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Annex [XXX]

European Commission Decision [xxx]

European Innovation Council (EIC) Work Programme 2026

European
Innovation
Council



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

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DISCLAIMER

This document represents a working draft of the EIC work programme for the purpose of feedback and comments.

This draft has not been adopted or endorsed by the European Commission. Any views expressed are the views of the Commission services and may not in any circumstances be regarded as stating an official position of the Commission. The information transmitted is intended only for the Member State or entity to which it is addressed for discussions and may contain confidential and/or privileged material.

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

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

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

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

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

Support and advice for potential applicants is available in each EU Member State and Associated Country, 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 Programme¹. 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 actions².² 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 tech³: 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 2026 Work Programme

The funding and support available in 2025 is organised into five main funding schemes:

1. the EIC Pathfinder for advanced research to develop the scientific basis to underpin breakthrough technologies (Section II);
2. the EIC Transition to validate technologies and develop business plans for specific applications (Section III);
3. The EIC Advance Research Challenges to solve specific, ambitious societal or technological problems quickly through staged 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).

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

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

⁴ https://eic.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-08/EIC_Board_Statement_Widening_final31072023.pdf

⁵ [Regulation - EU - 2024/795 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

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

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

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

Table 1. Summary of main calls in 2026⁶

			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. Challenges call: smaller consortia (at least two eligible entities) or single applicants as well as larger consortia.	Grants up to EUR 4.5 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)	06/05/2026			28/10/2026	
EIC Transition	Single applicants (SMEs, spin-offs, start-ups, research organisations, universities) or small consortia (minimum 2, maximum 5 eligible entities).	Grants of up to EUR 2.5 million to validate and demonstrate technology in application-relevant environment (starting at TRL 3 achieved or 4 aiming at achieving TRL 5 or 6) and develop business and market readiness.	16/09/2026				
EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges	Single applicants (SMEs, spin-offs, start-ups, research organisations, universities) or small consortia (minimum 2, maximum 5 eligible entities).	First stage grants up to [] to develop potential solutions followed by larger grants up to €2.5m to prototype and user test selected solutions					
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.	Continuous with batches 7/01/2026; 06/04/2026; 06/05/2026; 08/07/2026; 02/09/2026; 03/11/2026			Continuous with batches 7/01/2026; 04/03/2026; 06/05/2026; 08/07/2026; 02/09/2026; 03/11/2026	

⁶ 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.

EIC– STEP Scale Up	Single startups and SMEs, small mid-caps, investors on behalf of eligible companies	Investment component of EUR 10 up to 30 million for scaling up strategic technologies for Europe.	One cut off per quarter: 11/02/2026; 06/05/2026; 09/09/2026; 25/11/2026			One cut off per quarter: 11/02/2026; 06/05/2026; 09/09/2026; 25/11/2026	
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Main changes of the 2026 Work Programme

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

Main changes are

- ✦ Introduction of pilot **EIC Advance Innovation Challenges** to re-inforce the risk taking and user uptake of innovations. This call will be implemented through two stages of funding, a first stage open to all applicants calls for proposed solutions to the challenge, and a second stage to be funded through a call for 2027 to select a limited number of the first stage projects to proceed to implement their solutions.
- ✦ An increase in the indicative budget size of **EIC Pathfinder** projects to €4.5 million to enable progress to proof of concept stage, along with further introduction of lump-sum together with some minor improvements to the evaluation process.
- ✦ The inclusion of research results from Horizon Europe and Horizon 2020 research infrastructures as eligible for the **EIC Transition** call, alongside results from EIC Pathfinder, ERC Proof of Concept, and from Pillar 2 of Horizon Europe.
- ✦ A major simplification and shortening of the **EIC Accelerator** evaluation process: reducing the length of application forms which can be reused from short to full application stages: enabling applicants to reuse short applications for the full application stage; introducing a technical due diligence on full applications before the jury phase and to accelerate the subsequent investment decisions; and moving to regular batching of full applications and three jury weeks per year.
- ✦ **Clarifications for the EIC STEP Scaleup** call, reflecting experience of implementing this call in 2025
- ✦ **Reinforced Business Acceleration Services** for internationalisation and engaging with corporates
- ✦ Support for a regular **Gender and Diversity Innovation index**, building on the recent pilot projects
- ✦ An update of the **Plug In scheme**, following the completion of the pilot phase in 2023-25.

Key features of EIC support

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

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

EIC Awardees will also be offered facilitated 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,⁷ to identify, develop and implement such technology visions and to nurture potential market-creating innovations out of EIC funded projects and activities. 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

⁷ Appointed in accordance with point 1.2.2. of Pillar III in Annex I to Council Decision 2021/764, EIC Programme Managers are temporary staff employed by the Agency to manage one or more EIC Portfolios.

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

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

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

A tailored approach to proposal evaluation

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

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

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

For the EIC Accelerator, which supports high risk/high gain innovations to go to the market and scale up, proposals will be evaluated remotely and at interviews based on a binary scoring (GO/NO GO)⁸ (see Section V).

For the EIC STEP Scale Up, which supports promising companies developing critical technologies⁹, , to help them secure larger funding rounds for further scaling their businesses, proposals will be evaluated following remote interview based on a binary scoring (GO/NO GO) (see Section VI).

Policy of open access and Intellectual Property rights¹⁰

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).

⁸ 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").

⁹ Regulation - EU - 2024/795 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

¹⁰ For the EIC Accelerator, the Intellectual Property rules are included in the contract and/or investment agreement.

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

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

Economic security

Following the Communication on the European Economic Security Strategy¹¹ and the Commission Recommendation on critical technology areas for the EU's economic security¹² a number of provisions have been made to protect Europe from economic security risks.

These measures are:

- *[Eligibility criteria:* In line with Article 136 of the Financial Regulation¹³, 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

11 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

12 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)

13 EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509

non-eligible third country¹⁴ or by a legal entity established in a non-eligible third country cannot participate as recipients^{15, 16}.

- This restriction is exceptionally applied under the following calls:
 - specific Challenges under the EIC Accelerator [xxx] (see Section V);
 - the STEP scale up call which supports strategic areas in Digital technologies and deep tech, Clean and resource efficient technologies, Biotechnologies (see Section VI).]
- *Investment safeguards:* The inclusion of economic security safeguards in investment agreements by the EIC Fund for companies selected to receive an investment component under the EIC Accelerator, in order to safeguard the Union's strategic assets, interests, autonomy, or security and to achieve technological objectives and expected outcomes for companies selected under the EIC STEP Scale Up call as well as within the four priority technology areas defined in the Commission Recommendation on critical technology areas, namely: advanced semiconductors technologies, artificial intelligence technologies, quantum technologies and biotechnologies. The different possible safeguards are described in the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines and will be tailored to each specific investee. Where the need for such safeguard measures is identified in the Commission Award Decision, the EIC Fund will apply at least one of the safeguard measures in the investment agreement..

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

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ i.e., the legal entities which sign the grant agreement and/or the investment agreement and, on this basis, become beneficiaries of grants and/or investees respectively.

¹⁶ When participants are owned and controlled by natural persons, the nationality of these natural persons is the relevant factor for the assessment. However, depending on the risk assessment, and with a view to attracting global talent, the Agency, with the confirmation of its parent DGs and the programme committee may decide to use the place of residence of such controlling owners as the relevant factor for the assessment.

- *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 requirements 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 lists¹⁷, and in particular shall not make any funds available directly or indirectly to any institution or individual listed in sanction lists¹⁸.

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 Regulation¹⁹ 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 countries²⁰ 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 Regulation²¹.

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

¹⁷ Consolidated list of sanctions:

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

¹⁸ 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].

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

²⁰ 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.

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

EIC-EIT Collaboration

The EIC is progressively increasing collaboration and synergies with the EIT and its Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) with the overall aim of strengthening the European Innovation Ecosystem. A number of collaboration areas are already in place and will continue to be supported under the current Work Programme facilitating the access to services to European innovators. The Fast Track process by EIT KICs, that allows proposals from companies selected by the EIT KICs to enter the EIC Accelerator evaluation at the second stage will continue; EIC beneficiaries will have access to the services provided by the EIT KICs via the partnerships agreed with the Business Acceleration Services. The “Next Generation Innovation Talents” scheme allows EIT Label Masters and Doctoral programmes, EIT Alumni, EIT Jumpstarter beneficiaries to undertake secondments in EIC and EIT supported startups and SMEs. Collaboration will continue to promote women entrepreneurs, with EIT access to the EIC Women Leadership Programme and a joint approach to the women innovator’s prizes (see Section VIII).

Outlook for 2027

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

Glossary²²

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

Deep tech²³ 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

²² 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.

²³ 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.

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 combines advances in the physical, biological and digital spheres. Deep tech is distinct from 'high tech' which tends to refer only to R&D intensity²⁴.

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

The **EIC Awardees** or **EIC recipients** are the beneficiaries identified in an EIC Grant agreement (Pathfinder, Transition and Accelerator), or investees (for EIC Accelerator including EIC Step Scale Up Call), as well as winners of EIC Prizes. The Horizon Europe model grant agreements and contracts are available on the Funding and Tenders Portal²⁵.

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

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

EIC Community platform is a platform available to all EIC Awardees and Awardees of EIC Seals of Excellence²⁶, EIC Pre-accelerator Seals of Excellence and EIC Sovereignty (STEP) Seals²⁷ and other eligible entities. It facilitates links to Business Acceleration Services as well as enabling discussions, exchanges and match making. The [EIC Community platform](#) is a virtual meeting place where EIC Awardees and all other eligible entities can access services specifically designed for EIC beneficiaries that

²⁴ Ratio of a firm's R&D investment to its revenue.

²⁵ HE Model grant agreement

²⁶ 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

²⁷ 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)

connect them with peers, mentors and coaches, inventors, corporates, and innovation procurers. Additionally the EIC Community platform also facilitate 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 Excellence²⁸, EIC Pre-accelerator Seals of Excellence and EIC Sovereignty (STEP) Seals²⁹ 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.³⁰ The EIC Fund Manager manages

²⁸ 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

²⁹ 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)

³⁰ 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 CoInvestment Platform) and the performance of technology due diligence by the Agency.

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

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

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

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

EIC Tech to Market Advisers are agents employed by the Agency to assist primarily the EIC Transition projects, in agreement with EIC Programme Managers and in cooperation with EIC Project Officers, with the design and the execution of the

³¹ 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.

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

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

Seal of Excellence: is a quality label awarded to excellent proposals which could not be funded due to lack of available budget and meeting the conditions set out in the call text, in order to facilitate access to funding from other sources³². Awardees of the Seal of Excellence also have access to Business Acceleration Services. Member States may decide to transfer budget from European Regional Development Programmes to the Agency to fund directly Seal of Excellence proposals.

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

³² Information on public funding bodies that recognise and support Seal of Excellence projects is available at <https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/seal-excellence>.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) is a category of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. It consists of enterprises that employ fewer than 250 persons and have either an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 43 million. A full definition is provided in Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC.³³ Under the EIC, this category includes start-ups.

Small mid-cap means an enterprise employing up to 499 employees.³⁴

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,³⁵ 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:³⁸

TRL1 - Basic principles observed

TRL2 - Technology concept formulated

TRL3 - Experimental proof of concept

TRL4 - Technology validated in lab

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

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

TRL7 - System prototype demonstration in operational environment

TRL8 - System complete and qualified

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

Women-led SMEs (including start-ups) means companies where the position of either the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Technology Officer (CTO) or Chief Scientific Officer (CSO) is held by a woman at the time of application, interview and award of the EU financial support.

³³ 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.

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ Further information on market readiness and business readiness will be provided in the guidance documents. ³⁸ See for instance: <https://horizoneuropencpportal.eu/store/trl-assessment> and <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/career-development/researchers/manual-scientific-entrepreneurship/major-steps/trl>

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

II. EIC Pathfinder

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

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

II.1 EIC Pathfinder Open

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

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

Why should you apply?

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

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

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

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

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

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

The expected output of your project is the proof of principle that the main ideas of the envisioned future technology are feasible, thus validating its scientific and technological basis. Project results should include top-level scientific publications in open access. While your vision is expected to be worthwhile because of its potential for future impact, for instance to create new markets, improve our lives, or provide solutions for global challenges, these are not expected to be achieved in the course of your EIC Pathfinder Open project. However, you are expected to take the necessary measures in the course of the project to allow future uptake to take place. This includes: an adequate formal protection of the generated Intellectual Property (IP)³⁶, a plan for future exploitation and an assessment of relevant aspects related to regulation, certification, and standardisation.

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

³⁶ IP includes industrial property (patents, trademarks, designs and geographic indications of source) and copyright. See also Section I and Annex 6 for more information on the EIC policy of Open Access and IP rights.

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

Can you apply?

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

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

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

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

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

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

What support will you receive if your proposal is funded?

The total indicative budget for this call is EUR {XXX} 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 4.5 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).³⁷

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

Projects funded through EIC Pathfinder (including grants resulting from certain EIC pilot Pathfinder, FET-Open and Proactive calls)³⁸ 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 Agreement³⁹ can be found on the EU Funding & Tenders Portal.

How do you apply; how long does it take?

The deadline for submitting your proposal is 6 May 2026 at 17h00 Brussels local time.⁴⁰

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 20 format A4 pages.

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

³⁷ 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/lis-decision_he_en.pdf

³⁸ The eligible calls are all EIC Pathfinder calls under Horizon Europe and the following Horizon 2020 calls: FETOPENRIA-2014-2015; FETOPEN-01-2016-2017; FETOPEN-01-2018-2019-2020; H2020-FETPROACT-2014; FETPROACT-012016; FETPROACT-01-2018; FETPROACT-EIC-05-2019; FETPROACT-EIC-07-2020; FETPROACT-EIC-08-2020.

³⁹ [general-mga_horizon-euratom_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#), [general-mga_horizon-euratom_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴⁰ The call will open on XX 2026. The Director-General responsible for the call may decide to open the call up to one month prior to or after the envisaged date(s) of opening. The Director-General responsible may delay the deadline(s) by up to two months.

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

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

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

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

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

Table 2. Award criteria for EIC Pathfinder Open

Excellence (Threshold: 4/5, weight 60%)

Long-term vision: How convincing is the vision of a radically new technology and relevant potential solutions, towards which the project would contribute in the long term?

Science-towards-technology breakthrough: How concrete, novel, and ambitious is the proposed science-towards-technology breakthrough with respect to the state-of-the-art? What advancement does it provide towards realising the envisioned technology?

Objectives: How concrete and plausible are the proposed objectives to reach the envisaged proof of principle? To what extent is the high-risk/high-gain research approach appropriate for achieving them? How sound is the proposed methodology, including the underlying concepts, models, assumptions, alternative directions and options, appropriate consideration of the gender dimension in research content, and the quality of open science practices?

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

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

II.2 EIC Pathfinder Challenges

EIC Pathfinder Challenges aim to build on new, cutting-edge directions in science and technology to disrupt a field and a market or create new opportunities by realising innovative technological solutions grounded in high-risk/high-gain research and development.

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

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

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

Why should you apply?

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

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

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

Can you apply?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What support will you receive if your proposal is funded?

The total indicative budget for this call is EUR [xxx] 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 4.5 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 (2021-2025).⁴¹ It is advised to include a work package dedicated to portfolio activities and allocate at least 10 person-month to it.

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

Projects funded through EIC Pathfinder (including grants resulting from certain EIC pilot Pathfinder, FET-Open and Proactive calls)⁴² 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);

⁴¹ 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

⁴² The eligible calls are all EIC Pathfinder calls under Horizon Europe and the following Horizon 2020 calls: FETOPENRIA-2014-2015; FETOPEN-01-2016-2017; FETOPEN-01-2018-2019-2020; H2020-FETPROACT-2014; FETPROACT-01-2016; FETPROACT-01-2018; FETPROACT-EIC-05-2019; FETPROACT-EIC-07-2020; FETPROACT-EIC-08-2020.

- ✦ to participate in the 'Next Generation Innovation Talents' scheme (described in the glossary). The personnel costs of researchers participating in this scheme are eligible under your EIC Pathfinder grant agreements.

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

How do you apply; how long does it take?

The call deadline for submitting your proposal is 28 October 2026 at 17h00 Brussels local time.⁴³

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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

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 60%)	
<u>Objectives and relevance to the Challenge:</u>	How clear are the project's objectives? How relevant are they in contributing to the overall goal and the specific objectives of the Challenge?
<u>Novelty:</u>	To what extent is the proposed work ambitious and goes beyond the state-of-the-art?
<u>Plausibility of the methodology:</u>	How sound is the proposed methodology, including the underlying concepts, models, assumptions, appropriate consideration of the gender dimension in research content, and the quality of open science practices?
Impact (Threshold: 3.5/5; weight 20%)	
<u>Potential Impact:</u>	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?
<u>Innovation potential:</u>	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?
<u>Communication and Dissemination:</u>	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%)	
<u>Work plan:</u>	How coherent and effective are the work plan (work packages, tasks, deliverables, milestones, timeline, etc.) and risk mitigation measures in order to achieve the project objectives?

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

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

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

Step 2 (portfolio considerations):

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

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

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

Further information and details about the categories and the portfolio considerations will be provided in EIC Pathfinder Challenge Guides⁴⁴, 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

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

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.

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 [Pathfinder Challenge

[Placeholder for Challenge texts]

III. EIC Transition

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

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

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

Why should you apply?

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

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

proposition, refine incipient business plan⁴⁵ and validate incipient business model⁴⁶, intellectual property protection, etc.) and aspects of regulation, certification and standardisation (if relevant), aimed at getting both the technology and the business idea investment ready.

EIC Transition aims at maturing both your technology and business idea thus increasing its technology and market/commercial readiness. The expected outcomes of your EIC Transition project are a) a technology that is demonstrated to be effective for its intended application and b) a validated business model and a business plan⁸¹ for its development to market. It is also expected that the intellectual property generated by your EIC Transition project is formally protected in an adequate way (Annex 6).

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

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

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

⁴⁵ Usual components are products or services provided, market analysis, competition analysis, marketing strategy, organisation & management, financial projections.

⁴⁶ 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 Accelerator⁴⁷ (if you are a SME, including start-ups or spin-offs), and to seek other investors or sources of funding, to enter licensing or collaboration agreements with third parties, or other routes to market deployment. In case your project is not led by an SME or commercial partner, the formation and spin out of a new company can be included as part of the activities. You will be expected to describe the intended pathway and route to market in your proposal and must include specific milestones together with concrete and verifiable KPIs during the implementation of your project to assess progress towards the market.

