will provide a timely opportunity for relevant stakeholders (e.g. founders, European and national policy makers, academia, investors, large corporates, innovation agencies, national and regional accelerators, amongst others) to assess the comparative progress being made by Europe to encourage stakeholders to Choose Europe and to advance its ecosystem based on the stated ambitions of the EIC and objectives of the Startup and Scaleup Strategy and the European Innovation Act. The conference will be organised by University College Dublin (UCD) in Q4 of 2026 during the Irish Presidency of the of the Council (July-December 2026).

### **Expected outcomes and impacts:**

- ✦ An exploration and discussion, in a global context, of the progress of the EU's Startup and Scaleup Strategy against its five thematic priorities: innovation-friendly regulation; access to finance; faster market uptake and expansion; attracting and retaining talent; and access to infrastructure, networks and services.
- ✦ An exploration and discussion, in a global context, of where bottlenecks and barriers remain within Europe's deeptech and scaling ecosystem.
- ✦ The identification of best practices and new approaches (globally and within the Union, namely in the European Innovation Act) to address those remaining identified barriers and bottlenecks.
- ✦ The identification of key success factors and specialised approaches for the emergence of a new generation of European startups and scaleups in critical technology areas such as AI, Quantum, Biotechnology, Advanced Connectivity, Robotics, Space, Energy, Food Systems, amongst others.
- ✦ An exploration and discussion on best practice approaches in creating viable entrepreneurial career pathways to foster the entrepreneurial commitment of founders and to attract and retain research and commercialisation talent in Europe
- ✦ An exploration and discussion on best practice approaches to developing, exploiting and recirculating successful deep tech founders with previous successful exits back into Europe's deep tech ecosystem to create serial founders that can accelerate the next generation of Europe's deep tech startup and scaleups.
- ✦ An exploration and discussion on the evolving role of Universities and Research Performing Organisations in generating deep tech startups and scaleups, and their relationship with their spin-out community and other stakeholders during the different stages of a deep tech startup and scale up e.g. applied research phase, investor readiness, the development and testing of deep tech minimal viable products, founder team, company incorporation and spin-out, and through several rounds of venture fundraising.

**Type of Action:** Coordination and Support Action (CSA)/Grant to a named beneficiary (as the implementation of this grant is linked to an Irish Presidency event in support of the EIC). It will be awarded to an identified beneficiary according to Article 24 (3) (b) HE Regulation in conjunction with Article 198 (e) of the Financial Regulation.

**Legal entities:** University College Dublin

**Indicative budget:** EUR 300 000

**Indicative Timeline:** Q1 2026

## X. Annexes

These Annexes set out the general conditions applicable to calls and topics for grants and other forms of funding under the EIC Work Programme 2026. They also describe the evaluation and award procedures and other criteria for Horizon Europe EIC funding.

If a call or topic deviates from the general conditions or includes additional conditions, this is explicitly stated for the call or topic in the main part of this EIC Work Programme.

Applicants are invited to read the call documentation on the topic page of the Funding & Tenders Portal ('Portal') carefully, and particularly these Annexes, the [Horizon Europe Programme Guide<sup>221</sup>](#), the [Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual<sup>222</sup>](#) and the [EU Grants AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement<sup>223</sup>](#). These documents provide clarifications and answers to questions on preparing the application.

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<sup>221</sup> The Horizon Europe Programme Guide outlines the detailed guidance on the structure, budget and political priorities of Horizon Europe.

<sup>222</sup> The Online Manual outlines the procedures to register and submit applications online via the Funding & Tenders Portal and recommendations on preparing the application.

<sup>223</sup> The AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement contains detailed annotations on all the provisions in the grant agreement that must be signed to obtain the grant.

## Annex 1 Estimated Indicative Budget

<b>Calls/Actions</b> <sup>224</sup>	<b>Budget EUR million</b>
<b>HORIZON-EIC-2026-PATHFINDEROPEN-01</b>	166
<b>HORIZON-EIC-2026-PATHFINDERCHALLENGES-01</b>	96
<b>HORIZON-EIC-2026-AIC-01</b>	6
<b>HORIZON-EIC-2026-TRANSITIONOPEN-01-01</b>	100
<b>HORIZON-EIC-2026-ACCELERATOROPEN-01</b> <sup>225 226 227 228</sup>	414
<b>Grant component</b>	165
<b>Equity component</b> <sup>229</sup>	249

<sup>224</sup> The budgets set out in the calls / Actions are indicative. Unless otherwise stated, final budgets may change following evaluation. The final figures may change by up to 20% compared to the total budget indicated in this Work Programme. Changes within these limits will not be considered substantial within the meaning of Article 110(5) of EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

<sup>225</sup> The Accelerator is a continuously open call and hence this amount may be increased by any amounts committed but not allocated under the cut-offs of the previous EIC annual Work Programme as well as amounts from divestments. The share of the budget dedicated to investments (e.g., equity, equity-like, debt/guarantees, etc.) and grants will be a result of the evaluation and due diligence process for applications to the EIC Accelerator. In case the full budget allocated for investments in year N will not be committed fully in year N+1 at the latest, the unused budget may be reallocated to subsequent EIC Accelerator calls.

<sup>226</sup> The EIC Fund will receive an annual amount from the EIC Work Programme budget to cover administrative expenses and fees. This administrative budget covers the operation and administration expenses of any investment. These costs include any cost in relation to the acquisition, ownership or realisation of the investments. The administrative budget covers, among others, the fees payable to the EIC Fund Manager, other service providers, advisory, compensations to external experts, depositary and administrative agent fees, accounting, auditors, compliance procedures, communication and marketing, litigation or arbitration, statutory or regulatory fees, insurance premiums, taxes and other governmental charges and any other operational and administration costs and expenses as required. This budget will in average not exceed 10 % of the budget transferred for investments purposes. The indicative budget under indirect management is expected to be around EUR 729 million. This does not include the Scaleup Europe Fund compartment of the EIC Fund, where the indicative budget for indirect management is expected to be EUR 600 million.

<sup>227</sup> Amounts from EIC Accelerator calls, including amounts decommitted from proposals awarded funding under the Accelerator calls as well as amounts from divestments, may be used, within the same budgetary year, either for i) follow-on investments under the provisions set out in Horizon Europe Regulation Article 48(12), second subparagraph, and/or ii) for providing an equity component to grant-first beneficiaries, including for actions selected under Accelerator calls from previous years. Such investments will be subject to an award decision and to the provision of information to the EIC and EIE Programme Committee.

<sup>228</sup> The granting authority of the equity component is DG RTD, while EISMEA will be the granting authority of the grant component.

<sup>229</sup> Out of the total amount of EUR 1.362 billion implemented through the equity components, an estimated amount of EUR 604 million will be funded by external assigned revenues

<b>HORIZON-EIC-2026-ACCELERATORCHALLENGES-01<sup>230 231</sup></b>	220
<b>Grant component</b>	88
<b>Equity component<sup>229</sup></b>	132
<b>HORIZON-EIC-2026-STEP-01</b>	300
<b>Equity component<sup>229</sup></b>	300
<b>Reserve amount for follow on investments and investment component of Grant First<sup>232 229</sup></b>	80
<b>CSAs</b>	8.5
Administrative Agreement JRC	0.4
<b>Grants to identified beneficiaries</b>	0.3
<b>Scaleup Europe Fund (Contribution Agreement)<sup>229</sup></b>	600
<b>Equity Component<sup>229</sup></b>	600
<b>Prizes</b>	2.12
<b>Public Procurement Actions</b>	23.8
<b>Expert contracts</b>	6.5
<b>EIB Fees (Contribution agreement)<sup>229</sup></b>	1
<b>ESTIMATED TOTAL BUDGET</b>	2.024

<sup>230</sup> In accordance with Article 12.5 of Horizon Europe regulation No 2021/695, credits from the budget lines below will be transferred to budget line 01.020301.

EUR 50 000 000,00 from Cluster 4 (budget line 01.020240)

EUR 13 000 000,00 from Cluster 6 (budget line 01.020260)

EUR 12 000 000,00 from SOIL Mission (budget line 01.020260)

EUR 25 000 000,00 from CLIMATE Mission (budget line 01.020250)

EUR 10 000 000,00 from Fusion Research and development (budget line 01.030100 - EURATOM programme).

<sup>231</sup> The granting authority of the equity component is DG RTD, while EISMEA will be the granting authority of the grant component.

<sup>232</sup> This reserve is to provide: i) additional amounts for follow-on investments under the provisions set out in Horizon Europe Regulation Article 48(12), second subparagraph, including for actions selected under Accelerator calls from previous years; and/or ii) an equity component to grant-first beneficiaries selected under the EIC Work Programmes 2021 to 2023. Such investments will be subject to an award decision and to the provision of information to the EIC and EIE Programme Committee. The amounts needed for such additional financing will be reviewed on a regular basis during the year and any unused amounts re-allocated to EIC calls within the flexibility of the amounts set out in this Work Programme.

## Annex 2 General conditions

These general conditions are those applicable to calls and topics for grants and other forms of funding under the EIC Work Programme 2026. They also describe the evaluation and award procedures and other criteria for Horizon Europe EIC funding.

In particular, they outline:

- ✦ admissibility and eligibility criteria for participation and for receiving funding, the criteria for having the financial and operational capacity and for exclusion (sections A, B and C);
- ✦ award criteria, mandatory documents and evaluation procedure (sections D, E and F);
- ✦ legal and financial set-up of the grant agreements (Section G).

If a call or topic deviates from the general conditions or includes additional conditions, this is explicitly stated for the call or topic in the main part of this EIC Work Programme.

Applicants are invited to read the call documentation on the topic page of the Funding & Tenders Portal ('Portal') carefully, and particularly these Annexes, the [Horizon Europe Programme Guide](#)<sup>233</sup>, the [Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual](#)<sup>234</sup> and the [EU Grants AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement](#)<sup>235</sup>. These documents provide clarifications and answers to questions on preparing the application.

