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**Horizon Europe**  
**Work Programme 2023-2024**

*10. European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE)*

*(European Commission Decision C(2022)7550 of 6 December 2022)*



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## **Introduction**

The European Union (EU) and the world face a series of profound and rapid changes including in the areas of climate, the digital transition, and geopolitics. The COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine are causing unique health, social and economic challenges resulting in a pressing urgency for action. The crises have spurred researchers, entrepreneurs, industry, public authorities and institutions, civil society organisations, and people across the globe into close cooperation to identify and co-develop innovative solutions and achieve post-pandemic stability. More than ever in recent history, collaboration for innovative solutions is necessary for social and economic recovery, environmental sustainability and resilience. Moreover, the increasing importance of deep tech<sup>1</sup> innovations, emerging from a growing cohort of innovative startups in the EU, have the potential to deliver transformative solutions in the face of these global challenges and to transform the EU's business landscape.

The European Innovation Ecosystems work programme aims to create and expand more connected, inclusive, and efficient innovation ecosystems<sup>2</sup> that support the scaling of companies and spur innovation to address important challenges in a responsible way, as laid out in the New European Innovation Agenda<sup>3</sup>.

The work programme contains actions under two (2) destinations: CONNECT and INNOVSMES.

- The actions under the CONNECT destination focus on building interconnected, inclusive innovation ecosystems across the EU by drawing on the existing strengths of national, regional and local ecosystems and encouraging the involvement of all actors and territories to reinforce network connectivity for sustainably business growth and to set, undertake, and achieve collective ambitions towards challenges for the benefit of society, including green, digital, and social transitions. It will particularly support the flagship action on *accelerating and strengthening innovation in European Innovation Ecosystems across the EU and addressing the innovation divide* under the New European Innovation Agenda.
- The action under the INNOVSMES destination will support the European Partnership on Innovative Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), which will help innovative SMEs to increase their research and innovation (R&I) capacity and productivity and successfully embed in global value chains and access new markets.

In addition, it contains a number of other actions supporting the policy and programme goals of European Innovation Ecosystems.

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<sup>1</sup> Deep tech innovation aims to provide concrete solutions to our societal problems by finding its source in a deep interaction with the most recent scientific and technological advances and by seeking to produce a profound impact in the targeted application areas.

<sup>2</sup> Definition as per Article 2(47) of the [Horizon Europe Regulation](#).

<sup>3</sup> [A New European Innovation Agenda COM\(2022\) 332 final](#).

This work programme contributes to all key strategic orientations and impact areas of Horizon Europe<sup>4</sup> and to increasing innovation cohesion. It also works in complementarity with the European Innovation Council (EIC), the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), including the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) and the Regional Innovation Scheme, the “Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area” work programme and other innovative activities across Horizon Europe, the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) instrument (European Regional Development Fund) under Cohesion Policy and the regional Smart Specialisation Strategies, Euroclusters under the Single Market Programme, the Digital Europe Programme, Start-up Villages<sup>5</sup> as part of the Long-term Vision for Rural Areas<sup>6</sup>, the EU Partnerships for Regional Innovation<sup>7</sup>, as well as other relevant funding and policy initiatives at EU, national, regional and local level, such as the Enterprise Europe Network<sup>8</sup> and the European Defence Fund/European Defence Innovation Scheme.<sup>9</sup>

At the policy level, the EIC Forum<sup>10</sup> 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. The policy orientations of the EIC Forum will be consistent with the Pact for Research and Innovation<sup>11</sup>, and will feed into the work of the European Research Area governance and the European Research Area and Innovation Committee, in its role as a joint high-level strategic policy advisory committee, providing early advice to the Council of the EU, the European Commission, and the Member States on strategic research and innovation policy issues.

It aims at promoting a coherent and inclusive approach to EU innovation ecosystems’ policy and instruments and, as such, will operate 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 two (2) destinations:

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<sup>4</sup> [Horizon Europe Strategic plan 2021-2024.](#)

<sup>5</sup> More information under "[Start-up villages: a commitment to a long-term vision for rural areas.](#)"

<sup>6</sup> [Long-term vision for the EU’s Rural areas](#) (COM(2021)345 final.

<sup>7</sup> More information under "[Partnerships for Regional Innovation.](#)"

<sup>8</sup> More information under "[Enterprise Europe Network.](#)"

<sup>9</sup> More information under "[Defence Industry and Space.](#)"

<sup>10</sup> More information under "[EIC Forum.](#)"

<sup>11</sup> [Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe.](#)

## **Destination: CONNECT - Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems**

Today's urgent challenges are inherently complex and systemic and will not be solved by individual actors or territories in isolation. Fostering enabling innovation ecosystems across the European Union (EU) requires a systemic approach that is inclusive and collaborative, involves diverse actors, institutions and places, maximises the value of innovation to all, and ensures equitable diffusion of its benefits.

As highlighted in the European Commission Communication on a New European Innovation Agenda<sup>12</sup>, by increasing the inclusion and interconnection of less represented regions and actors into a more strongly integrated European ecosystem, the EU can capitalise on the experience, needs, visions, and perceptions of an increasingly diverse range of people, companies and places. In doing so, it can also take forward a uniquely inclusive European innovation model that is sustainable, guards against substantial labour market and wage gaps, and associated threats to territorial and social cohesion.

Moreover, such well-connected and diverse ecosystems provide innovative companies with the necessary support and conditions to thrive, i.e. through additional capabilities, data, customers, knowledge, and talents. Network connectivity within and between innovation ecosystems greatly contributes to sustainable business growth with high societal value. Therefore, the actions of this destination aim at strengthening and expanding cooperation between innovation players 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.

Besides stronger innovation performance, increased competitive sustainability, and more rapid transitions to a green and digital society, ecosystem integration can provide ecosystem actors and companies with access to new resource, markets, customers, and contribute to disruptive strategies and innovative solutions. By being actively engaged in their local, regional, national, and European networks, companies can increase their overall growth potential.

