

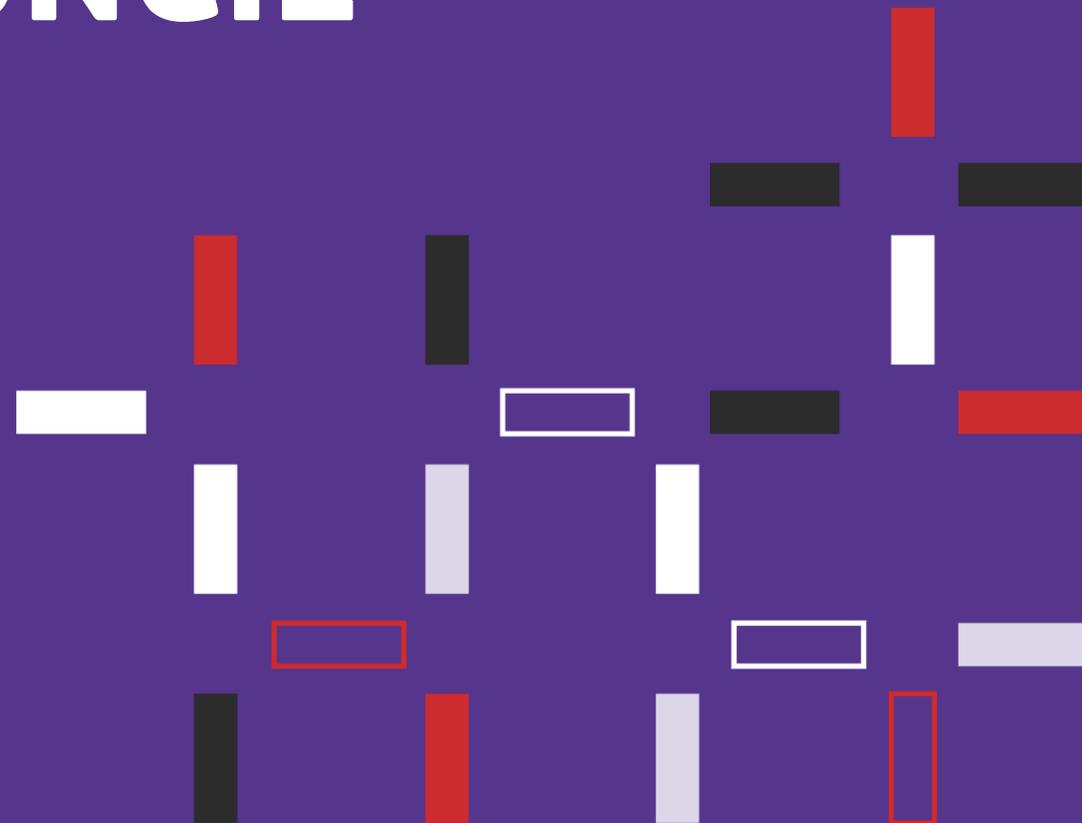


# THE EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL

EIC Pathfinder – 2026

Ana Garcia del Rio, Ph.D.

Project Advisor, Pathfinder Unit





- **Policy context / Global overview**
- **Pathfinder Open**
- **Pathfinder Challenges**





## Political Guidelines of Commission President von der Leyen

*"Europe's competitiveness will depend on starting a new age of invention and ingenuity. This requires putting research and innovation, science and technology, at the centre of our economy... To do this, we will expand the European Research Council and the European Innovation Council."*

## Some words from Mario Draghi

*"First – and most importantly – Europe must profoundly refocus its collective efforts on **closing the innovation gap** with the US and China, especially in **advanced technologies**."*

*"Public sector support for R&I is inefficient due to a **lack of focus on disruptive innovation** and fragmented financing, limiting the EU's potential to reach scale in high-risk breakthrough technologies."*

*"**Universities and other research institutions are central actors in early-stage innovation**, generating breakthrough research and producing new skills profiles for the workforce."*



## ***The EU Competitiveness Compass - January 2025***

- *Innovation and technological leadership central to EU competitiveness (following Draghi report).*
- *Call for “ARPA-style” approach to deliver breakthrough, mission-driven innovation (EIC).*
- *Need to scale-up deep-tech companies (EIC + Scale-up Europe Fund).*

## ***The EU Startup and Scale-up Strategy - June 2025***

- *Recognizes that Europe’s productivity, strategic autonomy and technological leadership depend on a thriving deep-tech startup ecosystem.*
- *Calls on the EIC as the EU’s flagship instrument for high-risk, high-impact innovation, to scale up its equity and blended finance support for breakthrough ventures.*
- *Highlights the “double valley of death” from lab to market and from growth to maturity, calling for stronger EIC action to bridge these gaps.*
- *Encourages the EIC to deepen its ARPA-style, challenge-driven programmes to accelerate market-creating innovations.*

## ***The Commission proposal for FP10 (2028–2034) – July 2025***

- *Reinforces role of EIC and major budget increase.*
- *Continues successful EIC schemes (Pathfinder, Transition, Accelerator).*
- *Expands scope of EIC to include defence/ dual use, reinforced ARPA-approach, and procurement.*

## ***The EIC Board Statement on FP10 – October 2025***

- *Welcomes the proposal and supports a stronger, more autonomous EIC with clear governance and sustainable reinvestment mechanisms for the EIC Fund.*
- *Recommends deepening the ARPA-like approach through more challenge-driven portfolios and enhanced programme management.*

