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European Innovation Council (EIC) Work Programme 2027

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 2027 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 1.816 million for the year 2027 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[1] 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[2]. 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[3]: 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.

[1] In line with Article 12 (1) (b) Council Decision 2021/764

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

[3] 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.[4] 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 2027 Work Programme

The funding and support available in 2027 are organised into the following 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 areas5 (SMEs, start-ups, spin-offs and small mid-caps) (Section VI) and specifically for critical defence technologies (Section VII)
6. The Scaleup Europe Fund which provides major investments in growth companies to become global leaders in their technology fields (Section X.I).

In each case, the financial support for visionary researchers and innovators is complemented with access to a range of Business Acceleration Services (Section VIII) 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

[4] https://eic.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-08/EIC_Board_Statement_Widening_final31072023.pdf
[5] Regulation - EU - 2024/795 - EN - EUR-Lex

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; biotechnologies; and defence technologies. Outside of the calls, a budget is also set aside to support-follow on investments to companies selected under previous EIC Work Programmes.

In line with Article 48 of Regulation (EU) 2021/695, as amended by Regulation (EU) 2025/2653[6], this Work Programme also supports innovation activities with potential dual-use applications under the EIC Accelerator (Section V), EIC STEP Scale Up call (Section VI), and Scaleup Europe Fund (Section X.1)

A dedicated EIC STEP Defence Scale Up call (Section VII) will support innovation in critical defence technologies, as defined in Regulation (EU) 2024/795 ([7]), using the EIC's equity investment support in complementarity with other existing Union instruments. All other EIC funding schemes – EIC Pathfinder, EIC Transition, and EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges – maintain an exclusive focus on civil applications, as provided by Regulation (EU) 2021/695.

In 2027 the EIC work programme will additionally fund the WomenTechEU initiative, providing targeted support to early-stage women-led deep-tech startups through a combination of grant funding, mentoring, coaching and access to business development opportunities.

In addition, the EIC Pre-Accelerator, funded under the Horizon Europe WIDERA Work Programme (2026–2027), will provide early-stage support to deep-tech startups from Horizon Europe widening countries. Beneficiaries will also gain access to the EIC Business Acceleration Services, helping them strengthen their innovation capacity and prepare for future EIC funding opportunities.

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

Linkages between the main funding schemes will be maximised through proactive management (see below) and approaches, such as additional 'Booster' grants to EIC

[6] Regulation (EU) 2025/2653 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 December 2025 amending Regulations (EU) 2021/694, (EU) 2021/695, (EU) 2021/697, (EU) 2021/1153 and (EU) 2024/795, as regards incentivising defence-related investment in the EU budget to implement the ReArm Europe Plan (Text with EEA relevance), OJ L, 2025/2653, 22.12.2025, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2025/2653/oj

(7) 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 (OJ L, 2024/795, 29.02.2024.

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 2027[8]

			EIC Open		EIC Challenges		
Call	**Who can apply**	**What for**	**Deadlines**	**Indicative Budget (EUR million)**	**EIC Challenge**	**Deadlines/ Cut-offs**	**Indicative Budget (EUR million)**
EIC Pathfinder	Open call: only consortia can apply. Standard conditions for multi-beneficiary consortia with three or more entities apply. Challenges call: In addition to the standard multi-beneficiary consortia with three or more entities, two-entities and single entity consortia are also eligible	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)	Stage 1 – 25/02/2027; Stage 2 – 16/09/2027	EUR 166	2.1 Breakthroughs in Advanced Materials for Electricity Generation, Storage and Transmission 2.2 Safe and Controlled Continual Learning in Open World for Reliable AI Agents (CLOWAI) 2.3 Quantum Energetics	29/09/2027	EUR 82
EIC Transition	Single applicants (SMEs, spin-offs, start-ups, research organisations, universities-) affiliated entities and subcontracting will be allowed.	Grants of less than EUR 2.5 million to validate and demonstrate technology in application-relevant environment (starting from TRL 3 completed aiming at completing TRL 5 or beyond) and develop business and market readiness.	14/09/2027	EUR 92			
EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges	Single applicants (SMEs, spin-offs, start-ups, research organisations, universities) or small consortia (maximum 3 eligible entities) – restricted	Grants up to €2.5m to develop, validate and user test selected solutions (aiming to reach TRL 6/7)			Step 2 1 Accelerating Physical AI: Embodied Intelligence for the Next Frontier of AI-Powered Robotics 2 Translating Disruptive New Approach Methodologies (NAMs) into Practice	15/06/2027	EUR 25

[8] 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.

	to follow up to Stage 1 projects						
EIC Accelerator	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.	20/01/2027 17/03/2027 01/09/2027 04/11/2027	EUR 428	2.1 Advanced in-situ Ocean Observation Technologies for Scalable, High-Resolution Marine Monitoring 2.2 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities 2.3 Alternative Concepts and Key Enabling Technologies for Fusion Power Plants 2.4 Carbon removal and circularity for climate change mitigation and EU industrial resilience	20/01/2027 17/03/2027 01/09/2027 04/11/2027	EUR 150
EIC– STEP Scale Up	Single startups and SMEs, small mid-caps, investors on behalf of eligible companies	Equity investment component of EUR 10 up to 30 million for scaling up strategic technologies for Europe.	28/01/2027 29/04/2027 06/09/2027 24/11/2027	EUR 290			
EIC – STEP Defence Scale Up	Single startups and SMEs, small mid-caps, investors on behalf of eligible companies.	Equity investment component of EUR 10 up to 30 million for scaling up critical defence technologies for Europe.	01/06/2027	EUR 100			
Scaleup Europe Fund	Single companies	Equity investments above EUR 30 million up to several hundred EUR million	Continuous - Implemented by SEF fund manager	EUR 400			

Main changes of the 2027 Work Programme

The 2027 EIC Work Programme is the final Work Programme under Horizon Europe. It builds on the successful implementation of the EIC since its launch in 2021 while introducing a number of targeted improvements based on implementation experience, advice from the EIC Board and feedback from Member States. In addition to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the EIC under the current Framework Programme, several of these measures will serve as pilots or provide evidence to inform the design of the EIC under the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

Main changes are:

- Introduction of a two-stage evaluation process for the EIC Pathfinder Open call, combining a short application with a full proposal for shortlisted applicants, together with interviews and refined award criteria to improve the identification of high-potential breakthrough research.
- **EIC Transition** will become a **single-beneficiary instrument**, replace the previous small-consortium approach, while allowing the participation of **affiliated entities** and subcontractors where necessary for the implementation of the project. The Work Programme also introduces a video pitch as part of the application and revises the list of eligible feeder projects to better target the objectives of the scheme.
- Further improvements to the **EIC Accelerator**, including refinements to the evaluation criteria, a reserve list mechanism, simplified resubmission rules and optimization of the evaluation calendar through four Accelerator batches, four STEP batches and one STEP Defence batch.
- Strengthening of **Business Acceleration Services**, including new support for pilot testing with public and private buyers, enhanced internationalization services and refinements to targeted support measures for beneficiaries.
- Introduction of a new **EIC category under the Women innovators prize on quantum** to incentivize breakthrough solutions to strategic technological and societal challenges, together with a dedicated quantum category under the European Prize for Women Innovators.
- Reinforcement of **EIC Data for Strategic Intelligence**, expanding the use of EIC portfolio data to support strategic analysis, foresight and evidence-based policymaking.
- Continued support for **WomenTechEU** and to strengthen the European innovation pipeline and broaden participation in the EIC ecosystem.

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,[9] 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 experts and overseen by EIC Programme Managers for projects within their portfolios.

[9] 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.

✦ 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). EIC Pathfinder Open uses a two-stage evaluation process including an interview at the second stage.

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)[10] (see Section V).

For the EIC STEP Scale Up and EIC STEP Defence Scaleup, which support promising companies developing critical technologies[11],[12], 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 Sections VI and VII).

Policy of open access and Intellectual Property rights[13]

[10] 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").
[11] Regulation - EU - 2024/795 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)
[12] Communication from the Commission – Second Guidance Note on the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) clarifying elements of Regulation (EU) 2024/795 and Commission Communication C/2024/3209
[13] For the EIC Accelerator, the Intellectual Property rules are included in the contract and/or investment agreement.

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).

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[14] and the Commission Recommendation on critical technology areas for the EU's economic security[15] a number of provisions have been made to protect Europe from economic security risks.

These measures are:

- *Eligibility criteria*

(i) In line with Article 136 of the Financial Regulation[16], 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

[14] 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
[15] 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)
[16] EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509

third country[17] or by a legal entity established in a non-eligible third country cannot participate as beneficiaries in Accelerator grant-only actions[18] under those EIC Accelerator Challenges that include the corresponding "Specific conditions".

(ii) In line with Article 48(2), third subparagraph of Regulation (EU) 2021/695, as amended by Regulation (EU) 2025/2653, for support under the EIC Accelerator STEP Scale Up Defence call, a legal entity established in the Union, or in an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe and which is controlled by a third country other than an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe or Ukraine, or by a legal entity of a third-country other than an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe or Ukraine, shall be eligible to participate if guarantees approved in accordance with the national procedures of the Member State or the EEA member associated to Horizon Europe in which the legal entity is established are made available to the Commission.

✦ *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 and the EIC STEP Scale Up Defence 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. In the case of the STEP Defence call, the Commission Award Decision may specify which investment safeguards should be applied by the EIC Fund.

The requirement for investment-related measures will be introduced in the Commission Award Decisions as follows:

(i) only in projects falling within the four priority technology areas for projects that involve specific technologies listed in the second column of the Annex to

[17] 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.

[18] 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.

Commission Recommendation C(2023)6689 and if their core purpose is to develop one of these specific technologies.

(ii) in all projects selected under all STEP Scale Up Calls (non-defence and defence).

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

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[19], and in particular shall not make any funds available directly or indirectly to any institution or individual listed in sanction lists[20].

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[21] 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[22] 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[23].

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[19] Consolidated list of sanctions:
https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/8442/Consolidated%20list%20of%20sanctions

[20] 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].

[21] EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.

[22] 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.

[23] EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.

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. 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 IX).

Glossary[24]

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).

Critical defence technologies means technologies as defined in Article 2 (1), point (a)(iv), of Regulation (EU) 2024/795 establishing the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) that either bring an innovative, emerging and cutting-edge element with a significant economic potential to the internal market or contribute to reducing or preventing the strategic dependencies of the Union.

Deep-tech[25] 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

[24] 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.
[25] 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[26].

Dual-use innovation in the context of EIC calls means an innovation that demonstrates a credible business case addressing demand from both civilian markets and the defence market (including, in particular, procurement by defence market buyers)[27].

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, Accelerator, EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges), or investees (for EIC Accelerator, the EIC STEP Scale Up Call and the EIC STEP Defence Call), as well as winners of EIC Prizes. The Horizon Europe model grant agreements and contracts are available on the Funding and Tenders Portal[28].

EIC Business Acceleration Services (BAS) are support services provided to the EIC Awardees and other eligible organisations as defined in Section VIII 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 VIII 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[29], EIC Pre-Accelerator Seals of Excellence and EIC Sovereignty (STEP) Seals[30] and other eligible entities. It facilitates links to Business Acceleration Services as well as enabling discussions, exchanges and match making. The EIC

[26] Ratio of a firm's R&D investment to its revenue.

[27] For the purposes of this definition, procurement by civil-security buyers (e.g. police, border management, civil protection, civil defence in the civil-protection sense) constitutes a civilian application and does not, on its own, establish a dual-use business case.

[28] HE Model grant agreement

[29] 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

[30] 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)

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 facilitates access the EIC Ecosystem Partners.

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[31], 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.[32] The EIC Fund Manager manages

[31] 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

[32] About the EIC Fund - European Commission (europa.eu)

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 Co-investment 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.[33] 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 Advanced Innovation Challenges (Stage 2), 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. As an exception, Programme Managers will be members of the juries for EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges (Stage 2). **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

[33] The EIC Forum is supported under the 'European Innovation Ecosystems' part of the Horizon Europe work programme.

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.

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[34], 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 Sklodowska 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.

Quasi-equity: Financing instruments combining features of debt and equity (e.g. convertible loans, notes, SAFEs or participation rights), typically allowing conversion into equity at a later stage.

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[35]. 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.

[34] https://innovation-radar.ec.europa.eu/

[35] 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.

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.

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.[36] Under the EIC, this category includes start-ups.

Small mid-cap means an enterprise employing up to 499 employees.[37]

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,[38] 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[39]:

TRL1 - Basic principles observed

TRL2 - Technology concept formulated

TRL3 - Experimental proof of concept

TRL4 - Technology[40] validated in lab

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

[36] 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

[37] 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.

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

[39] See for instance for health: https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/career-development/researchers/manual-scientific-entrepreneurship/major-steps/trl

[40] At system level

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)

The Business Readiness Levels (BRLs) provide a structured framework to assess the maturity of an innovation from the business point of view, from the identification of a potential market need to scaling of business opportunity. They complement technological development by focusing on the progressive validation of customer need, value creation, business model viability, and market uptake.

BRL 1 - Market need and value hypothesis formulated

BRL 2 - Business concept formulated and use cases defined

BRL 3 - Initial customer feedback obtained

BRL 4 - Problem–solution fit validated in target market

BRL 5 - Initial market interest demonstrated

BRL 6 - Business feasibility demonstrated

BRL 7 - Market entry readiness demonstrated

BRL 8 - Business adoption demonstrated

BRL 9 - Business scale achieved

The BRL scale is useful as a reference in particular for EIC transition projects.

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

Women-led proposal / women-led applicants means proposal where the 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

EIC Pathfinder Open supports the early-stage research and development component of the deep-tech approach to provide solutions for global challenges, create new markets, or in general to improve our lives. Before applying to this call, you should ensure that your proposal meets all the following essential characteristics (the Gatekeepers):

- You present a convincing long-term vision of a radically new, future or emerging technology that has the potential to have a transformative positive effect on our lives and commit within the project to achieve an experimental proof of concept or validation in a lab.
- You have a plausible idea for a concrete, novel and ambitious scientific breakthrough, providing the underpinning of the envisioned technology, and the knowledge and expertise within your team to realise it.
- You provide a convincing argument for a high-risk/high-gain research approach and methodology, to achieve this scientific breakthrough in an interdisciplinary collaboration of researchers and innovators, with concrete and plausible objectives.
- Your proposal addresses an important global challenge or an unsolved specific problem affecting our economy, society, or environment, and your novel technology, if successfully developed and validated, has the potential to contribute to solving it either on its own or in combination with other technologies. You present a high-level vision of how your research could enable future solutions, while recognising that the Pathfinder project itself is not expected to deliver the final solution.

Why should you apply?

You should apply if you are looking for support from EIC Pathfinder Open to realise an ambitious vision for a scientific breakthrough, which will provide the foundations of a radically new technology, with the potential to create new markets, respond to societal needs and/or to provide solutions to global challenges. EIC Pathfinder Open supports early-stage development of such future or emerging technologies (e.g., various activities starting from establishing basic principles and reaching at least a proof of concept or a technology validation in a lab), based on high-risk/high-gain science-towards-technology breakthrough research.

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 has the slightest idea about how they should answered; you may realise that there are many aspects of the problem at hand that you do not master initially. All this may make your application stronger. On the contrary, if the approach you want to follow is incremental by nature or known, or if you have already validated your technology in the lab and are looking just for funding its implementation, EIC Pathfinder Open will not support you.

EIC Pathfinder Open supports interdisciplinary research and development to explore and validate novel technological concepts, advancing breakthrough technologies towards validation.

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.

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

Expected outcome and impact:

The deep-tech approach is problem oriented. Its starting point is an important and fundamental issue, that will be tackled, e.g. related to the UN's sustainable development goals or an economic, environmental, or societal problem. It relies on the joint efforts of

a multitude of different experts, e.g., scientists, engineers, and entrepreneurs. Deep-tech employs the convergence of existing and emergent technologies, rooted in science and advanced engineering, and powered by the design-build-test-learn cycle. The novelty of technologies and the ways in which they are used make the deep-tech approach very powerful and may lead to the solution of global societal or environmental problems or to the creation of new markets and the disruption of existing industries.

The deep-tech journey needs time to move from basic science to applications to actual use cases. The amount of time required varies substantially for various cases, but it almost always takes longer than an innovation based on an available technology or existing engineering approach. EIC Pathfinder Open supports the initial phase of this journey. The projects funded by EIC Pathfinder Open work towards development of novel technologies when no existing technology fully solves the problem at hand. In some instances, a novel technology provides directly a solution, in others, success depends on combining novel and existing technologies or on developing new applications of established technologies. Sometimes the solution built will not work as desired and then again, the process will return to the technology development.

We do not expect that your project will deliver the final solution and even the prototype is not among the expected outputs. However, we want that all the steps an EIC Pathfinder Open project undertakes, from the breakthrough research to the validation in the lab and eventually further, are aligned towards the solution to the problem, which represents the ultimate goal.

The expected output of your project is at least an experimental proof of concept or a validation in a lab of the technology, which is the main focus of your project, proving its feasibility. You must do the validation through integrated use cases, , where relevant and appropriate to the maturity of the technology, clearly showing that the technology provides relevant steps toward the envisioned ultimate solution. Project results should include top-level scientific publications in open access. You are expected also to take the necessary measures in the course of the project to allow future uptake of the main results to take place. This includes: an adequate formal protection of the generated Intellectual Property (IP) [41], a well thought trough plan for future exploitation, and an assessment of relevant aspects related to regulation, certification, and standardisation. We are confident that in order to succeed in delivering a technology, which will contribute to the envisioned solution, your project team from the beginning should include also the actors needed to guide the scientific and technological development. Any ambitions to further develop the validated technology, including potential support under EIC Transition and

[41] 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.

subsequently EIC Accelerator support or VC investment, would strongly benefit from a clear and well-structured ownership and management of intellectual property rights (IPR)

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 (2021/2025).[42]

In addition to funding, successful applicants will receive tailor-made access to a wide range of Business Acceleration Services (see Section VIII) 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[43] can be found on the EU Funding & Tenders Portal.

How do you apply; how long does it take?

EIC Pathfinder Open employs a two-stage submission and two-stage evaluation call.

Stage 1: You must submit your initial short proposal via the Funding & Tenders Portal before the Stage 1 deadline, which is **February 25, 2027,** at 17h00 Brussels local time[44]. Sections 1 and 2 of the part B of your proposal, corresponding respectively to the award criteria Excellence and Impact, must consist of a maximum of 10 format A4 pages.

You will be requested to submit, separately from your proposal, a letter of commitment from each organisation you plan to include in the consortium, confirming that the organisation is aware of its participation in the proposal and willing to take part in the project if successful. Proposals not accompanied by the required letters of commitment will be considered incomplete and will therefore be ineligible. They will not be disclosed to evaluators.

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[42] 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

[43] general-mga_horizon-euratom_en.pdf (europa.eu), general-mga_horizon-euratom_en.pdf (europa.eu)

[44] The call will open on 25-11-2026. 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.

You will be informed about the outcome of the Stage 1 evaluation within 3 months from the call deadline for Stage 1 (indicative).

Following the stage 1 evaluation, proposals will be ranked in descending order according to their total score, calculated as weighted sum of the two average scores from the two award criteria. Proposals failing to reach the applicable threshold will be rejected. Starting from the top of the ranking list, proposals will be invited to submit a full proposal at stage 2 until the sum of the EU contributions requested by the invited proposals reaches 2.5 times the indicative budget available for the call. Where several proposals have been awarded the same total score at that point, all such proposals will be invited. The precise number of proposals invited, and the corresponding score required to pass to stage 2 cannot therefore be fixed in advance, as they depend on the EU contributions requested by the proposals submitted and on the treatment of ex aequo proposals.

Stage 2: If you are invited to Stage 2, you must submit your full proposal via the Funding & Tenders Portal before the deadline, which is **September 16, 2027**, at 17h00 Brussels local time. 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 in total of a maximum of 23 format A4 pages .

The composition of the consortium is expected to be the same as the one provided by the commitment letters for Stage 1. However, applicants may make some changes in the consortia if these are duly justified but must remain exceptional and must not substantially alter the proposal as evaluated at stage 1.

You will be informed about the outcome of the evaluation within 4 months from the call deadline for Stage 2 (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 for Stage 2 (indicative).

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

Stage 1:

Your short proposal will be first evaluated and scored individually by at least three EIC expert evaluators with respect to the Stage 1 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 two average scores from the two award criteria. Each criterion will be scored out of a total score of 5 (evaluators can make use of half points in their scoring).

