EN

# Horizon Europe

# Work Programme 2026-2027

*10. European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE)*

*(European Commission Decision C(2025) 8493 of 11 December 2025)*

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## Introduction

The European Union (EU) faces complex challenges, including the climate emergency, a relatively slow economic growth and a problematic geopolitical situation, particularly given the war of aggression in Ukraine. Among other factors, Europe's ability to respond to these challenges is closely linked to its capacity to innovate and become more competitive. Notably, deep tech[1] innovations, emerging from a growing cohort of startups in Europe, have the potential to deliver transformative solutions that can strengthen Europe's economic and environmental sustainability, as well as its global standing.

Cross-border collaboration is crucial to boost innovation and enhance Europe's competitiveness. Despite the competitive advantages of the European innovation ecosystems, much of the knowledge produced by researchers working in Europe remains unexploited. As has been highlighted by the Draghi report [2], a key reason behind this failure is the fact that researchers in Europe are less well integrated into networks of universities, start-ups, large companies and venture capitalists, which account for a large share of successful commercialisations in high-tech sectors[3]. Strengthening these networks, providing them with the infrastructure and resources they need, is a crucial step to putting research and innovation at the heart of our economy, as stated in the Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024-2029[4].

Against this background, the European Innovation Ecosystems work programme promotes better connected and more efficient innovation ecosystems[5], creating framework conditions that would allow Europe to become a startup powerhouse, as foreseen by the EU *Startup and Scaleup Strategy*[6]. In line with this strategy, this work programme aims to address some critical obstacles faced by many startups and scaleups throughout their journey, notably linked to the high level of market fragmentation in Europe, which include limited access to capital, slow innovation uptake and underutilised potential of public procurement.

The work programme contains actions under the destination CONNECT. The actions under this destination focus on building interconnected and inclusive innovation ecosystems across the EU. Drawing on the existing strengths of national, regional and local ecosystems and encouraging the involvement of all actors and territories, this destination aims to reinforce network connectivity for sustainable business growth and to define and achieve ambitious collective goals for the benefit of society, including green, digital, and social transitions.

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1 Deep tech is a technology that is based on cutting-edge scientific advances and discoveries and is characterised by the need to stay at the technological forefront by constant interaction with new ideas and results from the lab. Deep tech innovations are understood to be those that have the potential to deliver transformative solutions, rooted in cutting-edge science, technology and engineering, including innovation that combines advances in the physical, biological and digital spheres. Deep tech is distinct from 'high tech' which tends to refer only to R&D intensity.

2 The Draghi report on EU competitiveness

3 The future of European competitiveness – A competitiveness strategy for Europe

4 Ursula Von der Leyen, Europe's Choice: Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024-2029.

5 Definition as per Article 2(47) of the Horizon Europe Regulation.

6 EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy.

This work programme contributes to all key strategic orientations and impact areas of Horizon Europe[7] and to increasing innovation cohesion. Furthermore, it works in complementarity with several other EU initiatives, including: the European Innovation Council (EIC), the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), including the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) the Digital Europe Programme, as well as other relevant funding and policy initiatives at EU, national, regional and local level[8], such as the Enterprise Europe Network[9]. Eligibility to participate is also subject to the 'Participation of Chinese universities linked to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT)' eligibility condition (see General Annex B of the General Annexes).

At the policy level, the EIC Forum[10] will continue to work in a flexible manner to foster enabling framework conditions and flows of information, knowledge, talent and best practices among actors of innovation ecosystems and the EIC, to fully harness the potential of innovation. Overall, it will enhance the exchange of best practices and coordination of national innovation policy initiatives, including by providing policy orientations. By promoting a coherent and inclusive approach to EU innovation ecosystems' policy, it operates in complement to the actions in this work programme.

The National Contact Points for the European Innovation Ecosystems work programme are supported under the EIC work programme.

Proposals are invited against the following three calls for proposals:

7 Horizon Europe strategic plan 2025-2027 - European Commission (europa.eu).
8 Where applicable, funding from Member States / State resources must be compliant with State aid rules.
9 More information under Enterprise Europe Network.
10 More information under EIC Forum.

# Calls

## Call - Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems (2026.2)

***HORIZON-EIE-2026-02***

### Overview of this call[11]

Proposals are invited against the following Destinations and topic(s):

| Topics | Type of Action | Budgets (EUR million) | Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million)[12] | Indicative number of projects expected to be funded |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 2026 | | |
| Opening: 11 Dec 2025<br>Deadline(s): 10 Mar 2026 | | | | |
| Destination CONNECT: Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems | | | | |
| HORIZON-EIE-2026-02-CONNECT-01: European Startup and Scaleup Hubs pilot | COFUND | 20.00 | Around 20.00 | 1 |
| Overall indicative budget | | 20.00 | | |

| **General conditions relating to this call** | |
|---|---|
| *Admissibility conditions* | The conditions are described in General Annex A. |
| *Eligibility conditions* | The conditions are described in General Annex B. |
| *Financial and operational capacity and exclusion* | The criteria are described in General Annex C. |

11 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.
All deadlines are at 17.00.00 Brussels local time.
The budget amounts are subject to the availability of the appropriations provided for in the general budget of the Union for 2026 and 2027.

12 Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Award criteria* | The criteria are described in General Annex D. |
| *Documents* | The documents are described in General Annex E. |
| *Procedure* | The procedure is described in General Annex F. |
| *Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements* | The rules are described in General Annex G. |

## Call - Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems (2026.3)

***HORIZON-EIE-2026-03***

### Overview of this call[13]

Proposals are invited against the following Destinations and topic(s):

| Topics | Type of Action | Budgets (EUR million) 2026 | Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million)[14] | Indicative number of projects expected to be funded |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Opening: 09 Jun 2026<br>Deadline(s): 22 Sep 2026 | | | | |
| Destination CONNECT: Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems | | | | |
| HORIZON-EIE-2026-03-CONNECT-01: From lab to market: Strengthening the role of Technology Transfer Offices in bringing knowledge to the market | CSA | 5.00 | Around 1.00 | 5 |
| Overall indicative budget | | 5.00 | | |

[13] 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.
All deadlines are at 17.00.00 Brussels local time.
The budget amounts are subject to the availability of the appropriations provided for in the general budget of the Union for 2026 and 2027.