### A. ADMISSIBILITY

#### A.1 General admissibility conditions

Applications must be submitted before the **call deadline**.

Applications must be submitted **electronically** via the Funding & Tenders Portal electronic submission system (accessible via the topic page in the [Search Funding & Tenders](#) section).

Paper submissions are NOT possible.

Applications must be submitted using the forms provided *inside* the electronic submission system (not the templates available on the topic page, which are only for information). The structure and presentation must correspond to the instructions given in the forms.

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<sup>233</sup> The Horizon Europe Programme Guide outlines the detailed guidance on the structure, budget and political priorities of Horizon Europe.

<sup>234</sup> The Online Manual outlines the procedures to register and submit applications online via the Funding & Tenders Portal and recommendations on preparing the application.

<sup>235</sup> The AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement contains detailed annotations on all the provisions in the grant agreement that must be signed to obtain the grant.

Applications must be **complete** and contain all parts and mandatory Annexes and supporting documents (*see section E below*).

Applications must be **readable, accessible** and **printable**.

Applications must include **a plan for the exploitation and dissemination of results including communication activities**, unless provided otherwise in the specific call/topic conditions. The plan is not required for applications at the first stage of two-stage procedures. If the expected exploitation of the results entails developing, creating, manufacturing and marketing a product or process, or in creating and providing a service, the plan must include a strategy for such exploitation. If the plan provides for exploitation of the results primarily in non-associated third countries, the applicants must explain how that exploitation is to be considered in the EU's interest.

## **A.2 Page limits**

In addition to the above admissibility conditions, page limits will apply to parts of applications. The page limits, and sections subject to limits, will be clearly shown in the application templates in the Funding & Tenders Portal electronic submission system.

Unless provided otherwise in the specific call/topic conditions, **the limit for a full application is 45 pages** (except for 'Coordination and support' actions, where the limit is 30 pages). For topics using lump sum funding, the limit for 'Research and Innovation' actions and 'Innovation' actions is 50 pages and the limit for 'Coordination and support' action is 33 pages.

If an application exceeds the limits, there will be an automatic warning and invitation to resubmit a version that conforms to these limits. After the call deadline, excess pages will be automatically made invisible, and will not be taken into consideration by the evaluators.

## **A.3 Concurrent submissions**

For the EIC Accelerator, the applicant must not be in a situation of **concurrent submission/implementation**.

Concurrent **submission** exists when an applicant submits more than one proposal for evaluation to any EIC Accelerator call (including the EIC STEP Scale Up Call) before the evaluation feedback has been provided for the earlier submission. If a case of concurrent submission is identified, only the proposal submitted last (before the deadline) will be taken into consideration.

Concurrent **implementation** occurs when the awardee of an ongoing EIC Accelerator/EIC Pilot/SME instrument grant project submits another full proposal with a grant component before the first project reaches its end date.<sup>236</sup>

## B. ELIGIBILITY

### B.1 Entities eligible to participate

Any legal entity, regardless of its place of establishment, including legal entities from non-associated third countries or international organisations (including international European research organisations<sup>237</sup>) is eligible to participate (whether it is eligible for funding or not), provided that the conditions laid down in the Horizon Europe Regulation<sup>238</sup> have been met, along with any other conditions laid down in the specific call / topic.

A 'legal entity' means any natural or legal person created and recognised as such under national law, EU law or international law, which has legal personality and which may, acting in its own name, exercise rights and be subject to obligations, or an entity without legal personality<sup>239</sup>.

Beneficiaries and affiliated entities must register in the [Participant Register](#) before submitting their application, in order to get a participant identification code (PIC) and be validated by the Central Validation Service before signing the grant agreement. For the validation, they will be asked to upload the necessary documents showing their legal status and origin during the grant preparation stage. A validated PIC is not a prerequisite for submitting an application.

 For more information, see [Rules for Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment](#).

*Specific cases:*

**Affiliated entities** — Affiliated entities (i.e. entities with a legal or capital link to a beneficiary<sup>240</sup> which participate in the action with similar rights and obligations to the beneficiaries, but which do not sign the grant agreement and therefore do not become beneficiaries themselves) are allowed, if they are eligible for participation and funding.

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<sup>236</sup> Ongoing grant-only projects selected under a Horizon 2020 EIC pilot Accelerator or under Horizon Europe EIC Accelerator call may be eligible to submit a proposal for a blended finance or an investment only support under an EIC Accelerator call. Ongoing blended finance projects selected under a Horizon 2020 EIC pilot Accelerator call may be eligible to submit a proposal for a related investment component under an EIC Accelerator call.

<sup>237</sup> International European research organisation means an international organisation, the majority of whose members are Member States or Associated Countries, and whose principal objective is to promote scientific and technological cooperation in Europe (Article 2 (15) Regulation (EU) 2021/695).

<sup>238</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe (OJ L 170 , 12.5.2021, p. 1).

<sup>239</sup> See Article 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.

<sup>240</sup> See Article 190 EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.

**Associated partners** — Associated partners (i.e. entities which participate in the action without signing the grant agreement, and without the right to charge costs or claim contributions) are allowed, subject to any specific call/topic conditions.

**Entities without legal personality** — Entities which do not have legal personality under their national law may exceptionally participate, provided that their representatives have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf, and offer guarantees to protect the EU's financial interests equivalent to those offered by legal persons<sup>241</sup>.

**EU bodies** — Legal entities created under EU law including decentralised agencies may be part of the consortium, unless provided for otherwise in their basic act.

**Joint Research Centre** ('JRC')— Where provided for in the specific call/topic conditions, applicants may include in their proposals the possible contribution of the JRC but the JRC will not participate in the preparation and submission of the proposal. Applicants will indicate the contribution that the JRC could bring to the project based on the scope of the topic text. After the evaluation process, the JRC and the consortium selected for funding may come to an agreement on the specific terms of the participation of the JRC. If an agreement is found, the JRC may accede to the grant agreement as beneficiary requesting zero funding or participate as an associated partner and would accede to the consortium as a member.

**Associations and interest groupings** — Entities composed of members (e.g. European research infrastructure consortia (ERICs)) may participate as 'sole beneficiaries' or 'beneficiaries without legal personality'<sup>242</sup>. However, if the action is in practice implemented by the individual members, those members should also participate either as beneficiaries or as affiliated entities (otherwise their costs will NOT be eligible).

**Restrictions on participation in Innovation Actions, including the EIC Accelerator** — In accordance with the 2019 "EU-China – A Strategic outlook" communication, the 2021 "Global Approach to Research and Innovation" communication, and the joint conclusions of the 4<sup>th</sup> EU-China Innovation Cooperation Dialogue of 2019, an exercise to develop a Joint Roadmap for the future of EU-China cooperation in science, technology, and innovation (Roadmap) has been established between the EU and China. It has the objective to develop a level playing field for engagement between the EU and China in the areas of science, technology, and innovation (STI) that is respectful of fundamental research and innovation values and principles. This endeavour is to be achieved through an agreement on the framework conditions contained in the roadmap and their monitoring and evaluation. As progress so far has mainly taken place on the framework conditions linked to research rather than on those related to innovation and taking into

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<sup>241</sup> See Article 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

<sup>242</sup> See Articles 201(2) and 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

account the nature and objectives in particular of Innovation Actions, cooperation with entities established in China needs to be calibrated accordingly.

Legal entities established in China are therefore not eligible to participate in Horizon Europe Innovation Actions, including the EIC Accelerator, in any capacity. This includes participation as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, third parties giving in-kind contributions, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any). Exceptions may be granted on a case-by-case basis for justified reasons. The above eligibility criteria may be reviewed in the future in accordance with policy developments. This exclusion is justified under Article 22(6) of the Horizon Europe Regulation given the substantive concerns regarding the use of intellectual property generated under this publicly funded programme, and the ongoing discussions between China and the EU on the Joint Roadmap for the future of EU-China cooperation in science, technology, and innovation.

**Restrictions for the protection of European communication networks** — The protection of European communication networks has been identified as an important security interest of the Union and its Member States.<sup>243</sup> In line with the Commission Recommendation on the cybersecurity of 5G networks of 2019<sup>244</sup> and the subsequent report on the EU coordinated risk assessment of the cybersecurity of 5G networks of 2019,<sup>245</sup> the EU Toolbox on 5G cybersecurity,<sup>246</sup> the second report on Member States' progress in implementing the EU toolbox on 5G cybersecurity of 2023,<sup>247</sup> and the related Communication on the implementation of the 5G cybersecurity toolbox of 2023,<sup>248</sup> the Commission together with the Member States has worked to jointly identify and assess cyberthreats and security risks for 5G networks.<sup>249</sup> The toolbox also recommends adding country-specific information (e.g. threat assessment from national security services, etc.). This work is an essential component of the Security Union Strategy and supports the protection of electronic communications networks and other critical infrastructures.

Entities assessed as “high-risk suppliers”, are currently set out in the second report on Member States' progress in implementing the EU toolbox on 5G cybersecurity of 2023<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> European Council conclusions of 1 and 2 October 2020 (EUCO 13/20), point 11; Council Conclusions on the significance of 5G to the European Economy and the need to mitigate security risks linked to 5G, 14517/19.

<sup>244</sup> Commission Recommendation (EU) 2019/534 of 26 March 2019 Cybersecurity of 5G networks, L 88/42.

<sup>245</sup> NIS Cooperation Group, Report on EU coordinated risk assessment of the cybersecurity of 5G networks, 9 October 2019.

<sup>246</sup> NIS Cooperation Group, EU Toolbox on 5G Cybersecurity, 29 January 2020.

<sup>247</sup> NIS Cooperation Group, Second report on Member States' progress in implementing the EU Toolbox on 5G Cybersecurity, June 2023.

<sup>248</sup> Communication from the Commission: Implementation of the 5g cybersecurity Toolbox, Brussels, 15.6.2023 C(2023) 4049 final.