This destination offers a holistic package of actions that:

- Strengthen innovation ecosystems across the EU through fostering more efficient, inclusive, gender diverse, and connected innovation ecosystems, by accelerating the development and deployment of innovation, including deep tech<sup>13</sup> innovation and encouraging co-planning, co-implementation, and co-investments around European strategic priority areas;

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<sup>12</sup> [A New European Innovation Agenda, COM\(2022\) 332 final](#)

<sup>13</sup> Deep tech innovation aims to provide concrete solutions to our societal problems by finding its source in a deep interaction with the most recent scientific and technological advances and by seeking to produce a profound impact in the targeted application areas.

- Ensure the inclusion of all key innovation players from across the quadruple helix,<sup>14</sup> and all EU territories, including rural areas<sup>15</sup>;
- Mobilise policies, funding instruments (EU, national, regional) and fostering synergies between them;
- Improve public and private buyers' capacity to procure innovative solutions and enhance coordination on innovation procurement initiatives within Member States and Associated Countries;
- Improve the connection of individual innovators with other ecosystem actors and innovation support providers;
- Ensure openness and cross-fertilisation of the innovation ecosystem within and beyond the EU's borders.

In particular, the actions under this destination should promote the creation of links:

- Between all key innovation stakeholders, including the private sector, in particular between SMEs, start-ups and other innovators, including social innovators with investors, industry and public and/or private buyers for faster access to funds and markets and the public sector including authorities in charge of national, regional or local innovation policies and programmes and bodies responsible for smart specialisation strategies; also between SMEs, start-ups and foundations, civil society organisations, citizens, and individual inventors; with universities and research and technology organisations (RTOs) as sources of innovation and talent, to ensure that innovations match existing needs, values, and expectations of society, thereby accelerating deployment and up-take towards tackling societal challenges, and, if applicable, with innovation actors from peripheral or rural innovation ecosystems (such as start-up villages<sup>16</sup>);
- Among 'innovation leaders' and 'strong innovators' with 'moderate' and 'emerging innovators'<sup>17</sup> across the EU and Associated Countries<sup>18</sup> to increase innovation cohesion<sup>19</sup>;
- With networks such as National Contact Points, Partnerships for Regional Innovation (PRIs<sup>20</sup>), the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), and European Innovation Council (EIC) communities,

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<sup>14</sup> A model of cooperation between industry, academia, civil society and public authorities, with a strong emphasis on citizens and their needs.

<sup>15</sup> [Long-term vision for the EU's Rural areas \(COM\(2021\)345 final\)](#).

<sup>16</sup> More information under "[Start-up villages: a commitment to a long-term vision for rural areas.](#)"

<sup>17</sup> References: [Regional Innovation Scoreboard \(RIS\)](#), [European Innovation Scoreboard \(EIS\)](#), [Global Innovation Index \(GII\)](#).

<sup>18</sup> Associated countries are described in General Annex B.

<sup>19</sup> The work programme will act in complementarity with the "Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area" work programme

<sup>20</sup> More information under "[Partnerships for Regional Innovation.](#)"

the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), clusters and Euroclusters, European university alliances, Missions, pan-European platforms such as Startup Europe, public and private regional or local innovation actors, in particular incubators and innovation hubs (e.g. European Research Area hubs and Digital Innovation Hubs), that could be interconnected to favour partnering among innovators.

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, the EU's External Action instruments, the Economic and Investment Plans for the Western Balkans, Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods, 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 potential of businesses, including in the deep tech sector, and more specifically to one or several of the following impacts:

- Interconnected, inclusive, and more efficient innovation ecosystems across the EU that draw on the existing strengths of European, national, regional, and local ecosystems and engage new, less well-represented stakeholders and less advanced innovation territories, including rural areas, to set, undertake, and achieve collective ambitions tackling challenges for the benefit of society, including green, digital, and social transitions, and advancing the European Research Area and the New European Innovation Agenda;
- Enhance cross-border network connectivity and inter-regional collaboration of regional innovation valleys by reinforcing their capacity to create, reshore, and renew European value chains towards the sustainable green and digital transition and the EU's open strategic autonomy in EU countries and/or regions;
- Strengthen and expand cooperation between innovation ecosystems worldwide;
- Foster more inclusive and gender equal innovation ecosystems;
- Reducing territorial inequalities in access to innovation support.

The following call(s) in this work programme contribute to this destination:

Call	Budgets (EUR million)		Deadline(s)
	2023	2024	
HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-01	21.00		23 Mar 2023



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**European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE)**

HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-02	8.00		21 Sep 2023
HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-01		69.50	25 Apr 2024
HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-02		3.50	19 Sep 2024
Overall indicative budget	29.00	73.00	

**Call - Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems (2023.1)**

***HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-01***

**Conditions for the Call**

Indicative budget(s)<sup>21</sup>

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million)	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million) <sup>22</sup>	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
		2023		
Opening: 22 Dec 2022 Deadline(s): 23 Mar 2023				
HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-01-01	CSA	15.00	Around 15.00	1
HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-01-02	CSA	6.00	Around 0.50	12
Overall indicative budget		21.00		

<b>General conditions relating to this call</b>	
<i>Admissibility conditions</i>	The conditions are described in General Annex A.
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	The conditions are described in General Annex B.
<i>Financial and operational capacity and exclusion</i>	The criteria are described in General Annex C.
<i>Award criteria</i>	The criteria are described in General Annex D.

<sup>21</sup> 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 years 2023 and 2024.

<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

<i>Documents</i>	The documents are described in General Annex E.
<i>Procedure</i>	The procedure is described in General Annex F.
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	The rules are described in General Annex G.