[14] Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

| **General conditions relating to this call** | |
|---|---|
| *Admissibility conditions* | The conditions are described in General Annex A. |
| *Eligibility conditions* | The conditions are described in General Annex B. |
| *Financial and operational capacity and exclusion* | The criteria are described in General Annex C. |
| *Award criteria* | The criteria are described in General Annex D. |
| *Documents* | The documents are described in General Annex E. |
| *Procedure* | The procedure is described in General Annex F. |
| *Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements* | The rules are described in General Annex G. |

## Call - Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems (2027.1)

***HORIZON-EIE-2027-01***

### Overview of this call[15]

Proposals are invited against the following Destinations and topic(s):

| Topics | Type of Action | Budgets (EUR million) | Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million)[16] | Indicative number of projects expected to be funded |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 2027 | | |

[15] 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.
All deadlines are at 17.00.00 Brussels local time.
The budget amounts are subject to the availability of the appropriations provided for in the general budget of the Union for 2026 and 2027.

[16] Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Opening: 01 Jun 2027<br>Deadline(s): 15 Sep 2027 | | | | |
| Destination CONNECT: Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems | | | | |
| HORIZON-EIE-2027-01-CONNECT-01: Startup Europe | CSA | 18.00 | Around 2.00 | 9 |
| HORIZON-EIE-2027-01-CONNECT-02: Reinforcing synergies between experimentation spaces and innovation procurement | PCP | 10.00 | Around 10.00 | 1 |
| HORIZON-EIE-2027-01-CONNECT-03: Enhancing the involvement of philanthropic organisations in innovation ecosystems | CSA | 6.00 | Around 1.00 | 6 |
| Overall indicative budget | | 34.00 | | |

| **General conditions relating to this call** | |
|---|---|
| *Admissibility conditions* | The conditions are described in General Annex A. |
| *Eligibility conditions* | The conditions are described in General Annex B. |
| *Financial and operational capacity and exclusion* | The criteria are described in General Annex C. |
| *Award criteria* | The criteria are described in General Annex D. |
| *Documents* | The documents are described in General Annex E. |
| *Procedure* | The procedure is described in General Annex F. |
| *Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements* | The rules are described in General Annex G. |

# Destinations

## Destination CONNECT: Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems

Today's challenges are inherently complex and systemic and cannot be solved by individual actors or territories in isolation. Enhancing the innovation ecosystems across the European Union (EU) requires a holistic approach that is nuanced, collaborative and inclusive, connecting diverse actors along the research and innovation cycle.

Interconnectedness is particularly crucial to boost Europe's competitiveness. Despite the competitive advantages of the European innovation ecosystems, much of the knowledge produced in Europe remains unexploited. As has been highlighted by the Draghi report[17], a key reason behind this failure is the fact that researchers in Europe are less well integrated into networks of universities, startups, large companies and venture capitalists, which account for a large share of successful commercialisations in high-tech sectors. This indicates that strengthening the links between resources, organisations and investors is a crucial step to putting research and innovation at the heart of our economy.

Such effectively connected ecosystems can provide innovative companies with the necessary support and conditions to thrive through access to capabilities, data, customers, knowledge, and talent. Network connectivity within and between innovation ecosystems greatly contributes to sustainable business growth with high societal value. In line with the EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy, this destination improves the framework conditions for startups and scaleups, enabling them to capitalise on new geopolitical opportunities and reducing the reasons to relocate outside the EU.

Therefore, the actions of this destination aim to shift the European economy towards a more entrepreneurial, innovative and inclusive model by strengthening and expanding cooperation between innovation players. They aim to create a dynamic ecosystem to better support the next generation of innovative companies whose solutions will lead the shift towards a more competitive EU and a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient world.

In addition to stronger innovation performance, increased competitiveness and faster transitions to a green and digital society, ecosystem integration can provide innovation actors and companies with access to new resources, markets, customers, and contribute to disruptive and innovative solutions. By being actively engaged in their local, regional, national, and European networks, companies can increase their overall growth potential.

Accordingly, this destination offers a holistic package of actions that:

- Increase the capacity to convert research results generated in Europe into innovative products and services, leading to a higher rate of successful commercialization of these solutions by companies based in the Member States and Associated Countries;

[17] The future of European competitiveness – A competitiveness strategy for Europe

- Reinforce EU strategic autonomy and increase resilience in the supply chains by opening up opportunities for innovative companies to access the public procurement market and scale up their business;

- Establish robust, pan-European alliances of top-tier deep tech startup and scaleup hubs embedded in research and higher education ecosystems;

- Facilitate market expansion for deep tech startups across regions and sectors, thus enhancing cohesion and competitiveness across the EU;

- Strengthen less-connected innovation ecosystems by integrating them into a Europe-wide collaborative network;

- Increase the level of public and private investments in innovative companies, particularly startups and scaleups, through strengthened links with investors, including foundations;

- Establish stronger links between regions and countries with different innovation performances across the EU and Associated Countries;

- Promote a better alignment of the innovation policies of the Member States and Associated Countries, in line with the EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy, through the EIC Forum;

- As a result of the above, achieve an increased level of retention of promising startups and scaleups in Europe, particularly in the deep tech sector and strategic sectors like life sciences, artificial intelligence, clean tech, biotech, security, defence (including dual use technologies), robotics, advanced and raw materials, quantum technologies, cybersecurity, and many others.

Where appropriate, the applicants should consider and actively seek synergies with possibilities for further funding from other relevant EU, national and/or regional innovation programmes, including Cohesion Policy funds, the Recovery and Resilience Fund and other public and private funds or financial instruments.

**Expected impact**

Proposals for topics under this destination should set out a credible pathway to strengthening robust interconnected innovation ecosystems and creating a favourable environment to promote the scalability of businesses, including in the deep tech sector, and more specifically covering one or several of the following impacts:

- More competitive and more efficient European innovation ecosystems which provide favourable framework conditions for the development and market uptake of innovative solutions, drawing on the existing strengths of national, regional, and local ecosystems;

- Enhanced cross-border network connectivity and inter-regional collaboration to untap Europe’s potential for successful commercialization of innovative products and services,

notably through reinforced links between resources, organizations, investors and policymakers;

- Improved access to funding by European startups and scaleups, notably in the deep-tech and strategic sectors, through diverse sources, including innovation procurement and philanthropy;
- Enhanced knowledge and technology transfer and capacity building within the European innovation ecosystems, providing innovative companies with the necessary conditions to thrive;
- Increased participation of less represented R&I stakeholders and less advanced innovation territories in the R&I cycle, capitalising on the experience and vision of an increasingly diverse range of people, companies and territories while promoting social cohesion, inclusion, accessibility and gender balance;
- Improved systemic conditions to tackle key EU strategic priorities, including the green and digital transitions, through building innovative capacities;
- Increased coordination of innovation policy and networking activities by the Member States and Associated Countries through the EIC Forum.