The EIC Transition project is expected to mature your innovation both in its TRL and market and business readiness⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

Can you apply?

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

Your proposal must build on results already achieved within an eligible project that are, at least, at experimental proof of concept (applications must have completed all elements of Technology Readiness Level 3 or, ideally, technology validated in the lab level (TRL 4)⁵⁰. Proposals building on project results at other TRLs level are not eligible. EIC Transition is restricted to proposals based on results generated by the following eligible projects:

- ✦ EIC Pathfinder projects (including projects funded under the Horizon 2020 EIC pilot Pathfinder, FET-Open, FET-Proactive, CSA and CSA Lump sum FET Innovation Launchpad, and FET Flagships calls.⁵¹)
- ✦ European Research Council Proof of Concept projects funded Horizon 2020 or Horizon Europe.

⁴⁷ Minimum TRL for Accelerator is, since 2025, TRL 6.

⁴⁸ Business plan and business model will have to be further refine and validate during the project lifetime.

⁴⁹ In line with the Do No Significant Harm principle, see Introduction.

⁵⁰ Eligibility requirements of min achieved TRL3 and max TRL 4 apply for the proposal as well. In case there are different components, the overall TRL of the technology/innovation in the application domain will be assessed.

⁵¹ The indicative list of eligible project whose results can be used in EIC Transition application will be published at the opening of the call. The published list does not constitute proof of eligibility and is provided as indication only and subject to further requirements indicated in the Work Programme.

- ✦ Research and Innovation Actions ⁵² funded under Horizon 2020 Societal challenges and Leadership in Industrial Technologies⁵³ and under Horizon Europe pillar II, with an eligible TRL⁵⁴. European Defence Fund (EDF), including the Preparatory Action on Defence Research, research projects, but only for proposals which are focused on civil applications (including dual use)⁵⁵.
- ✦ Research and Innovation Actions funded under the Horizon Europe or Horizon 2020 Research Infrastructures part.

If you are applying on the basis of an eligible project for which the grant is still ongoing, you may apply if the start date of the grant is more than 18⁵⁶ months before the cut-off date of the relevant EIC Transition call).

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

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

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

⁵² 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.

⁵³ including projects funded under the cross-cutting activities part of the Horizon 2020 Work Programmes drawing from budgets of Pillar II and III

⁵⁴ 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.

⁵⁵ Applications under the EIC Transition Funding scheme must focus exclusively on civil applications. 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.

- ✦ In all cases you need to specify in your application the grant number and acronym of the eligible project(s) which generated the result together with reference to where the result has been reported (in the periodic reporting, the Horizon results platform, EIC Transition 'innovation discovery' tool⁵⁷ powered by the Innovation Radar or CORDIS).

You can apply for EIC Transition either as:

- ✦ A single legal entity established in a Member State or an Associated Country ('mono-beneficiary') if you are a start-up, SME or research performing organisation (university, research or technology organisation, including teams, individual Principal Investigators and inventors in such institutions who intend to form a spin-off company).⁵⁸ Larger companies (i.e. which do not qualify as SMEs) are not eligible to apply as a single legal entity; or
- ✦ A small consortium of two independent legal entities from two different Member States or Associated Countries, or
- ✦ A consortium of minimum three and maximum five eligible independent legal entities ('multi-beneficiary') following standard rules i.e. must include at least one legal entity established in a Member State and at least two other independent legal entities, each established in different Member States or Associated Countries (see Annex 2).⁵⁹

Only one proposal can be submitted per eligible originating ERC Proof of Concept funded in Horizon 2020 or Horizon Europe and FET Innovation Launchpad project⁶⁰.

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

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

⁵⁷ 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.

⁵⁸ 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.

⁵⁹ Consortia of more than 5 eligible entities will be deemed ineligible.

⁶⁰ this does not affect resubmission of the same (improved) proposal in subsequent calls in case it was not selected. Of course, resubmission must respect all eligibility criteria notably regarding time since end of the project.

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

Participation restrictions.

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

What support will you receive if your proposal is funded?

The total indicative budget for this call is EUR [xxx] million.

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

The funding rate of this grant will be 100% of the eligible costs. Eligible costs will take the form of a lump sum and the amount will be determined during the evaluation process. Applicants must therefore propose the amount of the lump sum based on their estimated project costs as defined in the Decision of 7 July 2021 authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027) – and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (20212025).⁶¹

The projects funded through EIC Transition are eligible:

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

In addition to funding, projects will receive tailor-made access to a wide range of Business Acceleration Services (BAS) and matchmaking events (see Section VII). Transition projects who receive EIC funding are expected and strongly encouraged to apply for Tech2Market BAS services. Coaching for Transition projects is mandatory

⁶¹ 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

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 2026 at 17h00 Brussels local time.⁶²

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

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

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

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

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

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

Starting with the highest scoring proposal and in descending order, a pool of the best ranked proposals (highest scoring) requesting an aggregated financial support equal

⁶² The call will open on 22-April-2025. The Director-General responsible for the call may decide to open the call up to one month prior to or after the envisaged date(s) of opening. The Director-General responsible may delay the deadline(s) by up to two months.

to approximately 2.2 times the budget available, will be invited to the next step. If in that pool:

- ✦ at least 30% of the applications are submitted by women-led SMEs or consortia (see definitions in the Glossary), only the applications of that pool will be invited to interviews;
- ✦ less than 30% of the applications are submitted by women-led SMEs or consortia,⁶³ the pool will be expanded to subsequent best ranked applications (starting with the highest scoring in descending, sequential order and at least equal score under Excellence criterion) submitted by women-led SMEs or consortia until reaching, if possible, a composition of the pool of at least 30% of applications submitted by women-led SMEs or consortia. All such applicants invited to interview must have met all evaluation criteria thresholds from the remote evaluation (Table 4).

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

The second step is an interview with an EIC jury. At the interview your proposal may be represented by a maximum of five persons.⁶⁴ Only individuals mentioned in the proposal and involved in the future project implementation can represent your proposal at the interview.

The EIC Jury will be composed of between four and six members and may additionally include one EIC Programme Manager with expertise in your area or managing one of the EIC Portfolios your project could be allocated to. The Agency may provide the EIC Jury with information related to the original project from which the result was generated. During the interview you should convincingly pitch your proposal to the EIC Jury, who will ask you questions aimed at clarifying various aspects of your proposal in line with the award criteria (in particular those regarding the quality of the team, the different elements already developed within the incipient business plan and incipient business model, the milestones and KPIs). The EIC Project Manager may also ask questions related to the implementation, and KPIs⁶⁵. 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

⁶³ The definition of women-led SMEs and consortia is provided in the Glossary in the Introduction.

⁶⁴ The number of participants to the interview must however be limited to the minimum necessary.

⁶⁵ In case the EIC Programme Manager is not available, or has several proposals in evaluation in the same time, it can be replaced by a Project Officer with relevant experience who will align with the PM.

proposal may then be funded if additional budget becomes available. The remote evaluation score will be used to rank the proposals in the reserve list⁶⁶.

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

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

Table 4. Award criteria for EIC Transition Open at first evaluation step	
Excellence (Threshold: 4/5)	
<u>Technological breakthrough:</u>	Does the technology have a high degree of novelty and higher performance compared to other technologies available or in development? Does the technology indicate high commercial potential?
<u>Objectives:</u>	How credible and feasible are the objectives for the planned technology development and maturation? How credible and feasible are the objectives and KPIs for the planned business development process?
<u>Methodology:</u>	Is the timing right for this technology/innovation (i.e., feasibility, minimum technological readiness level (TRL), unique selling points)? ⁶⁷
Impact (Threshold: 4/5)	
<u>Credibility of the impacts:</u>	To what extent the expected commercial impact(s) described in the proposal are credible and substantial within the project and beyond (e.g., one or several sectors, setting new standards, etc.)?
<u>Economic and/or societal benefits:</u>	To what extent does the proposed innovation have scale up potential including high capacity to gain or create new European or global markets? To what extent is the proposed innovation expected to generate positive impacts for the European Union, Member States or Associated Countries (e.g., strategic autonomy, employment etc.)?

⁶⁶ If two proposals with the same remote evaluation score are on the reserve list, the one with smaller budget will be ranked first.

⁶⁷ The technology must be developed in a safe, secure and reliable manner. Proposals which involve the development, use or deployment of AI based systems/techniques must be technically robust (e.g., resilient to attack, secure and safe, having fallback plan, accurate, reliable and reproducible). To a degree matching the type of research being proposed (from basic to precompetitive) they must demonstrate that they comply with the Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence Principles (see Annex 2).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Excellence (GO/NO GO)

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

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

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

If you meet all evaluation criteria thresholds at the first step but are not selected for funding (including from a No-GO recommendation from the jury), you will be awarded

a Seal of Excellence. If the proposal is submitted by a consortia, Seal of Excellence will be awarded to the coordinator of the proposal, listing the other participating legal entities.

If the application is recommended for funding, additional checks to verify that the application is within the scope of the call (and in particular whether the application is built upon results at TRL 3 or 4) may be further performed during the grant preparation phase.

IV. EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges- Pilot

The European Innovation Council is introducing a new experimental funding instrument under the 2026 Work Programme: **EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges**, piloting ARPA-style mechanisms to drive breakthrough innovation through structured, staged-based support and closer integration of user and demand perspectives.

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

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 Research Challenge:

- **Stage-gated funding:** Two-stage model with initial feasibility studies (Stage 1) followed by significant follow-up investments for scale-up (Stage 2).
 - **Stage 1:** Up to €300,000 lump sum for up to nine months to prepare and benchmark breakthrough solutions and explore their viability.
 - **Stage 2:** Up to €2.5 million lump sum for up to 2.5 years to prototype solutions and test them in real world environments and with the involvement of users the most promising projects
- **Demand-side integration:** commercial users (e.g. industry, public sector) and/or end-users should be involved from the outset to validate use cases, enhance market relevance, and facilitate uptake.
- **Single entity or small consortia:** Open to mono-beneficiaries or small consortia (2–3 partners), with flexibility to evolve between stages.
- **Proactive portfolio management:** Each challenge is guided by a Programme Manager who ensures strategic coherence and adaptation across funded projects.

The EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges pilot will be implemented through:

In 2026, an open call for Stage 1 inviting applications from all eligible entities that meet the established admissibility and eligibility criteria.

In 2027, a restricted call for Stage 2 open exclusively to the beneficiaries participating in Stage 1,

You can apply for EIC Advanced Innovation Challenge either as:

- ✦ A single legal entity established in a Member State or an Associated Country ('mono-beneficiary') if you are a start-up, SME or research performing organisation (university, research or technology organisation, including teams, individual Principal Investigators and inventors). 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 maximum three eligible independent legal entities ('multi-beneficiary') which must include at least one legal entity established in a Member State or Associated Country

What support will you receive if your proposal is funded?

The total indicative budget for this call is EUR 4 million under 2026 Work programme for Stage 1 projects and EUR 25 million under 2027 EIC work programme⁶⁸ for Stage 2 projects.

Stage 1 (solution design): 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 considers proposals with an EU contribution of up to EUR 300.000 and duration of maximum 9 months.

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

Stage 2 (prototyping and user testing): If successful, you will receive a lump sum grant for a Research and Innovation Action to cover the eligible costs, necessary for the implementation of your project. For this call, the Commission considers proposals with an EU contribution of up to EUR 2.5m and duration of maximum 2,5 years.

The funding rate of this grant will be 100% of the eligible costs. Eligible costs will take the form of a lump sum. 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).⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Subject to the Commission Decision on the 2027 EIC WP.

⁶⁹ 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

In addition to funding, stage 2 projects will receive tailor-made access to a wide range of Business Acceleration Services (BAS).

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

How do you apply; how long does it take?

Stage 1 (solution design): The deadline for submitting your proposal is XX April 2026 at 17h00 Brussels local time.⁷⁰

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

Sections 1 to 3 and the cover page of part B of your proposal must consist of a maximum of 10 format A4 pages.

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

You will be informed about the result of this evaluation, including feedback on your proposal, indicatively within 5 weeks after the call deadline.

If you are successful, you can expect your grant agreement to be signed within 2 months from the call deadline (indicative) and you are expected to start your project immediately after the signature of the Grant, not later than 1st October 2026.

Stage 2 (prototyping and user testing): The deadline for submitting your proposal is [June] 2027 at 17h00 Brussels local time.

Further details about the Stage 2 format will be provided on EIC WP 2027.

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

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

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

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

⁷⁰ The call will open November 15th 2025. The Director-General responsible for the call may decide to open the call up to one month prior to or after the envisaged date(s) of opening. The Director-General responsible may delay the deadline(s) by up to two months.

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

Table 6. Award criteria for EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges Stage 1	
Excellence (Threshold: 4/5, weight 60%)	
Clarity and relevance of the innovation idea: Is the problem clearly defined and the solution compelling? how the innovation alleviates the problem?.	
Breakthrough nature and novelty: Is the innovation novel compared to the state of the art? What is the potential for disruptive impact in the specific use case?	
Are expected performance improvements (qualitative/quantitative) realistic and credible?	
Impact (Threshold: 3.5/5, weight 20%)	
Does the innovation show potential for wider adoption or scale-up? Potential attractiveness to investors, industry, or public sector stakeholders.	
Quality and efficiency of the implementation (Threshold 3/5, weight 20%)	
Is the work plan realistic within the budget and timeline? Are the main risks acknowledged with mitigation measures?	
How appropriate and effective is the allocation of resources (comprising person-months and other cost items)?	
To what extent do all the consortium members have the necessary capacity and high-quality expertise for performing the project tasks?	

IV.1 [Advance Innovation Challenge]

[Placeholder for Challenge texts]

V. EIC Accelerator

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

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

Why should you apply?

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

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

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

Applicants to EIC Accelerator can submit proposals through:

- ✦ EIC Accelerator Open, which has no predefined thematic priorities and is open to proposals in any field of technology or application⁷¹; EIC Accelerator Challenges in predefined areas of emerging and strategic technologies.

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 persons⁷² (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 and may submit a proposal on behalf of that SME or small mid-cap, provided that a prior agreement exists with the company. The grant agreement and/or the investment agreement will be signed with the beneficiary/ final recipient of funding company only, subject to the “Approach in specific cases relating to a parent or holding company and an operating company” (see below); or
 - c. from a non-associated third country intending to establish an SME (including start-ups) or to relocate an existing SME to a Member State or an Associated Country. The company must prove its effective establishment in a Member State or an Associated Country at the time of submission of the full proposal.

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

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

⁷¹ 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.

⁷² In such cases, the applicant must use the same identification (PIC number) when submitting the full application in order to be eligible.

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

What support will you receive if your proposal is funded?

The total indicative budget for this call is EUR [xxx] million. EUR [xxx] million of the total indicative budget will be allocated to EIC Accelerator Open and EUR [xxx] million to EIC Accelerator Challenges. The total indicative budget for each Accelerator Challenges is provided in Challenge descriptions below.

The indicative budget for investment components is [EUR XXX} 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 Programmes⁷³.

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

Indicatively, the budget for grant components will be allocated approximately equally between the interview sessions. In case the amount allocated to GO applicants is less than the budget available for that interview session, or additional budget becomes available, then the remaining available budget will be allocated to the subsequent interview session. In case the amount allocated to GO applicants is above the budget available, then a number of applicants corresponding to the unavailable budget will be awarded funding using the available budget of the subsequent interview session

⁷³ See Annex 1 for full information about the budget.

The EIC Accelerator provides:

a) *grant component only* ('Grant Only') that will take the form of a lump sum contribution⁷⁴ 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 of⁷⁵:

- ✦ 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 contribution⁷⁶ via a grant agreement.

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

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

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

The EIC Accelerator model grant agreement can be found on the Funding & Tenders Portal⁷⁷.

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

⁷⁴ 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)

⁷⁵ 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).

⁷⁶ 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)

⁷⁷ Funding & tenders (europa.eu)

The minimum investment component is EUR 1 million and the maximum is EUR 10 million⁷⁸. 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 basis⁷⁹ in accordance with the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines⁸⁰.

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

⁷⁸ In certain cases, investments can be made in holding structures of the beneficiary company, subject to the provisions of the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines

⁷⁹ 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.

⁸⁰ 220301 EIC Investment Guidelines - Horizon Europe March 2022 FINAL (1)_0.pdf (europa.eu)

requirements, intellectual property management, and marketing approval (e.g. at least TRL 6⁸¹ 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).⁸²

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.

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 which will be evaluated remotely by EIC expert evaluators;
2. If successful, you will be invited to prepare a *full proposal*, where you will have access to support from EIC business coaches to develop your business plan; *Full proposals* may be submitted at any time and provide additional information to your short proposal. They will be assessed by an expert evaluator also conducting a technology due diligence, followed by an evaluation committee which will rank the proposals and invite 2 - 2.5x times the available budget to interview.

Interview with an EIC jury for selected applicants as the final step in the selection process;

If selected for funding, you will be invited to negotiate 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).

⁸¹ To be interpreted as all applicants has completed all aspects of TRL 5: validation in relevant environment.

⁸² 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/Is-decision_he_en.pdf

1. Submission of short proposals

You may submit a short proposal at any time via the Funding & Tenders Portal⁸³. The short proposal consists of:

- ✦ A short 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.⁸⁴ Short applications will be batched and sent for evaluation the first Tuesday of every month. 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.

2. Submission of full proposals

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.⁸⁵ You can only receive this support once for a proposal.

The optional coaching support is designed to improve the value proposition, business plan 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.

If you succeeded with your short application under the 2026 Work programme⁸⁶, your full proposal can be submitted to any of the following batches during 2026, and any of the batches for 2027. Applicants who succeeded with a positive evaluation of their short proposal under the 2025EIC Work Programme may apply to any of the following batches in 2026. You may decide which batch to apply to.

⁸³ Funding & tenders (europa.eu)

⁸⁴ 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.

⁸⁵ It is nevertheless up to the applicants to decide if and when to use the coaching services.

⁸⁶ This concerns all short applications submitted after the adoption of the 2025 Work Programme on 29 October 2024.

Full proposals will be batched at regular intervals for evaluation, and dates for 2026 are:⁸⁷

7/01/2026;

04/03/2026;

06/05/2026;

08/07/2026;

02/09/2026;

03/11/2026

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

The batching dates for 2027 will be announced in the 2027 Work Programme due to be adopted in Autumn 2026.