Proposals are invited against the following topic(s):

**HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-01-01: Organisation of the Women TechEU Scheme**

<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 15.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 15.00 million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The following additional eligibility criteria apply:</p> <p>This action requires the participation of at least three (3) independent legal entities, of which at least one (1) is established in a 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovator region and at least one (1) in a 'strong' or 'innovation leader' innovator region.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Regional Innovation Scoreboard</a> is taken as a reference, and in the case of entities representing national authorities, the <a href="#">European Innovation Scoreboard</a>. The applicants must use as a reference the latest version of the documents mentioned above at the time of the call closure. Associated Countries which are not included in the European Innovation Scoreboard and are ranked below 25 on the latest <a href="#">Global Innovation Index</a> 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 (<a href="#">H2020 country profile</a>) will be taken as a reference and countries ranked below the average will be considered as 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovators.</p>
<i>Procedure</i>	The procedure is described in General Annex F. The following

	<p>exceptions apply: The granting authority can fund a maximum of one project.</p>
<p><i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i></p>	<p>The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply: The beneficiary must 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 75 000, as previously determined in the <a href="#">decision authorising the use of financing not linked to costs for the Women TechEU actions under the Horizon Europe Programme (2021-2027)</a>. The beneficiary must allocate at least 75% of the total proposed budget to financial support to third parties. The beneficiary must respect the conditions that third parties must meet in order to be eligible for financial support to third parties under this action, as outlined in the scope of the topic.</p>

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

- Support deep tech<sup>23</sup> innovation as a basis for a modern, knowledge-driven, resource-efficient and competitive economy;
- Promote female leadership in the deep tech industry to build fairer, more inclusive, and more prosperous innovation ecosystems in the European Union (EU);
- Ensure a smooth continuation of the established Women TechEU scheme consistent with previous processes, outcomes, and branding;
- Foster cooperation and networking between women entrepreneurs in the deep tech field.

Scope: The Women TechEU scheme has been launched under the European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) Work Programme 2021 as a pilot scheme and became a fully-fledged initiative under the EIE Work Programme 2022.

As a final objective, the scheme supports European early-stage deep tech start-ups, registered and established in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country for at least six months at the time of the submission, founded or co-founded by women, holding a top management position (chief executive officer (CEO), chief technology officer (CTO), chief scientific officer (CSO), or equivalent). All deep tech domains should be eligible, with the emphasis being on overall gender balance and the position held by women in the start-up. The

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consortium selected under this call must ensure that these criteria are met for financial support to third parties.

The initiative complements activities funded under the European Innovation Council (EIC), paving the way for the participation of women-led start-ups in future EIC calls.

The consortium selected under this call is expected to organise the Women TechEU scheme, covering the following activities:

- Ensure the sound design, organisation, and management of the Women TechEU scheme, ensuring continuity of the scheme as implemented by the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency in 2021 and 2022;
- Ensure smooth connection with the EIC Business Acceleration Services (BAS)<sup>24</sup> for the mentoring and coaching support activities to selected applicants;
- Communicate and promote the scheme in order to secure quality applications;
- Organise landmark events, building a network of Women TechEU grantees, and help them to connect with the overall EIC community;
- Promote cooperation and networking activities among the community of women entrepreneurs in the deep tech field;
- Ensure proper geographical distribution and technological areas to be covered by the scheme;
- Report on the implementation of the scheme (key data on applications, start-ups funded, demographics of end-beneficiaries of the scheme, etc.) to European Commission services.

The applicants should consider a project duration of two (2) years and support provided by the consortium to eligible third parties under this initiative must be made up of the following components:

- Financial support to each selected company as an individual grant of EUR 75 000 supporting activities such as evaluating and refining products/services, design, user experience, upgrading the business model, updating the business plan and growth strategy, finding partners and investors, market validation, etc.;
- The possibility to participate in dedicated activities organised by InvestEU, the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), and other relevant networks;
- Please note that mentoring and coaching will be provided by the EIC BAS, under the ‘Women Leadership Programme’, which includes dedicated networking and pitching events funded under a separate EIC budget.

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<sup>24</sup> [EIC Business Acceleration Services.](#)

Type and range of activities

A main activity of the consortium will be to run calls for proposals (at least one (1) per calendar year, the consideration of multiple cut-off dates is encouraged), organise the evaluation process, and administer the grants. Beyond providing funding to women-led deep tech start-ups, proposals under this topic should include a sound promotion and communication strategy of the programme (especially in underrepresented Member States), clearly brand the scheme as an EU initiative, including but not limited to, through information and dissemination events, press and outreach events, or roadshows.

**HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-01-02: Preparatory action for setting up joint programmes among innovation ecosystems actors**

<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 0.50 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 6.00 million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The following additional eligibility criteria apply:</p> <p>This action requires the participation of at least three (3) independent legal entities, of which at least one (1) is established in a 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovator region and at least one (1) in a 'strong' or 'innovation leader' innovator region.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Regional Innovation Scoreboard</a> is taken as a reference, and in the case of entities representing national authorities, the <a href="#">European Innovation Scoreboard</a>. The applicants must use as a reference the latest version of the documents mentioned above at the time of the call closure. Associated Countries which are not included in the European Innovation Scoreboard and are ranked below 25 on the latest <a href="#">Global Innovation Index</a> 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 (<a href="#">H2020 country profile</a>) will be taken as a reference and countries ranked below the average will be considered as 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovators.</p>
<i>Legal and financial</i>	The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions

<i>set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	apply: 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). <sup>25</sup> .
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Expected Outcome: Project results are expected to contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

- Open dialogue, prepare the ground and facilitate the agreement among Member States, Associated Countries, and/or their regions, in cooperation with the private sector and research and innovation actors, towards more dynamic, inclusive, gender diverse, and connected innovation ecosystems, via co-planning, co-implementation, and co-investments around areas outlined in the New European Innovation Agenda<sup>26</sup>;
- Prepare joint long-term programmes and action plans fostering collaboration, common innovation-support activities, and the creation of common knowledge assets among EU, national, regional and/or local level innovation ecosystems, enhancing synergies and complementarities of their programmes and encouraging the alignment of their innovation policies and related policies impacting innovation in line with the new European Innovation Agenda, establishing, if relevant, links to the new Partnerships for Regional Innovation<sup>27</sup>;
- Ensure the inclusion of all key innovation players from across the quadruple helix<sup>28</sup>, and all EU territories, including rural areas;
- Foster synergies with other EU funding programmes, including Cohesion Policy instruments, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and any other funding leverages, including national or regional public funds, and private funds, to complement Horizon Europe support for innovation ecosystems.