The award criteria and their thresholds and weights for Stage 1 are as follows (Table 2a):

Table 2a. Award criteria for the short proposals to EIC Pathfinder Open

Excellence (Threshold: 4/5, weight 60%)
• How convincing and well-defined are the vision of a radically new technology and the potential solutions it would enable in the long term? • How novel and ambitious is the proposed science-towards-technology breakthrough with respect to the state-of-the-art and how feasible is it? • To what extent are the proposed objectives specific and attainable? How relevant are they for achieving an experimental proof of concept or the validation in the lab of the technology to be developed?
Impact (Threshold: 4/5, weight 40%
• How significant, pressing, and critical is the global problem whose solution could be facilitated by the envisioned new technology? • To what extent does the envisioned technology have the potential to provide the necessary building block(s) to contribute to the solution of the identified problem?

Stage 2:

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. Each criterion will be scored out of a total score of 5

The award criteria and their thresholds and weights for Stage 2 and the Interview are as follows (Table 2b):

Table 2b. Award criteria for the full proposal to EIC Pathfinder Open
Excellence (Threshold: 4/5, weight 50%)
• How convincing and well-defined are the vision of a radically new technology and the potential solutions it would enable in the long term? • How novel and ambitious is the proposed science-towards-technology breakthrough with respect to the state-of-the-art and how feasible is it? To what extent does it advance the realization of the envisioned technology? • To what extent are the proposed objectives specific, measurable, attainable, and time-bound? How relevant are they for achieving the validation in the lab of the technology to be developed?

• How appropriate and comprehensive are the proposed high-risk/high-gain interdisciplinary research approach and methodology for reaching the project objectives? To what extent the underlying concepts and models are robust, and the assumptions are valid? Does the methodology address open science practices? Does it appropriately consider the gender dimension in research and innovation, and engage citizens and end-users, where applicable?
Impact (Threshold: 4/5 weight 30%)
• How significant and credible are the potential transformative positive effects that the envisioned new technology would have on our economy, environment and society? • How appropriate, are the proposed activities to maximise expected outcomes and impacts as set out in the dissemination and communication plan? • To what extent does the envisioned new technology have potential for generating disruptive innovations in the future? How robust, realistic and adequate are the proposed measures for protection of the exploitable results and any other exploitation measures, as set up in the exploitation plan, to facilitate future translation of research results into innovations? • How suitable and operationally convincing 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 and in implementing the vision for building the practical solution, towards which the project is aligned?
Quality and efficiency of the implementation (Threshold 3/5, weight 20%)
• 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? • How appropriate are the overall resources and their allocation to work packages and consortium members under the lump sum budget model? • To what extent the consortium brings together the necessary high-quality expertise, capacity and interdisciplinary collaboration of researchers and innovators to successfully execute the project?

Interview

The interview will be part of the stage 2 evaluation. All proposals[45] initially evaluated in Stage 2 above the thresholds will be invited for an interview, which will be organised approximately between 10-14 weeks after the deadline. During the interview a group of members of the consortium should convincingly pitch in no more than 10 minutes your proposal to the EIC Evaluation Committee members, who will ask you questions aimed at clarifying various aspects of your proposal in line with the stage 2 award criteria (ref Table 2b) . The EIC Evaluation Committee will decide on the final score based on the score from the individual evaluation phase, the interview, and the outcome of its consensus discussions. The Evaluation Summary Report will comprise the final score, a collation of the comments from individual reports, or extracts of them, a comment that summarises the assessment by the evaluation committee as well as any additional comments.

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 EIC 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 EIC 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.

[45] The consortium will decide who will be present at the interview among the staff of the applicant organisations.

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 82 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).[46] 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 VIII) 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 **September 29, 2027, at 17h00 Brussels local time.** [47]

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).

[46] 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

[47] The call will open on 27-05-2027. 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?

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.

Step1 (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
Excellence (Threshold: 4/5; weight 50%)
Objectives and relevance to the Challenge: How clear are the project's objectives? How relevant are they in contributing to the overall goal and the specific objectives of the Challenge?
Novelty: 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: 4/5; 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 on 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[48], 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 y will be expected to entail collaboration between projects within the 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.

[48] To be published in the EIC website, European Innovation Council - European Commission (europa.eu)

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 Breakthroughs in Advanced Materials for Electricity Generation, Storage and Transmission

Background and Scope

Global energy demand is projected to grow 50% by 2050[49], driven by population growth, industrial expansion, and digitisation. In addition, Europe's electricity grids cannot always absorb peak renewable energy generation, leading to curtailment rather than storage for later use. Furthermore, in 2020, approximately 16% of Europe's electricity was lost during transmission and distribution due to non-negligible resistance in power grids[50].

Recent global shocks have underlined the need for Europe to develop homegrown solutions that will help it phase out ongoing dependence on imported fossil fuels, and accelerate the clean energy transition, strengthen energy system integration, and enhance energy system security across its Member States.

New concepts are thus needed for energy generation, storage and transmission to deliver the transformative improvements that will ensure that Europe can meet its energy needs sustainably, securely, and affordably, while reducing the utilisation of Critical Raw Materials (CRMs).

This Challenge focuses on the development of a new generation of advanced materials, including nanomaterials, specifically engineered to possess and exhibit novel properties, superior to conventional materials, that can contribute to Europe's strategic autonomy in energy across the three main pillars – energy generation, storage and transmission.

The Challenge supports the ambitions of the European Commission's Clean Energy Investment Strategy[51] and its Communication "Advanced Materials for Industrial Leadership"[52], 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.

Specific Objectives

[49] World Energy Outlook 2025

[50] New power cables in Europe to make energy cheaper and more sustainable | Horizon Magazine

[51] Clean Energy Investment Strategy

[52] Advanced Materials for Industrial Leadership - Research and innovation

Applicants to this Challenge must identify, develop and validate in the lab, devices based on cutting-edge novel advanced materials, demonstrating significantly enhanced performance. They should address one of the three pillars of the electricity system:

- Energy generators, based on breakthrough concepts for energy generation with substantially enhanced efficiency, durability, and cost-effectiveness and reduced utilisation of CRMs.
- Energy storage systems characterised by a sharp increase in energy density, life cycle, safety, and sustainability. The resulting storage systems must be focused on ensuring that future grids, which will be characterised by high renewable penetration, decentralisation, and demand flexibility, can address challenges surrounding stability, reliability, and resilience.
- Next generation energy transmission grids with substantially boosted efficiency utilising innovative technologies that can dramatically reduce energy losses, improve capacity, and enhance grid resilience.

All projects must ensure that their proposed innovations are designed for practical implementation in devices or systems intended for grid integration. AI approaches may be implemented to accelerate the development of advanced materials, ideally leveraging European AI engines with data stored in Europe.

Each project will also be required to develop a mid- to long-term roadmap outlining:

- How and when the innovation will achieve seamless integration into electrical grids, and
- The specific, measurable advantages it will deliver over existing solutions.

Expected Outcomes

The ambitious projects to be funded under this call will be expected to:

- Boost development of future electrical grids, based on cutting-edge advanced materials, demonstrating significantly enhanced performance in line with the specified objectives within one of three key areas for future electric grids.
- Uncover and explore novel phenomena in energy generation, storage, and transmission, laying the groundwork for new, Europe-led grid technologies.
- Pioneer innovative technologies, fostering new job opportunities in the energy technology sector.
- Significantly bolster Europe's strategic energy autonomy by developing new advanced materials that will support the development of Made in Europe technologies and solutions.

Portfolio Approach

The portfolio of selected projects will lead to the development and a comparative assessment of various devices and systems utilising advanced materials, evaluating their potential and maturity for integration into future electrical grids.

The portfolio will ensure a balanced coverage of projects developing electricity generation, storage and transmission solutions with no more than 3 projects under each of the three pillars. Furthermore, the selection of projects in the portfolio will depend on the expected synergies between projects across the three pillars, leading to integrated solutions.

II.2.2 Safe and Controlled Continual Learning in Open World for Reliable AI Agents (CLOWAI)

Background and Scope

Current generative and agentic AI systems perform strongly in well-defined, closed-world tasks such as process automation, code and text generation, or domain-specific assistance. In these settings, the objectives, inputs, constraints, and success criteria are largely specified in advance, and operating conditions are relatively stable or bounded.

These widely deployed systems are trained primarily in an offline paradigm: the model is pre-trained on large corpora, then frozen and deployed, without scope for autonomous continual learning. Their behaviour can be personalised through product-side memory or configuration mechanisms (e.g., retrieval-augmented generation), but their internal parameters are not continuously updated from individual interactions, by design, to control security, drift, and privacy risks.

The key question for the next wave of AI, deployed as long-lived systems interacting with users, tools, software services, and physical environments, is therefore how well such systems can learn and operate reliably in open-world settings, where tasks, contexts, and data distributions change over time and cannot be exhaustively anticipated. The challenge is not to build systems that learn everything, but to enable agents with a defined operational purpose to adapt safely when their deployment environment inevitably evolves beyond what was anticipated at training time.

Such agents must adapt continually while preserving reliable behaviour across time, configurations, and deployment updates, both in virtual environments (e.g., digital assistants, software agents, digital twins) and in physical environments (e.g., robots, industrial or IoT systems).

In keeping with the ambitions of the EU's AI Act[53] and approach to AI[54], safety and trustworthiness is the central constraint throughout. This Challenge therefore aims to go beyond current limitations by endowing agents with the ability to keep learning after deployment, under explicit governance, with novelty detection, controlled updates to model parameters and/or persistent adaptive state,

[53] AI Act | Shaping Europe's digital future
[54] European approach to artificial intelligence | Shaping Europe's digital future

and guarantees of traceability and auditability of update decisions, appropriate to the relevant virtual or physical setting[55].

Learning after deployment may incorporate human feedback[56] and oversight within governed update, validation, and rollback processes. It is intended to support adaptation within the agent's defined operational purpose, rather than unrestricted learning of unrelated tasks.

The Challenge targets interlinked risks arising from post-deployment learning, including, but not limited to, distribution drift, normative drift[57], catastrophic forgetting, compounding errors, and vulnerabilities such as hallucinations, poisoning, and sensor failures. Addressing these, including maintaining auditability over time, is essential for trust, safety, and accountable AI deployment.

Specific Objectives

The main objective of the Challenge is to develop the scientific foundations, methods, and validation assets that enable continual learning in open worlds for reliable AI models/agents deployed on cloud, edge, or hybrid infrastructures.

Proposals should demonstrate the applicability of their approach across at least two distinct application domains or deployment settings — spanning reliable AI agents, adaptive robotics, digital twins, and safety-critical systems, with application domains left open (e.g. industry, health, education, public services, etc.) — or provide a scientifically justified rationale for single-domain validation.

Approaches should also address robust decision rules under non-stationarity (e.g., calibrated uncertainty, adaptive thresholds, and abstention/escalation) and the safe incorporation of newly discovered classes/concepts without uncontrolled drift or full re-engineering (including rollback/quarantine when evidence is insufficient). Proposals should explain how the safety and assurance of post-deployment updates will be demonstrated and governed in their intended deployment context.

Proposals should contribute to one or more of the following specific objectives, organised by capability:

Capability 1 — Open-World Novelty Management

Open-set recognition, unknown detection, shift diagnosis, calibrated uncertainty, adaptive decision rules (including thresholds), and abstention/escalation policies.

Capability 2 — Reliable Continual Adaptation

Methods balancing stability and plasticity; prevention of catastrophic forgetting and harmful drift; safe incorporation of newly discovered classes/concepts; monitor--detect--adapt--verify--rollback loops for long-lived agents.

Capability 3 — Memory, Grounding, and Verification

[55] Importance also identified by EIC JRC Horizon Scanning workshops: Embodying the Future - Horizon scanning for emerging technologies and breakthrough innovations in the field of human-like AI systems

[56] Human feedback may be used as evidence, supervision, evaluation input or an approval signal.

[57] deviation over time from specified operational, safety, legal or ethical constraints governing the agent's behaviour.

- Memory: Long-term memory structures and management (provenance, conflict handling, revision/quarantine) that support adaptation while preventing compounding errors and corruption. Where relevant, memory and update mechanisms may assess the provenance and reliability of learning signals before their incorporation.
- Grounding: Continuous grounding of concepts, decisions, and actions to trusted evidence (tools, sensors, databases, simulators, rules/constraints) and detection of de-grounding after updates.
- Creativity[58]: Safe exploration, hypothesis generation, and planning to accelerate adaptation under novelty, paired with verification/constraint checking and risk-aware exploration policies.

Capability 4 — Robustness, Security, and Resilience under Non-Stationarity

Defences against poisoning/adversarial manipulation, including prompt injections where relevant, under non-stationarity; safe degradation and recovery, including sensor degradation and partial observability for physical agents.

In addition to addressing one or more of the four capabilities above, every funded project must demonstrate auditable and explainable learning and model changes, including provenance, data/model lineage, and operational controls. When applicable, explanations for human overseers should be human-readable or otherwise appropriate to the relevant deployment context.

Each funded project is expected to deliver:

- A validated prototype / proof of concept demonstrator (TRL4) in a controlled laboratory or simulated setting relevant to the intended application (virtual and/or physical), including long-horizon evaluation under drift/novelty (not only static test sets).
- A clear technical contribution to CLOWAI (methods, theory, architectures, or system components) addressing open-world novelty and continual adaptation, with stated assumptions (virtual/physical; cloud/edge/hybrid).
- Quantitative evidence of reliability improvements against strong baselines, including uncertainty handling and at least one relevant risk dimension (e.g., catastrophic forgetting, compounding errors, robustness/security, ungrounded inferences/hallucinations where applicable).
- A reusable artefact contribution to the portfolio (e.g., dataset slice, simulator scenario, benchmark task, evaluation harness, baseline implementation, or a documented module if relevant).
- An assurance and governance package for continual updates: monitoring signals, triggers (abstain/escalate/rollback/quarantine), logging/provenance, and explanation of what changes over time and why.

Portfolio Approach and Activities

[58] In this context, safe creativity means the controlled generation and testing of candidate hypotheses, plans, or actions against applicable constraints and risk thresholds.

Consistent with the EIC Pathfinder Challenges approach, funded projects will be expected to contribute to a coherent Challenge Portfolio with shared milestones, benchmarking, and joint portfolio activities steered by the EIC Programme Manager.

The CLOWAI Portfolio will be built across three axes. The first axis covers the scientific building blocks, spanning capability (what the system must do) and approach (how it is achieved); the second is the system integration layer, covering context/memory, orchestration, and model adaptation; the third is the demonstration pathway, as described under Specific Objectives above.

Across all projects, the Challenge Portfolio is expected to deliver a common evaluation framework, at least one open benchmark suite spanning virtual and physical/embodied agents, and complementary reference architectures for cloud and edge/hybrid deployment. These activities will be underpinned by shared governance, benchmarking, trustworthiness, auditability, update-provenance, and context-appropriate human-oversight requirements.

The accompanying Challenge Guide will provide further details on the portfolio structure, shared evaluation and benchmarking activities, reference architectures, assurance and governance practices for post-deployment updates, and opportunities for joint validation, dissemination, and transition to innovation.

Expected Impact

Robust continual learning in open world will strengthen the uptake of AI by making systems more resilient, adaptable, and trustworthy in real-world settings:

- Sustain performance in changing conditions
- Reduce the need for costly re-engineering and retraining cycles
- Enable rapid adaptation to new products, services, regulations, and usage patterns
- Support personalised and context-aware services without compromising safety
- Improve resilience and uptime for industry and public sector operators
- Increase transparency and controllability of AI behaviour over time
- Lower barriers to deployment in safety-critical or high-liability contexts

The resulting portfolio will not only advance the scientific state-of-the-art but also build a robust, integrated, and application-driven community, positioning Europe at the forefront of trustworthy, safe, and controlled AI. It should also lay the foundations for future European leadership in super-intelligent systems, supporting sovereignty and competitiveness in key sectors. It will support the ambitions of the AI Act and the European approach to Artificial Intelligence.

II.2.3 Quantum Energetics

Background and Scope

Quantum technologies hold the promise of transforming various sectors by, for example, delivering step changes in data processing capabilities, enhancing the security of communication, and through higher sensing capabilities. This promise has attracted significant public and private investments across the globe. However, large scale

deployment may come with a significant energy and environmental footprint. Energy efficient quantum technology will bring a competitive advantage, and to develop this, key questions are how energy consumption scales with system size; what is the dependence on performance and the underlying technology; how does it compare to classical counterparts.

In full-stack quantum computers including qubits, error correction, control electronics, cooling systems, and supporting infrastructure energy usage differs fundamentally from current systems. For example, in superconducting systems, most of the energy is spent on maintaining the operating environment and not on the computation itself; the balance differs markedly across platforms. Superconducting quantum computers must operate at temperatures close to absolute zero. Their cooling systems, known as dilution refrigerators, typically require tens of kilowatts (kW) of input power to provide milliwatts of cooling[59]. As a result, cooling alone can consume orders of magnitude more energy than the actual computation. In addition, control and readout electronics such as microwave generators, error correction processors, and measurement systems add several kilowatts of power consumption per system.

While Noisy Intermediate-Scale Quantum (NISQ) processors (trapped ions, superconducting qubits, neutral atoms, etc.) exhibit reduced energy consumption, suggesting a quantum energetic advantage, the underlying mechanisms remain poorly understood. In addition, reported energy figures are not comparable across platforms, because accounting boundaries and workloads differ and no convention exists for comparable reporting. As quantum processors scale up to millions of qubits, total energy demand could be very high, unless more efficient architectures or technologies significantly reduce these overheads. For Fault-Tolerant Quantum Computing (FTQC), efficiency gains will be even more critical, as the overhead of error correction and classical decoders introduce significant energy demands that must be optimised to make large-scale, practical quantum computing viable.

Likewise, while energy consumption in quantum communication is generally much lower than in full-scale quantum computing, consumption depends heavily on distance, hardware, and implementation (fibre vs free-space vs satellite). In quantum sensing, energy consumption primarily comes from cooling systems (where required), stable and high-quality lasers, and control electronics such as microwave and RF systems.

This Quantum Energetics Challenge will therefore address the energy cost of creating and consuming quantum coherence. Quantum systems such as photonic platforms, superconducting circuits, neutral atoms and trapped ions are the building blocks of

[59] The best cooling power achieved at 100 mK is of the order of 2 mW, while at the 20 mK at which superconducting qubits typically operate commercial systems deliver of the order of 15 μW.

upcoming quantum processors. Their energetic assessment will allow for the quantification of the energetic cost of processing quantum information, including computation, communication, sensing and metrology tasks. By establishing a framework that characterises these fundamental processes behind the exchange of energy of elementary quantum processors, this Challenge will help to develop energy efficient open quantum systems, and to support the classical to quantum transition[60] [61].

Specific Objectives

The overall goal of this Challenge is to develop energy efficient quantum technologies to enable responsible deployment, and benchmark them against relevant, comparable systems. Applicants to this Challenge can focus on one, and only one of the following 3 areas:

1. **Full-stack quantum computing**

The applicants should develop low-power quantum computing architectures, compilers and algorithms and energy-efficient error correction schemes to minimise overhead while enabling reliable, large-scale computation. Approaches may include circuit optimisation, minimisation of gate count and circuit depth, improvements in error correction efficiency, hybrid algorithm convergence, and the design of practical and basic scenarios to minimise the energy costs of quantum processes.
Applicants should also:

- define energy-based metrics for full stack quantum computing to measure and establish benchmarks for:
  - energy per task; energy required to reach a target fidelity (quantum) and a target error rate (classical)
  - total energy: power by runtime for quantum and classical systems, including energy consumed by post-processing steps such as classical optimisation, error mitigation, decoding, or data analysis as appropriate
  - derive fundamental bounds for energy consumption
- establish standardised full-stack energy benchmarks comparable to classical data centres by:
  - accounting energy consumption in quantum processor (qubits), error correction, control and readout electronics, classical co-processing, infrastructure (especially cooling)

[60] Successive EIC–JRC horizon scanning exercises on quantum technologies have explored their evolving technological landscape, with quantum energetics and energy efficiency featuring alongside questions of scalability, resource efficiency and low-power technologies - Scanning deep tech horizons: participatory collection and assessment of signals and trends
[61] (Dis)Entangling the Future - Horizon scanning for emerging technologies and breakthrough innovations in the field of quantum technologies

- quantifying energy cost per logical qubit and energy overhead of fault tolerance (critical for large scale systems)
- for FTQC, the relevant benchmark should focus on demonstrating a competitive energy advantage over state-of-the-art quantum solutions rather than classical counterparts

2. Quantum communication

Develop energy-efficient quantum communication technologies, such as low-power quantum repeaters and photonic quantum memories, to establish secure, long-distance quantum networks with minimal energy consumption by defining quantum communication energy efficiency by e.g. counting energy per secure bit (e.g., QKD), compared to classical encryption overhead.