# Europe's most ambitious innovation initiative

European  
Innovation  
Council



Budget

€ 10 billion

Unique

combines research & accelerator for SMEs, startups, scaleups

Largest deep-tech investor in Europe

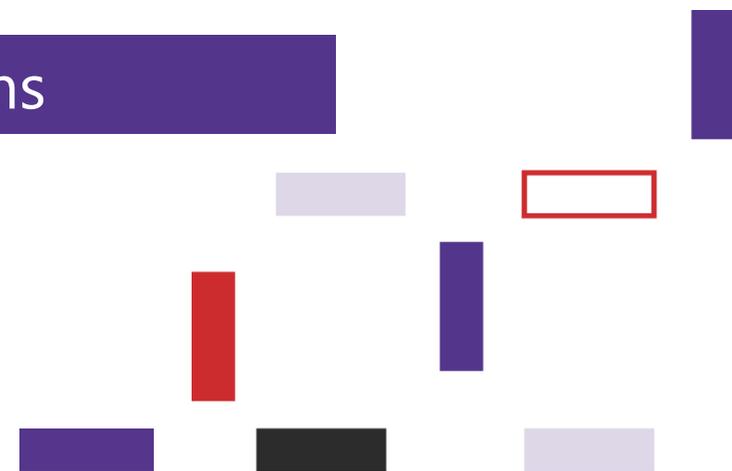
Over €3 billion

Enhances the European Innovation Ecosystems

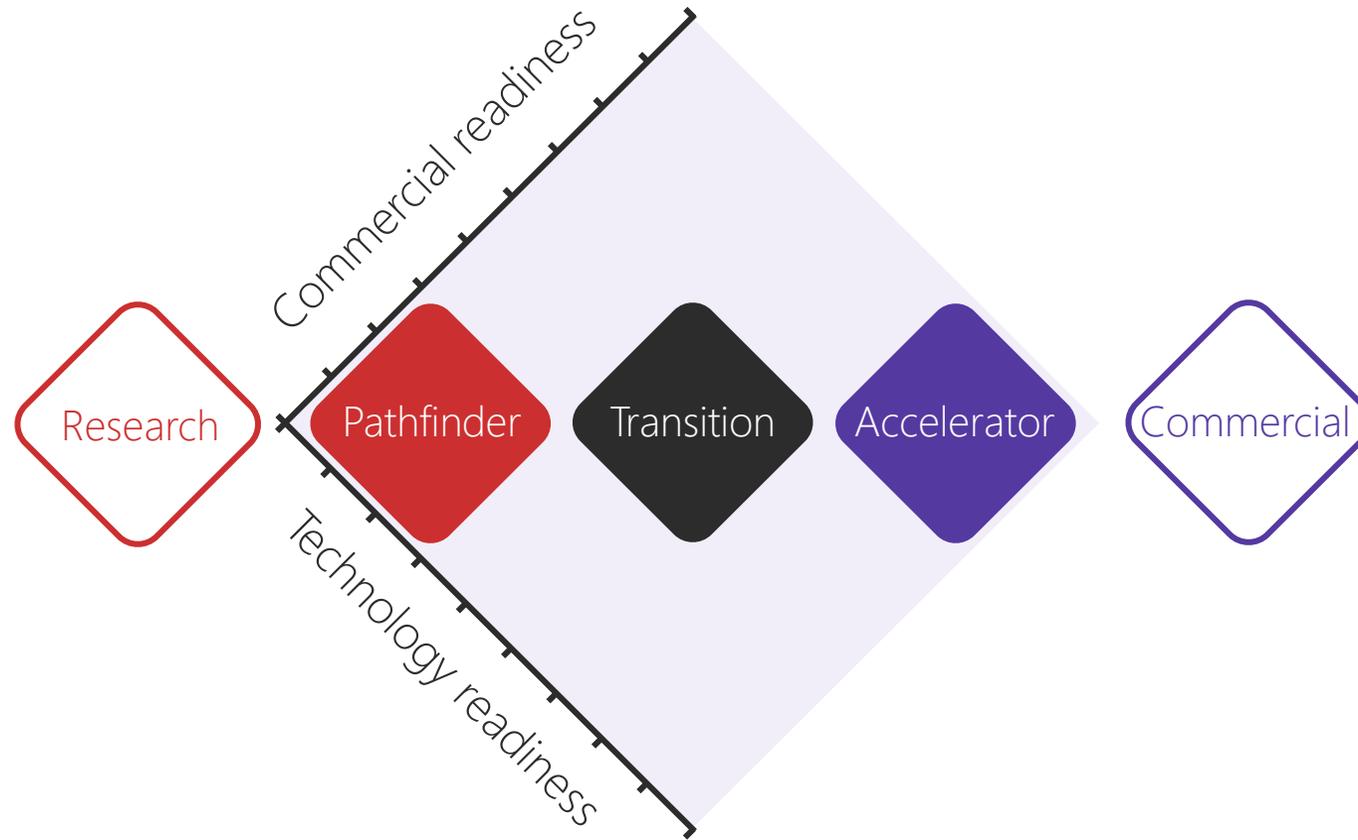
Partnerships with ERC, EIT regions...