The full proposal consists of:

- ✦ A short form based on the short application (you may revise based on feedback received).
- ✦ Additional data annexes on:
 - ✦ Financial data and company structure
 - ✦ Freedom to operate (FTO) analysis
 - ✦ Competitor analysis
 - ✦ Implementation plan (including proposed milestones) for grant component if applicable
- ✦ An updated pitch-deck in pdf format and video pitch (you may choose to reuse or update these from your short proposal)

You will be informed of the results within approximately 8-9 weeks of submission.

3. Interview with an EIC Jury.

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

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

⁸⁷ 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.

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 interviews. In case your application is not successful you will receive an official rejection letter (and your Seal of Excellence and Sovereignty (STEP) Seal, if awarded).

4. Invitation to negotiate grant component and due diligence process for investment component

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

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

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

The relevant information from your proposal will be transmitted to the EIC Fund and its investment advisor (the European Investment Bank), to structure the potential investment agreement (compliance checks,⁸⁸ 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.

⁸⁸ Such as KYC (Know Your Customer), AML/CTF (Anti-Money Laundering / Combating the Financing of Terrorism), Tax compliance, Sanctions, etc.

During this stage and, in particular, if you have not yet secured other investors, the EIC Fund or the Business Acceleration Services provided by the Agency will support you in the search for other investors. You will be asked for your consent before other investors are contacted or engaged in negotiations related to your proposal and company.

At the end of this process, which should usually take approximately between two to six months since the selection for funding⁸⁹, 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.⁹⁰ The investment amount decided by the EIC Fund will be within the maximum set by the Single Award Decision, as well as within the total amount available to the EIC Fund for investments. In some cases, the investment decision may lead to amendments to the grant agreement, for example in order to align the timing and definitions of milestones.

Lack of progress in the negotiations of the investment component by the beneficiary (and, in particular, insufficient proactive efforts from the beneficiary to attract potential co-investors to invest alongside the EIC Fund **or refusal of the beneficiary to include the EIC Fund in investment round**) may trigger a suspension of the payment deadlines as per Article 29.1(c) of the Model Grant Agreement and/or the termination of the grant agreement as per Annex 5 of the Model Grant Agreement (if the grant agreement preparations have not yet been completed, such lack of progress in the negotiations of the investment component by the applicant may also trigger the termination of the grant preparation phase and the rejection of the proposal).

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

⁸⁹ 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.

⁹⁰ The investment decisions will also be reported to the Programme Committee in accordance with Article 14 of Council Decision (EU) 2021/764.

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 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 (Table 6) 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.

Is the proposed technology or the application of an existing technology highly innovative. Is the technology a key enabling technology or lacking/essential in the technology matrix in terms of EU technology sovereignty. Is the technology a strategic technology in AI, HPC or in the challenges.
Is the technology ready for the market in terms of investment readiness. Is there an active and proven investor interest in the technology even if the technology has a lower TRL or is the technology close to market and will it require a large investment in order to capture the market before the competition does.

Is the technology a contribution to existing technological, societal trends and geopolitical trends
Is the market scalable and size-able and is it within reach for European players

2. Evaluation of full proposals

Full proposals will be evaluated:

1. By a highly qualified external expert who will conduct an in-depth technical due diligence, together with a preliminary assessment against the award criteria. This will include an online interview moderated by the Agency staff and result in a comprehensive technical due diligence report, which will assess the claims made in your proposal (including on the technology, intellectual property, market, etc)
2. By an Evaluation Committee of at least three independent experts and the Agency staff organised in thematic panels (e.g., digital, lifesciences, cleantech) who will score your proposal against the award criteria and rank all proposals. The Evaluation Committee will have access to the technology due diligence report and preliminary assessment by the first EIC evaluator.

The top ranked applications, between 2 and 2.5 times the budget available, will be invited to the jury interview. The EIC jury will have access to your full proposal and the technical due diligence 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 negotiating the grant or investment component, including for example on the milestones, and on proposed coaching activities.
- ★ **A NO GO but awarded a Seal of Excellence** if the Jury confirms the assessment of the evaluation committee that the criteria are met, but it is not recommended for funding within the budget available.
- ★ **A NO GO without the award of a Seal of Excellence** if the Jury finds weaknesses in your proposal which were not identified at the technical due diligence and evaluation committee stages and which mean the proposal does not meet all of the evaluation criteria. In such cases, you will receive feedback to justify this recommendation.

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).

Full proposals will be assessed according to the following award criteria (Table 7). The EIC Jury may focus the interview on any element of your proposal based on the remote evaluation result and its own assessment.

application stage by the external expert, the evaluation committee and then the Jury. At the full proposal stage, the Technical Due Diligence report will assess the claims made in the proposal against third party information and through a meeting with the applicant. The report will be made available to the Evaluation Committee, the Jury and if successful for investment support, to the European Investment Bank in its role as investment adviser to the EIC Fund.

Table []: Evaluation criteria for EIC Accelerator

[To be updated based on further work to simplify application forms and hence align questions in form with the criteria]

<u>Evaluation criteria</u>	<u>Short Proposal Stage</u>	<u>Full Proposal Stage</u>
<u>EXCELLENCE</u>		
<u>Innovation Assessment</u>	<u>Novelty and breakthrough nature:</u> Is the proposed innovation highly novel; is it deep tech in nature stemming from cutting-edge scientific advances; does it represent a significant improvement in cost or performance compared to existing or alternative solutions?	<u>Novelty and breakthrough nature:</u> Is the proposed innovation highly novel; is it deep tech in nature stemming from cutting-edge scientific advances; does it represent a significant improvement in cost or performance compared to existing or alternative solutions?
		<u>Technical feasibility and scalability:</u> What are the key technical risks and how will they be mitigated? Can the technology be scaled effectively to achieve breakthrough impact?
<u>Technology Maturity</u>	<u>Technology readiness level:</u> 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)?	<u>Technology readiness level:</u> 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)?
		<u>Intellectual property strategy:</u> Does the innovation have a sound IP strategy to

		enter the market in terms of protection and market opportunities?
Market Timing	Timing: Is the innovation at the cutting of new market or technological trends?	<i>(Covered in short proposal - no duplication)</i>
IMPACT		
Customer Value	Competitiveness and demand: Is there a clear and realistic product and go to market roadmap?	Customer validation and commercialization strategy: Is there a convincing and well-thought, thorough strategy for commercialisation, including regulatory approvals/compliance needed, time to market/deployment, and business and revenue model? Are the key partners identified and committed?
Market Opportunity	Market opportunity and European positioning: What is the total addressable market and potential market share of the innovation? How does this position Europe competitively in this market segment?	Scale-up strategy and European leadership potential: Does the innovation have the potential to scale up the company and establish European leadership in this technology area? What are the specific steps, resources, and timeline for scaling? FOR GRANT-ONLY: Can the applicant demonstrate access to the resources needed to commercialise and scale-up the innovation?
Business Model	Value creation potential: Does the innovation demonstrate clear potential for significant value creation and market disruption?	Revenue model and growth strategy: What is the detailed business model and revenue strategy? What are the realistic financial projections for achieving rapid growth? How will the company achieve market leadership position?
Broader Impact	Broader impact: Will the innovation, if successfully commercialised, achieve at least one positive societal, economic, environmental or climate impacts?	How will this contribute to European technological sovereignty?

<u>Challenge Alignment</u>	<i>(Not applicable at short stage)</i>	FOR CHALLENGES ONLY: Does the innovation contribute to the expected Challenge outcomes? Does it impact the EU Single Market by: Strengthening competitiveness? Reducing strategic dependencies?
<u>LEVEL OF RISK, IMPLEMENTATION AND NEED FOR UNION SUPPORT</u>		
<u>Team Capability</u>	Team foundation and ambition: Does the core team have the basic capability, motivation, and ambition to implement a breakthrough innovation and bring it to global markets? What critical competencies are currently missing and how will they be acquired in future recruitment plans, including adequate gender balance?	Team completeness and scale-up readiness: Building on the team foundation, does the team now have or have concrete plans to acquire all competencies needed for rapid scaling? Are there specific recruitment plans for building a world-class team capable of competing globally, including adequate gender balance?
<u>Risk Management</u>	<i>(Basic feasibility assessment covered in Excellence)</i>	Comprehensive risk assessment and mitigation: Have the main risks (technological, market, financial, regulatory) been comprehensively identified, together with specific measures to mitigate them?
<u>Implementation Planning</u>	<i>(High-level feasibility covered above)</i>	Implementation plan: 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 reasonable and non-excessive?
<u>Risk level</u>	Risk level: Does the company have demonstrated early traction with investors? Is the financing requirement significantly higher than	For Blended Finance and Equity only - Leverage effect: Can the company demonstrate that without EIC Fund investment, European market actors are unwilling to commit the full amount

	<u>the amount that market actors can finance alone?</u>	<u>needed AND that EIC support will leverage significant additional private investment?</u>
		Grant Only: <u>Can the company demonstrate the need for EIC grant support?</u>

Application submission limits

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

As from 1 January 2024, after three unsuccessful submissions⁹¹ of the same/improved proposal by the same legal entity to the EIC Accelerator call for Challenges or Open, which can be at any stage of the process (Short Proposal, Full Proposal) and for any form of support (Grant-Only, Blended finance, Equity-Only), an applicant may not apply again to the EIC Accelerator under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme.

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

Additional information concerning investments by the EIC Fund

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 million⁹² and subject to availability of budget. Such follow-on investments will be subject to a project review by external experts (to ensure the evaluation criteria for Accelerator are met), and an amended Award Decision by the European Commission, as well as a renewed assessment (due diligence) by the EIB as investment adviser to the EIC Fund.⁹³

⁹² Higher amounts for follow on investments are available by applying under the EIC STEP Scale Up call.

⁹³ In accordance with Article 48(12), second subparagraph, of the Horizon Europe Regulation. The Programme Committee shall be informed of such cases.

Such follow-on investments will be limited to the following exceptional categories of cases⁹⁴:

- i) Where necessary to secure EU interests which cannot be otherwise protected or in the case of strategic technologies⁹⁵, 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁹⁴ These cases stem from the advice of the EIC Board.

⁹⁵ Investments will be considered strategic where they are within the scope of the critical technology areas for the EU's economic security (Commission Recommendation of 3.10.2023, C(2023) 6689 final) or the priority sector set out in the STEP Regulation (Article 2, Regulation (EU) 2024/795)

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.⁹⁶

Approach for listed companies

Investments in listed companies may be made only in exceptional cases, where they are considered strategic⁹⁷, as set out in the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines

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.

V.1 EIC Accelerator Open

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

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

- *[Insert list of Accelerator challenges where restrictions apply]*

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

⁹⁶ Where necessary, via an amendment to the grant agreement.

⁹⁷ Investments will be considered strategic where they are within the scope of the critical technology areas for the EU's economic security (Commission Recommendation of 3.10.2023, C(2023) 6689 final) or the priority sector set out in the STEP Regulation (Article 2, Regulation (EU) 2024/795)

V.2 EIC Accelerator Challenges

The total indicative budget for EIC Accelerator Challenges is EUR [xxx] million. However, in case of underutilisation, this amount is subject to the following conditions on budget flexibility and potential transfers to the EIC Accelerator Open: if there are insufficient applications selected for funding for a Challenge, the budget will be transferred to the other Challenges; in case there are insufficient applications selected for all the Challenges, the remaining budget will be transferred to the Accelerator Open.⁹⁸

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

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

[Insert text on which Challenges] fall within the scope and objectives⁹⁹ 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 [ACCELERATOR CHALLENGE]

[Insert text for Accelerator Challenges] VI. EIC Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) Scale Up Call¹⁰⁰

- ❖ 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**?

⁹⁸ With the exception of the Next Generation EU component of the budget.

⁹⁹ 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.

¹⁰⁰ EIC STEP Scale Up call is a specific call as part of the EIC Accelerator as defined under Article 48 of the Horizon Europe Regulation - 2021/695 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu) following its amendment by Article 17(2) of the STEP Regulation. The same provisions on indirect management and on parent and holding companies as set out under the Accelerator call apply.

- ❖ Does the successful commercialisation and scaling of your technology/ innovation **represent significant risks** which mean that it cannot be sufficiently financed from the market investors?

If you answered **yes** to all questions, then the EIC Strategic Technology for Europe Platform (STEP) Scale Up call could be your launchpad to success. This call provides significant funding to fuel groundbreaking innovation in **strategic technologies**¹⁰¹, propelling Europe's economic, industrial, and technological competitiveness. This is a new call that has been introduced as a pilot action following the STEP Regulation¹⁰² to address an important market gap in financing deep tech scale up companies in Europe and to inform decisions on future support.

Why should you apply?

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

The companies selected under the EIC STEP Scale Up call shall receive **investments ranging from EUR 10 to EUR 30 million**. This investment can significantly accelerate the development and market launch of your technology, product, or service. With this funding, you'll gain the power to disrupt established markets and forge new ones across Europe, potentially achieving significant global impact. Crucially, this investment is designed to **catalyse major funding rounds**, e.g. in the range of EUR 50 to 150 million, and at least 3-5 times the EIC investment.

This call is part of the implementation of the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)¹⁰³ which supports the development or manufacturing of critical technologies throughout the Union or safeguarding and strengthening their respective value chains. Besides, support from the EIC, the projects may be eligible for support under other EU programmes included in STEP.

In 2026 support for start-ups in semiconductor technologies and quantum technologies will be pursued in particular through the STEP Scale Up call which foresees larger investments targeting strategic technologies including in support of the Chips

¹⁰¹ Guidance Note concerning certain provisions of Regulation (EU) 2024/795 establishing the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)

¹⁰² Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP), and amending Directive 2003/87/EC and Regulations (EU) 2021/1058, (EU) 2021/1056, (EU) 2021/1057, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) 2021/1060, (EU) 2021/523, (EU) 2021/695, (EU) 2021/697 and (EU) 2021/241, OJ L, 2024/795, 29.2.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/795/oj>.

¹⁰³ https://strategic-technologies.europa.eu/index_en

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 areas defined in the STEP regulation¹⁰⁴ and further developed in the Guidance note¹⁰⁵

- a. **Digital technologies**¹⁰⁶, 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; battery and 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, manufacturing and recycling technologies, technologies vital to sustainability such as water purification and desalination; and circular economy technologies.
- c. **Biotechnologies**, including medicinal products on the Union list of critical medicines and their components. Including DNA/RNA; proteins and other molecules; cell and tissue culture and engineering; process biotechnology techniques; Gene and RNA vectors; bioinformatics; and nanobiotechnology.

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

- a. they bring to the internal market an innovative, emerging and cutting-edge element with significant economic potential;

¹⁰⁴ [Regulation - EU - 2024/795 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#), Article 2(1), point (a) of the STEP Regulation

¹⁰⁵ 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.

¹⁰⁶ 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

- b. they contribute to reducing or preventing strategic dependencies of the Union.

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

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

You will therefore need to demonstrate that the company **already has a precommitment**¹⁰⁷ for an equity investment which meets the following elements:

- ❖ The pre-commitment from a single investor with demonstrable know-how and experience in the relevant market, technology and jurisdiction and subject to KYC by the EIC Fund or the EIF.¹⁰⁸ The pre-committed investor may be an existing investor in the company and does not necessarily need to be the investor who intends to lead the investment round.
- ❖ The pre-commitment represents at least 20% of the total target funding round you are aiming to raise.

The following entities are eligible to apply:

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

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

¹⁰⁷ The pre-commitment is non-legally binding in nature and will be assessed at the time of proposal evaluation.

¹⁰⁸ Investors who have not undergone a KYC by the EIC Fund or EIF may also be provide pre-commitments, but this will be subject to the completion of a KYC during the eligibility checks.

Specific conditions

In order to achieve the expected outcomes, and safeguard the Union's strategic assets, interests, autonomy, and security, it is important to avoid a situation of technological dependency on a non-EU source, in a global context that requires the EU to take action to build on its strengths, and to carefully assess and address any strategic weaknesses, vulnerabilities and high-risk dependencies which put at risk the attainment of its ambitions. The scope of this call follows the identification of priority technology areas where there is a need to reduce or prevent strategic dependencies of the Union, in line with EU strategic and security interests. For this reason, and in line with Article 136 of the Financial Regulation¹⁰⁹, recipients of the Accelerator funding¹¹⁰ under this call, must not be directly or indirectly controlled by a non-associated third country or a legal entity established in a non-associated third country.

Furthermore, in case of an investment support, specific safeguards may be introduced in the investment agreement (see Introduction, section on Economic Security).

What support will you receive if your proposal is funded?

The EIC STEP Scale Up call offers a total indicative budget of EUR 300 million for 2026, which is expected to rise to EUR 900 million for the period 2025-2027¹⁸⁶. Any unused amount from this budget will be allocated with priority to the EIC Accelerator Open call.¹¹¹

The support will be in the form of **equity-only investments** managed by the EIC Fund. Applicants to this call will not receive a grant component. It provides significant financial support, and applicants should apply for an **investment of a minimum of EUR 10 million¹¹² and maximum of EUR 30 million**, to co-invest in a funding round¹¹³ aiming at least three to five times the amount of the requested EIC contribution. The specific terms of each investment are considered and negotiated on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines. This ensures the investment is tailored to your company's needs while aligning with EIC's objectives.

EIC STEP Scale Up is designed to fill the funding gap for companies to invest in the scale up of high-risk innovations and where the amount needed for the scale up cannot

¹⁰⁹ EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#)

¹¹⁰ i.e., the legal entities which sign the investment agreement and, on this basis, become investees respectively. ¹⁸⁶ Amounts for 2026 and 2027 are subject to the availability of the appropriations provided for in the general budget of the Union for 2026 and 2027 following the adoption of that budget of the EIC Work Programmes for 2026 and 2027.

¹¹¹ 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.

¹¹² Applicants wishing to apply for lower investment amounts may apply to the EIC Accelerator call.

¹¹³ The EIC Fund may join the round when relevant either ongoing/upcoming /past.

be fully financed by other investors, including Invest EU implementing partners. Applicants are encouraged to consider complementarity with Venture Debt from InvestEU implementing partners in order to meet their financing needs.

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

Beyond funding, your company will benefit from a strong support system that fosters your continued growth within Europe through Business Acceleration Services (details available in Section VII). Applicants to the EIC STEP Scale Up call who meet the evaluation thresholds will also be **awarded a Sovereignty (STEP) Seal**, to facilitate and provide privileged access to funding and support from other EU programmes and other funders and investors¹¹⁴.

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 cut off per quarter. You must submit your proposal via the Funding and Tenders Portal.