Scope: *Target group(s): National, regional and/or local authorities together with private actors, including state-owned enterprises, and research and innovation actors or networks, e.g. the European Institute of Innovation and the Technology Knowledge and Innovation Communities (EIT KICs).*

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<sup>25</sup> This [decision](#) is available on the Funding and Tenders Portal, in the reference documents section for Horizon Europe, under ‘Simplified costs decisions’ or through this link: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision\\_he\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> [A New European Innovation Agenda, COM\(2022\) 332 final.](#)

<sup>27</sup> More information under "[Partnerships for Regional Innovation.](#)"

<sup>28</sup> A model of cooperation between industry, academia, civil society and public authorities, with a strong emphasis on citizens and their needs.

The topic will allow national, regional and/or local authorities in charge of innovation policies and programmes from Member States, Associated Countries and/or their regions, in cooperation with research and innovation actors, to prepare joint multi-annual programmes of activities and action plans with the aim of strengthening the performance and capacity of their innovation ecosystems, their efficient interconnection and their alignment towards EU-level priorities, in line with the New European Innovation Agenda<sup>29</sup>, to jointly tackle challenges at EU, national, regional, and local level.

The topic will allow applicants to prepare and agree on a common programme of activities and action plans. The applicants are encouraged to consider a project duration of up to 12 months and in their proposals they should:

- Identify areas and activities of cooperation to enhance the coordination and directionality of their research and innovation investments and policies and improve the efficiency and performance of the EU's innovation ecosystems, fostering their interconnection and scale-up while tackling EU, national, regional and/or local challenges:
  - The proposals may focus on a thematic/technological area of common interest in line with one or more EU priorities, including climate action, Green Deal and digital transformation, including those specified in the New European Innovation Agenda;
  - The proposals should pay attention to gender equality objectives<sup>30</sup>.
- Plan their long-term commitment: the applicants are encouraged to consider planning commitments of at least three (3) years towards engaging in the joint cooperation activities set out in the frame of the projects;
- Explain the potential for growth and competitiveness foreseen in the targeted sector and/or expected impact on relevant EU challenges through the proposed cooperation;
- Ensure inclusiveness and diversity with the involvement of all innovation actors, including individual inventors, enhance complementarities of EU, national and/or regional funds and programmes, and encourage the alignment of their innovation agendas;
- Provide a justification on the need for those joint activities that should be scalable at European level and demonstrate their strong EU added value;
- Explain its links to the New European Innovation Agenda and how the project will contribute to its objectives;
- Explain how the proposed action plans complement and reinforce their national and/or regional and/or local innovation plans, policies and/or strategies in synergy, including

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<sup>29</sup> [A New European Innovation Agenda, COM\(2022\) 332 final.](#)

<sup>30</sup> See for instance the [Horizon Europe regulation](#) for horizontal gender equality principles, the [ERA policy agenda 2022-2024](#), and the [Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#).



with their smart specialisation strategies, and if applicable their Partnerships for Regional Innovation and start-up villages<sup>31</sup>;

- Explain the process that they plan to follow, with an open, clear, realistic, and impact-oriented approach, including relevant guidance mechanisms and tools;
- Present what common knowledge assets are expected from the proposed action plans, and the benefit of the intended beneficiaries of the plans;
- Present the targeted milestones to be achieved.

The proposals for the development of a joint long-term action plan may include the following two (2) phases:

- A first phase to foster close dialogue among key stakeholders for strategy/partnership building, mapping, and analysis of existing national and/or regional and/or local innovation agendas/strategies/policies/plans/activities, including local pockets of excellence/innovation hubs, the relevant active/inactive actors (including financial actors, citizens, and individual innovators) and ways to motivate their inclusion, identification of areas of competitive advantage for sustainable economic growth, mapping of gaps, needs, and opportunities. Any activities are encouraged to consider existing tools, knowledge and expertise, including the methodology and governance tools tested and developed in the context of the Partnerships for Regional Innovation initiative or the knowledge and expertise of the EIT KICs with place-based approaches to innovation. Responsible Research and Innovation expertise may also be relevant in this regard<sup>32</sup>;
- A second phase dedicated to the concretising, setting up, and finalising the joint action plan(s) and allocation of the activities over a period of the proposed action plans.

The implementation of the proposed action plans is not part of this topic. For the implementation part, the successful proposals under the topic may seek further financial support from other EU programmes, including Horizon Europe and/or other public and/or private programmes.

## **Call - Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems (2023.2)**

***HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-02***

### **Conditions for the Call**

#### Indicative budget(s)<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> More information under ["Start-up villages: a commitment to a long-term vision for rural areas."](#)

<sup>32</sup> E.g. projects supported under SwafS-14-2018-2019-2020 in Horizon 2020.

<sup>33</sup> 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.

**Horizon Europe - Work Programme 2023-2024**  
**European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE)**

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million)	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million) <sup>34</sup>	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
		2023		
Opening: 08 Jun 2023 Deadline(s): 21 Sep 2023				
HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-02-01	CSA	4.00	Around 1.00	4
HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-02-02	CSA	4.00	Around 1.00	4
Overall indicative budget		8.00		

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

Proposals are invited against the following topic(s):

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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 years 2023 and 2024.

