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Annex

# European Innovation Council (EIC) Work Programme 2024

European  
Innovation  
Council



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

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## Who should read this document?

This document presents the 2024 European Innovation Council (EIC) Work Programme funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. It sets out how the EIC will allocate its funding of over EUR 1.2 billion for the year 2024 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), and founders 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 and 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, 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** ([Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eip/eip_en/index.cfm)) and through the **Enterprise Europe Network** (<https://een.ec.europa.eu/>).

**Applications** are made apply through the EU Funding and Tender Opportunities 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, which are critical for EU policies to achieve the green and digital transition and help ensure future open strategic autonomy in critical technologies.

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

### Six Strategic Goals for the EIC:

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

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

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

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

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

In addition, the EIC Board has published a set of recommendations to improve the participation of innovators from widening countries in the EIC.<sup>4</sup> The recommendations will be 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 2024 Work Programme

The funding and support available in 2024 is organised into three main funding schemes: the EIC Pathfinder for advanced research to develop the scientific basis to underpin breakthrough technologies (Section II); the EIC Transition to validate technologies and develop business plans for specific applications (Section III); and the EIC Accelerator to support companies (SMEs, start-ups, spin-offs and in exceptional cases small mid-caps) to bring their innovations to market and scale them up (Section IV). In each case, the direct financial support to innovators is augmented with access to a range of Business Acceleration Services (Section V) providing access to leading expertise, corporates, investors and ecosystem actors.

All of the main calls (Pathfinder, Transition, 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, including to support initiatives such as Net Zero Industry, Critical Raw Materials, the Chips Act, and Health Emergency Responses. Outside of the 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 VI), and additional supporting actions allowing the functioning of the EIC such as expert contracts, data management, communication and IT (Section VII).

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

Linkages between these funding schemes will be maximised through proactive management (see below) and new approaches, such as additional 'Booster' grants to ongoing 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 2024<sup>5</sup>**

Call	Who can apply	What for	EIC Open		EIC Challenges		
			Deadlines	Indicative Budget (EUR million)	EIC Challenge	Deadlines/ Cut-offs	Indicative Budget (EUR million)
<b>EIC Pathfinder</b>	Open call: only consortia can apply. Challenges call: smaller consortia (at least two eligible entities) or and single applicants as well as larger consortia.	Open Call: Grants up to EUR 3 million Challenge Call: Grants up to EUR 4 million. Higher amounts if duly justified. Projects to achieve the proof of principle and validate the scientific basis of breakthrough technologies (starting from early TRLs aiming at achieving TRL3 or 4)	7 March 2024	136	"Solar-to-X" devices Towards cement and concrete as a carbon sink Nature inspired alternatives for food packaging and films. Nanoelectronics for energy-efficient smart edge devices Protecting EU space infrastructure	16 October 2024	120
<b>EIC Transition</b>	Single applicants (SMEs, spin-offs, start-ups, research organisations, universities) or small consortia (minimum 2, maximum 5 eligible entities).	Grants of up to EUR 2.5 million to validate and demonstrate technology in application-relevant environment (starting at TRL 3/ 4 aiming at achieving TRL 5/ 6) and develop business and market readiness.	18 <sup>th</sup> September 2024	94			
<b>EIC Accelerator</b>	Single start-ups and SMEs (including spin-offs), individuals (intending to launch a start-up/ SME) and in exceptional cases small mid-caps (fewer than 499 employees).	Grant component below EUR 2.5M for innovation activities (starting at TRL 5 or 6 aiming at achieving higher TRLs) Investment component of EUR 0.5 up to 15 million for scaling up and other activities. Grant only and investment only component under certain conditions.	Short applications: any time (continuous) Full applications: 13 March 2024 3 October 2024	375	Human Centric Generative AI Virtual worlds and augmented interaction, including support to Industry 5.0 Enabling the smart edge & quantum technology components Food from precision fermentation and algae Monoclonal antibody-based therapeutics for emerging viruses Renewable energy sources and their whole value chain	Short applications: any time (continuous) Full applications: 13 March 2024 3 October 2024	300

<sup>5</sup> This table provides a simplified overview. All applicants need to read the relevant sections for the full information on eligibility and conditions for funding. Specific consortia eligibility conditions are described in Annex 2 of this current document. 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 deadline(s) by up to two months.



## Main changes of the 2024 Work Programme

The 2024 Work Programme incorporates adjustments, improvements and simplifications compared to the 2023 Work Programme, based on advice from the EIC Board, the reduced budget available (due to ending of the Next Generation EU budget) and experience and feedback from implementation.

Specific changes include:

### General:

- ✦ The introduction of lump sum cost model in most EIC main calls (except Pathfinder Open). This will remove financial reporting requirements for beneficiaries.
- ✦ Reinforced measures to protect against economic security risks (see below)
- ✦ The budget for all the main EIC calls has been reduced for two reasons: 1) the withdrawal of Next Generation EU contribution 2) the need to reserve budget for follow on financing for companies selected under previous EIC Accelerator calls as foreseen in the set-up of the EIC.

### EIC Pathfinder:

- ✦ The rebuttal pilot has been removed from the EIC pathfinder evaluation process.
- ✦ The specific rules on Intellectual Property have been updated following the recommendations of the EIC Board<sup>6</sup>.

### EIC Transition:

- ✦ There are no challenge topics under the Transition call.
- ✦ The eligibility of the EIC Transition Open has been extended to results stemming from Horizon 2020 Societal challenges and Leadership in Industrial Technologies and from Horizon Europe Pillar II projects fulfilling the eligibility criteria (see call text)
- ✦ The EIC Transition Open has a single deadline.

### EIC Accelerator:

- ✦ There is no longer the "grant first" form of support, but beneficiaries of "blended finance" may start with grant only funding with the investment component provided at a later stage.

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<sup>6</sup> [EICBoard Statement IP Provisions 26Apr2023.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

- ✦ The criteria to pass the short application stage require 3 out of 4 GOs from the expert evaluators.
- ✦ Introduction of consensus meetings for the evaluation of full applications if there are divergent views among evaluators.
- ✦ The evaluation criteria for excellence, includes an evaluation element to assess excellence of the company.
- ✦ The jury will not be able to change the form of support (e.g., between grant only, blended finance and equity only) or change the amount of equity requested, although they may make recommendations on the amount of equity finance which will be considered by the EIC Fund.
- ✦ In case of a “No Go” at the jury interview phase, applicants will immediately receive a rejection letter and where eligible be awarded the Seal of Excellence
- ✦ New application resubmission limits apply.

## 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 EIC 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.

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

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

Moreover, EIC takes a proactive approach of project and programme management, performed by EIC Programme Managers,<sup>7</sup> 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, EIC Transition and EIC Accelerator projects and consists of the following:

- ✦ The milestones defined by the proposals for funding will be used to periodically review the progress. Reviews will assess whether the activities foreseen to reach the milestones have been completed and will consider the results and outputs against the overall objectives. The reviews will be undertaken with support of independent experts and overseen by EIC Programme Managers for projects within their portfolios.
- ✦ Following the reviews, the EIC support may be continued on the basis of its implementation according to the description of action, amendments may be requested or, in case a project has lost economic or technological relevance or has not met agreed milestones, it may be suspended or even terminated. Reviews may also result in requests for amendments to ongoing or planned activities or deployment of some necessary EIC 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 EIC 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.
- ✦ 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

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

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 EIC 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)<sup>8</sup> (see Section IV).

### **Policy of open access and Intellectual Property rights<sup>9</sup>**

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

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 6.

### **Economic security**

Following the Communication on the European Economic Security Strategy<sup>10</sup> and the Commission Recommendation on critical technology areas for the EU's economic

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<sup>8</sup> In line with Article 28(3) and Article 29(2) of the Horizon Europe Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2021/695) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1290/2013 and (EU) No 1291/2013, OJ L 170, 12.5.2021, p. 1, (“Horizon Europe Regulation”).

<sup>9</sup> For the EIC Accelerator, the Intellectual Property rules are included in the contract and/or investment agreement.

<sup>10</sup> Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council on “European Economic Security Strategy”, JOIN(2023)20 final.

security<sup>11</sup> a number of provisions have been made to protect Europe from economic security risks.

These measures are:

- *Eligibility criteria:* The exclusion, in duly justified cases, of legal entities as beneficiaries and recipients of Accelerator grant funding which are directly or indirectly controlled by a non-associated third country or by a legal entity established in a non-associated third country from specific Challenges under the EIC Accelerator relating to artificial intelligence and quantum (see Section IV). Such exclusion is exceptionally applied and justified in order to safeguard the Union's strategic assets, interests, autonomy, or security and to achieve technological objectives and expected outcomes.
- *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 if this is deemed necessary in order to safeguard the Union's strategic assets, interests, autonomy, or security and to achieve technological objectives and expected outcomes in 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<sup>12</sup>. The different possible safeguards are described in the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines<sup>13</sup>, and will be tailored to each specific investee. Where the need for such safeguard measures is identified in the Commission Single Award Decision, the EIC Fund Manager will apply at least one of the safeguard measures in the investment agreement. The assessment by the Commission of the need for safeguard measures to be identified in the Award Decision will take account of EU policy developments on economic security, including the application of safeguards in the main Horizon Europe work programmes (such as those implemented under Article 22.5 of the Horizon Europe Regulation).
- *Intellectual Property:* A requirement 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 (see Annex 2).

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<sup>11</sup> [Commission Recommendation of 3 October 2023 on critical technology areas for the EU's economic security for further risk assessment with Member States \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> These technology areas are further described in the [Commission Recommendation of 3 October 2023 on critical technology areas for the EU's economic security for further risk assessment with Member States \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> [The EIF Fund Investment Guidelines are available on the EIC website.](#)

## 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 companies selected by the EIT KICs to enter the EIC Accelerator evaluation at the second stage will continue in 2024, EIC beneficiaries will have access to the services provided by the EIT KICs via the partnerships agreed with the EIC Business Acceleration Services. The new innovation intern scheme (“Next Generation Talents”) is due to be launched in 2024 and will allow 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 joint women innovators prizes.

## Outlook for 2025 and future years

The EIC Work Programme for 2025 will continue to follow advice provided by the EIC Board. This includes potential new synergies to support earlier stage deep tech startups and SMEs, where synergies the European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) could be developed<sup>14</sup>.

The Commission has proposed the creation of a Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)<sup>15</sup> which includes an increased budget for the European Innovation Council in order to make larger investments (above EUR 15 million) through the EIC Fund in companies in key focal areas. Subject to the outcome of the inter-institutional negotiations on this proposal, the EIC Work Programme will be amended to provide this additional financing in line with the objectives of the STEP.

The process to identify EIC Challenges will continue to be improved and reinforced with new evidence, including from the Joint Research Centre<sup>16</sup> and studies financed

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<sup>14</sup> See EIC Board statement on widening participation, [https://eic.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-08/EIC\\_Board\\_Statement\\_Widening\\_final31072023.pdf](https://eic.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-08/EIC_Board_Statement_Widening_final31072023.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> EUR-Lex - 52023PC0335 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

<sup>16</sup> Farinha, J., Vesnic Alujevic, L., Alvarenga, A. and Polvora, A., Everybody is looking into the Future! A literature review of reports on emerging technologies and disruptive innovation, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2023, doi:10.2760/144730, JRC134319.

<https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC134319>

under previous EIC Work Programmes. This will also benefit from the analysis of emerging trends from EIC funding and third-party sources, presented in the EIC emerging technology report<sup>17</sup>.

The Commission will also take into account the outcome of the mid-term evaluation of Horizon Europe in preparing future EIC Work Programmes.

## Glossary<sup>18</sup>

The **EIC Board** oversees the strategy and implementation of EIC activities and provides advice on EIC Work Programmes. It comprises 20 leading innovators and innovative researchers, including the EIC President, and 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 **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).

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

The **EIC Fund Manager** makes investment and divestment decisions on the companies selected through the EIC Accelerator call by following a due diligence performed by the EIB according to the EIC Investment Guidelines.<sup>19</sup> The EIC Fund Manager manages the EIC portfolio of invested companies, supported by the EIB, and in close coordination with the grant support provided to investee companies by the European Commission and managed by the Agency, as well as the provision of Business Acceleration Services (including access to other potential investors via the

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Farinha, J., Vesnic Alujevic, L. and Polvora, A., Scanning deep tech horizons: participatory collection and assessment of signals and trends, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2023, doi:10.2760/48442, JRC134369.

<https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC134369>

<sup>17</sup> [EIC-TechReport-2023-DigitalVersion\\_0.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>18</sup> These definitions are complemented by specific definitions regarding provisions concerning management of EIC Portfolios and Intellectual Property for EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition actions detailed in Annex 6.

<sup>19</sup> [EIC Investment Guidelines - Horizon Europe March 2022](#)



EIC Co-Investment Platform) and the performance of technology due diligence by the Agency.

The **EIC Forum** brings different innovation drivers and levels of governance closer together to discuss openly and informally relevant policy issues.<sup>20</sup> The policy recommendations and activities of the EIC Forum will aim at supporting and complementing initiatives undertaken in Horizon Europe.

The **EIC Awardees** are the beneficiaries identified in an EIC Grant agreement (Pathfinder, Transition and Accelerator), EIC contracts or investment agreements (for EIC Accelerator), as well as winners of EIC Prizes. The Horizon Europe model grant agreements and contracts are available on the EIC website<sup>21</sup>.

**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 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 Project Officers, with the design and the execution of the transition plan and to facilitate access to, and follow-up of, the relevant Business Acceleration Service offerings.

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

**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 and Tender Opportunities portal Expert Database.

**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 and EIC Accelerator calls as part of the evaluation procedure. EIC Programme Managers and, in the case of the

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<sup>20</sup> The EIC Forum is supported under the 'European Innovation Ecosystems' part of the Horizon Europe work programme.

<sup>21</sup> [general-mga.horizon-euratom.eu/pdf/europa.eu](https://general-mga.horizon-euratom.eu/pdf/europa.eu)

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** may take place in either a physical or virtual setting.

**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.

**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.

**EIC Business Acceleration Services (BAS)** are support services provided to the EIC Awardees and other eligible organisations to support the commercialisation of EIC innovations and the scaling up of EIC companies, namely access to coaches and training, especially through the services of the EIC Ecosystem Partners, and access to global partners (leading corporates, investors, procurers, distributors, clients), see Section V for more detail.

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

**EIC Community platform** is a platform available to all EIC Awardees and Seals of Excellence, facilitating 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 can connect with peer inventors, researchers, innovators and entrepreneurs as well as other actors from the ecosystem, including corporates, investors, business angels, mentors and coaches, innovation procurers, innovation agencies, business associations, clusters, accelerators, incubators, technology transfer offices and many more.

**EIC Ecosystem Partners** are organisations that have been selected to provide EIC Business Acceleration Services or other support to EIC Awardees. 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 Marketplace** will be an EIC-dedicated space supported by the Horizon Results Platform, where results on the EIC Pathfinder and Transition projects will be made available in order to cross-fertilise activities and stimulate and nurture potential innovation. The EIC Marketplace is expected to become available during the course of 2024.

**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.

**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. The scheme is funded by the EIC 2023 Work Programme and due to be launched in 2024.

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.

**Deep tech** is technology that is based on cutting-edge scientific advances and discoveries and is characterised by the need to stay at the technological forefront by constant interaction with new ideas and results from the lab. Deep tech is distinct from 'high tech' which tends to refer only to R&D intensity<sup>22</sup>.

**Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs)** provide a guide to the stage of development. TRLs are used in the Work Programme for guidance, but do not preclude support for non-technological innovations. A strong degree of importance will also be given to

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<sup>22</sup> Ratio of a firm's R&D investment to its revenue

market readiness and business readiness,<sup>23</sup> as described in the award criteria of the call texts. The following definitions of TRLs apply, recognising that there are important differences between technological fields:<sup>24</sup>

TRL1 - basic principles observed

TRL2 - technology concept formulated

TRL3 - experimental proof of concept

TRL4 - technology validated in lab

TRL5 - technology validated in relevant environment

TRL6 - technology demonstrated in relevant environment

TRL7 - system prototype demonstration in operational environment

TRL8 - system complete and qualified

TRL9 - actual system proven in operational environment

**Seal of Excellence:** is a quality label which shows that a proposal submitted to a call for proposals exceeded all of the evaluation thresholds set out in the work programme. It is awarded to individual SMEs that apply for EIC Transition or EIC Accelerator funding and are assessed to meet the relevant evaluation criteria as defined in the call text, but which are not directly funded by the EIC. The EIC Seal of Excellence provides access to EIC Business Acceleration Services and facilitates funding from other sources.<sup>25</sup> The Seal of Excellence for the EIC Transition and EIC Accelerator is only awarded to those applicants who agree to share the data about their proposal (basic information on the proposal, the call and the proposer) with other alternative funding and support bodies which may decide to fund the project. The grant component of projects awarded a Seal of Excellence is exempted under the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER)<sup>26</sup> from State Aid notification requirements under the same funding rates as those applicable to the EIC. The investment component of projects awarded a Seal of Excellence may be supported by other funders, including public funders in accordance with the State Aid rules.

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<sup>23</sup> Further information on market readiness and business readiness will be provided in the guidance documents.

<sup>24</sup> See for instance for health: <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/career-development/researchers/manual-scientific-entrepreneurship/major-steps/trl>

<sup>25</sup> Information on 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>.

<sup>26</sup> COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) 2021/1237 of 23 July 2021 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty.

**Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)** is a category of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. It consists of enterprises that employ fewer than 250 persons and have either an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 43 million. A full definition is provided in Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC.<sup>27</sup> Under the EIC, this category includes start-ups.

**Small mid-cap** means an enterprise employing up to 499 employees.<sup>28</sup>

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

**Women-led 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.

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<sup>27</sup> Commission Recommendation of 6 May 2003 concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (2003/361/EC), OJ L 124, 20.5.2003, p. 36.

<sup>28</sup> Where the staff headcount is calculated in accordance with Articles 3, 4, 5 and 6 of Title I of the Annex of Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC.

## II. EIC Pathfinder

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

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

### II.1 EIC Pathfinder Open

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

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 address 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 (including '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 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 address global challenges, these are not expected to be addressed or achieved in the course of your EIC Pathfinder Open project. However, you are expected to take the necessary measures to allow future uptake to take place, for instance through an adequate formal protection of the generated Intellectual Property (IP)<sup>29</sup> 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

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<sup>25</sup> IP includes industrial property (patents, trademarks, designs and geographic indications of source) and copyright. See also Section I and Annex 6 for more information on the EIC policy of Open Access and IP rights.

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.

### **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, start-ups, industrial partners or natural persons. The eligibility of associated countries and third countries is detailed in Annex 2.

The standard admissibility and eligibility conditions are detailed in Annex 2. The scope of proposals should be in line with the Do Not Significant Harm principle (see 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.

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

The total indicative budget for this call is EUR 136 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 3 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.

In addition to funding, successful applicants will receive tailor-made access to a wide range of Business Acceleration Services (see Section [V](#)) 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)<sup>30</sup> may be eligible:

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

The Model Grant Agreement<sup>31</sup> can be found on the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal.

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

The deadline for submitting your proposal is 7 March 2024 at 17h00 Brussels local time.<sup>32</sup>

You must submit your proposal via the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal before the given 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).

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

Your proposal will be first evaluated and scored individually by at least four EIC expert evaluators with respect to the award criteria. The score for each award criterion will

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<sup>30</sup> The eligible calls are all EIC Pathfinder calls under Horizon Europe and the following Horizon 2020 calls: FETOPEN-RIA-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.

<sup>31</sup> [general-mga\\_horizon-euratom\\_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#) [general-mga\\_horizon-euratom\\_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>32</sup> The call will open on 10 December 2023. 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.

be the median 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 committee may invite expert evaluators who evaluated and scored the proposals individually to the consensus discussions, in particular to clarify diverging evaluators' opinions.

The Evaluation Summary Report will comprise the final score, a collation of the comments from individual reports, or extracts of them, a comment that summarises the assessment by the evaluation committee as well as any additional comments, possibly including advice not to resubmit the proposal.

Proposals will be assessed according to the following award criteria (Table 2):

Table 2. Award criteria for EIC Pathfinder Open
<b>Excellence (Threshold: 4/5, weight 60%)</b>
<b>Long-term vision:</b> How convincing is the vision of a radically new technology towards which the project would contribute in the long term?
<b>Science-towards-technology breakthrough:</b> How concrete, novel, and ambitious is the proposed science-towards-technology breakthrough with respect to the state-of-the-art? What advancement does it provide towards realising the envisioned technology?
<b>Objectives:</b> How concrete and plausible are the proposed objectives to reach the envisaged proof of principle? To what extent is the high-risk/high-gain research approach appropriate for achieving them? How sound is the proposed methodology, including the underlying concepts, models, assumptions, alternative directions and options, appropriate consideration of the gender dimension in research content, and the quality of open science practices?
<b>Interdisciplinarity:</b> How relevant is the interdisciplinary approach from traditionally distant disciplines for achieving the proposed breakthrough?
<b>Impact (Threshold: 3.5/5, weight 20%)</b>
<b>Long-term impact:</b> How significant are the potential transformative positive effects that the envisioned new technology would have to our economy, environment and society?

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

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 multi-disciplinary 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. 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 that would contribute to the specific objectives of the respective Challenge. Specifically, your project must aim to deliver by its end the expected outcomes defined in the respective Challenge. In general, the starting point of a proposal answering to a Pathfinder Challenge 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 as well as an 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 project should reinforce their mind-set for targeted research and development aimed at high-impact applied results. This will strengthen Europe's capacity for exploiting the scientific discoveries made in Europe throughout the steps to market success or for solving global challenges. You are particularly encouraged to empower female researchers in your project and to achieve gender balance among your work package leaders.

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 Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal after the call opening. 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 support collaborative or individual research and innovation from consortia or from single legal entities established in a Member State or an Associated Country (unless stated otherwise in the specific Challenge chapter). 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.

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

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

The scope of proposals should be in line with the Do Not Significant Harm principle (see Annex 2).

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

The total indicative budget for this call is EUR 120 million which is expected to be allocated in approximately equal shares across the Challenges.

You will receive a grant for a Research and Innovation Action to cover the eligible costs, necessary for the implementation of your project, including the portfolio activities. For this call, the EIC considers proposals with an EU contribution of up to EUR 4 million as appropriate. Nonetheless, this does not preclude you to request larger amounts, if duly justified or stated otherwise in the specific Challenge.

The funding rate of this grant will be 100% of the eligible costs. Eligible costs will take the form of a lump sum and the amount will be determined during the evaluation

process. Applicants must therefore propose the amount of the lump sum based on their estimated project costs as defined in the Decision of 7 July 2021 authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027) – and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2021-2025).<sup>33</sup> It is advised to include a work package dedicated to portfolio activities and allocate at least 10 person-month to it.

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

Projects funded through EIC Pathfinder (including grants resulting from certain EIC pilot Pathfinder, FET-Open and Proactive calls)<sup>34</sup> may be eligible:

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

The Model Grant Agreement can be found on the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal.

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

The call deadline for submitting your proposal is 16 October 2024 at 17h00 Brussels local time.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> This [decision](#) is available on the Funding and Tenders Portal, in the reference documents section for Horizon Europe, under 'Simplified costs decisions' or through this link: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision\\_he\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> The eligible calls are all EIC Pathfinder calls under Horizon Europe and the following Horizon 2020 calls: FETOPEN-RIA-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.

You must submit your proposal via the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal before the given 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. EIC expert evaluators will assess each proposal separately against the award criteria;
- 2. an EIC evaluation committee will consider all proposals passing the first step together in order to assess the best portfolio of projects to achieve the specific objectives of the Challenge (so called portfolio considerations). The evaluation committee will be composed of EIC expert evaluators and EIC Programme Managers.