1. Submission of proposals

To be deemed admissible and eligible, proposals must consist of:

- ❖ a full business plan, including information on the company's ownership and financial structure and a justification on the STEP related objectives (maximum 50 pages);
- ❖ a pitch-deck (maximum 15 pages) in pdf format (this version will be presented to the jury if invited to interview);
- ❖ a pre-commitment from a single investor (according to a template available on the EIC website); The pre-commitment must represent at least 20% of the total target funding round, which must range between EUR 50 to 150 million, and be at least 3-5 times the EIC investment)
- ❖ a financial plan and consent document (according to the template available on the EIC website)
- ❖ An ownership control declaration.

¹¹⁴ As STEP Seal beneficiary, you might be requested to provide additional documentation for the sake of an Ownership and Control Assessment where there is such requirement.

- ❖ Results of the freedom to operate (FTO) analysis. If you do not have one, please upload a note of maximum 2 pages outlining your freedom to operate and providing as much information as possible on this issue. In cases where the FTO is not relevant (e.g. software), please upload a simple statement.
- ❖ CVs of key personnel

All personal data and information in your proposal will be kept strictly confidential. However, before submitting your full proposal, you will need to give consent 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 ¹¹⁵.

Upon submission, your proposal will be assessed if it meets the eligibility criteria set out above in terms of whether it falls within scope of the STEP technologies; the pre-commitment from a single investor; and the eligibility of the applicant entity.

The investment adviser to the EIC Fund, may be requested to support the eligibility assessment regarding the pre-commitment from an investor.

In cases where a Technology Due Diligence report is not already available, this will be conducted by a suitably qualified external expert.

If your application meets these requirements, you will be invited to attend a jury interview. It is expected that you will be informed about the interview within approximately 4-6 weeks from the start of the evaluation process.

2. Interviews with an EIC Jury

At the interview, you will be assessed by a Jury of maximum six members (see Glossary). Detailed information about the format of the interview will be communicated to you in the invitation

You will be informed about the result of the interview within approximately two weeks from the date of the interview.

[If you are successful, an ownership control assessment will be conducted to assess the eligibility of your company to receive EIC STEP Scale Up support.]

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

¹¹⁵ InvestEU Implementing partners - European Union (europa.eu)

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.

If you have expressed an interest and given consent, and your company has been awarded a Sovereignty (STEP) Seal following the evaluation, the relevant information from your proposal will be passed to the relevant InvestEU implementing partners to consider for Venture Debt support.

How does the EIC decide if your proposal will be selected for a potential investment by the EIC Fund?

Your proposal will be assessed on its merits by leading experts and the Commission will ensure open and fair competition to all eligible proposals submitted.

The EIC STEP Scale Up call utilizes a "first come, first served" approach to evaluate proposals. However, juries will be asked to take account of overall budget availability for the full year and will be limited to recommend proposals amounting to no more than 70% of the available budget for the calendar year within the first six months of the year. The Jury will be informed about budget availability, including additional amounts that may be available due to previous amounts awarded that were not fully used.

Proposals will be assessed according to the following award criteria (Table 8). The EIC Jury may focus the interview on any element of your proposal based on its own assessment.

The EIC Jury members, based on your interview and their overall assessment, will recommend one of three outcomes for your proposal:

❖ GO and Sovereignty (STEP) Seal:

Your proposal meets all of the evaluation criteria (see below) and is recommended for a potential equity investment. The Jury may provide observations for consideration by the EIC Fund regarding the investment amount or other considerations for the investment decision or management. The Jury may recommend a different investment

amount than requested by the applicant in line with the call's requirements . It is important to remember that investment amounts authorised in the Commission Award Decision are subject to successful completion of the due diligence and negotiation by the EIC Fund according to the Investment Guidelines, and investment amounts may be reduced or rejected by the EIC Fund for justified reasons.

Your project will also be awarded the Sovereignty (STEP) Seal and will have access to Business Acceleration Services.

❖ **NO GO and Sovereignty (STEP) Seal¹¹⁶:**

Your proposal meets the main elements of the award criteria, including the contribution to the STEP objectives, but is not recommended for funding based on the jury's overall consideration of the submitted proposals and due to the lack of budget availability.

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

❖ **NO GO:**

Your proposal does not meet all the evaluation criteria required for funding. You will receive detailed feedback outlining the areas where your proposal fell short to help you improve for future applications.

The Jury may also provide recommendations regarding a potential resubmission, or not, of your application and improvements needed.

Table 8. Award criteria elements for EIC STEP Scale Up proposals	
Excellence	
Novelty and breakthrough character of the innovation: Does the innovation have breakthrough character and a high degree of novelty compared to existing solutions?	
Timing: Is the innovation at the cutting edge of new market, societal or technological trends?	

¹¹⁶ As STEP Seal beneficiary, you might be requested to provide additional documentation for the sake of an Ownership and Control Assessment where there is such requirement.

<p>Technological feasibility: has the technology been developed in a safe, secure and reliable manner? Has it been adequately assessed, validated or certified?</p>
<p>Intellectual Property Strategy: Does the company have the necessary Intellectual Property Rights to ensure adequate protection of the idea? Has a freedom to operate analysis been carried out?</p>
<p>Impact</p>
<p>Market development: Does the innovation have the potential to trigger customer demand and develop new markets or significantly transform existing ones? Has the potential market for the innovation been adequately quantified, including conditions and growth rates? Is the expected market share acquisition reasonably ambitious and reachable?</p>
<p>Commercialisation strategy: Is there a convincing and well thought-through strategy for commercialisation, including regulatory approvals/compliance needed, time to market/deployment, and business and revenue model? Are the key partners identified and committed?</p>
<p>Scale up potential: Does the innovation have the potential to scaleup the company and to become a global leader in the technology?</p>
<p>Broader impact: Will the innovation, if successfully commercialised achieve positive broader societal, economic, environmental or climate impacts? Does the innovation have the potential to create new markets or significantly transform existing ones within the EU, fostering economic, social, and territorial cohesion?</p>
<p>STEP Impact: Does the innovation have a clear and measurable positive impact on the EU Single Market, either by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Strengthening its competitiveness: Does the innovation address a critical need within the EU internal market, fostering innovation and technological leadership for European companies? reducing strategic dependencies: Does the innovation contribute to reducing the EU's reliance on non-EU sources for critical technologies or raw materials? <i>(Note: applicants from Associated Countries will need to demonstrate contributions the EU internal market or strategic dependencies)</i>
<p>Level of risk, implementation, and need for Union support</p>

Team: Does the team have the capability and motivation to implement the innovation proposal and bring it to the market? Is there a plan to acquire any critical competencies which are currently missing, including adequate representation of women and men?

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? Is there evidence that market actors would be willing to invest, either alongside the EIC or at a later stage?

Risk mitigation: Have the main risks (e.g., technological, market, financial, regulatory) been identified, together with measures to take to mitigate them?

Investment leverage: Does the proposal provide a convincing and realistic plan for raising an equity financing round using the EIC Fund investment to attract 3-5 times the amount from other investors? What is the anticipated timeline for concluding the financing round? How many investors have committed or are engaged in advanced discussions? How pressing is the timeline for finalising this deal?

VII. Business Acceleration Services

The Business Acceleration Services (BAS) provide EIC Awardees and other eligible organisations 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
EIC Awardees that have been assessed under an EIC call within Horizon Europe (2021-2025) , within EIC Accelerator, EIC Transition, EIC Pathfinder, EIC STEP Scaleup, and EIC Prizes including beneficiaries and associated partners of EIC grants and recipients of EIC Fund Investments.	12 days of coaching and more if justified 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 EIC Pilot (2018-2020) ¹¹⁷ including beneficiaries and associated partners of EIC grants and recipients of EIC Fund Investments.	<p>12 days of coaching and more if justified</p> <p>Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)</p> <p>Up to 50% co-funding of services from EIC ecosystem partners to a maximum value of €60.000 per beneficiary</p>
Horizon Europe Seal of Excellence and Sovereignty (STEP) Seal holders awarded under EIC calls	<p>3 days of coaching</p> <p>Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)</p> <p>Up to 50% co-funding of services from EIC ecosystem partners to a maximum value of €60.000 per beneficiary</p>
Companies selected under the EIC Scaling Club initiative (non EIC)	Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)
Women TechEU Awardees	<p>Can join EIC Women Leadership Programme including 3 days of coaching, training and mentoring.</p> <p>Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)</p>
“Ukraine call” Awardees	<p>3 days of coaching</p> <p>Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)</p>

¹¹⁷ Except Phase 1 beneficiaries

Pre-Accelerator call Awardees ¹¹⁸	<p>12 days of coaching</p> <p>Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)</p> <p>1-to-1 investment readiness and outreach support</p>
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	<p>3 days of coaching</p> <p>Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)</p>
Beneficiaries supported under calls from other parts of Horizon Europe which foresee budget contributions to enable provision of EIC BAS services ¹¹⁹	Services as defined in the Work Programme part providing the budget
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
Phase 2 of the SME Instrument under Horizon 2020;	Possibility to apply to all BAS activities (subsequent selection may apply)

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

¹¹⁸ Pre-Accelerator call included in the 2025 Horizon Europe widening work programme (WIDERA)

¹¹⁹ This approach is foreseen for the Regional Innovation Valleys call under the European Innovation Ecosystem Work Programme 2026-2027. The budget foreseen will be made available as top ups to the relevant BAS service contracts.

approaches and adapting or even stopping the ones that are not efficient is built in all BAS implementing contracts.

Unless otherwise specified in the specific calls, the eligible entities can apply to EICs BAS services through open calls published on the [EIC Community Platform](#). The selection is done based on assessment from business partners or market experts or on a first come first served basis.

The BAS services funded through the EIC work programmes cover among other things:

- ✦ **Coaching**
- ✦ support to attend European and international **business trade fairs and** expand business in new global markets (Global Business Expansion Programme);
- ✦ Support to pilot and **close deals with corporates** (EIC Corporate Partnership Programme 4.0)
- ✦ Training and support for start-ups and SMEs in winning contracts from **public and private sector innovation procurement** tenders and funding to test products with innovation procurers (EIC Innovation Procurement Programme)
- ✦ Strengthen skills, knowledge and network needed to **scale up** (EIC Scaling Club 2.0)
- ✦ Dedicated support for **female founders** (The EIC Women Leadership Programme)
- ✦ Dedicated **Business and Innovation Acceleration Services** to EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition beneficiaries¹²⁰ supporting transition from lab to market. (Tech2Market BAS)
- ✦ **Visibility of beneficiaries and one-to-one services to find co-investors** through a [digital platform](#) listing all EIC Accelerator, Transition, EIC STEP Scaleup and Pre-Accelerator companies.
- ✦ Support in **Environmental, Social and Governance** related reporting (EIC GHG Tool).

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 programmes, legal and IP expertise, access to testing and research infrastructure, matchmaking with large corporates and investors, and many more. The services from EIC Eco Systems partners can be accessed through the [EIC Service](#)

¹²⁰ 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.

[Catalogue](#). The catalogue provides information of the services, conditions to apply and eventual costs.

The EIC BAS services and the infrastructure to provide access to EIC Ecosystem partners are funded through multi-year procurements¹²¹, expert contracts (coaching) and Coordination and Support Actions (CSA) some of which were financed through previous Work Programmes. The following actions pertaining to BAS services will be funded in 2026.

VI.1 EIC business coaches (direct EIC services)

Business coaching focuses on providing insights on business development and guidance to improve business performance. EIC coaching is mandatory part of EIC funding. Beneficiaries are encouraged to choose their coach/coaches early in their project to maximise the benefits.

Coaching topics cover the entire entrepreneurial and innovation endeavour from challenging the value proposition and business model, IP management, data protection, improving strategy and investor business case, building the team and leadership, to international expansion. EIC business coaching is provided to eligible entities:

- ✦ At full proposal application stage for EIC Accelerator, three days of remote coaching.¹²²
- ✦ For EIC Awardees, business coaching is accessible via an EIC Ecosystem Partner or directly from the EIC if no suitable alternative is available. Twelve days of remote coaching¹²³ are offered to EIC Awardees, Pre-accelerator Awardees. In exceptional cases (e.g., scaling up), this can be extended beyond the 12 days.
- ✦ Other entities eligible to receive BAS services receive three days of remote coaching. Exceptionally, coaching can be offered to beneficiaries of other EIC or Horizon Europe actions.

The eligible companies/teams will receive an invitation to use the Coach Matching Tool. Beneficiaries can use this tool to find and select coaches that suit their needs.

¹²¹ 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.

¹²² Applicants are encouraged to use the EIC coaching services. It is nevertheless up to the applicants to decide if and when to use the coaching services.

¹²³ Coaching involving travel may take place in duly justified cases when the physical presence of the coach is expected to bring significantly better results, mainly for coaching to EIC awardees. Coaching 2025 budget may also be used for the Horizon 2020 EIC legacy projects.

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 Regulation¹²⁴, and new coaches are selected when necessary. The selected coaches register their profile and expertise in the Commission's corporate database.

Applicants to provide EIC coaching services must have: at least five years of professional experience as investor, board advisor or in managerial positions with responsibilities in developing business innovation; and at least five years of coaching experience supporting new business development within a corporate's departments or with start-ups. The fields of new business development include technical expertise as well as practical involvement on go-to-market processes, building/acquisition of strategic partnerships and organizational and financial development.

EIC business coaches have the task to support the recipients of BAS depending on their needs, assess with them improvement opportunities and assist them in their process of learning and solving complex business development issues. As highly qualified specialized business coaches, their fees will be proportionate to their high-level strategic support, and it will closely mirror the international level of fees for experts performing tasks of similar nature. In this respect, EIC business coaches will receive EUR 1 000 per day of coaching (corresponding to EUR 500 per half day), which is considered to be proportionate to the specific services that EIC business coaches will provide, which are more complex than the standard tasks of experts evaluators.

Type of action: Expert contracts action.

Indicative budget: EUR 2 million

Indicative timetable: Q1 2026

VI.2 International Trade Fairs programme 4.0

This action will allow to select EIC Awardees that are SMEs that are already established in Europe to attend European and international business trade fairs. The aim is to support their commercialisation strategy in European and foreign markets, and to strengthen the EU innovation brand around the world. The provided services will include exhibition space within the 'EIC Pavilion' in relevant fairs, market training sessions for the participating

¹²⁴ EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509

companies, organisation of business meetings at the fair, company promotion, the organisation of side events and sessions at the fair.

Type of action: Procurement.

Indicative budget: EUR 7 million

Indicative timetable: Q1 2026

VI.3 Financial support to access services from Ecosystem partners

The EIC seeks partnerships with EIC Ecosystem Partners (see Glossary). The goal is to provide all EIC Awardees and other eligible entities with access to existing or bespoke services from the best service providers around Europe for the incubation, acceleration, growth and scale up of innovative tech companies, such as for instance: pitching and networking events, matchmaking to customers and investors, specialised trainings (e.g. on intellectual property protection, technology due diligence etc.), innovation boot camps and summer schools, support to validate/accelerate a technology, mentorship, business coaching, co-investment opportunities, data mining or mapping services e.g. of tech infrastructures, piloting plants, testbeds etc.

This action covers the financial support in the form of lump sum grants to EIC Awardees aiming at co-funding access to services from Ecosystem Partners. It is complemented by a procurement of services (awarded under a different Work programme) to support the Agency with the selection and quality control of ecosystem partners and managing the catalogue of services.

Scope of the action – financial support to third parties

The standard admissibility and eligibility conditions for Coordination and Support Actions (CSAs), as outlined in Annex 2, will apply to this call. The CSA Beneficiary will provide financial support to EIC Awardees in the form of lump sums, covering up to 50% of the cost of services received from EIC Ecosystem Partners. A continuously open call will be implemented for the selection of EIC Awardees, ensuring timely and flexible access to support. Applications should propose a limited number of maximum lump sum amounts, corresponding to different categories of services, as defined in the EIC Service Catalogue. The EIC Awardees having access to this support are as defined in the Glossary and for the purposes of this action include Awardees selected through calls under the EIC Pilot (2018-2020)¹²⁵ and entities awarded a Seal of Excellence under the EIC Work Programmes under Horizon Europe and pre-accelerator grant.

¹²⁵ Except Phase 1 beneficiaries

The CSA Beneficiary will launch a continuously open call, inviting eligible entities to apply for a fixed-amount lump sum¹²⁶ under this action. Applications must reference a specific partner from the online EIC Ecosystem Partner Catalogue, and a prove of approval from this Partner. The application may concern a service to be still implemented or already delivered services (no later than 3 months from the accomplishment of the service). Lump sum grants will be awarded on a “first-come, first-served” basis, determined by the electronic timestamp of the successful application submission, and subject to eligibility checks and confirmation of the absence of double funding. In addition, the CSA Beneficiary will be responsible for disseminating information about the call and establishing a dedicated helpdesk to reply to the questions from EIC Awardees. The application system put in place should be lean and should not request to create a full profile on already existing platforms. The CSA Beneficiary will be responsible for monitoring the services received by the EIC Awardees, run the quality survey directly after the end of the service and impact survey 6 months after the end of the service. Both surveys should be validated with the Agency.

The maximum size of cumulative support allocated to a recipient (or third party) under this action is EUR 60,000.

The CSA Beneficiary needs to put in place a real-time reporting and monitoring system about applications received and funding awarded per EIC Awardee as well as aggregated data displayed in dashboards, including but not limited to geographical distribution, type of service, financial support received (value of the lump sums, type and geographical distribution of partners, results of the quality and impact surveys etc). The exact content of the dashboard will be defined at the beginning of the project. By the end of the project all data gathered during its implementation will be made available to the Agency following template provided by the Agency.

The CSA Beneficiary will be required to work in close coordination with the Agency and the contractor responsible for implementing the call for Ecosystem Partners and EIC service catalogue, as well as with other EU services as necessary. This collaboration will include participation in regular coordination meetings and the timely provision of relevant information to support the effective implementation of the action. In addition, the CSA Beneficiary will contribute, in cooperation with the Agency, to the preparation of an “uptake and impact report” summarising the overall activities and outcomes of the EIC Ecosystem Partnership Programme.

The CSA Beneficiary must ensure sound financial management and applicants must clearly outline in their proposals the mechanisms that will be put in place for the effective and efficient administration of financial support, including measures to prevent misuse or abuse.

¹²⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf

If admissible and eligible, the proposals for the Coordination and Support Actions will be evaluated and ranked against the criteria as described in Annex 2.

The funding rate of the CSA is 100% of the eligible costs.

At least 75% of the total budget to be funded by the EIC must be allocated to financial support to third parties (the EIC Awardees and other eligible entities). An effective duration of around 2-3 years would enable the project to achieve the desired objectives.