3. Quantum sensing

Develop miniaturised, portable ultra-low-power quantum sensors achieving superior precision and sensitivity by establishing benchmarks for quantum sensing sensitivity per watt and energy per measurement precision.

Starting at TRL 2, projects must clearly achieve a proof of concept by demonstrating energetic advantages in quantum computing, communication or sensing and validating the scientific basis of the breakthrough. Projects must reach TRL 3-4 with prototypes or testbeds that empirically show lower energy consumption than classical counterparts (or competitive energy advantage over state-of-the-art quantum solutions for FTQC) for the targeted use cases.
Furthermore, all projects should define and provide the conditions of an energetic advantage of quantum nature where testbeds, prototypes and quantum devices consume less energy than their classical counterparts (for FTQC a comparable state-of-the-art quantum technology is the relevant benchmark).

Expected Outcomes and Impacts
This EIC Pathfinder Challenge aims to deliver:

- Technology breakthroughs that form the basis for future, energy-mindful quantum computing, communication, and sensing technologies.
- Fostering interdisciplinary collaboration among EU researchers, industry, and stakeholders to deliver building blocks for energy-mindful quantum technologies and drive forward innovation ecosystems.
- Pre-standardisation analysis of which standards would be relevant at the current technology readiness level of the project (e.g. terminology, use cases, benchmarking,

performance of enabling technologies), and contribution to the initiation and development of such standards.

Portfolio approach and activities

The portfolio of selected projects will seek to achieve a balance across the following dimensions:

- Full-stack quantum computing (NISQ or FTQC) platforms,
- Quantum Communication, and
- Quantum Sensing

Projects are expected to work together on establishing a pre-normative framework characterising fundamental processes behind the exchange of energy of elementary quantum technology, which should lead to agreed-upon, European measurement practices for quantum energy accounting.

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 high commercial potential 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[62]?
- ✦ Have you conducted preliminary market research to identify potential commercial customers (e.g. industry, public sector) and/or users for your breakthrough technology, including specific use case(s) and also and explored potential competitors?
- ✦ Do you envisage building or have already built a motivated and entrepreneurial team with a mix of skills, not only researchers, but also 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 and business readiness activities.

It supports innovation activities that go beyond validation in the laboratory by building on technologies that **are well beyond experimental proof of concept (TRL 3) and are**

[62] Proposals targeting niche or very small markets are deemed not suited for EIC Transition and are not recommended to apply.

in the process of laboratory validation (TRL4), helping to mature and further validate them in application environments through prototyping, formulation, modelling, user testing and other validation activities (completing TRL 5 or beyond).

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 an economically viable, sustainable business plan and business model with key assumptions tested and with the business model tested on first customers (i.e. higher Business Readiness Levels).

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[63]. EIC Transition projects should address, in a balanced way, both technology and market/business development, including iterative learning processes based on early customer or user feedback.

The activities must in all cases address improving business readiness towards commercialisation and deployment (market research, value proposition, refine incipient business plan[64] and validate incipient business model[65], intellectual property protection, etc.) and aspects of regulation, certification and standardisation 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 towards market. It is expected that the intellectual property generated by your EIC Transition project is formally protected in an adequate way (see Annex 6).

Business planning, market research and validation, engaging user and prospect customers, business feasibility are key activities in EIC Transition that in general should be conducted by the beneficiary and not externalised or subcontracted to third parties or specialised companies. The project team should demonstrate capacity or a convincing plan to build capacity during project execution.

[63] If relevant, this might also include novel technologies for the public sector

[64] Usual components are products or services provided, market analysis, competition analysis, marketing strategy, organisation & management, financial projections.

[65] It usually includes value proposition, target market(s), revenue streams, cost structure, channels. [81] 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[66] (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 you are not yet an SME or commercial entity, the formation and spin out of a new company can be included as part of the activities. You must 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[67] 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.

In order to be eligible your proposal must build on results already achieved within an eligible project [68]. Proposals building on project results at other TRLs level (e.g., 5 and beyond) are not eligible.[69]

EIC Transition is restricted to proposals based on results generated by the following eligible projects[70]:

- EIC Pathfinder projects (including projects funded under the Horizon 2020 EIC pilot Pathfinder, FET-Open, FET-Proactive and FET Flagships calls[71]).
- European Research Council Proof of Concept projects funded under Horizon Europe.

[66] Minimum TRL for Accelerator is, since 2025, TRL 6.
[67] Business plan and business model will have to be further refine and validate during the project lifetime.
[68] If the proposal consists of different technologies, the relevant TRL will be assessed as the lowest TRL of its core technological components/subsystems.
[69] 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 4) may be conducted.
[70] For the avoidance of doubt results of an EIC Transition project are not eligible to (re) apply to EIC Transition.
[71] The indicative list of eligible projects, 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 [72] funded under Horizon 2020 Societal challenges and Leadership in Industrial Technologies[73] under Horizon Europe Pillar II and the European Defence Fund, with an eligible TRL[74].
- Research and Innovation Actions funded under the Horizon Europe Research Infrastructures part.

If you are applying on the basis of an eligible project for which the grant is still ongoing[75], you may apply only 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 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 eligible for funding) were <u>not</u> part of the eligible project whose results are further developed in the EIC Transition proposal, you (the applicant) 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 to such results, including IPR, for the purpose of future commercial exploitation for the whole duration of the EIC Transition project and a minimum of 1 year after the end of the project. The level of commitment (e.g. not covering the above period)

[72] 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.
[73] including projects funded under the cross-cutting activities part of the Horizon 2020 Work Programmes drawing from budgets of Pillar II and III
[74] 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.
[75] 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.

from the IPR owner will be assessed by the evaluators under the implementation criterion.

- In all cases you need to specify in your application the grant number and acronym of the eligible project(s) which generated the result(s) together with reference to where the result(s) has(ve) been reported (in the periodic reporting, the Horizon results platform, EIC Transition 'innovation discovery' tool [76] powered by the Innovation Radar or CORDIS). Failing to clearly provide this information in the dedicated place in the proposal template makes the application incomplete.

To be considered admissible, all proposals must include a Letter of Intent from at least one interested third party (i.e. potential customer or user)[77] using the template available on the EIC website.

The Letter of Intent must confirm that no financial or other incentives have been exchanged for the endorsement[78]. The Agency reserves the right to verify the authenticity, depth, and operational readiness of any partnership declared via a Letter of Intent at any stage of the evaluation or project lifecycle, including to confirm the availability of the pledged resources (infrastructure, data, personnel, etc.).

Where a discrepancy between the commitments stated in the Letter of Intent and the situation established by the Agency is identified **during the evaluation**, it may lead to a lower score under the relevant award criterion. Where intentional misrepresentation is suspected, the proposal may be rejected, and the case may be handled under the applicable exclusion procedure.

Where such a discrepancy is identified **after signature of the grant agreement**, the Agency will act on the basis of the provisions of the Model Grant Agreement, in particular those on the obligation to provide accurate and complete information, on conflicts of interest, and on the consequences of non-compliance , which may include rejection of costs, reduction of the grant, recovery of amounts unduly paid, termination of the grant agreement or of the participation of a beneficiary, and administrative sanctions.

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[76] 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.

[77] The Letter of Intent (LoI) should not be confused with a letter of interest (e.g. from a subcontractor, service provider or consultant) or letter of support (e.g. from a professor or expert). For the avoidance of doubt the party providing the letter may not receive money, subcontracting or other support from the action.

[78] LoIs from potential subcontractors or service providers are not acceptable for obvious reasons. Conversely the entities signing the LoI(s) cannot act later as subcontractors or service providers if the proposal is selected. Any non-compliance will be considered a conflict of interest according to article 12 MGA.

Upon request, applicants must be prepared to provide evidence of ongoing collaboration, such as a signed Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA), data transfer protocols, or internal resource allocation approvals.

You can apply for EIC Transition 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).[79,80] Larger companies (i.e. which do not qualify as SMEs) are not eligible to apply as a single legal entity (but may be involved e.g. as subcontractors or signatories of letters of intent). While the grant agreement will be signed with a single beneficiary, the involvement of "Affiliated entities" as described in Article 8 of the model grant agreement can be used. Consortium members of the original project (e.g. universities, research organisations, TTOs) may be involved as third parties, e.g., affiliated entities, associated partners or subcontractors[81]

Only one proposal can be submitted per eligible originating ERC Proof of Concept project [82]. In case multiple proposals from same originating projects are detected all become automatically ineligible.

Applicants[83] that are already beneficiaries of an ongoing EIC Transition project or have submitted several proposals in the current call must demonstrate that they have the required operational capacity to execute all the projects in case they may be selected (as requested in Annex2).

The applicant must specify which path to market will explore and pursue during the execution of the EIC Transition project: direct exploitation by the 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 another path to be described.

Individual SMEs (including Startups, Spinoffs who are participating in EIC Transition projects) must be actively involved in the research, development and commercialization of innovative products or services.

Participation restrictions.

[79] 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.

[80] If during the execution of the project a Spin-off is created by a research team, the Grant agreement can be amendment to change the beneficiary to the newly created spin off or add the Spin-off as affiliated entity provided the legal requirements are met.

[81] A credible justification in the proposal is needed. this argumentation will be evaluated during evaluation.

[82] 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.

[83] For universities or RTOs, etc. this means research group.

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 92 million.

If successful, you will receive a grant for a Research and Innovation Action to cover the eligible costs (see conditions below), 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.

Each EIC Transition project will have to demonstrate after its first year of implementation that it has met pre-defined technological objectives and KPIs [84] (according to the grant agreement and following KPIs proposed in the application). Where these have not been met, the project review will consider both the extent of the shortfall and its causes, distinguishing factors within the project's control from external factors, and will assess whether the innovation and its expected results remain relevant. A project will not continue if review concludes that its objectives are no longer achievable or that the expected results have lost their relevance[85,]

Applicants should specify first-year milestones and KPIs that are realistic and proportionate to the technological risk serving as clear and measurable criteria to assess progress against objectives. KPIs will be assessed on their relevance and rigour, not on ambition alone; realistic targets that are well justified will not be penalised relative to more ambitious ones. Where milestones and KPIs are not met, a project review will assess the progress achieved, the reasons for any shortfall, and whether the project should continue, be re-oriented or be terminated. The review will follow a defined procedure, and its outcome and reasoning will be communicated to the beneficiary. A decision to stop a project should be understood not as a failure of the project team, but as a normal and responsible consequence of supporting high-risk innovation. This 'fail fast' strategy is essential for encouraging ambitious risk-taking while directing resources toward the highest-impact innovations.

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

[84] These first-year objectives and KPIs will be defined by applicants and will be clearly identified in the proposal. They will be evaluated according to corresponding evaluation criteria and will be included in the grant agreement. They will be assessed during the project review by independent monitors, POs and Programme Managers (if applicable).

[85] art. 32.2 HE regulation: The grant agreement may establish milestones and related pre-financing instalments. If milestones are not reached, the action may be suspended, amended, or, where duly justified, terminated.

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).[86]

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 VIII). Transition projects who receive EIC funding are expected and strongly encouraged to apply for Tech2Market BAS services. Coaching for EIC Transition projects is mandatory unless well justified (e.g. if already provided by other ecosystem players). Transition 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 2027** at 17h00 Brussels local time.[87]

You must submit your proposal, including a 3-5" video pitch[88] and letter of intent 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 remotely by EIC expert evaluators. If your proposal successfully passes this first evaluation phase (see details below), you will be invited for

[86] Horizon Europe regulation, article 32.3 fo/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf" \h 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

[87] The call will open on 30-April-2027. 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.

[88] the essential element of the video pitch is the quality of the content not the quality of the video itself.

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 4-5 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 1-2 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.

Proposals will be ranked by score in descending order. Starting with the highest-scoring proposal, a pool of the best-ranked proposals will be invited to the next stage, up to the point where the aggregated financial support requested by that pool reaches maximum 2.5 times the available budget. Where this pool already includes at least 30% women-led proposals (as defined in the Glossary), it will proceed to the interview stage unchanged. Where it includes fewer than 30%, the next highest-ranked women-led proposals will additionally be invited until that threshold is met.

Where women-led proposals represent less than 30% of the initial interview pool, additional women-led proposals will be invited to interview, starting from the highest-ranked proposal and proceeding in descending order of score, provided they have obtained at least the same score under the Excellence criterion and have met all remote evaluation thresholds (Table 4). This process will continue until, where possible, women-led proposals represent at least 30% of the interview pool.

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 EIC 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.[89] Only individuals mentioned in the

[89] The number of participants to the interview must however be limited to the minimum necessary.

proposal and involved in the future project implementation can represent your proposal at the interview.

The EIC Jury will be composed of up to 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 and the EIC Programme Manager 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 Programme Manager may also ask questions related to the implementation, and KPIs[90]. 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 proposal may then be funded depending on the budget available. The remote evaluation score will be used to rank the proposals in the reserve list[91].

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+5. Award criteria for EIC Transition Open at first (remote phase) and second evaluation step (Jury Phase)
Excellence (Threshold: 4/5)
Technological breakthrough and maturity: To what extent does the proposed technology[92] represent a clear deep-tech innovation with breakthrough potential , and demonstrate an appropriate level of technological maturity (TRL) for the proposed transition activities,? To what extent is expected to deliver a substantial performance or value improvement compared with existing solutions or competing approaches under development, and is this advantage convincingly evidenced?

[90] In case the EIC Programme Manager is not available, or has several proposals in evaluation at the same time, it can be replaced by a Project Officer with relevant experience who will align with the PM.

[91] If two proposals with the same remote evaluation score are on the reserve list, the one requesting the smaller budget will be ranked first.

[92] it is recalled that the proposed technology must clearly build on and mature research results developed in the previous research project(s) and which have the maturity (i.e. right TRL) to move out of the lab and transition towards the market

Objectives: How clear, relevant, and ambitious are the technological objectives, milestones and KPI for the first year, and how well do they support the reduction of the main technological uncertainties and risks? How clear, relevant, and achievable are the overall project objectives, milestones and KPI for advancing both technology maturity AND business readiness
Impact (Threshold: 4/5)
Credibility of the impacts: How clearly are the use cases and target users or (potential) paying customers defined, and how well is the problem, need or opportunity they address substantiated within the identified market(s)? To what extent is the proposed business model and business plan credible and realistic within the project and beyond (including making the technology and the team attractive to private investment)
High commercial potential: To what extent does the proposed technology/ innovation demonstrate high commercial potential including market demand and scale up potential supported by credible evidence[93]? To what extent does the proposed technology or innovation contribute to reducing strategic dependencies or supporting economic security in strategically important areas?
Quality and efficiency of the implementation (Threshold 4/5)
Quality and motivation of the team: To what extent has the (project) team demonstrated, through concrete evidence, that it has the expertise, track record and operational capacity[94] required to deliver the proposed technology maturation and commercialisation activities? To what extent does the team provide credible evidence of its commitment and preparedness to translate the innovation into an investment-ready business proposition[95]?
Workplan, resources and assumptions: To what extent are the work plan, requested lump sum budget, and resource allocation across work packages[96] coherent, realistic, and clearly & convincingly justified for the proposed objectives and deliverables? To what extent are the project's key technical and market claims and assumptions supported by specific[97], relevant and credible evidence rather than unvalidated or automatically generated content?

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.

You will receive as feedback of the evaluation an Evaluation Summary Report from the first evaluation step. The feedback may include advice not to resubmit the proposal. If you have been invited for an interview, you will also receive feedback from the EIC Jury.

[93] including also the credibility and quality of the Letter(s) of Intent (LoI)

[94] This includes also cases when applicants have several ongoing projects (e.g. Horizon Europe, Eureka, etc.).

[95] This could include how credible are measures to incorporate the missing business/commercial skills.

[96] including, where applicable, between/ to third parties.

[97] e.g. original data, cited studies, test results, customer or user evidence

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.

IV. EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges- Pilot

Disclaimer : The call introduces the second phase of the 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. The EIC Work Programme (2026) provided the provisions for the implementation of Stage 1 support for this pilot. The information under the 2027 EIC Work Programme will supersede any EIC Work Programme 2026 provisions.

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[98] 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[99] 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.

[98] 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).
[99] 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 an EIC 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 EIC Programme manager will ensure strategic alignment, cross-project learning, and coherent portfolio development.

The EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges pilot is being implemented through:

In 2026, an open call for Stage 1 invited applications from all entities meeting the established admissibility and eligibility criteria:

- 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, a restricted call for Stage 2 which is open **exclusively** to the proposals participating in Stage 1[100].

You[101] will be able to 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).[102] 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,

[100] 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.

[101] in case of small consortia, it must include the entity participating in stage1

[102] 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).[103]

What support will you receive if your proposal is funded?

The total indicative budget for this call is EUR 25 million under 2027 EIC work programme in the restricted call for Stage 2 projects.

Stage 2 restricted call (development and user testing, including the underlying research activities**):** 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 HE Model Grant Agreement can be found on the Funding & Tenders Portal.

How do you apply; how long does it take?

Stage 2 restricted call (development and user testing): The deadline for submitting your proposal is **15th June 2027 at 17h00 Brussels local time.**

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

The applicants to Stage2 will have the opportunity and are encouraged to submit new or updated letter(s) of intent[104] (LoI) which should take in account the result of stage 1 and stage 2 planned activities. The LoI should be from at least one interested third party (e.g., potential customer or user)[105] using the dedicated AIC template available on the EIC website.

The Letter of Intent must confirm that no financial or other incentives haves been exchanged for the endorsement[106]. The Agency reserves the right to verify the authenticity, depth, and operational readiness of any partnership declared via a Letter of Intent at any stage of the evaluation or project lifecycle, including to confirm the

[103] Consortia of more than 3 eligible entities will be deemed ineligible.
[104] The Letter of Intent (LoI) should not be confused with a letter of interest (e.g., from a subcontractor, service provider or consultant) or letter of support (e.g. from a professor or expert). For the avoidance of doubt the party providing the letter may not receive money, subcontracting or other support from the action.
[105] in case they are not part of the consortia submitting the proposal.
[106] LoIs from potential subcontractors or service providers are not acceptable for obvious reasons. Conversely the entities signing the LoI(s) cannot act later as subcontractors or service providers if the proposal is selected. Any non-compliance will be considered a conflict of interest according to article 12 MGA.

availability of the pledged resources (infrastructure, data, personnel, etc.). Any significant discrepancy between the commitments stated in the Letter of Intent and the verified reality may result in a lower evaluation score or, in cases of suspected intentional misrepresentation, the exclusion of the proposal from the evaluation process or termination of the Grant Agreement.

Upon request, applicants must be prepared to provide evidence of ongoing collaboration, such as a signed Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA), data transfer protocols, or internal resource allocation approvals. You must submit your proposal and your presentation for the pitch in the form of a pdf 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.

The presentation of 15 minutes should contain the main results of the Stage 1 project and how these convinced commercial users (e.g. industry, public sector) and/or end-users and/or other major stakeholders like regulators to be involved in Stage 2. It should also present the milestones for scaling up the innovation during your Stage 2 proposal and an initial business plan.

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

The Agency will strive to inform the applicants about the outcome of the evaluation within shortest possible time after the submission deadline. The Agency will aim to complete the grant negotiations as quickly as possible, where possible reusing administrative information provided in the Stage 1 grant agreements.

How does the EIC decide if your proposal will be funded (Stage 2)?

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 for an interview session (virtual or physical) before an independent expert jury of up to 6 persons including the assigned EIC Programme Manager(s).

[Before the interview session, the Agency will seek assistance from the European Patent Office (EPO) to analyse the technological novelty, the inventive merit and the proposed future strategy of all eligible proposals. 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.]

At the interview your proposal may be represented by a maximum of three persons.[107] Only individuals mentioned in the proposal and involved in the future project implementation can represent your proposal at the interview.

During the interview the applicant should pitch the proposal to the EIC Jury, who will ask questions aimed at clarifying various aspects of the proposal in line with the award criteria (in particular those regarding the results of Stage 1, quality of the team, the different elements already developed within the incipient business plan and incipient business model, the milestones and KPIs). The EIC Jury will recommend your proposal for funding or not ('GO', 'NO GO', GO Reserve), taking into account as much as possible a coherent portfolio approach.

Successful applicants at the second stage funding will be strongly encouraged to undertake during 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 7).

Table 7. Award criteria for EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges Stage 2
Excellence (Threshold: 4/5)
Have the Stage 1 activities successfully demonstrated the breakthrough potential of the innovation and generated convincing evidence of its technical feasibility, performance and competitive advantage?
Is the proposed Stage 2 workplan sufficiently ambitious, credible and robust to enable successful validation, deployment and scale-up?
Impact (Threshold: 4/5)
Does the innovation have the potential to create or transform markets?
Have the Stage 1 results generated credible evidence of market interest, including engagement from potential users, customers, industrial partners, procurers, investors and, where relevant, regulatory authorities?
Quality and efficiency of the implementation (Threshold 3/5)

[107] The number of participants to the interview must however be limited to the minimum necessary.