Sixth Work Programmes (2026)

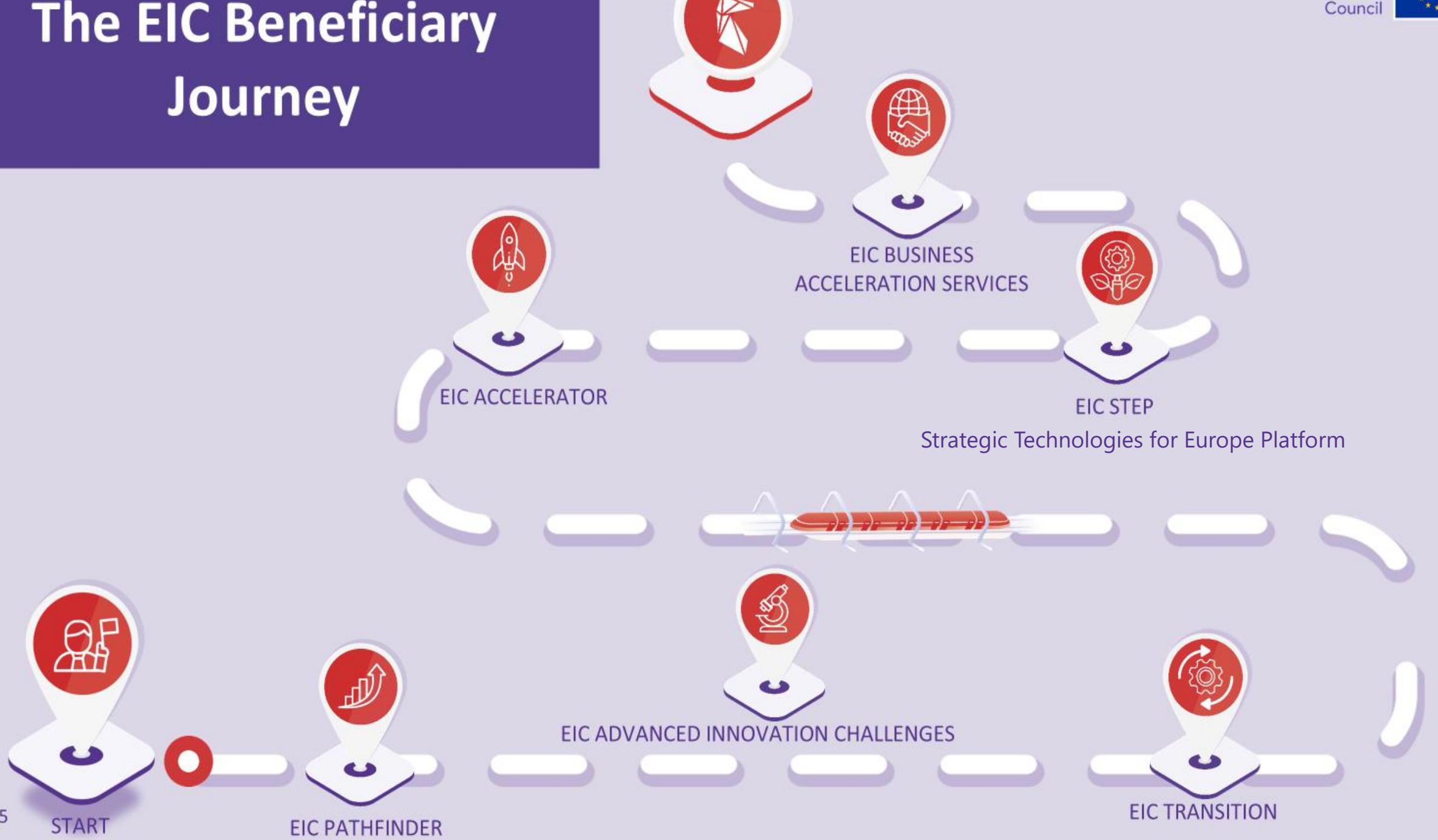
€ 1.4 billion



EIC stages the entrepreneurial journey as pathfinder, transition, accelerator with increasing readiness levels