Proposals are invited against the following topic(s):

**HORIZON-EIE-2026-02-CONNECT-01: European Startup and Scaleup Hubs pilot**

| **Call: Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems (2026.2)** | |
|---|---|
| **Specific conditions** | |
| *Expected EU contribution per project* | The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 20.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts. |
| *Indicative budget* | The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 20.00 million. |
| *Type of Action* | Programme Co-fund Action |
| *Eligibility conditions* | The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:<br>A hub must be represented by a single legal entity (for instance an umbrella organisation representing a science and technology park or an innovation cluster or district, an accelerator or a venture builder embedded in an innovation ecosystem) or several legal entities representing the relevant actors of the innovation ecosystem supporting startups (e.g. research and higher education institutions, corporates, |

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|---|---|
| | public authorities, capital providers).<br>The consortium should consist of a network of at least ten (10) hubs from at least ten (10) different Member States or Associated Countries. For Member States and Associated Countries with an overall population not exceeding 35 million[18], participation is limited to a single hub in the given consortium. For Member States and Associated Countries with an overall population exceeding 35 million, the participation is limited to two hubs in the given consortium. In addition, at least two (2) participating hub shall be established in a "widening country".[19]<br>The consortium must provide a single letter of intent at the moment of submission of the proposal indicating the source of the required 50% of complementary funding (e.g. national and/or regional funding, EU funding, or private investments).<br>Subject to restrictions for the protection of European communication networks. |
| *Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements* | The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:<br>Beneficiaries may provide financial support to third parties. The support to third parties can only be provided in the form of grants. The maximum amount to be granted to each third party is EUR 60 000. |

Expected Outcome: Projects under this topic will contribute to the following outcomes:

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

[18] The most recent available data from Eurostat at the time of opening of the call will be used as reference (Population on 1 January by age and sex)

[19] "Widening countries" are listed under Article 2 of the Horizon Europe regulation (Regulation (EU) 2021/695).

6. Mobilise greater private and public capital into deep tech ventures across participating innovation hubs.

Scope: This action builds upon the EU's strategic vision outlined in the *EU Competitiveness Compass*[20], the EIC scaling strategy[21], and the *EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy*[22]. It aligns with the objectives of strengthening Europe's deep tech capabilities, increasing regional innovation cohesion and supporting the growth of globally competitive companies.

The EU must act decisively to close the innovation gap with other world regions by enabling more commercial successes based on its scientific excellence. While Europe generates world-class research, European deep tech startups often struggle to scale into global champions. The *European Startup & Scaleup Hubs (ESSH)* pilot will address this structural weakness by creating a connected network of Europe's leading and emerging startup supporting structures, embedded in innovation ecosystems that bring together universities, research and higher education institutions, research and technology organisations, corporates, entrepreneurs and investors, while also encouraging these hubs to expand their activities.

The action aims to pilot a network of around 10-18 ESSHs — highly capable startup and scaleup hubs deeply integrated with leading research, technology and higher education institutions and strong track records in venture building, scaling, and investment attraction as well as providing entrepreneurial education. These hubs shall collaborate across borders to:

- Open their ecosystems to non-local startups, enabling scaling through access to talent, corporates, capital, infrastructure, facilities and mentoring.
- Foster shared infrastructure and expertise, including access to labs, facilities, research departments, and innovation services.
- Support pan-European startup development, for both local and network-partner startups, including EIC-supported ventures, by connecting startups to relevant services of the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), EU industry cluster organisations, European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH)[23], Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) of the European Institute of Innovation and technology (EIT) and other EU, national, regional or local instruments.
- Bridge regional gaps by integrating less-connected hubs into the network via mentoring, shared services, and capacity building.

Particular attention should be paid to enable deep tech spinoffs, startups and scaleups accessing resources, services and contacts not directly available in their local innovation hubs to facilitate the expansion of their operations in the single market.

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20 *Competitiveness compass - European Commission*

21 The term strategy refers to a set of actions launched under the EIC to support scaleups in particular the EIC STEP Scale Up scheme and the EIC Scaling club

22 *Choose Europe for your startup and scaleup - European Commission*

23 European Digital Innovation Hubs Network (europa.eu)

The selected pilot ESSHs will form a "Champions League of startup hubs", committed to supporting each other's startups including EIC supported ventures and Seal of Excellence holders, thus catalysing a new norm of intra-European scaling. ESSHs will serve as role model for emerging hubs in Europe and share best practices. The selected pilot ESSHs should organise one of their yearly meetings at the margins of the EIC summit and will be invited to participate actively in the yearly EIC summit meeting.

The indicative project duration is two years.

Selection criteria for ESSHs should include:

- Proven track record in startup creation, scaleup success, venture capital mobilisation, and entrepreneurial education.
- Strong integration of at least one local university, research and higher education institution and research and technology organisation, recognised for its research excellence in deep tech areas, in each hub represented in the consortium.
- Sectoral strength in deep tech areas with relevance for European strategic sectors such as, for example, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, advanced semiconductors, medical technology, biotechnology, bioeconomy applications, cleantech and energy (including nuclear technology), water and blue tech, security, defence, space, robotics and advanced materials.
- Demonstrated ability to federate the relevant actors of the local innovation ecosystem (research and higher education institutions, corporates, capital providers, entrepreneurs and public authorities) and cross-border collaboration capabilities.
- Access to research and technology infrastructures, facilities and services, including legal and regulatory advice, and commitment to opening them to startups and scaleups from other hubs.
- Strong commitment and strategy on how to link up the activities of the ESSHs closely with the activities of the EIC.

KPIs during pilot phase:

- Number of newly supported[24] startups (i.e. from the beginning of the project) at network level during the project (Target: Minimum 100).
- Number of supported startups that raised seed financing or venture capital by the end of the project (Target: Minimum 50%).

[24] 'Support' encompasses all the activities relevant to the development of startups such as provision of a service (advisory, legal or other), access to infrastructure, introduction to relevant business or investment leads, etc.

- Number of newly supported startups (i.e. from the beginning of the project) by a hub outside of the startups' local innovation ecosystem during the project (Target: Minimum 50).

The ESSHs should facilitate access of deep tech spinoffs, startups and scaleups to all the relevant dedicated services, structures and funding opportunities available in Europe. This encompasses for instance the services offered by EEN and EDIH, activities supported by the EIT as well as opportunities offered by the EIC and the EIC Scaling Club initiative (EIC Scaling Club[25]). For this purpose, the startup hubs are encouraged to liaise with experts from the EEN, EDIH, EIT, EIT KICs and the EIC. Cooperation could also be established with Regional Innovation Valleys[26], Excellence Hubs[27], Hubs for Circularity[28], and Industry 5.0 System Innovation Hubs[29]. ESSHs are also encouraged to leverage the EIC ecosystems programme and open up to EIC-supported ventures from outside their established partner network that would benefit their local ecosystems.

The action may be implemented through financial support to third parties or directly by the consortium partners to allow companies to best benefit from the services described above. For consortia opting for the financial support to third parties scheme, the monitoring of the support to third parties provided for each action, as well as the management of the financial support to third parties, will be ensured by the coordinator.