Step1 (assessment of each proposal separately):

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

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

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

<b>Table 3. Award criteria for EIC Pathfinder Challenges</b>
<b>Excellence (Threshold: 4/5; weight 60%)</b>
<b>Objectives and relevance to the Challenge:</b> How clear are the project’s objectives? How

<sup>35</sup> The call will open on 20 June 2024 . 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.

relevant are they in contributing to the overall goal and the specific objectives of the Challenge?
<b>Novelty:</b> To what extent is the proposed work ambitious and goes beyond the state-of-the-art?
<b>Plausibility of the methodology:</b> 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?
<b>Impact (Threshold: 3.5/5; weight 20%)</b>
<b>Potential Impact:</b> 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?
<b>Innovation potential:</b> 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?
<b>Communication and Dissemination:</b> 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?
<b>Quality and efficiency of the implementation (Threshold 3/5; weight 20%)</b>
<b>Work plan:</b> How coherent and effective are the work plan (work packages, tasks, deliverables, milestones, timeline, etc.) and risk mitigation measures in order to achieve the project objectives?
<b>Allocation of resources:</b> How appropriate and effective is the allocation of resources (comprising person-months and other cost items) to work packages and consortium members?
<b>Quality of the applicant/consortium</b> ( <i>depends if mono or multi-beneficiaries</i> ): 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 and stage of technology readiness level, size, etc.

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

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

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

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

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

The 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 Project Officer and relevant EIC Programme Manager will contact and support you during the grant agreement preparation to plan the portfolio activities for which

you will be expected to collaborate with the other projects in 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 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 Solar-to-X devices for the decentralized prosumption of renewable fuels, chemicals and materials as climate change mitigation pathway**

#### **Background and scope:**

There are currently quite mature technologies tested on industrial pilot scale to provide synthetic fuels and chemicals from renewable energy sources via a sequence of independent energy and chemical conversion steps (Power-to-X or Carbon Capture and Utilization technologies). However, energy losses during the different steps (e.g., electricity production or thermochemical conversion) make the process highly energy intense. Also, the provision of affordable, renewable electricity at the needed scale is challenging. A potential workaround to this bottleneck is the development of devices which directly convert solar energy and abundantly available molecules (such as water or carbon oxides) into liquids and gases – within a single device. These so-called solar-to-X technologies avoid the beforehand conversion of solar energy into electricity and reduce the complexity of the process by a complete integration of the different steps. **Solar-to-X technologies, also called artificial photosynthesis or solar fuel technologies, support the vision of a decentralized, local energy and production system with a local provision of the needed resources. In this vision, communities become not only prosumers of electricity, but also of fuels, chemicals and materials.**

In this Challenge, solar-to-X technologies must address societal needs not already sufficiently covered by other energy technologies. The developed technologies should demonstrate how they can be embedded in the full functional value chain from generation to use, be self-sustaining in the long-run and provide a win-win opportunity for prosumers and the environment. **The objective is to make progress towards synthetic fuels and chemicals technologies which integrate all necessary conversion steps into a single device, and which are solely and directly driven by solar energy.** Devices which are driven by electricity or heat are not the focus of this Challenge – except for radically new electrolyzer designs beyond

incremental R&D on mature electrolyzer designs. Partially integrated systems, where the overall balance of plant is not significantly simplified (e.g., PV-assisted photoelectrochemical devices) are not within the scope of this Challenge. The use of sacrificial agents has to be avoided and the desired product has to go beyond hydrogen and carbon monoxide. To summarize, this Challenge focusses on: i) Novel electrolyzer designs showing a significantly simplified balance-of-plant compared to mature electrolyzer designs; ii) Fully-integrated PV-EC devices, with electrochemical conversion (EC) and photovoltaic unit (PV) combined in a single device; iii) Photosynthetic devices converting directly sunlight and simple feedstock molecules into a fuel or chemical (e.g., Photoelectrochemical devices, Particulate systems, Biohybrid photosynthetic devices, Thermally-integrated photosynthetic devices, etc.); iv) Solar-driven biological conversion devices (e.g., solar cell factories).

This Challenge is directly relevant to the objectives of the European Green Deal and Repower EU.

### **Specific objectives:**

Project proposals should address one (and only one) of the following three areas:

#### **Area 1: Standalone solar-to-X device development**

Projects should address all of the following specific objectives:

- Develop standalone solar-to-X devices, converting sunlight and simple, low-energy molecules such as water, carbon oxides or N<sub>2</sub> (non-exhaustive list) into fuels, chemicals and materials.
- Enable simplified production chains where one directly goes from simple feedstock to complex products, beyond hydrogen or carbon monoxide.
- Design solar-to-X systems that can operate independently, allowing communities and remote areas to have access to reliable and sustainable energy sources and a local production and utilization of chemicals and fuels.
- The developed devices have to reach at least TRL 4 within a 3-4 year project runtime.

#### **Area 2: Benchmarking and common metrics development for solar-to-X devices**

Projects should address all of the following specific objectives:

- Develop common metrics, protocols and equipment to enable a fair and standardized comparison between technologies within the same class, as well as between different technology classes in the field of solar-to-X (see Area 1 for the different technology categories).

- Develop a holistic framework by identifying key performance indicators common to the different categories, while considering unique features of each category. It is required to develop metrics, protocols and equipment for multiple solar-to-X device architectures (aligned with Area 1).
- Devices stemming from area 1 should serve as a portfolio-own testbed to validate the developed methodologies, protocols and equipment in practice. Standards for solar-to-X devices can (and should) build on existing ones.
- Acceptance of the developed metrics and protocols by a broad range of stakeholders within the diverse research communities must be ensured from the beginning, by e.g., co-creation workshops, extensive outreach activities, etc.

### **Area 3: Understanding fundamental mechanisms by means of computational materials science**

Projects should address all the following specific objectives:

- Explore fundamental phenomena crucial to multiple device architectures to enable next-generation solar-to-X devices.
- Drive forward the one-to-one comparison between theory at the atomistic level and experiment. Developing more accurate and less resource-demanding quantum mechanical methods is highly encouraged.
- Bridge the scales from describing properties at the atomic, mesoscopic up to the macroscopic device level within a multiscale approach.
- Adopt a holistic approach to exploring phenomena applicable to multiple solar-to-X device architectures (aligned with area 1). Devices stemming from area 1 should serve as a portfolio-own testbed to validate the developed theoretical models.

### **Expected outcomes and impacts:**

This Challenge addresses the development of devices - their enabling technologies and use cases - that store sunlight directly on the long term in the form of fuels and chemicals to enable a decentralized energy, transport and production system.

The portfolio of projects selected under this Challenge is expected to collectively:

- cover Areas 1,2 and 3: There is a strong need to go from the pure concept to next maturity level by developing devices running at elevated timeframes and efficiencies (Area 1). To ensure a fair and honest comparison between the developed devices, common metrics, key performance indicators and standardised protocols must be developed and tested (Area 2). At the same time, fundamental mechanisms that are common to the different device

architectures are not fully understood and require dedicated exploration (Area 3). Combining these three aspects in a single portfolio of different projects with close interaction and a commonly developed vision is expected to significantly speed up innovation in the field of solar-to-X.

- identify the most impactful end products and application cases (both on an environmental and economic level): Renewable fuels and chemicals provide the opportunity to couple diverse sectors, including the energy, chemical and transport sector, construction, agriculture or the food and feed sector. By choosing a specific material, chemical or fuel, diverse application scenarios can be addressed by the different projects. Future application scenarios may include remote locations (f. ex. ammonia synthesis for precision farming), single buildings, energy communities in cities or off-grid communities (e.g., devices integrated in architecture), etc.

Concerning environmental and economic impacts:

- The overall system must be cost-efficient and show a simplified balance-of-plant compared to current solutions, e.g., the combination of photovoltaics and an electrolyzer unit.
- The feedstock for the desired product must be sourced locally, preferably valorizing waste streams and solar energy.
- Projects should promote the use of abundant and sustainable resources in the fabrication of solar-to-X devices, minimizing the reliance on rare or expensive materials.
- Proposals should clearly identify a (future) market need and address it with the proposed technology.

Portfolio composition: The applicants of Area 1 should specifically mention to which of the technological areas their technology belongs (Novel electrolyzer designs, Fully-integrated PV-EC, Photosynthetic devices, Solar-driven biological conversion devices).

### **Specific conditions**

Technologies starting from an energy-rich feedstock, such as biomass, and proposals that only address parts of the full solar-to-X chain (e.g., half reactions) will not be considered.

## **II.2.2 Towards cement and concrete as a carbon sink**

### **Background and scope:**

Cement is the largest manufactured product in the world by mass. In 2022 humans produced 4,2 billion tons of it (about 626 kg per capita). Combined with water, sand and aggregates cement is the glue to form concrete. Aside from water, there is no material we use more than concrete. Contractors can combine concrete with steel reinforcement bars to mould and create the build environment in which we experience our lives. The industry is interrelated with other major sectors such as energy and steel. Its supply chains are vast, deeply complex, with increasing degrees of fragmentation going downstream. This complexity is also reflected in the many ways cement and concrete markets can be (sub-) segmented, for example by cement use (concrete, mortar, etc.), concrete use (reinforced, non-reinforced, ready-mix, precast products, etc.), end-use (residential, non-residential, infrastructural, energy, etc.) to name a few.

Cement and concrete are versatile, low-cost, abundant and relatively local. Modern societies are hard to imagine without these materials. Realistically, cement and concrete are here to stay. Then again, current mainstream cement and concrete technologies are also the source of 8% of our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (about 600 kg per capita), which are “embodied” in our buildings and infrastructures. Roughly 60% of these emissions are “chemical” released by converting limestone into clinker, and 40% of doing so at very high temperatures by burning fossil fuels. With EU (and global) commitments for rapid and radical emission reductions, it is necessary to pull all scientific, economic, and regulatory levers to reduce the environmental impacts of the cement and concrete sector.

One default pathway to decarbonize cement (and indeed a major element in the sector’s strategy to decarbonize to net-zero by 2050) is to capture and store CO<sub>2</sub> of current production processes (CCS). Technologies for CCS are in development and expected to increase the cost of cement. To avoid additional costs of future emissions as much as possible, accelerated deep-tech innovations are needed to fully negate or even absorb emissions by the sector in future. The breakthrough innovations sought with this Pathfinder Challenge aim to be more cost effective than CCS. Moreover, this Pathfinder Challenge encourages breakthrough innovations that utilize CO<sub>2</sub>. Such innovations can play an important role in future CCUS economies, and trigger future revenue opportunities for the sector by offering negative emissions at scale. However, CCS/CCUS technologies that are unrelated to cement and concrete technologies are out of scope of this Pathfinder Challenge.

This Pathfinder Challenge seeks to support breakthrough innovations and (alternative) pathways for decarbonized and carbon-negative cement and concrete. Future pathways must meet some important conditions to be ultimately successful.

- The economical and abundant availability of feedstock at the place of production (cement) and consumption (concrete) is an important condition for implementing practically viable alternative cement chemistries, concrete mixtures and substitute materials.
- Most of the consumption growth of cement (and associated CO<sub>2</sub> emissions) is expected in developing nations. Therefore, if innovative (deep-tech) solutions for cementitious materials are to be adopted on a significant scale (a condition for “disruptive innovation”) they shall (at least in potential) be low cost and used easily by people with minimal training and scientific knowledge.
- Ultimate success and technology adoption shall depend on meeting or exceeding the mechanical and operational performance levels of the incumbent mainstream cement and concrete technologies, which are also reflected in the various norms and standards.

### **Specific objectives:**

This challenge is supporting the development of breakthrough technologies in one or more of the following domains:

(1) Advanced technologies that change the paradigm of prevailing binder technologies with alternative low-carbon compounds based on alternative feedstocks (e/g magnesia-based, (ultra-) mafic rocks), and curing processes (e/g carbonation curing), and the combination thereof. Widespread adoption of such radical new pathways will also need breakthrough innovations in energy efficient industrial production processes. Such engineered carbon mineralisation pathways (e/g MOMS) can in principle utilize and store large amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> with high permanence and (CCUS) value in the final mortar and (reinforced) concrete applications. As the alternative feedstocks often formed the host rocks for valuable ores, some mine waste could contain accessible, abundant, and useful raw materials.

(2) Advanced technologies for a more efficient use of clinker in cement (reducing its clinker fraction), and of cement in concrete compositions (binder efficiency).

- For cement, radical innovations are sought that further extend the use of supplementary cementitious materials (SCMs), and that give access to novel, abundantly available alternative sources of reactive SCMs compared to the prevailing SCM materials that have limited (or even declining) availability.
- For concrete, the amount of binder used to produce concretes of a given strength can vary considerably (e/g depending on use case and geographical location). This points to substantial CO<sub>2</sub> mitigation potential with innovations that solve for a consistently more efficient use of cement, for example. through

innovations that optimize and control particle size distribution (e/g more sophisticated grinding processes) in combination with compatible admixtures, and technologies that support industrialization to reduce variability of binder intensity and reduce waste.

Novel reinforcement technologies may further improve efficient use of cement in reinforced concrete (e/g consumption driven by concerns about steel corrosion), and may be necessary for novel pathways for cement and concrete technologies that are not compatible with steel reinforcement.

- Novel pathways for compatible and equally performing “synthetic aggregates” may offer additional potential for CCUS at the concrete-mix level.

(3) Advanced technologies that lower or negate the need for burning fossil fuels to avoid the associated CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. For example, novel breakthrough process innovations to manufacture decarbonized lime (e/g at low process temperatures, by non-thermal processes, electrified processes).

(4) Enabling technologies in support of (1), (2) and (3) based on technologies for computational material science or data-driven science (including AI and ML). There is a need for breakthrough simulation and prediction technologies that enhance the understanding of the characteristics and interactions of raw materials, hydration processes and microstructural development of cementitious materials. If generalizable technologies can be adapted to a wide variety and variation of real-world raw materials without the need for extensive local empirical testing, this would greatly enhance and accelerate development cycles, knowledge acquisition, discovery, and implementation.

#### **Expected outcomes and impacts:**

Project results must clearly demonstrate validation in laboratory environment (TRL4) of the breakthrough technology.

The portfolio of projects selected under this Pathfinder Challenge is expected to cover the four (4) domains mentioned in the previous section. The collaboration between the selected projects is expected to be mutually beneficial and contribute to a further reduction of carbon emissions of cement and concrete. For example, the projects selected under 1, 2 and 3 will be required to closely collaborate with the project selected under 4, so that this project can provide additional guidance to the projects on plausible pathways.

In addition, projects are required to develop common metrics and terminology to compare project results. The results of each project shall include a rough order of magnitude (ROM) estimation of the potential impact the breakthrough technology



can have on emission reductions. A portfolio activity that results in quantitatively stating the decarbonization potential of all portfolio projects combined is encouraged.

Also, portfolio activities to develop techno-economic views on the future implementation, adoption, and scaling potential of the various technologies in realistic real-world conditions, coupled with a view on an entrepreneurial path towards future commercialisation are strongly encouraged. Realistic expectations of operational conditions in those markets where future growth is expected most is critical for the adoption of innovative technologies at scale. For example, feed stocks required for some novel pathways may be found at different locations than existing quarries and cement plants. This requires a strategic rethinking of the cement and concrete value chains and distribution channels in target markets. Also, novel pathways utilizing CO<sub>2</sub> for curing will require a stream of (likely) purified CO<sub>2</sub>, which triggers additional supply chain considerations. Other novel pathways may adopt to existing cement and concrete value chains and distribution channels as an innovation strategy for fast scaling and wide market adoption.

Any innovation that offers a reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions shall still enable, meet, or exceed the performance and workability criteria of the incumbent products it enhances or substitutes by the time of market adoption, as referenced by various industry norms and standards. It is expected that the collaboration between the portfolio projects will positively contribute to the understanding of this topic.

In the long run, it is expected that project results will form the basis for the development of novel cement and concrete products, production processes, and other solutions that impact the sector in its efforts to decarbonize and even absorb CO<sub>2</sub> in step with the ambitions of the European Green Deal.

The portfolio of supported projects shall also contribute to medium to long-term impacts such as increasing EU technological leadership and reducing EU dependency on critical raw materials supply.

### **II.2.3 Nature inspired alternatives for food packaging and films for agriculture**

The food production system is heavily reliant on fossil fuel derived plastics. This reliance spans both the early stages of the production process, for example in agricultural mulch, through to the latter stages in which food and beverages are packaged to enable food transportation, preservation, hygiene and safety, increasing the lifespan of foods and contributing to safety of foods and the retention of their nutritional content.

Plastic's low cost, durability, and linear use with low levels of recycling is the source of numerous environmental challenges that impact whole ecosystems particularly at the end of life. These environmental impacts are further accentuated by coating agents and formulation additives that deliver a range of functional properties. These additives can in turn leach out into the surrounding environment including air, water, food or animal and human body tissues, in particular during biodegradation.

This Pathfinder Challenge aims to support ambitious interdisciplinary research that will lead to the development and production of sustainable nature inspired alternatives for food packaging and agricultural production such as, but not limited to, greenhouse and mulch films. These materials must have a reduced environmental impact, through design and production, while delivering the functional characteristics of plastics.

Proposals should look to bring forward ideas that span the product lifecycle from the development of novel sustainable materials, their design and production through to end of life, while maximising the time and extent of use. Abundant, naturally occurring materials that display properties to be optimized for food related applications with a reduced environmental footprint in production and enhanced scope for re-use recycling and biodegradability, including in extreme environments, will be encouraged.

Applicants are encouraged to develop synergies with relevant activities under Horizon Europe Cluster 6 Work Programme 2021 – 2022 and Work Programme 2023 – 2024, and its partnerships, in particular Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking (CBE JU).

### **Specific objectives:**

The Challenge seeks groundbreaking proposals with the capacity to replace the use of fossil-carbon-based plastics from farm to fork and thereby support EU policy ambitions to move towards a more circular, resource efficient and climate neutral economy.

Proposals must seek to deliver nature-inspired sustainable alternatives to fossil carbon derived plastics and associated production processes. These alternatives shall be circular, safe and sustainable by design and allow for reusability, recyclability and full biodegradability. They must look to address one or more of the current uses of plastics in the food system (e.g., agricultural mulch, food packaging), and utilise bio-based sources and raw materials such as:

- polymers extracted from nature (e.g., cellulose, chitin, lignin, keratin)
- natural polymers (e.g., microbial, fungal and plant materials), or
- synthetic polymers from biobased materials.

Attention should also be paid to consider regulatory aspects in the development and incorporation of chemical additives that can deliver high sanitary standards for contact with food. The additives must be formulated in a way to meet set of biodegradability criteria and the assessment of the ability of the products to fully biodegrade in natural soil and aquatic environments across the EU.

All projects must demonstrate at least preliminary evidence of an improved cradle-to-gate and cradle-to-grave lifecycle assessment, when compared to fossil carbon derived plastics and current additives. This lifecycle assessment must take account of environmental, social and economic considerations. The resulting materials and associated processes must over their lifecycle:

- Reduce energy consumption and the carbon footprint
- Reduce water consumption and associated environmental footprint
- Enhance biodegradability, compostability or reusability

They must also include one or more enhanced functional characteristics for use in the food value chain while minimising or potentially eliminating the harmful effects with a view to:

- increasing shelf life and retaining the nutritional properties of packaged food, and
- enhancing the productivity and functionality of agricultural films

This could include the use of smart functionalities in responding to environmental conditions and the use of biodegradable electronic features.

Projects with strong capacity for use beyond food and agriculture (e.g., packaging for pharmaceuticals) will also be encouraged and prioritised.

Irrespective of starting point, the resulting outputs of the projects must be shown to be effective for their intended application with, at the very least, a lab-based demonstrator i.e., reach TRL 4 or above.

### **Expected outcomes and impacts:**

The projects selected under this Challenge are expected to collectively provide a portfolio of environmentally friendly materials and use cases informed by availability, efficiency and end functionality. Further, funded projects will be expected to work

together to develop a robust approach to measure the lifecycle impacts i.e., the environmental, social and economic consideration of the funded projects.

The successful implementation of these Challenge projects will lead to a paradigm shift in the food and agriculture sector. It will in the medium-term lead to the development of a new group of nature-inspired materials that are commercially viable, environmentally sound and support moves towards a more circular, resource efficient and environmentally sustainable economy. These will help the sector reduce pollution in soils, sediment, inland water and oceans, and decrease contamination of food, animal and human tissues with micro and nano plastic particles and leached additives.

#### **II.2.4 Nanoelectronics for energy-efficient smart edge devices**

##### **Background and scope:**

Power consumption and heat dissipation are the most urgent challenges in electronics ranging from mobile devices to large data centres and becomes especially relevant for smart edge devices. Advanced chip designs are lowering energy consumption of microelectronic components, devices and systems, while increasing performance such as speed, capacity, reliability and security. Applications include artificial intelligence, communications, computing and sensing.

Various strategies are and have been tested, but still there is much room to improve energy consumption towards near-fundamental limits, through the co-design of geometry, materials, circuits, and integration in a holistic approach.

The overall goal of this challenge is to explore novel materials and beyond CMOS devices, non-von Neumann architectures and alternative information processing paradigms to drastically reduce energy consumption in order to meet application-specific needs of smart edge devices and circuits.

##### **Specific objectives:**

The overall objective of this challenge is to explore solutions (starting at TRL 1/2) that will have a drastic impact on decreasing the power consumption of any smart edge device, but specially for Edge Processing and memories, Edge Sensing and Imaging, Edge Communication and Edge Power Management. The proposed solutions should start at TRL 1-2 and reach TRL 3-4.

The projects, supported under this Challenge are expected to address one or more of the following aspects:

- fundamental issues like heat dissipation at nanoscale that has turned out to be the most critical bottleneck in information processing covering the design of a device from the understanding of the physics and the nanoscale thermal transport at component level to circumvent the “heat valley”, selecting the materials and process solutions.
- demonstration of the potential of the developed technologies for energy savings and contained environmental footprint towards responsible smart edge devices.

The proposed developments may cover (amongst others):

*At Design level.*

- Computer modelling based on the fundamental understanding of heat transport across layers and interfaces, harvesting fluctuations instead of fighting them for computing or the use of different state variables, e.g., spins, photons, phonons or mechanical switches, instead of charge.
- Analysis of the dissipation mechanisms in signal transmission and conversion, heat removal from hot spots in components and circuits, potential for energy conversion at the nano-scale, etc.

*At Materials/Process levels:*

- Novel or unique electrical, mechanical and optical interconnections or other switching mechanisms
- Efficient heat dissipation new materials for in-chip heat dissipation, e.g., 2D materials
- Embedding energy harvesters in the final devices and/or circuits
- Effective 3D multi-die heterogeneous integration including advanced packaging, heterogeneous integration, and modular design of components (such as chiplets)

*At Device/Architecture levels:*

- Molecular electronic circuits
- Beyond CMOS. Non mainstream semiconductor transistors including a plausible circuit concept, e.g., single electron transistors.
- Novel non-von Neumann architectures and alternative processing approaches

**Expected outcomes and impacts:**

The portfolio of projects selected under this Challenge is expected to collectively:

- derive fundamental bounds for energy consumption and designing practical and basic scenarios to minimize the energy costs of the different processes
- harness energetic efficiencies as optimization tools to operate smart technological choices to build smart edge devices.

The expected impact from this Challenge is to open an unprecedented way for the reduction of power consumption in information processing, transmitting, etc. by developing new fundamental technology solutions going from advanced materials to advanced devices and circuits, that holistically will allow a drastic reduction of energy consumption of smart edge solutions.

### **Specific conditions**

The applicants must describe in their proposal energy-based metrics for the technologies and methodologies to measure them and establish benchmarks.

Stable, abundant and non-toxic materials which withstand device and circuit processing steps should be used.