<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

## HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-02-01: Stimulating Experimentation Practices

<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	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.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 4.00 million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The following additional eligibility criteria apply:</p> <p>This action requires the participation of at least three (3) independent legal entities, of which at least one (1) is established in a 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovator region and at least one (1) in a 'strong' or 'innovation leader' innovator region.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Regional Innovation Scoreboard</a> is taken as a reference, and in the case of entities representing national authorities, the <a href="#">European Innovation Scoreboard</a>. The applicants must use as a reference the latest version of the documents mentioned above at the time of the call closure. Associated Countries which are not included in the European Innovation Scoreboard and are ranked below 25 on the latest <a href="#">Global Innovation Index</a> 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 (<a href="#">H2020 country profile</a>) will be taken as a reference and countries ranked below the average will be considered as 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovators.</p>
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	<p>The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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).<sup>35</sup>.</p>

<sup>35</sup> This [decision](#) is available on the Funding and Tenders Portal, in the reference documents section for Horizon Europe, under 'Simplified costs decisions' or through this link:

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

- Increase knowledge on experimentation frameworks for testing innovations;
- Provide services for testing innovative solutions leading to technology upscaling, reducing cost, accelerating time to the market, and reducing investment risks;
- Enhance knowledge sharing and development of best practices between stakeholders that have been actively engaged in testing and experimentation processes;
- Facilitate the deployment and potential commercialisation of new innovative solutions;
- Identify areas where the multi-sectoral and/or emerging nature of some innovations requires coordinated action by innovators and regulators;
- Identify legal, regulatory, fiscal, technical, and operational pre-requisites or barriers for different use-cases which hamper the development of innovation;
- Explore areas where the European supervisory authority exists, and pan-European testing might be desirable.

Scope: *Target group(s): Innovators, research and technological organisations, national and regional authorities, European Institute of Innovation and Technology Knowledge and Innovation Communities (EIT KICs), Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), start-ups, regulators and other government bodies, non-government organisations (NGOs), and other civil society organisations.*

Regulation creates the essential conditions that enable innovation to thrive, providing a general framework for finance and funding, intellectual property rights, rules for competition, and consumer protection. However, sometimes regulation lags behind technological developments, leading to situations where disruptive technologies could potentially render regulations obsolete, or be perceived as a barrier that hampers the deployment of emerging technologies.

Due to this complex relationship between regulation and innovation, which varies on a case-by-case basis, it is important to ensure that disruptive innovations are tested in close cooperation not only with regulatory actors, but also end-users themselves. This would allow innovators to receive societal feedback before potential mass deployment, and regulators to create a flexible framework that takes into account the evolving nature of disruptive technologies.

In line with the New European Innovation Agenda<sup>36</sup>, it is acknowledged that framework conditions, including regulations, can drive or thwart the development and uptake of

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[https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision\\_he\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> [A New European Innovation Agenda, COM\(2022\) 332 final.](#)

innovative new products and processes. To that extent, regulatory frameworks that facilitate experimentation by innovators and enable learning and adaptation by regulators appear to be essential in order to nurture breakthrough innovations. Moreover, it would be substantial to gain knowledge from distinct approaches taken forward across European Union (EU) Member States in order to clarify options at the disposal of innovators and regulators to facilitate such experimentation.

Applicants should identify an area where innovative technologies emerge, justifying why experimentation in this area is essential to facilitate the development of a specific technology or innovative solution. Moreover, the applicants should closely cooperate with innovators who have identified fields where the deployment of innovation is hampered. Specifically, proposals should attempt to identify areas where innovative ideas need to be tested in a physical or virtual environment in order to be trialled in real- or near-real world conditions to assess their market viability and where:

- Innovative ideas are under development but are hampered by existing regulations; **or**
- Innovative ideas are under development in areas which remain unregulated.

This action is expected to support policy makers in their aim to enable, promote and support transformative innovation by utilising the different experimentation frameworks/spaces (such as regulatory sandboxes, living labs, and test beds), and recognise what could be implemented or not.

After the identification of the area and technology for experimentation, each proposal should put forward an action plan aiming to set up an experimentation space to examine the potential of a particular innovative solution. This could be possibly linked to relevant smart specialisation strategies. The action plan will also articulate which experimentation framework is considered the most appropriate to address the possible challenges in relation to the identified technology.

As a final step, each consortium will set up the experimentation space proposed in the action plan. The development of the experimentation space would lead to the identification of potential legal, regulatory, fiscal, technical and operational pre-requisites or barriers helping policy makers to foster further innovation.

The proposals should focus on the following activities:

- The identification of areas and the presentation of concrete topics where experimentation could facilitate the deployment of disruptive technologies by establishing a regulatory sandbox, living lab or, test bed;
- Awareness-raising and enhanced knowledge on the existing experimentation frameworks for testing innovation;
- Identify and scale up best practice examples of regulatory sandboxes, living labs, and test beds;

- Interconnect innovators with organisations that set up and promote experimentation activities;
- An action plan which will elaborate on how to implement a regulatory sandbox or living lab or test bed in order to examine the potential of an emerging technology;
- Creation or utilisation of networking and coordination structures and tools to facilitate innovation development and access to and sharing of best practices, resources, talents, markets, expertise, services and knowledge, including open and collaborative knowledge bases and common knowledge assets (methods, data, processes);
- Establishment of an experimentation space or cooperation with existing services in the identified priority area which will provide a technology assessment base line for future developments of the technology being tested;
- Clarify the usage of existing and the assignment of newly created intellectual property rights.

Proposals may build on or seek collaboration with existing projects of EIT KICs in the area of innovation testing such as those related to demonstrators/test beds/living labs or other EIT KICs real-life experimentation environment activities.

**HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-02-02: Specialist Advisory Services to build capacities on innovation procurement**

<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	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.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 4.00 million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The following additional eligibility criteria apply:</p> <p>This action requires the participation of at least three (3) independent legal entities, of which at least one (1) is established in a 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovator region and at least one (1) in a 'strong' or 'innovation leader' innovator region.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Regional Innovation Scoreboard</a> is taken as a reference, and in the case of entities representing national authorities, the <a href="#">European Innovation Scoreboard</a>. The applicants must use as a reference the latest</p>

	<p>version of the documents mentioned above at the time of the call closure. Associated Countries which are not included in the European Innovation Scoreboard and are ranked below 25 on the latest <a href="#">Global Innovation Index</a> 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 (<a href="#">H2020 country profile</a>) will be taken as a reference and countries ranked below the average will be considered as ‘moderate’ or ‘emerging’ innovators.</p>
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	<p>The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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). <sup>37</sup>.</p>

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

- Promote opportunities that innovation procurement opens for public procurers;
- Enhance public buyers' familiarity with innovation procurement processes which could lead to the establishment of long-term and sustainable innovation procurement strategies;
- Further engagement of the public procurers' communities with Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), start-ups, incubators, accelerators, and research institutions in driving innovation demand and detecting innovative solutions;
- Contribute to a cultural change in public buyers' perception for adopting risk-averse innovative solutions;
- Stimulate SME's response to public buyers' needs and challenges aiming at decreasing potential uncertainties;
- Improve the procurers' capacity to communicate their needs and identify innovative suppliers who could effectively address them;
- Deploy public and private partners' collaboration in co-design processes to match their needs and identify existing technologies that could result in procurement of innovation.

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<sup>37</sup> This [decision](#) is available on the Funding and Tenders Portal, in the reference documents section for Horizon Europe, under ‘Simplified costs decisions’ or through this link: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision\\_he\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf)

Scope: *Target group(s): Public and private procurers, state-owned enterprises, SMEs and start-ups, research and technological organisations, innovation agencies and other public bodies responsible for promoting innovation procurement, the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs).*

Despite the legal reforms and incentives in the area of public procurement of innovative solutions, this field is still characterised by a risk-adverse approach. In some Member States and Associated countries, the use of innovation procurement is slowly gaining pace, but other administrations still resist the use of a more innovation-attuned approach, which recognises that there might be different possible solutions to problems, rather than just the incumbent technology or process. The strategic potential of innovation procurement is immense, especially in supporting technological development in and by the public sector. Companies, and particularly SMEs and mid-caps, may depend on sales to the public sector or just consider this opportunity can be motivating to innovate and adopt new technologies through public demand.

This action will support innovation procurement specialist advisory services that will act as the intermediary between public procurers and innovative suppliers, bridging those gaps that hamper the progress in the integration of innovative solutions in the public sector. With these innovation procurement specialist advisory services, it is expected to overcome the fragmentation and dispersion of public procurement across the EU, enhancing the coordination on procuring innovative solutions within Member States and Associated Countries.

The innovation procurement specialist advisory services are expected to have several main competencies which will help them achieve their goals:

- Specialised knowledge on one or more market sector(s) and increased awareness of the national, regional, or local innovative start-ups and SMEs which are active in their sector(s) of specialisation;
- Strong awareness of market opportunities that exist in their sectors of expertise, namely relevant competitions and calls which are open or planned at national, regional, and local levels;
- Good understanding of both what public procurers demand, but also what innovative suppliers could provide;
- Good technical background on their sectors, being in the position to assess the technical solutions proposed and the potential implications which could emerge from the implementation of an innovative solution. This way, the innovation procurement specialist advisory services should be able to explain to the public buyers the function of the proposed innovative solutions and clarify technical aspects which could negatively affect their risk perception;



- Thorough knowledge of relevant procurement procedures. Consequently, the advisory services should be able to provide clarity in the legal framework for both public buyers and suppliers and eliminate uncertainties that could emerge;
- Strong knowledge of and good connections to innovative SMEs and the start-up environment, including the European Innovation Council (EIC) and the EIT, as well as other EU and national networks (European Enterprise Network, Startup Europe, etc.).

The innovation procurement specialist advisory services are expected to facilitate the essential change of culture of public procurers regarding the adoption of innovative solutions by diminishing their resistance to change and risk-averse perceptions. To that extent, it is expected to reverse the slow uptake of innovation procurement practices for buying innovative solutions over traditional ones, and to spur the underpinning research and innovation activities by SMEs, start-ups, and industry providers enabling innovation (research and development) services and outcomes of innovation process to enter the market. The innovation procurement specialist advisory services are expected to strengthen the interaction of public procurers with small innovative companies by providing practical knowledge and eliminating the perception that procurement is limited to a legal and administrative process.

The specialist advisory services participating in this process should also set up new expert networks by sharing best practices among them, regardless of where an initiative took place. To that extent, besides the increase of knowledge and awareness, there is good potential for creating synergies. The proposals should focus on the following activities:

- Awareness-raising and enhanced knowledge on innovation procurement legal frameworks for public procurers and evaluators of innovative procurement;
- Enhanced innovation knowledge and skills in procurers, raising awareness about co-design processes between SMEs and procurers (public and private) that may help to discover the most up-to-date innovative technological solutions, and assist in their development and further acquisition;
- Scale up examples of best practice on the definition of needs and design of procedures and long-term strategies in the field of innovation procurement;
- Create more structured cooperation between the ecosystems of procurers and financial investors for innovation procurements.

**Call - Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems (2024.1)**

***HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-01***

**Conditions for the Call**

Indicative budget(s)<sup>38</sup>

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million)	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million) <sup>39</sup>	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
		2024		
Opening: 11 Jan 2024 Deadline(s): 25 Apr 2024				
HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-01-01	COFUND	55.00 <sup>40</sup>	8.00 to 12.00	5
HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-01-02	CSA	2.50	Around 2.50	1
HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-01-03	CSA	12.00	1.50 to 2.00	6
Overall indicative budget		69.50		

**General conditions relating to this call**

<i>Admissibility conditions</i>	The conditions are described in General Annex A.
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	The conditions are described in General Annex B.
<i>Financial and operational capacity and exclusion</i>	The criteria are described in General Annex C.
<i>Award criteria</i>	The criteria are described in General Annex D.
<i>Documents</i>	The documents are described in General Annex E.

<sup>38</sup> 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 years 2023 and 2024.

<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

<sup>40</sup> Of which EUR 25.00 million from the 'European Innovation Council (EIC)' budget.

<i>Procedure</i>	The procedure is described in General Annex F.
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	The rules are described in General Annex G.