**HORIZON-EIE-2026-03-CONNECT-01: From lab to market: Strengthening the role of Technology Transfer Offices in bringing knowledge to the market**

| **Call: Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems (2026.3)** | |
|---|---|
| **Specific conditions** | |
| *Expected EU contribution per project* | The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 1.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts. |
| *Indicative budget* | The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 5.00 million. |
| *Type of Action* | Coordination and Support Actions |
| *Eligibility conditions* | The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:<br>This action requires the participation, as beneficiaries, of at least three (3) legal entities from at least three (3) different Member States or |

25 Horizon Europe Grant Agreement n°101114582.
26 Regional Innovation Valleys (europa.eu)
27 Excellence Hubs - European Commission (europa.eu)
28 Hubs4Circularity (h4c-community.eu)
29 HORIZON-CL4-INDUSTRY-2025-01-HUMAN-65: Network of Industry 5.0 system innovation hubs in connected Regional Innovation Valleys (IA)

| | |
|---|---|
| | Associated Countries that are universities, research and higher education institutions or research technology organisations (RTOs).<br>In addition, at least one (1) legal entity shall be established in a "widening country". [30] |
| *Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements* | The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:<br>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) [31]. |

Expected Outcome: Project results are expected to contribute to the following outcomes:

- Increased commercialisation of academic research results, by facilitating access for industry, startups and scaleups to the intellectual assets of academic research;
- Strengthened collaboration between industry and academia, reflected in an increased number of technology transfer deals and joint R&D projects resulting in market-ready innovations;
- Introduced more startup friendly intellectual asset transfer/licensing policies in universities/research and higher education institutions/RTOs;
- Increased number of spinoffs by enabling researchers to overcome the barriers to commercialising their intellectual assets;
- Reduced transaction costs related to Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) negotiations by establishing more standardised asset transfer policies across universities/research and higher education institutions/RTOs;
- Optimised transfer/licensing processes by universities/research and higher education institutions/RTOs based on grouping intellectual assets in portfolios that can be commercialised in package deals that are more attractive for industry and investors.

Scope: Academic knowledge producing organisations (universities, research and higher education institutions and RTOs) are acting as innovation engines by fuelling startups and industries with new knowledge, technologies and skilled individuals. This potential can be

30 "Widening countries" are listed under Article 2 of the Horizon Europe regulation (Regulation (EU) 2021/695).

31 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

nurtured with efficient intellectual management strategies and effective Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs). However, Europe's potential of research valorisation is underutilised.

Currently, it is challenging for industrial actors to identify and access academic results that have potential for commercialisation. On the one hand, a relatively complex fragmented landscape of TTOs generates high transaction costs discouraging companies, especially startups from engaging in collaboration or accessing academic research for commercialisation. On the other hand, the lack of financial and non-financial incentives for academic researchers hampers their commitment. Indeed, in many cases, researchers cannot fully appropriate royalties from the licensing of intellectual assets and knowledge valorisation activities are not recognised for their career progression.

In this regard, the Draghi report[32] recommends European universities/RTOs to adopt a more coordinated, commercialisation minded, and startup friendly intellectual asset management approach[33].

Participating beneficiaries should engage in the following activities:

- adopting startup-friendly intellectual asset management strategies;
- accelerating the commercialisation of academic research results under fair and transparent conditions in an attractive way for innovative companies and investors, in particular for critical technology areas related to the EU's economic security;
- reinforcing the adoption of best practices in intellectual asset management [34] including the equitable sharing of value generated in R&I activities;
- improving the support to researchers and students in commercialising research results;
- enhancing intellectual asset management practices by establishing portfolio approaches to market intellectual assets in package deals;
- facilitating the collaboration between researchers, startups and innovative companies.

More specifically, project participants should:

1. Identify and share best-practices developed to support knowledge valorisation [35];
2. On this basis, create a common set of tools for start-up friendly licensing/transfer [36] to be adapted to the specific national/regional context with templates, strategies, successful

32 The future of European competitiveness – A competitiveness strategy for Europe

33 For example, using virtual shares or licensing conditions that compensate the university/research and higher education instituion/RTO only at the time when sales/profits are made from the product or service that commercialises the IPR or when investors exit the company.

34 As identified in the Code of Practice on the management of intellectual assets for knowledge valorisation in the European Research Area.

35 Participants are encouraged to share their best practices in the repository of best practices of the Knowledge Valorisation Platform, amongst others.

case studies and business models. The toolbox could include standardised rules and processes together with flexible and adaptable clauses to support negotiation, conclusion and implementation of licensing agreements;

3. Develop a common incentives and benefit-sharing model ensuring incentives for researchers and students to engage in commercialisation with a fair distribution of revenues from intellectual assets;

4. Test the licensing/transfer tools and benefit-sharing models by implementing at least three pilot cases with researchers or students engaging in commercialization activities.

5. The outcomes of these activities should enable to inform the further development of a blueprint for licensing, royalty- and revenue-sharing and equity participation for academic institutions and their inventors when commercialising IP and creating spinoffs[37]. The blueprint should further support effective intellectual asset management and IPR negotiation and licensing practices across Europe.

The participation of innovation agencies and/or national and regional authorities that can help universities, research and higher education institutions or RTOs in adapting their intellectual asset management policy and implementation is encouraged. Beneficiaries should ensure to consult relevant stakeholders in particular startups and SMEs to carry out the action. They are also encouraged to leverage relevant complementary programmes such as the EIT Higher Education Initiative[38].

**HORIZON-EIE-2027-01-CONNECT-01: Startup Europe**

| **Call: Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems (2027.1)** | |
|---|---|
| **Specific conditions** | |
| *Expected EU contribution per project* | The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 2.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts. |
| *Indicative budget* | The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 18.00 million. |
| *Type of Action* | Coordination and Support Actions |
| *Eligibility conditions* | The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:<br>At least 50% of the beneficiaries in a consortium must be established in |

36 The project is encouraged to collaborate and build further where ever possible on results from other EU funded projects in the knowledge valorization domain. This includes in particular projects from calls HORIZON-CL4-2023-HUMAN-01-31 and HORIZON-CL4-2024-HUMAN-02-35.

37 The creation of a dedicated blueprint is part of the Lab to Unicorn Initiative announced under the EU Startup and Scaleup strategy.