## **II.2.5 Strengthening the sustainability and resilience of EU space infrastructure**

### **Background and scope:**

The ever-growing orbital population of satellites and space debris poses increasing challenges to space infrastructure. The density of space objects amplifies the risk of orbital collisions, unexpected fragmentation events and re-entries that may result in the degradation of space assets, hindering the services they deliver and, thus making Earth orbits unusable.

Debris growth is escalating with more than 2,500 non-operational satellites, 36,500 space debris pieces bigger than 10 cm and 1 million pieces of debris between 1-10 cm in Earth's orbits. Collision avoidance manoeuvres for satellite owners has doubled and is expected to grow. Continuous trajectory changes of spacecraft will result in insufficient fuel for deorbiting, critical end of life spacecraft manoeuvres and any other remediation or in-space mobility activities. In-space recycling of dysfunctional orbital assets will provide an opportunity for space assets re-utilisation and in-space refuelling.

This challenge addresses the long-term emerging need for green, compact and affordable de-orbiting solutions and in-space recycling of space debris.

Space systems and services in the EU are critical infrastructures that need to be better protected. Still, the level of protection of space assets varies across Member States, and there is a need to expand the scope of EU actions.

In this context, the need to protect EU space infrastructure and continue to promote the preservation of a safe and secure space domain is essential.

### **Specific objectives**

The overall goal of this Challenge is to support the development of innovations that will strengthen the protection of EU space infrastructure.

The specific goals of this challenge are 1) development of technologies for space debris mitigation and active debris removal; 2) concepts for in-space recycling of dysfunctional orbital assets; 3) innovations for protecting EU space infrastructure.

The projects, supported under this challenge are expected to develop break-through concepts in one or more of the following areas:

- Game-changing technologies for controlled space debris mitigation (to reduce their generation) and active debris removal (by managing existing space debris, de-orbiting, relocation, etc.) including ones that prevent spacecraft system damage. This includes among others propellantless propulsion technologies such as space-based lasers, laser pushed lightsails, physical sweeper in orbit, laser electric propulsion, tethers or water propulsion for moving all sized debris
- In-space Recycling & Re-use of orbital assets- with a focus on recycling and re-using dysfunctional orbital assets. The overall aim is recycling, partial and/ or complete re-use of assets in-space.
- Game- changing innovations and innovative space applications for protecting EU space infrastructure that focus on concepts that enable detection, identification and avoidance of natural and human-made hazards in space.

Breakthrough ideas and concepts proposed under this challenge should be designed and validated in a laboratory environment. They should address “old” debris and active debris removal (ADR) including end-of-life (EoL) disposal. The concepts may also include debris mitigation measures to be integrated into the design of spacecrafts and launchers.

**Expected outcomes and impacts:**

The portfolio building approach will select a group of projects in the scope of the above challenge objectives and develop:

- Technologies for space debris mitigation and remediation using very little propellant, that could be self-standing, in combination or in complementarity to other technologies to protect EU Space infrastructure.
- In-space Recycling & Re-use of orbital assets could research techniques or processes to generate basic materials and re-use components for structures and assets, thereby supporting the in-space assembly and manufacturing

(ISAM) domain. This may lead to the development of innovative in-space services based on reusing of parts of orbital assets.

- Game- changing innovations and innovative space applications may result in, among others: 1) collision avoidance concepts providing accurate and timeliness detection and tracking of orbiting space objects, 2) innovations for space situational awareness (SSA), 3) development of algorithms and simulation tools for re-entry, close proximity operations, fragmentation and 4) innovative concepts for in-orbit spacecraft recognition and space debris detection;

This topic directly contributes to reinforcing the EU strategic autonomy and EU Space policy, notably regarding the EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence and the EU approach for Space Traffic Management. It will contribute to strengthening the European resilience by promoting a secure, sustainable and safe space domain.

### **Specific conditions**

The submitted proposals must follow interdisciplinary and cross-sectorial approaches, looking for inspiration, ideas, and knowledge in a broad range of disciplines.

Applicants are encouraged to develop synergies with relevant activities under Horizon Europe Cluster 4 Work Programme 2021 – 2022 and Work Programme 2023 – 2024, destination Open Strategic Autonomy In Developing, Deploying And Using Global Space-Based Infrastructures, Services Applications And Data.



### 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. 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 case 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., from minimum TRL 3 or TRL 4 up to Technology Readiness Level 5 to 6). The activities must in all cases address market readiness towards commercialisation and deployment (market research, value proposition, business case and business model, prospects for growth, intellectual property protection, competitor analysis 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 business model, its validation and a business plan for its development to market. It is also expected that the intellectual property generated by your EIC Transition project is formally protected in an adequate way (Annex 6).

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

- ✦ A focused collaborative project to further develop strategic and high impact technologies towards specific applications while improving also the market readiness towards a promising market application. This pathway is likely to require a collaboration among several applicants ('multi-beneficiary' approach) including SMEs, research performers, technology transfer offices and potential users/ customers;
- ✦ An individual SME (including start-ups, spin-offs) identifies a market opportunity to apply the results of an eligible project towards a specific market application. This pathway is likely to require, or lead to, a licensing arrangement with the SME and could also involve a collaboration between the result owner(s) of the eligible project and the interested SME;
- ✦ A team of entrepreneurial researchers within a research or technology organisation who want to turn selected project results into a viable product by looking for a suitable business model or creating a start-up or spin-off company, and which may involve collaboration with the host research or technology organisation, as well as their technology transfer offices. In some cases, the results may already be relatively close to market or ready for investment (e.g., often with higher TRLs) and would therefore normally not need significant further technological development and hence require lower amounts of funding.

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

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

The EIC Transition project is expected to mature your innovation both in its TRL and market and business readiness since 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;<sup>36</sup>

### 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 (TRL 3) or, ideally, technology validated in the lab level (TRL 4). Proposals building on project results at TRLs other than TRL3 or TRL4 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.<sup>37</sup>)
- ✦ European Research Council Proof of Concept projects funded Horizon 2020 or Horizon Europe.

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<sup>36</sup> In line with the Do Not Significant Harm principle, see Annex 2

<sup>37</sup> Eligible projects are those funded under the following calls: FETOPEN-RIA-2014-2015; FETOPEN-01-2016-2017; FETOPEN-01-2018-2019-2020;; FETPROACT-01-2016; FETPROACT-01-2018; FETPROACT-EIC-05-2019; FETPROACT-EIC-07-2020; FETHPC-01-2016, FETHPC-02-2017, FETHPC-01-2018, FETPROACT-EIC-08-2020; FETPROACT-09-2020; FETOPEN-03-2018-2019-2020; FETFLAG-03-2018; FETFLAG-05-2020 H2020-FETFLAG-2014 (for projects funded under the related Specific Grant Agreements); projects resulting from a joint transnational call (both with and without EU co-funding) under any of the QuantERA, FLAG-ERA and ChistERA ERANETS.

- ✦ Research and Innovation Actions directly <sup>38</sup>funded under Horizon 2020 Societal challenges and Leadership in Industrial Technologies and under Horizon Europe pillar II, with an eligible TRL<sup>39</sup>.
- ✦ European Defence Fund (EDF), including the Preparatory Action on Defence Research, research projects, but only for proposals which are focused on civil applications (including dual use)

If you are applying on the basis of an eligible project for which the grant is still active, you may apply if the project has been active for at least 12 months (i.e., the start date of the grant is more than 12 months before the date of the selected EIC Transition call cut-off).

If you are applying on the basis of an eligible project which has already been completed, you may apply within 30 months of the completion of the project (i.e. the end date of the grant for the eligible project is less than 30 months from the date of the selected EIC Transition cut-off).

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 coordinator) need to include in your proposal a commitment letter from the relevant owner(s) of the result(s), which confirms the commitment of the owner of the linked project research result 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.

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<sup>38</sup> Grants funded via cascade mechanisms (e.g., ERA NETs and financial support to third parties) will not be eligible.

<sup>39</sup> Applicants must prove the grant from which the result was generated was funded by Horizon 2020 or Horizon Europe by specifying the relevant grant number and acronym as indicated in the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal.

- ✦ In all cases you need to specify in your application the grant project which generated the result together with reference to where the result has been reported (in the periodic reporting, the Horizon results platform, the Innovation Radar or CORDIS).

You can apply for EIC Transition either as:

- ✦ A single legal entity established in a Member State or an Associated Country ('mono-beneficiary') if you are a start-up, SME or research performing organisation (university, research or technology organisation, including teams, individual Principal Investigators and inventors in such institutions who intend to form a spin-off company).<sup>40</sup> Larger companies (i.e. which do not qualify as SMEs) are not eligible to apply as a single legal entity; or
- ✦ A small consortium of two independent legal entities from two different Member States or Associated Countries, or
- ✦ A consortium of minimum three and maximum five independent legal entities ('multi-beneficiary') following standard rules i.e. must include at least one legal entity established in a Member State and at least two other independent legal entities, each established in different Member States or Associated Countries (see Annex 2).<sup>41</sup>

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

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

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

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<sup>40</sup> A spin-off from a research performing organisation (university, research or technology organisation) having a legal (e.g., contractual cooperation not limited to the action, e.g., a collaboration agreement for research in a particular field) or capital (research performing organisation owning a controlling share in the capital of the spin-off) can be considered as an affiliated entity according to Article 8 of the Grant Agreement.

<sup>41</sup> Consortia of more than 5 eligible entities will be deemed ineligible.

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

The total indicative budget for this call is EUR 94 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. Nonetheless, in exceptional cases, this does not preclude you to request larger amounts, if very well motivated and duly explained.

The funding rate of this grant will be 100% of the eligible costs. Eligible costs will take the form of a lump sum and the amount will be determined during the evaluation process. Applicants must therefore propose the amount of the lump sum based on their estimated project costs as defined in the Decision of 7 July 2021 authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027) – and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2021-2025).<sup>42</sup>

The projects funded through EIC Transition are eligible:

- ✦ to receive EIC 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 and matchmaking events (see Section V).

The Model Grant Agreement can be found on the Funding and Tenders Opportunities portal.

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

The deadline for submitting your proposal is 18 September 2024 at 17h00 Brussels local time.<sup>43</sup>

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

<sup>43</sup> The call will open on 17 April 2024. The Director-General responsible for the call may decide to open the call up to one month prior to or after the envisaged date(s) of opening. The Director-General responsible may delay the deadline(s) by up to two months.

You must submit your proposal via the Funding and Tender Opportunities 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 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 12-14 weeks after the deadline. At the interview, you will be assessed by a panel of maximum 6 EIC Jury members. You will be informed about the result of the interview indicatively within 4 weeks from the start of the interviews.

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

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

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

Starting with the highest scoring proposal and in descending order, a pool of the best ranked proposals (highest scoring) requesting an aggregated financial support equal to approximately the double of the budget available,<sup>44</sup> 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,<sup>45</sup> the pool will be expanded to subsequent best ranked applications (starting with the highest scoring in descending, sequential order and at least

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<sup>44</sup> A higher number may be invited, for example if several applications receive the same score.

<sup>45</sup> The definition of women-led SMEs and consortia is provided in the Glossary in the Introduction.

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 may 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 Jury interview. EPO experts will not participate directly in the evaluation process but will provide their assessment to the Jury as material ‘for information’. The assessment by the patent examiners will not be binding and the Jury appointed by the EIC will have complete freedom to decide on its relevance.

The second step is an interview with an EIC jury. At the interview your proposal may be represented by a maximum of five persons.<sup>46</sup> Only individuals mentioned in the proposal and involved in the future project implementation can represent your proposal at the interview.

The EIC jury will be composed of between four and six members, and may additionally include one EIC Programme Manager as observer with expertise in your area or managing one of the EIC Portfolios your project could be allocated to. During the interview you should convincingly pitch your proposal to the 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 incipient business plan and business model, the milestones and KPIs). The jury will recommend your proposal for funding or not (‘GO’ or ‘NO GO’).

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.

<b>Table 4. Award criteria for EIC Transition Open at first evaluation step</b>
<b>Excellence (Threshold: 4/5)</b>
<b>Technological breakthrough:</b> Does the technology have a high degree of novelty and higher performance compared to other technologies available or in development? Does the technology indicate high commercial potential?
<b>Objectives:</b> How credible and feasible are the objectives for the planned technology development and maturation? How credible and feasible are the objectives and KPIs for the

<sup>46</sup> The number of participants to the interview must however be limited to the minimum necessary.



planned business development process?
<b>Methodology:</b> Is the timing right for this technology/innovation (i.e., feasibility, technological readiness level, unique selling points)? <sup>47</sup>
<b>Impact (Threshold: 4/5)</b>
<b>Credibility of the impacts:</b> To what extent the expected commercial impact(s) described in the proposal are credible and substantial within the project and beyond (e.g., one or several sectors, setting new standards, etc.)?
<b>Economic and/or societal benefits:</b> To what extent does the proposed innovation have scale up potential including high capacity to gain or create new European or global markets? To what extent is the proposed innovation expected to generate positive impacts for the European Union, Member States or Associated Countries (e.g., strategic autonomy, employment etc.)?
<b>Investment readiness and go to market strategy:</b> 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?
<b>Quality and efficiency of the implementation (Threshold 3/5)</b>
<b>Quality and motivation of the team:</b> 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?
<b>KPIs and Milestones:</b> 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?
<b>Workplan and allocation of resources:</b> How appropriate and effective is the allocation of resources (person-months and equipment) between work packages and between project partners? Is the number of project partners well justified?

<sup>47</sup> The technology must be developed in a safe, secure and reliable manner. Proposals which involve the development, use or deployment of AI based systems/techniques must be technically robust (e.g., resilient to attack, secure and safe, having fallback plan, accurate, reliable and reproducible). To a degree matching the type of research being proposed (from basic to precompetitive) they must demonstrate that they comply with the Trustworthy Intelligence Principles (see Annex 2).

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)
<b>Excellence (GO/NO GO)</b>
<b>Technological breakthrough:</b> 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?
<b>Objectives:</b> 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?
<b>Methodology:</b> Is the timing right for this technology/innovation (i.e., feasibility, technological readiness level, unique selling points)?
<b>Impact (GO/NO GO)</b>
<b>Credibility of the impacts:</b> Is the incipient proposed business model sound and promising? To what extent the expected commercial impact(s) described are realistic and substantial within the project and beyond?
<b>Market and economic impacts:</b> have potential markets/ use cases and users of the innovation been identified? Does the proposed innovation have high impact potential for the European Union, Member States or Associated Countries including high capacity to gain or create new European or global markets?
<b>Investment readiness and go to market strategy:</b> Are the plans to ensure the subsequent financing of the technology/ innovation (e.g., applying for EIC Accelerator, private investment, patenting/licensing, etc.) appropriate?
<b>Quality and efficiency of the implementation (GO/NO GO)</b>
<b>Quality and motivation of the team:</b> Does the team have the capability and motivation to mature the proposed technological innovation and implement market-related activities?
<b>Risk assessment:</b> Have the risk that might prevent the validation of the innovation in

relevant application environment and/or market success been appropriately considered?

**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?

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 submit your proposal as an individual SME and it meets all evaluation criteria thresholds at the first step but is not selected for funding (including from a No-Go recommendation from the jury), it may be awarded a Seal of Excellence.

Already at submission stage you will also be asked to agree to share your relevant data with alternative funding bodies of your Member State or Associated Country should your proposal be awarded a Seal of Excellence.

## IV. 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 funding from EUR 0.5 to EUR 17.5 million and Business Acceleration Services (see Section [V](#)).

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). The EIC Accelerator looks to support companies where the EIC support will act as a catalyst to crowd in other investors necessary for the scale up of the innovation.

Applicants to EIC Accelerator can submit proposals through:

- ✦ EIC Accelerator Open, which has no predefined thematic priorities and is open to proposals in any field of technology or application;<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> In line with the Do Not Significant Harm principle, see Annex 2

- ✦ 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 exceptional cases for rapid scale up purposes ; or
- ✦ one or more natural persons (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 agreement on its investment component;
  - 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; 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. Your company must prove its effective establishment in a Member State or an Associated Country at the time of submission of the full proposal.

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

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

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

Applicants may also be able to apply if they have a project financed by an eligible programme managed by a Member State or an Associated Country under the pilot Plug-in scheme. The Plug-in scheme to apply to the EIC Accelerator is detailed in Annex 4.

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

The total indicative budget for this call is EUR 675 million. EUR 375 million of the total indicative budget will be allocated to EIC Accelerator Open and EUR 300 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 405 million and is managed by the EIC Fund. This budget may be increased by unused amounts allocated to the EIC Fund under previous EIC Work Programmes<sup>49</sup>.

The EIC Accelerator provides:

- a) grant component only ('Grant Only')** that will take the form of a lump sum contribution<sup>50</sup> via a grant agreement. Grant only shall be provided only once to any legal entity for the duration of the Horizon Europe programme (2021-27)<sup>51</sup>
- b) blended finance** support which is composed of:
  - ✦ An *investment component* usually in the form of direct equity or quasi-equity such as convertible loans via an investment agreement.
  - ✦ A *grant component*, that will take the form of a lump sum contribution<sup>52</sup> via a grant agreement.
- c) investment component only (Equity-Only)** support to non-bankable SMEs, including start-ups, which have already received an eligible grant support<sup>53</sup>, via an investment agreement

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<sup>49</sup> See Annex 1 for full information about the budget

<sup>50</sup> [Decision authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation \(2021-2027\) – and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community \(2021-2025\)](#)

<sup>51</sup> According to Horizon Europe Art.48.1, Grant-only support under the Accelerator shall be provided only under the following cumulative conditions:

- (a) the project shall include information on the capacities and willingness of the applicant to scale-up;
- (b) the beneficiary shall be a start-up or an SME
- (c) 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.

<sup>52</sup> [Decision authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation \(2021-2027\) – and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community \(2021-2025\)](#)

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

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 and Tender Portal<sup>54</sup>.

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

The minimum investment component is EUR 0.5 million and the maximum is EUR 15 million<sup>55</sup>.

The investment component is intended to finance market deployment and scale up and it can be requested in parallel to the grant (and may be used for co-financing innovation activities) or at a later stage during the lifetime of their grant agreement. Within the maximum budget awarded by the Commission, the terms of investment will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis<sup>56</sup> in accordance with the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines<sup>57</sup>.

The investment component of the EIC is designed to fill the funding gap for high-risk innovations to a stage where they can be 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

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<sup>53</sup> Eligible grants are those awarded by the EIC, as well as the EIC pilot under Horizon 2020.

<sup>54</sup> [Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>55</sup> In certain cases, investments can be made in holding structures of the beneficiary company, subject to the provisions of the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines

<sup>56</sup> In the case of the investment component, the financial support may exceptionally be revised following a periodic or final review of an EIC Accelerator project (in line with Article 48(12), second sub paragraph of the Horizon Europe Regulation), also in light of the terms and conditions established in the investment agreement. The EIC Investment Guidelines are available on the EIC website.

<sup>57</sup> [220301 EIC Investment Guidelines - Horizon Europe March 2022 FINAL \(1\) 0.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

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 may be for a higher amount in exceptional and well justified cases.<sup>58</sup>

EIC Accelerator grant funding covers innovation activities, including demonstration of the technology in the relevant environment, prototyping and system level demonstration, R&D and testing required to meet regulatory and standardisation requirements, intellectual property management, and marketing approval (e.g. at least TRL 5<sup>59</sup> to 8).

Eligible costs will take the form of a lump sum and the amount will be determined during the evaluation process. Applicants must therefore propose the amount of the lump sum based on their estimated project costs as defined in the Decision of 7 July 2021 authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027) – and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2021-2025).<sup>60</sup>

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

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<sup>58</sup> In the case of the grant component, the financial support may exceptionally be revised upon advice by the EIC Board and subject to a project review by external independent experts (in line with Article 48(12), second subparagraph of the Horizon Europe Regulation). For “grant only” applications the maximum is less than EUR 2.5 million.

<sup>59</sup> To be interpreted as all aspects of TRL 4 completed and validation in relevant environment started.

<sup>60</sup> This [decision](#) is available on the Funding and Tenders Portal, in the reference documents section for Horizon Europe, under ‘Simplified costs decisions’ or through this link: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision\\_he\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf)



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

The application process consists of a number of steps:

1. *Short proposals* which may be submitted at any time and which will be evaluated remotely by EIC expert evaluators on a first come, first served basis;
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;
3. Full proposals will first be assessed remotely by EIC expert evaluators. If successful, you will be invited to an *interview* with an EIC jury as the final step in the selection process;
4. If selected for (potential)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).

### 1. Submission of short proposals

You may submit a short proposal at any time as from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024<sup>61</sup> via the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal<sup>62</sup>. 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.

All personal data and information in your proposal will be kept strictly confidential.<sup>63</sup> However, before submitting your full proposal, you will be offered the opportunity to share basic data and information with your Member State or Associated Country National Contact Point and other bodies such that they can provide additional support. National Contact Points and other bodies are under strict confidentiality rules, and will only receive the basic information about your proposal (e.g., abstract, funding request, contact details).

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<sup>61</sup> Short proposals may be submitted prior to 1 January 2024 according to the provisions set out in the 2023 EIC Work Programme.

<sup>62</sup> [Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](https://europe.europa.eu/funding)

<sup>63</sup> All personal data will be processed in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data.

Within approximately 4-6 weeks, you will receive the evaluation result of your short proposal specifying whether or not your proposal met the admissibility, eligibility and award criteria evaluation elements (set out in the next section) and can therefore proceed to submit a full proposal. In both cases, you will receive feedback from four expert evaluators.

## **2. Submission of full proposals**

If your short proposal is successful, then you will be entitled to receive coaching support to prepare a full proposal from one of the business coaches from the EIC Business Acceleration Services.<sup>64</sup> 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 2024 Work programme, your full proposal can be submitted to any of the following cut-offs during 2024, and any of the cut-offs for 2025. Applicants who succeeded with a positive evaluation of their short proposal under the 2023 EIC Work Programme may apply to any of the following cut-offs in 2024. You may decide which cut-off to apply to.

The two cut-off dates for 2024 are:<sup>65</sup>

- ✦ 13 March 2024
- ✦ 3 October 2024

The cut-off dates for 2025 will be announced in the 2025 Work Programme due to be adopted in Autumn 2024.

The full proposal consists of

- ✦ a full business plan and full information on the company's finances and structure of the potential beneficiary/final recipient company. You will also need to propose a set of milestones to be used as a basis for the EIC to manage the funding for your innovation.

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<sup>64</sup> It is nevertheless up to the applicants to decide if and when to use the coaching services.

<sup>65</sup> 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 will receive 3 days of remote coaching.

- ✦ a pitch-deck in pdf format<sup>66</sup> and a video pitch of up to three minutes. You may decide to reuse or update the pitch-deck and video pitch submitted with your short proposal.

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, if applying for investment.

Likewise, applicants requesting an investment component will be requested to give their consent for the Agency and the EIC Fund to search for a suitable investment partners and share the necessary information, including personal and proposal data, with these investment partners.

Once you submit your full proposal, it will be assessed remotely against award criteria evaluation elements (set out in the next section) by three EIC expert evaluators. Within approximately six-weeks<sup>67</sup> you will be informed about the result of the remote evaluation and will receive feedback. If successful, you will be invited to attend an interview (which may be in person or online) with an EIC Jury.

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

All companies receiving a GO from the remote evaluation stage will be invited to the interviews. In case the number of applicants to invite exceeds the capacities of the initially planned interview sessions, a first batch of applicants will be invited according to the following prioritisation, starting with category 'a' below, proceeding to the next:

- a. Gender balance: women-led companies (until 40% of invited companies is reached);
- b. Submission date and time: any remaining companies will be prioritised based on the date and time submission of their short proposal.

The remaining batch of applicants to interview will be invited to a further set of interviews to be organised before the interviews of the next cut-off date.