Expected outcomes and impacts

This action should facilitate for EIC Awardees and other eligible entities to access the best competence, ecosystems and infrastructure in Europe for their specific need, and at the same time provide the conditions for ecosystems to build critical mass to provide highly specialised and excellent ecosystem services.

This action should:

- Increase access of EIC Awardees to new partners and services with sector specific knowledge, expertise, equipment/R&I infrastructure, networks or markets;
- Enable faster transition of innovations from lab to market and scale up of EIC companies, increasing the chances for return on EIC investments;
- Create synergies and further spread excellence within the European Innovation Ecosystem
- Allow EIC Ecosystem Partners access to a deal flow of top-level European innovators (i.e. EIC awardees).

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

- "Time to inform" measuring time from application of an EIC Awardee to the notification of the confirmation about lump sum award;
- "Time to pay" the lump sum (from reception of the service to payment); and
- EIC Awardees using the lump sum scheme (target at least 20% of eligible group)
- 90% of entities receiving financial support evaluating application system as lean and easy.

Further KPIs can be developed in the proposal for this action and will be taken into consideration during the evaluation stage.

Type of action: Coordination and Support Action (CSA). This action will be evaluated partially or fully by representatives of Union institutions or bodies, according to Article 29 paragraph 1 of Horizon Europe Regulation. The conditions are described in Annex 2.

Number of projects expected to be funded: 1

Call opening: Q1 2026

Deadline for applications: March 2026

Indicative budget: EUR 4.5 million. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of proposals requesting other amounts if duly justified.

VI.4 EIC Scaling Club 2.0

The focus for EIC Scaling Club 2.0 is to increase success and support the growth of the top deep tech companies in Europe, by strengthen the skills, knowledge and network of peers, investors and customers needed for growth.

EIC Scaling Club 2.0 should support a minimum of 50 DeepTech companies from the EIC portfolio (primarily EIC Fund companies) and deep tech companies from outside the EIC portfolio that have been supported by national and regional programmes in Member States or Associated Countries. In all cases the companies must have the potential to scale up as global leaders or potential unicorns¹²⁷

The identified companies, ready for series B+ funding rounds, should demonstrate credible high-growth potential and should develop cutting-edge solutions in key technological areas, contributing to Europe's technological autonomy and supporting EU's strategic priorities, e.g. AI, advanced materials, quantum, biotech, robotics and space technologies, energy and decarbonisation, as specified in the Competitive Compass for the EU.¹²⁸ The cohort of supported companies, active in diverse sectors, should be geographically diverse, engaging a balanced portfolio of women-led companies.

The initiative should provide a package of growth-focused capability building support through bespoke networking and learning among peers and partners, as well as facilitating outreach. The initiative should also enhance visibility of the selected companies and the European scaleup scene.

The activities

The package of growth-focused support to the identified companies, should focus on:

- strengthening investment readiness
- strengthening operational excellence
- facilitate outreach to new customers, business partners and market (e.g. within EU as well as expansion to foreign markets)
- facilitate access to (late-stage) financing

¹²⁷ The final list of participating companies will have to be approved by the Commission.

¹²⁸ A Competitiveness Compass for the EU, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions, COM(2025) 30 final. January 2025.

- facilitate access to talents.

The initiative should leverage the existing networks and build on the success and methodologies of its predecessor action, the EIC Scaling Club.

For the implementation, the action should:

- be tailored to the specific needs of Europe's deep tech companies in various sectors. It should be delivered in an agile way while, properly balancing companies' engagement and the action's added value.
- be implemented in strong conjunction with the EIC Business Acceleration Services, and the network of EIC ecosystem partners, exploiting synergies and cross-promoting relevant actions, such as the international trade fairs, matchmaking with corporates, innovation procurement, investor outreach, etc.
- support participating companies' engagement in relevant scale-up schemes at EU level (EIC Step Scale Up, InvestEU initiative, EU Innovation Fund, etc.) and national levels (soft-landing schemes).
- play a proactive role in helping EIC build growth, expertise and leadership in the field of scaling up companies, by contributing to a better understanding of concrete challenges and needs of Europe's deep tech scale-ups and knowledge on the most efficient interventions to overcome the challenges.
- engage the EIC Scaling Club alumni companies, leveraging their scale-up experience, insights, and networks to strengthen the ecosystem for new cohorts. Alumni companies can act as mentors or peer advisors, providing real-world perspectives and fostering a culture of collaboration. An ongoing engagement of alumni companies would not only reinforce community ties but also support the alumni's own continued growth through visibility and access to new opportunities.
- should effectively promote the participating companies as Europe's most promising tech champions and global leaders. The action's branding and visual identity should be closely linked with the EIC, contributing to reinforcement of respective actions and all communication activities should be closely coordinated with EIC communication actions.

The proposal must describe the suggested methodology, both for identifying the supported companies and for scaling them up. The proposal should include the concrete set of proposed scale-up support actions, strengthened by the rationale for their implementation and added-value. It should also suggest a methodology for alumni engagement and visibility enhancement.

Expected impact

The action is expected to generate the following impact:

- **Strengthening growth skills** through mentoring and curated peer learning on fundamental growth barriers such as inclusive work culture, organisation, talent attraction, international expansion, and funding;
- **Increase the number and value of investments deals** from strategic European and non-European, co-investments partners, such as public and private investors (including National Promotional Banks and Institutions or/and Regional Banks that provide late-stage investment), including funding through initial public offerings (IPOs) and acquisitions of the participating companies.
- **Increase the number and value of commercial deals** from customers and through strategic partners, e.g. corporates, buyers, infrastructure and service providers, within EU as well as in foreign markets.
- Strengthening attractiveness to **attract highly skilled talents**
- **Building a strong peer-network** of Europe's top-performing deep tech founders and key mentors
- **Strengthen visibility of supported companies** and the image of the European deep tech scaleup scene

Governance

The implementing consortium should:

- demonstrate expertise, experience and means to foster substantial growth of European DeepTech scale-ups.
- suggest a suitable set of KPIs to measure and report impact. The results should be reported twice a year to the EU commission.
- Establish systematic data gathering, that ensures full respect of the data protection regulations, in order to evaluate impact and refine future actions.
- Establish a steering group. The members of the steering group should be selected in collaboration with the commission and include representatives from all part of the ecosystem, as well as the commission.
- Secure that all communication is clearly branded as EIC actions and approved by the EIC communication teams.
- Ensure synergies with:
 - Other EIC activities (e.g., EIC Innovation Procurement, EIC ecosystem partnership, Corporate Partnership programme 4.0 and Co-investment Support).
 - Other EIB activities (e.g. xxxx)
 - Relevant EU industry alliances, missions, and innovation ecosystems.

Type of action: Coordination and Support Action (CSA). This action will be evaluated partially or fully by representatives of Union institutions or bodies, according to Article 29 paragraph 1 of Horizon Europe Regulation.

Number of projects expected to be funded: 1

Call opening: Q1 2026

Deadline for applications: June 2026

Indicative budget: EUR 5 million

VI.5 Strategic access to innovation procurement

The EIC Innovation Procurement Programme provides already a holistic support to the EIC Awardees to access public and private sector procurement markets in Europe and at an international level. This action will be part of the EIC Innovation Procurement Programme and contribute significantly to the enhancement of the skills of innovators to act as potential suppliers in procurements, the development of their contacts with public and private sector buyers as well as the increasing of commercialisation through procurement of the EU funded cutting-edge innovations (with a focus on the EIC top-notch innovators) in Europe and at a global level.

Type of action: Procurement.

Indicative budget: EUR 4 million

Indicative timetable: Q1 2026

VI.6 Corporate partnership programme 4.0

The Startups and Scaleups Strategy has announced that the Commission will create a European Corporate Network to better integrate large companies, corporate venture investors and corporate procurers into the EU's innovation ecosystem and benefit from innovative solutions developed by startups. The Network members would advise on related policy, engage in matchmaking with startups and make a voluntary commitment to privilege European startups when they engage, invest and procure innovative solutions, especially when they use public funding or when they operate critical research or technology infrastructures

This action aims to support the announcement made in the Startups and Scaleups Strategy. Considering the scope of the EIC, this action includes the following objectives:

- support the Commission to establish a trusted network of corporate leaders (CEOs) from established industry and CEOs from the new economy and to create a Forum of CIOs to facilitate the sharing of best practices; and support the organisation of

activities designed following the conclusions of the CEOs network and the CIOs Forum and the Commission, notably multicorporate matchmaking events, advanced market commitments from the corporates and challenges from the corporates to the startups to act as lead markets for innovative solutions.

- Development and upgrade of the **EIC (Multi-)Corporate Days**, bridging the gap between EIC-backed innovators and large corporations through challenge-based engagements.

These objectives will be implemented in close partnership with the Commission and the trusted corporate network.

Type of action: Procurement

Call opening: Q1 2026

Indicative budget: EUR 7 million

VIII. EIC Prizes

VIII.1 The European Prize for Women Innovators

Objectives and scope

Facing fast-paced developing technologies and science, it is crucial to involve women and girls in the design, development and up-take of innovative solutions. Achieving gender equality and diversity benefits not only individuals, but also increases the performance of business, research and innovation.

Nevertheless, women continue to face multiple barriers, in bringing new ideas to the market and raising capital for their companies. This negatively affects the success rate of women-founded businesses and perpetuates the lack of awareness about the systemic nature of gender inequality. Hence, women's efforts and contributions to science and innovation should be encouraged and supported.

The [Political Guidelines for the European Commission for 2024-2029](#) underscore a strengthened commitment to gender equality. Building on this momentum, the Commission is set to renew its [Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#)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 Agenda²⁰¹, 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.

This prize supports a culture within research and innovation organisations and companies allowing women to become the innovators and entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

The prize is awarded every year to women from across the EU and countries associated to Horizon Europe, who have transformed their ideas into disruptive innovations to benefit people and the planet and who are inspiring leaders.

As for the previous edition, the 2027 European Prize for Women Innovators is organised in coordination between the Agency and the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT). The winners are chosen by an independent expert jury.

There are two EIC prize categories funded under this Work Programme: Women Innovators and Rising Innovators. In the first category, three prizes of EUR 100 000, EUR 70 000 and EUR 50 000 are awarded to the three highest-ranked applications. In the second category, three prizes of EUR 50 000, EUR 30 000 and EUR 20 000 are awarded to the three highest-ranked applications from promising 'Rising Innovators' under the age of 35. (The EIT Women Leadership category will be funded and managed by the EIT in coordination with the above prizes.)

Eligibility criteria

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

1. The applicant¹²⁹ must be a woman (natural person);¹³⁰
2. The applicant must be legally residing¹³¹ 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-founder¹³² of the company or organisation¹³³;
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 incorporated¹³⁴ at least one year before the call year¹³⁵;

¹²⁹ The applicant must apply as a natural person and not as a legal entity

¹³⁰ 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.

¹³¹ 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.

¹³² 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.

¹³³ Self-employment is not acceptable.

¹³⁴ 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.

¹³⁵ The company must be registered or incorporated before 1 January 2023.

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

In addition to the above, those applying for the Rising Innovators category must be aged under 35 at the start of the call year.¹³⁶ There is no age limit to apply for the Women Innovators category, though applicants eligible for several prize categories can only apply to one.

Applicants are expected to provide proof of eligibility upon request.

Applicants must support their written application with an inspiring video message about themselves and their achievements, lasting no more than 90 seconds.

The jury's assessment will be based on Parts A and B of the application form, as well as the video submitted by the applicant.

Award criteria

The prize is awarded to the applicants who in the opinion of the jury best address the following criteria:

1. **Breakthrough innovation** – the company or organisation founded or cofounded by the applicant is developing a breakthrough innovation focusing, among others, on DeepTech and Science Technology Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) fields. In presenting their innovation, the applicant should demonstrate what makes this innovation breakthrough in relation to other existing solutions.
2. **Impact** – this innovation addresses a real need or challenge, with significant benefits for people and/or the planet. The applicant will demonstrate how the company's or organisation's current performance and growth is driving a positive socio-economic and/or environmental impact, among others, in terms of wellbeing, education, profit, or job creation.
3. **Inspiration** – the applicant is an inspiring leader, who has played a pivotal role in the success of the company or organisation and is a role model empowering other women and girls in realising their full potential. The applicant should, for example, highlight her efforts to promote gender balance within the company, organisation or beyond, and/or to advocate for innovative initiatives that have positively contributed to gender equality in, e.g., access to finance, networks, product design, education and contributes to a gender-responsive innovation.

The jury will review and score all eligible applications and invite the shortlisted applicants to a hearing in front of the jury members to defend their application. This hearing may take place remotely.

¹³⁶ Those applying for the Rising Innovator category must be born on or after 1 January 1990.

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 2026
Deadline for submission of proposals	Q3 – Q4 2026
Award of the prize	Q1 – Q2 2027

Indicative Budget:

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

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

Cities and/or towns are faced with most severe societal and sustainability challenges but do also have the means to develop, promote, and apply effective innovative

solutions. They are the place where ideas, people, public and private actors meet and engage to improve the quality of life of citizens. They are the natural playground where breakthrough innovations flourish and nourish. They provide ground to experiment new technologies and products in a real environment, their interaction with people and their added value.

Objectives and Scope

The traditional city innovation ecosystem is opening to new models of innovation engaging citizens, ensuring their involvement in the decision-making process, and reinforcing democracy and rights. An increasing number of cities are acting as test beds for innovation and run people-driven initiatives to find solutions to societal challenges, such as climate change, digitalisation, sustainable growth or social cohesion, including through new endeavours such as nature-based solutions and EU Missions

The public domain is particularly challenged with finding effective ways to ensure the mainstreaming of these practices into the ordinary urban development process. Successful practices are particularly crucial to enhance the city's capacity to attract and retain new resources, funds and talents to stimulate the growth of breakthrough innovations. Moreover, collaboration and strengthening synergies among innovation ecosystems boost cities' development and resilience to tackle urban challenges and inspires many other cities follow a similar path.

The New European Innovation Agenda¹³⁷ 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.

¹³⁷ eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022DC0332

The second one, the **European Rising Innovative City** category, would include cities with a population of 50 000 and up to 249 999 inhabitants; and, based on the cumulative criteria set out below, would reward the winner (ranked 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 ¹³⁸ must be located in one of the Member States or Associated Countries to Horizon Europe.
2. For the category of the **European Capital of Innovation**, the candidate city must have a minimum population of 250 000 inhabitants. In countries where there are no such cities, the city coming closest to 250 000 inhabitants is eligible to apply for the European Capital of Innovation category, provided that it has a minimum population of 50 000 inhabitants and that the city did not apply for the European Rising Innovative City category. The candidate cities for the **European Rising Innovative City** category must have a population of 50 000 and up to 249,999 inhabitants. In countries where there are no such cities, the largest city by number of inhabitants is eligible.
3. Winners of former European Capital of Innovation Awards editions, as well as runners-up of the edition 2024 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

¹³⁸ A city is a Local Administrative Unit or a group of Local Administrative Units where a majority of the population lives in an urban centre of at least 50 000 inhabitants. Local Administrative Units and their respective population figures should be those set out in the latest available validated or partially validated LAU correspondence table published by Eurostat ([Local administrative units \(LAU\) - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#)) at the time of the submission of the application. Local authorities may represent one city defined as a Local Administrative Unit, or a "greater city" or Metropolitan region, taking account of Functional Urban Areas when relevant. Legal entities with separate legal personality from cities, even if founded and funded by the cities, are not eligible to apply.

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

2. **Escalating** – promoting the acceleration of the different actors of the local innovation ecosystem, supporting growth of highly innovative start-ups and SMEs establishing innovation friendly legal framework, creating an environment that stimulates growth and attracts private and public investments, resources, diversity and talents; and driving innovation demand through efficient innovation public procurement.

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

3. **Ecosystem building** – unlocking cities potential as local innovation ecosystem facilitators by fostering synergies among different innovation ecosystem players, from public, industry, start-ups, civil society, citizens to academia, to contribute to the development of an innovation ecosystem within the city. The applicant is expected to provide details on concrete results of the showcased initiatives.

4. **Expanding** – acting as a role model for other cities by supporting the dissemination and replication of tested solutions that boost the local innovation ecosystem; by promoting mutual learning, knowledge transfer and capacity building; and by enhancing cooperation and synergies between cities that are front-runners in driving the local innovation ecosystem, and those that are still exploring and testing their role as innovation enablers.

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

5. **City innovative vision** – applicants should demonstrate their long-term strategic vision/plan, highlighting the innovative initiatives that have positively contributed to the transformation of the city and which will further support the development of a sustainable and resilient innovation ecosystem ensuring the green and digital transition.

The applicant is expected to provide details on concrete results of the showcased initiatives. Moreover, the applicant is invited to provide information on how all showcased activities follow the innovative vision/strategy.

6. **Citizens' rights** – the use of innovation to strengthen democracy, to protect citizens' rights, to foster social cohesion, and ensure integration with a special view on minorities, gender, disability, or race.

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

The jury will review and score eligible applications and invite the shortlisted applicants to a hearing in front of the jury members to defend their application. This hearing may take place remotely.

Further details on the evaluation process and award criteria, as well as promotional activities will be specified in the rules for this contest published at the launch of the yearly contest.

Moreover, in this edition, the title “Capital of Innovation –iCapital- 2026” or “Rising Innovative city 2026” 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 intent¹³⁹ to commit on a series of actions to promote iCapital during the year.

For the common rules of contest for prizes, please see the Funding & Tenders Portal.

Expected results

The European Capital of Innovation Awards aim to champion inspiring cases of municipality-enabled innovation flourishing in cities. The Awards are a prestigious recognition for city administrators who are courageous enough to open up their governance practices to experimentation, to boost innovation by all means, to be a role model for other cities, and to push the boundaries of technology for the benefit of their citizens.

In addition to the monetary reward, the prize brings high visibility in the form of renewed public interest and increased media coverage.

A European prize to the most innovative cities ecosystems. 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 2026 budget will be allocated as follows:

European Capital of Innovation winner	EUR 1 000 000
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¹³⁹ 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.

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	
Deadline for submission of application	
Award of the prize	

IX. Other Actions

IX.1 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.¹⁴⁰

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 them¹⁴¹..

Type of action: Expert contract action.

Indicative budget: EUR 0.5 million

Indicative Opening: From Q1 2026

IX.2 External expertise for monitoring, ethics and policy advice

The EIC uses external independent experts for monitoring of projects¹⁴² 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

¹⁴⁰ 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.