Proposals are invited against the following topic(s):

**HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-01-01: Implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys**

<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR 8.00 and 12.00 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 55.00 million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Programme Co-fund Action
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>This action requires the participation of at least five (5) national or regional authorities, from at least five (5) different Member States or Associated Countries, of which at least two (2) are representing a 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovator region and at least one (1) is representing a 'strong' or 'innovation leader' innovator region.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Regional Innovation Scoreboard</a> is taken as a reference, and in the case of entities representing national authorities, the <a href="#">European Innovation Scoreboard</a>. The applicants must use as a reference the latest version of the documents mentioned above at the time of the call closure. Associated Countries which are not included in the European Innovation Scoreboard and are ranked below 25 on the latest <a href="#">Global Innovation Index</a> 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 (<a href="#">H2020 country profile</a>) will be taken as a reference and countries ranked below the average will be considered as 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovators.</p> <p>The consortium must provide a 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,</p>

	European funding, or private investments).
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	<p>The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>Beneficiaries may provide financial support to third parties (FSTP). The support to third parties can only be provided in the form of grants.</p> <p>The EUR 60,000 threshold provided for in Article 204 (a) of the Financial Regulation No 2018/1046 does not apply.</p> <p>The maximum amount of FSTP to be granted to an individual third party is EUR 600.000. This amount is justified since the cascading grants will each support three to four concrete interregional projects to be undertaken by research and innovation entities. Due to the nature of these projects (e.g. development or deployment of technological innovations) and their relatively small number of expected participants, a threshold lower than EUR 600.000 would constitute an obstacle to establishing effective collaborations.</p> <p>Grants award under this topic will have to submit the following deliverable(s): Annual work plans subject to approval by the Commission. For the first year, the annual work plan needs to be submitted together with the respective proposal.</p> <p>The funding rate is 50% of the eligible costs.</p>

Expected Outcome: In line with the new European Innovation Agenda’s<sup>41</sup> flagship on *accelerating and strengthening innovation in European Innovation Ecosystems across the EU and addressing the innovation divide*, this action is intended to create connected regional innovation valleys across the European Union (EU), involving regions with lower innovation performances, by building on strategic areas of regional strength and specialisation (defined in their smart specialisation strategies), in support of key EU priorities. Successful applicant regions under this call topic will be recognised as “regional innovation valleys”<sup>42</sup>.

Projects results are expected to contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

- Open<sup>43</sup>, efficient, inclusive and interconnected innovation ecosystems across the EU in line with the New European Innovation Agenda, building on their diversities and complementarities, enhancing the joint definition of visions and strategies involving

<sup>41</sup> [A New European Innovation Agenda COM\(2022\) 332 final](#)

<sup>42</sup> The EU contribution under this topic constitutes two budget lines, EUR 30 million from the EIE 2024, as well as an additional EUR 25 million from the EIC 2024.

<sup>43</sup> The notion of “openness” can be defined as “the pooling of knowledge for innovative purposes where the contributors have access to the inputs of others and cannot exert exclusive rights over the resultant innovation” (Chesbrough, H., & Appleyard, M. 2007. [Open Innovation and Strategy](#). California Management Review, 50(1): 57–76).

actors from across the quadruple helix <sup>44</sup>, based notably on their respective national/regional smart specialisation strategies, and strengthening their efficiency and potential to innovate;

- Enhanced synergies, complementarities and cooperation among European innovation ecosystems around strategic areas, technologies and challenges of common European interest, build on Smart Specialisation Strategies and, where applicable, on the participation in the pilot Partnerships for Regional Innovation (PRIs)<sup>45</sup>, the creation of common knowledge assets within regional innovation valleys, and support to their cross-border connectedness;
- Increased innovation capabilities, including in deep tech <sup>46</sup> in Member States and Associated Countries, allowing innovators to bring their ideas to the market and enable innovations to be scaled up at EU level, and facilitating the link with the private sector and other research and innovator actors;
- Better links between innovation 'leaders' and 'strong' innovator regions with 'moderate' and 'emerging' innovator regions across the EU and Associated Countries<sup>47</sup>;
- More innovation co-investments, mobilising other funding leverages, including European, national or regional public funds and/or other private funds, to complement Horizon Europe support;
- Increased participation of all innovation ecosystems actors across EU territories in technology and industrial value chains (existing and emerging ones) relevant to the EU twin green and digital transition to achieve broader sustainability and the EU's open strategic autonomy.

*Scope: Target group(s): The topic is primarily focused on the regional aspects of innovation and targeted at national and/or regional innovation authorities. Other relevant entities can participate in the consortia as associated partners (such as research institutions, public authorities, universities, companies, clusters, innovation intermediaries, etc.).*

The aim of this topic is to foster the creation of efficient, open, inclusive and interconnected European innovation ecosystems in line with the New European Innovation Agenda, notably in thematic/technological areas (including deep tech) that will be critical for EU value chains

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<sup>44</sup> A model of cooperation between industry, academia, civil society and public authorities, with a strong emphasis on citizens and their needs.

<sup>45</sup> More information under "[Partnerships for Regional Innovation](#)."

<sup>46</sup> Deep tech innovation aims to provide concrete solutions to our societal problems by finding its source in a deep interaction with the most recent scientific and technological advances and by seeking to produce a profound impact in the targeted application areas.

<sup>47</sup> References: the [Regional Innovation Scoreboard](#), and in the case of entities representing national authorities, the [European Innovation Scoreboard](#). Associated Countries which are not included in the European Innovation Scoreboard and are ranked below 25 on the [Global Innovation Index](#) 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 ([H2020 country profile](#)) will be taken as a reference and countries ranked below the average will be considered as 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovators.

contributing to the twin green and digital transitions and a resilient society, particularly in the areas of reducing reliance on the fossil fuels, increasing global food security, mastering the digital transformation (including cybersecurity), improving healthcare, and achieving circularity.

The topic will support strategically oriented long-term programmes of activities (action plans) to enable authorities in charge of public national, regional, or local innovation policies and programmes, with the participation of the private sector and research and innovation actors, to implement joint activities towards innovation development and deployment, aimed at tackling challenges at EU, national, regional, and local level.