38 EIT Higher Education Initiative

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| | 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovator countries or regions.<br>The Regional Innovation Scoreboard is taken as a reference, and in the case of entities representing national authorities, the European Innovation Scoreboard. The applicants must use as a reference the latest version of the documents mentioned above at the time of the call opening. Associated Countries which are not included in the European Innovation Scoreboard and are ranked below 25 on the Global Innovation Index 2024 are considered as 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovators. In cases of Associated Countries not included in any of the previously mentioned references, the participation rank of the country in the Horizon Europe programme (Horizon Europe country profile) will be taken as a reference and countries ranked below the average will be considered as 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovators.<br>Subject to restrictions for the protection of European communication networks. |
| *Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements* | The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:<br>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) [39].<br>Beneficiaries may provide financial support to third parties. The support to third parties can only be provided in the form of grants. The maximum amount to be granted to each third party is EUR 60 000. |

Expected Outcome: Project results are expected to contribute to the following outcomes:

- Increasing the market footprint of European startups in strategic digital technologies and deep tech[40] innovation, including but not limited to Artificial Intelligence, Advanced Computing, Cybersecurity, Next Generation Internet, Blockchain, Internet of Things, Metaverse, Energy, Greentech, AgriTech, and Fintech;

[39] 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

[40] Deep tech is a technology that is based on cutting-edge scientific advances and discoveries and is characterised by the need to stay at the technological forefront by constant interaction with new ideas and results from the lab. Deep tech innovations are understood to be those that have the potential to deliver transformative solutions, rooted in cutting-edge science, technology and engineering, including innovation that combines advances in the physical, biological and digital spheres. Deep tech is distinct from 'high tech' which tends to refer only to R&D intensity.

- Better connection of startups and scaleups, including European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and European Innovation Council (EIC)-supported startups and Seal of Excellence holders, to relevant local and/or European ecosystems, communities, and potential new markets;

- A scaling up of capabilities in matching technology solutions developed by highly innovative European Union (EU)-funded digital and deep tech startups with investment and growth opportunities in collaboration with other initiatives such as: the EIC, the EIT and the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), InvestEU, the Digital Europe Programme, Women TechEU, public and private buyers, or investors and corporate innovation ventures.

In pursuit of the above outcomes the projects are expected to prioritise:

- Startups and scaleups that have already achieved market-product fit or scale ups that have raised at least a round of financing (seed or later); and

- Startups and scaleups established in 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovator countries and/or regions; or

- Women-led startups and scaleups[41].

Scope: This action will connect local digital, deep tech, and manufacturing startup and scaleup ecosystems and support cross-border acceleration activities for startups and scaleups that demonstrate traction (i.e. market-product fit or at least a seed round raised). Among the startup and scaleup ecosystems to be connected, specific attention will be given to the inclusion of ecosystems in 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovator countries and/or regions.

While cross-border acceleration activities are open to all European startups and scaleups demonstrating traction, the action targets companies identified in Horizon Europe (e.g. though the EIC, including the EIC Scaleup 100 action, EIT-supported companies and companies supported through Regional Innovation Valleys) and the Digital Europe Programme (e.g. from European Digital Innovation Hubs), and the use of Innovation Radar intelligence[42] and other relevant data set[43]. Targeting of companies funded by national programmes, particularly those part of "Plug-in" certified programmes (see EIC Work Programme 2025 Annex 4) should also be considered.

In terms of outreach and amplification, actions should be publicised where relevant in the EIC Community[44] and should actively engage with activities and events of the Europe Startup

41 Startups founded, or co-founded by women, holding a top management position (chief executive officer (CEO), chief technology officer (CTO), or chief scientific officer (CSO) or equivalent).

42 The EU Innovation Radar Platform (Actions can also have Application Programming Interface (API) access to the Innovation Radar data sets).More information under The EIC Community.

43 Including the work of the Joint Research Centre in the areas of innovative Startups and scale-ups with high growth potential. More information under "New European Alliance to accelerate startups growth."

44 More information under The EIC Community.

Nations Alliance[45]. Special attention will be given to support European digital and deep tech startups and scaleups in accessing innovation procurement opportunities (public or corporate procurers).

The action may be implemented through financial support to third parties or directly by the consortium partners to allow companies to best benefit from the services described above. For consortia opting for the financial support to third parties scheme, the monitoring of the support to third parties provided for each action, as well as the management of the financial support to third parties, will be ensured by the coordinator.

The actions implemented must ensure that the companies that excel in technology get appropriate support to also thrive in product-market-fit, financial alignment, business model and revenue generation, team dynamics and leadership, and adaptability to external factors including regulatory challenges, industry trends, market changes and other factors to make them investment-ready.

The applicants should put in place proper communication and publicity of the actions engaged, including success stories of funded companies and case studies about the impact of the project.

The projects should monitor the development of supported startups and scaleups with relevant indicators. For this purpose, consortium partners should ensure the monitoring of supported companies for three years after the end of the project with a robust set of indicators including: (1) average percentage evolution in revenue of supported companies; (2) percentage of supported companies securing follow-on funding; (3) amount of follow-on funding secured; (4) average profitability of supported companies; (5) market share evolution of supported companies; (6) survival rate of supported companies (6, 12, 18 months after end of support for startups, and 1, 2, 3 years for scaleups).

**HORIZON-EIE-2027-01-CONNECT-02: Reinforcing synergies between experimentation spaces and innovation procurement**

| **Call: Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems (2027.1)** | |
|---|---|
| **Specific conditions** | |
| *Expected EU contribution per project* | The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 10.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts. |
| *Indicative budget* | The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 10.00 million. |
| *Type of Action* | Pre-commercial Procurement |

[45] Including the work of the Joint Research Centre in the areas of innovative Startups and scale-ups with high growth potential. More information under New European Alliance to accelerate startups growth

| | |
|---|---|
| *Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements* | The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:<br>PCP/PPI procurement costs are eligible.<br>The beneficiaries may provide financial support to third parties to provide financial incentives to final end-users to adopt the solutions. The support to third parties can only be provided in the form of grants. The maximum amount to be granted to each third party is EUR 200 000 to ensure the deployment and impact of the project outcomes. This amount is justified since the FSTP actions need to allow procurers to provide financial incentives to final end-users to adopt the solutions; therefore, the amount needs to be sufficient to support the deployment and maximise the impact of the project outcomes.<br>The specific conditions for actions with PCP/PPI procurements in section H of the General Annexes apply to grants funded under this topic. |

Expected Outcome: Project results are expected to contribute to the following outcomes:

- Advancing public sector modernization by capitalising on the transformational power of innovative technologies to improve the quality and efficiency of public services;
- Reinforce EU strategic autonomy and increase resilience in the supply chains by opening up opportunities for innovative companies, including notably SMEs and startups, to access the public procurement market and scale up their business;
- Improving opportunities for market uptake and economies of scale for the supply side through increased demand for innovative solutions and where relevant contribution to standardisation, regulation or certification;
- It is expected that if PCP results in the successful innovative solutions than at least one of those will be ready for deployment or even being already deployed in the project.
- Supporting the uptake of innovative and sustainable solutions through collaborative procurement approaches that encourage safer and more efficient practices in public sector applications.