¹⁴¹ As requested in Commission Decision C(2016) 3301 final

¹⁴² Including projects financed by the EIC pilot, SME instrument, Fast Track to Innovation, FET Open and FET Proactive under Horizon 2020.

and to the EIC Programme Managers) and project reviews for increases in Accelerator support¹⁴³.

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 interest¹⁴⁴.

Type of action: Expert contracts.

Indicative budget: EUR 5.4 million

Indicative opening: From Q1 2026.

IX.3 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 2026. Furthermore, this action supports the organisation of the EIC Awards Ceremonies, the organisation of the iCapital alumni network awards ceremony, as well as various communication activities around the EIC Prizes .

This action will also support a prominent EIC presence at key European Commission and /or third party events, ensuring high visibility of the EIC and selected beneficiaries, leading to increased impact in the visibility and branding of the EIC among key

¹⁴³ Necessary to implement Horizon Europe regulation [Article 48.12](#)

¹⁴⁴ [Commission Decision C\(2007\)5858](#)

audiences. This should allow the EIC to become a prominent voice in the ongoing debates relevant to innovation policy in Europe and globally. C communication and outreach should generate awareness and impact at international, European, national, regional and local levels.

Type of action: Public procurement actions.

Indicative opening: From Q1 2026.

Indicative budget: EUR 4 million

IX.5 EIC Data management and IT systems integration¹⁴⁵

The purpose of this action is to provide to the EIC the technical means to achieve the EIC Programme objectives.

This action covers the entire development lifecycle of the relevant IT tools and methodology including the development of user stories, functional and technical analysis, IT architecture and development of new functionalities, evolutive maintenance of existing IT components, cloud infrastructure architecture and provisioning, automatic /user testing of new features, IT helpdesk and user support while ensuring adequate IT project and team management, ensure security and IT governance compliance.

The focus in 2026, continues to build on the existing work done within the EIC and continues to ensure the evolutive maintenance of existing IT tools in support of the EIC, with the needed technical and usability improvements the EIC IT system, and develop new functionalities and features in response to evolving business processes and user needs. The objective is to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the EIC operations complementing the EC Corporate IT Tools.

The focus will also be on harnessing the data and information coming from internal and third-party sources to enable data-driven / strategic decision-making and strategic 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:

¹⁴⁵ The code developed to implement the IT components should be released in open source under code.europa.eu

- ✦ Further harmonise and consolidate data sources into a common data model and infrastructure for EIC. Develop needed webservices to exchange Business Acceleration Services (BAS) data with other EC IT systems and stakeholders including EIT, EIB, EIC Fund etc.
- ✦ Improve and expand the IT tools and interfaces built to support the daily operations management of EIC staff, including Project Officers, Programme Managers EIC Board Members as well as third parties such as staff of EIC Fund, EIB and service providers for the due diligence process involved in the negotiation, monitoring and other processes of EIC Accelerator projects and companies.
- ✦ EIC IT developments will also complement Corporate IT tools and the IT developments foreseen by EIC Fund, EIB, EIT and relevant third parties to cover the additional EIC actions and other specificities (such as STEP, etc.) .
- ✦ Update, improve and maintain the EIC Community to help EIC funded projects and companies in finding partners, relevant support and services to their activities and projects, facilitate business development, networking activities and the establishment of communities of practice (c.f. chapter V. Business Acceleration Services.) Where applicable, these actions will complement IT developments foreseen through Business Acceleration Services. The objective is also to further integrate the EIC Community with other corporate tools including CORDIS, Horizon Results Platform / EU Innovation platform, Innovation Radar.
- ✦ Update and improve the EIC Coaching system to automate administrative operations, generate statistics automatically and better integrate with the other EIC and EC corporate tools, while serving new business needs and stakeholders (c.f. chapter V. Business Acceleration Services.)
- ✦ Further develop and expand the event management back-office and front-end / communication tools in support of the Business Acceleration Services (BAS) and EIC Communication team.
- ✦ Provide IT support for the organisation of "EIC Prizes" such as iCapital and Women Innovators.
- ✦ Support capacity development and Learning on all EIC IT tools and methodologies for EIC stakeholders including evaluators, experts and beneficiaries on-line and through EU Academy training events.
- ✦ Update and improve the EIC support service management tool to automate and streamline support workflows for operational activities.
- ✦ Data repatriation, integration and exploitation (including through dashboards) of data collected by service providers and CSAs

- ✦ **Operational AI Support :** Support the integration and implementation of AI tools to support operational activities. This includes: Developing and deploying AI-powered tools to streamline and automate processes, integrating AI capabilities into existing IT systems and applications, ensuring seamless interaction between AI tools and human stakeholders. Improve usability, integration and seamless user experience across all the above tools, while increasing modularity and configurability of the IT tools developed, to increase their re-usability withing the EC services. Ensure maintenance and proper user support for all the tools made available.
- ✦ **Ensure EIC IT Tools developments and IT developments delegated to contracted third parties follow the evolving European Commission infrastructure, application development and security standards while ensuring their compliance with Commission Data and IT governance principles.**

The above developments will follow, as much as possible, the principles of open-source code and open data standards ensuring that both the tools and data generated can be reused by other institutions, Member States, Associated Countries and relevant third parties. AI development and implementation will be in accordance with the AI Act, European Commission's guidelines on AI and relevant corporate compliance rules.

Type of action: Public procurement action

Indicative budget: EUR [3] million

Indicative opening: From Q1 2026.

IX.5 Future-oriented strategic intelligence research to support EIC internal knowledge production and management

The purpose of this action is to extend the ongoing collaboration between EIC and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC). The goal is to solidify and expand EIC internal capacity by combining the production and management of future-oriented knowledge with best-in-class data-driven and expert-based inputs.

This is centred on evidence-based support to operational activities such as the proactive management by EIC Programme Managers, support to the EIC Feedback to Policy (F2P) mandate, or support to EIC equity related activities. The main work streams are to:

- Provide short and medium-term future-oriented evidence-based advice on signals and trends on emerging technologies and breakthrough innovations.

- Support the development of long-term strategic intelligence, grounded in anticipatory, collective, and hybrid methods, for knowledge transfer and capacity building; and
- Explore innovative future-oriented methodologies and anticipatory intelligence to support policy feedback and priority setting by the EIC.
- Assess the impact of EIC support on company development including comparative analysis with companies that have not received EIC support.
- Analyze and assess the impacts of EIC investments including the role of the EIC in developing European VC networks

Type of action: Administrative Agreement implying direct transfer of credits/budget to the JRC due to volume, complexity, and cost of services, including expert engagement

Indicative timetable: Q2 2026

Indicative budget: **EUR 400 000**

IX.6 European innovation gender and diversity index

This action aims to build on the foundational work of the GENDEX Pilot Project (2023–2025) and the European Parliament’s Pilot Project on the Gender Gap in Investments, transforming them into a fully operational, data-driven, and stakeholder-ready Gender & Diversity Index. These pilots have established the basis for a European-wide framework to measure and address gender and diversity disparities—particularly in deep tech, venture capital, and start-up ecosystems.

While SHE Figures remains the Commission’s flagship monitoring tool for gender equality in R&I, this action complements it by addressing underexplored areas such as investment flows, start-up dynamics, and venture ecosystems, offering more practical and actionable insights for funders, investors, and innovators.

Objectives

- Establish a bi-annual flagship report tracking key gender and diversity metrics across innovation and investment landscapes.
- Ensure continuity of findings from GENDEX and the EP Pilot Project, and explore synergies with She Figures.
- Revisit the GENDEX and EP Pilot Project on Gender Gap in Investments methodology, definitions, and data sets to incorporate new best practices and analytics, while also ensuring alignment with the She Figures reports.

- Provide actionable analytics, exploitation, dissemination and communication tools and frameworks to mainstream diversity;
- Support informed investment decisions through benchmarking tools and data visualisation dashboards.
- Align with EU instruments (She Figures, EIC data, Horizon Europe reporting) to improve coherence and data usability.
- Provide actionable tools (e.g. country fiches, handbooks, templates for diversity reporting) to support mainstreaming efforts.

Expected Deliverables

The contractor will:

1. Upgrade and operationalise the GENDEX Scorecard into a broader Gender & Diversity Index.
2. Validate and harmonise methodologies and definitions and data sets used in GENDEX and the EP Pilot Project.
3. Integrate multi-source datasets (public, commercial, EIC primary, surveys), ensuring quality, privacy, and consistency.
4. Develop an interactive user-friendly dashboard for easy access, filtering, and visualisation of data.
5. Create voluntary diversity reporting templates for start-ups, scale-ups, and investors (including API-compatible formats).
6. Produce tailored dissemination products (e.g. reports, infographics) targeting key stakeholder groups.
7. Draft a cross-country comparative index of gender equality performance across the EU.
8. Publish a policy report with 5–6 expert articles and a flagship synthesis report combining data and policy insights.

The implementation of the action will involve interactions with the Commission and an advisory panel, and the contractor is expected to organise workshops involving relevant users from the Commission and other stakeholders (e.g. investors) and engage in data sharing with other relevant initiatives (e.g. She Figures contractor, JRC Indicators Explorer, ERA Subgroup on Gender, INSPIRE).

Expected Impact

- Enhanced ability to identify and address diversity gaps at multiple levels
- Inputs to Evidence-based policy and funding decisions at EU, national, and organisational levels.
- Comparative benchmarking across Member States and Associated Countries.
- Contribution to ERA Policy Agenda Action 5: Promote gender equality and foster inclusiveness.
- Complementarity with She Figures, particularly for deep tech and venture finance contexts

Type of Action: Procurement

Indicative budget: EUR 700,000

IX.7 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. 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 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^[1].

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;
- 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: XXX

Deadline for applications: XXX 2026 at 17h00 Brussels local time

Indicative budget: EUR 4.3 million. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of proposals requesting other amounts if duly justified¹⁴⁶.

IX.8 Fees for the European Investment Bank for tasks related to the investment component of the EIC Accelerator

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

The European Investment Bank will receive an annual fee for these tasks.

Type of Action: Contribution agreement

Indicative budget: EUR 1 million

¹⁴⁶ flexibility in the duration will be expected to take into account the demand for booster grants.

X. Annexes

These Annexes set out the general conditions applicable to calls and topics for grants and other forms of funding under the EIC Work Programme 2026. They also describe the evaluation and award procedures and other criteria for Horizon Europe EIC funding.

If a call or topic deviates from the general conditions or includes additional conditions, this is explicitly stated for the call or topic in the main part of this EIC Work Programme.

Applicants are invited to read the call documentation on the topic page of the Funding & Tenders Portal ('Portal') carefully, and particularly these Annexes, the [Horizon Europe Programme Guide](#)¹⁴⁷, the [Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual](#)¹⁴⁸ and the [EU Grants AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement](#)¹⁴⁹. These documents provide clarifications and answers to questions on preparing the application.

¹⁴⁷ The Horizon Europe Programme Guide outlines the detailed guidance on the structure, budget and political priorities of Horizon Europe.

¹⁴⁸ The Online Manual outlines the procedures to register and submit applications online via the Funding & Tenders Portal and recommendations on preparing the application.

¹⁴⁹ 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 ¹⁵⁰	Budget EUR million
HORIZON-EIC-2026-PATHFINDEROPEN-01	
HORIZON-EIC-2026-PATHFINDERCHALLENGES-01	
HORIZON-EIC-2026-TRANSITIONOPEN-01-01	
HORIZON-EIC-2026-ACCELERATOROPEN-01 ^{151 152 153}	
Grant component	
Equity component	
HORIZON-EIC-2026-ACCELERATORCHALLENGES-0 229	
Grant component	

¹⁵⁰ 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](#).

¹⁵¹ 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.

¹⁵² The EIC Fund will receive an annual amount from the EIC Work Programme budget to cover administrative expenses and fees. This administrative budget covers the operation and administration expenses of any investment. These costs include any cost in relation to the acquisition, ownership or realisation of the investments. The administrative budget covers, among others, the fees payable to the EIC Fund Manager, other service providers, advisory, compensations to external experts, depositary and administrative agent fees, accounting, auditors, compliance procedures, communication and marketing, litigation or arbitration, statutory or regulatory fees, insurance premiums, taxes and other governmental charges and any other operational and administration costs and expenses as required. This budget will in average not exceed 10 % of the budget transferred for investments purposes. The indicative budget under indirect management is expected to be around EUR 729 million.

¹⁵³ 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.

Equity component	
HORIZON-EIC-2026-STEP-01	

Equity component	
Reserve amount for follow on investments and investment component of Grant First¹⁵⁴	
Other calls/ CSAs	
Grants to identified beneficiaries	
Prizes	
Public Procurement Actions	
Expert contracts	
EIB Fees	
Service Level agreement	
ESTIMATED TOTAL BUDGET	

¹⁵⁴ This reserve is to provide: i) additional amounts for follow-on investments under the provisions set out in Horizon Europe Regulation Article 48(12), second subparagraph, including for actions selected under Accelerator calls from previous years; and/or ii) an equity component to grant-first beneficiaries selected under the EIC Work Programmes 2021 to 2023. Such investments will be subject to an award decision and to the provision of information to the EIC and EIE Programme Committee. The amounts needed for such additional financing will be reviewed on a regular basis during the year and any unused amounts re-allocated to EIC calls within the flexibility of the amounts set out in this Work Programme.

Annex 2 General conditions

These general conditions are those applicable to calls and topics for grants and other forms of funding under the EIC Work Programme 2026. They also describe the evaluation and award procedures and other criteria for Horizon Europe EIC funding.

In particular, they outline:

- admissibility and eligibility criteria for participation and for receiving funding, the criteria for having the financial and operational capacity and for exclusion (sections A, B and C);
- award criteria, mandatory documents and evaluation procedure (sections D, E and F);
- legal and financial set-up of the grant agreements (Section G).

If a call or topic deviates from the general conditions or includes additional conditions, this is explicitly stated for the call or topic in the main part of this EIC Work Programme.

Applicants are invited to read the call documentation on the topic page of the Funding & Tenders Portal ('Portal') carefully, and particularly these Annexes, the Horizon Europe Programme Guide¹⁵⁵, the Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual¹⁵⁶ and the EU Grants AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement¹⁵⁷. These documents provide clarifications and answers to questions on preparing the application.

¹⁵⁵ The Horizon Europe Programme Guide outlines the detailed guidance on the structure, budget and political priorities of Horizon Europe.

¹⁵⁶ The Online Manual outlines the procedures to register and submit applications online via the Funding & Tenders Portal and recommendations on preparing the application.

¹⁵⁷ The AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement contains detailed annotations on all the provisions in the grant agreement that must be signed to obtain the grant.

A. ADMISSIBILITY

A.1 General admissibility conditions

Applications must be submitted before the **call deadline**.

Applications must be submitted **electronically** via the Funding & Tenders Portal electronic submission system (accessible via the topic page in the [Search Funding & Tenders](#) section). Paper submissions are NOT possible.

Applications must be submitted using the forms provided *inside* the electronic submission system (not the templates available on the topic page, which are only for information). The structure and presentation must correspond to the instructions given in the forms.

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 re-submit a version that conforms to these limits. After the call deadline, excess pages will be automatically made invisible, and will not be taken into consideration by the evaluators.

A.3 Concurrent submissions

For the EIC Accelerator, the applicant must not be in a situation of **concurrent submission/implementation**.

Concurrent **submission** exists when an applicant submits more than one proposal for evaluation to any EIC Accelerator call (including the EIC STEP Scale Up Call) before the evaluation feedback has been provided for the earlier submission. If a case of concurrent submission is identified, only the proposal submitted last (before the deadline) will be taken into consideration.

Concurrent **implementation** occurs when the awardee of an ongoing EIC Accelerator/EIC Pilot/SME instrument grant project submits another full proposal with a grant component before the first project reaches its end date.¹⁵⁸

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 organisations¹⁵⁹) is eligible to participate (whether it is eligible for funding or not), provided that the conditions laid down in the Horizon Europe Regulation¹⁶⁰ 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 personality¹⁶¹.


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.

¹⁵⁸ 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.

¹⁵⁹ 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).

¹⁶⁰ 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).

¹⁶¹ See Article 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

 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 beneficiary¹⁶² 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.

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 persons¹⁶³.

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'¹⁶⁴. 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).

¹⁶² See Article 190 EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

¹⁶³ See Article 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

¹⁶⁴ See Articles 201(2) and 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

Restrictions on participation in Innovation Actions, including the EIC Accelerator —

In accordance with the 2019 “EU-China – A Strategic outlook” communication, the 2021 “Global Approach to Research and Innovation” communication, and the joint conclusions of the 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 endeavor 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 and objectives in particular of Innovation Actions, cooperation with entities established in China needs to be calibrated accordingly.

Legal entities established in China are therefore not eligible to participate in Horizon Europe Innovation Actions, including the EIC Accelerator, in any capacity. This includes participation as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, third parties giving in-kind contributions, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any). Exceptions may be granted on a case-by-case basis for justified reasons. The above eligibility criteria may be reviewed in the future in accordance with policy developments. This exclusion is justified under Article 22(6) of the Horizon Europe Regulation given the substantive concerns regarding the use of intellectual property generated under this publicly funded programme, and the ongoing discussions between China and the EU on the Joint Roadmap for the future of EU-China cooperation in science, technology, and innovation.

Restrictions for the protection of European communication networks — The protection of European communication networks has been identified as an important security interest of the Union and its Member States.¹⁶⁵ In line with the Commission Recommendation on the cybersecurity of 5G networks of 2019¹⁶⁶ and the subsequent report on the EU coordinated risk assessment of the cybersecurity of 5G networks of 2019,¹⁶⁷ the EU Toolbox on 5G cybersecurity,¹⁶⁸ the second report on Member States’

¹⁶⁵ 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.

¹⁶⁶ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2019/534 of 26 March 2019 Cybersecurity of 5G networks, L 88/42.

¹⁶⁷ NIS Cooperation Group, Report on EU coordinated risk assessment of the cybersecurity of 5G networks, 9 October 2019.

¹⁶⁸ NIS Cooperation Group, EU Toolbox on 5G Cybersecurity, 29 January 2020.

progress in implementing the EU toolbox on 5G cybersecurity of 2023,¹⁶⁹ and the related Communication on the implementation of the 5G cybersecurity toolbox of 2023,¹⁷⁰ the Commission together with the Member States has worked to jointly identify and assess cyberthreats and security risks for 5G networks.¹⁷¹ 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 2023¹⁷² and the related Communication on the implementation of the 5G cybersecurity toolbox of 2023¹⁷³.