<sup>249</sup> Within the NIS framework NIS 1 + 2 (Directive - 2022/2555 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu))

<sup>250</sup> NIS Cooperation Group, Second report on Member States' progress in implementing the EU Toolbox on 5G Cybersecurity, June 2023.

and the related Communication on the implementation of the 5G cybersecurity toolbox of 2023<sup>251</sup>.

The toolbox also underlines that further developing European capacities in the area of 5G and post-5G technologies by leveraging EU Research & Innovation Funding programmes is a strategic risk mitigating measure. This entails the need to avoid the participation of high-risk supplier entities in the development of other technologies linked to the evolution of European communication networks to prevent technology transfer and the persistence of dependencies in materials, semiconductor components (including processors), computing resources, software tools and virtualisation technologies, as well as related cybersecurity.

In order to protect the specific policy requirements of the Union and/or its Member States, it is therefore appropriate that the following additional eligibility criteria apply to actions identified as “subject to restrictions for the protection of European communication networks” that concern the evolution of European communication networks (5G, post-5G and other technologies linked to the evolution of European communication networks):

Entities that are assessed as high-risk suppliers of mobile network communication equipment (and any entities they own or control) are not eligible to participate as beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners.

The assessment is based on the following criteria:

- likelihood of interference from a non-associated third country, for example due to:
  - the characteristics of the entity’s ownership or governance (e.g. state-owned or controlled, government/party involvement);
  - the characteristics of the entity’s business and other conduct (e.g. a strong link to a third country government);
  - the characteristics of the respective third country (e.g. legislation or government practices likely to affect the implementation of the action, including an offensive cyber/intelligence policy, pressure regarding place of manufacturing or access to information).
- (cyber-)security practices, including throughout the entire supply chain;
- risks identified in relevant assessments of Member States and third countries as well as other EU institutions, bodies and agencies, if relevant.

Exceptions may be requested from the Agency and will be assessed case-by-case, taking into account the criteria provided for in the 5G cybersecurity toolbox, the security risks and availability of alternatives in the context of the action.

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<sup>251</sup> Communication from the Commission: Implementation of the 5G cybersecurity Toolbox, Brussels, 15.6.2023 C(2023) 4049 final.

**Restrictions on participation or control** — In line with Article 22(5) of the Horizon Europe Regulation, for actions related to EU strategic assets, interests, autonomy or security, the specific call/topic conditions may limit participation to legal entities established only in EU Member States or in EU Member States and specific associated or non-associated third countries. In this case, the eligible countries will be identified in the specific call/topic conditions. In addition, for duly justified and exceptional reasons, to guarantee protection of the strategic interests of the EU and its Member States, the specific call/topic conditions may also exclude the participation of legal entities directly or indirectly controlled by non-eligible third countries or by legal entities of non-eligible third countries (or make their participation subject to specific conditions).

**EU restrictive measures** — Entities subject to [EU restrictive measures](#) under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU)<sup>252</sup> as well as Article 75 TFEU<sup>253</sup> are not eligible to participate in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, third parties giving in-kind contributions, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any).

Applicants to the EIC Accelerator undertake that their Ultimate Beneficial Owners are not listed and, moreover, do not do business with customers, or make funds or economic resources available to, or for the benefit of (directly or indirectly) any natural or legal person designated under EU sanctions (Obligation of Result).

Special rules also apply to entities covered by Commission Guidelines No 2013/C 205/05<sup>254</sup>.

**Legal entities established in Russia, Belarus, or in non-government-controlled territories of Ukraine** — Given the illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the involvement of Belarus, there is currently no appropriate context allowing the implementation of the actions foreseen in this programme with legal entities established in Russia, Belarus, or in non-government-controlled territories of Ukraine. Therefore, even where such entities are not subject to EU restrictive measures, such legal entities are not eligible to participate in any capacity. This includes participation as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, third parties giving in-kind contributions, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any). Exceptions may be granted on a case-by-case basis for justified reasons.

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<sup>252</sup> Please note that the EU Official Journal contains the official list and, in case of conflict, its content prevails over that of the [EU Sanctions Map](#).

<sup>253</sup> Please note that the EU Official Journal contains the official list and, in case of conflict, its content prevails over that of the [EU Sanctions Map](#).

<sup>254</sup> Commission guidelines [No 2013/C 205/05](#) on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards (OJEU C 205 of 19.07.2013, pp. 9-11).

With specific regard to measures addressed to Russia, following the adoption of the Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024<sup>255</sup> (amending Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July 2014) concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine, legal entities established outside Russia but whose proprietary rights are directly or indirectly owned for more than 50% by a legal person, entity or body established in Russia are also not eligible to participate in any capacity.

**Measures for the protection of the Union budget against breaches of the principles of the rule of law in Hungary** — Following the [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/2506](#), as of 16 December 2022, no legal commitments can be entered into with Hungarian public interest trusts established under the Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity they maintain. Affected entities may continue to apply to calls for proposals and can participate without receiving EU funding, as associated partners, if allowed by the call conditions. However, as long as the Council measures are not lifted, such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, affiliated entities, subcontractors, recipients of financial support to third parties, etc.). In case of multi-beneficiary grant calls, applicants will be invited to remove or replace that entity in any funded role and/or to change its status into associated partner. Tasks and budget may be redistributed accordingly.

**Restrictions on control in Accelerator grant-only actions** – In line with Article 136 of the Financial Regulation<sup>256</sup>, where necessary and duly justified and in line with Article 136 of the Financial Regulation, participation as a beneficiary<sup>257</sup> in Accelerator grant-only actions may, as an additional eligibility condition, be limited to legal entities which are not directly or indirectly controlled by a non-eligible third country or by a legal entity established in a non-eligible third country. Unless otherwise stated, such non-eligible countries are all countries other than EU Member States and Associated Countries.

## B.2. Entities eligible for funding

To become a beneficiary, legal entities must be eligible for funding.

To be eligible for funding, applicants must be established in one of the following countries:

- ✦ the Member States of the European Union, including their outermost regions:

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania,

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<sup>255</sup> (OJ L 229, 31.7.2014, p. 1–11).

<sup>256</sup> Regulation - 2021/695 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

<sup>257</sup> The eligibility criteria do not apply to blended finance actions and to equity-only actions because appropriate controls are implemented for the investment component in the context of the Know Your Customer (KYC) / "Red Flag" report prior to any EIC Fund investment. In addition, Investment safeguards can be introduced, where appropriate, in the investment agreements.

Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden.

✦ the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) linked to the Member States<sup>258</sup>

Aruba (NL), Bonaire (NL), Curaçao (NL), French Polynesia (FR), French Southern and Antarctic Territories (FR), Greenland (DK), New Caledonia (FR), Saba (NL), Saint Barthélemy (FR), Sint Eustatius (NL), Sint Maarten (NL), St. Pierre and Miquelon (FR), Wallis and Futuna Islands (FR).

✦ countries associated to Horizon Europe – Pillar III<sup>259</sup>:

Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Georgia, Iceland, Israel, Kosovo<sup>260</sup>, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom<sup>261</sup>.

If the association agreement provides for an exclusion from the EIC Accelerator investment component, legal entities from that country are only eligible to apply for the 'grant-only' component of the EIC Accelerator.

Other third countries may become associated to Horizon Europe during the programme. For the purposes of the eligibility conditions, applicants established in other third countries negotiating association to Horizon Europe will be treated as entities established in an Associated Country, if the Horizon Europe association agreement with the third country concerned applies at the time of signature of the grant agreement.

✦ the following low- and middle-income countries:<sup>262</sup>

Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Comoros, Congo (Democratic Republic), Congo (Republic), Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt (Arab

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<sup>258</sup> Entities from Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) are eligible for funding under the same conditions as entities from the Member States to which the OCT in question is linked. See the Horizon Europe Programme Guide for a complete list of OCTs.

<sup>259</sup> The list is correct at the time of adoption of this Work Programme. Please see the [Horizon Europe List of Participating Countries](#) on the Portal for up-to-date information on the current list and on the position for Associated Countries.

<sup>260</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

<sup>261</sup> The United Kingdom is associated to the entire Horizon Europe Programme, with the only exception of the investment component of the EIC Accelerator managed by the EIC Fund (which is part of the EIC Accelerator of Horizon Europe that provides investments through equity or other repayable form), for award procedures implementing Union budget for the year 2024 and onwards.

<sup>262</sup> The list is correct at the time of adoption of this Work Programme. See the [Horizon Europe List of Participating Countries](#) [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/programme-guide\\_horizon\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/programme-guide_horizon_en.pdf) on the Portal for a up-to-date list of these countries.

Republic), El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Fiji, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic), Iraq, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kiribati, Korea (Democratic People's Republic), Kyrgyz Republic, Lao (People's Democratic Republic), Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Micronesia (Federated States), Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Niue, Pakistan, Palau, Palestine<sup>263</sup>, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Rwanda, Samoa, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sudan, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tonga, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic), Vietnam, Yemen Republic, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Legal entities which are established in countries not listed above will be eligible for funding if provided for in the specific call/topic conditions, or if their participation is considered essential for implementing the action by the Agency.

*Specific cases:*

**Affiliated entities** — Affiliated entities are eligible for funding if they are established in one of the countries listed above, or in a country identified in the specific call/topic conditions.

**Associated partners** — Entities not eligible for funding (and therefore not able to participate as beneficiaries) may participate as associated partners, unless specified otherwise in the specific call/topic conditions.

**Coordination and Support Actions** – To be eligible to participate as beneficiaries (or affiliated entities) in 'Coordination and support' actions, legal entities must be established in a Member State or Associated Country, unless the specific call/topic conditions provide otherwise (in which case the general rules for eligibility for funding apply). Legal entities established in a non-associated third country may, however, participate in 'Coordination and support' actions as associated partners, unless this is explicitly excluded by the specific call/topic conditions.

**EU bodies** — Legal entities created under EU law may also be eligible to receive funding, unless their basic act states otherwise.

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<sup>263</sup> This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

**International organisations** — International European research organisations are eligible to receive funding. International organisations with headquarters in a Member State or Associated Country are eligible to receive funding for 'Training and mobility' actions or when provided for in the specific call/topic conditions. Other international organisations are not eligible to receive funding, unless provided for in the specific call/topic conditions, or if their participation is considered essential for implementing the action by the Agency.