Work Plan: Is the work plan clear, credible, and feasible within the proposed timeline and budget?
Team: Does the team demonstrate the capacity to decisively advance towards market under conditions of uncertainty and speed?
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 and roles of project partners well justified?

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 the impact of natural hazards or human-induced disasters, 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[108].
- 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. When related to autonomous or semi-autonomous execution of wet-lab experiments, proposals should additionally ensure compliance with applicable EU and national biosafety regulations and containment standards, while ensuring automated screening of any AI-generated/AI-selected biological sequences, agents, and protocols against recognised dual-use and controlled agent lists.

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

[108] Minimal human intervention shall not exclude mandatory human authorisation checkpoints for any action involving agent synthesis, culture of high-risk pathogens above BSL 2, or environment release.

- 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[109], Apply AI Strategy[110]. 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 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[111] 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.

[109] https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-launches-ai-innovation-package-support-artificial-intelligence-startups-and-smes
[110] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_383 150 AI Act | Shaping Europe's digital future (europa.eu)
[111] 3Rs principle: replacement, reduction and refinement of animal studies

This Challenge competition therefore looks to accelerate the adoption of both 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
- 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 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 VIII).

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[112];

[112] 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.

- EIC Accelerator Challenges in predefined areas of emerging and strategic technologies.

In line with Article 48 of Regulation (EU) 2021/695, as amended by Regulation (EU) 2025/2653[113], the EIC Accelerator may support potential dual-use applications, while advancing civilian application use, under both Open and Challenges (see Glossary in the Introduction for the definition of "dual-use innovation").

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[114] (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.

[113] Regulation (EU) 2025/2653 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 December 2025 amending Regulation (EU) 2021/695
[114] In such cases, the applicant must use the same identification (PIC number) when submitting the full application in order to eligible.

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

Concurrent submissions to the EIC Accelerator, the EIC STEP Scale Up call and the EIC STEP Defence Scale Up call-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.

What support will you receive if your proposal is funded?

The total indicative budget for this call is EUR 578 million. EUR 428 million of the total indicative budget will be allocated to EIC Accelerator Open and EUR 150 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 347 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[115].

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. In addition, proposals that come from SMEs established in Western Balkans countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia or Serbia) may be selected from the Seal of Excellence

[115] See Annex 1 for full information about the budget.

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

reserve list, in the order of ranking, for indicatively up to EUR 20 million of Union contribution. to Horizon Europe rules shall apply these projects.[116]

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[117] 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;
- 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[118]:

- 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[119] 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 VIII).

The 30% co-funding of the work packages corresponding to 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

[116] Subject to amounts to be provided as transfers from the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance.
[117] 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)
[118] 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).
[119] 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)

Portal[120].

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[121]. 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[122] in accordance with the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines[123].

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

[120] Funding & tenders (europa.eu)
[121] In certain cases, investments can be made in holding structures of the beneficiary company, subject to the provisions of the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines
[122] 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.
[123] EIC Investment Guidelines 2026

requirements, intellectual property management, and marketing approval (e.g. at least TRL 6[124] 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).[125]

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 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. In addition, for support to innovation activities that have dual-use applications, the Agency may object to transfer of non-exclusive licencing of results under the same conditions as those set in the grant agreement for transfer of ownership or exclusive licensing.

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 with an EIC jury** for selected applicants as the final step in the selection process.

[124] To be interpreted as all applicants has completed all aspects of TRL 5: validation in relevant environment.

[125] 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

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[126].

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.

All personal data and information in your proposal will be kept strictly confidential.[127] 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 batches in 2027 (see below).

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[128]. You can only receive this support once for a proposal.

[126] Funding & tenders (europa.eu)
[127] 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.
[128] It is nevertheless up to the applicants to decide if and when to use the coaching services.

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 2026 or 2027 Work programme[129], your full proposal can be submitted to any of the following batches:[130]

- 20/01/2027
- 17/03/2027
- 01/09/2027
- 04/11/2027

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 EIC Jury interview sessions, 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**[131] 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).

[129] This concerns all short applications submitted after the adoption of the 2026 Work Programme. Proposals which received a GO under the 2024 and the 2025 work programme and have already submitted a full proposal will be eligible to submit a full proposal in 2027 as long as they remain within their submission limitations.

[130] 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.

[131] 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 in maximum 10 minutes.

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 after the batching date, you will be informed of the results of the evaluation panels.

Proposals must not contain EU classified information, as defined in the Council Decision 2013/488/EU of 23 September 2013 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information[132].

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 two times per year (indicative dates will be published on the EIC website) and you will be invited at least 2 weeks in advance. 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 interview session. 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. In exceptional cases, to protect the financial interests of the Union or mitigate high reputational risks, the Agency may, during this grant preparation phase (of the grant only and blended finance), require the fulfilment of specific prerequisites prior to grant signature, or insert specific binding conditions into the grant agreement. These measures will be based on the Evaluation Summary Report or mandatory compliance checks under the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines.

[132] Council Decision of 23 September 2013 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information (2013/488/EU), ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2013/488/2025-08-14

Where the applicant has also been recommended for the investment component, the conditions applying to that component are assessed separately under the EIC Fund's due diligence and investment process as set out in the EIC Fund investment guidelines, according to its timeline. Conditions verified during grant agreement preparation are limited to those the Agency can establish at that point on the basis of information provided by the applicant.

Failure to comply with these requirements may prevent the conclusion of the grant agreement preparation 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[133], 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.

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.

[133] Such as KYC (Know Your Customer), AML/CTF (Anti-Money Laundering / Combating the Financing of Terrorism), Tax compliance, Sanctions, etc.

At the end of this process, which should usually take approximately between two to six months since the selection for funding[134], 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.[135] 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 negotiation or implementation of the investment component, where attributable to the beneficiary, may where proportionate and duly justified, and in accordance with the applicable procedures, result in suspension of the payment deadlines under Article 29.1(c) of the HE Model Grant Agreement and/or termination of the grant agreement under Article 32.3 of the HE Model Grant Agreement. This includes: failure to cooperate with the EIC Fund investment process without objective justification, including failure to provide information reasonably necessary for the investment assessment, due diligence or KYC/AML procedures; insufficient cooperation in relation to co-investor discussions to the extent within the beneficiary's control; or refusal, without objective justification, to permit the EIC Fund to assess potential participation in a financing round; as well as the identification during the EIC Fund assessment of material issues that prevent the proposed investment from complying with the applicable Fund investment guidelines.

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 EISMEA 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 implementation of the project or within one year after the end of the duration of the project. 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

[134] 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.

[135] 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[136] 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.
- For the second interview session, the EIC Jury may recommend your proposal to be placed on a reserve list '**GO Reserve**' which may then be funded if additional budget becomes available after the selected proposals from all cutoffs in 2027 have been funded. The ranking order of the reserve list shall be determined by the number of award criteria scored as GO by the EIC Jury. Should there be equal number of GOs, the remote evaluation score will be used to rank the proposals in a reserve list. [137]
- **Awarded a Seal of Excellence** if the Jury confirms the assessment of the evaluation panel that the criteria are met, but it is not recommended for funding (**NO-GO** or GO Reserve) within the budget available.

[136] 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.

[137] If two proposals with the same remote evaluation score are on the GO reserve list, priority will be given to women-led companies and following this priority will be given to proposals submitted under one of the challenges, the highest score in impact, and followed by the earlier date of submission.

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).

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.

It is important to highlight that applications for dual-use innovation will be assessed against the same set of criteria and do not receive preferential treatment compared to purely civilian innovations.

Table 8: Award criteria for EIC Accelerator (Overall Threshold 13 out of 15 for full proposal stage)

Award criteria	Short Proposal Stage	Full Proposal Stage
EXCELLENCE (Threshold 4/5 for full proposal stage)		
Innovation – Deep-tech and breakthrough nature	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?
Technology Readiness – TRL	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)? Are	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)? Are the pathways to the

	the pathways to the projected TRL outlined in the proposal feasible and realistic?	projected TRLs outlined in the proposal feasible and realistic?
Intellectual Property	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?
IMPACT (Threshold 4/5 for full proposal stage)		
Market Opportunity	What and how big is the total market addressed? What is the realistic expectation of the share of the total market? Does the company demonstrate the potential for significant scale-up and market growth? Where relevant, this includes addressable demand across civilian and defence end-users where a credible business case exists in both.	What and how big is the total market addressed? What is the realistic expectation of the share of the total market? Does the company demonstrate the potential for significant scale-up and market growth? Does the market analysis take into account the current and potential competition? Where relevant this includes addressable demand across civilian and defence end-users where a credible business case exists in both.
Business model	*Not assessed*	Are the detailed business model and revenue strategy sound? are the financial projections realistic?
Broader Impact	*Not assessed*	Will the proposed innovation contribute to European technological leadership and/or reduce dependencies on other regions? Will the innovation have broader environmental and/or social impacts?
Challenge Alignment (FOR CHALLENGES ONLY)	*Not assessed*	Does the innovation contribute to the expected Challenge outcomes?
STEP Impact (ONLY FOR CHALLENGES WITHIN SCOPE OF STEP)	*Not assessed*	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)
LEVEL OF RISK, IMPLEMENTATION AND NEED FOR UNION SUPPORT (Threshold 4/5 for full proposal stage)		
Team Capability	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?
Risk Management	*Not assessed*	Have the main risks (technological, market, financial, regulatory[138]) been comprehensively identified, together with specific measures to mitigate them?
Implementation Plan	*Not assessed*	*For Grant Only and Blended Finance* - 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? *For Grant Only and Blended Finance* - LUMP SUM: Are the estimated costs in the work packages corresponding to the grant component reasonable and non-excessive?
Risk level of the investment and leverage effect	Has the company demonstrated early traction with investors? Is the financing requirement to be internationally competitive significantly higher than the amount that market actors can finance alone?	Has the company demonstrated early traction with investors? Is the financing requirement to be internationally competitive significantly higher than the amount that market actors can finance alone?

[138] The Medical Device Coordination Group (MDCG), with the support of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) has launched a pilot programme to support the development of breakthrough medical devices in the EU. As part of the pilot, manufacturers whose devices are granted 'breakthrough' status by evaluators in their assessments under this programme will benefit from enhanced regulatory support, including priority scientific advice from the medical device expert panels that are overseen by EMA. Where such status is granted, this will be taken into consideration by evaluators."

		For blended finance and equity only: Will EIC Fund investment be able to catalyse other public and private investments with a period of 6 months to 2 years? *FOR GRANT-ONLY*: Can the applicant demonstrate access to the resources needed to commercialise and scale-up the innovation? FOR GRANT ONLY: Can the company demonstrate the need for EIC grant support?

Application submission limits

The EIC Accelerator applies limitations on the number of unsuccessful submissions 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 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 and reducing the Union's strategic dependencies where they fall within the scope of the sectors set out in Article 2(1)(a) of the STEP Regulation[139] as amended, including the fourth strategic sector on defence technologies introduced by Regulation (EU) 2025/2653. The definition is also supported by STEP Commission guidance as further detailed in Guidance notes

[139] 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.

C(2024)3148 of 8 May 2024[140] and C(2025)6798 of 23 December 2025[141]. The Commission Award Decisions 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[142] and subject to availability of budget. Higher amounts may be provided where they are financed by other EU programmes according to the rules and objectives of those programmes. 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.[143]

Such follow-on investments will be limited to the following exceptional categories of cases[144]:

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

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.

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[140] Communication from the Commission: Guidance note concerning certain provisions of Regulation (EU) 2024/795 establishing the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP).

[141] Communication from the Commission – Second Guidance Note on the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) clarifying elements of Regulation (EU) 2024/795 and Commission Communication C/2024/3209

[142] Higher amounts for follow on investments are available by applying under the EIC STEP Scale Up call.

[143] In accordance with Article 48(12), second subparagraph of the Horizon Europe Regulation. The Programme Committee shall be informed of such cases.

[144] These cases stem from the advice of the EIC Board.

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[145], 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.[146]

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.

[145] In the case of the EIC STEP Defence call eligible countries other than the EU Member States are Ukraine and EEA countries associated to Horizon Europe.
[146] 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.

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 150 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.

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[147] 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 in-situ Ocean Observation Technologies for Scalable, High-Resolution Marine Monitoring

Background and Scope

Enhancing the EU's strategic autonomy while supporting the transition towards a globally competitive sustainable blue economy, climate resilience, biodiversity protection and restoration, zero pollution, and maritime security require a profound transformation of ocean observation systems and capabilities.

Ocean observation is a strategic capability for Europe, underpinning climate resilience, biodiversity protection and restoration, marine management, economic competitiveness, blue finance and insurance, zero pollution, and the security of maritime and underwater infrastructures.

The world ocean absorbs around 90% of the excess heat generated by human activities,[148] which makes it central to planetary stability. Yet the ocean dynamic remains insufficiently understood, with observation capacities still underdeveloped, fragmented, unevenly distributed, costly to operate, and observing technologies difficult to scale-up from prototypes to market. The ocean is the ultimate receptacle for much of the pollution generated on land. Marine biodiversity, and consequently the production capacity of the ocean, is therefore under a wide range of pressures.

Despite Europe's world class scientific expertise and technological assets, current in situ ocean observing systems do not yet provide the integrated, operational, high-resolution,

[147] 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.
[148] https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-ocean-heat-content

and real-time data and information required by end-users including public authorities, industry or the scientific community. Key shortcomings and gaps in current ocean observation systems and technologies, that must be addressed include:

- limited integration of multi-source data, in particular, in-situ observations;
- insufficient real-time biodiversity and pollution monitoring;
- lack of AI-ready, interoperable datasets;
- barriers to scaling up from local pilots to large-scale deployment;
- limited availability of affordable, continuous observation in coastal, remote regions, and deep-sea environments;
- high operational costs and environmental footprint of existing systems.

With the world's largest maritime area, around 70,000 km of coastline, and 40% of its population living within 50 km of the sea, the EU has a major stake in maritime matters, as reflected in the European Ocean Pact[149] and initiatives such as Ocean Eye[150].

This Challenge complements these efforts by supporting start-ups and SMEs in accelerating market-creating innovations for advanced ocean observation technologies that deliver sustained, scalable, cost-effective, and high-resolution monitoring solutions[151]. This will in turn transform these technologies into a scalable, integrated, dual-use, and service-oriented industry.

Specific Objectives

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

- Autonomous ocean observation systems: advanced sensor networks across the surface, water column, and seabed; autonomous marine vehicles; long-endurance and connected systems; innovative underwater communication technologies; and smart, adaptive observation capabilities.
- Integrated ocean observation and mapping systems: multi-platform and multi-scale systems enabling high-resolution ocean mapping and persistent observation.
- AI-ready and interoperable data ecosystems: AI-driven ocean data analytics platforms, FAIR datasets, and integration of heterogeneous data streams to support predictive modelling and operational services.
- Persistent and connected observation capabilities: scalable systems with potential applications across civil, environmental, economic, and security domains, including advanced sensing and adaptive AI strategies.

[149] https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/european-ocean-pact_en
[150] https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/science-observation-and-data/oceaneye_en
[151] See for example Observing the Future - Horizon scanning for emerging technologies and breakthrough innovations in the field of ocean observation

- Scalable biodiversity monitoring: strengthened biological and environmental monitoring through eDNA-based approaches and AI-enabled species and habitat detection.

Applicants are encouraged to engage relevant end users, including, as appropriate, those delivering weather forecasts and climate services, shipping, fisheries and aquaculture, offshore energy, telecommunications, insurance, environmental protection and restoration and pollution in order to accelerate market uptake and deployment.

Expected Outcomes and Impacts

By targeting deep-tech solutions, this Challenge will look to:

- strengthen Europe's position and leadership in strategic ocean observation technologies and services, including autonomous observing systems, AI-enabled ocean intelligence, biodiversity and pollution monitoring enable data-driven decision-making for climate action, biodiversity protection and restoration, pollution, marine management, maritime security, and the protection of underwater infrastructure;
- contribute to the development of the European Digital Twin Ocean and related European infrastructures;
- strengthen Europe's innovation and industrial base across the ocean observation value chain, from sensors to data services;
- facilitate collaboration between SMEs, industry, investors, researchers, and public institutions;
- contribute to a competitive, scalable, and investment-ready blue economy and to the development of markets that reinforce European sovereignty;
- support the Ocean Eye objective of boosting Europe's innovation capacity in ocean observation technologies.

Across all priorities, proposals should quantify the improvement expected over current practice, stating the metric used, the baseline, and how it will be measured. Proposals should also address the full life cycle of the proposed system, including end-of-life management and, where possible, reuse of sensors/hardware deployed at sea.

Indicative budget: EUR 30 million

V.2.2 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities

Background and scope

Cities occupy only 4% of the EU's land mass[152] , but are home to 75% of EU citizens[153]. Worldwide, cities account for more than 65% of energy consumption and more than 70% of CO2 emissions[154]. Cities are also disproportionately exposed to the impacts of climate change.

Cities therefore have a clear incentive to be at the forefront of efforts to support low-carbon transitions, which will in turn support the EU in achieving its ambitious goals, set out under the European Green Deal[155] and other related policies to move towards a 55% reduction in emissions by 2030 and climate neutrality by 2050. At the same time, accelerating this transition strengthens EU competitiveness by fostering place-based innovation and creating lead markets for clean technologies. It also enhances resilience and reduces strategic dependencies, notably by promoting more diversified, circular and resource-efficient urban systems. The transformation of cities will also deliver wider co-benefits such as reduced air and noise pollution, more sustainable mobility, improved health and well-being, reduced urban environmental footprints, enhanced urban greening and biodiversity, reducing road fatalities, more efficient use of energy and infrastructures, as well as improved waste and water management.

Through its EU Mission on Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities [156], the European Commission is collaborating with over 100 cities committed to accelerating their transformation to climate neutrality, while start-ups and scale-ups across Europe are already developing deep-tech solutions to support this goal. The aim of this EIC Accelerator Challenge is to accelerate Europe's transition by scaling up innovative companies and connecting them with the Cities Mission for real-world deployment.

This Challenge competition focuses on deep-tech solutions including Nature-based Solutions (NbS)[157] and engineering approaches.

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:

- **Energy and Buildings:** Climate-neutral solutions that address greenhouse gas emissions from the built environment through decarbonisation of energy use,

[152] European Environment Agency, Analysing and managing urban growth, European Environment Agency, Copenhagen, 2019, https://www.eea.europa.eu/articles/analysing-and-managing-urban-growth
[153] Urban population (% of total population) - European Union | Data
[154] This global figure includes emissions beyond cities (e.g. emissions physically taking place well outside a city but "triggered" by the cities). The estimate for EU-27 using the Eurostat definition of cities (i.e. more than 50,000 inhabitants) would be 36% of GHG coming directly from cities.
[155] The European Green Deal - European Commission
[156] EU Mission: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities
[157] 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.

supply, and management. Proposals could include solutions such as, but not limited to:

  - retrofitting and improving the energy efficiency in existing buildings, which could include new concepts mimicking nature to strongly reduce energy consumption
  - integration of renewable energy sources and energy storage systems to achieve grid flexibility: grid architectures able to connect diverse, decentralised sources like solar, wind, and hydropower to the grid and to store (in stationary or EV batteries and/or thermal storage) and deliver energy from renewables, possibly using local direct current microgrids at low/medium voltage smart energy management to harness the waste heat from buildings, transport, and industry via smart thermal networks, phase-change materials, or heat-exchange hubs to power districts, and smart bidirectional charging of EV batteries to exploit energy surplus at the district level (for buildings)
  - expanding the range of technologies for long-term energy storage and recovery, increasing their efficiency, and broadening their areas of application.

- **Transport and Mobility:** Solutions aimed at decarbonising the urban mobility and transport sector with a specific focus on public transport. Proposals could include solutions such as, but not limited to:
  - smart bidirectional charging stations (V2G) for smart charging to integrate renewable electricity and reduce pressure on the grid by optimising energy use between electric vehicles and the grid
  - autonomous SAE L4[158] mobility solutions that can improve public transport efficiency, safety and accessibility
  - congestion reduction, traffic management and reducing empty trips leveraging digital technologies including AI, edge-computing or novel sensing to optimise traffic flows
  - real-time data fusion, simulation and predictive modelling as well as analytics for smoother transitions to sustainable urban multimodal mobility
- **Resource Management:** Supports deep-tech including NbS solutions that enable the implementation of circular resource management practices. Proposals could include solutions such as, but not limited to:

[158] This corresponds to High Driving Automation, where the vehicle can handle all driving tasks in specific operational domains (geographic areas, road types, weather conditions) without any human intervention. If the system encounters a situation it cannot handle, it can safely pull over and stop.

