

# Horizon Europe – European Innovation Council

## What is Horizon Europe?

Horizon Europe is the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation with a budget of €95.5 billion for the period 2021-2027. It tackles climate change, helps to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and boosts Europe's competitiveness and growth.

The programme facilitates collaboration and strengthens the impact of research and innovation in developing, supporting, and implementing EU policies while tackling global challenges. It supports the creation and better sharing of knowledge and technologies.

It also creates jobs, fully engages Europe's talent pool, boosts economic growth, promotes industrial competitiveness, and optimises investment impact within a strengthened European Research Area.

For information on UK participation in the programme see UKRO's [dedicated factsheet](#).

## What is the European Innovation Council?

The [European Innovation Council](#) (EIC) provides a coherent and connected system of innovation funding that supports projects with market potential. Its schemes, piloted at the end of Horizon 2020, are principally targeted at Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and industry, but also have opportunities for academic involvement (mainly in the EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition).

## How was the EIC established?

An Enhanced EIC pilot was introduced in 2019, restructuring the available funding schemes and building on successful Horizon 2020 instruments such as Fast Track to Innovation and the SME Instrument. This allowed to better align the EIC pilot structure with the vision for a fully-fledged European Innovation Council under Horizon Europe with its own Board and dedicated Programme Managers. The formal establishment of the EIC was supported by the work of a dedicated EIC Advisory Board, which provides the European Commission with independent advice on the necessary steps.

At the end of June 2020, the Advisory Board published a report entitled "A Vision and Roadmap for Impact" which presented a roadmap for establishing the fully-fledged European Innovation Council in Horizon Europe. The document sets out the steps the Commission should take to fully establish the EIC and makes several recommendations, which are in line with the Commission's proposal to establish the EIC as a more formal structure under Horizon Europe.

The EIC was officially launched in March 2021 and a new [EIC Board](#) was established later the same year, following a dedicated call for applications from leading European researchers and innovators.

## Programme Managers

As part of the process to create a more formal structure for the EIC, the Commission has also started recruiting dedicated [EIC Programme Managers](#) who are professionals with visionary thinking, appointed as temporary Commission staff to help ensure flexible and proactive management and steering of technology or challenge-based portfolios. They are appointed full-time for a period of up to four years within the EIC and must have deep expertise in their field, experience managing multidisciplinary teams, and strong abilities to communicate and influence.

## EIC Forum

The Commission has also established an [EIC Forum](#) at the beginning of Horizon Europe to bring together public authorities and bodies in charge of national innovation policies in the EU Member States/ Horizon Europe Associated Countries.

The main aim of the Forum is to discuss the development of innovation-friendly regulation; promote the alignment of R&I agendas with EU efforts to consolidate an open market for capital flows and

investment; enhance coordination between national innovation programmes and the EIC; and establish a joint communication strategy on innovation in the EU.

## What does the EIC fund?

The EIC is the main component of Pillar III of Horizon Europe – Innovative Europe – which aims to foster all forms of innovation, including breakthrough innovation, and market deployment of innovative solutions.

The new investments for 2024 reinforce the EIC's increasing track record in supporting high-impact technologies and start-ups. Furthermore, through these investments – in particular, the EIC Challenges – the EIC will continue to support major EU priorities related to digitisation, post-Covid recovery and clean transition.

## Bottom-up opportunities

Building on the success of the Enhanced EIC pilot in Horizon 2020, the EIC serves as a one-stop shop for European innovators and channel funding through three main bottom-up instruments:

- **Pathfinder Open** – based on the FET Open scheme in Horizon 2020, this instrument supports international consortia working on establishing future and emerging breakthrough technologies through collaborative research and innovation projects.
- **Accelerator Open** – based on the SME Instrument in Horizon 2020, this instrument aims to bridge the financing gap between late stages of innovation activities and market take-up, to effectively deploy breakthrough market-creating innovation and scale up companies where the market does not provide viable financing.

In addition, activities such as prizes, fellowships and business added-value services are funded through the Accelerator.

- **Transition Open** – a new scheme that supports the maturation and validation of novel technologies in the lab and relevant application environments, as well as the development of a business case and business model towards an innovation's future commercialisation.