### **B.3 Single legal entity ('Mono-beneficiary') and consortium ('multi-beneficiary') composition**

Unless otherwise provided for in the specific call/topic conditions:

- ✦ Applicants for mono-beneficiary actions must be established in a Member State or Associated Country.
- ✦ Proposals for multi-beneficiary actions: proposals must be submitted by a consortium including as beneficiaries, at least three legal entities, independent from each other and each established in a different country as follows:
  - at least one independent legal entity established in a Member State; and
  - at least two other independent legal entities, each established in different Member States or Associated Countries.

As affiliated entities do not sign the grant agreement, they do not count towards the minimum eligibility criteria for consortium composition (if any).

The Joint Research Centre, international European research organisations and legal entities created under EU law are deemed to be established in a Member State other than those in which the other legal entities participating in the action are established.

Applications for 'Coordination and support' actions may be submitted by one or more legal entities, which may be established in a Member State, Associated Country or, in exceptional cases and if provided for in the specific call/topic conditions, in another third country.

### **B.4. Eligible activities**

Eligible activities are the ones described in the call conditions. Applications will only be considered eligible if their content corresponds, wholly or in part, to the topic description for which it is submitted.

Projects must focus exclusively on civil applications and must not:

- ✦ aim at human cloning for reproductive purposes;

- ✦ intend to modify the genetic heritage of human beings which could make such changes heritable (exception for research relating to cancer treatment of the gonads, which may be financed);
- ✦ intend to create human embryos solely for the purpose of research or for the purpose of stem cell procurement, including by means of somatic cell nuclear transfer.

Projects must, moreover, comply with EU policy interests and priorities (environment, social, security, industrial policy, etc.).

### **B.5 Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs)**

Where the specific call/topic conditions require a Technology Readiness Level (TRL), the definitions set out in the Glossary apply, unless otherwise specified.

### **B.6 Ethics**

Projects must comply with ethical principles (including the highest standards of research integrity) and applicable EU, international and national law.

Applicants must have completed the ethics self-assessment as part of their application.

 For more information, see [How to complete your ethics self-assessment](#).

Projects involving ethics issues will have to undergo an ethics review to authorise funding and may be made subject to specific ethics requirements. These requirements become part of the grant agreement as ethics deliverables, e.g. ethics committee opinions/authorisations required under national or EU law.

### **B.7 Security — EU classified and sensitive information**

Projects involving classified and/or sensitive information will have to go through the security appraisal process to authorise funding and may be made subject to specific security rules (detailed in the Security Section, which is annexed to the grant agreement). Specific provisions for EU-classified information (EUCI) and sensitive information (SEN) will be included in the grant agreement, as necessary and appropriate.

The rules for protecting EU-classified information (governed by Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/444<sup>264</sup> and/or national rules) provide for instance that:

- ✦ projects involving information classified TRES SECRET UE/EU TOP SECRET (or equivalent) can NOT be funded;
- ✦ EU-classified information must be marked in accordance with the applicable security instructions in the Security Classification Guide appendix of the Security

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<sup>264</sup> See Commission Decision 2015/444/EU, Euratom of 13 March 2015 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 53).

Aspects Letter (SAL) which is contained in the Security Section of the grant agreement;

- ✦ generation of, or access to, information with classification levels CONFIDENTIEL UE/EU CONFIDENTIAL or above (and RESTREINT UE/EU RESTRICTED, if required by national rules) may take place only on the premises of entities which have been granted a facility security clearance (FSC) issued by the competent national security authority NSA);
- ✦ handling of information classified CONFIDENTIEL UE/EU CONFIDENTIAL or above (and RESTREINT UE/EU RESTRICTED, if required by national rules) may take place only in a secured area accredited by the competent NSA;
- ✦ access to and handling of information classified CONFIDENTIEL UE/EU CONFIDENTIAL or above may be granted only to individuals with a valid personnel security clearance (PSC) and an established need-to-know, who have been briefed on the applicable security rules;
- ✦ access to, and handling of, information classified RESTREINT UE/EU RESTRICTED may be granted only to individuals who have a need-to-know and have been briefed on the applicable security rules; at the end of the grant, the classified information must either be returned or continue to be protected according to the applicable rules;
- ✦ subcontracting of tasks involving EU-classified information is subject to prior written approval by the European Commission, which is the originator of EU classified information. It is only possible to subcontract these tasks to entities established in an EU Member State or in a non-EU country with a security of information agreement with the EU (or an administrative arrangement with the Commission);
- ✦ disclosure of EU-classified information is subject to prior written approval by the European Commission.

Depending on the type of activity, FSCs may have to be provided before the grant is signed. The Agency will assess this for each case and fix the delivery date during the grant preparation stage. It is not possible to sign any grant agreement before at least one of the beneficiaries in the consortium has an FSC.

In certain cases, the project results might not require classification, but they might be sensitive and require restricted disclosure or limited dissemination for security reasons, according to the applicable security instructions in the Security Section. This means that, in principle, third parties should have no access to results subject to this type of restriction.

Disclosure of this information is subject to prior written approval by the European Commission.

Further security recommendations may be added to the grant and contract agreement in the form of security deliverables (*e.g. establishing a security advisory board, appointing a project security officer, limiting the level of detail, using a fake scenario, etc.*).

In addition, EIC Awardees must ensure that their projects are not subject to national/third country security requirements that could affect implementation or put into question the award of the grants (*e.g. technology restrictions, national security classification, etc.*). Any potential security issues must be notified immediately to the Agency.

### **B.8 Gender equality plans and gender mainstreaming**

Relevant EIC Awardees must take all measures to promote equal opportunities between men and women in implementing the action and, where applicable, in line with their gender equality plan. They must aim to achieve, to the extent possible, a gender balance at all levels of personnel assigned to the action, including at supervisory and managerial level.

In addition, to be eligible, legal entities from Member States and Associated Countries that are public bodies, research organisations or higher education establishments (including private research organisations and higher education establishments) must have a gender equality plan, covering the following minimum process-related requirements:

- ✦ publication: a formal document published on the institution's website and signed by the top management;
- ✦ dedicated resources: commitment of resources and expertise in gender equality to implement the plan;
- ✦ data collection and monitoring: sex/gender disaggregated data on personnel (and students, for the establishments concerned) and annual reporting based on indicators;
- ✦ training: awareness raising/training on gender equality and unconscious gender biases for staff and decision-makers.

Content-wise, it is recommended that the gender equality plan addresses the following areas, using concrete measures and targets:

- ✦ work-life balance and organisational culture;
- ✦ gender balance in leadership and decision-making;
- ✦ gender equality in recruitment and career progression;
- ✦ integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content;

- ✦ measures against gender-based violence including sexual harassment.


A self-declaration will be requested at proposal stage. If all the above-mentioned mandatory requirements are met through another strategic document, such as a development plan or an inclusion or diversity strategy, it can be considered as an equivalent. This eligibility criterion does not apply to other categories of legal entities, such as private for-profit organisations, including SMEs, non-governmental or civil society organisations.

## B.9 Financial support to third parties

Where the specific call/topic conditions allow for financial support to third parties, the applicants must clearly describe in their proposal the objectives and the expected results, including the elements listed in the application template. The following conditions must also be fulfilled:

- ✦ projects must publish their open calls widely and adhere to EU standards of transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality;
- ✦ all calls for third parties and all calls that are implemented by third parties must be published on the Funding & Tenders Portal, and on the beneficiaries' websites;
- ✦ the calls must remain open for at least 2 months;
- ✦ if submission deadlines are changed, this must immediately be announced and registered applicants must be informed of the change;
- ✦ projects must publish the outcome of the calls without delay, including a description of third-party projects, the date of the award, the duration, and the legal name of the third party and country of establishment;
- ✦ the calls must have a clear European dimension.

Further conditions may be stipulated in the specific conditions for the topic.

 For more information, see AGA — *Annotated Model Grant Agreement*, Articles 6.2.D.1 and 9.4.

## C. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

### C.1 Financial capacity

Applicants must have **stable and sufficient resources** to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share. Organisations participating in several projects must have sufficient capacity to implement all these projects.

The financial capacity check will be done on the basis of the documents uploaded in the [Participant Register](#) during the grant preparation stage (e.g. profit and loss account and balance sheet, business plan, audit report produced by an approved external auditor, certifying the accounts for the last closed financial year, etc.). The analysis will be based on

neutral financial indicators, but will also take into account other aspects, such as dependency on EU funding and deficit and revenue in previous years.

The check will normally be done for the coordinator and if the requested grant amount is equal to or greater than EUR 500 000, except for:

- ✦ public bodies (entities established as a public body under national law, including local, regional or national authorities) or international organisations; and
- ✦ cases where the individual requested grant amount is not more than EUR 60 000 (low-value grant).

If needed, it may also be done for the other applicants, including affiliated entities. If the financial capacity is structurally guaranteed by another legal entity, the financial capacity of that legal entity will be verified.

If the Agency considers that the financial capacity is not satisfactory, they may require: – further information;

- ✦ an enhanced financial responsibility regime, i.e. joint and several responsibility of affiliated entities (*see Section G below*); and
  - ✦ prefinancing paid in instalments;
- or
- ✦ propose no prefinancing;
  - ✦ request that the applicant concerned is replaced or, if needed, reject the entire proposal.

**i** For more information, see [Rules on Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment](#).

## C.2 Operational capacity

Applicants must have the **know-how**, **qualifications** and **resources** to successfully implement their tasks in the project and contribute their share (including, when appropriate, sufficient experience in EU/transnational projects of comparable size).

This assessment of operational capacity will be carried out during the evaluation of the award criterion 'Quality and efficiency of the implementation'. It will be based on the competence and experience of the applicants and their project teams, including their operational resources (human, technical and other) or, exceptionally, the measures proposed to obtain the necessary competence and experience by the time the tasks are implemented.