- recycling and reuse of urban waste streams such as construction debris, heat and e-waste and organic matter into high-value materials through advanced recycling and upcycling
- improving water resource planning and management and better processing of wastewater to improve access to clean water

To support the development of deep-tech solutions that can be deployed at scale, applicants are strongly encouraged to engage with at least one of the cities that are part of the Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission[159] and secure a clear commitment, in the form of a letter of intent underlining interest in the proposed solution. Where required, connections to these cities can be facilitated through the Cities Mission Platform[160].

Where appropriate, applicants could also explore potential synergies with relevant projects and solutions supported by the Driving Urban Transitions (DUT) Partnership[161].

Expected Outcomes and Impacts

By targeting deep tech, this Challenge looks to develop and commercially scale solutions needed by cities across Europe to:

- Deliver measurable decarbonisation improvements in the areas of buildings and energy, mobility and resource management[162], supporting urban transformation to climate-neutrality.
- Deploy scalable solutions that can be adapted to different urban contexts with varying environmental and demographic challenges.
- Deliver tangible benefits for residents and the environment in terms of energy consumption, pollution reduction, increased biodiversity and mobility, while enhancing health, wellbeing, equity, accessibility, affordability and quality of life for those who live and work in cities.

The EIC will also, through its Business Acceleration Services, especially the innovation procurement programme, connect the startups and SMEs supported under this Challenge with the network of cities engaged in the Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission, to further accelerate the uptake of breakthrough solutions.

Indicative budget: EUR 50 million

V.2.3 Alternative Concepts and Key Enabling Technologies for Fusion Power Plants

Background and Scope

[159] EU missions - Publications Office of the EU
[160] Home - NetZeroCities
[161] Driving Urban Transition to a sustainable future. | dut
[162] Aligning with for example the Water Resilience Investment Accelerator announced in the Water Resilience Strategy

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 [163], and roadmaps unveiled worldwide[164].

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[165], the 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[166], 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:

[163] The Draghi report on EU competitiveness
[164] For instance: China, Japan, South Korea, US, UK
[165] https://www.iter.org/
[166] Euratom Research and Training Programme - Research and innovation

- 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 supports the Competitiveness Compass for the EU[167] by helping fusion energy start-ups and SMEs deploy and scale up their innovative technologies and concepts. Aligned with the Clean Industrial Deal[168] 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:

[167] Competitiveness compass - European Commission
[168] Clean Industrial Deal - European Commission

- 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[169], 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 2027[170]

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.

V.2.4 Carbon removal and utilisation for climate change mitigation and EU industrial resilience

Background and scope

Achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and net negative emissions thereafter requires not only deep emission reductions, but also large-scale carbon removal. In view of this, the European Climate Law[171] recognises that permanent removals will play an increasing role in the EU economy in the coming decades. The Carbon Removal and Carbon Farming Regulation (CRCF) [172] establishes the first EU-wide voluntary certification

[169] IAEA-TECDOC-2047
[170] This is a continuation of the 2026 Challenge for which EUR 10 million was allocated from Euratom in 2026
[171] https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/european-climate-law_en
[172] https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/carbon-removals-and-carbon-farming_en

framework for permanent carbon removals, carbon farming, and carbon storage in products. This regulatory framework creates the foundation for a trusted European carbon removal market. The first certification methodologies for permanent carbon removal activities, including Direct Air Capture with Carbon Storage (DACCS), Biogenic Emissions Capture with Carbon Storage (BioCCS), and Biochar Carbon Removal (BCR), were adopted in early 2026, with further methodologies being considered. In July 2026, the European Commission proposed to integrate permanent removals in the EU Emission Trading System (ETS)[173] as of 2031 by purchasing 250 Mt of CRCF-certified DACCS and BioCCS.

In parallel, over half the EU's energy consumption comes from imported fossil fuels[174] with volatile global markets. To reduce its dependence on these imports while ensuring sufficient access to carbon to meet the needs of hard to abate sectors, such as fuels, chemicals or materials, for which carbon is embedded in their products, the EU must also develop carbon utilisation rather than only storing CO_2 permanently underground.

This Challenge has the twin objective therefore of supporting the EU's climate targets and ensuring industrial value chain resilience by supporting technologies for carbon removal and utilisation.

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 (or more) of the following priorities:

- Technologies for carbon dioxide removal (CDR): this encompasses permanent carbon removal and carbon removal with carbon storage in products as defined by the CRCF Regulation. This includes DACCS, BioCCS, BCR as described in the delegated regulation (EU) 2026/285 as well as carbon removal approaches that do not yet have a CRCF methodology such as, but not limited to, enhanced rock weathering, direct ocean capture, alkalinity enhancement, and CO_2 mineralisation in products. Activities can cover one or more parts of the removal value chain (capture, transport, storage); for carbon capture technologies, this means direct air or ocean carbon capture or capture from biogenic or mixed biogenic waste streams.
- CO_2 capture and utilisation technologies (CCU): this is agnostic with respect to the source of carbon and focuses on converting captured carbon into fuels, chemicals, and materials, alongside agriculture, food and feed uses (e.g., methanol, synthetic natural gas, proteins, fertilisers).

[173] https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/carbon-markets/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets_en
[174] https://energy.ec.europa.eu/document/download/7fac9eea-5717-4182-a368-bd68c427ff4c_en?filename=Communication.pdf

- Technologies for quantifying, monitoring and verifying the environmental impact, such as carbon removal/ reduction impact, methane leakage emissions etc.

Selected beneficiaries will gain access to tailored Business Acceleration Services, including facilitated access to the EU CRCF Buyers' Club[175] for carbon removal. This will facilitate engagement with a network of committed private buyers of carbon removal, supporting the generation of future revenues and strengthening the underlying business case.

Further, applicants may wish to consider engaging with European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA) recognised carbon ratings agency, to provide an independent assessment of the carbon removal potential of their projects.

Solutions focused on storing captured fossil CO2 as a gas without chemical transformation and hydrogen production technologies are not within the scope of this Challenge.

Expected Outcomes and Impacts

By targeting deep-tech solutions, this Challenge will look to:

- Significantly accelerate the scale-up of CCU and CDR technologies
- Demonstrate technologies at industrially relevant scales
- Develop fully sustainable solutions, maximising energy and cost efficiency while minimising the use of Critical and Strategic Raw Materials to ensure scalability without new dependencies
- Contribute to the emergence of a competitive European carbon removal value chain in the emerging global carbon removal market, by accelerating the commercialisation and deployment of permanent carbon removal technologies across Europe
- Support new business models, with early links to end-users and customers, including corporates, procurement channels and off-takers, to develop technically and commercially viable technologies.

Indicative budget: EUR 50 million

[175] https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/carbon-removals-and-carbon-farming/eu-crcf-buyers-club_en

VI. EIC Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) Scale Up Call[176]

- 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 or 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[177],** propelling Europe's economic, industrial, and technological competitiveness.

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

This call is part of the implementation of the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)[178] which supports the development or manufacturing of critical technologies throughout the Union or safeguarding and strengthening their respective value chains.

[176] 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, on follow-on investments, listed companies, and on parent and holding companies as set out under the Accelerator call apply.
[177] Guidance Note concerning certain provisions of Regulation (EU) 2024/795 establishing the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)
[178] https://strategic-technologies.europa.eu/index_en

Besides support from the EIC, the projects may be eligible for support under other EU programmes included in STEP.

In 2027, 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, which includes Critical Raw Materials, and further developed in the [179][180]

a. **Digital technologies**[181] 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 technologies; advanced materials[182], manufacturing and recycling technologies, technologies vital to sustainability such as water purification and desalination; and circular economy technologies.

[180] 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.
[181] 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
[182] According to the guidance note, this includes critical raw materials

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.

Within the scope of the abovementioned sectors, the EIC STEP Scale up call may support potential dual-use applications, while advancing civilian application use.

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 the STEP Regulation adopted in 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**[183] for an **equity**[184] investment which meets the following elements:

- The pre-commitment comes from a single qualified investor[185] with demonstrable know-how and experience in the relevant market, technology and jurisdiction and subject to KYC by the EIC Fund or the EIF.[186]. 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. Moreover, the portion of the pre-commitment corresponding to at least 20% of the funding round must be fully uninvested as of the date of the pre-commitment letter. Syndicated pre-

[183] The pre-commitment is non-legally binding in nature and will be assessed at the time of proposal evaluation.
[184] Quasi-equity instruments shall not be taken into account for the purpose of meeting the 20% precommitment threshold. Precommitments that do not reach this threshold fully through equity shall be deemed ineligible.
[185] 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
[186] 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.

commitments, as long as no entity's individual contribution is equal or above the 20% threshold, will be deemed ineligible.

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). 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 will be introduced in the investment agreement (see Introduction, section on Economic Security).

Concurrent submissions to the EIC Accelerator, the EIC STEP Scale Up calls and EIC STEP Defence call 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.

What support will you receive if your proposal is funded?

The EIC STEP Scale Up call offers a total indicative budget of EUR 290 million for 2027, [187]. Any unused amount from this budget will be allocated with priority to the EIC Accelerator Open call.[188]

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.

Applicants should apply for an **investment of a minimum of EUR 10 million[189] and maximum of EUR 30 million,** to co-invest in a funding round[190] in the range of EUR 50 to 150 million or more, and at least three to five times the amount of the requested EIC contribution. The specific terms of each investment are considered and negotiated

[187] This includes the EUR 600 million allocated under the EIC 2025-2026 Work Programmes and which may be reused in this call if there are unused amounts.
[188] 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.
[189] Applicants wishing to apply for lower investment amounts may apply to the EIC Accelerator call.
[190] The EIC Fund may join the round when relevant ongoing/upcoming /past.

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 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. The EIC Fund will be requested to take appropriate safeguard measures for individual companies 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 VIII). 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 subject to budget availability:

28/01/2027

29/04/2027

06/09/2027

24/11/2027[191].

You must submit your proposal via the Funding and Tenders Portal.

The EIC STEP Scale UP Call may support applications for dual- use innovations.

1. Submission of proposals

[191] Proposals will be batched at 17h00 Brussels time.

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);
- an **equity** 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 is expected to be in the range of EUR 50 to 150 million or more, and be at least 3-5 times the EIC investment;
- a financial plan (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

Proposals must not contain EU classified information, as defined in the Council Decision 2013/488/EU of 23 September 2013 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information[192].

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 [193].

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.

[193] InvestEU Implementing partners - European Union (europa.eu)

In cases where a recent 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

If your application passes the eligibility assessment, you will be invited to an interview 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 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. In the event that the overall budget available for the full year is entirely allocated by the third batch's completion, the fourth batch of the year will not take place.

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 proposal 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 proposal will be awarded the Sovereignty (STEP) Seal and access to Business Acceleration Services.

+ For the last batch of 2027, the EIC Jury may recommend your proposal to be placed on a reserve list '**GO Reserve**'. The proposal may then be selected funded if additional budget becomes available after the selected proposals retained

from in 2027 have been funded, provided the eligibility conditions regarding pre-commitment remain valid. The ranking order of the reserve list shall be determined by the number of GOs received on the criteria during the interview.[194]

- **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.

It is important to highlight that applications for dual-use innovation will be assessed against the same set of criteria and do not receive preferential treatment compared to purely civilian innovations.

Table 9. Award criteria elements for EIC STEP Scale Up proposals
Excellence
Innovation – Deep-tech and breakthrough nature: 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?
Technological feasibility: Has the technology been developed in a safe, secure and reliable manner? Has it been adequately assessed, validated or certified?
Intellectual Property: Does the innovation have adequate IP protection and sound IP strategy to enter the market to be addressed?
Impact
Market opportunity: What and how big is the market addressed? What is the realistic expectation of the share of the total market? Does the company demonstrate the potential for significant scale-up and market growth? Does the market analysis take into account the current and potential competition? Where relevant, this includes addressable demand across civilian and defence end-users where a credible business case exists in both.

[194] Should there be equal number of GOs at the interview, priority will be given to women-led companies, followed by higher score on impact followed by date of submission.

Business model: Are the detailed business model and revenue strategy sound? Are the financial projections realistic?
STEP Impact: 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).
Level of risk, implementation, and need for Union support
Team capability: 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?
Risk level of the investment: 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?
Investment leverage: Does the proposal provide a convincing and realistic plan for raising an equity financing round using the EIC Fund investment to attract at least 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?
Risk management: Have the main risks (e.g., technological, market, financial, regulatory) been comprehensively identified, together with measures to take to mitigate them?

Application submission limits

The EIC STEP Scale Up call applies limitations on the number of unsuccessful submissions by the same legal entity.

As from 1 January 2026, after **three** unsuccessful submissions by the same legal entity to the EIC STEP Scale Up call or STEP Defence calls which can be at any stage of the process (eligibility check, interviews), an applicant may not apply again to the EIC STEP Scale Up or STEP Defence 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.

Approach for listed companies

Investments in listed companies may be made only in exceptional and duly justified cases, based on the **STEP Impact** that the innovation has 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.[195].

[195] A company's listing status shall not, in itself, preclude an investment. The assessment shall take into account the company's stage of development, financing needs, market context and will be subject to the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines.

VII. EIC STEP Scale Up Defence[196]

- ❖ Does your company have a game-changing innovative technology focused on the development and commercialisation of a critical defence technology for Europe?
- ❖ Is your company looking to raise a major funding round to scale up rapidly and become a leading European defence technology company, and has already secured an initial investment from a qualified investor for this round?
- ❖ Does the successful commercialisation and scaling of your technology represent significant risks, which mean that it cannot be sufficiently financed by market investors alone?

If you answered yes to all questions, then the EIC Strategic Technology for Europe Platform (STEP) Scale Up Defence call could be your launchpad to success. This call provides significant funding to fuel groundbreaking innovation in critical defence technologies[197], strengthening Europe's defence technological and industrial base and reducing strategic dependencies.

Why should you apply?

The EIC STEP Scale Up Defence call presents a unique opportunity for ambitious scale-up companies developing critical defence technologies to access significant equity investment and strategic support. It is designed to propel European defence innovators to become strategic leaders in their fields.

In particular, the call aims to strengthen the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) and reduce strategic dependencies, in complementarity with other existing Union instruments such as the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP).

The companies selected under the EIC STEP Scale Up Defence call shall receive equity-only investments ranging from EUR 10 to EUR 30 million. This investment can significantly accelerate the development and scaling of your defence technology, product, or service. With this funding, you will gain the capacity to strengthen Europe's defence capabilities and forge new markets across Member States. Crucially, this investment is designed to catalyse major funding rounds in the range of EUR 50 to 150 million or more, leveraging at least 3-5 times the EIC investment.

[196] EIC STEP Scale Up Defence 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, listed companies, follow-on investments, and on parent and holding companies as set out under the Accelerator call apply.

[197] Regulation (EU) 2025/2653

The total indicative budget for the EIC STEP Scale Up Defence call is EUR 100 million for 2027. The support is provided as equity-only investment managed by the EIC Fund, aiming to crowd-in private capital and enable the company to scale faster than would be possible with market financing alone. In case the full amount is not utilised it would be reallocated to the EIC STEP Scale up call.

Can you apply?

The EIC STEP Scale-Up call for defence technologies supports projects falling within the **defence strategic technology areas as described in STEP** (Second Guidance Note on STEP), namely:

- **Air and missile defence**: this can for example include integrated multi-layered air and missile defence systems, interceptors, detection systems (including radars);
- **Artillery and precision strike**: this can for example include artillery systems, long-range precision strike capabilities, advanced munitions;
- **Missiles and ammunition**: this can for example include guided missiles and ammunition, conventional munitions, warheads, propellants;
- **Drones and counter-drones**: this can for example include unmanned aerial systems (all classes), swarming systems, jammers, anti-UAV systems;
- **Strategic enablers**: this can for example include space assets and their protection, space situational awareness, space-based services (Earth Observation, PNT, secure communications), protection of critical infrastructure and energy security;
- **Cyber, AI and electronic warfare**: this can for example include AI for command and control, cyber-defence, information warfare, electromagnetic spectrum operations, electronic warfare systems, digital transformation of armed forces, optronics and radiofrequency systems;
- **Military mobility**: this can for example include warehousing and engineering capabilities, sustainable and agile logistics, additive manufacturing for combat maintenance;
- **Ground combat**: this can for example include close fire support systems, soldier systems, manned and unmanned ground combat systems;
- **Maritime**: this can for example include maritime situational awareness, surface and underwater combat systems, manned and unmanned platforms, seabed and anti-submarine warfare systems;
- **Air combat**: this can for example include air combat systems, airborne early warning, tactical and strategic air transport, rotorcraft, air-to-air refuelling;

- **Medical and countermeasures**: this can for example include military medical technologies, CBRN defence including sensors, protection, decontamination and recovery systems.

Note: To be eligible under this call, the proposed products, technologies or services must have a primary defence application. Solutions with predominantly civilian or dual-use applications should refer to the **general EIC STEP Scale Up call**.

In order to apply under the EIC STEP Scale Up Defence call, your innovation must also be *critical* thereby meeting either of the following conditions:

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

Eligible countries of establishment and restricted participation

In accordance with Article 48(2) of the Horizon Europe Regulation, participation is limited to **SMEs, including start-ups, and small mid-caps**[198] **established in the Union, in Ukraine, or in an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe**.[199]

This call has a general **exclusion rule: legal entities,** established in the Union, in Ukraine or in an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe, **that are directly or indirectly controlled by a third country other than Ukraine or an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe, or by legal entities** of such a third country cannot participate.[200] However, such entities may still be eligible to participate in this call provided that appropriate guarantees are made available to the Commission and approved in accordance with the national procedures of the Member State or EEA member associated to Horizon Europe in which the legal entity is established.

Pre-commitment

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 pre-commitment**[201] for an **equity**[202] investment which meets the following elements:

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[198] CELEX:32003H0361:EN:TXT.pdf
[199] Appropriate controls are implemented 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.
[200] Appropriate controls are implemented 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.
[201] The pre-commitment is non-legally binding in nature and will be assessed at the time of proposal evaluation.
[202] Quasi-equity instruments shall not be taken into account for the purpose of meeting the 20% precommitment threshold. Precommitments that do not reach this threshold fully through equity shall be deemed ineligible

- The pre-commitment comes from a single qualified investor[203] subject to KYC by the EIC Fund or the EIF. 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. Moreover, the portion of the pre-commitment corresponding to at least 20% of the funding round must be fully uninvested as of the date of the pre-commitment letter. Syndicated pre-commitments, as long as no entity's individual contribution is equal or above the 20% threshold, will be deemed ineligible.

The following entities are eligible to apply:

- A single company classified as a SME or small mid-cap (up to 499 employees) established in the Union, in Ukraine or in an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe[204] (see Annex 2). 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, Ukraine or in an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe.
- 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 will be introduced in the investment agreement (see Introduction, section on Economic Security).

Concurrent submissions to the EIC Accelerator, the EIC STEP Scale Up call and the EIC STEP Defence call 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 .

Guarantees

Should the applicant consider that the entity may be directly or indirectly controlled by a third country other than Ukraine or an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe or by legal entities of such a third country then the following steps should be taken:

[203] Qualified Investor is an investor — public or private —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
[204] Legal entities directly or indirectly controlled by a third country other than Ukraine or an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe, or by legal entities of such a third country shall be excluded from participation unless guarantees are provided and approved in accordance with the national procedures of the Member State or EEA member associated to Horizon Europe in which the legal entity is established

- Carry out the self-assessment to determine whether they are indeed directly or indirectly controlled by a third country other than Ukraine or an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe or by legal entities of such a third country.
- If applicants find this is the case, then applicants should submit guarantees at the time of application in accordance with the national procedures of the Member State or the EEA member associated to Horizon Europe in which the legal entity is established.
- If such guarantees are not submitted at application stage, applicants will be requested to provide them if invited to an interview with the EIC Jury (failure to submit guarantees within two weeks from the end of the interview session will result in applications being deemed as non-eligible). Guidelines concerning the submission of guarantees are available on the Funding & Tender Portal.
- If you did not complete a self-assessment and it is found during the investment due diligence process that your company is directly or indirectly controlled by a third country other than Ukraine or an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe or by legal entities of such a third country, then you will be requested to provide guarantees to the Agency within two weeks of the date of the request (failure to submit guarantees will result in applications being rejected as non-eligible).

Such guarantees must provide assurances that the participation of the legal entity does not contravene the security and defence interests of the Union and its Member States, as established within the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) pursuant to Title V of the Treaty on European Union, including respect for the principle of good neighbourly relations.