Interviews will be organised approximately three to four weeks after applicants are informed of the result of the remote evaluation (or longer if there is a need for a further set of interviews). At the interview, you will be assessed by a panel of maximum six jury members. EIC Programme Managers and representatives from the

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<sup>66</sup> There are no limits on the number of slides at full application stage, but the applicant must be able to present at the Jury interview in a maximum of 10 minutes.

<sup>67</sup> This period may be longer, for example if the evaluation is taking place over the summer period.

EIB as Investment Advisor to the EIC Fund may participate as observers in the interview, but will not be members of the jury and will not take part in the jury's deliberations. 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.

The Agency may reimburse the cost of applicants invited to attend on-site interviews during the evaluation of their proposals subject to the adoption of the decision authorising it. This information will be communicated to applicants when invited to the interview.

The Agency aims to complete the full process from submission of the full application (cut-off date for full proposal submission) to signature of the grant within 5 months in most cases.

#### **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 Only:** you will be invited to prepare the grant agreement. Once the grant preparations are concluded, and subject to the adoption of the award decision by the Commission, you will be invited to sign the EIC Accelerator grant agreement. You will then receive, a first pre-financing payment on the grant component. The Agency will aim to provide the first pre-financing within five months of the cut-off date and within two-three months from the date your proposal is selected for funding.

**Blended finance:** 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).

Following the award decision and completion of the grant preparations, you will be invited to sign a grant agreement.

The relevant information from your proposal will be passed to the EIC Fund and its investment advisor (the European Investment Bank), to structure the potential investment agreement (compliance checks,<sup>68</sup> due diligence, syndication of potential co-investors, tranches of investment and related objectives and milestones, etc.). The EIB 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 in the grant implementation, or in a number of tranches.

During this stage, and in particular if you have not yet secured other investors, the EIC Fund or the Business Acceleration Services provided by the Agency will also look 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, an investment component will be decided by the EIC Fund. The decision to invest as well as the amount and the terms of the investment component will be made by the EIC Fund in compliance with the EIC Investment Guidelines.<sup>69</sup> The investment amount decided by the EIC Fund will be within the maximum set by the Single Award Decision, as well as within the total amount available to the EIC Fund for investments. In some cases, the investment decision may lead to amendments to integrate in 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) may trigger a suspension of the grant payments as per Article 29.1(c) of the Model Grant Agreement.

Should the outcome of the due diligence conclude that the innovation or your company is not yet mature for investment, the EIC Fund may recommend to the Commission that you start with the grant component first, 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 a maximum of one year after

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<sup>68</sup> Such as KYC (Know Your Customer), AML/CTF (Anti-Money Laundering / Combating the Financing of Terrorism), Tax compliance, Sanctions, etc.

<sup>69</sup> The investment decisions will also be reported to the Programme Committee in accordance with Article 14 of Council Decision (EU) 2021/764.

the end date of the grant. If no investment decision is taken during this period, you may subsequently apply for equity only support.

As an outcome of the due diligence process, the investment may be rejected, notably due to the results of the due diligence, compliance checks, existence of irregularities, in cases of misrepresentation by the applicant or in the case of a manifest error in any previous assessments, in accordance with the EIC Investment guidelines. In such a case, the Agency may also request amendments of the grant agreement. In cases of misrepresentation, submission of false information, non-submission of information, suspicion of fraud or any other ground listed in the EIC Accelerator grant agreement, the Agency may suspend and/or terminate your grant agreement. The EIC Accelerator grant agreement may also be terminated if the non-investment is likely to affect the implementation of the action or puts into question the decision awarding the financial support.

### **Equity Only:**

An award decision will be adopted by the Commission covering the investment in the same way as for blended finance. The relevant information from your proposal will be passed to the European Investment Bank, acting as an investment adviser for the EIC Fund, to proceed with the investment agreement in the same way as for blended finance. If your proposal is considered not mature for investment, it is not possible for the EIC Fund to recommend a grant financing.

### **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 as soon as they are submitted. 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. You may resubmit your proposal, according to applicant submission limits (see below section 3). You will be expected to make improvements to your proposal.

<b>Table 6. Evaluation elements for EIC Accelerator Open and Challenges at short proposal stage</b>
<b>Excellence</b>
<b>Excellence of the company:</b> Does the company has the vision and ambition to scale up?
<b>Novelty and breakthrough character of the innovation:</b> Does the innovation have breakthrough character and a high degree of novelty compared to existing solutions?
<b>Technology readiness level:</b> Has the innovation reached TRL 5 (i.e. it has been tested in the relevant environment)?
<b>Timing:</b> Is the timing right for this innovation in terms of market, users, societal or scientific of technological trends and developments?
<b>Impact</b>
<b>Competitiveness and demand:</b> Is the innovation better than what the competition proposes, and is the solution bringing sufficient added value to trigger demand from potential customers?
<b>Market development:</b> Does the innovation have the potential to develop new markets or significantly transform existing ones?
<b>Broader impact:</b> Will the innovation, if successfully commercialised achieve positive broader societal, economic, environmental <sup>70</sup> or climate impacts?
<b>Level of risk, implementation, and need for Union support</b>
<b>Team:</b> 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?

## 2. Evaluation of full proposals: remote evaluation and interviews

Full proposals will be assessed following the cut-off dates listed below. This will start with a remote evaluation where your full proposal will be sent to three EIC expert

<sup>70</sup> Projects must comply with the 'do no significant harm' principle enshrined in Article 17 of the EU Taxonomy Regulation as part of the eligibility criteria.

evaluators (different than the short proposal evaluators) whose expertise will be matched against the area of technology and application of your innovation. The expert evaluators will then assess your proposal against the award criteria evaluation elements set out below.

Each evaluator will assess whether your full proposal meets each of the award criteria evaluation elements and give a GO or NO GO per element:

- ✦ If all three evaluators give a GO for all the evaluation elements, then your full proposal will be successful and you will be invited to an interview with an EIC jury.
- ✦ If two of the three evaluators give a GO for all the evaluation elements, then there will be a consensus meeting to decide if you will be invited to an interview with an EIC Jury.
- ✦ If two or more of the evaluators give a NO GO on any of the evaluation elements then your proposal will be rejected.

The EIC jury will have access to the remote evaluation results of your full proposal but will not have access to your short proposal or the evaluation results of your short proposal and will also not have access to any previous proposals in cases of resubmissions.

EIC Jury members, based on your interview and their overall assessment, will recommend your proposal for funding (GO) or not (NO GO):

- ✦ If the proposal receives a GO and is recommended for funding, the EIC jury may recommend lowering the grant amount. The EIC jury will not change the amount requested for the investment component, 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) but may make recommendations to be taken into account when negotiating the grant or investment component, including for example on the milestones and the valuation, and on proposed coaching activities. Applicants are reminded that the amounts awarded by the Commission are subject to negotiation, including due diligence.
- ✦ If your proposal receives a NO GO and is not recommended for funding, your proposal will normally be awarded a Seal of Excellence<sup>71</sup> to facilitate funding from alternative funding sources and access to EIC Business Acceleration Services. Exceptionally, EIC juries may recommend that your proposal does not

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<sup>71</sup> To make Seal of Excellence operational applicants must give the consent to share data about your application with other alternative funding and support bodies.



receive a Seal of Excellence if they find weaknesses in your proposal which were not identified by the expert evaluators at the remote evaluation stage. In such cases, you will receive feedback to justify this recommendation.

Following the notification of the outcome of your application, you will receive an official rejection letter (and your Seal of Excellence, if awarded).

Indicatively, the budget for grant components will be allocated approximately equally between the cut-offs. In case the amount allocated to GO applicants is less than the budget available for that cut-off, or additional budget becomes available as a result of the grant agreement concluded with EIC Awardees, then the remaining available budget will be allocated to the subsequent cut-off. 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 cut-off. Such applicants will be identified using the ordering set out above for the invitation to interviews.

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.

<b>Table 7. Award criteria elements for EIC Accelerator Open and Challenges at full proposal stage: remote and interview</b>
<b>Excellence</b>
<b><u>Excellence of the company:</u></b> Does the company have a clear mission and vision and partnerships to realise their ambition to scale up?
<b><u>Novelty and breakthrough character of the innovation:</u></b> Does the innovation have breakthrough character and a high degree of novelty compared to existing solutions, and for EIC Accelerator Challenges, is it addressing the specific objectives of the challenge?
<b><u>Timing:</u></b> Is the timing right for this innovation in terms of users, societal or scientific of technological trends and developments?
<b><u>Technological feasibility:</u></b> has the technology been developed in a safe, secure and reliable manner? Has it been adequately assessed, validated or certified?
<b><u>Intellectual Property Strategy:</u></b> Does your company have the necessary Intellectual Property Rights to ensure freedom to operate and adequate protection of the idea?
<b>Impact</b>
<b><u>Competitiveness and demand:</u></b> Is the innovation better than what the competition

proposes, and is the solution bringing sufficient added value to trigger demand from potential customers?

**Market development:** Does the innovation have the potential to 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?

**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?

**Scale up potential:** Does the innovation have the potential to scale up the company?

*For grant only support: can the applicant demonstrate access to the resources needed to commercialise and scale-up the innovation*

**Broader impact:** Will the innovation, if successfully commercialised achieve positive broader societal, economic, environmental<sup>60</sup> or climate impacts, and for EIC Challenges does it have the potential to contribute to the expected outcomes and impacts set out in the **Challenge?**

#### **Level of risk, implementation, and need for Union support**

**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 (for applicants requesting an investment component):**

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?

*Note: if an applicant has previous investors or is in a current investment round, this will not be used as a reason to reject an application against this element. Moreover, this assessment should take into account the international context and whether competitor companies outside of the EU or Associated Countries have access to larger investment amounts.*

*Note: Small mid-caps will be expected to provide documentary evidence that their bank has refused the financing needed for the project.*

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

**Implementation plan:** Is there a clear implementation plan with defined milestones, work packages and deliverables, together with realistic resources and timings?

## **Application submission limits**

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

After three unsuccessful submissions to the EIC Accelerator<sup>72</sup>, which can be at any stage of the process (Short Proposal, Full Proposal) and for any form of support (Challenge, Open, Grant only, Blended finance, Equity only), an applicant may not apply again to the EIC Accelerator under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme.

This provision repeals the rules on '*on resubmission of applications to the EIC Accelerator*' laid down in previous EIC Work Programmes. Furthermore, the number of applications to the EIC Accelerator submitted in previous years by the same applicant will not be taken into account for the purpose of the application of this new rule.

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

## **Approach for follow-on investment 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 consists of additional amounts to the original maximum amount laid down in the Single Award decision or the decision on investment, and within a maximum of EUR 15 million and subject to availability of budget. Such follow on investments will be subject will be subject to a project review by external experts (to ensure the evaluation criteria for Accelerator are met) amended Award Decision by the European Commission as well a renewed assessment (due diligence) by the EIB as investment adviser to the EIC Fund (as set out above under "Equity Only").<sup>73</sup>

Such follow on investments will be limited to the following exceptional categories of cases<sup>74</sup>:

- i) Where necessary to secure EU interests which cannot be otherwise protected or in the case of strategic technologies<sup>75</sup>, or

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<sup>72</sup> Three submissions of the same (improved) proposal from the same legal entity.

<sup>73</sup> In accordance with Article 48(12) second subparagraph of the Horizon Europe Regulation. The Programme Committee shall be informed of such cases.

<sup>74</sup> These cases stem from the advice of the EIC Board.

<sup>75</sup> Investments will be consider strategic where without securing the investment in the Union there is a risk of dependency of a critical technology on a limited number of third country suppliers. See also section of the Introduction on economic security.

- 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"<sup>76</sup> support under previous EIC Work Programmes, 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, unused 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<sup>77</sup>**

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.

Therefore, the EIC Fund may decide to invest not in the beneficiary but in its parent or holding company in such cases:

- Provided that the latter fulfils all eligibility criteria, including SME status, non-bankability for the purpose of the EIC Accelerator, and establishment in an EU Member State or Associated County, and
- in accordance with the EIC Fund Investment Guidelines.

In these cases, and where there is a grant component of support, the grant agreement with the beneficiary will include the parent or holding company as an affiliated entity in its role as investee.<sup>78</sup>

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

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<sup>76</sup> As provided for under previous EIC Work Programmes

<sup>77</sup> In case of equity only, the parent or holding will have to submit the application

<sup>78</sup> Where necessary, via an amendment to the grant agreement.

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.

## IV.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 falls within the scope of the Challenges topics below, grant funding is subject to eligibility in accordance with the specific conditions applicable to those topics:

- ✦ Human centric generative AI made in Europe (Section IV.2. 1)
- ✦ Emerging quantum technology components (Section IV.2.3B)

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

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 or other relevant environment (e.g., at least Technology Readiness Level 5 or higher). 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.

The EIC Accelerator focuses 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.

## IV.2 EIC Accelerator Challenges

The total indicative budget for EIC Accelerator Challenges is EUR 300 million. However, 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.<sup>79</sup>

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 2024, these objectives include Net Zero Industry, Critical Raw Materials, RePower EU, the Health Emergency Response Authority (HERA), the draft AI act and the Chips Act.

All Challenge applicants are encouraged to develop synergies with relevant activities under Horizon Europe Work Programme 2021 – 2022 and Work Programme 2023 – 2024.

### IV.2.1 Human Centric Generative AI made in Europe

#### **Background and scope:**

The rise of generative AI is astonishing. By seamlessly enhancing human abilities with machine capabilities, this next wave of AI may boost productivity in many sectors, create a new industry and also lead to profound socio-economic changes.

Furthermore, Generative AI is likely to revolutionise human-computer interaction, fostering more intuitive, conversational, and adaptive experiences.

Nevertheless, these advantages are not without some limitations. Current generative AI models function based on predictions rather than understanding, and their extensive capabilities and inherent risks are yet to be fully discovered.

The aim of this Challenge is to foster a European, human-centric approach to AI, tackling prevalent issues like transparency deficit and trust inadequacy. European AI start-ups have the potential to develop the next generation of generative AI models that embody EU values and guarantee Europe's sovereignty in this critical field.

#### **Specific objectives:**

This Challenge aims to support the development of:

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<sup>79</sup> With the exception of the Next Generation EU component of the budget.

- ✦ foundation language and multimodal ‘frontier’ models that reach performances at least equivalent to the most powerful state of the art large generative models, capable of meeting the needs of European user industry, scientists, public sector and citizens;
- ✦ smaller foundation models with highly promising performance competing with frontier models in specific domains.

It is expected that the developed models go beyond the current state of the art in a way suitable for overcoming the current difficulties and limitations of this kind of tools. Examples of areas in which there could be relevant technological improvements include:

- ✦ Reliable content: Generative AI models minimising fictional elements;
- ✦ Transparency and traceability: Generative AI models allowing to trace the origin of the information provided.

The targeted applicants are primarily SMEs developing models themselves, but could also include SMEs providing innovative infrastructure, development tools, and critical support to the developers of generative AI solutions, in helping the efficient use of existing models while addressing specific issues such as hallucination or limited models knowledge.

The applicant must demonstrate a genuine commitment to developing and deploying “European-Value driven” AI. This European perspective should become a differentiating factor that will bring a competitive advantage to these companies, and also an important element to de-risk future investments.

### **Expected outcomes and impacts:**

This Challenge is expected to reinforce the development of foundation models, which are “European-Value driven”, in line with the trustworthy and ethical principles as well as the (draft) AI Act.

The AI models developed and deployed under this Challenge are expected to comply with the EU concept for Trustworthy AI<sup>80</sup> and the relevant ethical principles<sup>81</sup> as well as the (draft) AI Act. In that respect, besides performances, due attention should be paid to data quality, transparency, privacy, and security.

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<sup>80</sup> See Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI (<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/ethics-guidelines-trustworthy-ai>)

<sup>81</sup> See Ethics By Design and Ethics of Use Approaches for Artificial Intelligence ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ethics-by-design-and-ethics-of-use-approaches-for-artificial-intelligence\\_he\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ethics-by-design-and-ethics-of-use-approaches-for-artificial-intelligence_he_en.pdf))



In the mid and long term, it is expected to reduce dependencies and support European companies in leveraging the advances in generative AI enhance their products and develop new ones.

The selected beneficiaries will receive favourable access to European supercomputing resources for the training of their large foundation models in line with the access terms and conditions of the EuroHPC regulation. In addition, they may benefit from additional actions aimed at creating strategic partnerships with major industries or attracting further capital. In addition, opportunities may be explored to provide the selected beneficiaries with access to scientific datasets through the European Open Science Cloud or to provide users of the European Open Science Cloud with access to the tools developed by the beneficiaries.

### **Specific conditions**

Any technology under this Challenge must be developed in a robust manner, paying specific attention to safety, security and ethics considerations in future applications.

In order to achieve the expected outcomes, and safeguard the Union's strategic assets, interests, autonomy, and security, it is important to avoid a situation of technological dependency on a non-EU source, in a global context that requires the EU to take action to build on its strengths, and to carefully assess and address any strategic weaknesses, vulnerabilities and high-risk dependencies which put at risk the attainment of its ambitions. For this reason, beneficiaries of the grant component of Accelerator funding<sup>82</sup> must not be directly or indirectly controlled by a non-associated third country or a legal entity established in a non-associated third country other than such third countries or legal entities established in OECD member countries, Mercosur member countries countries with which the EU cooperates under a Trade and Technology Council, and countries with which the EU has a Digital Partnership<sup>83</sup>.

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

**Indicative budget:** EUR 50 million.

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<sup>82</sup> i.e., the legal entity which signs the grant agreement.

<sup>83</sup> OECD member countries have demonstrated a commitment to trustworthy and human-centric AI, as outlined by their adoption of OECD principles. Collaboration with India, Singapore, and Mercosur countries fosters not only technological advancements but also the ethical and secure deployment of AI aligned with European values. The Trade and Technology Council with India, the Digital Partnership with Singapore, and the Framework Cooperation Agreement with Mercosur, serve to mitigate the strategic and technological risks for collaboration with these countries.

## IV.2.2 Enabling virtual worlds and augmented interaction in high-impact applications to support the realisation of Industry 5.0

### Background and scope:

As recognised in the Communication on “An EU initiative on Web 4.0 and virtual worlds: a head start in the next technological transition”<sup>84</sup>, virtual worlds will be an important aspect of Europe’s Digital Decade and will impact the way businesses operate, innovate, produce and interact with customers. This Challenge aims at enabling the use of high-fidelity virtual worlds in high-impact markets and applications promoting Industry 5.0 principles of sustainability, human-centric, and resilience by scaling up cutting-edge innovations for platforms, middleware, tools, and devices.

Although virtual worlds are not a new concept, they have only recently started to become feasible. They owe their technical, economic, and social viability to the maturity of a range of enablers, such as the underlying technology building blocks and the connectivity infrastructure. However, the existing technological advances and cutting-edge innovations need to be scaled-up for a mainstream adoption of virtual worlds in industry. This requires implementing a human-centric approach in the technology design and deployment, based on partnerships with industry, involvement of end-users, such as workers or customers, and cross-sector cooperation.

In addition, this Challenge aims to orient the application of the solutions developed with virtual worlds technologies to Industry 5.0 Challenges, which are pressuring industry in a complex global economic, ecological and social context. The Challenge would thus fund solutions responding to industry needs for upskilled talent, resource efficiency and cost effectiveness, as well as lower carbon emissions. Such approaches are necessary to ensure that both industry and society reap the benefits of the technologies to the fullest potential by, for example, lowering their cost, applying their use to sustainability or industry resilience challenges, to enhancing collaboration in work environments and workers’ learning, or improving ergonomics.

### Specific objectives:

The specific objective of the Challenge is to support the development and deployment of advanced virtual worlds technology solutions for industry which are

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<sup>84</sup> [EUR-Lex - 52023DC0442 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

human centric, sustainable, and resilient in their design and / or user contexts. The introduction to the market of innovations in the following areas and their scale up in exploiting new market opportunities is encouraged:

- Artificial Intelligence, e.g., for intelligent human-centric agents that interact with users, to create and script adaptive virtual worlds and interaction scenarios, and to provide more intuitive and accessible immersive experiences in dynamic Industry 5.0 application contexts: innovation management or operations management, such as collaborative worker platforms, rapid waste-less prototyping in virtual labs, knowledge valorisation across different teams, as well as remote working in challenging environments.
- Distributed ledger technology, e.g., for enabling secure and transparent transactions and for facilitating the management of digital assets in and across virtual worlds or in relation to linked physical assets in industrial applications, for instance in order to support adoption of technology applications for multi-site Industry 5.0.
- Spatial computing and location mapping, e.g., for spatially aware virtual worlds applications through accurate positioning of objects and users, realistic physics simulations, or for virtual world experiences closely tied to industrial physical locations and spaces.
- Digital twins for resilient and safer transport technologies and sustainable urban mobility systems. Digital twins can also help to optimise performance and decision-making in industrial contexts, including the development of sensors and sensor fusion analysis.
- Wearables, smart textiles and smart objects to complement and enrich users' interactions through virtual worlds, e.g., for realistic, immersive or embodied experiences and interactions with improved ergonomics and cost-effective enabling applications contributing to Industry 5.0 goals.
- Development of AR/VR solutions for worker augmentation and learning, for remote expert assistance& development management, including for skills training or customer onboarding in industrial applications.

### **Expected outcomes and impacts:**

Proposals are expected to aim at a sufficient integration of high-risk innovations with state-of-the-art building blocks (proprietary or not) towards compelling in-situ demonstration of clear added-value from using virtual worlds in high-impact markets, supporting the realisation of industry 5.0, with clear up-take in the market and scale up exploitation.

Expected outcomes of the innovations include:

- enabling skills upgrades, talent attraction, employee well-being and knowledge retention; and
- cost-effectiveness and resource efficiency for industry

Interoperability between solutions is a key point for the free movement of users and tools between virtual worlds and avoids the phenomenon of gate keepers.

### **Specific conditions**

The AI models developed and /or applied under this Challenge must comply with the EU concept for Trustworthy AI<sup>85</sup> and the relevant ethical principles<sup>86</sup> as well as the (draft) AI Act. In that respect, in addition to performance, due attention should be paid to data quality, transparency, privacy, and security. In addition, the AR/VR and AI tools should be developed and / or applied based on human-centricity principles. This European perspective should become a differentiating factor that brings a competitive advantage to these companies, as well as being an important element in de-risking future investments.

**Indicative budget:** EUR 50 million.

## **IV.2.3 Enabling the smart edge and quantum technology components**

This Challenge contributes to the objectives of the Chips Act by supporting the development of critical technologies where start-ups and SMEs with disruptive innovations have the potential to scale up and help ensure the future open strategic autonomy of the Union.

### **A. Enabling the smart edge**

#### **Background and scope**

The concept of the **smart edge** encompasses a wide range of devices situated in or near the location where data is acquired or generated. As data processing moves closer to the edge of the network, a new generation of smart edge devices is

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<sup>85</sup> See Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI (<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/ethics-guidelines-trustworthy-ai>)

<sup>86</sup> See Ethics By Design and Ethics of Use Approaches for Artificial Intelligence ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ethics-by-design-and-ethics-of-use-approaches-for-artificial-intelligence\\_he\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ethics-by-design-and-ethics-of-use-approaches-for-artificial-intelligence_he_en.pdf))

emerging, requiring innovative solutions for low-power processing, sensing, and communication.

The concept of smart edge recognises the limitations and challenges of relying solely on centralized cloud-based processing. By bringing intelligence closer to the data source, smart edge offers several advantages for instance with real-time processing at the edge, there is a significant reduction in latency, which is crucial for applications that require immediate responses and actions. Other advantages include bandwidth optimization that is particularly important in scenarios where network connectivity is limited or expensive, enhanced privacy and security by keeping sensitive data locally and reducing the exposure of data during transmission, as well as real-time decision-making without relying on cloud connectivity or remote servers.