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);

¹⁶⁹ NIS Cooperation Group, Second report on Member States’ progress in implementing the EU Toolbox on 5G Cybersecurity, June 2023.

¹⁷⁰ Communication from the Commission: Implementation of the 5g cybersecurity Toolbox, Brussels, 15.6.2023 C(2023) 4049 final.

¹⁷¹ Within the NIS framework NIS 1 + 2 (Directive - 2022/2555 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu))

¹⁷² NIS Cooperation Group, Second report on Member States’ progress in implementing the EU Toolbox on 5G Cybersecurity, June 2023.

¹⁷³ Communication from the Commission: Implementation of the 5G cybersecurity Toolbox, Brussels, 15.6.2023 C(2023) 4049 final.

- the characteristics of the entity’s business and other conduct (e.g. a strong link to a third country government);
- the characteristics of the respective third country (e.g. legislation or government practices likely to affect the implementation of the action, including an offensive cyber/intelligence policy, pressure regarding place of manufacturing or access to information).
- (cyber-)security practices, including throughout the entire supply chain;
- risks identified in relevant assessments of Member States and third countries as well as other EU institutions, bodies and agencies, if relevant.

Exceptions may be requested from the Agency and will be assessed case-by-case, taking into account the criteria provided for in the 5G cybersecurity toolbox, the security risks and availability of alternatives in the context of the action.

Restrictions on participation or control — In line with Article 22(5) of the Horizon Europe Regulation, for actions related to EU strategic assets, interests, autonomy or security, the specific call/topic conditions may limit participation to legal entities established only in EU Member States or in EU Member States and specific associated or non-associated third countries. In this case, the eligible countries will be identified in the specific call/topic conditions. In addition, for duly justified and exceptional reasons, to guarantee protection of the strategic interests of the EU and its Member States, the specific call/topic conditions may also exclude the participation of legal entities directly or indirectly controlled by non-eligible third countries or by legal entities of non-eligible third countries (or make their participation subject to specific conditions).

EU restrictive measures —Entities subject to [EU restrictive measures](#) under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU)¹⁷⁴ as well as Article 75 TFEU¹⁷⁵ are not eligible to participate in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, third parties giving in-kind contributions, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any).

Applicants to the EIC Accelerator undertake that their Ultimate Beneficial Owners are not listed and, moreover, do not do business with customers, or make funds or economic resources available to, or for the benefit of (directly or indirectly) any natural or legal person designated under EU sanctions (Obligation of Result).

¹⁷⁴ 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](#).

¹⁷⁵ 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](#).

Special rules also apply to entities covered by Commission Guidelines No 2013/C 205/05¹⁷⁶.

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 2024¹⁷⁷ (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 actions – In line with Article 136 of the Financial Regulation¹⁷⁸, where necessary and duly justified and in line with Article 136 of the Financial Regulation, participation as a recipient¹⁷⁹ in Accelerator actions may, as an

¹⁷⁶ 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).

¹⁷⁷ (OJ L 229, 31.7.2014, p. 1–11).

¹⁷⁸ Regulation - 2021/695 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

¹⁷⁹ i.e., the legal entities which sign the grant agreement and/or the investment agreement and, on this basis, become beneficiaries of grants and/or investees respectively.

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 States¹⁸⁰

Aruba (NL), Bonaire (NL), Curaçao (NL), French Polynesia (FR), French Southern and Antarctic Territories (FR), Greenland (DK), New Caledonia (FR), Saba (NL), Saint Barthélemy (FR), Sint Eustatius (NL), Sint Maarten (NL), St. Pierre and Miquelon (FR), Wallis and Futuna Islands (FR).

- ★ countries associated to Horizon Europe – Pillar III¹⁸¹:

Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Georgia, Iceland, Israel, Kosovo¹⁸², Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom¹⁸³.

If the association agreement provides for an exclusion from the EIC Accelerator investment component, legal entities from that country are only eligible to apply for the 'grant-only' component of the EIC Accelerator.

Other third countries may become associated to Horizon Europe during the programme. For the purposes of the eligibility conditions, applicants established in other third countries negotiating association to Horizon

¹⁸⁰ 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.

¹⁸¹ 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.

¹⁸² 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.

¹⁸³ The United Kingdom is associated to the entire Horizon Europe Programme, with the only exception of the investment component of the EIC Accelerator managed by the EIC Fund (which is part of the EIC Accelerator of Horizon Europe that provides investments through equity or other repayable form), for award procedures implementing Union budget for the year 2024 and onwards.

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:¹⁸⁴.

Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Comoros, Congo (Democratic Republic), Congo (Republic), Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt (Arab Republic), El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Fiji, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic), Iraq, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kiribati, Korea (Democratic People's Republic), Kyrgyz Republic, Lao (People's Democratic Republic), Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Micronesia (Federated States), Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Niue, Pakistan, Palau, Palestine¹⁸⁵, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Rwanda, Samoa, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sudan, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tonga, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic), Vietnam, Yemen Republic, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Legal entities which are established in countries not listed above will be eligible for funding if provided for in the specific call/topic conditions, or if their participation is considered essential for implementing the action by the Agency.

Specific cases:

Affiliated entities — Affiliated entities are eligible for funding if they are established in one of the countries listed above, or in a country identified in the specific call/topic conditions.

¹⁸⁴ The list is correct at the time of adoption of this Work Programme. See the [Horizon Europe List of Participating Countries](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/programme-guide_horizon_en.pdf) https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/programme-guide_horizon_en.pdf on the Portal for a up-to-date list of these countries.

¹⁸⁵ 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.

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 eligibility criteria for consortium composition (if any).

The Joint Research Centre, international European research organisations and legal entities created under EU law are deemed to be established in a Member State other than those in which the other legal entities participating in the action are established.

Applications for 'Coordination and support' actions may be submitted by one or more legal entities, which may be established in a Member State, Associated Country or, in exceptional cases and if provided for in the specific call/topic conditions, in another third country.

B.4. Eligible activities

Eligible activities are the ones described in the call conditions. Applications will only be considered eligible if their content corresponds, wholly or in part, to the topic description for which it is submitted.

Projects must focus exclusively on civil applications and must not:

- ✦ aim at human cloning for reproductive purposes;
- ✦ intend to modify the genetic heritage of human beings which could make such changes heritable (exception for research relating to cancer treatment of the gonads, which may be financed);
- ✦ intend to create human embryos solely for the purpose of research or for the purpose of stem cell procurement, including by means of somatic cell nuclear transfer.

Projects must, moreover, comply with EU policy interests and priorities (environment, social, security, industrial policy, etc.).

B.5 Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs)

Where the specific call/topic conditions require a Technology Readiness Level (TRL), the definitions set out in the Glossary apply, unless otherwise specified.

B.6 Ethics

Projects must comply with ethical principles (including the highest standards of research integrity) and applicable EU, international and national law.

Applicants must have completed the ethics self-assessment as part of their application.

 For more information, see [How to complete your ethics self-assessment](#).

Projects involving ethics issues will have to undergo an ethics review to authorise funding and may be made subject to specific ethics requirements. These requirements become part of the grant agreement as ethics deliverables, e.g. ethics committee opinions/authorisations required under national or EU law.

B.7 Security — EU classified and sensitive information

Projects involving classified and/or sensitive information will have to go through the security appraisal process to authorise funding and may be made subject to specific security rules (detailed in the Security Section, which is annexed to the grant agreement). Specific provisions for EU-classified information (EUCI) and sensitive information (SEN) will be included in the grant agreement, as necessary and appropriate.

The rules for protecting EU-classified information (governed by Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/444¹⁸⁶ 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 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

¹⁸⁶ 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).

information agreement with the EU (or an administrative arrangement with the Commission);

- ★ disclosure of EU-classified information is subject to prior written approval by the European Commission.

Depending on the type of activity, FSCs may have to be provided before the grant is signed. The Agency will assess this for each case and fix the delivery date during the grant preparation stage. It is not possible to sign any grant agreement before at least one of the beneficiaries in the consortium has an FSC.

In certain cases, the project results might not require classification, but they might be sensitive and require restricted disclosure or limited dissemination for security reasons, according to the applicable security instructions in the Security Section. This means that, in principle, third parties should have no access to results subject to this type of restriction. Disclosure of this information is subject to prior written approval by the European Commission.

Further security recommendations may be added to the grant and contract agreement in the form of security deliverables (*e.g. establishing a security advisory board, appointing a project security officer, limiting the level of detail, using a fake scenario, etc.*).

In addition, EIC Awardees must ensure that their projects are not subject to national/third country security requirements that could affect implementation or put into question the award of the grants (*e.g. technology restrictions, national security classification, etc.*). Any potential security issues must be notified immediately to the Agency.

B.8 Gender equality plans and gender mainstreaming

Relevant EIC Awardees must take all measures to promote equal opportunities between men and women in implementing the action and, where applicable, in line with their gender equality plan. They must aim to achieve, to the extent possible, a gender balance at all levels of personnel assigned to the action, including at supervisory and managerial level.

In addition, to be eligible, legal entities from Member States and Associated Countries that are public bodies, research organisations or higher education establishments (including private research organisations and higher education establishments) must have a gender equality plan, covering the following minimum process-related requirements:

- ★ publication: a formal document published on the institution's website and signed by the top management;
- ★ dedicated resources: commitment of resources and expertise in gender equality to implement the plan;

- ✦ data collection and monitoring: sex/gender disaggregated data on personnel (and students, for the establishments concerned) and annual reporting based on indicators;
- ✦ training: awareness raising/training on gender equality and unconscious gender biases for staff and decision-makers.

Content-wise, it is recommended that the gender equality plan addresses the following areas, using concrete measures and targets:

- ✦ work-life balance and organisational culture;
- ✦ gender balance in leadership and decision-making;
- ✦ gender equality in recruitment and career progression;
- ✦ integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content;
- ✦ measures against gender-based violence including sexual harassment.


A self-declaration will be requested at proposal stage. If all the above-mentioned mandatory requirements are met through another strategic document, such as a development plan or an inclusion or diversity strategy, it can be considered as an equivalent. This eligibility criterion does not apply to other categories of legal entities, such as private for-profit organisations, including SMEs, non-governmental or civil society organisations.

B.9 Financial support to third parties

Where the specific call/topic conditions allow for financial support to third parties, the applicants must clearly describe in their proposal the objectives and the expected results, including the elements listed in the application template. The following conditions must also be fulfilled:

- ✦ projects must publish their open calls widely and adhere to EU standards of transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality;
- ✦ all calls for third parties and all calls that are implemented by third parties must be published on the Funding & Tenders Portal, and on the beneficiaries' websites;
- ✦ the calls must remain open for at least 2 months;
- ✦ if submission deadlines are changed, this must immediately be announced and registered applicants must be informed of the change;
- ✦ projects must publish the outcome of the calls without delay, including a description of third-party projects, the date of the award, the duration, and the legal name of the third party and country of establishment;
- ✦ the calls must have a clear European dimension.

Further conditions may be stipulated in the specific conditions for the topic.

 For more information, see AGA — *Annotated Model Grant Agreement, Articles 6.2.D.1 and 9.4.*

C. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

C.1 Financial capacity

Applicants must have **stable and sufficient resources** to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share. Organisations participating in several projects must have sufficient capacity to implement all these projects.

The financial capacity check will be done on the basis of the documents uploaded in the [Participant Register](#) during the grant preparation stage (e.g. profit and loss account and balance sheet, business plan, audit report produced by an approved external auditor, certifying the accounts for the last closed financial year, etc.). The analysis will be based on neutral financial indicators, but will also take into account other aspects, such as dependency on EU funding and deficit and revenue in previous years.

The check will normally be done for the coordinator and if the requested grant amount is equal to or greater than EUR 500 000, except for:

- ✦ public bodies (entities established as a public body under national law, including local, regional or national authorities) or international organisations; and
- ✦ cases where the individual requested grant amount is not more than EUR 60 000 (low-value grant).

If needed, it may also be done for the other applicants, including affiliated entities. If the financial capacity is structurally guaranteed by another legal entity, the financial capacity of that legal entity will be verified.


If the Agency considers that the financial capacity is not satisfactory, they may require: – further information;

- an enhanced financial responsibility regime, i.e. joint and several responsibility of affiliated entities (*see Section G below*); and

- prefinancing paid in instalments;

or

- propose no prefinancing;
- request that the applicant concerned is replaced or, if needed, reject the entire proposal.

 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)¹⁸⁷ or are in one of the following **exclusion situations**¹⁸⁸ 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);
- ✦ 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](#)¹⁸⁹ (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

¹⁸⁷ See Article 138 EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

¹⁸⁸ See Article 138 and 141, EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

¹⁸⁹ 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).

- ✦ they have created under a different jurisdiction an entity with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant).

Applicants will also be refused if they:¹⁹⁰

- ✦ 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 that the proposed work corresponds to the description in the work programme)	Impact	Quality and efficiency of the implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Clarity and pertinence of the project's objectives. ✦ Quality of the proposed coordination and/or support measures including soundness of methodology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Credibility of the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts specified in the Work Programme, and the likely scale and significance of the contributions due to the project. ✦ Suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ 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

¹⁹⁰ Article 143 EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#)

	as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities.	whole brings together the necessary expertise.
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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

Submission

All proposals must be submitted **electronically** via the Funders & Tenders Portal electronic submission system (accessible via the topic page in the [Search Funding & Tenders](#) section). Paper submissions are NOT possible.

Proposals must be **complete** and contain all parts and mandatory annexes and supporting documents.

The application form will have two parts:

- **Part A** (to be filled in directly online) contains administrative information about the applicant organisations (future coordinator and beneficiaries and affiliated entities and/or investees), the summarised budget for the proposal and call-specific questions;

- **Part B** (to be downloaded from the Portal submission system, completed and then assembled and re-uploaded as a PDF in the system) contains the technical description of the project.

Annexes and supporting documents will be directly available in the submission system and must be uploaded as PDF files (or other formats allowed by the system).

Proposals should be designed to stay as close as possible to the award criteria (*see Section D above*). The application form will help to achieve this.

When submitting the proposal, the coordinator will have to confirm that they have the mandate to act for all applicants. Moreover, they will have to confirm that the information in the application is correct and complete and that all participants comply with the conditions for receiving EU funding (especially eligibility, financial and operational capacity, exclusion, etc.). Proposals not complying with these requirements, where applicable, will be rejected. Before signing the grant, each participant will have to confirm this again by signing a declaration of honour.

For lump sum grant proposals, the estimated budget must be described in a detailed budget table. This will be used as a basis for justifying and/or fixing the lump sum amount. As the lump sum must be an approximation of the costs actually incurred, the costs included in this detailed budget table must comply with the basic eligibility conditions for EU actual cost grants (*see AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement, Article 6*). This is particularly important for purchases and subcontracting, which must ensure best value for money (or, if appropriate, the lowest price) and be free from any conflicts of interest. If the budget table contains ineligible costs, the grant may be reduced (even later on during implementation of the project or after its end). Exceptionally, the Decision authorising the use of lump sum funding for a specific action might specify that a detailed budget table is not required.

 **Applicants may be asked at a later stage for further documents (for legal entity validation, financial capacity check, bank account validation, etc.).**

F. PROCEDURE

F.1 Evaluation procedure and ranking

Proposals will be checked for formal requirements (admissibility and eligibility) and then evaluated (for each topic separately) for operational capacity and award criteria (*see Sections C and D above*) by an **evaluation committee** composed of independent external experts and then ranked according to their quality score.

For lump sum grants proposals, comments on the detailed lump sum budget table will be provided in the Evaluation Summary Report only for proposals invited to grant agreement preparation (or placed in the reserve list) and ones rejected (in part) due to significant overestimation or underestimation of costs.

Exceptionally, where indicated in the specific call/topic conditions, the evaluation committee may be composed partially or, in the case of 'Coordination and support actions', partially or fully of representatives of EU institutions.

For proposals with the same score within a single budget envelope (with the exception of the first stage of two-stage submissions) a method to establish the **priority order** will be determined, taking into consideration the objectives of the specific topic. In the absence of special arrangements in the specific call/topic conditions, the following method will apply:

For each group of proposals with the same score, starting with the group achieving the highest score and continuing in descending order:

- 1) Proposals that address aspects of the call that have not otherwise been covered by more highly ranked proposals will be considered to have the highest priority.
- 2) The proposals identified under 1), if any, will themselves be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for 'Excellence'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on scores for 'Impact'. In the case of 'Innovation actions', priority will be given to the score for 'Impact', followed by that for 'Excellence'.
- 3) If necessary, the gender balance among the researchers with a leading role named in the researchers table in the proposal, will be used as a factor for prioritisation.
- 4) If necessary, any further prioritisation will be based on geographical diversity, defined as the number of Member States or Associated Countries represented in the proposal, not otherwise receiving funds from projects higher up the ranking list (and if equal in number, then by budget).
- 5) If a distinction still cannot be made, the panel may decide to further prioritise by considering other factors related to the objectives of the call, or to Horizon Europe in general. These may include, for example, enhancing the quality of the project portfolio through synergies between projects or, where relevant and feasible, involving SMEs. These factors will be documented in the panel report.
- 6) The method described in 1), 2), 3) and 4) will then be applied to the remaining equally ranked proposals in the group.

At the end of the evaluation, all applicants will be informed of the result in an evaluation result letter. Successful proposals will be invited to the next stage, 'grant preparation'; the other proposals will be put on the reserve list or rejected.

⚠️ No commitment to provide funding — Invitation to the grant preparation stage does NOT constitute a formal commitment to funding. Various legal checks are still needed before the grant can be awarded, such as legal entity validation, financial capacity verification, exclusion check, etc.

⚠️ If indicated in the specific call/topic conditions, proposals may also receive a **Seal of Excellence** ¹⁹¹ and/or a **Sovereignty (STEP) Seal** ¹⁹² 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 consent, display in the STEP Portal with the aim of enhancing the visibility of the project and attract potential investors.

⚠️ **Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)**¹⁹³ — 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 consent, 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).

¹⁹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/seal-excellence_en.

¹⁹² [Sovereignty seal - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁹³ 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).

Only the procedural aspects of an evaluation may be the subject of a request for an evaluation review. The evaluation of the merits of a proposal will not be the subject of an evaluation review.

A request for an evaluation review must relate to a specific proposal and must be submitted within 30 days after the beneficiary accesses the evaluation results. The deadlines will be counted from the date of opening/access. The maximum size limit of the request is 7 000 characters. Notifications of evaluation results which have not been opened in the Funding & Tenders Portal within 10 days after sending are considered to have been accessed (see also [Funding & Tenders Portal Terms and Conditions](#)).