What support will you receive if your proposal is funded?

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. Applicants should apply for an **investment of a minimum of EUR 10 million and maximum of EUR 30 million,** to co-invest in a funding round[205] in the range of EUR 50 to 150 million or more, 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 Defence 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 be fully financed by other investors, including InvestEU direct and indirect financial

[205] The EIC Fund may join the round when relevant ongoing/upcoming /past.

products provided by implementing partners. Applicants are encouraged to consider in particular complementarity with debt (including 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, EEA countries associated to Horizon Europe and Ukraine in order to contribute to their economic growth and job creation. The EIC Fund will be requested to take appropriate safeguard measures for individual companies 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 VIII) as well as fast-track access to EUDIS Business Accelerator. Applicants to the EIC STEP Scale Up Defence 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 Defence call at any time until the 01/06/2027[206]. The evaluation of applications submitted will be organised on a single batch[207]. You must submit your proposal via the Funding & 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 defence 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 or more, and be at least 3-5 times the EIC investment);
- A financial plan (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

[206] The call will open on 01/12/2026. 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.
[207] Proposals will be batched at 17h00 Brussels time.

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
- Self-assessment document to determine whether or not the applicant is directly or indirectly controlled by a third country other than Ukraine or an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe[208]. In case of direct or indirect control outcome, applicant is expected to submit the guarantee.

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 an InvestEU implementing partners, if your company is awarded a Sovereignty (STEP) Seal [209].

Upon submission, and if admissible, 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.

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 submission deadline.

2. Interviews with an EIC Jury

If your application passes the eligibility assessment, you will be invited to an interview 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

[208] If applicable, guarantees must be approved in accordance with the national procedures of the Member State or EEA member associated to Horizon Europe in which the legal entity is established.
[209] 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 Defence 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 independent experts and the Commission and EISMEA will ensure open and fair competition to all eligible proposals submitted.

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 award criteria (see below) and is recommended for a potential equity investment. The EIC Jury may provide observations for consideration by the EIC Fund regarding the investment amount or other considerations for the investment decision or management. The EIC 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 proposal will also be awarded the Sovereignty (STEP) Seal and will have access to Business Acceleration Services and fast-track access to EUDIS 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 EIC Jury's overall consideration of the submitted proposals and due to the lack of budget availability.

Your proposal will be awarded the Sovereignty (STEP) Seal and access to Business Acceleration Services and fast-track access to EUDIS Business Acceleration Services.

❖ **NO GO:**

Your proposal does not meet all the award 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 EIC Jury may also provide recommendations regarding a potential resubmission, or not, of your application and improvements needed.

The EIC Jury may recommend your proposal to be placed on a reserve list '**GO Reserve**'. the proposal may then be selected for funding if additional budget becomes available after the selected proposals retained from in 2027 have been funded provided the eligibility conditions regarding pre-commitment are still valid. The ranking order of the reserve list shall be determined by the number of GOs received on the criteria during the interview [210].

Award Criteria

Proposals will be assessed by the EIC Jury at interview against the following award criteria (Table 10), on the basis of the application documents and the interview. The EIC Jury applies a binary GO / NO GO scoring and may focus the interview on any element of the proposal based on its own assessment.

Table 10. Award criteria elements for EIC STEP Scale Up Defence
Excellence
Innovation — defence technology breakthrough: Is the proposed innovation deep-tech in nature stemming from cutting-edge scientific or technological advances with a clear defence application? Does it represent a significant improvement in cost, performance or capability compared to existing or alternative defence solutions?

[210] Should there be equal number of GOs on the criteria at the interview, priority will be given to women-led companies, followed by higher score on impact, followed by date of submission.

Technological feasibility & readiness: Has the technology been developed in a safe, secure and reliable manner? Has it been adequately assessed, validated, or certified for the intended defence application? Is the current Technology Readiness Level substantiated?
Intellectual Property: Does the innovation have an adequate IP protection and a sound IP strategy for defence markets? Has the applicant demonstrated freedom to operate and the ability to control its core technology without undue third-country dependency (absence of third-country export control such as ITAR/EAR)?
Impact
Market Opportunity: What and how big is the defence market addressed? What is the realistic expectation of the share of the total defence market (in the EU and globally) over the medium term? Does the company demonstrate **credible traction with defence end-users** on a realistic pathway to adoption and scale-up within the European defence ecosystem?
Business Model: Are the detailed business model and revenue strategy sound and adapted to defence-market specificities (procurement cycles, classification and security requirements, export-control constraints, certification and qualification pathways)? Are the financial projections realistic given these specificities?
STEP Defence Impact: Does the innovation have a clear and measurable positive impact on one or both of the following: (i) strengthening the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) by bringing to the EU internal market a cutting-edge defence technology with significant economic and security potential; or (ii) reducing or preventing strategic dependencies of the Union in defence-critical technologies or capabilities. Applicants from Associated Countries will need to demonstrate contributions to the EU internal market or to reducing strategic dependencies on third countries. Does the applicant demonstrate a credible commitment and concrete ability to engage with EU defence innovation ecosystems?
Level of risk, implementation, and need for Union support
Team capability: Does the company have the necessary team to develop the innovation and scale the company within defence markets? Does the team have relevant defence sector expertise and, where and if needed, appropriate security clearances? Have skills or competence gaps been identified with a credible plan to fill them?
Risk level of the investment: Is the investment of a nature and risk level — including defence-specific factors such as longer procurement cycles, classification constraints and limited exit pathways — that European market actors will not finance in full without EIC Fund participation?
Investment leverage: Does the proposal provide a convincing and realistic plan for raising an equity financing round using the EIC Fund investment to attract at least 3 to 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?
Defence-specific risk management: Has the applicant identified the main defence-specific risks (export controls and licensing, classification and security clearances, certification pathways, and procurement timelines) and proposed concrete and proportionate mitigation measures?

Supporting Documentation Including Classified Information

If in your proposal you wish to include any supporting documentation as **classified information** as governed by Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/444[211], you must contact EISMEA at least 30 working days before the deadline submission in order to arrange the delivery of the classified documents. Guidelines concerning the handling of classified information are available on the Funding & Tender Portal (including the relevant contact information). Classified information must not under any circumstances be submitted online though the Funding & Tenders.

Additional conditions and safeguards

Specific safeguards will be introduced in the investment agreement, in accordance with the EIC Investment Guidelines (at least one safeguard measure) and the provisions set out in the Introduction (Economic Security).

For investments in companies selected under this call, the lead (or co-lead) investor must not be controlled directly or indirectly by an entity in a third country other than a European Economic Area member of Ukraine.

When implementing investments, the EIC Fund will ensure that supported companies keep most of their value, including their IP, in the EU, EEA countries associated to Horizon Europe and Ukraine in order to contribute to their economic growth and job creation.

Such safeguards may be tailored to the specific technology and risk profile of the company and may include provisions related to ownership changes, governance, intellectual property, location of activities, or supply-chain security.

Additional requirements on ethics

For proposals submitted under the EIC STEP Scale Up Defence call additional ethics requirements will apply, in particular regarding the respect of international humanitarian law and the use of artificial intelligence-based systems which must ensure that AI-enabled functions related to weapon systems do not render weapons without possibility for meaningful human control.

Application submission limits

[211] 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).

The EIC STEP Scale Up Defence call applies limitations on the number of unsuccessful submissions by the same legal entity.

As from 1 April 2026, after **three** unsuccessful submissions by the same legal entity to the EIC STEP Scale Up or STEP Defence 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 of STEP Defence 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.

Approach for listed companies

Investments in listed companies may be made only in exceptional and duly justified cases, , based on the **STEP Impact** that the innovation has 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.

VIII. 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
Applicants 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 Access to all services from EIC ecosystem partners
EIC Awardees that have been assessed under an **EIC call within Horizon Europe (2021-2026),** EIC Accelerator including dual-use beneficiaries, EIC Transition, EIC Pathfinder, EIC advanced Innovation challenges beneficiaries EIC STEP Scaleup recipients, EIC STEP Defence recipients and EIC Pre-Accelerator call awardees[212], and EIC Prizes.	12 days of coaching and more if justified Access to all services from EIC ecosystem partners and possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply 1-to-1 investment readiness and outreach support for startups, SMEs Up to 50% co-funding of services from EIC ecosystem partners to a maximum value of €60.000 per beneficiary Up to €60.000 support for pilots and testing with public and private buyers
EIC Awardees that have been assessed under the Horizon 2020 EIC Pilot (2018-	12 days of coaching and more if justified

[212] [212] Pre-Accelerator call included in the 2025 Horizon Europe widening work programme (WIDERA)

2020) [213] including beneficiaries and associated partners of EIC grants and recipients of EIC Fund Investments.	Access to all services from EIC ecosystem partners and 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 Up to €60.000 support for pilots and testing with public and private buyers
Horizon Europe **Seal of Excellence** and **Sovereignty (STEP) Seal** holders awarded under EIC calls, and the EIC Pre-Accelerator call	3 days of coaching Access to all services from EIC ecosystem partners and possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply) In addition, for Seals of Excellence that have been funded by national or regional programmes[214][215]: • Up to 50% co-funding of services from EIC ecosystem partners to a maximum value of €60.000 per beneficiary • Up to €60.000 support for pilots and testing with public and private buyers
Companies selected under the **EIC Scaling Club** initiative	Access to coaching, training and mentoring through the EIC Scaling Club. Access to all services from EIC ecosystem partners and possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)
Companies selected for investments under the **Scaleup Europe Fund** that comply with the eligibility conditions applicable to EIC support.	Access to all services from EIC ecosystem partners and possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)
Recipients of support under Women TechEU	Access to 3 days of coaching, training and mentoring through the EIC Women Leadership Programme Access to all services from EIC ecosystem partners and possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)

[213] Except Phase 1 beneficiaries
[214] As notified to the Commission and the Agency through the Seal of Excellence Dashboard.
[215] This prevails over the EIC WP 2026 description of the action VIII.3 Financial support to access services from Ecosystem partners

Awardees of the call 'Support for the Ukrainian Tech SMEs and startups' under the EIC 2025 Work Programme	3 days of coaching Access to all services from EIC ecosystem partners and possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply
Beneficiaries who have been assessed under an **EIC call within Horizon Europe (2021, 2022, 2023)**, successfully meeting all award criteria, and subsequently receiving funding through alternative schemes based on this evaluation	3 days of coaching Access to all services from EIC ecosystem partners and possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply

Non EIC beneficiaries with access to BAS services

Beneficiaries and recipients of support under calls from other parts of Horizon Europe which foresee budget contributions to enable provision of EIC BAS services, e.g. final beneficiaries of Regional Innovation Valleys FSTP calls[216]	12 days of coaching Access to all services from EIC ecosystem partners and possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply 1-to-1 investment readiness and outreach support)

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 and access to experts** in areas such as regulations, IPR

[216] Funding for those beneficiaries is foreseen in the EIE 2026-2027 WP (to be spent via procurement and coaching)

- support to attend European and international **business trade fairs and** expand business in new global markets (Global Business Expansion and BAS strategic internationalisation services below);
- Support to pilot and **close deals with corporates** (EIC Corporate Partnership)
- Training and support for start-ups and SMEs in winning contracts from **public and private sector innovation procurement** tenders and co-funding for pilots that validate products with innovation procurers (EIC Innovation Procurement and Support to Pilot Tests and Proofs of Concept with Public and Private Buyers below)
- Strengthen network and skills, knowledge and network needed to **scale up** (EIC Scaling Club 2.0)
- Dedicated support for **female founders and researchers** (EIC Women Leadership [217])
- Dedicated **Business and Innovation Acceleration Services** to EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition beneficiaries[218] supporting transition from lab to market. (Tech2Market)
- **Support to find co-investors** through matchmaking and a digital platform listing all EIC Transition, EIC Pre-Accelerator, EIC Accelerator, EIC STEP Scaleup and Scaleup Europe Fund 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, internationalisation support and many more. The services from EIC Ecosystems partners can be accessed through the EIC Service Catalogue. The catalogue provides information of the service provider, their contact information and eventual conditions for co-funding.

The EIC BAS services, including management of the network of the EIC Ecosystem partners are funded through multi-year procurements[219], expert contracts (coaching) and Coordination and Support Actions (CSA) some of which were financed through previous Work Programmes.

Support for Regional Innovation Valleys (RIVs) beneficiaries: The Business Acceleration Services will also be made available to eligible companies supported through the Regional Innovation Valleys (RIVs) initiative under the European Innovation

[217] 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.
[218] 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.
[219] 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.

Ecosystems (EIE) programme. This support aims to facilitate the market uptake and scale-up of innovations developed by RIVs beneficiaries by providing access to selected EIC Business Acceleration Services, including coaching, investment readiness, access to investors, corporates and innovation procurers, internationalisation support, entrepreneurship training, and tailored business advisory services. The action contributes to simplifying the support landscape by avoiding duplication of similar services under different Union programmes and by leveraging the established EIC BAS ecosystem. The corresponding budget is financed through a transfer from the EIE programme.

The following actions pertaining to BAS services will be funded in 2027:

VIII.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 **for grants projects**. For companies with EIC equity only (EIC Accelerator equity only, STEP or the Scaleup Europe Fund**)** the coaching is not mandatory but can be granted if there are specific needs identified.

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 in accordance with the eligibility table above[220]

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[221], 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

[220] 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.
[221] EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509

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 eligible beneficiaries to meet 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 2,25 million

Indicative timetable: Q1

VIII.2 Support to Pilot Tests and Proofs of Concept with Public and Private Buyers

Background and Rationale

Finding first customers and securing early validation remain critical barriers to the market uptake and commercialisation of innovative solutions developed by EIC-supported SMEs and start-ups. Public and private buyers—including public authorities, large corporates, and private-sector entities—hold significant purchasing power and can act as early adopters, helping to validate breakthrough technologies while enhancing their own service offerings. However, innovation procurement carries inherent risks for both parties:

- For procurers, uncertainties around the performance, reliability, and scalability of untested solutions, especially those coming from startups, create hesitation.
- For innovators, the costs of customisation and pilot testing divert scarce resources from core development activities and constitutes a barrier for engagement with buyers.

To address these challenges, this action will support pilot testing or proof-of-concept (PoC) demonstrations of EIC-funded innovations in collaboration with committed public and private buyers. By embedding these activities within the EIC Innovation Procurement and

Corporate Partnership ecosystems, the action will de-risk adoption, foster trust-based partnerships, and accelerate the procurement and scaling of cutting-edge solutions.

The project beneficiary (a single legal entity or consortium) will receive funding to allocate grants to EIC Awardees selected through open, competitive calls. These grants will enable EIC Awardees to test their innovations in the operational environments of committed buyers, who must provide in-kind contributions (e.g., access to infrastructure, data, personnel, and validation reports) and/or financial contributions to startups. Buyers will not receive financial support but must demonstrate a clear commitment to future procurement.

Scope of the Action

The CSA will support **pilot tests and PoC demonstrations** carried out by EIC Awardees in real operational environments, structured around two pillars:

a. Public Sector Pilots

The action will support EIC Awardees to conduct pilots or PoCs with **committed public procurers**, addressing the lack of testing opportunities that currently hinders innovation-driven public procurement.

The CSA will be **fully embedded in the EIC Innovation Procurement Programme**, ensuring:

- the pipeline of proposals coming from EIC Awardees needs to be therefore the one coming from different activities under EIC Innovation Procurement Programme.
- linkage with the EIC Innovation Procurement Toolkit and Academies, including post-PoC procurement pathways.

A central concept is that of the **committed buyer**: a public authority with a clear intention to procure innovative solutions, supported by a dedicated or planned procurement budget linked to the pilot's thematic area.

b. Private Sector Pilots

The CSA will also support pilots and PoCs with private-sector stakeholders, including but not limited to large corporates. These activities will facilitate trust-building, validation, industrial uptake and access to private sector supply chains.

Two main pathways are envisaged:

a) Pilots originating from the **EIC Corporate Partnership Programme (CPP)** ecosystem, including links to EIC Corporate Days and partner networks aiming at technology validation, co-development, strategic collaboration and continuity from demonstration to procurement.

b) Pilots originating from the **EIC Innovation Procurement Programme**, ensuring continuity from demonstration to procurement. As in the public sector, the **committed buyer** concept applies, with pilots linked to a clear intention and capacity to purchase innovative solutions.

The calls should focus on incentivising additional investments in pilots/PoC by the private sector,

c) Pilots related to Stage 2 of the Advanced Innovation Challenges

The EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges aim to support high-risk, demand-driven deep-tech innovations with transformative potential, particularly in areas where significant research and technological progress have not yet translated into sufficient commercial uptake.

A key feature of the Advanced Innovation Challenges is the early integration of the demand side. Commercial users, including industrial and public-sector buyers, end-users and other relevant stakeholders, such as regulators, should be involved from the outset. Their participation will help validate concrete use cases, strengthen the market relevance of the proposed solutions and facilitate their subsequent adoption and deployment.

The CSA will also support EIC Awardees selected under Stage 2 of the Advanced Innovation Challenges by facilitating the validation, piloting and uptake of their innovative solutions with relevant users and stakeholders.

To ensure continuity and maximise the prospects for market deployment, the selected EIC Awardees will be encouraged to participate in the relevant EIC Business Acceleration Services programmes, including, but not limited to, the EIC Innovation Procurement Programme and the EIC Corporate Partnership Programme. This integration will enable the pilots to benefit from broader access to potential buyers, corporate partners, end-users and procurement opportunities, while supporting the transition from successful validation to commercial adoption.

3. Specific Objectives of This Action

This action has the following primary objectives:

1. To enable EIC Awardees to prove the concept or pilot-test their innovative solutions in the services, premises, or operational environments of public and private buyers aiming to procure innovation.
2. To increase the purchase of innovative solutions by public and private buyers across Europe through structured pilot collaborations, thereby scaling up EIC companies and improving the products and services offered by buyers.

3. Reduce perceived and actual risks for buyers when procuring innovative solutions, thereby incentivise more pilots and mainstreaming innovation procurement across Europe.
4. Foster long-term strategic partnerships and commercial agreements between EIC-supported companies and large corporates.
5. De-risk early-stage corporate–startup collaboration and attract **additional private investment in pilots.**

Expected Outcomes and Impacts

By the end of the action, the following results are expected:

- Increased business opportunities for EIC Awardees through validated pilot tests and PoCs in real-world buyer environments.
- Higher uptake of innovative solutions by public and private buyers via innovation procurement, leading to follow-up contracts, co-development agreements, or investments.
- Scaling of EIC companies through new commercial partnerships with public and private entities.
- Improved public and private services in Europe through the adoption of EIC-funded innovations, particularly in green and digital transition areas.
- Publicly available validation reports to support replication, procurement, and further scaling of successful pilots.

Implementation Approach

The project beneficiary must:

- Allocate **at least 80% of the total budget** to financial support for third parties (FSTP) to EIC Awardees, in grants of up to **€60,000 per pilot**. At least 50% of the FSTP budget shall be allocated to pilots with public sector buyers.
- Select beneficiaries through an **open, transparent, and competitive process**, ensuring equal treatment and absence of conflicts of interest. The call should be constantly open with at least 4 "cut-off" dates per year to gather the applications.
- Ensure that the pipeline of applying final beneficiaries is coming from the EIC Innovation Procurement Programme and EIC Corporate Partnership Programme. The companies eligible to receive FSTP are EIC Awardees selected as of EIC Pilot as well as Seal of Excellence that have been funded by national or regional programmes, EIC Scaling Club members, EIC Pre-Accelerator beneficiaries and Scaleup Europe Fund investment recipients. Entities entitled to commercialise results of Transition and Pathfinder projects are also eligible after demonstrating such rights.

- Ensure that each pilot is backed by a **formal commitment** (e.g. MoU) from the participating buyer.
- Ensure that FSTP incentivise additional corporate investments in pilots with EIC beneficiaries
- Demonstrate experience in managing pilot schemes with corporates and public buyers.
- Disseminate results effectively, including a **public catalogue of pilots and validation reports**.
- Monitor the consumption of the FSTP, as well as provide statistics about applicants and funded proposals taking into consideration their country, EIC funding type and dates, type of buyers, originating EIC BAS scheme (CPP or IPP) and more including through dedicated dashboards.
- Track and report follow-up procurement, commercial agreements, and investments
- All the above data generated by the project will need to be transferred periodically to the Agency, following a requested structure.
- Publish at list 20 success stories
- Ensure that all monitoring and impact data will be provided in regular manner to the granting authority via a dedicated API.
- Communication activities and websites needs to be aligned with the overall EIC communication strategy and visual identity and follow EIC BAS channels

Type of Action and Budget

Type of Action: **Coordination and Support Action (CSA)**.