The potential market size for smart edge solutions is expected to be significant, driven by the increasing adoption of edge computing, IoT, and AI technologies across various industries,, with an expected growth rate between 30% and 40% until 2023, according to most market analysts.<sup>87</sup>

### **Specific objectives**

The objective of this Challenge is to promote the development of novel semiconductor components and integrated smart systems for next-generation **edge devices** with significant impact. The proposals should focus on development of smart integrated devices where the competitive advantage may lie in the system approach or in one of the key components or technologies, such as the following:

- ✦ **Edge Processing** – involving the design and/or integration of edge processors that minimize energy consumption and enable real-time decisions: low- and ultralow-power processors, open-source processor cores, embedded System-on-Chip processors, programmable processors (e.g.,FPGAs), AI accelerators, and neuromorphic processors. Processors will require low-latency non-volatile memory for local data storage; some NV-RAMs allow for highly efficient in-memory computing and analog computing. Security is another critical aspect and may involve cryptographic accelerators and hardware security modules.
- ✦ **Edge Sensing and Imaging**- including the design and/or integration of components for data acquisition: optical sensors, Lidars, Radars, T-o-F sensing, biometric sensing, environmental sensing, chemical and gas sensing, and MEMS.

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<sup>87</sup> [McKinsey](#), [Mordor Intelligence](#), [Grand View Research](#), [Fortune BI](#), [others](#).

- ✦ **Edge Communication** - covering the design and/or integration of connectivity and communication technologies on chips for edge devices: 5G and 6G wireless communication, low-power wireless communication, optical connectivity, mesh networking, software-defined networking, and security protocols for edge and IoT applications.
- ✦ **Edge Power Management** - involving the design and/or integration of components to efficiently manage and utilise power, such as those based on wide bandgap materials. This includes solutions for dynamic power management, sleep mode optimization, battery optimization, and energy harvesting for sustainable and autonomous operation.
- ✦ **Integrated Smart Edge Devices** - referring to highly integrated customised edge devices based on System-on-Chip integration, System-in-Package integration, heterogeneous integration, and modular design of components, such as chiplets, for integration into customized edge devices through advanced packaging technologies, including 2.5D and 3D packaging, enabling improvements in device miniaturisation, performance and reliability.

Relevant examples of the use of integrated chips in edge devices include smart cameras, wearables, hearing aids, AR/VR gear, industrial automation devices, drones, as well as network edge nodes, 5G/6G base stations, and autonomous vehicles. Proposals should demonstrate high potential for commercial deployment in key EU industry sectors such as industrial automation, information and communication, mobility, health and well-being, agri-food, security, and energy.

### **Expected outcomes and impacts**

This Challenge should lead to deep-tech innovations for next-generation edge and IoT semiconductor chips devices that will have important impact for the smart edge, including:

- Industrial Automation: enabling real-time monitoring of machinery, predictive maintenance, and automated decision-making to increase productivity, reduce downtime, and improve safety in industrial settings.
- Mobility: enabling intelligent transportation systems and new mobility services and models, (e.g., automated vehicles) significantly improving efficiency, effectiveness, safety, and sustainability.
- Smart Cities: enabling real-time monitoring of traffic, energy usage, air quality, leading to reduced congestion, improved sustainability, and enhanced quality of life for city residents.

- Health and Well-being: enable remote patient monitoring, personalized treatment plans, and real-time analysis of medical data to improve patient outcomes, reduce healthcare costs, and increase access to care.
- Agriculture: more efficient and sustainable by enabling precision farming techniques to increased crop yields, reduced water usage, and enhanced environmental sustainability.
- Environmental Monitoring: to improve resource management, early warning systems for natural disasters, and enhanced environmental sustainability.

### **Specific conditions**

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

## **B. Emerging quantum technology components**

### **Background and scope**

The focus of this Accelerator Challenge is on fostering innovation in the area of quantum information processing components. Europe is a global leader in research in quantum technologies. Translating this level of R&D excellence into market innovation is a strategic priority, but companies set up to do that mostly struggle to get the necessary funding to scale-up. Supporting European deep tech start-ups in the development of hardware components, including specific components for quantum technologies, is key for strengthening Europe's technological sovereignty and is critical for transitioning innovations from lab to market.

Quantum technologies represent a major paradigm shift of the way we develop devices at nanoscale. These novel technologies are expected to have significant effect on the entire European economy. Advancing innovation capabilities in the area of quantum technologies can increase the strategic innovation and engineering capacities of Europe, giving rise to a range of new products and business models. The latter will enable European companies to take a leading role in a market, which is expected to grow from EUR 1.7 billion in 2021 to EUR 94 billion by 2040 in an aggressive disruption scenario.

This strategic area is particularly focused on the development of emerging, fault-tolerant quantum computing hardware components (e.g., by using different types of qubits and a new methods for controlling them), quantum sensors that work in real

environment, as well as quantum communication devices that can be deployed in a real environment for practical applications such as quantum repeaters, devices for quantum-based encryption etc. Innovation in any segment of the value chain for the development of quantum technology components is addressed.

Quantum computing (QC) and quantum simulation has already attracted investments from large multinational companies and governmental research and innovation programmes. Yet, QC hardware still suffers from large error rates during computation. In addition, none of today's solutions (and even proposed solutions and those demonstrated on a small scale), come close to the need for a control system that scales to many thousands of qubits.

Quantum sensors have a very wide range of applications and have already made significant improvements in recent years in both quality and fabrication methods. However, large number of them can only operate in tightly controlled environment such as laboratories or very specific testbeds.

Quantum communication is of crucial importance for ultra-secure communications and Europe needs to scale up the production of the underlying components and systems to deploy quantum-based infrastructures based on trusted European technology.

### **Specific objectives**

The objective of this Challenge is to support ground-breaking innovations that have a high potential to develop:

- Full stack fault-tolerant quantum computing with:
  - improved performance
  - significantly simplified QPU (Quantum Processing Units) integration with control electronics
  - scalable control systems (scalable to tens of thousands of qubits, needed for meaningful practical applications)
  - software development
- Quantum sensing components to function in real/harsh environment for various application areas, such as ecotoxicology, pharmaceuticals, biomedical, space, corrosion detection in power plants, gas/oil tanks, raw material detection, medical imaging, automotive and many more.
- Quantum communication devices that can be deployed in a real environment such as quantum repeaters, devices for quantum-based encryption etc.



### **Expected outcomes and impacts**

This Challenge is expected to support the EU in taking a leading role in the development of cutting-edge quantum computing/simulation and quantum sensing and quantum communications that can be used in real environment and deployed in various areas.

In mid and long term, this Challenge is expected to expand the quantum capabilities of Europe, underpin its economic resilience and digital sovereignty. It should pave the way for Europe to be at the cutting-edge of quantum capabilities by 2030 as envisioned by the 2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade Policy Programme

### **Specific conditions<sup>88</sup>**

Any technology under this Challenge must be developed in a robust manner, paying specific attention to safety, security and ethics considerations in future applications.

While the European Union has done a lot to respond to major technological challenges in recent years, in light of the risks that certain economic dependencies and technical evolutions can present, it now needs a comprehensive strategic approach to economic security, de-risking and promoting its technological edge in critical sectors.

In order to achieve the expected outcomes, and safeguard the Union's strategic assets, interests, autonomy, and security, it is important to avoid a situation of technological dependency on a non-EU source, in a global context that requires the EU to take action to build on its strengths, and to carefully assess and address any strategic weaknesses, vulnerabilities and high-risk dependencies which put at risk the attainment of its ambitions. For this reason, beneficiaries of the grant component of Accelerator funding<sup>89</sup> 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).]

**Indicative budget:** EUR 50 million. At least 30% of this budget will be allocated to the Quantum technology components and at least 30% to the semiconductor chip

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<sup>88</sup> These conditions provide for a consistency with topics relating to quantum technologies included in the Horizon Europe 2023-2024 main work programme.

<sup>89</sup> i.e., the legal entity which signs the grant agreement

development areas. The remainder will be flexibly allocated to either area in function of the successful submissions.

#### **IV.2.4 Food from precision fermentation and algae**

##### **Background and scope:**

Land based agricultural production is the source of approximately 95% of human food nutrients (UN FAO). Intensive and often inappropriate practices in agriculture have however resulted in severe soil degradation, thereby reducing the capacity of soils to support food production and other important ecosystem services such as the regulation of water, nutrients and carbon cycles. Soil degradation is further accelerated by the effects of climate change leading to significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the release of nutrients.

When combined with an increasing human population, likely to increase net demand for food by a further 60%<sup>90</sup>, there is a clear rationale to explore complementary routes to food production that are efficient, resilient, and sustainable, thereby helping the sector realise its net zero ambitions.

This Accelerator Challenge focuses on supporting the production of food from precision fermentation and algae that decouples food production from the soil and environmental conditions. It looks to support the development of viable alternatives that complement agriculture, and capable of producing foods rich in proteins, fats, carbohydrates, dietary fibres, vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients by bacteria, yeasts, fungi, and algae in quantities that are comparable to, or even greater than, foods of traditional plant or animal origin. Such foods may also thus deliver precision nutrition that provides consumers with healthier alternatives with regard to reference intakes of nutrients, thereby contributing to maintain the overall health of the general population.

These foods could be produced from agricultural side streams and wastes instead of high-value crops, and used for human consumption, as a nutritional supplement, ingredient, or for animal feed. The benefits of such a shift include ease of production, independence from climate conditions, reduced pressure on natural resources such as land and water, reduced hazards associated with the use of pesticides and antibiotics, and cost-effectiveness. A shift from the current livestock production

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<sup>90</sup> According to estimates compiled by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), by 2050 we will need to produce 60 per cent more food to feed a world population of 9.3 billion.

system would also reduce dependency on feed imports, with beneficial effects on reducing global biodiversity losses.

**Specific objectives:**

In support of the EU Soil Mission, the EU Green Deal, Farm to Fork strategy, Fit for 55 and REPowerEU policy actions, the key goal of this Challenge is to support the production of sustainable and nutritious food from precision fermentation and algae.

Innovations must go beyond incremental changes to the state of the art and deliver novel production processes that must deliver energy and resource efficient, low-emission foods that are integral to a healthy diet. The approaches taken must be scalable based on a range of process parameters such as, but not limited to light, temperature, and pressure to allow custom modification of the final product to a range of operating environments including those with high, or even extreme, resource constraints without compromising the potential gains from a shift to food from precision fermentation and algae. Further, innovations must also ensure a closed circle production process to prevent the release of micro-organisms or other contaminants through waste streams. All projects must therefore provide a lifecycle assessment taking into account environmental, social and economic considerations.

The specific objectives of this Challenge are the development and scaling up of interdisciplinary solutions in the areas of:

- Bacteria, yeast or fungi-based fermentation systems
- Macro-and micro-algae based novel aquaculture systems.

Proposals are expected to consider regulatory aspects alongside issues surrounding consumer acceptance and articulate suitable strategies to support market entry within and beyond the EU.

**Expected outcomes and impacts:**

This Challenge aims to improve the sustainability, efficiency, and resilience of the European food supply chain through decoupling food production from the soil and minimising environmental impacts including water pollution. It looks to support radical technological innovation with possible disruptive effects on existing markets to secure additional food sources while preserving the environment and supporting biodiversity at the same time.

Viable alternatives are critical to address challenges linked to climate change and the environment including biodiversity loss and pollution. In doing so, this Challenge will foster EU technological autonomy and leadership in delivering scalable food production processes that can generate benefits to consumers in Europe and beyond.

Further, the development of novel foods and processes may also help provide consumers with healthier alternatives thereby decreasing the incidence of food-related health conditions amongst the general population.

**Indicative budget:** EUR 50 million.

#### **IV.2.5 Monoclonal antibody-based therapeutics for new variants of emerging viruses**

##### **Background and scope:**

Pandemics and large-scale outbreaks can claim millions of lives and cause significant levels of social and economic disruption. mRNA-based prophylactic vaccines and therapeutics played a critical role in enabling a return to normalcy following the global SARS-CoV2 pandemic. However, the pandemic exposed global vulnerabilities to future such events with the emergence of new variants of the virus of high concern. This calls for the development of variant-proof antiviral therapeutics that can maintain treatment efficacy even as viruses evolve.

Current evidence suggests that monoclonal antibodies (mAbs), have the potential to deliver such targeted antiviral therapies that can complement vaccination in the event of future outbreaks. mAbs-based therapies can deliver high specificity in the treatment of viral infections and provide immediate protection, in the case of immunosuppressed individuals who are often at the highest risk of infection.

Several mAbs received emergency use authorisation (EUA) from regulatory agencies worldwide during the SARS-CoV2 pandemic and work underway through the World Health Organisation (WHO) sees their potential being explored in areas such as HIV, influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) alongside their preventative potential in the case of HIV. Researchers are also exploring the use of mAbs for infections such as Malaria and Leishmaniasis.

Despite the increasing use of mAbs-based therapeutics for a wide range of diseases, the emergence of new variants of high concern for known or emerging pathogens remains a major challenge for the humanity. To address this global challenge, this EIC Challenge will support the development of mAbs-based therapeutics against new variants of emerging pathogens of high concern, as a line of defence complementary to new vaccines.

##### **Specific objectives:**

In the era of pandemic preparedness and precision medicine, the overall goal of this EIC Challenge is to support the development of strategic approaches leading to broad spectrum mAbs-based therapeutics against new variants of emerging pathogens of high concern. Applicants to the Challenge can address:

- Broad-spectrum mAbs-based therapies
- More effective mAbs-based therapies (e.g., address the issue of inter-individual variability)
- Clinical administration of broad spectrum mAbs-based therapeutics to outpatients with mild symptoms in overwhelmed hospitals or in dealing with hypersensitivity to treatment
- Rapid production of mAbs-based therapies: technological innovations that can allow for the production of a mAb, including test batches during the development phase, with minimal lead time, enabling rapid availability of a product in the event of an outbreak.
- Administration of mAbs-based therapeutics: new technologies that can simplify the administration of mAbs, thereby extending the half-life of the antibody or injecting mRNA coding for a mAb.

**Expected outcomes and impacts:**

This Challenge aims to enhance the EU’s response to future pandemics. It will provide solutions that can complement efforts to deliver rapid detection and analysis of virus variants, in coordination with relevant international systems and networks (such as the HERA incubator) and will ensure that the development of new antiviral treatments target the variants of highest concern. It will also help develop a platform of approaches that can ensure efficacy of future treatment in the event that new variants of high concern exhibit decreased susceptibility to current mAbs.

**Indicative budget:** EUR 50 million.

## **IV.2.6 Renewable energy sources and their whole value chain including materials development and recycling of components**

**Background and scope:**

In 2022 the global investments in renewable energy and fuels overtook the investment in fossil fuels. To transform the European Union (EU) into a resource-efficient economy while preserving Europe’s natural environment and tackling climate change it is crucial to develop renewable energy-based systems. Renewable energy

sources (RES), such as solar thermal and photovoltaic, wind, hydro, geothermal, heat pumps, bio and renewable fuels, and their whole value/supply chain from raw materials mining to components manufacturing and further recycling, are at the centre of the energy-based systems to reach energy transition and the EU green deal goals.

For Europe to drive such renewable energy transition, it is necessary to invest more in the development of RES and minimize both their environmental impact and levelized cost of energy (LCOE).

Currently EU is importing from third countries part of the “enabling” components of the RES, such as critical raw materials (CRM). To make the EU reach the strategic net-zero manufacturing capacity and at least 40% of annual deployment energy needs by 2030 it is necessary to scale up the manufacturing, and the whole supply chain of clean technologies, such as RES, in the EU.

### **Specific objectives:**

This challenge aims at scaling-up different RES and their supply chain to limit the EU’s significant dependency on imports of components including CRM to ultimately increase the EU’s energy strategic autonomy in the energy sector. This challenge contributes to the objectives of both Net-zero industry and Critical raw materials acts and to the EU’s open strategic autonomy.

This challenge focuses on RES and its proposals can target one or more of the following objectives:

- scale-up the manufacturing of RES that produce heat and electricity from renewable sources at different scales (e.g., power plants or at small scale level), location (on or offshore) and uses (from stationary to mobility).
- Scale up of technologies for exploring, mining and or processing, synthesizing materials, excluding CRM, that are part of RES.
- Scale-up of technologies for recycling or re-use of RES components, including materials, into usable materials and/or components.

The abovementioned technologies (including materials) have to be developed without using CRM or ensuring the maximization of their recycle/reuse so ensuring a circular economy approach. As well they need to minimize the environmental footprint measured through a life-cycle analysis (including cost and social impact evaluation).

### **Expected outcomes and impacts:**

- Strengthen the European value chain producing RES.

- Limit the EU's significant dependency on imports CRM and components necessary for the renewable energy transition.
- Enable a more diversified and risk-aware configuration of the European value chain of the RES.

**Indicative budget:** EUR 50 million.

## V. EIC Business Acceleration Services

All EIC Awardees (from the EIC Accelerator, EIC Transition, EIC Pathfinder), Seal of Excellence holders<sup>91</sup>, applicants to the EIC Accelerator who have succeeded at the short application stage, EIC Scale up100 participants and Women TechEU Awardees have access to EIC Business Acceleration Services (BAS). These services are procured from external contractors or delivered by selected ecosystem partners and consist mainly of business coaching, business advice, networking opportunities to expand the client base and to find co-investors, and access to testing/scaleup facilities. The EIC BAS services are also part of the tools available to EIC Programme Managers, EIC Tech to Market Advisers and EIC Project Officers to proactively manage the EIC portfolios.

Since 2023, the EIC BAS services have been expanded through **EIC Ecosystem Partners** (see Glossary). EIC BAS services provided by EIC Ecosystem Partners include access to existing incubation and acceleration programmes, legal and IP expertise, testing and research infrastructure and many more as well as services specifically designed in collaboration with EIC. These services are offered to EIC Awardees free of charge or on favorable conditions via a [service catalogue](#) available in the EIC Community Platform. This approach allows EIC Awardees and Seals of Excellence to access the best services available across Europe while enabling EIC Ecosystem Partners to provide their services at European level.

The EIC also continues to directly manage a core set of business acceleration services which provide a clear added value, which include:

- ✦ **Coaching** for EIC Accelerator applicants, EIC Awardees and EIC Seal of Excellence recipients when a suitable alternative service cannot be provided by EIC Ecosystem Partners.
- ✦ Support to attend European and international **business trade fairs and a soft-landing programme in USA;**
- ✦ Support to pitch EIC-funded innovations to corporates (**EIC Corporate Days**) and public/private innovation procurers (**EIC Procurers Days**);
- ✦ Training and support for start-ups and SMEs to compete in **public innovation procurement** bids and funding to test products for innovation procurers;
- ✦ **Tech2Market Business Acceleration Services** - Dedicated Business and Innovation Acceleration Services to Pathfinder and Transition beneficiaries

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<sup>91</sup> Seal of Excellence holders as of Horizon Europe



supporting transition from lab to market. It will give access to venture building activities helping entrepreneurial researchers / proto-entrepreneurs to acquire critical skills and connect with partners and service providers supporting in business and venture development;

- ✦ A **platform** for EIC Accelerator companies in receipt of equity investment **to find co-investors**;
- ✦ **The EIC Women Leadership Programme** to provide training sessions on leadership and entrepreneurial skills, business coaching and mentoring to women- (co)founded and/or led EIC companies (see Glossary), women researchers from EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition aspiring for leadership position in business, and Women TechEU Awardees;
- ✦ Support in assessing and reducing **greenhouse gas emissions**, for instance through the provision of a carbon-footprint measurement tool and specific trainings on the subject.

Additionally, the EIC Scale Up 100 action launched in 2023 will accelerate the scaleup of future tech champions from among the EIC companies and beyond.

The services provided by the EIC Ecosystem Partners as well as all other EIC BAS services are listed on and accessed through the EIC Community platform.<sup>92</sup> The EIC Community platform is a virtual meeting place, where EIC Awardees and Seal of Excellence can connect with each other and with other innovators, entrepreneurs, researchers, investors, corporates and procurers. It provides matching and collaboration features.

EIC BAS services are funded through multi-year procurement contracts and grants, some of which were financed through previous Work Programmes. The following actions pertaining to EIC BAS services will be funded in 2024.

## V.1 EIC Tech to market Entrepreneurship & Venture Building

The objective of this action is to support EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition projects in their transition from lab to market by providing tailored services to entrepreneurial researchers for the market deployment of research results. The Agency will procure the provision of services such as :

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<sup>92</sup> The EIC will also seek operational synergies with Enterprise Europe Network, national and regional clusters, the European IP Helpdesk, Start-up Europe, EIT KICs, national innovation agencies and the National Contact Points networks.

- ✦ Training activities to help entrepreneurial researchers acquire the critical knowledge for developing deep-tech based innovations;
- ✦ Support activities to EIC funded teams for building a strong value proposition and a viable business model;
- ✦ Access from EIC funded early TRL ideas to venture building expertise, comprising activities from identification of promising business ideas to venture creation and development.

**Type of action:** Public Procurement action

**Indicative budget:** EUR 4.500.000

**Indicative timetable:** from Q4 2024

## V.2 Access to EIC business coaches (direct EIC services)

The EIC will continue to directly provide three days of remote coaching to EIC Accelerator applicants invited to submit a full proposal.<sup>93</sup>

EIC Awardees can have access to business coaching via a suitable EIC Ecosystem Partner, however if such partner cannot be found business coaching can be provided directly by the EIC. In either case the EIC will request to the service provider a structured coaching report after the coaching has been provided, to ensure the services are of the highest quality.

**Business coaching** focuses on providing insights on business development and guidance to improve business performance. 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.

Three days of remote coaching<sup>94</sup> are offered to all EIC Awardees.<sup>95</sup> Additional coaching days for EIC Awardees (in principle up to 12 days) will depend on the project review and input from Project Officers and EIC Programme Managers. When duly justified for exceptional cases, (e.g., scaling up), the number of coaching days

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<sup>93</sup> Applicants are encouraged to use the EIC coaching services. It is nevertheless up to the applicants to decide if and when to use the coaching services.

<sup>94</sup> Coaching involving travel may take place in duly justified cases when the physical presence of the coach is expected to bring significantly better results, mainly for coaching to EIC awardees. Coaching 2023 budget may also be used for the Horizon 2020 EIC legacy projects

<sup>95</sup> EIC Accelerator, EIC Transition and EIC Pathfinder awardees, Seal of Excellence companies and Women Leadership programme participants

could be extended beyond the 12 days. Coaching support can exceptionally be offered to other EIC ecosystem beneficiaries and related Programmes.

- ✦ The EIC coaching services are provided by highly qualified business coaches. The coaches register their profile and expertise in the Commission's corporate database, through a single Call for Expression of interest published for experts across all EU programmes, as well as on the [EIC Coach Platform](#). The selection of the business coaches is made following a continuously open call in accordance with Article 237 of the Financial Regulation, and new coaches are selected at the beginning of every year. Applicants 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 includes 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 EIC 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 remuneration will be proportionate to their high-level strategic support, and it will closely mirror the international level of remuneration 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 2.000.000

**Indicative timetable:** from Q1 2024

## VI. EIC Prizes

### VI.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 European Commission put in place a [Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#)<sup>96</sup>, which sets out the Commission's broader commitment to equality across all EU policies.

As outlined in the New European Innovation Agenda<sup>97</sup>, supporting women innovators strengthens the European research and innovation system and creates gender-equal working environments where all talents can thrive. By integrating a gender dimension in projects, research quality is improved as well as the production of the knowledge, technologies and innovations.

The European Prize for Women Innovators celebrates the women entrepreneurs behind Europe's game-changing innovations, so that they may inspire other women and girls realise their full potential as the EU's future scientists, innovators, and tech leaders.

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.