If the evaluation of this award criterion leads to a score above the applicable threshold, then the applicants are considered to have sufficient operational capacity.

For this assessment, applicants will be required to provide the following information in the application form:

- ✦ description of the consortium) participants; and
- ✦ for each participant:
  - identity of researchers involved in the proposal (through the researchers table);
  - up to five most relevant publications, widely used datasets, software, goods, services, or any other achievements relevant to the call content;
  - up to five most relevant previous projects or activities, connected to the subject of this proposal; and
  - description of any significant infrastructure and/or any major items of technical equipment, relevant to the proposed work.

Additional supporting documents may be requested if they are needed to confirm the operational capacity of any applicant.

Public bodies, Member State organisations and international organisations are exempted from the operational capacity check.

For the EIC Accelerator, the operational capacity of the applicant will be assessed during the evaluation of the award criterion 'Level of risk, implementation, and need for Union support'. Experts will assess whether each participant has, or will have in due time thanks to EIC support, sufficient operational capacity to successfully carry out their tasks in the proposed work-plan. This assessment will be based on the competence and experience of the applicant, including their operational resources (human, technical, other) and the measures proposed to secure these resources by the time of the implementation of the tasks.

### C.3 Exclusion

Applicants that are subject to **EU administrative sanctions** (i.e. exclusion)<sup>265</sup> or are in one of the following **exclusion situations**<sup>266</sup> that bar them from receiving EU grants can NOT participate:

- ✦ bankruptcy, winding up, affairs administered by the courts, arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities or other similar procedures (including procedures for persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts);

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<sup>265</sup> See Article 138 EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

<sup>266</sup> See Article 138 and 141, EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

- ✦ they are in breach of social security or tax obligations (including if done by persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts);
- ✦ they are guilty of grave professional misconduct (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant);
- ✦ they are guilty of fraud, corruption, having links to a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant);
- ✦ they have shown significant deficiencies in complying with their main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant);
- ✦ they are guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Regulation No [2988/95](#)<sup>267</sup> (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant); or
- ✦ they have created under a different jurisdiction an entity with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant).

Applicants will also be refused if they:<sup>268</sup>

- ✦ have misrepresented the information required as a condition for participating in the procedure or have failed to supply that information; or
- ✦ were previously involved in the preparation of documents used in the award procedure where this entails a breach of the principle of equality of treatment, including distortion of competition, that cannot be remedied otherwise.

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<sup>267</sup> Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 2988/95 of 18 December 1995 on the protection of the European Communities financial interests, (OJ L 312, 23.12.1995, p. 1).

<sup>268</sup> Article 143 EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#)

## D. AWARD CRITERIA

### D.1 Award criteria

If admissible and eligible, the proposals for Coordination and Support Actions will be evaluated and ranked against the following **award criteria**:

<b>Excellence</b> (The following aspects will be taken into account, to the extent that the proposed work corresponds to the description in the work programme)	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Quality and efficiency of the implementation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✦ Clarity and pertinence of the project's objectives.</li><li>✦ Quality of the proposed coordination and/or support measures including soundness of methodology.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✦ Credibility of the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts specified in the Work Programme, and the likely scale and significance of the contributions due to the project.</li><li>✦ Suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✦ Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks, and appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages, and the resources overall.</li><li>✦ Capacity and role of each participant, and the extent to which the consortium as a whole brings together the necessary expertise.</li></ul>

### D.2 Scores and weighting

Evaluation scores will be awarded for the criteria, and not for the different aspects listed.

For Coordination and Support Actions full applications, each criterion will be scored out of 5. The threshold for individual criteria will be 3. The overall threshold, applying to the sum of the three individual scores, will be 10.

All scores will be given a weight of 1.

Proposals that pass the individual threshold AND the overall threshold will be considered for funding, within the limits of the available call budget. Other proposals will be rejected.

### D.3 Two-stage calls

Where applicable, this is detailed in the main part of this Work Programme, under the relevant sections.

## E. DOCUMENTS

### E.1. Submission

All proposals must be submitted **electronically** via the Funders & Tenders Portal electronic submission system (accessible via the topic page in the [Search Funding & Tenders](#) section). Paper submissions are NOT possible.

Proposals must be **complete** and contain all parts and mandatory annexes and supporting documents.

The application form will have two parts:

- **Part A** (to be filled in directly online) contains administrative information about the applicant organisations (future coordinator and beneficiaries and affiliated entities and/or investees), the summarised budget for the proposal and call-specific questions;
- **Part B** (to be downloaded from the Portal submission system, completed and then assembled and re-uploaded as a PDF in the system) contains the technical description of the project.

Annexes and supporting documents will be directly available in the submission system and must be uploaded as PDF files (or other formats allowed by the system).

Proposals should be designed to stay as close as possible to the award criteria (*see Section D above*). The application form will help to achieve this.

When submitting the proposal, the coordinator will have to confirm that they have the mandate to act for all applicants. Moreover, they will have to confirm that the information in the application is correct and complete and that all participants comply with the conditions for receiving EU funding (especially eligibility, financial and operational capacity, exclusion, etc.). Proposals not complying with these requirements, where applicable, will be rejected. Before signing the grant, each participant will have to confirm this again by signing a declaration of honour.

For lump sum grant proposals, the estimated budget must be described in a detailed budget table. This will be used as a basis for justifying and/or fixing the lump sum amount. As the lump sum must be an approximation of the costs actually incurred, the costs

included in this detailed budget table must comply with the basic eligibility conditions for EU actual cost grants (see AGA — *Annotated Grant Agreement, Article 6*). This is particularly important for purchases and subcontracting, which must ensure best value for money (or, if appropriate, the lowest price) and be free from any conflicts of interest. If the budget table contains ineligible costs, the grant may be reduced (even later on during implementation of the project or after its end). Exceptionally, the Decision authorising the use of lump sum funding for a specific action might specify that a detailed budget table is not required.

**⚠ Applicants may be asked at a later stage for further documents (for legal entity validation, financial capacity check, bank account validation, etc.).**

## F. PROCEDURE

### F.1 Evaluation procedure and ranking

Proposals will be checked for formal requirements (admissibility and eligibility) and then evaluated (for each topic separately) for operational capacity and award criteria (see *Sections C and D above*) by an **evaluation committee** composed of independent external experts and then ranked according to their quality score.

For lump sum grants proposals, comments on the detailed lump sum budget table will be provided in the Evaluation Summary Report only for proposals invited to grant agreement preparation (or placed in the reserve list) and ones rejected (in part) due to significant overestimation or underestimation of costs.

Exceptionally, where indicated in the specific call/topic conditions, the evaluation committee may be composed partially or, in the case of 'Coordination and support actions', partially or fully of representatives of EU institutions.

For proposals with the same score within a single budget envelope (with the exception of the first stage of two-stage submissions) a method to establish the **priority order** will be determined, taking into consideration the objectives of the specific topic. In the absence of special arrangements in the specific call/topic conditions, the following method will apply:


For each group of proposals with the same score, starting with the group achieving the highest score and continuing in descending order:


- 1) Proposals that address aspects of the call that have not otherwise been covered by more highly ranked proposals will be considered to have the highest priority.
- 2) The proposals identified under 1), if any, will themselves be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for 'Excellence'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on scores for 'Impact'. In the case of 'Innovation

actions', priority will be given to the score for 'Impact', followed by that for 'Excellence'.

- 3) If necessary, the gender balance among the researchers with a leading role named in the researchers table in the proposal, will be used as a factor for prioritisation.
- 4) If necessary, any further prioritisation will be based on geographical diversity, defined as the number of Member States or Associated Countries represented in the proposal, not otherwise receiving funds from projects higher up the ranking list (and if equal in number, then by budget).
- 5) If a distinction still cannot be made, the panel may decide to further prioritise by considering other factors related to the objectives of the call, or to Horizon Europe in general. These may include, for example, enhancing the quality of the project portfolio through synergies between projects or, where relevant and feasible, involving SMEs. These factors will be documented in the panel report.
- 6) The method described in 1), 2), 3) and 4) will then be applied to the remaining equally ranked proposals in the group.

At the end of the evaluation, all applicants will be informed of the result in an evaluation result letter. Successful proposals will be invited to the next stage, 'grant preparation'; the other proposals will be put on the reserve list or rejected.

 No commitment to provide funding — Invitation to the grant preparation stage does NOT constitute a formal commitment to funding. Various legal checks are still needed before the grant can be awarded, such as legal entity validation, financial capacity verification, exclusion check, etc.

 If indicated in the specific call/topic conditions, proposals may also receive a **Seal of Excellence** <sup>269</sup> and/or a **Sovereignty (STEP) Seal** <sup>270</sup> as explained in the main part of this Work Programme. With prior authorisation from the applicant, the Agency may share information concerning the proposal and the evaluation with interested financing authorities, subject to the conclusion of confidentiality agreements. In the case of the Sovereignty (STEP) Seal, information about the project will be, upon agreement, display in the STEP Portal with the aim of enhancing the visibility of the project and attract potential investors.

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<sup>269</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/seal-excellence\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/seal-excellence_en).

<sup>270</sup> Sovereignty seal - European Commission (europa.eu)

**⚠ Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP<sup>271</sup>)** — If provided for in the specific call/topic conditions, proposals that have been assessed positively and comply with the minimum quality requirements (including eligibility, exclusion, and award criteria) may be awarded a '[STEP Seal](#)', if the project contributes to any of the STEP objectives. Information about the project will be, upon agreement displayed in the STEP Portal with the aim of enhancing the visibility of the project, which may help it attract public or private funding by certifying its quality and contribution to the STEP objectives.

**Budget flexibility** — The budgets set out in the calls and topics are indicative. Unless otherwise stated, final budgets may change following evaluation. The final figures may change by up to 20% compared to the total budget indicated in each individual part of the work programme. Changes within these limits will not be considered substantial within the meaning of Article 110(5) of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No [2024/2509](#).

## **F.2 Evaluation review procedure**

If the consortium believes that the evaluation procedure was flawed, the coordinator can submit a **complaint** (following the deadlines and procedures also set out in the evaluation result letter).