# The EIC Beneficiary Journey



# WP2026: 5 main funding schemes

Budget: €1.4 bn

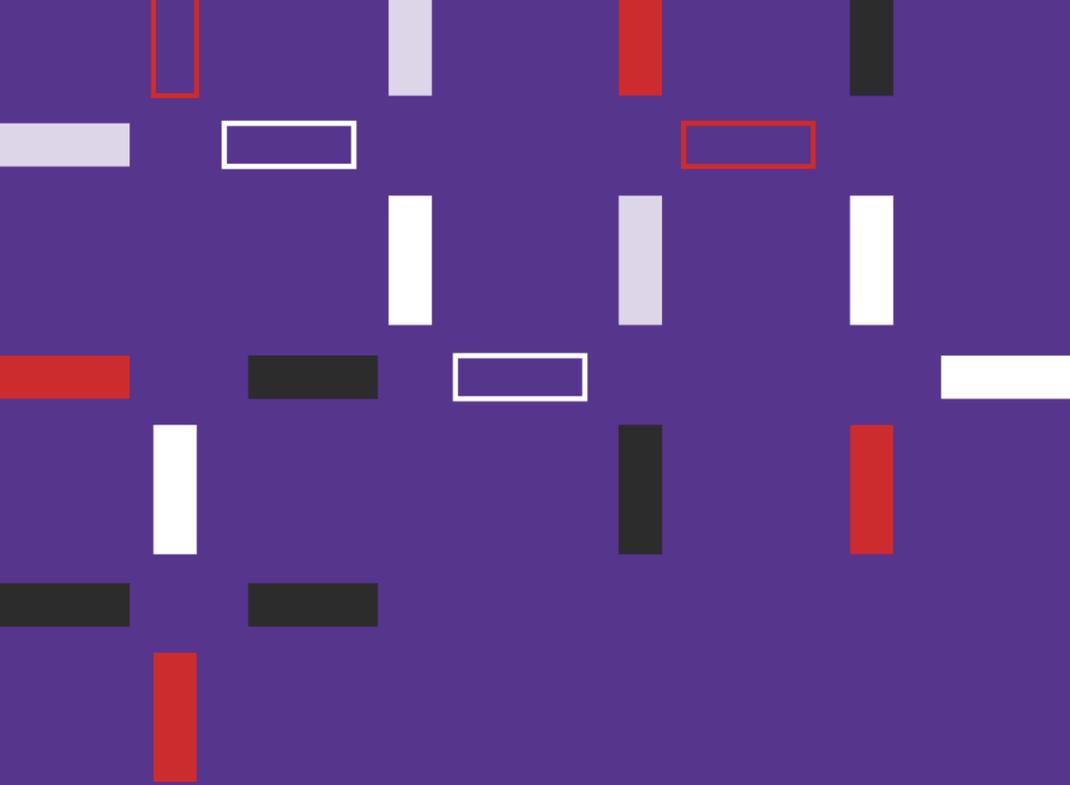
	million
<b>EIC PATHFINDER</b>	€262
<i>Funding for early-stage technology research and development</i>	
	max
<b>GRANTS PER PROJECT</b>	€4
Open: apply by 12.05.2026	€166
Challenges: apply by 28.10.2026	€96
<b>FROM TRL 1-2 TO REACH TRL 3-4</b>	

	million
<b>EIC TRANSITION</b>	€100
<i>Funding for technology validation and commercialisation</i>	
	max
<b>GRANTS PER PROJECT</b>	€2.5
Open: apply by 16.09.2026	
<b>FROM TRL 3-4 TO REACH TRL 5-6</b>	

	million
<b>EIC ACCELERATOR</b>	€634
<i>Funding for commercialisation and scale-up</i>	
	max
<b>GRANTS PER COMPANY</b>	€2.5
	max
<b>EQUITY INVESTMENT PER COMPANY</b>	€10
Open: continuous with batches	€414
7.01.2026   04.03.2026   06.05.2026   08.07.2026   02.09.2026   04.11.2026	
Challenges: continuous with batches	€220
7.01.2026   4.03.2026   6.05.2026   8.07.2026   2.09.2026   4.11.2026	
<b>FROM TRL 6 TO TRL9</b>	

	million
<b>STEP SCALE-UP</b>	€300
<i>Equity investments to catalyse larger investments to companies with pre-commitments from investors</i>	
	max
<b>INVESTMENT</b>	€30
Open: one batch per quarter	
11.02.2026   6.05.2026   9.09.2026   25.11.2026	

NEW SCHEME	<b>EIC ADVANCED INNOVATION CHALLENGES</b>		
	<i>To support high-risk, demand-driven deep tech innovation with transformative potential especially in areas where there is extensive research but lack of commercial uptake.</i>		
2026	€6m	26.02.2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>First stage grants up to €0.3m</li> <li>Larger grants up to €2.5m</li> </ul>
2027	€25m	18.06.2027	



# EIC Pathfinder

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- 1 What is the EIC Pathfinder?
- 2 Statistics from 2021-2025 Pathfinder calls
- 3 2026 EIC Pathfinder Open call & its main novelties
- 4 2026 EIC Pathfinder Challenges call & its main novelties
- 5 Calls summary table



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# What is the EIC Pathfinder?

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# What is the EIC Pathfinder?



- funds **research** to develop the **scientific basis** to underpin breakthrough technologies
- supports the **earliest stages** of scientific, technological or deep-tech R&D
- aims to build on new, **cutting-edge directions in science & technology** to disrupt a field and a market or create new opportunities
- realises innovative technological solutions to identify, develop and scale up **breakthrough technologies** and **disruptive innovations** in Europe





## EIC Pathfinder **Open**

to support **projects in any field** of science, technology or application without predefined thematic priorities ('bottom-up')

## EIC Pathfinder **Challenges**

to support **coherent portfolios** of projects within predefined thematic areas with the aim to achieve specific objectives for each Challenge

2

# Statistics from 2021-2025 Pathfinder calls



# Call statistics EIC Pathfinder 2021-2025



<b>Open</b>	eligible proposals	funded proposals	EU contribution	success rate
2021	868	60	183.1 M€	6,9%
2022	858	66	206.5 M€	7,7%
2023	783	62	186.9 M€	7,9%
2024	1110	45	137.3 M €	4,1%
2025	2069	44	140.7 M €	2,1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5688</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>854,5 M €</b>	<b>4,9%</b>

<b>Challenges</b>	eligible proposals	funded proposals	EU contribution	success rate
2021	403	42	146.9 M€	10,4%
2022	436	49	182.7 M€	11,2%
2023	365	46	168.2M€	12,3%
2024	401	32	119,6 M€	8,0%
2025	in evaluation	<i>est. 30</i>	<i>indicative 120 M€</i>	<i>est 4.4%</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1605</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>617.4M€</b>	<b>10,5%</b>

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# 2026 EIC Pathfinder **Open** call & its main novelties