Scope: This topic aims to shorten the time to market for innovations by reinforcing synergies between innovation procurement and experimentation spaces such as test beds, livings labs or regulatory sandboxes. While public buyers often do not use experimentation spaces to test before they invest, companies also too often only start looking for potential customers, verifying regulatory compliance and product certification after R&D is finished, which delays commercialisation. This action enables innovators to develop and test innovative solutions immediately in cooperation with public buyers and where relevant also with competent regulatory and certification bodies.

This specific challenge tackles both the gap between supply and demand for innovative solutions and the lack of cooperation of buyers with test beds, living labs, regulatory authorities and certification bodies during R&D. It targets therefore consortia of public buyers with similar procurement needs to drive innovation from the demand side, by together challenging the market to develop innovative solutions and by cooperating with test beds, living labs and where applicable with regulatory and certification bodies to remove regulatory and/or certification barriers for innovative solutions to enter the market in Europe. Cooperating with regulatory authorities has the specific benefit that then the testing environment of the PCP procurement can serve also as a regulatory sandbox. By fostering innovation procurement and opening a route to the market for innovative companies, including in particular also startups and scaleups, this topic contributes to the objectives of the EU Startup Scaleup Strategy and the European Innovation Act.

PCP actions target consortia of procurers with similar needs that want to procure together and with relevant competent regulatory and certification bodies that want to cooperate with the procurers during the PCP project. Therefore, this topic does not provide direct funding to developers, industry or research organisations to perform R&D. They will be able to respond to the call for tenders launched by consortia of procurers funded under this call, and the winning tenderers will receive procurement contracts from the procurers. Specific guidance on PCP actions and minimum eligibility requirements can be found in General Annexes H of the Horizon Europe work programme.

Joint pre-commercial procurement enables public buyers to share the effort and costs of procuring R&D and create a critical mass of demand that can trigger suppliers to commercialise promising research that can address concrete public sector needs. The aim of engaging in such more forward-looking R&D procurement strategies is to modernise the provision of public services faster, whilst creating also opportunities for industry and researchers in Europe to take international leadership in new markets. Establishing a cooperation between public buyers and suppliers during the development and testing of the solutions enables to tune developed solutions to concrete customer needs. When public buyers don’t have themselves advanced testing environments to test innovative technologies, cooperating with experimentation spaces such as living labs or test beds can help public buyers overcome this issue. Cooperating where relevant also with regulatory and/or certification bodies enables these bodies to learn already during the PCP about the potential impact of emerging innovations and adapt where needed the regulatory/certification process to accommodate smooth arrival of those innovations on the market. Testing the compliance of innovation solutions by a transnational buyers’ group in cooperation with regulatory/certification entities of different countries can also facilitate early identification of potential implications of ensuring the compliance of emerging innovations with regulations in a cross-border context.

This topic complements calls for PCP Actions foreseen in other Horizon Europe 2025 work programmes, by tackling challenges that are not addressed by or that cut across the scope of

PCP action topics in other work programmes[46]. It is open to proposals for PCP actions in all areas of public sector interest requiring innovative solutions linked to the EU strategic priorities. It is open both to proposals that require improvements mainly based on one specific technology field, as well as to those that require end-to-end solutions that need combinations of different technologies.

The aim is to leverage PCP to encourage the development and to provide a first customer reference for the piloting, installation and validation of breakthrough innovations. Involvement of procurement decision makers is thus needed to ensure that end solution(s) are adopted by procurers, increasing the societal impact of the R&D activities. Therefore, procurers should declare in the proposal their interest to pursue deployment of solutions resulting from the PCP in case the PCP delivers successful solutions and indicate whether they will (1) procure successful solution(s) as part of the project during or after the PCP procurement, (2) launch after the project a separate follow-up procurement after the PCP to buy such type of solutions, (3) adopt successful solutions without the need to procure them (e.g. in case of open source solutions), (4) foresee financial or regulatory incentives for others to adopt successful solutions (e.g. in case the final end-users of the solutions are not the procurers but for example citizens).

In these four cases, the procurers can implement the project as a fast-track PCP (see general annex H). In the first case, the procurers must foresee the budget in the proposal to purchase at least one solution during the project (either as part of the PCP procurement budget or as part of the budget for subcontracting, purchase of equipment or other costs). In the second case, the procurers should include in the proposal a deliverable that prepares the follow-up procurement to purchase such type of solution(s) after the PCP procurement. In the first and third case, the procurers must foresee sufficient time during the project to deploy and validate that the solutions function well after installation. In the fourth case, the procurers can use financial support to third parties to provide financial incentives to final end-users to adopt the solutions, with a maximum budget of EUR 200 000.

The project funded under this topic should demonstrate a greater degree of ambition in terms of innovation level and/or deployment scope. The selection of the third parties to be supported under the grant will be based on an external review by independent experts of the proposed work, under full responsibility of the beneficiary consortia.

### HORIZON-EIE-2027-01-CONNECT-03: Enhancing the involvement of philanthropic organisations in innovation ecosystems

| **Call: Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems (2027.1)** |
|---|
| **Specific conditions** |

[46] For an overview of PCP actions in other work programmes see: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/support-policy-making/shaping-eu-research-and-innovation-policy/new-european-innovation-agenda/innovation-procurement/horizon-europe-funding-pcp-and-ppi_en

| | |
|---|---|
| *Expected EU contribution per project* | The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 1.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts. |
| *Indicative budget* | The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 6.00 million. |
| *Type of Action* | Coordination and Support Actions |
| *Eligibility conditions* | The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:<br>The coordinator of the project must be a higher education institution, or research technology organisation(s) (RTOs) or a network of such organisations.<br>Consortia must include at least three (3) participants from three (3) different member states or associated countries, including higher education institution(s) or RTOs and philanthropy organisation(s) or network of philanthropy organisations.<br>The Joint Research Centre (JRC) may participate as member of the consortium selected for funding as a beneficiary with zero funding, or as an associated partner. The JRC will not participate in the preparation and submission of the proposal - see General Annex B. |
| *Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements* | The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:<br>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) [47]. |

Expected Outcome: Project results are expected to contribute to the following outcomes:

- Increase the collaboration of philanthropic organisations with higher education institutions, TTOs, innovative companies and Venture Capital (VCs) in supporting innovative projects and companies to develop and grow;
- Support the transition of academic research and innovations from higher education institutions to market-ready solutions.