**NEW in 2024!** Applications to this scheme must build on the results (demonstrated proof of principle) achieved within eligible past Horizon collaborative projects, ERC Proof of Concept, EIC Pathfinder or European Defence Fund projects.

## Top-down opportunities

### EIC Strategic Challenges

EIC Challenges target the strategic priorities of the EU and complement the bottom-up calls for proposals under each of the three main EIC schemes. There are additional calls for proposals with funding available only in the priority areas selected by the Commission under each annual EIC Work Programme. These calls might have different deadlines and budgets but, in principle, follow the same rules for eligible consortia/single applicants as the EIC Open calls.

As a novelty in Horizon Europe, EIC Strategic Challenges support portfolios of projects with the assistance of dedicated EIC Programme Managers. The portfolios reflect the scope of a particular challenge and successful projects may be requested to join one or more thematic portfolios overseen by the Programme Managers. These projects may then be requested to participate in portfolio activities together with other projects or initiatives to help maximise the impact of EIC funding in a selected priority area.

In 2024, most funding opportunities are dedicated to SMEs and start-ups to develop and scale up “deep tech” innovations in critical fields such as generative Artificial Intelligence, space, critical raw materials, semiconductors and quantum technologies.

## Call timings and budgets

Summary of the main calls in the [2024 Work Programme](#):

	Open calls		Challenge-driven calls		
	Call deadline(s)	Indicative budget (€ million)	Challenges	Call deadline(s)	Indicative budget (€ million)
EIC Pathfinder	7 March 2024	136	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Solar-to-X” devices</li> <li>• Towards cement and concrete as a carbon sink</li> <li>• Nature inspired alternatives for food packaging and films.</li> <li>• Nanoelectronics for energy-efficient smart edge devices Protecting EU space infrastructure</li> </ul>	16 October 2024	120
EIC Transition	18 September 2024	94	This year there are no Challenge calls, so there is only one deadline.		
EIC Accelerator	<b>Short applications:</b> continuous <b>Full applications:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13 March 2024</li> <li>• 3 October 2024</li> </ul>	375	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human Centric Generative AI</li> <li>• Virtual worlds and augmented interaction, including support to Industry 5.0</li> <li>• Enabling the smart edge &amp; quantum technology components</li> <li>• Food from precision fermentation and algae</li> <li>• Monoclonal antibody-based therapeutics for emerging viruses</li> <li>• Renewable energy sources and their whole value chain</li> </ul>	<b>Short applications:</b> continuous <b>Full applications:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13 March 2024</li> <li>• 3 October 2023</li> </ul>	300

## What is new in 2024?

Building on the advice of the EIC Board, the 2024 Work Programme introduced several simplifications and improvements, including:

- **The introduction of a lump sum cost model in most EIC main calls** (except Pathfinder Open). This will remove financial reporting requirements for beneficiaries.
- The rebuttal (right to react) pilot has been removed from the EIC Pathfinder evaluation process.
- The opening of EIC Transition funding to follow up results from Horizon collaborative projects, in addition to results from ERC Proof of Concept, EIC Pathfinder and European Defence Fund projects.
- The EIC Transition Open call has a single deadline.
- The introduction of consensus meetings for EIC Accelerator applications to improve the robustness of the evaluation process.

The full list of changes is provided in the 2024 Work Programme.

## Business Acceleration Services

EIC Business Acceleration Services (BAS) are tailor-made services, notably for EIC Community members, aiming at the commercialisation of EIC innovations and scaling up of EIC companies through access to coaches, mentors, expertise and training, access to global partners (leading corporates, investors, procurers, distributors, clients) and access to the innovation ecosystem and peers.

They form an integral part of the EIC programmes and are offered for free to eligible EIC-funded projects and beneficiaries. All EIC beneficiaries (from the EIC Accelerator, EIC Transition and EIC Pathfinder) have access to BAS.

## More information

- [Horizon Europe website](#)
- [EIC website](#)
- [2024 EIC Work Programme](#)

Horizon Europe's legal basis:

- [Regulation establishing Horizon Europe](#)
- [Decision establishing the Specific Programme of Horizon Europe](#)
- [First Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe \(2021-2024\)](#)
- [Second Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe \(2025-2027\)](#)

UKRO Portal

- [UKRO Portal](#) (subscriber access required)