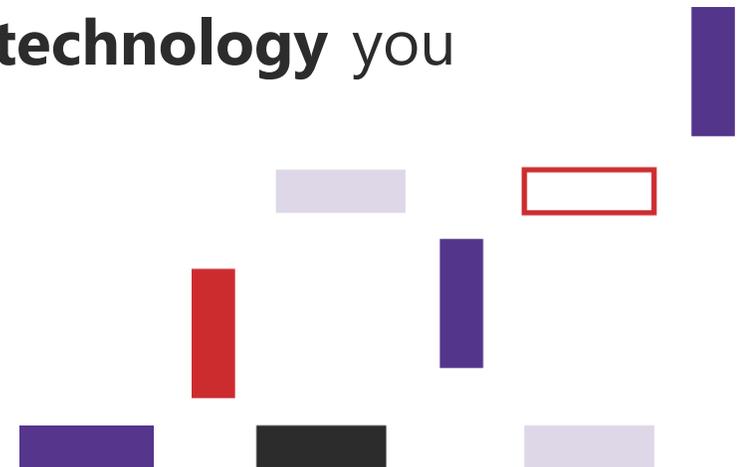


**What's  
new?**

# Why apply?



- Realise **an ambitious vision for radically new technology**, with potential to create new markets and/or to address global challenges.
- Support for **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: Gatekeepers



**Collaborative, interdisciplinary research**, meeting the following criteria:

- **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 & methodology**, with concrete and plausible objectives.



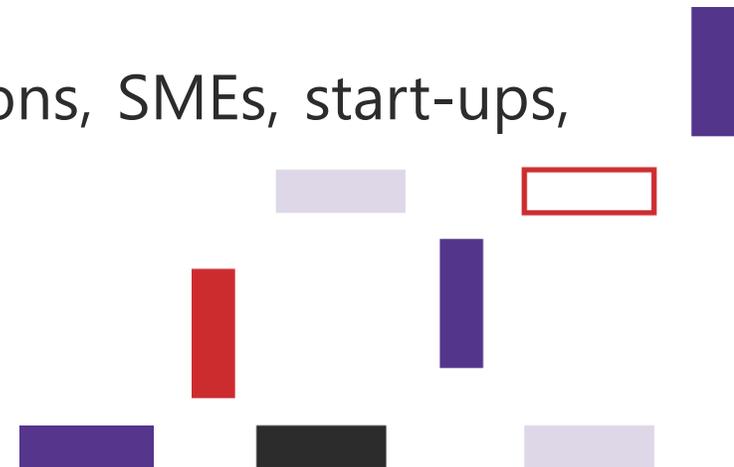


- **Proof of principle** that the **main ideas of the envisioned future technology are feasible**, thus validating its scientific and technological basis.
- Project results should include **top-level scientific publications** in open access.
- Projects are expected to take the necessary measures to **allow future uptake to take place**, for instance through an **adequate formal protection of the generated Intellectual Property (IP)** and **an assessment of relevant aspects related to regulation, certification, and standardization**.
- Projects are encouraged to involve and empower in their teams **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.
- Project are also encouraged to **empower female researchers** and to achieve gender balance among the work package leaders.

# Consortium composition | Open projects



- Proposals 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 1 legal entity established in a Member State; and
  - at least 2 other independent legal entities, each established in **different** Member States or Associated Countries.
- The legal entities may be universities, research organisations, SMEs, start-ups, industrial partners or natural persons.



# Support upon proposal funding



- You will receive a grant for a **Research and Innovation Action** to cover the **eligible costs**, necessary for the implementation of your project.
- For this call, the EIC considers proposals with a requested EU contribution of **up to EUR 4 million** as appropriate. Nonetheless, this does not preclude you to request larger amounts, if properly justified.
- The funding rate of this grant will be 100% of the eligible costs (lump sum).
- The total indicative budget for this call is EUR **166 million**.
- Successful applicants will receive tailor-made access to a wide range of **Business Acceleration Services** and interactions with **EIC Programme Managers**.

**NEW**

**NEW**



# Additional opportunities for Pathfinder selected projects:



**Projects** funded through EIC Pathfinder are eligible to:

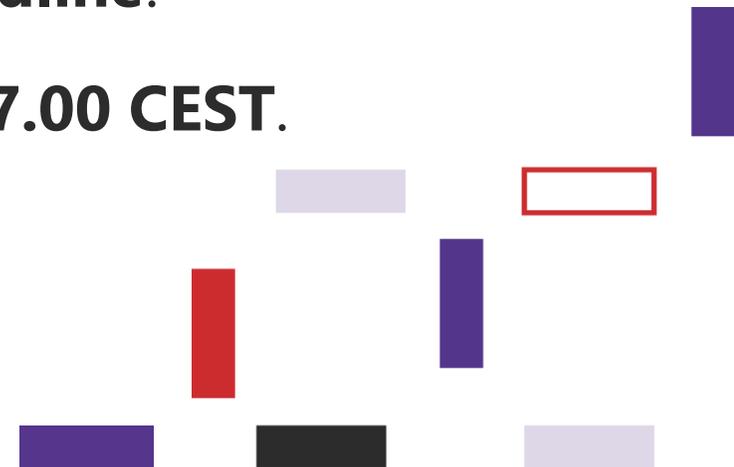
- receive **EIC Booster grants** (up to 3 per project or more if duly justified) of a fixed amount not exceeding EUR 50 000 to undertake complementary activities:
  - to explore potential pathways to commercialization
  - for portfolio activities
- submit an **EIC Transition** proposal
- submit an **EIC Accelerator** proposal via the **Fast Track** scheme
- participate in '**Next Generation Innovation Talents**' scheme (personnel costs of participating researchers are eligible under Pathfinder grants)



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



- You must submit your application via the **Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal** before the given deadline.
- You will be informed about the outcome of the evaluation within **5 months from the call deadline** (indicative).
- If your proposal is selected for funding, you can expect your **grant agreement to be signed by 8 months after the call deadline**.
- The deadline to submit the proposal is **12 May 2026 at 17.00 CEST**.