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<sup>96</sup> [Gender equality in research and innovation \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>97</sup> See Flagship 4: Fostering, attracting and retaining deep tech talent :[The New European Innovation Agenda \(europa.eu\)](#)

As for the previous edition, the 2025 European Prize for Women Innovators is organised jointly by 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 following the same broad approach and the same timetable.)

### **Eligibility criteria**

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

- 1.** The applicant must be a woman;<sup>98</sup>
- 2.** The applicant must be legally established<sup>99</sup> in an EU Member State, including overseas countries and territories (OCTs) or a country associated to Horizon Europe;
- 3.** The applicant must be the founder or co-founder<sup>100</sup> of the company or organisation;
- 4.** The company or organisation must be established in an EU Member State including overseas countries and territories, (OCTs) or a country associated to Horizon Europe, and registered or incorporated<sup>101</sup> at least two years before the call year<sup>102</sup>;
- 5.** Applicants who have already received an EU or Euratom prize cannot receive a second prize for the same activities.

In addition to the above, those applying for the Rising Innovators category must be aged under 35 at the start of the call year.<sup>103</sup> There is no age limit to apply for the Women Innovators category (or for the EIT Women Leadership category), though applicants eligible for several prize categories can only apply to one.

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<sup>98</sup> This Prize celebrates women in all their diversity. The word 'woman' equates to a cis woman, or a transgender woman who is legally defined as a woman.

<sup>99</sup> A person is legally established in a given country, if she is recognised as a resident under national law in that country, and proof of such recognition can be provided upon request.

<sup>100</sup> A co-founder is somebody who has started the company (i.e. "founded" the company) with at least one other person, and proof of this can be provided upon request.

<sup>101</sup> The company or organisation is formed and registered with the appropriate statutory authority of the country as a 'company or corporation', and proof can be provided upon request.

<sup>102</sup> The company must be registered or incorporated before 1 January 2022.

<sup>103</sup> Those applying for the Rising Innovator category must be born on or after 1 January 1989.

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.

### **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 co-founded by the applicant is pioneering a breakthrough and disruptive innovation focusing, among others, deep-tech and Science Technology Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) fields, within the EU or countries associated to Horizon Europe.
- 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, 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 an interview to defend their application. This interview may take place remotely.

Further details on the evaluation and award criteria will be specified in the rules for this contest published at the launch of the contest. For the common 'Rules of Contest for Prizes' please see the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal.

### **Expected results**

The prize will boost public awareness of the potential, importance and contribution of women to the EU innovation ecosystem and create strong role models, inspiring more women to become innovators themselves.

### **Type of Action: Recognition Prize**

### **Indicative Timetable:**

Stages	Indicative period
<b>Opening of the contest</b>	Q1 – Q2 2024
<b>Deadline for submission of proposals</b>	Q3 – Q4 2024
<b>Award of the prize</b>	Q1 – Q2 2025

**Indicative Budget:**

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

## VI.2 The European Capital of Innovation Awards (iCapital)

Cities are faced with most severe societal and sustainability challenges but do also have the means to develop, promote, and apply effective innovative solutions. They are the place where ideas, people, public and private actors meet and engage to improve the quality of life of citizens. They are the natural playground where breakthrough innovations flourish and nourish. They provide ground to experiment new technologies and products in a real environment, their interaction with people and their added value.

### **Objectives and Scope**

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

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

The New European Innovation Agenda<sup>104</sup>, sets out a vision for harnessing the power of innovation to drive economic growth, social progress, and contribute to the green and digital transition in Europe. The agenda emphasizes the need for strategic investments in key technologies, including deep tech, and for strengthening and better connecting innovation ecosystems through stronger collaboration between regions, to close the innovation divide.

For this reason, the European Capital of Innovation Awards will recognize the cities' role as catalysers of the local innovation ecosystem and will stimulate new activities aimed at boosting game-changing innovation.

### **Categories**

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<sup>104</sup> [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022DC0332](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022DC0332)



In 2024, the European Capital of Innovation Awards will feature two categories. The first one, the **European Capital of Innovation category**, would include cities which have a population of minimum 250 000 inhabitants and, based on the cumulative criteria set out below, would reward the winner (ranked 1st) with EUR 1 million and two runners-up (ranked 2nd and 3rd) with EUR 100 000 each one.

The second one, the **European Rising Innovative City category**, would include towns and cities<sup>105</sup> with a population of 50 000 and up to 249 999 inhabitants; and, based on the cumulative criteria set out below, would reward the winner (ranked 1<sup>st</sup>) with EUR 500 000 and the two runners-up (ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>) with EUR 50 000 each one.

Each application has to contain a specific endorsement to apply signed by the city Mayor (or the equivalent highest political representative).

### **Eligibility criteria**

- 1.** The candidate towns and cities must be located in one of the Member States or Associated Countries to Horizon Europe.
- 2.** For the category of 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 towns and cities for the European Rising Innovative City category must have a population of 50 000 and up to 249,999 inhabitants.
- 3.** Winners of former European Capital of Innovation Awards editions, as well as runners-up of the edition 2023 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:

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<sup>105</sup> The term „town“ or „cities“ is used to refer to a geographical subnational jurisdiction (“local administrative unit”) such as a town or a city that is governed by a local government as the legal entity of public administration, understanding that the institutions of local governments may vary from country to country and terminology used in national contexts may differ.

- 1. Experimenting** – innovative concepts, processes, tools, and governance models proving the city’s commitment to act as a test-bed for innovative practices while ensuring the mainstreaming of these practices into the ordinary urban development process. In this criterion, among others, the applicant should consider answering these questions: Why are these initiatives and/or concepts perceived as new? In which sense are they different to others? What was the city’s role in these innovative concepts and/or models? What impact did they have in the city and ecosystem’ stakeholders? How is the city implementing these innovative practices? 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.  
In this criterion, among others, the applicant should consider providing information about concrete actions taken to pursue and accelerate the growth of highly innovative start-ups and SMEs, as well as their quantitative and qualitative implications about actions to promote the use of innovation procurement and their impact into the city, citizens, and the market, about actions aimed to promote investments and growth within the city, or to attract and retain talent. 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.  
In this criterion, among others, the applicant should consider providing information about the role of the city on boosting the city’s innovation ecosystem: (e.g., is the city a key actor in these interactions?) the level of maturity of the ecosystem, the actions taken to ensure the involvement of all innovation ecosystem players and its results. 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.

In this criterion, among others, the applicant should consider answering the following questions: e.g., What are the activities and initiatives for which the city can be considered a role model for others? How is the city sharing its knowledge with other cities? Is the city cooperating with other cities in the areas of this competition in particular with cities located in regions that are moderate or emerging innovators under the Regional Innovation Scoreboard<sup>106</sup>? How does the city you collaborate with other cities to support the twin transitions to a green and digital economy? 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.

In this criterion, among others, the applicant should consider answering to these questions: e.g., what was the “point of departure” of the city and what has been achieved by now? What does the city want to achieve, and which are the tangible actions already taken or put in place to get to those objectives? Moreover, innovative approaches to define, sustain, and implement the long-term strategic vision/plan such as e.g., Climate City Contracts as proposed by the Climate-neutral and Smart Cities Mission could be considered. 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 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, the winning cities (ranked 1st in each category) will be

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<sup>106</sup> [Regional innovation scoreboard \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic-regional-innovation-scoreboard-2020-2021-2022-2023-2024-2025-2026-2027-2028-2029-2030-2031-2032-2033-2034-2035-2036-2037-2038-2039-2040-2041-2042-2043-2044-2045-2046-2047-2048-2049-2050-2051-2052-2053-2054-2055-2056-2057-2058-2059-2060-2061-2062-2063-2064-2065-2066-2067-2068-2069-2070-2071-2072-2073-2074-2075-2076-2077-2078-2079-2080-2081-2082-2083-2084-2085-2086-2087-2088-2089-2090-2091-2092-2093-2094-2095-2096-2097-2098-2099-2100-2101-2102-2103-2104-2105-2106-2107-2108-2109-2110-2111-2112-2113-2114-2115-2116-2117-2118-2119-2120-2121-2122-2123-2124-2125-2126-2127-2128-2129-2130-2131-2132-2133-2134-2135-2136-2137-2138-2139-2140-2141-2142-2143-2144-2145-2146-2147-2148-2149-2150-2151-2152-2153-2154-2155-2156-2157-2158-2159-2160-2161-2162-2163-2164-2165-2166-2167-2168-2169-2170-2171-2172-2173-2174-2175-2176-2177-2178-2179-2180-2181-2182-2183-2184-2185-2186-2187-2188-2189-2190-2191-2192-2193-2194-2195-2196-2197-2198-2199-2200-2201-2202-2203-2204-2205-2206-2207-2208-2209-2210-2211-2212-2213-2214-2215-2216-2217-2218-2219-2220-2221-2222-2223-2224-2225-2226-2227-2228-2229-2230-2231-2232-2233-2234-2235-2236-2237-2238-2239-2240-2241-2242-2243-2244-2245-2246-2247-2248-2249-2250-2251-2252-2253-2254-2255-2256-2257-2258-2259-2260-2261-2262-2263-2264-2265-2266-2267-2268-2269-2270-2271-2272-2273-2274-2275-2276-2277-2278-2279-2280-2281-2282-2283-2284-2285-2286-2287-2288-2289-2290-2291-2292-2293-2294-2295-2296-2297-2298-2299-2300-2301-2302-2303-2304-2305-2306-2307-2308-2309-2310-2311-2312-2313-2314-2315-2316-2317-2318-2319-2320-2321-2322-2323-2324-2325-2326-2327-2328-2329-2330-2331-2332-2333-2334-2335-2336-2337-2338-2339-2340-2341-2342-2343-2344-2345-2346-2347-2348-2349-2350-2351-2352-2353-2354-2355-2356-2357-2358-2359-2360-2361-2362-2363-2364-2365-2366-2367-2368-2369-2370-2371-2372-2373-2374-2375-2376-2377-2378-2379-2380-2381-2382-2383-2384-2385-2386-2387-2388-2389-2390-2391-2392-2393-2394-2395-2396-2397-2398-2399-2400-2401-2402-2403-2404-2405-2406-2407-2408-2409-2410-2411-2412-2413-2414-2415-2416-2417-2418-2419-2420-2421-2422-2423-2424-2425-2426-2427-2428-2429-2430-2431-2432-2433-2434-2435-2436-2437-2438-2439-2440-2441-2442-2443-2444-2445-2446-2447-2448-2449-2450-2451-2452-2453-2454-2455-2456-2457-2458-2459-2460-2461-2462-2463-2464-2465-2466-2467-2468-2469-2470-2471-2472-2473-2474-2475-2476-2477-2478-2479-2480-2481-2482-2483-2484-2485-2486-2487-2488-2489-2490-2491-2492-2493-2494-2495-2496-2497-2498-2499-2500-2501-2502-2503-2504-2505-2506-2507-2508-2509-2510-2511-2512-2513-2514-2515-2516-2517-2518-2519-2520-2521-2522-2523-2524-2525-2526-2527-2528-2529-2530-2531-2532-2533-2534-2535-2536-2537-2538-2539-2540-2541-2542-2543-2544-2545-2546-2547-2548-2549-2550-2551-2552-2553-2554-2555-2556-2557-2558-2559-2560-2561-2562-2563-2564-2565-2566-2567-2568-2569-2570-2571-2572-2573-2574-2575-2576-2577-2578-2579-2580-2581-2582-2583-2584-2585-2586-2587-2588-2589-2590-2591-2592-2593-2594-2595-2596-2597-2598-2599-2600-2601-2602-2603-2604-2605-2606-2607-2608-2609-2610-2611-2612-2613-2614-2615-2616-2617-2618-2619-2620-2621-2622-2623-2624-2625-2626-2627-2628-2629-2630-2631-2632-2633-2634-2635-2636-2637-2638-2639-2640-2641-2642-2643-2644-2645-2646-2647-2648-2649-2650-2651-2652-2653-2654-2655-2656-2657-2658-2659-2660-2661-2662-2663-2664-2665-2666-2667-2668-2669-2670-2671-2672-2673-2674-2675-2676-2677-2678-2679-2680-2681-2682-2683-2684-2685-2686-2687-2688-2689-2690-2691-2692-2693-2694-2695-2696-2697-2698-2699-2700-2701-2702-2703-2704-2705-2706-2707-2708-2709-2710-2711-2712-2713-2714-2715-2716-2717-2718-2719-2720-2721-2722-2723-2724-2725-2726-2727-2728-2729-2730-2731-2732-2733-2734-2735-2736-2737-2738-2739-2740-2741-2742-2743-2744-2745-2746-2747-2748-2749-2750-2751-2752-2753-2754-2755-2756-2757-2758-2759-2760-2761-2762-2763-2764-2765-2766-2767-2768-2769-2770-2771-2772-2773-2774-2775-2776-2777-2778-2779-2780-2781-2782-2783-2784-2785-2786-2787-2788-2789-2790-2791-2792-2793-2794-2795-2796-2797-2798-2799-2800-2801-2802-2803-2804-2805-2806-2807-2808-2809-2810-2811-2812-2813-2814-2815-2816-2817-2818-2819-2820-2821-2822-2823-2824-2825-2826-2827-2828-2829-2830-2831-2832-2833-2834-2835-2836-2837-2838-2839-2840-2841-2842-2843-2844-2845-2846-2847-2848-2849-2850-2851-2852-2853-2854-2855-2856-2857-2858-2859-2860-2861-2862-2863-2864-2865-2866-2867-2868-2869-2870-2871-2872-2873-2874-2875-2876-2877-2878-2879-2880-2881-2882-2883-2884-2885-2886-2887-2888-2889-2890-2891-2892-2893-2894-2895-2896-2897-2898-2899-2900-2901-2902-2903-2904-2905-2906-2907-2908-2909-2910-2911-2912-2913-2914-2915-2916-2917-2918-2919-2920-2921-2922-2923-2924-2925-2926-2927-2928-2929-2930-2931-2932-2933-2934-2935-2936-2937-2938-2939-2940-2941-2942-2943-2944-2945-2946-2947-2948-2949-2950-2951-2952-2953-2954-2955-2956-2957-2958-2959-2960-2961-2962-2963-2964-2965-2966-2967-2968-2969-2970-2971-2972-2973-2974-2975-2976-2977-2978-2979-2980-2981-2982-2983-2984-2985-2986-2987-2988-2989-2990-2991-2992-2993-2994-2995-2996-2997-2998-2999-3000)

invited to sign a declaration of intent<sup>107</sup> to commit on a series of actions to promote iCapital during the year.

For the common rules of contest for prizes, please see the Funding and Opportunities Portal.

### Expected results

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 2024 budget will be allocated as follows:

<b>European Capital of Innovation winner</b>	<b>EUR 1 000 000</b>
<b>European Capital of Innovation 1<sup>st</sup> runner-up</b>	EUR 100 000
<b>European Capital of Innovation 2<sup>nd</sup> runner-up</b>	EUR 100 000
<b>European Rising Innovative City winner</b>	<b>EUR 500 000</b>
<b>European Rising Innovative City 1<sup>st</sup> runner-up</b>	50 000
<b>European Rising Innovative City 2<sup>nd</sup> runner-up</b>	50 000

### Indicative timetable of contest(s)

<b>Stages</b>	<b>Date and time or indicative period</b>
<b>Opening of the contest</b>	Q1 or Q2 2024
<b>Deadline for submission of application</b>	Q2 or Q3 2024
<b>Award of the prize</b>	Q4 2024

<sup>107</sup> Declaration of intent would be a voluntary document containing detailed information about the use of the iCapital brand, the organization and participation of events such as the opening and / or award ceremonies, info days, or the knowledge sharing with other cities, among other actions.

## VI.3 The European Innovation Procurement Awards

### Objectives and scope

Innovation procurement boosts the process of transforming research results and ideas into innovative solutions. It represents an untapped potential to stimulate the demand for innovation. Moreover, it appears to have a positive impact on private spending on research and innovation activities and innovation commercialisation success.

By putting in place dedicated strategies aimed to lift and enhance the use of innovation procurement, the public and private sectors can provide state-of-the-art services and goods to the society and, at the same time, offer new growth and commercialisation opportunities for suppliers of disruptive solutions, particularly start-ups and SMEs.

The European Union has recognized the importance of innovation procurement as a tool for modernizing the public sector, strengthening Europe's industrial competitiveness, and addressing key societal challenges such as climate change and the transition to a sustainable, net-zero economy. The New European Innovation Agenda<sup>108</sup> sets out a vision for harnessing the power of innovation to drive economic growth, social progress, and environmental sustainability in Europe. The Agenda emphasizes the need for strategic investments in key technologies, including deep tech, and for stronger collaboration between public and private sector actors to foster innovation and promote the uptake of new solutions.

In this context, it is proposed that the European Innovation Procurement Awards 2025 societal challenge would focus on the theme of net-zero, in line with the EU's commitment to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and the recent proposal for a Net-Zero Industry Act<sup>109</sup>. The awards would recognize public and/or private procurer, individuals/natural persons and/or legal entities that are using innovation procurement to support the transition to a sustainable, net-zero economy, and are driving innovation across key sectors such as energy, transportation, construction and manufacturing.

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<sup>108</sup> A Communication from the Commission on a new European innovation agenda adopted on 5.07.2022 (COM(2022)332 final)

<sup>109</sup> COM(2023) 161 - Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing a framework of measures for strengthening Europe's net-zero technology products manufacturing ecosystem (Net Zero Industry Act)

The European Innovation Procurement Awards 2025 challenge would provide an opportunity to reward the procurement of innovative solutions and /or innovation procurement practices that are driving Europe's transition to a sustainable, net-zero economy, and to recognize the outstanding efforts of those leading the way in this critical area.

The European Innovation Procurement Awards 2025 aim to recognise public and private buyers, natural persons and those legal entities supporting these practices across Europe in their efforts to promote and stimulate both procurement of innovative solutions and the innovative ways the solutions are procured.

The Awards also aim to demonstrate how innovation procurement positively transforms society and the economy by not only creating new and sustainable markets, but also by tackling societal challenges such as green energy transition.

These Awards complement and encourages synergies with other EIC initiatives aiming to support and foster innovation procurement in the European Union (i.e EIC Business Acceleration Services Innovation Procurement Program).

## **Categories**

In this edition, the European Innovation Procurement Awards will feature the following two categories:

- ✦ **Innovation procurement initiative (including implementation) category:** to reward actions, and mid/long-term strategies and action plans that trigger different innovation procurements as well as to reward procurements of R&D services and/or procurements to buy and deploy innovative solutions. Special focus will be placed on the facilitation of the access to procurement markets to innovative SMEs and start-ups including EIC beneficiaries.
- ✦ **Facing societal challenges category:** - “Net Zero Industry Procurement” to reward procurement practises and/or the procurement of R&D services and/or the procurement and deployment of innovative solutions that contribute to achieving the goals set out in the Net Zero Industry Act. This may include solutions that promote circularity, energy efficiency, and the use of renewable energy in industry, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and promote sustainable and responsible production and consumption. Special focus will be placed also on the facilitation of the access to procurement markets to innovative SMEs and start-ups including EIC beneficiaries.

Each category will reward the winner with EUR 75 000 (1st ranked) and one runner-up (ranked 2nd) with EUR 50 000, and one runner-up (ranked 3rd) with EUR 25 000.

## Eligibility criteria

- ✦ Eligible applicants are any public and/or private procurer, individuals/natural persons and/or legal entities supporting the use of innovation procurement established in one of the Member States including overseas countries and territories (OCTs) or Associated Countries to Horizon Europe;
- ✦ The awarded procurement/procurement practice must have taken place in a Member State (including overseas countries and territories, OCTs) or in an Associated Country to Horizon Europe;
- ✦ The awarded procurement /procurement practice must relate to completed or ongoing initiatives started after 1 January 2019. In the case of ongoing activities, only work completed by the submission deadline will be considered for the prize (Applicants will be required to prove the starting date of the practice by providing supporting documents);
- ✦ Applicants can only apply to one of the two categories for the same set of activities;
- ✦ Winners of former European Innovation Procurement Awards editions, as well as runners-up of the previous edition are not eligible;
- ✦ 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. The prize will be awarded after closure of the yearly contest to the applicants who, in the opinion of the jury, best address the following cumulative criteria:

- 1. Transformation** – stimulating innovation procurement with the aim to ensure a sustainable and inclusive growth. In this criterion, the applicant should bear in mind that this transformation refers to the shift into (a) buying the process of innovation (research and development services); (b) buying the outcomes of innovation; or (c) the establishment of innovation procurement friendly frameworks which include tools to measure results of support actions.
- 2. Uptake** – the innovative procurement practice or action is replicable and scalable, and therefore, contributes to providing, more efficient and effective solutions. In this criterion, among others, the applicant should provide information (KPIs) about how the procurement practice/action is replicable and scalable, the number of countries, entities and/or sectors where the solution has been implemented and/or replicated; or about how it has provided more efficient and effective solutions.

- 3. Collaboration** – demonstrated co-operation linked to the innovation procurement practice. Special attention should be paid to the establishment of synergies, to the promotion of best practices, to the support to capacity building and skill development, and to the efforts of knowledge sharing between stakeholders within the different territories, especially among those at different state of maturity in innovation procurement. In this criterion, among others, the applicant should provide information (KPIs) about the number of partners (including start-ups, universities, academics, public and private organisations) involved in this collaboration; publications; conferences and events organised/attended to share knowledge, actions implemented to foster collaboration; or about the ratio of engagement and influence within the innovation ecosystem.
- 4. Innovative SMEs and start-ups access to procurement markets** – how the innovative procurement practise or action facilitates the access of innovative SMEs and start-ups (including but not limited to EIC beneficiaries) to procurement markets. Complementarity and synergies with other EIC initiatives aimed at supporting and fostering innovation procurement in the European Union must be taken into account.
- 5. Societal impact** – procurement practices/actions with a demonstrated positive quantitative and qualitative impact on society, with special emphasis to achieving the green deal and digital transformation priorities. In this criterion, among others, the applicant should provide information (KPIs) about the number of purchased and deployed solutions and/or projects implemented that contribute to achieving green and digital transitions; or about concrete positive transformations in the ecosystem.

The jury will review and score eligible applications and will 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. For the common rules of contest for prizes, please see the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal.

### **Expected results**

The awards aim to:

- ✦ Stimulate the innovation procurement uptake;



- ✦ Acknowledge and support the efforts done by public and private procurers, and legal entities supporting them, to deliver better services and/or to bring products to the market in an innovative way, while facilitating the access to procurement markets to innovative SMEs and start-ups including EIC beneficiaries and;
- ✦ Build a diverse European community of public and private buyers to share, work together and inspire each other in the design of innovative procurement processes, and particularly in the delivery of public services.

Indicative timetable of the contest:

Stages	Date and time or indicative period
Opening of the contest	Q 1 Q2 2024
Deadline for submission of applications	Q 3 Q4 2024
Award of the prize	Q4 2024 Q 1 2025

**Type of Action:** Recognition prize

**Indicative budget:** the following 2024 budget will be allocated as follows:

<b>Innovation procurement initiative award winner</b>	<b>EUR 75 000</b>
Innovation procurement strategy initiative 1 <sup>st</sup> runner up	EUR 50 000
Innovation procurement initiative 2nd runner up	EUR 25 000
<b>Facing societal challenges category winner</b>	<b>EUR 75 000</b>
Facing societal challenges 1st runner up	EUR 50 000
Facing societal challenges 2 <sup>nd</sup> runner up	EUR 25 000

## VI.4 The European Social Innovation Competition 2024

The European Social Innovation Competition (EUSIC) aims at stimulating the potential of social innovation to provide solutions to societal challenges and to foster sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe. This competition looks for new entrepreneurial solutions responding to the most burning social needs, creating social relationships and enabling new collaborations in an innovative way and bringing effective solutions to systemic social challenges.