Indicative Budget: The Commission considers that a contribution of €6 million would allow the action to be implemented effectively. However, **other amounts may be proposed if duly justified**.

Duration: 3 years to achieve the desired objectives.

Number of Projects Expected: **1**.

Indicative timetable: Call Opening: Q1 2027, **Deadline for Applications**: 15 April 2027 at 17h00 (TBC) Brussels local time

VIII.3 EIC BAS strategic internationalisation services

In the context of expanding EU strategic trade relations and tech collaboration in diverse geographical regions, EIC is positioned as major EU startup policy instrument, supporting

a large portfolio of top European deep-tech innovators. This action will equip EIC with targeted set of instruments to support EIC Awardees and other eligible EIC-supported companies to access and scale in markets outside EU Members States and associated countries and for EIC to engage with institutional and ecosystem partners like trade promotion agencies, international organisations as well as investors, procurers, corporates, and other innovation stakeholders.

The aim is to facilitate EIC supported companies with market entry, customer acquisition, pilot-to-contract pathways, commercial deployment especially through procurement and access to investment in high growth markets that present specific regulatory, cultural and operational challenges and to raise EIC visibility among relevant stakeholders in those regions, strengthening 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.

This action will be complementary to existing BAS internationalisation activities, like participation to major trade fairs, Global Business Expansion Programme and global procurement assistance as it will deploy a tailored mix of interventions adapted to the needs and specificities of diverse markets and stakeholders, such as: market exploration missions, tailored market entry services, regulatory and compliance coaching, investor engagement events, participation in relevant regional and sector specific trade fairs and innovation events, investor engagement events & targeted investor introductions (venture capital, corporate venture, strategic investors), buyer engagement and corporate or public-sector matchmaking with key regional players.

Type of action: Public procurement.
Indicative budget: EUR 4 million
Indicative timetable: Q1 2027

IX. EIC Prizes

IX.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[200], 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[222], 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.

[222] 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 2028 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 three EIC prize categories funded under this Work Programme: Women Innovators, Rising Innovators and Challenge Prize. 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.)

In the third category, one prize of EUR 100 000 is awarded to the highest-ranked application in a specific challenge of strategic importance to the EU. For this work programme, the challenge is quantum technologies: it seeks women innovators whose companies or organisations are advancing quantum computing, communication, sensing, metrology or simulation towards market deployment, strengthening Europe's autonomy and competitiveness in a field decisive for the coming decade.

Eligibility criteria

All applicants must comply with the following eligibility criteria to participate:

1. The applicant must be a woman (natural person);[223]
2. The applicant must apply as a natural person and not as a legal entity. The applicant must be legally residing[224] 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[225] of the company or organisation[226];

[223] 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.
[224] 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.
[225] 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.
[226] Self-employment is not acceptable.

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[227] at least one year before the call year[228];

5. Applicants who have already received an EU or Euratom prize cannot receive a second prize for the same activities.

6. Challenge category ONLY - In addition to the above, applicants for the Challenge category must demonstrate that the core activity of their company or organisation is the development or commercial deployment of quantum technologies, namely quantum computing, quantum communication, quantum sensing, quantum metrology or quantum simulation. Applicants must be able to provide, upon request, evidence that the company or organisation has generated revenue, secured external investment, or entered into a pilot or commercial agreement with a third party in relation to those technologies.

In addition to the above, those applying for the Rising Innovators category must be aged under 35 at the start of the call year.[229] There is no age limit to apply for the Women Innovators category, though applicants eligible for several prize categories can only apply to one. The Challenge category (quantum in this work programme) is mutually exclusive with all other categories. Applicants may only submit a proposal under one category per call. In the case of applications submitted under multiple categories, only the latest application will be considered, and all other applications will be deemed ineligible.

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, association, or organisation founded or cofounded by the applicant is developing a breakthrough innovation focusing, among others, on Deep-tech and Science Technology Engineering,

[227] 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.
[228] The company must be registered or incorporated before 1 January 2026.
[229] Those applying for the Rising Innovator category must be born on or after 1 January 1992.

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.

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
Opening of the contest	Q1 – Q3 2027
Deadline for submission of proposals	Q3 – Q4 2027
Award of the prize	Q1 – Q2 2028

Indicative Budget:

Category	Amount
'Women Innovators' category	
1st prize	EUR 100 000
2nd prize	EUR 70 000
3rd prize	EUR 50 000
'Rising Innovators' category	
1st prize	EUR 50 000
2nd prize	EUR 30 000
3rd prize	EUR 20 000
'Challenge: Quantum' category	
1st prize	EUR 100 000

IX.2 The European Capital of Innovation Awards (iCapital)

Cities 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[230] 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.

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 1st) with EUR 500 000 and the two runners-up (ranked 2nd and 3rd) 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 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

[230] eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022DC0332

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 development process. The applicant is expected to provide details on concrete results of the showcased initiatives.

2. **Scaling up** – 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- 2028" or "Rising Innovative city 2028" will be awarded in the respective category. Therefore, to celebrate the year the winning cities (ranked 1st in each category) will be invited to sign a declaration of intent[231] 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.

[231] 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.

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.

Type of Action: Recognition Prize

Indicative budget: the following 2027 budget will be allocated as follows:

European Capital of Innovation winner	**EUR 1 000 000**
European Capital of Innovation 1st runner-up	EUR 100 000
European Capital of Innovation 2nd runner-up	EUR 100 000
European Rising Innovative City winner	**EUR 500 000**
European Rising Innovative City 1st runner-up	50 000
European Rising Innovative City 2nd runner-up	50 000

Indicative timetable of contest(s)

Stages	Date and time or indicative period
Opening of the contest	Q1-Q2 2027
Deadline for submission of application	Q2-Q3 2027
Award of the prize	Q4 2027 – Q1 2028

X. Other Actions

X.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 the 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[232], 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 is 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 complements 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 is 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 operates as a market-based, privately managed and privately co-financed growth fund investing in major European-led investment rounds.

The contribution to the Scaleup Europe Fund from the EU budget is complemented and amplified by investments from a number of other investors that commit to the same

[232] COM(2025) 270 final

objectives. In this way the contribution of EUR 1 billion from the EIC (of which EUR 600 million from the 2026 Work Programme and an additional EUR 400 million from 2027 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[233]. 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 invests in scaleup and growth stage companies active in developing and/ or deploying strategic technology areas, covering three broad thematic domains[234]:

- **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 is also be able to invest in technologies with **dual-use applications.**

The Scaleup Europe Fund aims to provides 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 is established as a dedicated compartment of the EIC Fund, alongside the existing Horizon Europe and EIC Pilot compartments. It benefits from additional investors in capital and will operate under compartment-specific investment guidelines, governance arrangements and decision-making structures.

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 is implemented through indirect management, with the European

[233] 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.
[234] The Scaleup Europe Fund will contribute to the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) in these domains.

Investment Bank acting as the investor of record for Horizon Europe contribution for the Scaleup Europe Fund.

The EIC Fund has identified a suitable investment adviser and portfolio manager[235] 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 for investments of the Scaleup Europe Fund using Union funds supported with Union budget, the Fund documents 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 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 are submitted directly to the Scaleup Europe Fund and are 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[236].

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 are limited in all cases to single companies qualifying as SMEs or small mid-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 also apply. In line, the Commission will reserve the right to excuse itself from

[235] 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.
[236] European Innovation Council - European Innovation Council

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 400 million from 2027.

Indicative timetable: Q2 for conclusion of contribution agreement

X.2 Financial Support under the EIC Booster Grant Scheme

The objective of this action is to organise and ensure the implementation of the EIC Booster Grant scheme. The project implementing this action must provide financial support in the form of grants of a fixed maximum amount not exceeding EUR 50 000 to a booster grant project linked to an EIC pathfinder or EIC transition funded projects.

Scope of the action – financial support to third parties

EIC Awardees or other potential booster grant beneficiaries (Technology Transfer Offices, EIC Inventors and other third parties) can be invited to apply at any time for an EIC Booster grant following a positive recommendation from an EIC Programme Manager or a project review.

The selected CSA project will put in place a constantly open call, using its own IT, for EIC booster grant applicants (EIC Awardees, Technology Transfer Offices, EIC Inventors and other third parties as indicated above) to submit a Booster Grant proposal. Following a positive recommendation from an EIC Programme Manager or an EIC project review, the CSA project will send an invitation to submit a proposal to the identified applicant/s for Booster grant project.

The CSA project will then organise the evaluation of the submitted Booster grant proposal by setting-up an evaluation committee composed of 3 evaluators: an EIC Programme Manager, an external expert selected from a pool of experts covering the broad technology areas, and either an EIC Project Officer or a second external expert. Each evaluator will assess whether the proposal meets each of the award criteria described in annex 5 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 final decision will be motivated and communicated to the applicant by the CSA project. Successful applicants will be awarded by the CSA project an EIC Booster grant in the form of a lump sum grant. The CSA project should also take care of support to applicants including a helpdesk to reply to the questions from the identified applicants.

After signature of the booster grant agreement between the selected CSA project and the selected Booster grant project, the CSA project will ensure a pre-financing payment of 70% of the total amount to the booster grant project and will ensure a final payment at the end of the grant after approval of a final report. Each Booster grant project will have to submit a final report of around 10 pages presenting the results. The selected CSA project will set up a system to perform an assessment of final report ensuring that the activities have been performed as originally foreseen for the booster grant before payment and refer to EISMEA in case of identified issues during the implementation of the project. The final approval of such a report will be performed by the Agency.

The CSA beneficiary will run an impact survey 6 months after the end of the booster grant to the booster grant recipients, or earlier in case the booster grants ends towards the end of the CSA project. The results of this survey should be communicated to the Agency. A maximum of three EIC Booster grants projects 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 EIC Booster grant project can be awarded for each EIC Transition project. The maximum size of cumulative financial support in the form of a grant allocated to Pathfinder a project under this action is EUR 150,000. Any such EIC Booster grant can be awarded to an individual EIC awardee or a group of EIC Awardees.

The selected CSA project will need to put in place a real-time reporting and monitoring system about applications received and financial support awarded per EIC booster grant project, as well as aggregated data displayed in dashboards, including but not limited to geographical distribution, type of funded activity, financial support received (value of the lump sums, 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. Each EIC booster grant project has to clearly identify to which EIC Pathfinder or EIC transition project it relates. The selected CSA project would need to collaborate closely for the implementation of this action with the Agency, including participation in regular meetings and making available relevant information. The CSA project should also provide content, in collaboration with the Agency, for an "impact report".

The selected CSA project must ensure sound financial management and applicants must specify in their proposals how the management and control of this financial support will be organised in an effective and efficient way, including avoidance of any abuse. The standard admissibility and eligibility conditions for Coordination and Support Action ("CSA") as detailed in Annex 2 will apply to this call. If admissible and eligible, the proposals for the current Coordination and Support Actions will be evaluated and ranked against the criteria as described in Annex 2. Only one project will be selected. 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 Booster grants projects). An effective duration of 2 years would enable the project to achieve the desired objectives.

Expected outcomes and impacts

The selected proposal under this call is expected to organise the EIC Booster Grant innovation scheme, covering the following activities: -

- Ensure the sound design, organisation, and management of the Booster Grant scheme, ensuring continuity of the scheme as implemented by the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency since 2023 and the EIC project BOOST 101192038.
- Report on the implementation of the scheme (key data on applications, organisations funded, demographics of end-beneficiaries of the scheme, etc.) to European Commission services.

The Key Performance Indicators (KPI) that will be used to monitor the action should include as a minimum:

- "Time to inform" measuring time from application of an EIC booster grant project to the notification of the confirmation about lump-sum award;
- "Time to sign" the Booster grant agreement measuring time from application of an EIC Booster grant project to the signature of the agreement.
- "Time to pay" the lump sum (from reception of the signature of the booster grant agreement to payment);
- 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)

Number of projects expected to be funded: 1

Call opening: 14 January 2027 (TBC)

Deadline for applications: 15 April 2027 at 17h00 (TBC) Brussels local time

Indicative budget: EU 6 million. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of proposals requesting other amounts if duly justified.

X.3 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 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.[237]

[237] 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.

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[238].

Type of action: Expert contract action.

Indicative budget: EUR 0.5 million

Indicative Opening: From Q1 2027

X.4 External expertise for monitoring, ethics and policy advice

The EIC uses external independent experts for monitoring of projects[239] 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[240]. 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[241].

Type of action: Expert contracts.

Indicative budget: EUR 4 million

[238] As set out in the Horizon Europe Specific Programme
[239] Including projects financed by the EIC pilot, SME instrument, Fast Track to Innovation, FET Open and FET Proactive under Horizon 2020.
[240] Necessary to implement Horizon Europe regulation Article 48.12
[241] Commission Decision C(2007)5858

Indicative opening: From Q1 2027.

X.5 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.

In addition, this action provides further support to the organisation of the EIC Summit 2027. 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 2027.

Indicative budget: EUR 4,5 million

X.6 EIC Data management and IT systems integration[242]

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 2027, 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 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, integrate legacy data and ensure data interoperability. Develop needed webservices to exchange Business Acceleration Services (BAS) data with other EC IT systems and stakeholders including EIT, EIB, EIC Fund etc.
- Data repatriation, integration and exploitation (including through dashboards) of data collected by service providers and CSAs
- 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.

[242] The code developed to implement the IT components should be released in open source under code.europa.eu

- Further improve the EIC IT solutions complementing the corporate IT tools for the coordination and monitoring of the investment component and support 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 and networking activities (c.f. chapter VIII. Business Acceleration Services.) Where applicable, these actions will be complemented by IT developments foreseen through Business Acceleration Services. The objective is also to further integrate the EIC Community with EU Innovation platform and other corporate tools.
- 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.
- 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.
- Preparatory IT developments for implementation of EIC activities subject to the adoption of the Horizon Europe (2028-34) legislation.

The above developments will follow, as much as possible, the principles of open-source and sovereign software, and open data standards, ensuring that both IT solutions 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.

The budgetary envelope foreseen for the implementation of the activities above, include the necessary contingency to ensure business continuity in the transition period between the current and the next MFF.

Type of action: Public procurement actions

Indicative budget: EUR 5 million

Indicative opening: From Q1 2027.

XI.6 EIC Data for Strategic Intelligence Capacity Building and Reinforcement

Objective

This action aims to strengthen the European Innovation Council's (EIC) data and analytical capacity to support strategic intelligence and evidence-based decision-making across its programmes. It will enhance the EIC's ability to systematically collect, integrate, and analyse internal and external data, and to translate these into actionable insights for operational planning, portfolio management, and feedback to policy.

Scope and Rationale

Building on ongoing efforts, the action will address current gaps in knowledge architectures, analytical methodologies, and data exploitation. It will support a more integrated and forward-looking use of data across the EIC, boosting the current mix of quantitative analytics with qualitative and expert-based approaches.

The initiative is aligned with emerging practices in public sector innovation, including anticipatory governance, mission-oriented policy design, and experimental approaches to evidence generation. It draws on frameworks developed by organisations such as the Joint Research Centre, OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, particularly in relation to data-informed policy experimentation and strategic intelligence systems.

Key areas of work:

- **Data augmentation and enhanced analytics**
  Expansion and integration of internal and external data sources, including project-level data, R&I outputs, and business intelligence. Development of analytical pipelines and dashboards to support monitoring of performance, trends, and investment patterns in the European deep-tech ecosystem, including benchmarking of EIC performance.
- **Strategic intelligence and sensemaking**
  Development of new methodologies and tools for the identification, aggregation, and interpretation of signals, trends, and emerging domains relevant to EIC activities. This includes strengthening foresight capabilities and supporting the design of EIC Challenges and portfolio strategies.
- **Impact assessment and performance monitoring**
  Design and implementation of approaches to assess the R&I and economic impacts of EIC-funding and support activities across different time horizons. This includes portfolio-level analysis and alignments with current and future EIC KPI.
- **Future-oriented and anticipatory analysis**
  Application of mixed-method approaches combining data-driven analytics with expert judgement to explore future scenarios, technology trajectories, and potential policy implications. This supports the EIC's anticipatory role in feedback to policy for broader EU strategic reviews.

Expected Outcomes

- Improved integration and usability of EIC internal and external data assets
- Strengthened analytical support to Programme Managers and Parent DGs
- More robust evidence base for Feedback to Policy and EU institutional decision-making at large
- Development of reusable methodologies and tools adaptable to potentially new EIC areas of activity

Implementation Approach

The action will adopt a modular and iterative approach with potential launch of multiple initiatives that should allow for progressive refinement of scope and priorities, including the renewal of the current contract on Business and Investment Insights for EIC Strategic Intelligence (EISMEA/2024/OP/0013). Emphasis will be placed on stakeholder-centric design and scalability of outputs via collaboration with best-in-class third parties to combine in-house analytical development with targeted external expertise.

Type of action (TBD): Public procurements

Indicative timetable (TBD): Q4 2027

Indicative budget (TBD): EUR 1 million

X.7 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 Scaleup Europe Fund, 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 1,6 million

X.8 Women TechEU

Only 15% of innovative start-ups are founded or co-founded by women, and a mere 6% have all-women founding teams. These women-led businesses are also less likely to raise venture capital than male-only businesses, they attract less early-stage equity investment and the amounts that they raise tend to be lower. Data shows that in Europe only around 5% of venture capital goes to mixed teams and only 2% to all-female teams. Women TechEU is Europe's answer to this innovation gender gap. It supports early-stage deep-tech European start-ups led by women and its objective is to achieve a more gender balanced innovation ecosystem by supporting women-led start-ups in its riskiest stage. The initiative complements the activities funded under the European Innovation Council (EIC), paving the way for the participation of the start-ups in future EIC calls. Women TechEU targets highly innovative start-ups founded, or co-founded by women, holding a top management position (CEO, CTO or equivalent) in the company at the time of submission

Women TechEU is dedicated to supporting early-stage, women-led deep-tech start-ups in achieving critical de-risking milestones, enhancing executive capabilities, and strengthening

ecosystem networks. The initiative also aims to facilitate their advancement through the innovation pipeline and participation in the European Innovation Council (EIC).

In recent years, Women TechEU has established itself as a vital resource for securing financing for women-led start-ups. Notably, these start-ups have filed 230 patents and achieved a remarkable six-fold return on investment. The fourth Women TechEU open call attracted 1,107 applications, underscoring its importance in the EU's action plan for women in research, innovation, and start-ups, this initiative aims to enhance the competitiveness of women-led companies addressing critical societal challenges.

Post-programme evaluations conducted in 2026 revealed that over 50% of Women TechEU beneficiaries operate in regulated deep-tech sectors, such as life sciences, advanced manufacturing, quantum technologies, and high-performance computing. In these fields, effective de-risking necessitates investments that significantly exceed prior funding expectations. Consequently, companies often find themselves needing to prioritize between critical tasks—such as regulatory certification, IP protection, and feasibility validation—making it impossible to pursue all three simultaneously.

In response to these challenges, the maximum amount of financial support to third parties has been raised from EUR 75,000 to EUR 150,000 per start-up. This adjustment is designed to align with evidence-based sectoral cost structures, adhere to current Horizon Europe standards for deep-tech single-beneficiary support, and tackle the structural underfunding that has hindered follow-on conversion rates to the EIC accelerator, which currently stands at 19.5%.

Beneficiary Profile

To qualify for support, start-ups must:

- Be registered and established in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country for at least six months at the time of submission
- Be founded or co-founded by women, with a woman holding a top management position (CEO, CTO, CSO, or equivalent) at the time of submission
- Operate in any deep-tech domain for example life sciences, advanced manufacturing, quantum technologies, high-performance computing, artificial intelligence, robotics and construction automation, though not exclusively.

The women-led startups must respect the above conditions to be eligible for financial support to third parties under this action. The scheme is designed for early-stage companies that have not yet received substantial financial support, ensuring assistance reaches those most in need.

Expected Outcome

The consortium selected under this call is expected to Implement the Women TechEU initiative, covering the following activities:

Call and evaluation management

– Ensure the sound design, organisation and management of the Women TechEU, ensuring continuity of the initiative;

– Implementing calls for proposals and organizing the evaluation of proposals and award of support to successful applicants. The call should use, where appropriate, the same evaluation criteria as for the EIC Accelerator;

Network and community building

- Establish alumni network connecting Women TechEU cohorts with successful women deep-tech founders at scale stage (including EIC accelerator awardees), providing mentorship, lessons learned, and strategic advice on progression milestones to accelerate business development, investor readiness, and progression along the women-led innovation pipeline.
- Develop a sponsorship dimension beyond mentoring and coaching, connecting awardees to experienced CEOs, investors, first customers, strategic partners and board-level networks who can advocate for them and open doors as they move towards scale.
- Promote cooperation and networking activities among the community of women entrepreneurs in the deep-tech field;
- Organise landmark events, building a network of Women TechEU grantees, and help them to connect with the overall EIC community;

Capability development

- Create linkages with the Business Acceleration Services (BAS) for the Women Leadership Programme and EIC Community Platform to selected applicants;
- Facilitate access to relevant training in intellectual property ideally in cooperation with EUIPO and EPO, ensuring awardees benefit from authoritative guidance on IP protection, prosecution timelines, freedom-to-operate assessment, and licensing strategy.