# Proposal application form

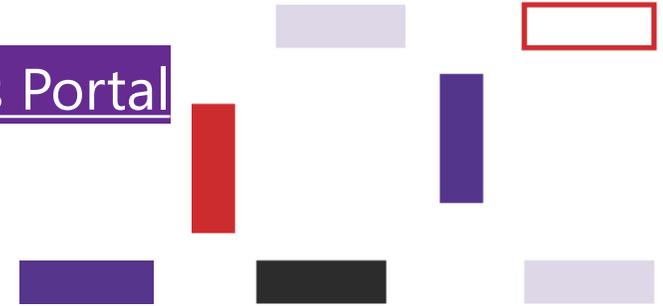


- **Part A**
  - to be filled in online (no page limit), contains: administrative details, the summarised budget and call specific questions
- The **estimated budget** must be described in a **detailed budget table**. This will be used as a basis for justifying and/or fixing the **lump sum amount**.
- **Part B:**
  - to be uploaded as a single document (page limit: max. **22** A4 pages Section 1 to 3)
  - contains: the technical description of the project.

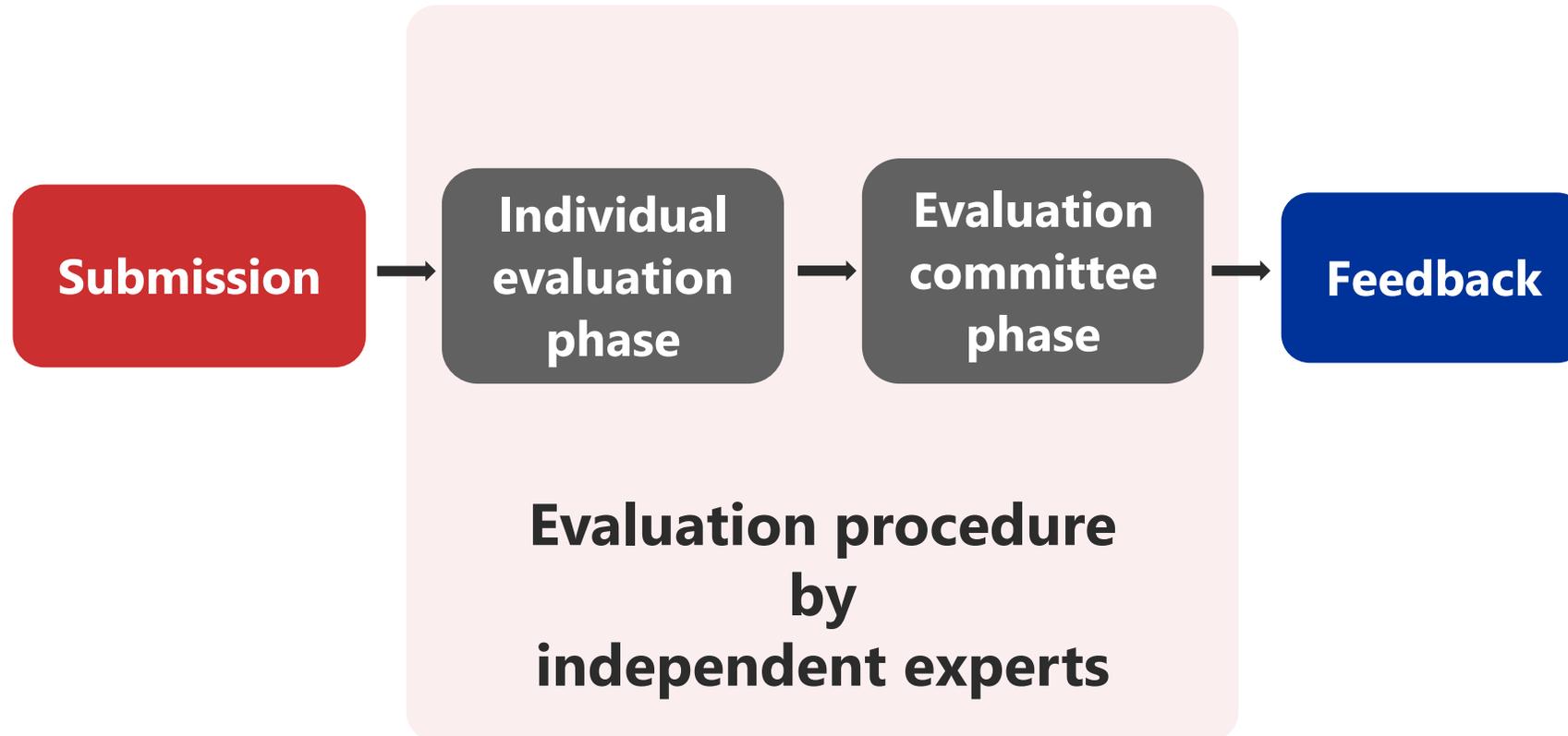
**NEW**

**NEW**

Template available on the [Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal](#)



# How is proposal funding determined?





- At least three EIC expert evaluators evaluate and score the proposals individually based on the **award criteria**:
  - ❖ **Excellence**
  - ❖ **Impact**
  - ❖ **Quality and efficiency of the implementation**
- The **score** for each evaluation criterion will be the **average of the evaluators' scores** per criterion.
- The **overall score from this individual evaluation phase** will be the **weighted sum** of the three average scores from the three award criteria.