This competition is open, among others, to non-profit and for-profit organisations, such as entrepreneurs and social enterprises, corporate responsibility departments of private companies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), educational institutions and universities.

The competition will directly support the three solutions that best tackle the defined challenge with a prize of EUR 75.000, EUR 50.000 and EUR 25.000 for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd ranked winners.

This competition is launched and managed by the Agency.

### **Objectives and Scope**

The European Social Innovation Competition 2024 will focus on social innovation in **Digital Democracy**.

The Commission in its Decision: '2030 Digital Compass: European way for the Digital'<sup>110</sup> highlighted its vision to empower citizens and businesses through digital transformation. The Union's path to the digital transformation of the economy and society should embrace "respect for fundamental rights, the rule of law and democracy, inclusion, accessibility, equality, sustainability, resilience, security, improving quality of life, the availability of services and respect for citizens' rights and aspirations"<sup>111</sup>. The 'Action Plan for the Social Economy'<sup>112</sup> builds on the participatory and democratic principles of the social economy whose actors can also play a role in democratisation of the digital world.

In the era of rising populism, disinformation, (deep)fake news, hate speech, polarization, radicalisation, foreign interference, and lack of political participation of groups of society, this year's topic aims to:

- incentivise, support and reward social innovations that will help identify and tackle disinformation, encourage democratic governance models in online services, tools and business models;
- connect actors in emerging democratic practices, such as, for instance, the public consultation and deliberation platforms based on [Decidim](#);

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<sup>110</sup> DECISION (EU) 2022/2481 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 14 December 2022 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030, available online: [Publications Office \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>111</sup> Idem, p.1.

<sup>112</sup> COM(2021) 778 COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy, available online : [EUR-Lex - 52021DC0778 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

- promote the creation and adoption of digital commons such as open source, open hardware and open data solutions;
- raise awareness amongst the public about democratic values in the virtual and digital world;
- build grassroots communities and strengthen civil society, based on participation, collaboration, deliberation and building spaces for dialogue based on democratic values
- and develop digital organisational and/or business models driven by democratic principles as well as supporting equal access, open and shared technologies.

The European Social Innovation Competition 2024 will emphasise the importance of digital social innovation to strengthen the Union democratic space where social economy actors and civil society play a crucial role. In light of this, it will support innovative solutions to achieve the above aims in a range of different ways (e.g., through new, scalable digital technologies or innovative use and commercialization of existing ones). Digital technologies and data are tools and assets for social innovators to build new sustainable and community-driven business models which will ultimately bring positive impacts to democracy and societal changes.

The EUSIC 2024 Competition will showcase social innovators' concrete ideas to promote civic engagement and mobilisation through innovative digital services promoting the general interest and democratic principles in the Union. In such situations innovative actors are producing, sustaining and governing collective goods efficiently by innovative and collaborative means and offer new solutions to challenges for democratic systems.

The Competition will look for technological and non-technological social innovations, with a particular focus on new participatory and engagement models, breakthroughs, socially sustainable or breakthrough, market-creating and deep-tech innovations embracing the objectives of this year's edition, which, consequently, will have a positive impact on civic engagement, local prosperity as well as sustainable economic growth.

Three winners (ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd) would be rewarded with EUR 75.000, 50.000 and 25.000 respectively.

### **Eligibility criteria**

1. The applicant must be a natural person or a legal entity established in one of the Member States including overseas countries and territories, (OCTs) or Associated Countries to Horizon Europe.

2. Proposed solutions that harm the environment or social welfare or discriminate on basis of gender, age, socio-economic and geographic situation, disability, ethnicity, and sexual or gender identity, or are not in line with the Do No Significant Harm Principle are not eligible.<sup>113</sup>
3. The proposed solutions or activities contained in the application must have taken place in a Member State including overseas countries and territories (OCTs) or in an Associated Country to Horizon Europe.
4. The proposed solutions must relate to ongoing activities or completed initiatives. In case of ongoing activities, only work achieved by the submission deadline will be considered for the prize. The solutions proposed can be at different stages of implementation.
5. Winners of all categories, including both from the challenge and the Impact Prizes, of previous editions of the European Social Innovation Competition are not eligible.
6. Applicants that have already received an EU or Euratom prize cannot receive a second prize for the same activities.

### **Award criteria**

Three prizes will be awarded after closure of the contest to the applicants who, in the opinion of the jury of independent experts, best address the following cumulative criteria:

- 1. Degree of Innovation** - the degree to which any new product, service and/or organisational or business model is new for its given context in connection to the challenge of the competition. The idea must be new and innovative within its given socio-economic and geographical context;
- 2. Usability and inclusiveness;** whether the proposed solution is easy to use and affordable and can engage the largest part of EU citizens, irrespective of their background or computer skills.
- 3. Positive social Impact** - the potential of the proposal to tackle the competition challenge, fostering collaboration and partnerships with relevant stakeholders. The applicant must demonstrate how the proposed solution will contribute to solving year's challenge;

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<sup>113</sup> In line with the Do Not Significant Harm principle, see Annex 2.

- 4. Viability** and sustainability- the financial and environmental sustainability of the proposal, including a sustainability plan to make the solution durable in the medium- or long-term;
- 5. Scalability and replicability** - the idea's potential to scale and be replicated across sectors, governance levels or at regional, national, European or global level.
- 6. Decentralisation and governance:** improvements in transparency and accountability (while respecting privacy and/or anonymity).

The jury will review and score eligible applications. On this basis, the jury will propose up to three winners (ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup>). Each winner will receive EUR 75.000, 50.000 and 25.000 respectively.

Further details on the evaluation process and award criteria, as well as communication and dissemination activities, will be specified in the rules for this contest published at the launch of the yearly contest. For the common rules of contest for prizes, please see the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal.

### Expected results

The European Social Innovation Competition aims at raising awareness about social innovation across a wide audience, sparking the creation of new socially innovative ideas creating a network of like-minded practitioners and supporting finalists to transform their ideas into structured businesses.

### Indicative timetable of the competition:

Stages	Date and time or indicative period
Opening of the contest	Q1 - Q2 2024
Deadline for submission of applications	Q2 – Q3 2024
Award of the prize	Q3 2024 - Q1 2025

**Type of Action:** Recognition Prize

### Indicative budget:

Challenge prize (3 winners)	EUR 150 000 (EUR 75 000, 50 000, 25 000)
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## VII. Other Actions

### VII.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 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 2 000 for full attendance at a plenary meeting, and;
  - EUR 1 000 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, the Agency will, where appropriate, reimburse those days with an honoraria of EUR 1000 per day and travel and subsistence expenses necessary for members of the

Board to carry out their activities in accordance with their contract and the Commission's rules on the reimbursement of external experts.<sup>114</sup>

5. In the case of participation at plenary meetings through the use of remote communication, the duration of 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. Daily expenses other than plenary meetings shall be reimbursed based on time spent and at the request of the Agency, without prejudice to the responsibility of the Commission, of a daily amount of EUR 1000. 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 1000 is in line with relevant market standards.

**Type of action:** Expert contract action.

**Indicative budget:** EUR 500 000

**Indicative Opening:** From Q1 2024

## VII.2 External expertise for monitoring, ethics and policy advice

The EIC uses external independent experts for monitoring of projects<sup>115</sup> and ethics compliance, for other compliance checks (including on Gender Equality Plans), for technology assessments (including where necessary on risks to economic security), for policy advice on the optimal achievement of the EIC objectives, as well as for the implementation of scientific/technological/ innovation intelligence, proactive management of EIC activities (including support to BAS activities and to the EIC Programme Managers) and project reviews for increases in Accelerator support<sup>116</sup>.

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<sup>114</sup> Commission Decision C(2007) 5858.

<sup>115</sup> Including projects financed by the EIC pilot, SME instrument, Fast Track to Innovation, FET Open and FET Proactive under Horizon 2020.

<sup>116</sup> Necessary to implement Horizon Europe regulation [Article 48.12](#)

The EIC could reimburse the costs of applicants invited to attend interviews during the evaluation of their proposals subject to the adoption of the decision authorising it and the IT tools readiness.

A special allowance of EUR 450/day will be paid to the experts appointed in their personal capacity who act independently and in the public interest.

**Type of action:** Expert contracts.

**Indicative budget:** EUR 4.980.000

**Indicative opening:** From Q1 2024.

### VII.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. 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.

In addition, this action provides further support to the organisation of the EIC Summit 2024 and the (co-) organisation of the other events in the margins of the EIC Summit 2024 as well as the organisation of the EIC Summit 2025 which is due to take place in March 2025. Furthermore, this action support the organisation of the EIC Awards Ceremonies as well as various communication activities around the EIC Prizes (including stakeholders mapping, media consumption, graphic design and the Social Innovation Academia).

This action will also support a prominent EIC presence at key European Commission and /or third party events and a reinforced presence of the EIC at the 4-5 most important technology and start-up events in Europe in 2024 and 2025, ensuring high visibility of the EIC and selected beneficiaries, leading to increased impact in the visibility and branding of the EIC among key audiences. This action will and to ensure a more prominent EIC presence at key events, including the EU Research and



Innovation Days as well as third parties events. This should allow the EIC to become a prominent voice in the ongoing debates relevant to innovation policy in Europe and globally. The communication and outreach campaign should generate awareness and impact at international, European, national, regional and local levels.

**Type of action:** Public procurement actions.

**Indicative opening:** from Q1 2024.

**Indicative budget:** EUR 4.500.000

## VII.4 EIC Data management and IT systems integration<sup>117</sup>

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

This includes 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 2024, building on the developments started in 2021-2023 is to advance on the needed developments, improvements and technological upgrade to improve the scalability and robustness of the EIC IT system. This will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the EIC operations complementing the EC Corporate IT Tools.

The focus will also be on harnessing the data and information coming from internal and third-party sources to enable data-driven / strategic decision-making and strategic intelligence for the proactive management of EIC activities and the efficient and effective delivery of services to EIC applicants, beneficiaries and stakeholders.

Considering the above, the EIC IT developments will focus on the following key components:

- ✦ Further harmonise and consolidate data sources into a common data model and infrastructure for EIC. Develop needed webservices to exchange EIC Business Acceleration Support (BAS) data with other EC IT systems. Improve and expand the IT tools and interfaces built to support the daily operations

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<sup>117</sup> The code developed to implement the IT components should be released in open source under [code.europa.eu](http://code.europa.eu)

management of EIC staff and third parties (e.g., staff from 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. Where applicable, these actions will complement IT developments foreseen by EIC Fund, EIB and relevant third parties.

- ✦ 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 (see Section V). Where applicable, these actions will complement IT developments foreseen through EIC Business Acceleration Services.
- ✦ Further 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.
- ✦ Further develop and expand the event management tools linked to the new Business Acceleration Services (BAS).
- ✦ Support capacity development and Learning for EIC evaluators, experts and beneficiaries on-line and through EU Academy training events.
- ✦ Improve usability, integration and seamless user experience across all the above tools.
- ✦ Ensure maintenance and proper user support for all the tools made available.

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.

**Type of action:** Public procurement action

**Indicative budget:** EUR 2.8 million

**Indicative opening:** From Q1 2024.

## VII.5 Foresight and anticipatory data-driven intelligence

The use of foresight and anticipatory data-driven intelligence is key in the design and deployment of EIC funding. This ranges from how EIC Challenges are structured and benchmarked to the way all EIC operations can provide feedback to policy and

support positive impacts at societal level. The aim of this action is to increase current EIC capacity in the production, management and use of future-oriented knowledge.

### VII.5.1. Anticipation and monitoring of emerging technologies and breakthrough innovations

This action will extend the ongoing collaboration between EIC and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC). The goals are to:

- ✦ Acquire evidence-based, stakeholder-centric and future-oriented inputs on signals, trends, drivers and potential impacts of upcoming technologies and innovation domains, through a mixed methods approach.
- ✦ Support EIC internal strategic intelligence, with focus on the identification and mapping of fields for EIC Challenges, proactive management of portfolios by EIC Programme Managers, and EIC mandate on Feedback to Policy (F2P).

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

**Indicative timetable:** Q3 2024.

**Indicative budget:** EUR 400.000

### VII.5.2. Data and analytical studies<sup>118</sup>

This action will complement the current EIC exploitation of internal and external data and other research outputs. It is targeted to address analytical gaps in topics such as knowledge architectures and methodologies for strategic intelligence, or monitoring of performance, impacts and trends at the level of EIC beneficiaries and other actors active across the TRLs covered by EIC programmes.

The overall goal is to scope, assess, and develop both quantitative and qualitative stakeholder-centric research to support institutional governance, operational planning, feedback to policy, and strategic scenarios.

**Type of action:** Public procurement action

**Indicative timetable:** Q4 2024

**Indicative budget:** EUR 300.000

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<sup>118</sup> The studies provided under this action will be published in open source under [code.europa.eu](https://code.europa.eu)

## VII.6 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<sup>119</sup>.

### **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:** 16 January 2024

**Deadline for applications:** 17 April 2024 at 17h00 Brussels local time

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

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<sup>119</sup> flexibility in the duration will be expected to take into account the demand for booster grants.

# Annexes

## Annex 1 Estimated Indicative Budget

<b>Calls/Actions <sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>Budget EUR million</b>
<b>HORIZON-EIC-2024-PATHFINDEROPEN-01<sup>(2)</sup></b>	136
<b>HORIZON-EIC-2024-PATHFINDERCHALLENGES-01<sup>(2)</sup></b>	120
<b>HORIZON-EIC-2024-TRANSITIONOPEN-01-01<sup>(2)</sup></b>	94
<b>HORIZON-EIC-2024-ACCELERATOROPEN-01 <sup>(3-5)</sup></b>	375
<b>Grant component</b>	150
<b>Equity component</b>	225
<b>HORIZON-EIC-2024-ACCELERATORCHALLENGES-01- <sup>(3-5)</sup></b>	300
<b>Grant component</b>	120
<b>Equity component</b>	180
<b>Reserve amount for follow on investments <sup>(6)</sup></b>	180
<b>HORIZON-EIC-2024-BOOSTER</b>	6
<b>Prizes</b>	2.6
<b>Public Procurement Actions</b>	12.1
<b>Expert contracts</b>	7.5
<b>Scientific and technical services by the Joint Research Centre</b>	0.4
<b>Contribution agreement with the European Investment Bank for indirect management of the EIC Fund</b>	1.5
<b>ESTIMATED TOTAL BUDGET</b>	<b>1.235</b>

<sup>(1)</sup> 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 this Work Programme. Changes within these limits will not be considered substantial within the meaning of Article 110(5) of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 2018/1046.

<sup>(3)</sup> The Accelerator is a continuously open call and hence this amount may be increased by any amounts committed but not allocated under the cut-offs of the previous EIC annual Work Programme. The share of the budget dedicated to investments (e.g., equity, equity-like, debt/guarantees, etc.) and grants will be a result of the evaluation and due diligence process for applications to the EIC Accelerator. In case the full budget allocated for investments in year N will not be committed fully in year N+1 at the latest, the unused budget may be reallocated to subsequent EIC Accelerator calls.

<sup>(4)</sup> The EIC Fund will receive an annual amount from the EIC Work Programme budget to cover administrative expenses and fees. This administrative budget covers the operation and administration expenses of any investment. These costs include any cost in relation to the acquisition, ownership or realisation of the investments. The administrative budget covers, among others, the fees payable to the EIC Fund Manager, other service providers, advisory, compensations to external experts, depositary and administrative agent fees, accounting, auditors, compliance procedures, communication and marketing, litigation or arbitration, statutory or regulatory fees, insurance premiums, taxes and other governmental charges and any other operational and administration costs and expenses as required. This budget will in average not exceed 10 % of the budget transferred for investments purposes. The indicative budget under indirect management is expected to be around EUR 585 million.

<sup>(5)</sup> Amounts from EIC Accelerator calls, including amounts decommitted from proposals awarded funding under the Accelerator calls, may be used for follow-on investments within the same budgetary year either to grant-first beneficiaries or under the provisions set out in Horizon Europe Regulation Article 48(12), including for actions selected under Accelerator calls from previous years. Such follow-on investments will be subject to a valid financing decision and to the provision of information to the EIC and EIE Programme Committee.

<sup>(6)</sup> The reserve for follow on financing is to provide additional amounts for follow-on investments to grant-first beneficiaries or under the provisions set out in Horizon Europe Regulation Article 48(12), including for actions selected under Accelerator calls from previous years. Such follow-on investments will be subject to a valid financing 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 for proposals

### A. ADMISSIBILITY

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

Proposals must be submitted **electronically** directly via the Funding and Tender portal electronic submission system (accessible via the call topic page in the [Search Funding and Tenders](#) section); or indirectly via the EIC Community Platform where applicants will be redirected to the Portal. Paper submissions are NOT possible.

Proposals must be readable, accessible, printable and complete (contain all the requested information and all required annexes and supporting documents) and must be submitted using the forms provided inside the electronic submission system.

The Application Form for EIC Pathfinder, EIC Transition and EIC Accelerator 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), the summarised budget for the proposal and ethics and security specific questions;
- ✦ **Part B** (to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed and then assembled and re-uploaded as PDF in the system) — contains the technical description of the project. For the EIC Accelerator, Part B will consist of the business plan.

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).

The **page limits** and sections subject to limits will be clearly shown in the application templates and must be respected. If an application exceeds the limits, there will be an automatic warning and invitation to re-submit a version that conforms to these limits. Excess pages will be automatically made invisible and will not be taken into consideration by the evaluators.

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 grants may be reduced (even later on during implementation of the project or after they 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.

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 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 project submits another full proposal before the first project reaches its end date.<sup>120</sup>

In no circumstances can the same costs be financed twice by the budget (Article 191 of the Financial Regulation).

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

## B. ELIGIBILITY

### Entities eligible for participation

Any legal entity,<sup>121</sup> regardless of its place of establishment, including legal entities from non-associated third countries or international organisation (including international European research organisations)<sup>122</sup> is **eligible to participate** (whether it is eligible for funding or not), provided that the conditions laid down in the Horizon Europe Regulation have been met together with any other **conditions laid down in the specific call or topic**.

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<sup>120</sup> Ongoing grant-only projects selected under a Horizon 2020 EIC pilot Accelerator or under Horizon Europe EIC Accelerator call may be eligible to submit a proposal for a blended finance or an investment only support under an EIC Accelerator call.

Ongoing blended finance projects selected under a Horizon 2020 EIC pilot Accelerator call may be eligible to submit a proposal for a related investment component under an EIC Accelerator call.

<sup>121</sup> For the definition of 'legal entity', see Article 2 (16) Regulation (EU) 2021/695 as well as Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation.

<sup>122</sup> International European research organisation means an international organisation, the majority of whose members are Member States or Associated Countries, and whose principal objective is to promote scientific and technological cooperation in Europe (Article 2 (15) Regulation (EU) 2021/695).

A 'legal entity' means any natural or legal person created and recognised as such under national law, EU law or international law, which has legal personality and which may, acting in its own name, exercise rights and be subject to obligations, or an entity without legal personality.<sup>123</sup>

Beneficiaries and affiliated entities must register in the Participant Register before submitting their application, in order to get a participant identification code (PIC) and be validated by the Central Validation Service before signing the grant agreement. For the validation, they will be asked to upload the necessary documents showing their legal status and origin during the grant preparation stage. A validated PIC is not a prerequisite for submitting an application.

*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) as well as Article 75 TFEU 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) - <http://www.sanctionsmap.eu/>

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) [EU Sanctions Map](#).

*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).<sup>124</sup> Exceptions may be granted on a case-by-case basis for justified reasons.

*Legal entities established in China* — In accordance with the 2019 "EU-China - A Strategic outlook" communication, the 2021 "Global Approach to Research and

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<sup>123</sup> See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation.

<sup>124</sup> In accordance with Article 204 of the Financial Regulation.

Innovation” communication, and the joint conclusions of the 4<sup>th</sup> EU-China Innovation Cooperation Dialogue of 2019, an exercise to develop a Joint Roadmap for the future of EU-China cooperation in science, technology, and innovation (Roadmap) has been established between the EU and China. It has the objective to develop a level playing field for engagement between the EU and China in the areas of science, technology, and innovation (STI) that is respectful of fundamental research and innovation values and principles. This 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 condition may be reviewed in the future in accordance with policy developments. This exclusion is justified 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

### **Entities eligible for funding**

To become a beneficiary and therefore to be eligible for funding, applicants must be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:

- ✦ Member States of the European Union, including their outermost regions
- ✦ the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) linked to the Member States<sup>125</sup>
  - Aruba (NL), Bonaire (NL), Curaçao (NL), French Polynesia (FR), French Southern and Antarctic Territories (FR), Greenland (DK), New Caledonia

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<sup>125</sup> Entities from Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) are eligible for funding under the same conditions as entities from the Member States to which the OCT in question is linked. See the Horizon Europe Programme Guide for a complete list of OCTs.

(FR), Saba (NL), Saint Barthélemy (FR), Sint Eustatius (NL), Sint Maarten (NL), St. Pierre and Miquelon (FR), Wallis and Futuna Islands (FR).

★ Eligible non-EU countries:

■ countries associated to Horizon Europe<sup>126</sup>

Considering the Union's interest to retain, in principle, relations with the countries associated to Horizon 2020, most third countries associated to Horizon 2020 are expected to be associated to Horizon Europe in due course of time. In addition, other third countries may also become associated to Horizon Europe during the programme. For the purposes of the eligibility conditions, applicants established in Horizon 2020 Associated Countries or in other third countries negotiating association to Horizon Europe will be treated as entities established in an Associated Country, provided that the Horizon Europe association agreement with the third country concerned applies at the time of signature of the grant agreement. 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.

■ Low- and middle-income countries.<sup>127</sup>

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

*Specific cases:*

*Affiliated entities* — Affiliated entities are eligible for funding if they are established in one of the countries listed above.

*EU bodies* — Legal entities created under EU law may also be eligible to receive funding, unless their basic act states otherwise.

*International organisations* — the Joint Research Centre (JRC), international European research organisations are eligible to receive funding. Unless their participation is

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<sup>126</sup>

See the [Horizon Europe List of Participating Countries](#) on the Portal for up-to-date information on the current list of and the position for Associated Countries.

<sup>127</sup> See the [Horizon Europe List of Participating Countries](#) for an up to date list of these countries.

considered essential for implementing the action by the granting authority, other international organisations are not 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 and when provided for in the specific call conditions.

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](#) [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. 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 and/or to change its status into associated partner. Tasks and budget may be redistributed accordingly.

### **Single legal entity ('Mono-beneficiary') and consortium ('multi-beneficiary') composition**

Unless otherwise provided for in the specific call conditions:

- ✦ Applicants for mono-beneficiary actions must be established in a Member State or Associated Country.
- ✦ Proposals for multi-beneficiary actions: unless provided for in the specific call conditions, 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 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).

Unless specified otherwise, proposals for EIC Pathfinder Challenge and EIC Transition may be submitted as well by multi-beneficiary comprising of two legal entities, provided that those two legal entities are established in two different Member States or Associated countries.

The JRC, 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.

Proposals for Coordination and Support actions may be submitted by one or more legal entities, which must be established in a Member State, Associated Country, or in exceptional cases and if provided for in the specific call conditions, in another third country.<sup>128</sup>

Proposals for 'Pre-commercial procurement' actions and 'Public procurement of innovative solutions' actions must include as beneficiaries a 'buyers' group'. This group must consist of a minimum of two independent legal entities that are public procurers<sup>129</sup>, each established in a different Member State or Associated Country and with at least one of them established in a Member State.

### **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 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 (with the exception of 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;
- ✦ lead to the destruction of human embryos (for example, for obtaining stem cells);

### **Ethics**

Projects must comply with:

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<sup>128</sup> Consortia of two entities must be comprised of independent legal entities from two different Member States or Associated Countries. Consortia of three or above entities follow standard rules i.e. they must include at least one legal entity established in a Member State and at least two other independent legal entities, each established in different Member States or Associated Countries (see Annex 2).