[47] 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

Scope: There are currently more than 33000 philanthropic organisations in Europe with EUR 50 billion of annual philanthropic expenditure and EUR 567 billion pool of philanthropic assets[48]. Philanthropic organisations and higher education institutions have been working together for many years in supporting the development of breakthrough research and technologies. At the same time, the EU still faces challenges in bringing technologies to the market. Therefore, this action aims at building on these established models of cooperation to support the transfer of developed technologies to the market by supporting facilities (like living labs and test beds) and/or engaging relevant stakeholders to further commercialize technologies with concrete common objective.

The purpose of this topic is to incentivise philanthropic organisations support to projects with high-potential, not only through financial resources, but also by providing access to expertise and networks of like-minded stakeholders and investors, as well as by being themselves first users of new technologies, allowing for their testing.

Higher education institutions are expected to propose a plan outlining how they intend to advance and commercialize the research and technologies they have developed. This plan should detail how they will engage with philanthropic organizations and/or venture capital investors to support early-stage companies, as well as with businesses that could adopt university-developed technologies. It should also include strategies for involving other relevant stakeholders who can help bringing these innovations to market. The cooperation could take place at the regional, national or European level with the participation of at least one higher education institution or network of such organisations, RTO and one philanthropic organisation or network of philanthropic organisations. Consortia could also include accelerator or investors networks and government organisations and/or other relevant innovation stakeholders.

The role of the philanthropic organisation in the consortia could include, but is not limited to:

- Providing access to other investors and networks of like-minded stakeholders;
- Increase the awareness of the project among relevant stakeholders;
- Accelerate the implementation and adoption of developed technologies by other stakeholders;
- Being first users of new developed technologies, allowing for their testing.

The collaboration of beneficiaries should lead to concrete results, where the activities could include, but are not limited to one or more of the following:

- Bringing together diverse research and innovation actors to collaboratively develop a technology or combination of technologies. By the end of the project, the consortium should demonstrate the application—or confirmed interest in application—of the

[48] McKinsey and Philea. In this topic, philanthropy refers to foundations, corporate funders and individuals using their own financial and non-financial resources for the public good.

developed technology or technologies in the creation of new, or the improvement of existing, products and/or services by at least one startup, scaleup, or corporate entity;

- Supporting the creation of experimentation spaces and testing environments like living labs, testing beds, incubators or accelerators;
- In collaboration with Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs), supporting the launch of multiple spin-offs that successfully secure venture funding. The funding should come from at least one of the following investor types: angel investors, accelerators, venture capital firms, corporate investors, philanthropic organizations, or National Promotional Banks. As a result, a number of signed deals are expected;
- Building one or several accelerators with the aim to attract a number of startups to venture funding.

The duration of the project depends on the proposed project but in order to have quality results, it is foreseen to be between one to three years.

For the purposes of this call, eligible philanthropic organization should meet the criteria set by Philea for "public-benefit foundation". Specifically, five criteria had been collectively defined to consider an organisation as a public-benefit foundation:

1. They are independent, separately constituted non-profit bodies.
2. They have no members or shareholders.
3. They have their own established and reliable source of income, usually but not exclusively from an endowment.
4. They have their own governing board.
5. They distribute their financial resources for educational, cultural, religious, social or other public-benefit purposes, either by
    a. Supporting associations, charities, and educational institutions or individuals; or,
    b. Operating their own programmes.

Participants are also encouraged to leverage relevant complementary programmes such as the EIT Higher Education Initiative[49].

To support the work of higher education institutions in identifying relevant philanthropic organisations to collaborate with, the Commission will also launch a study to map and profile the relevant philanthropic organisations working in the area of research and innovation in Europe.

[49] EIT Higher Education Initiative

## Other actions not subject to calls for proposals

### 1. Renewal of the EU Intellectual Property Helpdesk

In the European Union (EU), Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), including startups, individual innovators, researchers, and European micro small and medium-sized enterprises do not always have sufficient knowledge of how to best use Intellectual Property (IP) [50] to facilitate the exploitation of research results, and more generally to manage, disseminate and valorise technologies and other IP rights and assets. A smart use of IP will help EU creators and inventors to obtain adequate reward for their intellectual efforts. It also enables SMEs to appropriately commercialise and take advantage of their intellectual assets in the EU. It may increase the chances that the scaling up and exploitation will take place in the EU. It is instrumental in securing better margins, organising technology transfers, collaboration, and attracting investors. It may thus boost the resilience of the European economy.

This action supports the better use of IP by SMEs by providing for an EU IP Helpdesk based on the experience of the previous initiatives, inspired by the activities of the existing IP Helpdesk[51], and possibly extending its scope. The IP Helpdesk should raise awareness on IP matters via a website, develop and conduct trainings including Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), as well as customised advice in relation to cross-border IP issues across the EU and developing an IP strategy. The IP Helpdesk should work seamlessly with the European Innovation Council (EIC) acceleration services, as well as selected other innovation ecosystem services. It should in particular coordinate its website offering with the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO)[52], the European Patent Office (EPO)[53] and other EU-funded IP support services (namely International IP Helpdesks [54]) and implement promotional activities in coordination with the action "Awareness raising on IP management for European research and innovation (R&I)"[55].

The EU IP Helpdesk is currently active on a three years contract from September 2023 until September 2026 which has a clause to be extended for an additional 24 months, securing the service until September 2028. This extension should allow for a continuation of:

- Improving EU SME's knowledge about IP showing specifically how to use IP as a strategic and structuring element for business development;
- Supporting EU project applicants for IP issues that are relevant in cross-border research and commercial relationships supported by EU funds (IP rights management as to the results of common projects);

50 On SME challenges with IP, see the joint European Patent Office (EPO)-European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) study.
51 More information under European IP Helpdesk.
52 European Union Intellectual Property Office
53 European Patent Office
54 More information under IP Helpdesk.
55 Projects supported under HORIZON-CL4-2021-HUMAN-01-17.

- Supporting the management, dissemination and/or valorisation of technologies and other intellectual assets. This involves the provision of guidance to enhance the capacity of SMEs (including startups and scaleups) to compete internationally, the protection of their intangible assets timely and adequately, the examination of ways to leverage their intangible assets for investments and their support with proof-of-concept IP advice;

- Increasing the participation of the target group(s): entrepreneurs, SMEs and startups (applicants, together with the universities), startup hubs, universities (applicants), National Contact Points, Enterprise Europe Network partners, Chambers of Commerce, professional associations, EIC coaches, Business accelerators (applicants providers) for all in particular by strengthening the linkages with local stakeholders in 'moderate' and 'emerging' innovator countries[56] and peripheral European countries;

- Supporting the promotion of socially responsible IP practices, identifying areas of particular societal concern where non-exclusive, royalty-free licences on the IP resulting from EU-funded research could be granted for a limited time to innovators/SMEs.

- Supporting the identification of critical IP created through public funding and prevent it from leaving the EU without control and guarantees.