# Award criterion "Excellence"



Threshold  
4/5

Weight  
50%

NEW

- **Long-term vision:** How convincing is the vision of a **radically new technology** towards which the project would contribute in the long term?
- **Science-towards-technology breakthrough:** How concrete, **novel and ambitious** is the proposed science-towards-technology breakthrough with respect to the state-of-the-art? What advancement does it provide towards realising the envisioned technology?
- **Objectives:** How **concrete and plausible** are the proposed objectives to reach the envisaged proof of principle? To what extent is the **high-risk/high-gain research** approach appropriate for achieving them? How sound is the proposed methodology, including the underlying concepts, models, assumptions, alternative directions and options, appropriate consideration of the **gender dimension** in research content, and the quality of **open science practices**?
- **Interdisciplinarity:** How relevant is the interdisciplinary approach from traditionally distant disciplines for achieving the proposed breakthrough?

# Award criterion “Impact”

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Innovation  
Council



Threshold  
3.5/5

Weight  
30%

**NEW**

- **Long-term impact:** How significant are the **transformative positive effects** to our economy, environment and society?
- **Innovation potential:** 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?
- **Communication and Dissemination:** 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?

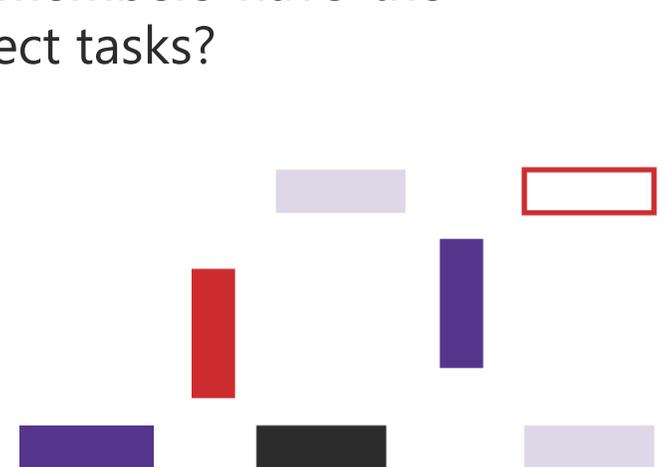
# Award criterion “Quality and efficiency of the implementation”



Threshold  
3/5

Weight  
20%

- **Work plan:** How coherent and effective are the work plan (work packages, tasks, deliverables, milestones, timeline, etc.) and risk mitigation measures in order to achieve the project objectives?
- **Allocation of resources:** How appropriate and effective is the allocation of resources (comprising person-months and other cost items) to work packages and consortium members?
- **Quality of the consortium:** To what extent do all the consortium members have the necessary capacity and high-quality expertise for performing the project tasks?



# Evaluation committee phase



- The evaluation committee will be composed of **EIC expert evaluators different** from those who evaluated the proposals individually;
- The **final score** will be decided based on the score from the individual evaluation phase and the outcome of the consensus discussions;



# Ranking list – Equal score resolution



**Proposals with the same scoring** will be untied 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
- if needed, other factors determined by the evaluation committee.



# Feedback to applicants



Applicants will receive an **Evaluation Summary Report** that will comprise of:

- the **final score**;
- **comment that summarises** the assessment by the evaluation committee;
- **additional comments**, possibly including advice not to resubmit proposal.



4 2026 EIC  
Pathfinder  
Challenges call &  
its main  
novelties



**What's  
new?**



## Orsolya Symmons

Health and Biotechnology

## Hedi Karray

Artificial Intelligence

## Federica Zanca

Medical imaging and AI in healthcare

## Isabel Obieta

Sustainable Semiconductors

## Stella Tkatchova

Space systems & technologies

## Samira Nik

Quantum tech & electronics

## Franc Mouwen

Architecture engineering construction technologies

## Ivan Stefanic

Food chain technologies, novel & sustainable food

## Paolo Bondavalli

Advanced materials for energy

## Carina Faber

Renewable energy conversion & alternative resource exploitation

EIC  
PROGRAMME  
MANAGERS

## Former PMs

**Iordanis Arzimanoglou**  
Biotechnology & Health



**Eric Claverol-Tinturé**  
MedTech & Medical Devices



**Francesco Matteucci**  
Materials for Energy & Environment



**Antonio Marco Pantaleo**  
Energy Systems



# EIC Pathfinder Challenges - introduction



- Build on **new, cutting-edge directions in science and technology**;
- Disrupt a market or create new opportunities **by realising innovative technological solutions** grounded in high-risk/high-gain research and development;
- Establish **a portfolio of projects** for each Challenge that explore different perspectives, competing approaches or complementary aspects;
- Proactively steered by **EIC Programme Managers**