<sup>129</sup> 'Public procurers' are organisations that are contracting authorities or contracting entities as defined in EU public procurement directives 2014/24/EU, 2014/25/EU, and 2009/81/E.

- ✦ ethical principles (including the highest standards of research integrity), and
- ✦ applicable EU, international and national law

Particular attention must be paid to the principle of proportionality, to the right to privacy, the right to the protection of personal data, the right to the physical and mental integrity of a person, the right to non-discrimination and to the need to ensure protection of the environment and high levels of human health protection.

Applicants must complete the Ethics issues table and Self-Assessment as part of their proposal in accordance with the guidelines.

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

Projects involving ethics issues will have to undergo an ethics screening/assessment to authorise funding and may be made subject to specific ethics requirements (which become part of the grant agreement). Projects may be also subject to ethics checks/reviews and ethics audits.

### **Do Not Significant Harm (DNSH) principle**

Innovations that significantly harm the environment (and therefore contravene the 'do not significant harm' principle of the EU Taxonomy Regulation),<sup>130</sup> social welfare or that are primarily designed for military applications, or in other fields which are generally excluded from EU funding pursuant to Article 18 Horizon Europe Regulation, will not be funded.

In general, EIC funding will not be awarded to projects that contravene the objectives of the Green Deal, including for example proposals dedicated to enhancing the use of fossil fuels and related technologies. Exceptions might be established, however, for activities aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions from certain fossil fuel-based energy sources, such as those covered by the Complementary Climate Delegated Act<sup>131</sup> under the Taxonomy Regulation. For example, this delegated act recognises that, under strict conditions, specific fossil gas-related activities that can help accelerate the transition from high-emitting energy sources, such as coal, to

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<sup>130</sup> Regulation (EU) 2020/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2020 on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment, and amending Regulation (EU) 2019/2088, OJ L 198, 22.6.2020, p. 13.

<sup>131</sup> Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/1214 of 9 March 2022 amending Delegated Regulation (EU) 2021/2139 as regards economic activities in certain energy sectors and Delegated Regulation (EU) 2021/2178 as regards specific public disclosures for those economic activities



renewable or low-carbon gases are in line with the EU's climate and environmental objectives.<sup>132</sup>

### **Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence**

All AI-based systems or techniques need to be developed in a safe, secure and responsible manner, with a clear identification of and preventative approach to risks and in accordance with the AI Act. Depending on the type of research being proposed (from basic to precompetitive) and as appropriate, AI-based systems or techniques should be, or be developed to become (implicitly or explicitly contributing to the following objectives):

- ✦ technically robust, accurate and reproducible, and able to deal with and inform about possible failures, inaccuracies and errors, proportionate to the assessed risk posed by the AI-based system or technique;
- ✦ socially robust, in that they duly consider the context and environment in which they operate;
- ✦ reliable and function as intended, minimising unintentional and unexpected harm, preventing unacceptable harm and safeguarding the physical and mental integrity of humans;
- ✦ able to provide a suitable explanation of its decision-making process, whenever an AI-based system can have a significant impact on people's lives.

All proposals involving the development, use and/or deployment of AI based system/technique must ensure that the proposed AI system/technique is technical robust (e.g.,resilient to attack, safe and secure, having fallback plan, accurate, reliable and reproducible), safe and must describe how they will uphold the principles of human agency and oversight, fairness, diversity, non-discrimination, societal and environmental well-being, transparency and accountability.

### **Security — EU classified and sensitive information**

Projects involving classified and/or security 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 a 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.

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<sup>132</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022R1214>

The rules for protecting EU-classified information (governed by Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/444<sup>133</sup> provide for instance that:

- ✦ projects involving information classified TRES SECRET UE/EU TOP SECRET (or equivalent) CANNOT 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) issue by the competent national security authority NSA);
- ✦ handling of information classified CONFIDENTIEL UE/EU CONFIDENTIAL or above (and RESTREINT UE/EU RESTRICTED, if required by national rules) may take place only in a secured area accredited by the competent NSA;
- ✦ access to and handling of information classified CONFIDENTIEL UE/EU CONFIDENTIAL or above may be granted only to individuals with a valid personnel security clearance (PSC) and an established need-to-know, who have been briefed on the applicable security rules;
- ✦ access to, and handling of, information classified RESTREINT UE/EU RESTRICTED may be granted only to individuals who have a need-to-know and have been briefed on the applicable security rules;
- ✦ at the end of the grant, the classified information must either be returned or continue to be protected according to the applicable rules;
- ✦ subcontracting of tasks involving EU-classified information is subject to prior written approval by the European Commission, which is the originator of EU-classified information. It is only possible to subcontract these tasks to entities established in an EU Member State or in a non-EU country with a security of information agreement with the EU(or an administrative arrangement with the Commission);

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<sup>133</sup> See Commission Decision 2015/544/EU, Euratom of 13 March 2015 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 53.

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

Please note that, depending on the type of activity, facility security clearing (FSC) may have to be provided before grant signature. The Agency will assess the need for clearings in each case and will establish their delivery date during grant preparation. Please note that, in no circumstances can we sign any grant agreement until 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 security sensitive and consequently require restricted disclosure or limited dissemination due to security reasons, in accordance with 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., create Security Advisory Board, appointment of Project Security Officer, limit the level of detail, use fake scenario, etc.*).

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

### **Use of Copernicus and Galileo/EGNOS**

Projects involving earth observation, positioning, navigation or timing data, services or technologies must make use of at least Copernicus and Galileo/EGNOS data, services and technologies.

### **Gender Equality Plans and gender mainstreaming**

To be eligible, each legal entity that is a public body, a research organisation or a higher education establishment 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 in gender equality to implement the plan;

- ✦ Data collection and monitoring: sex/gender disaggregated data on personnel and students and annual reporting based on indicators;
- ✦ Training: Awareness raising/trainings on gender equality and unconscious gender biases for staff and decision-makers;
- ✦ Recommended areas to be covered and addressed via 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, while the existence of the Gender Equality Plan is confirmed before grant signature. 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.

Relevant EIC Awardees must also 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.

### **Financial support to third parties**

Where the specific call 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 and 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.

### **Open Science and Data Management**

For the EIC Pathfinder and Transition, the EIC funded projects must comply with the open science requirements as described in the Model Grant Agreement (article 17). This concern:

- ✦ providing immediate open access to scientific publications under the conditions required by the grant agreement;
- ✦ managing responsibly research data generated or reused by projects in line with the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable data)'. Producing and updating a data management plan; providing open access to research data under the principle 'as open as possible, as closed as necessary', that is with exceptions, under the conditions required by the grant agreement;
- ✦ providing information about the research outputs/tools/instruments needed to validate the conclusions of scientific publications or to validate/re-use research data;
- ✦ providing digital or physical access to the results needed to validate the conclusions of scientific publications, unless exceptions apply (the same as with open access to research data);
- ✦ in cases of public emergency, if requested by the granting authority, providing immediate open access to all research outputs under open licenses or, if exceptions apply, access under fair and reasonable conditions to legal entities that need the research outputs to address the public emergency.

Further, open science practices that are not mandatory but recommended, may be included in projects at the design phase, such as involving all relevant knowledge actors, including citizens, early and open sharing of research, output management beyond research data, open peer-review. This is a non-exhaustive list of practices that proposers are expected to adopt when possible and appropriate for their projects. Recommended open science practices are incentivised through their evaluation at the

proposal stage. Proposers should be aware of both mandatory and recommended practices and integrate them into their proposals.

## **Data Management**

All EIC funded projects must develop and update a data management plan in case they generate or reuse research data or any other research outputs (except for publications). All personal and non-personal data must be managed responsibly in line with the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable data), the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)<sup>134</sup> and the respective European, international and national legal frameworks. Personal data must not be made public unless explicitly agreed by the data subjects. Non-personal data will be open in principle but exceptions to open access apply (following the principle 'as open as possible, as closed as necessary').

## **Granting authority right to object to transfers or licensing**

For Horizon Europe EIC actions, the granting authority may, up to 4 years after the end of the action, object to a transfer of ownership or to the exclusive licensing of results. The conditions for this opposition are set on Horizon Europe Regulation ( art 40.4<sup>135</sup>).

## **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 shall not enter into any contract or maintain a business relationship with any institution or individual listed on sanction lists,<sup>136</sup> and in particular shall not make any funds available directly or indirectly to any institution or individual listed in sanction lists.

The EIC applies the EU rules, policies and procedures, addressing the requirements in respect of money laundering, terrorism financing, tax avoidance, tax fraud, tax

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<sup>134</sup> Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation), OJ L 119, 4.5.2016, p. 1.

<sup>135</sup> 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

<sup>136</sup> Consolidated list of sanctions: <https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/en/8442/Consolidated%20list%20of%20sanctions>

evasion contained in Article 155(2)(a) of the Financial Regulation and complies with the prohibition to enter into new or renewed operations with entities incorporated or established in jurisdictions listed under the relevant Union policy on non-cooperative jurisdictions or that are identified as high-risk third countries<sup>137</sup> or that do not effectively comply with Union or internationally agreed tax standards on transparency and exchange of information, as well as the possibility to derogate from this requirement when the action is physically implemented in one of those jurisdictions, contained in Article 155(2)(b) of the Financial Regulation.

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

## **C. FINANCIAL and OPERATIONAL CAPACITY**

### **Financial capacity**

In EIC EICactions, 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 by the Agency on the basis of the documents you will be requested to upload in the Participant Register during grant preparation (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 only be done for the coordinator and if the requested grant amount is equal or greater than EUR 500 000, except for:

- ✦ public bodies (entities established as 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).

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<sup>137</sup> Pursuant to Article 9(2) of Directive (EU) 2015/849 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2015 on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering or terrorist financing, amending Regulation (EU) No 648/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Directive 2005/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Commission Directive 2006/70/EC (OJ L 141, 5.6.2015, p. 73), as may be amended.

For more information, see [Rules on Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment](#).

### **Operational capacity**

Applicants to EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition calls 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/trans-national 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', on the basis of the competence and experience of the applicants and their project teams, including its operational resources (human, technical and other) or, exceptionally, the measures proposed to obtain it by the time of the implementation of the tasks.

If the evaluation of this award criterion leads a score above the applicable threshold, then the applicants are considered to have sufficient operational capacity.

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 judge 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.

### **Exclusion**

Applicants that are subject to EU administrative sanctions (i.e. exclusion)<sup>138</sup> or are in one of the following exclusion situations<sup>139</sup> banning them from receiving EU grants can NOT participate:

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<sup>138</sup> See Article 136 EU Financial Regulation <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32018R1046&qid=1535046024012>.

<sup>139</sup> See Articles 136 and 141 EU Financial Regulation <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32018R1046&qid=1535046024012>.



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

Applicants will also be refused if it turns out that:<sup>140</sup>

- ✦ during the award procedure they misrepresented information required as a condition for participating or failed to supply that information, or

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<sup>140</sup> See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32018R1046&qid=1535046024012>.

- ✦ they were previously involved in the preparation of the call and this entails a distortion of competition that cannot be remedied otherwise (conflict of interest).

## D. AWARD CRITERIA

If admissible and eligible, the proposals for Coordination and Support Actions will be evaluated and ranked against the following three award criteria:

Excellence	Impact	Quality and efficiency of the implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✦ Clarity and pertinence of the project's objectives.</li> <li>✦ Quality of the proposed coordination and/or support measures including soundness of methodology.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✦ Credibility of the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts specified in the Work Programme, and the likely scale and significance of the contributions due to the project.</li> <li>✦ Suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✦ Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks, and appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages, and the resources overall.</li> <li>✦ Capacity and role of each participant, and extent to which the consortium as a whole brings together the necessary expertise.</li> </ul>

For full proposals, each criterion will be scored out of 5. The threshold for each individual criterion will be 3. The overall threshold, applying to the sum of the three individual scores, will be 10.

For other types of actions, including 'Research and Innovation Actions' (EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition) and 'Innovation and Market Deployment Actions' (EIC Accelerator), the award criteria are detailed in the relevant call sections.

## E. EVALUATION REVIEW PROCEDURE

For EIC Pathfinder, EIC Transition and EIC Accelerator, EIC Prize winners and beneficiaries of other actions as described in this WP<sup>141</sup> if the consortium believes that the evaluation procedure was flawed, the coordinator can submit a complaint (following the deadlines and procedures set out in the evaluation result letter).

Only the procedural aspects of an evaluation may be the subject of a request for an evaluation review. The evaluation of the merits of a proposal will not be the subject of an evaluation review.<sup>142</sup>

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 maximum size limit of the request is 5 000 characters. Notifications of evaluation results which have not been opened in the Funding and Tenders Portal within 10 days after sending are considered to have been accessed and that deadlines will be counted from the date of opening/access (see also [Funding and Tender Opportunities 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 by evaluators who were not involved in the previous evaluation, or a confirmation of the initial evaluation.

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<sup>142</sup> See Article 30 (2) of Regulation (EU) 2021/695.

## 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 IV). Instead, a project review is carried out by the responsible 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 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 (Section IV), centred on the underlying idea of that potential new action;
- ✦ an evaluation process that guarantees an independent assessment of proposals in compliance with Article 48 of the Horizon Europe Regulation.

The responsible 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 to one of the cut-off dates within the next 12 months following the notification about the successful result of the initial review. Applicants are free to decide to which cut-off date (within the next 12 months) they wish to apply. They will receive coaching as specified in Section IV.

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

In 2024, the funding bodies and schemes 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.<sup>143</sup>

These 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 in 2021-2023, the scheme may be opened to other parts of Horizon Europe and Horizon 2020, and to the funding bodies responsible for their implementation.

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

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<sup>143</sup> For previous beneficiaries of a grant, the Fast Track scheme cannot be used to request grant-only support.

## Annex 4 Pilot Plug-in scheme to apply for the EIC Accelerator

The pilot Plug-in scheme is a specific process applicable to the EIC Accelerator only. Its process is equivalent to the Fast Track, as described under Annex 3. However, the Plug-in scheme applies to proposals that result from existing national or regional programmes.

Under the Plug-in scheme, applicants do not apply directly to the EIC Accelerator call (Section IV). Instead, a project review is carried out by the certified national or regional programme to assess the innovation or market deployment potential of an existing project supported by the programme, and to decide whether the project is suitable for support under the EIC Accelerator.

The project review - implemented by the funding/managing body responsible for the programme or by other appointed authority under the responsibility of the funding body - must be conducted using:

- ✦ award criteria equivalent to the ones set out for the short application stage of the EIC Accelerator (Section IV), centred on the underlying idea of that potential new action;
- ✦ equivalent evaluation processes that guarantee an independent assessment of proposals in compliance with Article 48 of the Horizon Europe Regulation.

The responsible funding/managing body, or other appointed authority under the responsibility of the funding body, can submit the outcome of the project 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 allocated at national or regional level; and
- ✦ the applicant meets the eligibility criteria for the EIC Accelerator.

Applicants will then be invited to prepare a full proposal for the EIC Accelerator to one of the cut-off dates within the next 12 months following initial review. Applicants may decide to which cut-off they apply. They will receive support through coaching as specified in Section IV.

Full proposals to the EIC Accelerator stemming from the Plug-in scheme will be assessed as set out in Section IV (above) and will be treated exactly the same way as all other full proposals.

The pilot Plug-in scheme will be implemented by programmes which have been assessed by a group of experts and certified by the Commission. To guarantee the effective implementation of this pilot, only public programmes – both national and regional – have been considered initially. The experts assessed the programmes<sup>144</sup> submitted by the Member States and Associated Countries, their related national or regional evaluation procedures, and whether the project review is equivalent to the assessment of proposals under the EIC Accelerator.

The Commission certifies the programmes that are deemed suitable for the Plug-in scheme based on the experts' assessment. The experts will collaborate with the EIC Plug-in contact points (representatives of Member States and Associated Countries) who will have to provide accurate information regarding the programmes. Only programmes for which all the key elements and information are provided by the EIC Plug-in contact points will be considered for the certification.

Following the results of a mapping of national and regional programmes, the first set of submission of programmes by Member States, and an independent assessment by experts, a first set of programmes have been certified to be compliant with the requirements of the Plug-in scheme. Further programmes may be assessed during 2023 and 2024 and subject to this assessment, may also be certified to be compliant with the Plug-in scheme. A full list of certified programmes for the Plug-in scheme is available on the EIC website.

The Commission services<sup>145</sup> will be notified if any future changes in the criteria and/or evaluation of the regional or national programmes may impact the assessment and certification of those programmes.

The Commission may withdraw the certification, if it finds out that:

- ✦ false information was used to obtain the certification;
- ✦ the project review did not comply with the provisions as set out in the EIC work programme.

The funding/managing bodies in charge of these national/regional programmes, or other appointed authority under the responsibility of the funding body, are responsible for implementing the Plug-in scheme in accordance with the above

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<sup>144</sup> "Programme" in this context is to be understood in the widest possible sense; in particular, it refers to all systems and institutions of organised services, activities and opportunities to support and scale up high impact innovations at the national or regional level.

<sup>145</sup> From the Directorate General in charge and/or Executive Agency to which the tasks/programme will be delegated.



provisions. They may decide not to implement the scheme or to introduce it at a later stage. A coordination among the different national and regional funding bodies will have to be ensured at national level to avoid duplication of the proposals.

After the certification process is concluded, the responsible funding/managing bodies, or other appointed authorities under the responsibility of the funding body, will be entitled to present the projects that have passed the project review and were funded under those certified programmes. In the pilot phase, a limitation for the number of projects proposed by each programme and each Member State or Associated Country will be agreed.

Plug-in proposals may be submitted by eligible programmes following the publication of this work programme and once programmes have been certified as eligible from at least two thirds of the Member States. Once submitted to the Agency, Plug-in applicants will then be treated in the same way as other applicants who have passed the short proposal stage of the EIC Accelerator evaluation and may submit their full applications to any of the cut-offs in the 12 month period following the submission of their Plug-in application.

The pilot Plug-in scheme is subject to an assessment after the first implementation to verify the effectiveness of the process and the quality of the proposals, in view of the renewal of the Plug-in process under subsequent cut-offs and possibly the inclusion of other programmes.

## Annex 5 EIC Booster grants for EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition Awardees

In line with Article 47(2) of the Horizon Europe Regulation,<sup>146</sup> with the aim to implement Portfolio coordinating activities or to nurture innovation out of these, EIC 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), potential beneficiaries 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;
- ✦ verification of innovation potential;
- ✦ consolidation of IP rights;
- ✦ business case development;
- ✦ exploratory / preparatory work for creating start-ups or spin-offs;
- ✦ Support for hosting by a public or private incubator/ accelerator.

Portfolio activities could include, but are not limited to:

- ✦ defining common objectives and activities;
- ✦ building synergies within the EIC Portfolio and with any outside relevant partners, including within the EIT Community;

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<sup>146</sup> See also Article 195(e) of the Financial Regulation.

- ✦ 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 EIC 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 EIC 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 EIC Booster grant can be awarded for each EIC Transition project. Any such EIC Booster grant can be awarded to an individual EIC awardee or a group of EIC Awardees.<sup>147</sup>

EIC Awardees or other potential booster grant beneficiary as indicated above 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. Each proposal will be assessed in accordance with Article 29, paragraph 2, of Horizon Europe Regulation taking into account the following considerations ("award criteria"):

For activities to explore potential pathways to commercialisation:

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

For portfolio activities:

- ✦ Contribution of the activity to the objectives of the EIC Portfolio (Excellence);
- ✦ Timeliness of the activity proposed to maximise its impact (Impact);
- ✦ Engagement of EIC Portfolio's projects and relevant external partners (Quality and efficiency of implementation).

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

- ✦ An EIC Programme Manager.

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<sup>147</sup> This includes affiliated entities that are participating in the Pathfinder or Transition projects.

- ✦ 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 final decision will be motivated and communicated to the applicant within 6 weeks and the Programme Committee will be informed. Successful applicants will be invited for grant agreement preparation (GAP), which might take into account adjustments proposed by the EIC Programme Manager.

Following successful grant preparation, and for Innovation activities until a Financial support to third parties under a CSA is set-up, the Agency will award the EIC Booster grants (in the form of a Coordination and Support Action)<sup>148</sup> to cover the eligible costs necessary for the implementation of the proposed activities. The funding rate of this grant will be 100% of the eligible costs. Eligible costs will take the form of a lump sum 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).

Once a Financial support to third parties under a CSA will be launched as described on section VII.6, the implementation of Booster grants for Innovation activities will be performed by the CSA beneficiary.

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<sup>148</sup> This may be a new grant agreement or an amendment to the existing grant agreement.

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

In accordance with the Horizon Europe Regulation,<sup>149</sup> the current Work Programme provides for additional dissemination and exploitation obligations in particular to facilitate the exploitation of results, and to enable a more pro-active role to the Commission and EISMEA identifying and maximising exploitation opportunities in the Union.

Together with specific intellectual property rules provided for under annex 5 of the Model Grant agreement, the following rules will apply to EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition actions.

### 1. Definitions

The following definition is complementing those provided in the Glossary in the introductory section of this Work Programme for the purpose of this Annex.

With reference to information and results owned by any EIC awardee that is a not-for-profit legal entity, EIC Inventors are any of their employees and subcontractors, established in a Member States or Associated Country, and appearing or entitled to appear as inventor in any corresponding patent filing and according to the definition of inventor for the relevant patent jurisdiction.

### 2. Exchange of information for the purpose of EIC portfolio activities

#### 2.1 – Access to information about results<sup>150</sup>

- a. At any time and without prejudice to the EIC awardee's ownership of results the EIC Programme Manager may request any EIC awardee to facilitate information on results (preliminary or final) generated by the action, subject to paragraphs b) and c) below, with the aim to probe their potential for further innovation.
- b. Where any such result (preliminary or final) was not already made public through agreed dissemination activities or a patent or protection by any other intellectual property right, that information shall be earmarked and treated by the Agency as confidential and disseminated only to:

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<sup>149</sup> In accordance with Recital (85) and notably the second indent of Article 39(1) of Horizon Europe Regulation.

<sup>150</sup> Results' means any tangible or intangible effect of the action, such as data, know-how or information, whatever its form or nature, whether or not it can be protected, as well as any rights attached to it, including intellectual property rights.

- ✦ other EIC Awardees, bound by an EIC grant agreement or an EIC contract, that refers to or includes the obligations detailed under section 2.2 below;
- ✦ EIC inventors having signed a non-disclosure agreement with the Agency, providing for the obligations detailed under section 2.2 below;
- ✦ other member of the EIC Community platform established in a Member State or an Associated Country and having signed a non-disclosure agreement with the Agency, providing for the obligations detailed under section 2.2.

Where based on that confidential information any of above mentioned entities request disclosure or access to the underlying detailed data and results, the EIC awardee may refuse it based on its legitimate interests, including commercial exploitation and any other constraints, such as data protection rules, privacy, confidentiality, trade secrets, Union competitive interests, security rules or intellectual property rights.

- c. EIC Awardees may object to the obligation provided for under paragraph b) when:
- ✦ committing to either publish or patent or protect by any other intellectual property right and without unreasonable delays, or
  - ✦ demonstrating concrete exploitation of the said preliminary findings and results, subject to initial discussion with and final agreement of the Agency on the corresponding update of the Plan for dissemination and exploitation referred to in Section 3.1.

## **2.2 – Non-disclosure obligations**

Where EIC Awardees are informed on or given access or disclosure to any preliminary findings, results or other intellectual property generated by other EIC actions, and where this information is earmarked as confidential in accordance with section 2.1.b, they must:

- ✦ keep it strictly confidential; and
- ✦ not disclose it to any person without the prior written 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 EIC Business Acceleration Services, as detailed and



referred to under section 3.5. 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 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 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 will impose penalties in accordance with the grant agreement.