Only the procedural aspects of an evaluation may be the subject of a request for an evaluation review. The evaluation of the merits of a proposal will not be the subject of an evaluation review.

A request for an evaluation review must relate to a specific proposal and must be submitted within 30 days after the beneficiary accesses the evaluation results. The deadlines will be counted from the date of opening/access. The maximum size limit of the request is 7 000 characters. Notifications of evaluation results which have not been opened in the Funding & Tenders Portal within 10 days after sending are considered to have been accessed (see also [Funding & Tenders Portal Terms and Conditions](#)).

An evaluation review committee will provide an opinion on the procedural aspects of the evaluation. The evaluation review committee may recommend a re-evaluation of the proposal, to be carried out primarily by evaluators who were not involved in the previous evaluation, or a confirmation of the initial evaluation.

## **F.3 Indicative timetable for evaluation and for signature of the grant agreement**

Unless otherwise stated in the specific call/topic conditions, the timing for evaluation and grant preparation is as follows:

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<sup>271</sup> Regulation (EU) 2024/795 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 February 2024 establishing the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) (OJ L, 2024/795, 29.2.2024).

- information on the outcome of the evaluation: around 5 months from the deadline for submission;
- indicative date for the signing of grant agreements: around 8 months from the deadline for submission.

## G. LEGAL AND FINANCIAL SET-UP OF THE GRANT AGREEMENTS

During the grant preparation stage, the applicant will be asked to prepare the grant agreement, together with the Agency project officer.

This grant agreement will set out the framework for the grant and its terms and conditions, particularly concerning deliverables, reporting and payments. The applicable model with the complete text of the provisions is available on the topic page, together with the other call documentation.

### G.1 Starting date & project duration

The project starting date and duration will be fixed in the grant agreement (*see Data Sheet, point 1*). Normally, the starting date will be after the grant has been signed. A starting date before the date the grant is signed (retroactive) can be granted exceptionally for duly justified reasons.<sup>272</sup>

The project duration is provided in months (extensions will be possible only exceptionally, for duly justified reasons and if the Agency agrees).

### G.2 Milestones and deliverables

The milestones and deliverables for each project will be managed through the grant management system in the Portal and are reflected in Annex 1 of the grant agreement.

The standard deliverables will be set out in the specific call/topic conditions.

### G.3 Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount

The grant parameters (maximum grant amount, funding rate, total eligible costs, etc.) will be fixed in the grant agreement (*Data Sheet, point 3 and Article 5*).

The project budget is provided in EUR. The amount of the grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

For **actual cost grants**, the grant will be a budget-based, mixed actual cost grant. This means that it will reimburse ONLY certain types of costs (eligible costs) and ONLY those costs *actually* incurred for the project (NOT the *budgeted* costs).

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<sup>272</sup> Article 196 EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

The costs will be reimbursed at the funding rate fixed in the specific call/topic conditions and in the grant agreement.

Such grants may NOT produce a profit. If there is a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs), it will be deducted from the final grant amount.

Moreover, the final grant amount may be reduced in case of non-compliance (e.g. improper implementation, breach of obligations, etc.).

The relevant maximum Horizon Europe funding rates are as follows:

- ✦ Research and innovation action: 100%
- ✦ Innovation action: 70% (except for non-profit legal entities, where a rate of up to 100% applies)
- ✦ Coordination and support action: 100%
- ✦ Innovation and market deployment: 70% (except for non-profit legal entities, where a rate of up to 100% applies)

Other funding rates may be set out in the specific call/topic conditions.

For **lump sum and unit grants**, the funding rate is already applied as part of the methodology for fixing the amounts and is therefore not shown in the grant agreement.

#### **G.4 Budget categories and cost eligibility rules**

The budget categories and cost eligibility rules are fixed in the grant agreement (*see Data Sheet, point 3 and Article 6*).

Budget categories:

- ✦ actual costs (i.e. costs which are real and not estimated or budgeted) for:
  - personnel costs (unless declared as a unit cost; see below);
  - subcontracting costs;
  - purchase costs (unless declared as a unit cost; see below); and
  - costs of providing financial support to third parties (if provided for in the specific call conditions);
- ✦ units (i.e. an amount per unit) for:
  - personnel unit costs;
  - personnel costs of SME owners/natural persons not receiving a salary;

- personnel costs calculated by the beneficiaries according to their usual cost accounting practices (average personnel costs);
  - costs of internally invoiced goods and services calculated by the beneficiaries according to their usual cost accounting practices; and
  - specific unit costs (if provided for in the specific call/topic conditions; see also Annex 2a of the grant agreement);
- ✦ flat-rate (i.e. costs calculated by applying a percentage fixed in advance to other types of eligible costs) for:
- indirect costs (25% flat-rate of the total eligible direct costs, excluding eligible direct costs for subcontracting, financial support to third parties and any unit costs or lump sums which include indirect costs);
- ✦ lump sum (i.e. a global amount deemed to cover all costs of the action or a specific category of costs, if provided for in the specific call/topic conditions).

Within a grant, different forms of costs can be used.

Costs can also be declared under several EU Synergy grants, if the cumulative funding under the grants does not exceed 100% of the eligible costs and the contributions declared to them.

### **G.5 Reporting & payment arrangements**

The reporting and payment arrangements are fixed in the grant agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4 and articles 21 and 22*).

After the grant has been signed, the consortium will normally receive a float to start working on the project (normally, pre-financing of 160% of the average EU funding per reporting period (i.e. maximum grant amount/number of periods); exceptionally, less or no pre-financing). For actions with only one reporting period, it will be less, since 100% would mean the totality of the grant amount.

Payments will be automatically lowered if one of the consortium members has outstanding debts towards the EU (granting authority or other EU bodies). Such debts will be offset by the Agency, in line with the conditions set out in the grant agreement (*see Article 22*).

At the moment of the prefinancing payment, an amount ranging from 5% to 8% of the maximum grant amount will be deducted from the prefinancing payment and transferred to the mutual insurance mechanism. This mechanism covers the risks associated with non-recovery of sums due from the beneficiaries.

There will be one or several interim payments linked to a periodic report, depending on the duration of the project.

At the end of the project, the consortium will be invited to submit a report on the basis of which the final grant amount will be calculated. If the total of earlier payments is higher than the final grant amount, the beneficiaries concerned (or the coordinator) will be asked to pay back the difference (recovery).

## G.6 Certificates

Depending on the size of the grant amount and on the type of beneficiaries, beneficiaries may be required to submit a certificate on the financial statements. The thresholds for this certificate are fixed in the grant agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4 and Article 24*).

## G.7 Liability regime for recoveries

The liability regime for recoveries is that of individual financial responsibility. Each beneficiary is liable only for their own debt (and those of its affiliated entities, if any) (*Data Sheet point 4.4 and Article 22*).

## G.8 Provisions concerning project implementation

- ✦ Proper implementation of the action (*Article 11*).
- ✦ Conflict of interest (*Article 12*).
- ✦ Confidentiality and security (EU classified information) (*Article 13 and Annex 5*).
- ✦ Ethics (research integrity) and values (gender mainstreaming) (*Article 14 and Annex 5*).
- ✦ Data protection (*Article 15*).
- ✦ Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), background and results, access rights and rights of use (*Article 16 and Annex 5*).

In addition to the standard provisions, the following specific provisions in the model grant agreement will apply to all grants awarded under this work programme:

**Additional exploitation obligations in case of a public emergency:** If requested by the Agency, beneficiaries must grant non-exclusive licences to their results – for a limited period of time specified in the request and on fair and reasonable conditions – to legal entities that need the results to address the public emergency. These legal entities must commit to rapidly and broadly exploiting the resulting products and services on fair and reasonable conditions. This provision will apply up to 4 years after the end of the action.

**Additional information obligation relating to standards:** Unless stated otherwise in the specific call conditions, beneficiaries must, up to 4 years after the end of the action, inform the Agency if the results could reasonably be expected to contribute to European or international standards.

Please also see Annex 6 of this Work Programme.

Where provided for in the specific call conditions, the Agency may, up to 4 years after the end of the action, object to a transfer of ownership or to the exclusive licensing of results, as set out in the specific provision of *Annex 5*.

- ✦ Communication, dissemination, open science and visibility (*Article 17 and Annex 5*). In addition to the standard provisions, the following specific provisions in the model grant agreement will apply to all grants awarded under this work programme:

**Open science - additional practices, validation of scientific publications:**

Beneficiaries must provide (digital or physical) access to data or other results needed to validate the conclusions of scientific publications, to the extent that their legitimate interests or constraints are safeguarded (and unless they already provided the (open) access at publication).

**Open science - additional practices, public emergency:** In case of a public emergency, if requested by the granting authority, beneficiaries must immediately deposit any research output in a repository and provide open access to it under a CC BY licence, a public domain dedication (CC 0) or equivalent.

As an exception, if providing open access would be against the beneficiaries' legitimate interests, the beneficiaries must grant non-exclusive licences, on fair and reasonable conditions, to legal entities that need the research output to address the public emergency. These legal entities must commit to rapidly and broadly exploiting the resulting products and services on fair and reasonable conditions. This exception is limited to 4 years after the end of the action.

- ✦ Specific rules for carrying out the action (*Article 18 and Annex 5*).

Other provisions may be set out in the specific call/topic conditions.

## **G.9 Non-compliance and breach of contract**

The grant agreement (*Chapter 5*) provides for the measures that may be taken in case of breach of contract (and other violations of law).

- For more information, see the [AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement](#).

## H. APPLICANT AGREEMENT REQUIREMENTS

This annex consolidates all requirements regarding agreement by applicants referenced throughout this Work Programme. The objective is to ensure transparency for applicants and facilitate data handling processes for the Agency.

All data will be processed in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 (the EU Data Protection Regulation) and other applicable legal frameworks, and all data are considered strictly confidential. Confidentiality and data protection obligations apply at all stages of the evaluation, support, and implementation processes.