An evaluation review committee will provide an opinion on the procedural aspects of the evaluation. The evaluation review committee may recommend a re-evaluation of the proposal, to be carried out primarily by evaluators who were not involved in the previous evaluation, or a confirmation of the initial evaluation.

F.3 Indicative timetable for evaluation and for signature of the grant agreement

Unless otherwise stated in the specific call/topic conditions, the timing for evaluation and grant preparation is as follows:

- 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, if agreed with the Agency¹⁹⁴.

¹⁹⁴ Article 196 EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

The project duration is provided in months (extensions will be possible only exceptionally, for duly justified reasons and if the Agency agrees).

G.2 Milestones and deliverables

The milestones and deliverables for each project will be managed through the grant management system in the Portal and are reflected in Annex 1 of the grant agreement.

The standard deliverables will be set out in the specific call/topic conditions.

G.3 Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount

The grant parameters (maximum grant amount, funding rate, total eligible costs, etc.) will be fixed in the grant agreement (*Data Sheet, point 3 and Article 5*).

The project budget is provided in EUR. The amount of the grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

For **actual cost grants**, the grant will be a budget-based, mixed actual cost grant. This means that it will reimburse ONLY certain types of costs (eligible costs) and ONLY those costs *actually* incurred for the project (NOT the *budgeted* costs).

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:
 - o personnel costs (unless declared as a unit cost; see below);
 - o subcontracting costs;
 - o purchase costs (unless declared as a unit cost; see below); and
 - o costs of providing financial support to third parties (if provided for in the specific call conditions);
- units (i.e. an amount per unit) for:
 - o personnel unit costs;
 - o personnel costs of SME owners/natural persons not receiving a salary;
 - o personnel costs calculated by the beneficiaries according to their usual cost accounting practices (average personnel costs);
 - o costs of internally invoiced goods and services calculated by the beneficiaries according to their usual cost accounting practices; and
 - o 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:
 - o indirect costs (25% flat-rate of the total eligible direct costs, excluding eligible direct costs for subcontracting, financial support to third parties and any unit costs or lump sums which include indirect costs);
- lump sum (i.e. a global amount deemed to cover all costs of the action or a specific category of costs, if provided for in the specific call/topic conditions).

Within a grant, different forms of costs can be used.

Costs can also be declared under several EU Synergy grants, if the cumulative funding under the grants does not exceed 100% of the eligible costs and the contributions declared to them.

G.5 Reporting & payment arrangements

The reporting and payment arrangements are fixed in the grant agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4 and articles 21 and 22*).

After the grant has been signed, the consortium will normally receive a float to start working on the project (normally, pre-financing of 160% of the average EU funding per reporting period (i.e. maximum grant amount/number of periods); exceptionally, less or no pre-financing). For actions with only one reporting period, it will be less, since 100% would mean the totality of the grant amount.

Payments will be automatically lowered if one of the consortium members has outstanding debts towards the EU (granting authority or other EU bodies). Such debts will be offset by the Agency, in line with the conditions set out in the grant agreement (*see Article 22*).

At the moment of the prefinancing payment, an amount ranging from 5% to 8% of the maximum grant amount will be deducted from the prefinancing payment and transferred to the mutual insurance mechanism. This mechanism covers the risks associated with non-recovery of sums due from the beneficiaries.

There will be one or several interim payments linked to a periodic report, depending on the duration of the project.

At the end of the project, the consortium will be invited to submit a report on the basis of which the final grant amount will be calculated. If the total of earlier payments is higher than the final grant amount, the beneficiaries concerned (or the coordinator) will be asked to pay back the difference (recovery).

G.6 Certificates

Depending on the size of the grant amount and on the type of beneficiaries, beneficiaries may be required to submit a certificate on the financial statements. The thresholds for this certificate are fixed in the grant agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4 and Article 24*).

G.7 Liability regime for recoveries

The liability regime for recoveries is that of individual financial responsibility. Each beneficiary is liable only for their own debt (and those of its affiliated entities, if any) (*Data Sheet point 4.4 and Article 22*).

G.8 Provisions concerning project implementation

- Proper implementation of the action (*Article 11*).
- Conflict of interest (*Article 12*).
- Confidentiality and security (EU classified information) (*Article 13 and Annex 5*).

- Ethics (research integrity) and values (gender mainstreaming) (*Article 14 and Annex 5*).
- Data protection (*Article 15*).
- Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), background and results, access rights and rights of use (*Article 16 and Annex 5*).

In addition to the standard provisions, the following specific provisions in the model grant agreement will apply to all grants awarded under this work programme:

Additional exploitation obligations in case of a public emergency: If requested by the Agency, beneficiaries must grant non-exclusive licences to their results – for a limited period of time specified in the request and on fair and reasonable conditions – to legal entities that need the results to address the public emergency. These legal entities must commit to rapidly and broadly exploiting the resulting products and services on fair and reasonable conditions. This provision will apply up to 4 years after the end of the action.

Additional information obligation relating to standards: Unless stated otherwise in the specific call conditions, beneficiaries must, up to 4 years after the end of the action, inform the Agency if the results could reasonably be expected to contribute to European or international standards.

Please also see Annex 6 of this Work Programme.

Where provided for in the specific call conditions, the Agency may, up to 4 years after the end of the action, object to a transfer of ownership or to the exclusive licensing of results, as set out in the specific provision of *Annex 5*.

- Communication, dissemination, open science and visibility (*Article 17 and Annex 5*).
In addition to the standard provisions, the following specific provisions in the model grant agreement will apply to all grants awarded under this work programme:

Open science - additional practices, validation of scientific publications: Beneficiaries must provide (digital or physical) access to data or other results needed to validate the conclusions of scientific publications, to the extent that their legitimate interests or constraints are safeguarded (and unless they already provided the (open) access at publication).

Open science - additional practices, public emergency: In case of a public emergency, if requested by the granting authority, beneficiaries must immediately deposit any research output in a repository and provide open

access to it under a CC BY licence, a public domain dedication (CC 0) or equivalent.

As an exception, if providing open access would be against the beneficiaries' legitimate interests, the beneficiaries must grant non-exclusive licences, on fair and reasonable conditions, to legal entities that need the research output to address the public emergency. These legal entities must commit to rapidly and broadly exploiting the resulting products and services on fair and reasonable conditions. This exception is limited to 4 years after the end of the action.

- Specific rules for carrying out the action (*Article 18 and Annex 5*).

Other provisions may be set out in the specific call/topic conditions.

G.9 Non-compliance and breach of contract

The grant agreement (*Chapter 5*) provides for the measures that may be taken in case of breach of contract (and other violations of law).

 For more information, see the [AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement](#).

Annex 3 Fast Track scheme to apply for the EIC Accelerator

The 'Fast Track' scheme is a specific process applicable to the EIC Accelerator. It provides for a specific treatment of proposals that result from existing Horizon Europe or Horizon 2020 projects.

Under the Fast Track scheme, applicants do not apply directly to the EIC Accelerator call (Section V). Instead, a project review is carried out by the responsible granting authority or national funding body to assess the innovation or market deployment potential of an existing project, and to decide whether the project is suitable for support under the EIC Accelerator.

The project review – implemented by the granting authority or national funding body responsible for the programme – must be conducted using:

- ✦ award criteria equivalent to the ones set out for the short application stage of the EIC Accelerator regarding excellence and impact (Section V), centred on the underlying idea of that potential new action;
- ✦ a project review process that guarantees an independent assessment and is carried out within the previous two years in compliance with Article 48 of the Horizon Europe Regulation.

The responsible granting authority or national funding body can submit the outcome of the projects review to the EIC Accelerator, if the project review concludes that the following conditions are met:

- ✦ the proposal meets the first two criteria of the EIC Accelerator (i.e. excellence and impact);
- ✦ there is no duplication of funding of activities to be supported under the EIC Accelerator with the existing grant; and
- ✦ the applicant meets the eligibility criteria for the EIC Accelerator.

Fast Track applicants will then be invited to prepare a full proposal for the EIC Accelerator following the notification about the successful result of the initial review. The Fast track Accelerator applicants will be submitted to the same submission limitations that apply to the EIC Accelerator.

They will receive coaching as specified in Section V.

Full proposals to the EIC Accelerator stemming from the Fast Track scheme will be assessed as set out in Section V, and will be treated in exactly the same way as all other full proposals.

In 2026, the national funding bodies, schemes, projects and beneficiaries which are eligible for the Fast Track for EIC Accelerator cut-off dates are:

- ✦ The EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition projects (including under EIC pilot) managed by the Agency;
- ✦ Relevant schemes managed by the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), as identified as relevant by each KIC;
- ✦ Funding schemes for SMEs supported under the Eurostars-2 Joint Programme and the Partnership on Innovative SMEs managed by the Eureka secretariat and relevant national bodies;
- ✦ Companies awarded a grant only under the Horizon 2020 EIC pilot Accelerator and the Horizon Europe EIC Accelerator managed by the Agency.¹⁹⁵ ▪
Companies awarded grants under the Pre-accelerator funding scheme; ▪
Companies awarded grants under the Women Tech.EU scheme.

These national funding bodies are responsible for implementing the Fast Track scheme in accordance with the above provisions. They may decide not to implement the scheme or to introduce it at a later stage.

Subject to experience with the Fast Track scheme, the scheme may be opened to other parts of Horizon Europe and Horizon 2020, and to the funding bodies responsible for their implementation.

The EIC website will provide up to date information about how the Fast Track scheme is being implemented by the relevant funding bodies.

¹⁹⁵ 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,¹⁹⁶ 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:

¹⁹⁶ Article 198(e) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

- ✦ 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.¹⁹⁷

EIC Awardees or other potential booster grant beneficiary as indicated above can be invited to apply at any time for an Booster grant following a positive recommendation from an EIC Programme Manager or a project review or a participation in the EIC Tech2Market BAS programme, in particular Business Validation Programme and/or Venture Building Programme (Opportunities exploration phase or Team creation). Each proposal will be assessed in accordance with Article 29, paragraph 2, of Horizon Europe Regulation taking into account the following considerations ("award criteria"):

For activities to explore potential pathways to commercialisation:

- ✦ Timeliness and pertinence of the activities proposed (Excellence);
- ✦ Potential of the proposed Deeptech innovation to create new market or to solve pressing societal needs / problems (Impact);
- ✦ Expertise, capabilities and motivation of the applicants to take this innovation forward to the market (Quality and efficiency of implementation).

For portfolio activities:

- ✦ Contribution of the activity to the objectives of the EIC Portfolio (Excellence);
- ✦ Timeliness of the activity proposed to maximise its impact (Impact);

¹⁹⁷ This includes affiliated entities that are participating in the Pathfinder or Transition projects.

- ✦ Engagement of EIC Portfolio's projects and relevant external partners (Quality and efficiency of implementation).

Each proposal will be evaluated by a mixed evaluation committee composed of:

- ✦ An EIC Programme Manager.
- ✦ An external expert selected from a limited pool of trained experts, covering the broad technology areas.
- ✦ Either an EIC Project Officer or a second external expert.

The evaluation committee will assess whether the proposal meets each of the award criteria and will give a GO or NO GO. Proposals receiving at least two GO will be selected. Proposals not receiving at least two GO will be rejected. The evaluation committee may invite a rejected applicant to resubmit an adjusted proposal.

The implementation of Booster grants for Innovation activities will be performed by the CSA beneficiary selected under the call for proposals HORIZON-EIC-2024BOOSTER.

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

In accordance with the Horizon Europe Regulation,¹⁹⁸ 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 results²⁸²

- 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:

¹⁹⁸ In accordance with Recital (85) and notably the second indent of Article 39(1) of Horizon Europe Regulation. ²⁸² 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 consent of the owner, and then only under conditions of confidentiality equal to those provided under this section; and
- ✦ use the same degree of care to protect its confidentiality as the EIC awardee uses to protect its own confidential information of a similar nature; and
- ✦ act in good faith at all times; and

- ✦ not use any of it for any purpose other than assessing opportunities to propose other research or innovation activities to the EIC, or any other initiative agreed by the owner.

These EIC Awardees may disclose any such information to their employees and, with the prior authorisation of the owner, to their subcontractors established in a Member State or an Associated Country if these subcontractors:

- ✦ need to access it for the performance of their work with respect to the purpose permitted as above; and
- ✦ are bound by a written agreement or professional obligation to protect its confidentiality in the way described in this section.

No obligations are imposed upon the EIC Awardee where such information:

- ✦ is already known to the EIC awardee before and is not subject to any other obligation of confidentiality; or
- ✦ is or becomes publicly known through no act by or default by/of the EIC awardee; or
- ✦ is obtained by the EIC awardee from a third party and in circumstances where the EIC awardee has no reason to believe that there has been a breach of an obligation of confidentiality.

The restrictions in this section do not apply if such information is required to be disclosed by any law or regulation, by any judicial or governmental order or request, or pursuant to disclosure requirements relating to the listing of the stock of the EIC awardee on any recognised stock exchange.

Upon the end or termination of the grant agreement or of the participation of the EIC awardee, it must immediately cease to use the said information, except if otherwise directly agreed with the owner, or if the EIC awardee remains a member of the EIC Community referred to under section 2.1.b.

The provisions of this section will be in force for a period of 60 months following the end or the termination of the grant agreement or of the participation of the EIC awardee, at the end of which period they will cease to have effect.

3. Specific provisions on intellectual property and related dissemination and exploitation activities

3.1 – Plan for exploitation and dissemination

EIC Awardees must report to the Agency on their exploitation and dissemination activities:

- ✦ in accordance with the grant agreement, together with any updated version of the plan for exploitation and dissemination;
- ✦ within 30 days upon request from the EIC Programme Manager for the purpose of EIC portfolio activities.

The Agency may also request an update of the plan for exploitation and dissemination of the results at any time during the implementation of the action.

EIC Awardees must address and agree in their Consortium agreement on all related intellectual property issues, from ownership and co-ownership of results to the consortium's internal approval process for their dissemination. EIC Awardees must also identify therein any pre-existing technology fitting the action's needs and objectives and try to reach appropriate licensing agreement between them to prevent research funding redundancy.

The EIC Awardees are deemed to have signed the Consortium agreement at the date of the signature of this grant agreement. The Agency may require a copy at any time in accordance with the grant agreement.

3.2 – Dissemination activities

Each EIC awardee will propose and undertake dissemination activities of the plan for exploitation and dissemination agreed by the Agency with the aim of supporting innovation in the European Union and fostering the development of the EIC Community, opting for publications as main route to bring technical and scientific knowledge to the public.

When approving the plan for exploitation and dissemination of the results or any update, the Agency may subject any proposed dissemination activity to one or a combination of the following conditions:

- ✦ the prior assessment of any innovation potential of the results to be disseminated,
- ✦ the prior protection of the result to be disseminated, in accordance with the grant agreement, the cost being eligible;

Where the Agency disagrees to a dissemination activity, it will actively assist the EIC Awardees to achieve compliance with the required conditions, without unreasonable delay and in due time, notably by proposing complementary EIC support for exploitation or a support of the Business Acceleration Services, as detailed and referred to under section VII. Where the Agency agrees to a dissemination activity, it will abide to the grant agreement.

The Agency is hereby entrusted with the right to also disseminate and promote the exploitation of any results that are made public by the EIC awardee or with its assent.

3.3 – Exploitation of results

EIC Awardees must use their best efforts to exploit their results or have them exploited by a third party, in priority those established in a Member State or an Associated Country, including through transfer or licensing. The Agency may object to a transfer of ownership or the exclusive licensing of results under certain conditions as detailed in the EIC grant agreement.

EIC Awardees must report on any exploitation operation :

- ✦ at the reporting periods provided for in the grant agreement;
- ✦ with the periodicity agreed at the end of the action together with the final exploitation and dissemination plan;
- ✦ within 30 days upon request from the Agency, within 4 years after final payment.

Each EIC Awardee agrees upon signature of the grant agreement, to ensure the necessary support or access rights for the further development and exploitation of results that any of its EIC Inventors have contributed to (respecting the transfer rule).

If the EIC Awardee provides financial or other support to the EIC Inventor for any such exploitation, royalties or other returns may be shared with the EIC Awardee on mutually beneficial terms, provided the conclusion of any such agreement does not prevent the EIC Inventor(s) to exercise their rights. Such financial support should include as a minimum the full or partial funding of the costs of relevant Intellectual Property Right protection in major jurisdictions. Other support includes expertise, access to infrastructure and facilities, or other forms of support. The royalties and other returns to the EIC Awardee should be fair and proportionate to the financial and other support provided.

If the EIC Awardee does not commit to provide support within a maximum period of 6 months from the date of the first formal request from the EIC Inventor, or that support is manifestly inadequate, then the EIC Awardee must entrust sufficient access rights to allow the EIC Inventor to further develop and exploit the result. If the EIC Awardee does not provide support for exploitation, then by default the access rights to the EIC Inventor are royalty free.

The EIC Inventor must inform the EIC Awardee in due time before any exploitation activity they intend to undertake, and report to the EIC Awardee on the implementation of the exploitation activity.

If the EIC Awardee considers that the exploitation activity could negatively affect its own exploitation activities:

- ✦ In the absence of any approved exploitation and dissemination plan, the EIC Awardee may request to the Agency the suspension of the access rights of a given EIC Inventor, by demonstrating that their use puts negatively at stake their future strategy of or ongoing valorisation activities.
- ✦ Where an exploitation and dissemination plan has been approved, the EIC Awardee may directly suspend the access rights of a given EIC Inventor if this would negatively affect the implementation of the said approved plan. The EIC Inventor may request the Agency to lift that suspension by demonstrating that the exercise of the access rights does not affect the said plan.

3.4 – Failure to exploit or disseminate

The Agency is entrusted with the right to disseminate and promote the exploitation of results that have not been made public through dissemination activities or patent or protection by any other IPR, where the EIC awardee owning it:

- ✦ does not provide any information regarding exploitation or dissemination of those results; or
- ✦ neither intends to exploit nor disseminate those results; or
- ✦ declares to continue research activities on those results but without a view of their subsequent exploitation; or
- ✦ where, despite its best efforts, no exploitation or dissemination takes place within the delays provided in the final exploitation and dissemination plan set out in the grant agreement and in the absence of any demonstrated alternative exploitation or dissemination opportunity.

Where the EIC awardee continues to oppose to the dissemination by the Agency or refuses to provide any data or document necessary for the said dissemination, the Agency may impose penalties in accordance with the grant agreement.