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

Indicative timetable: Last quarter of 2026

Indicative budget: EUR 2.60 million from the 2026 budget

**2. Studies and Communication**

Activities under this action will support the Commission with appropriate expertise in preparation of new policy initiatives in support of innovation ecosystems. These activities may include studies, support and communication activities that are needed to analyse and enhance the EU R&I environment. Contracts under this action may be implemented on the basis of framework contracts, low/middle value contracts or open tender procedures in order to further ensure that the Commission is provided with appropriate and timely analyses.

This action will also support the activities of the EIC Forum and/or its working groups through gathering new or more robust evidence and producing analyses in support of policy discussions.

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

[56] References: European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS), Global Innovation Index (GII)

Indicative budget: EUR 0.58 million from the 2026 budget and EUR 0.68 million from the 2027 budget

### 3. Mapping of European philanthropic organisations

A unique characteristic of philanthropy is its ability to respond in real time to the critical challenges facing our societies, while simultaneously taking a longer-term view. There is considerable alignment between EU research and innovation policy and philanthropic organisations objectives. Philanthropic organisations support innovative research, forward-thinking ideas, and experimental projects. In order to facilitate further the collaboration with higher education institutions and the EIC, this action aims to map philanthropic organisations, which operate in EU or fund substantial amount of projects in the EU. The mapping should include information by country, activities, investments relevant for EU research and innovation priorities. The study should provide easily accessible information to be used by universities and higher education institutions in order to support them in identifying suitable philanthropic organisation for further collaboration.

The purpose of this mapping is to:

- Provide an overview of philanthropic organisations which could be potential partner for higher education institutions in conducting and commercializing the research;
- Provide an overview of philanthropic organisations that are suitable for collaboration with the EIC;
- Inform national and regional policy makers of potential of mobilizing philanthropic organisations in supporting research and innovation.

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

Indicative timetable: Second quarter of 2026

Indicative budget: EUR 0.10 million from the 2026 budget

### 4. Use of individual experts on assisting with the monitoring of actions

This action will support the use of appointed independent experts for the monitoring of running actions (grant agreement, grant decision, public procurement actions, financial instruments) funded under Horizon Europe and previous Framework Programmes and where appropriate include ethics checks, as well as compliance checks regarding the Gender Equality Plan eligibility criterion.

Form of Funding: Other budget implementation instruments

Type of Action: Expert contract action

Indicative budget: EUR 0.02 million from the 2026 budget and EUR 0.02 million from the 2027 budget

### 5. EUREKA membership fee

The European Union is a member of EUREKA and, as such, pays an annual contribution to the budget of the EUREKA Secretariat.

EUREKA is an international network established in 1985 as an agreement between 18 countries to foster European competitiveness and integration and to encourage Research & Development cooperation. Since then, it expanded to include over 45 countries in Europe and beyond who share the same goals and have national funding available to organisations who apply through our programmes.

Type of Action: Subscription action

Indicative timetable: First quarter of 2026 and first quarter of 2027

Indicative budget: EUR 0.40 million from the 2026 budget and EUR 0.40 million from the 2027 budget

### 6. Technical assistance to support the Regional Innovation Valleys and other innovation policy priorities

The Joint Research Centre (JRC) will provide assistance in the implementation of the Regional Innovation Valleys, fostering the interconnectedness of participating regions and facilitating the promotion of the interregional innovation projects.

JRC actions and scientific services will include, among others:

- Mapping and label award of the Regional Innovation Valleys through online tools, such as interactive maps, which will help to disseminate the results, as well as to attract new investments, partners, or clients for the interregional projects;
- Other types of innovation policy support.

Type of Action: Provision of technical/scientific services by the Joint Research Centre

Indicative budget: EUR 0.30 million from the 2026 budget

### 7. Benchmarking of national policy frameworks and investments on innovation procurement across Europe

European Council Conclusions[57] call on policy makers to strengthen the policy support for innovation procurement and to encourage public buyers to increase investments in innovation procurement. The Startup and Scaleup Strategy and the EIC Forum 2024 policy orientations

[57] Council conclusions (29 November 2024) on Strengthening the competitiveness of the EU, reinforcing the European Research Area and overcoming its fragmentation

highlight the importance of continuing the benchmarking of national policy frameworks and investments for innovation procurement across Europe. It provides a better understanding of what is the status across different countries of the implementation of policy measures that create a conducive ecosystem for innovation procurement, what are current levels of investment in innovation procurement across different sectors, what are good practices versus remaining barriers and how can they be overcome.

Regularly taking stock in a comparable way across Europe of the progress that different countries are making on innovation procurement, will enable policy makers to learn from each other to continue improving their performance and will help innovative companies that want to grow their business across borders to understand better the situation on innovation procurement in other countries.

This action provides the budget for the last year (year 2029) of the ongoing service contract for implementing the benchmarking of national policy frameworks and investments on innovation procurement across Europe. The action may also support activities to implement recommendations resulting from the benchmarking.

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

Indicative timetable: Last quarter of 2027

Indicative budget: EUR 1.00 million from the 2027 budget

## Budget[58] [59]

| | Budget line(s) | 2026 Budget (EUR million) | 2027 Budget (EUR million) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Calls** | | | |
| HORIZON-EIE-2026-02 | | 20.00 | |
| | *from 01.020302* | *20.00* | |
| HORIZON-EIE-2026-03 | | 5.00 | |
| | *from 01.020302* | *5.00* | |
| HORIZON-EIE-2027-01 | | | 34.00 |
| | *from 01.020302* | | *34.00* |
| **Other actions** | | | |
| Public procurement | | 3.28 | 1.68 |
| | *from 01.020302* | *3.28* | *1.68* |
| Expert contract action | | 0.02 | 0.02 |
| | *from 01.020302* | *0.02* | *0.02* |
| Subscription action | | 0.40 | 0.40 |
| | *from 01.020302* | *0.40* | *0.40* |

[58] The budget figures given in this table are rounded to two decimal places.
The budget amounts are subject to the availability of the appropriations provided for in the general budget of the Union for 2026 and 2027.

[59] This amount does not include a budget transfer of €4,750,000 from the EIE to the EIC in year 2027 to support projects and companies under "Implementing co funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys calls": HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-03-01, HORIZON-EIE-2025-02-CONNECT-02 and HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-05-ACCESS-01. The support required by RIVs projects and participating companies will be provided through the EIC Business Accelerate Support service contracts. Enabling these projects and companies to benefit directly from the BAS support avoids duplication of efforts and streamlines the process.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Provision of technical/scientific services by the Joint Research Centre | | 0.30 | |
| | *from 01.020302* | *0.30* | |
| **Estimated total budget** | | 29.00 | 36.10 |