### **Types of data concerned (non-exhaustive)**

The data subject to agreement -based sharing may include (non-exhaustively):

- ✦ Personal data: such as names, roles, contact details and background of key personnel;
- ✦ Proposal data: including abstracts, objectives, expected impacts, and other technical and administrative information submitted as part of the application.
- ✦ Investment-related data: such as business data financial projections, funding structure, ownership information, cap tables, or any information disclosed to support due diligence (e.g. pitch decks, or investment materials);
- ✦ Business and financial data: where applicable, this may include, information on intellectual property, strategic plans, or commercial partnerships.

**Note:** The provisions in this annex do not override or modify any applicable confidentiality obligations established elsewhere in this Work Programme or its Annexes.

## Annex 3 Fast Track scheme to apply for the EIC Accelerator

The 'Fast Track' scheme is a specific process applicable to the EIC Accelerator. It provides for a specific treatment of proposals that result from existing Horizon Europe or Horizon 2020 projects.

Under the Fast Track scheme, applicants do not apply directly to the EIC Accelerator call (Section V). Instead, a project review is carried out by the responsible granting authority or national funding body to assess the innovation or market deployment potential of an existing project, and to decide whether the project is suitable for support under the EIC Accelerator.

The project review – implemented by the granting authority or national funding body responsible for the programme – must be conducted using:

- ✦ award criteria equivalent to the ones set out for the short application stage of the EIC Accelerator regarding excellence and impact (Section V), centred on the underlying idea of that potential new action;
- ✦ a project review process that guarantees an independent assessment and is carried out within the previous two years in compliance with Article 48 of the Horizon Europe Regulation.

The responsible granting authority or national funding body can submit the outcome of the projects review to the EIC Accelerator, if the project review concludes that the following conditions are met:

- ✦ the proposal meets the first two criteria of the EIC Accelerator (i.e. excellence and impact);
- ✦ there is no duplication of funding of activities to be supported under the EIC Accelerator with the existing grant; and
- ✦ the applicant meets the eligibility criteria for the EIC Accelerator.

Fast Track applicants will then be invited to prepare a full proposal for the EIC Accelerator following the notification about the successful result of the initial review. The Fast track Accelerator applicants will be submitted to the same submission limitations that apply to the EIC Accelerator.

They will receive coaching as specified in Section V.

Full proposals to the EIC Accelerator stemming from the Fast Track scheme will be assessed as set out in Section V, and will be treated in exactly the same way as all other full proposals.

In 2026, the national funding bodies, schemes, projects and beneficiaries which are eligible for the Fast Track for EIC Accelerator are:

- ✦ The EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition projects (including under EIC pilot) managed by the Agency;
- ✦ Relevant schemes managed by the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), as identified as relevant by each KIC;
- ✦ Funding schemes for SMEs supported under the Eurostars-2 Joint Programme and the Partnership on Innovative SMEs managed by the Eureka secretariat and relevant national bodies;
- ✦ Companies awarded a grant only under the Horizon 2020 EIC pilot Accelerator and the Horizon Europe EIC Accelerator managed by the Agency.<sup>273</sup>
- ✦ Companies awarded grants under the EIC Pre-Accelerator call;
- ✦ Companies awarded grants under the Women Tech.EU scheme.

These national funding bodies are responsible for implementing the Fast Track scheme in accordance with the above provisions. They may decide not to implement the scheme or to introduce it at a later stage.

Subject to experience with the Fast Track scheme, the scheme may be opened to other parts of Horizon Europe and Horizon 2020, and to the funding bodies responsible for their implementation.

The EIC website will provide up to date information about how the Fast Track scheme is being implemented by the relevant funding bodies.

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<sup>273</sup> For previous beneficiaries of a grant, the Fast Track scheme cannot be used to request grant-only support.

## Annex 4 EIC Plug-in scheme for the EIC Accelerator

Following the evaluation of the EIC Plug-in pilot scheme from 2022-24, the objectives for the EIC Plug-In scheme are:

- ✦ **Stronger alignment** between national and EU innovation support to support the growth of companies with potential to contribute to Europe's competitiveness
- ✦ **More streamlined process to access funding** for innovation projects from excellent companies
- ✦ **Identification** of strategic companies with innovation projects based on excellent research and with impact potential

The EIC Plug-In scheme aims to support collaboration between national or regional funding bodies providing grants or/and equity to deep tech startups, in particular around the review and evaluation of suitable projects and companies for EIC Accelerator. The aim is to strengthen the capability of the funding bodies to identify and support promising deep tech projects and companies that could benefit from EIC accelerator support.

Eligible funding bodies will be able to propose a limited number of companies from national and regional programmes, for direct access to the full proposal stage of the EIC Accelerator. The companies should be selected based on criteria equivalent to the criteria for EIC Accelerator Short application (Section V) and through a process that guarantee an independent assessment of proposals. The eligible funding bodies, programmes and project review processes will be certified by the Commission with the support of external experts. The list of responsible national and regional funding bodies from Member State and Associated Country that have certified programmes will be published on the EIC website.

The selected projects and companies will have the same access to EIC coaching as proposals selected in the EIC accelerator short application phase. Full proposals stemming from the Plug-in partnership will be assessed as set out in Section V (above) and will be treated exactly the same way as all other full proposals. The number of proposals that can be given access for the Plug-In will be limited at the level of the Member State and Associated Countries.

The Commission may withdraw the certification, if it finds out that:

- ✦ false information was used to obtain the certification
- ✦ the project review does not comply with the provisions as set out in the most recent EIC work programme

A Member State or Associated Country may decide not to implement the Plug-in scheme or to introduce it at a later stage.

## Annex 5 Booster grants for EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition Awardees

In line with Article 47(2) of the Horizon Europe Regulation,<sup>274</sup> with the aim to implement Portfolio coordinating activities or to nurture innovation out of these, Booster grants of a fixed amount not exceeding EUR 50 000 may be awarded outside any call for proposal to EIC Awardees, Technology Transfer Offices, EIC Inventors and other third parties linked to projects already selected under the Pathfinder or where relevant Transition calls (EIC Pathfinder projects including grants resulting from certain EIC pilot Pathfinder, FET-Open and FET-Proactive calls, see Section III and of EIC Transition projects)

Additionally, and for the purpose of further assessing innovation potentialities and explore potential pathways to commercialisation out of these projects results (preliminary or final), applicants may also be EIC Awardees, Technology Transfer Offices, EIC Inventors and other third parties provided with the necessary access rights or entrusted with any such task by the concerned awardee. Booster grants may in particular support the development of potential innovation stemming from the future EIC Market Place. Complementary activities to explore potential pathways to commercialisation (Innovation activities) could include, but are not limited to:

- ✦ definition of a commercialisation process;
- ✦ market and competitiveness analysis;
- ✦ technology assessment and/or certification;
- ✦ verification of innovation potential;
- ✦ consolidation of IP rights;
- ✦ freedom to operate (FTO);
- ✦ business case development;
- ✦ testing, piloting with users or potential customers.;
- ✦ exploratory / preparatory work for creating start-ups or spin-offs;
- ✦ support for hosting by a public or private incubator/ accelerator.
- ✦ support in participating to Tech2Market BAS programme (in particular Business Validation Programme and/or Venture Building Programme);

Portfolio activities could include, but are not limited to:

- ✦ defining common objectives and activities;
- ✦ building synergies within the EIC Portfolio and with any outside relevant partners, including within the EIT Community;
- ✦ engaging strategic partners to overcome common challenges;
- ✦ (co)-organising events;
- ✦ maximising data sharing;
- ✦ raising visibility of the EIC Portfolio's community and the EIC.

These Booster grants do not fund research, or activities that were already foreseen in the original project or that are already funded by other EIC instruments. A maximum of three Booster grants can be awarded for each EIC Pathfinder project and more than three may be awarded in exceptional and duly justified cases. A maximum of one Booster grant can be awarded for each EIC Transition project and more than one may be awarded in exceptional and duly justified cases. Any such Booster grant can be awarded to an individual EIC awardee or a group of EIC Awardees.<sup>275</sup>

EIC Awardees or other potential booster grant beneficiary as indicated above can be invited to apply at any time for an Booster grant following a positive recommendation from an EIC Programme Manager or a project review or a participation in the EIC Tech2Market BAS action, in particular Business Validation Programme and/or Venture Building Action (Opportunities exploration phase or Team creation). Each proposal will be assessed in accordance with Article 29, paragraph 2, of Horizon Europe Regulation taking into account the following considerations ("award criteria"):

For activities to explore potential pathways to commercialisation:

- ✦ Timeliness and pertinence of the activities proposed (Excellence);
- ✦ Potential of the proposed Deeptech innovation to create new market or to solve pressing societal needs / problems (Impact);
- ✦ Expertise, capabilities and motivation of the applicants to take this innovation forward to the market (Quality and efficiency of implementation).

For portfolio activities:

- ✦ Contribution of the activity to the objectives of the EIC Portfolio (Excellence);
- ✦ Timeliness of the activity proposed to maximise its impact (Impact);

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<sup>275</sup> This includes affiliated entities that are participating in the Pathfinder or Transition projects.

- ✦ Engagement of EIC Portfolio's projects and relevant external partners (Quality and efficiency of implementation).

Each proposal will be evaluated by a mixed evaluation committee composed of:

- ✦ An EIC Programme Manager.
- ✦ An external expert selected from a limited pool of trained experts, covering the broad technology areas.
- ✦ Either an EIC Project Officer or a second external expert.

The evaluation committee will assess whether the proposal meets each of the award criteria and will give a GO or NO GO. Proposals receiving at least two GO will be selected. Proposals not receiving at least two GO will be rejected. The evaluation committee may invite a rejected applicant to resubmit an adjusted proposal.

The implementation of Booster grants for Innovation activities will be performed by the CSA beneficiary selected under the call for proposals HORIZON-EIC-2024BOOSTER.