Progression and Investment pathways

- Implement project reviews of awardees as a basis to access the Fast Track to the EIC Accelerator;
- Facilitate structured introductions to investors pre-screened for commitment to women-led deep-tech funding, including Investment round preparation and readiness support.

- ✦ Facilitate structured connections between Women TechEU awardees and corporates, first customers, public procurement opportunities, and strategic investors.
- ✦ Provide Investment round preparation and readiness support, including investor readiness coaching and follow-on financing strategy

Promotion and communications

- ✦ Deploy comprehensive promotion and communication strategy, particularly targeted at underrepresented Member States, to secure quality applications
- ✦ Clearly brand the scheme as an EIC initiative across all materials and communications
- ✦ Conduct information and dissemination events, press and outreach events, and roadshows

Diversity and quality

- ✦ Promote a diversity in geographical participation and technological areas to be covered by the scheme;

Reporting

- ✦ Report on scheme implementation to Commission services, covering delivery metrics and progression KPIs tracked across and beyond the project period:

  Delivery: applications received, evaluation outcomes, number and profile of start-ups funded, demographics of end-beneficiaries, and de-risking activities implemented;

  Investment progression: follow-on funding raised, Investment round readiness and achievement, and investor engagement (introductions, term sheets, committed capital);

  Market traction: first customers, corporate partnerships, and public procurement exposure;

  EIC progression: Fast Track applications to, and conversion into, the EIC Accelerator;

  Leadership and equity: retention of women in CEO, CTO, CSO or equivalent roles as companies grow and raise.

Women TechEU third parties will be eligible for mentoring and coaching provided by the BAS, under the 'Women Leadership Programme', which includes dedicated networking and pitching events funded under a separate EIC budget.

The financial support to third parties of up to EUR 150,000 per start-up enables women-led deep-tech start-ups to complete critical de-risking activities—regulatory certification, intellectual property protection and prosecution, technical and clinical feasibility validation, business model refinement, and Investment round readiness preparation—that institutional investors require before committing follow-on capital. By removing the forced trade-offs inherent in underfunded support, the grants position beneficiaries to achieve meaningful investment readiness and strengthen their progression through the EIC pipeline, thereby improving follow-on EIC Accelerator conversion rates and advancing women's leadership in deep-tech innovation ecosystems across Europe.

Project Duration

The consortium should consider a project duration of two (2) years, with a possibility to extend the grant for another year, subject to achieving the key milestones of the project.

Budget and Resource Allocation

The consortium shall allocate a minimum of 75% of the total proposed budget to grants to third parties (Women TechEU beneficiaries). The remaining budget finances consortium delivery, management, promotion, and support activities.

The financing amount for the Women TechEU action is fixed at EUR 150 000 per start-up. This amount reflects the funding landscape for deep-tech SME support under Horizon Europe and is grounded in observed sectoral cost structures for de-risking in regulated deep-tech domains. [243]

Type of Action: Coordination and Support Action (CSA)

Call Opening: 1 April 2027

Deadline for applications: 1 September 2027 at 17:00 Brussels local time

Indicative budget: EUR 15 million

X.9 Greek presidency conference

In view of the strategic expansion of the EIC, with major policy shifts, as the opening to defence and dual-use innovation, EIC is positioned as a central instrument for Europe's technological sovereignty and deep-tech competitiveness. In this context, the Greek

[243] Independent evaluation by the implementing consortium of the previous Woman Tech.EU programme (February 2026) recommends a funding envelope of EUR 100 000–250 000 per start-up; EUR 150 000 sits within this independently assessed range. EUR 150 000 enables beneficiaries to address regulatory and compliance pathway, IP freedom-to-operate clearance, technical or clinical proof-of-concept data, and a validated business model within a single award, strengthening their de-risking milestones and their progression through the EIC pipeline.

Presidency is committed to advancing a coordinated European approach to deep-tech innovation, scale-up financing, technological sovereignty and global talent attraction.

The objective of this direct action is to support the organisation of a high-level conference on the future of the European Innovation Council in Horizon Europe 2028 – 2034 and the future direction of EU innovation policy, in light of the implementation of the EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy, the European Innovation Act and EU Inc. initiative. Building on the EIC's strengthened role in 2026 – 2027 and the transition towards the next Framework Programme, the conference will provide a timely forum for shaping a coherent European policy vision for deep-tech innovation, scale-up, technological sovereignty and global competitiveness. It will bring together European and national policy makers, innovation agencies, investors, academia, research and technology organisations, industry and other key stakeholders to assess progress, identify remaining bottlenecks and discuss the policy, regulatory and investment choices needed for the future.

The conference will be organised by the Centre for Research and Technology Hellas (CERTH)

under the General Secretariat of Research and Innovation in Q4 of 2027 during the Greek Presidency of the Council.

Expected outcomes and impacts

- Exploration and discussion of the future role, objectives and instruments of the EIC in Horizon Europe 2028–2034, including continuity and possible evolution of existing funding schemes, in support of Europe's deep-tech leadership and competitiveness.
- Exploration and discussion of how the EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy, the European Innovation Act and EU Inc. can contribute to a more innovation-friendly, better connected and globally competitive European ecosystem for startups and scaleups.
- Identification of policy, regulatory, financial and operational measures needed to strengthen Europe's capacity to create, attract, grow and retain innovative companies in critical technology areas and to support their scale-up in the Single Market and globally.
- Identification of best practices and new approaches for improving scale-up finance, market uptake, cross-border expansion and the emergence of pan-European deep-tech value chains.
- Exploration and discussion of approaches to reducing fragmentation across European innovation ecosystems and improving coordination between EU, national and regional actors in the design and delivery of innovation support.
- Exploration and discussion of measures to attract and retain talent for innovation, including founders, researchers, highly skilled workers and innovative entrepreneurs, and to address barriers linked to mobility and residence procedures.

- Identification of strategic orientations for the future of EU innovation policy so as to reinforce Europe's technological sovereignty, economic security and long-term competitiveness in the next decade.

Type of Action: Coordination and Support Action (CSA)/Grant to a named beneficiary (as the implementation of this grant is linked to a 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: Centre for Research and Technology Hellas (CERTH)- Egialias 52, Marousi 151 25,

Indicative budget: EUR 300.000

Indicative timeline for call publication: Q4 2026

XI. 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 2027. 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[244], the Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual[245] and the EU Grants AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement[246]. These documents provide clarifications and answers to questions on preparing the application.

[244] The Horizon Europe Programme Guide outlines the detailed guidance on the structure, budget and political priorities of Horizon Europe.
[245] The Online Manual outlines the procedures to register and submit applications online via the Funding & Tenders Portal and recommendations on preparing the application.
[246] 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

Calls/Actions [247][248]	Budget EUR million
HORIZON-EIC-2027-PATHFINDEROPEN-01	166
HORIZON-EIC-2027-PATHFINDERCHALLENGES-01	82
HORIZON-EIC-2027-AIC-01	25
HORIZON-EIC-2027-TRANSITIONOPEN-01-01	92
HORIZON-EIC-2027-ACCELERATOROPEN-01[249] [250]	428
Grant component	171
Equity component[251] [252].[253]	257

[247] Tha granting authority of the equity component is DG RTD, while EISMEA will be the granting authority of the grant component.

[248] 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.

[249] 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.

[250] 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.

[251] 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 767 million for the Horizon Europe compartment, and EUR 400 million for the Scaleup Europe Fund compartment of the EIC Fund (where administrative expenses and fees will also not exceed 10 % of the budget transferred). In addition, an amount will be made available to the EIC Fund to cover the set up costs of the Scaleup Europe Fund and necessary arrangements in case of any additional liabilities.

[252] Out of the total amount of EUR 1.169 billion implemented through the equity components (indirect management of around EUR 767 million for the Horizon Europe compartment, and EUR 400 million for the Scaleup Europe), an estimated amount of EUR 500 million will be funded by external assigned revenues of the programme and by external assigned revenues made available from the EIC Pilot under Horizon 2020 Programme.

[253] 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

HORIZON-EIC-2027-ACCELERATORCHALLENGES-01 [254]	150
Grant component	60
Equity component [251 252 253]	90
HORIZON-EIC-2027-STEP-01	290
Equity component[251 252 253]	290
HORIZON-EIC-2027-STEP-DEFENCE-01	100
Equity component[251 252 253]	100
Reserve amount for follow on investments and investment component of Grant First[251 252 253]	30
CSAs	27
Grants to identified beneficiaries	0.3
Scaleup Europe Fund – Equity component[251 252 253]	400
Prizes	2,2
Public Procurement Actions	15,9
Expert contracts	6,7
EIB Fees (Contribution agreement)	1,6
ESTIMATED TOTAL BUDGET	1.816

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.

[254] 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 25 000 000,00 from Cluster 5 (budget line 01.020250)
- EUR 15 000 000,00 from Cluster 6 (budget line 01.020260)
- EUR 10 000 000,00 from Fusion Research and development (budget line 01.030100 - EURATOM programme)
- EUR 4 750 000,00 will be transferred from the EIE budget line to the EIC budget line to support RIVs FSTP projects in 2027. The budget transferred to Support for Regional Innovation Valleys (RIVs) beneficiaries will be spent via public procurement actions.

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 2027. 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[255], the Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual[256] and the EU Grants AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement[257]. 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 unless otherwise specified in the call conditions (e.g. for classified information).

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.

[255] The Horizon Europe Programme Guide outlines the detailed guidance on the structure, budget and political priorities of Horizon Europe.
[256] The Online Manual outlines the procedures to register and submit applications online via the Funding & Tenders Portal and recommendations on preparing the application.
[257] 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 and the EIC STEP Up Defence 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.[258]

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[259]) is eligible to participate (whether it is eligible for funding or not), provided that the conditions laid down in the Horizon Europe Regulation[260] 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[261].

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[262] 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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[258] 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.

[259] 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).

[260] 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).

[261] See Article 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.

[262] 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[263].

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' [264]. 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 the participation of legal entities established in China— 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 4th 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 account the nature

[263] See Article 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.
[264] See Articles 201(2) and 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.

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 Research and Innovation Actions or Innovation Actions,, 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.

Participation of Chinese universities linked to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) — Based on Article 22(6) of the HE Regulation, universities (higher education establishments) established in China which are public bodies, that are administered by or fall under the supervision of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) are not eligible to participate in any action under all parts of this Work Programme. This takes into account China's specific civil military fusion strategy, wider China-related risks[265], Horizon Europe's exclusive civil use application mandate and relevant policy requirements.

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.[266] In line with the Commission Recommendation on the cybersecurity of 5G networks of 2019[267] and the subsequent report on the EU coordinated risk assessment of the cybersecurity of 5G networks of 2019,[268] the EU Toolbox on 5G cybersecurity,[269] the second report on Member States' progress in implementing the EU toolbox on 5G cybersecurity of 2023,[270] and the related Communication on the implementation of the 5G cybersecurity toolbox of

[265] China's National security law, the National Defence law, the State Secrets Law, the cybersecurity law, the data security law, and a number of other measures aimed at bolstering China's technological apparatus in both civil and military domains.
[266] 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.
[267] Commission Recommendation (EU) 2019/534 of 26 March 2019 Cybersecurity of 5G networks, L 88/42.
[268] NIS Cooperation Group, Report on EU coordinated risk assessment of the cybersecurity of 5G networks, 9 October 2019.
[269] NIS Cooperation Group, EU Toolbox on 5G Cybersecurity, 29 January 2020.
[270] NIS Cooperation Group, Second report on Member States' progress in implementing the EU Toolbox on 5G Cybersecurity, June 2023.

2023,[271] the Commission together with the Member States has worked to jointly identify and assess cyberthreats and security risks for 5G networks.[272] 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[273] and the related Communication on the implementation of the 5G cybersecurity toolbox of 2023[274].

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);

[271] Communication from the Commission: Implementation of the 5g cybersecurity Toolbox, Brussels, 15.6.2023 C(2023) 4049 final.
[272] Within the NIS framework NIS 1 + 2 (Directive - 2022/2555 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu))
[273] NIS Cooperation Group, Second report on Member States' progress in implementing the EU Toolbox on 5G Cybersecurity, June 2023.
[274] Communication from the Commission: Implementation of the 5G cybersecurity Toolbox, Brussels, 15.6.2023 C(2023) 4049 final.

– 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.

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).

Restrictions on control in Innovation Actions in critical technology areas: — The protection of the European Union's technological edge and strategic autonomy in key areas is essential to its overall security, its economic security, its innovation capacity, and its resilience. Innovation Actions (IAs) under Horizon Europe are designed to support the development, piloting, and market deployment of advanced technologies. Given their proximity to commercial and potentially security-related applications, these actions are particularly sensitive to issues of strategic dependence, technology leakage, and foreign interference. In line with the objectives set out in the European Economic Security Strategy[275], A Competitiveness Compass for the EU[276], and related policy documents, the Union must ensure that research and innovation funding does not contribute—directly or indirectly—to the unwanted transfer of sensitive technologies or the creation of strategic dependencies. It should also not result in heightened security risks for the European Union.

In this context, the participation of entities controlled by China in certain innovation actions poses specific risks to the overall security of the European Union. The risks are determined

[275] Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council on "European Economic Security Strategy, JOIN(2023) 20 final, Brussels, 20.06.2023.

[276] 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: A Competitiveness Compass for the EU, COM(2025) 50 final, Brussels, 29.01.2025.

by a fundamental regulatory imbalance between the EU and China in the area of innovation and by an array of Chinese policy and legislative initiatives that increase the level of risk such as China's Made in China 2025 strategy, China's civil military fusion strategy, China's new quality productive forces framework, the National security law, China's cybersecurity law, China's data security law, and a number of other measures aimed at bolstering China's technological apparatus in both civil and military domains. The EU has legitimate concerns linked to the potential risks of allowing entities controlled by China participate in innovation actions focusing on the development of those technology areas identified as critical for the EU's economic security. To address these concerns, it is appropriate to calibrate the participation of Chinese owned or controlled entities accordingly.

In light of the above, in accordance with Article 22(5) of the Horizon Europe Regulation, entities established in a Member State, Associated Country or in an eligible third country which are directly or indirectly controlled by China or by a legal entity established in China are not eligible to participate in Innovation Actions where stated in the specific call/topic conditions of the Horizon Europe Work Programme.

These restrictions apply to Innovation actions that fall within the ten critical technology areas identified by the European Commission in the Annex to the Commission Recommendation on critical technology areas for the EU's economic security for further assessment with Member States 2023/2113 of 3 October 2023277 as being most sensitive for our economic security: advanced semiconductors, Artificial Intelligence (AI), quantum, biotechnologies, advanced connectivity, navigation and digital technologies, advanced sensing, space & propulsion, energy, robotics and autonomous systems, advanced materials, manufacturing and recycling technologies.

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)[278] as well as Article 75 TFEU[279] 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

[277] Available here

[278] 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.

[279] 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.

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[280].

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.

With specific regard to measures addressed to Russia, following the adoption of the Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024[281] (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[282], where necessary and duly justified and in line with Article 136

[280] 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).
[281] (OJ L 229, 31.7.2014, p. 1–11).
[282] Regulation - 2021/695 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

of the Financial Regulation, participation as a beneficiary[283] 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, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden.

- the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) linked to the Member States[284]

  Aruba (NL), Bonaire (NL), Curação (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[285]:

  Albania, Arab Republic of Egypt, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Georgia, Iceland, Israel, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom[286].

  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.

[283] 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.

[284] 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.

[285] 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.

[286] The United Kingdom is associated to the entire Horizon Europe Programme, with the only exception of the investment component of the EIC managed by the EIC Fund (which is the part of Horizon Europe that provides investments through equity or other repayable forms), for award procedures implementing the Union budget for the year 2024 and onwards.

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:[287].

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,, 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[288], Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Rwanda, Samoa, São Tomé and Principe, 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:

[287] 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 on the Portal for a up-to-date list of these countries.

[288] 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.

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.

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 or maximum 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.

Unless otherwise specified, projects must focus exclusively on civil applications. They 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.

In line with the Horizon Europe Regulation as amended by Regulation (EU) 2025/2653:

- proposals submitted under the EIC Accelerator (Open and Challenges) and under the EIC STEP Scale Up call **may include innovations with potential dual-use applications**, while advancing civilian application use;
- proposals submitted under the EIC STEP Scale Up Defence call will **include innovation in critical defence technologies** as referred to in Article 2(1), point (a)(iv), of Regulation (EU) 2024/795, while fostering, where appropriate, innovations with dual-use potential.

The application of these derogations shall be subject to the Commission's monitoring of the Programme pursuant to Article 50 of Regulation (EU) 2021/695.

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. For proposals submitted under the EIC STEP Scale Up Defence call (Section VII), additional ethics requirements may apply, in particular regarding the respect of international humanitarian law and the use of artificial intelligence-based systems which must ensure that AI-enabled functions related to weapon systems do not render weapons indiscriminate.

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[289] 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 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

[289] 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).

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

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) applying as beneficiaries or affiliated entities must have at the moment of grant signature and during the duration of the grant must have a gender equality plan, covering the following minimum process-related requirements:

- publication: a formal document signed by the top management, published on the institution's website, and actively communicated within the institution;
- 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 for staff and decision-makers 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

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 responsibilities 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.

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)[290] or are in one of the following **exclusion situations**[291] 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);
- 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);

[290] See Article 138 EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.
[291] See Article 138 and 141, EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509 .

- 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[292] (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 excluded if they:[293]

- 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.

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**:

Excellence (The following aspects will be taken into account, to the extent	Impact	Quality and efficiency of the implementation

[292] 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).
[293] Article 143 EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509

that the proposed work corresponds to the description in the work programme)		
✦ **Clarity and pertinence of the project's objectives.** ✦ **Quality of the proposed coordination and/or support measures including soundness of methodology.**	✦ Credibility of the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts specified in the work programme. ✦ Suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities.	✦ Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks, and appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages, and the resources overall. ✦ Capacity and role of each participant, and the extent to which the consortium as a whole brings together the necessary expertise.

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. In case of the EIC STEP Defence call, there is a possibility to submit classified information outside the Portal (see Call text for details).

For proposals submitted under the EIC STEP Scale Up Defence call (Section VII), the following additional supporting documents must be uploaded at the application stage:

- the self-assessment on third-country control (where applicable);
- it is also encouraged that, where necessary, applicants submit the guarantee approved by the relevant Member State or EEA member (where the self-assessment indicates that the applicant falls under the exclusion rule).

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 EIC **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 EIC 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** [294] and/or a **Sovereignty (STEP) Seal** [295] 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

[294] https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/seal-excellence_en.
[295] Sovereignty seal - European Commission (europa.eu)

the STEP Portal with the aim of enhancing the visibility of the project and attract potential investors.

⚠ **Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP[296])** — 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.

[296] 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).

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:

- 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.[297].

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.

[297] Article 196 EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.

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).

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 cots;
- 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 EIC 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)*.

For projects funded under the EIC STEP Scale Up Defence call (Section VII), the application of the additional exploitation obligations in case of a public emergency and the open

science provisions shall be without prejudice to applicable security classification rules, export control regulations and national security requirements. Where results are subject to security classification or export control restrictions, the relevant provisions shall be applied in a manner consistent with those restrictions.

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 2027, 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-3 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.[298]
- Companies awarded grants under the EIC Pre-Accelerator call;
- Companies awarded grants under the Women Tech.EU scheme.
- As a pilot action, projects supported under Horizon Europe Cluster 1 managed by the European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HADEA) or the Innovative Health Initiative Joint Undertaking, where a relevant innovation by an eligible entity is identified.

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.

[298] 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,[299] 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.[300]

EIC Awardees or other potential booster grant beneficiary as indicated above can be invited to apply at any time for a 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 Deep-tech 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);

[300] 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 and its successor selected under this EIC Work Programme.

Annex 6 Additional provisions concerning Intellectual Property for EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition

In accordance with the Horizon Europe Regulation,[301] 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[302]

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:

[301] In accordance with Recital (85) and notably the second indent of Article 39(1) of Horizon Europe Regulation.
[302] 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 VIII. 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.