# Expected project outcomes

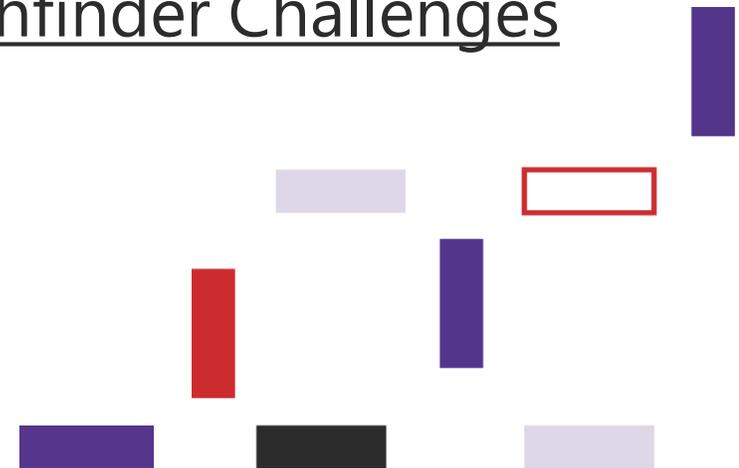


- Expected outcomes defined in the respective Challenge
- Project results should include **top-level scientific publications** as well as an **adequate formal protection of the generated Intellectual Property as well as an assessment of relevant aspects related to regulation, certification, and standardization;**
- Projects are encouraged to involve and empower within their teams **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;
- Project particularly encouraged to **empower female researchers** and achieve **gender balance** among the work package leaders.

# Pathfinder Challenge guides



- **Challenge Guides** will provide more information about:
  - **Objectives** of the Challenges
  - **Technical information** underpinning the objectives
  - **Portfolio considerations** used for the final selection of proposals to be funded
- Challenge Guides are already published on the [EIC Pathfinder Challenges page](#)



# EIC Pathfinder challenges 2026



Info day on Pathfinder Challenges with Programme Managers on March 2026 (tbc)

## PATHFINDER CHALLENGES



Advanced Materials for Miniaturised Energy Harvesting Systems

€ 32 million



Biotechnology for Healthy Aging

€ 32 million



DeepRAP: Deep Reasoning, Abstraction & Planning towards trustworthy Cognitive AI Systems

€ 32 million

**Indicative call budget € 96 million**



# Can you apply?



- **Single legal entities** established in a Member State or an Associated Country (mid-caps and larger companies will not be permitted)
- **Consortia of two entities** must be two 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, industrial partners or natural persons.



# How to apply: how long does it take?



- You must submit your application via the **Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal** before the given deadline.
- You will be informed about the outcome of the evaluation within **5 months from the call deadline** (indicative).
- If your proposal is selected for funding, you can expect your **grant agreement to be signed by 8 months after the call deadline**.
- The call will open on 28 July 2026.
- The deadline to submit the proposal is **28 October 2026 at 17.00 CET**.

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# Pathfinder Summary table



# Pathfinder calls 2026 – Summary table



	Pathfinder Open	Pathfinder Challenges
<b>Total budget</b>	<b>€166 million</b>	<b>€96 million</b>
<b>Proposals (indicative)</b>	Up to €4 million or more if justified	Up to €4 million or more if justified
<b>Funding rate</b>	100% of eligible costs, lump sums	100% of eligible costs, lump sums
<b>Opening</b>	05 February 2026	28 July 2026
<b>Deadline</b>	12 May 2026 at 17.00 CEST	28 October 2026 at 17.00 CET
<b>Length of proposal</b>	22-page proposal (part B)	30-page proposal (part B)
<b>Applicants</b>	<p><b>Consortia:</b> min. 3 partners from 3 different Member States /Associated Countries of which at least 1 partner in a Member State</p>	<p><b>Consortia:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If 2 partners: from different MS/AC,</li> <li>• If 3+ partners: from min 3 different MS/AC of which at least 1 partner in a MS</li> </ul> <p><b>Single legal entities</b> in a MS/AC</p>



- **General information on the EIC WP 2026**

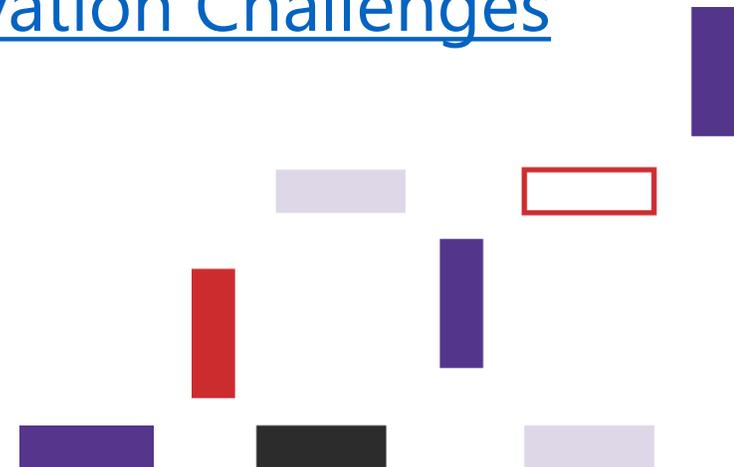
[EIC 2026 Work Programme](#)

- **Recording of the EIC WP 2026 Info day**

[Online Info Day - EIC Work Programme 2026](#)

[Online Info Day – EIC WP2026 - Accelerator Challenges](#)

[Online Info Day – EIC WP2026 - Advanced Innovation Challenges](#)





# Thank you!

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