## Annex 6 Additional provisions concerning Intellectual Property for EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition

In accordance with the Horizon Europe Regulation,<sup>276</sup> the current Work Programme provides for additional dissemination and exploitation obligations in particular to facilitate the exploitation of results, and to enable a more pro-active role to the Commission and EISMEA identifying and maximising exploitation opportunities in the Union.

Together with specific intellectual property rules provided for under annex 5 of the Model Grant agreement, the following rules will apply to EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition actions.

### 1. Definitions

The following definition is complementing those provided in the Glossary in the introductory section of this Work Programme for the purpose of this Annex.

With reference to information and results owned by any EIC Awardee that is a not-for-profit legal entity, EIC Inventors are any of their employees and subcontractors, established in a Member States or Associated Country, and appearing or entitled to appear as inventor in any corresponding patent filing and according to the definition of inventor for the relevant patent jurisdiction.

### 2. Exchange of information for the purpose of EIC portfolio activities

#### 2.1 – Access to information about results<sup>282</sup>

- a** At any time and without prejudice to the EIC Awardee's ownership of results the EIC Programme Manager may request any EIC Awardee to facilitate information on results (preliminary or final) generated by the action, subject to paragraphs b) and c) below, with the aim to probe their potential for further innovation.
- b** Where any such result (preliminary or final) was not already made public through agreed dissemination activities or a patent or protection by any other intellectual property right, that information shall be earmarked and treated by the Agency as confidential and disseminated only to:

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<sup>276</sup> In accordance with Recital (85) and notably the second indent of Article 39(1) of Horizon Europe Regulation.

<sup>282</sup> Results' means any tangible or intangible effect of the action, such as data, know-how or information, whatever its form or nature, whether or not it can be protected, as well as any rights attached to it, including intellectual property rights.

- ✦ other EIC Awardees, bound by an EIC grant agreement or an EIC contract, that refers to or includes the obligations detailed under section 2.2 below;
- ✦ EIC inventors having signed a non-disclosure agreement with the Agency, providing for the obligations detailed under section 2.2 below;
- ✦ other member of the EIC Community platform established in a Member State or an Associated Country and having signed a non-disclosure agreement with the Agency, providing for the obligations detailed under section 2.2.

Where based on that confidential information any of above mentioned entities request disclosure or access to the underlying detailed data and results, the EIC Awardee may refuse it based on its legitimate interests, including commercial exploitation and any other constraints, such as data protection rules, privacy, confidentiality, trade secrets, Union competitive interests, security rules or intellectual property rights.

- c EIC Awardees may object to the obligation provided for under paragraph b) when:
  - ✦ committing to either publish or patent or protect by any other intellectual property right and without unreasonable delays, or
  - ✦ demonstrating concrete exploitation of the said preliminary findings and results, subject to initial discussion with and final agreement of the Agency on the corresponding update of the Plan for dissemination and exploitation referred to in Section 3.1.

## 2.2 – Non-disclosure obligations

Where EIC Awardees are informed on or given access or disclosure to any preliminary findings, results or other intellectual property generated by other EIC actions, and where this information is earmarked as confidential in accordance with section 2.1.b, they must:

- ✦ keep it strictly confidential; and
- ✦ not disclose it to any person without the prior written agreement of the owner and then only under conditions of confidentiality equal to those provided under this section; and
- ✦ use the same degree of care to protect its confidentiality as the EIC awardee uses to protect its own confidential information of a similar nature; and
- ✦ act in good faith at all times; and

- ✦ not use any of it for any purpose other than assessing opportunities to propose other research or innovation activities to the EIC, or any other initiative agreed by the owner.

These EIC Awardees may disclose any such information to their employees and, with the prior authorisation of the owner, to their subcontractors established in a Member State or an Associated Country if these subcontractors:

- ✦ need to access it for the performance of their work with respect to the purpose permitted as above; and
- ✦ are bound by a written agreement or professional obligation to protect its confidentiality in the way described in this section.

No obligations are imposed upon the EIC Awardee where such information:

- ✦ is already known to the EIC awardee before and is not subject to any other obligation of confidentiality; or
- ✦ is or becomes publicly known through no act by or default by/of the EIC awardee; or
- ✦ is obtained by the EIC awardee from a third party and in circumstances where the EIC awardee has no reason to believe that there has been a breach of an obligation of confidentiality.

The restrictions in this section do not apply if such information is required to be disclosed by any law or regulation, by any judicial or governmental order or request, or pursuant to disclosure requirements relating to the listing of the stock of the EIC awardee on any recognised stock exchange.

Upon the end or termination of the grant agreement or of the participation of the EIC awardee, it must immediately cease to use the said information, except if otherwise directly agreed with the owner, or if the EIC awardee remains a member of the EIC Community referred to under section 2.1.b.

The provisions of this section will be in force for a period of 60 months following the end or the termination of the grant agreement or of the participation of the EIC awardee, at the end of which period they will cease to have effect.

### **3. Specific provisions on intellectual property and related dissemination and exploitation activities**

#### **3.1 – Plan for exploitation and dissemination**

EIC Awardees must report to the Agency on their exploitation and dissemination activities:

- ✦ in accordance with the grant agreement, together with any updated version of the plan for exploitation and dissemination;
- ✦ within 30 days upon request from the EIC Programme Manager for the purpose of EIC portfolio activities.

The Agency may also request an update of the plan for exploitation and dissemination of the results at any time during the implementation of the action.

EIC Awardees must address and agree in their Consortium agreement on all related intellectual property issues, from ownership and co-ownership of results to the consortium's internal approval process for their dissemination. EIC Awardees must also identify therein any pre-existing technology fitting the action's needs and objectives and try to reach appropriate licensing agreement between them to prevent research funding redundancy.

The EIC Awardees are deemed to have signed the Consortium agreement at the date of the signature of this grant agreement. The Agency may require a copy at any time in accordance with the grant agreement.

### **3.2 – Dissemination activities**

Each EIC awardee will propose and undertake dissemination activities of the plan for exploitation and dissemination agreed by the Agency with the aim of supporting innovation in the European Union and fostering the development of the EIC Community, opting for publications as main route to bring technical and scientific knowledge to the public.

When approving the plan for exploitation and dissemination of the results or any update, the Agency may subject any proposed dissemination activity to one or a combination of the following conditions:

- ✦ the prior assessment of any innovation potential of the results to be disseminated,
- ✦ the prior protection of the result to be disseminated, in accordance with the grant agreement, the cost being eligible;

Where the Agency disagrees to a dissemination activity, it will actively assist the EIC Awardees to achieve compliance with the required conditions, without unreasonable delay and in due time, notably by proposing complementary EIC support for exploitation or a support of the Business Acceleration Services, as detailed and referred to under section VII. Where the Agency agrees to a dissemination activity, it will abide to the grant agreement.

The Agency is hereby entrusted with the right to also disseminate and promote the exploitation of any results that are made public by the EIC awardee or with its assent.

### **3.3 – Exploitation of results**

EIC Awardees must use their best efforts to exploit their results or have them exploited by a third party, in priority those established in a Member State or an Associated Country, including through transfer or licensing. The Agency may object to a transfer of ownership or the exclusive licensing of results under certain conditions as detailed in the EIC grant agreement.

EIC Awardees must report on any exploitation operation:

- ✦ at the reporting periods provided for in the grant agreement;
- ✦ with the periodicity agreed at the end of the action together with the final exploitation and dissemination plan;
- ✦ within 30 days upon request from the Agency, within 4 years after final payment.

Each EIC Awardee agrees upon signature of the grant agreement, to ensure the necessary support or access rights for the further development and exploitation of results that any of its EIC Inventors have contributed to (respecting the transfer rule).

If the EIC Awardee provides financial or other support to the EIC Inventor for any such exploitation, royalties or other returns may be shared with the EIC Awardee on mutually beneficial terms, provided the conclusion of any such agreement does not prevent the EIC Inventor(s) to exercise their rights. Such financial support should include as a minimum the full or partial funding of the costs of relevant Intellectual Property Right protection in major jurisdictions. Other support includes expertise, access to infrastructure and facilities, or other forms of support. The royalties and other returns to the EIC Awardee should be fair and proportionate to the financial and other support provided.

If the EIC Awardee does not commit to provide support within a maximum period of 6 months from the date of the first formal request from the EIC Inventor, or that support is manifestly inadequate, then the EIC Awardee must entrust sufficient access rights to allow the EIC Inventor to further develop and exploit the result. If the EIC Awardee does not provide support for exploitation, then by default the access rights to the EIC Inventor are royalty free.

The EIC Inventor must inform the EIC Awardee in due time before any exploitation activity they intend to undertake, and report to the EIC Awardee on the implementation of the exploitation activity.

If the EIC Awardee considers that the exploitation activity could negatively affect its own exploitation activities:

- ✦ In the absence of any approved exploitation and dissemination plan, the EIC Awardee may request to the Agency the suspension of the access rights of a given EIC Inventor, by demonstrating that their use puts negatively at stake their future strategy of or ongoing valorisation activities.
- ✦ Where an exploitation and dissemination plan has been approved, the EIC Awardee may directly suspend the access rights of a given EIC Inventor if this would negatively affect the implementation of the said approved plan. The EIC Inventor may request the Agency to lift that suspension by demonstrating that the exercise of the access rights does not affect the said plan.

### **3.4 – Failure to exploit or disseminate**

The Agency is entrusted with the right to disseminate and promote the exploitation of results that have not been made public through dissemination activities or patent or protection by any other IPR, where the EIC awardee owning it:

- ✦ does not provide any information regarding exploitation or dissemination of those results; or
- ✦ neither intends to exploit nor disseminate those results; or
- ✦ declares to continue research activities on those results but without a view of their subsequent exploitation; or
- ✦ where, despite its best efforts, no exploitation or dissemination takes place within the delays provided in the final exploitation and dissemination plan set out in the grant agreement and in the absence of any demonstrated alternative exploitation or dissemination opportunity.

Where the EIC awardee continues to oppose to the dissemination by the Agency or refuses to provide any data or document necessary for the said dissemination, the Agency may impose penalties in accordance with the grant agreement.