The applicants are encouraged to consider a project duration of three to five (3-5) years and proposals should:

- Present the applicants' respective commitment to enhance the coordination and directionality of their research and innovation (R&I) investments and policies, their joint strategic visions, and their proposed joint innovation programme of activities; before the proposal submission the participants should have already selected a thematic/technological area and reached an agreement on what they want to achieve, in order to be able to present concrete action plans; the plans can be further detailed on an annual basis during the implementation of the projects;
- Describe the activities necessary, the process that will be followed, and the research and innovation assets that will be mobilised; activities should be open, clear, realistic, impact-oriented and ensure:
  - o Inclusiveness and diversity by expanding their activities to territories that are less advanced in innovation deployment ('moderate' and 'emerging' innovators<sup>48</sup>) and with the involvement of all innovation actors: research institutions, universities, companies, clusters, innovation intermediaries, as well as those that are currently less active or missing in the innovation ecosystems (e.g. investors, foundations, public and private buyers, social innovators, civil society organisations including non-governmental organisations, individual innovators, rural actors, as well as women-led start-ups and SMEs); each participating region is expected to mobilise all relevant actors of its innovation ecosystem to ensure their contribution to and benefit from the activities supported through the project;
  - o Participation of private actors, either for the joint implementation of proposed activities, and/or their possible co-funding; for example, via links and cooperation with innovative SMEs, start-ups, industry, private entities supporting innovation and innovators, including clusters, associations, as well as investors and foundations;

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<sup>48</sup> References: [Regional Innovation Scoreboard \(RIS\)](#), [European Innovation Scoreboard \(EIS\)](#), [Global Innovation Index \(GII\)](#).

- o Complementarity and synergies with other funds (EU, public, and/or private) and innovation-related strategies/policies/programmes/plans at national and/or regional level, including their smart specialisation strategies, and where relevant, the participation in pilot PRIs, start-up villages<sup>49</sup>, as well as other relevant programmes (e.g. the European Institute of Innovation and Technology and the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (EIT KICs), Enterprise Europe Network); applicants should outline the scope for synergies and/or additional funding, in particular where this makes the projects more ambitious or increases their impact and expected results.
- Explain the need and the reasons for selecting the proposed action plans that should be scalable at European level and demonstrate their strong EU added value; the proposed plan:
  - o Should include the provisions and modalities for the competitive selection and funding of the provisions and modalities for the competitive selection and funding of at least three to four (3-4) interregional innovation projects in the selected thematic/technological area, including deep tech, linked to key EU priorities:
    - These interregional projects should focus on the development and/or deployment of technologies and innovations, including breakthrough and disruptive, through cooperation between research and innovation actors from the participating regions;
    - Each of these interregional projects should aim to deliver concrete and tangible outcomes during the duration of the project, and ensure their dissemination and exploitation;
    - These interregional projects should be managed in a coordinated manner, as a portfolio of projects, and should identify and establish links with other relevant EU, national or regional projects in similar thematic/technological area (horizontal integration) or complementary areas (vertical integration) with a view to integrate into and contribute to existing or emerging value chains.
    - Proposals should allocate at least 50% of the action plan's total budget to these interregional innovation projects.
  - o Should include a consistent set of core collaborative activities, for example:
    - Networking and coordination structures and tools to facilitate innovation development and access to and sharing of best practices, resources, talents, markets, expertise, services and knowledge, including open and collaborative knowledge bases and common knowledge assets (methods, data, processes);

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<sup>49</sup> More information under ["Start-up villages: a commitment to a long-term vision for rural areas."](#)

- Support to interconnections between innovation hubs/local pockets of excellence; market analysis, development and activities towards better access to new markets and finance for innovative SMEs and start-ups;
  - Training and skills development; interconnection of open innovation infrastructures; supportive activities towards scale up, exploitation and dissemination of innovative solutions;
  - Joint public procurement initiatives;
  - Social innovators' and civil society integration, as interlocutors for society and important inputs to the development of innovations and promotion of gender equality and diversity.
- Explain the reasons for selecting the proposed strategic areas of cooperation, and how this cooperation will improve the efficiency and performance of the EU's innovation ecosystems, fostering their interconnection and scale-up, and their contribution to key EU priorities; the joint innovation programme of activities should focus on a thematic/technological area, in line with the smart specialisation strategies of the participating regions, and should highlight how it will contribute to innovation priorities of common interest, EU strategic priorities (including climate, digital and social transitions, and open strategic autonomy) and where appropriate Horizon Europe Missions; it should pay attention to gender equality objectives<sup>50</sup>; it should clarify the potential for growth and competitiveness foreseen in the targeted sector and/or expected impact on EU challenge(s);
  - Present how the consortium plans to implement these joint activities;
  - Include clear targets in terms of outcomes for the measures/activities underpinned by verifiable indicators (applicants may wish to refer to the Sustainable Development Goals, the EU taxonomy on sustainable finance, or other relevant policy frameworks);
  - Ensure their long-term commitment towards engaging in the joint cooperation activities set up in the frame of their projects.

In order to comply with the idea of a joint Horizon Europe and Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument call provided in the New European Innovation Agenda, this call may be implemented as a synergy action with I3, in which event the call text may be updated accordingly.

**HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-01-02: The African Union-European Union Innovation Platform**

**Specific conditions**

<sup>50</sup> See for instance the [Horizon Europe regulation](#) for horizontal gender equality principles, the [ERA policy agenda 2022-2024](#), and the [Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#).



*Horizon Europe - Work Programme 2023-2024  
European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE)*

<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 2.50 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 2.50 million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The following additional eligibility criteria apply:</p> <p>Legal entities established in all African Union member states<sup>51</sup> may exceptionally participate in this Coordination and Support Action as a beneficiary (or affiliated entity). Due to the scope of this topic, all African Union member states are exceptionally eligible for Union funding.</p> <p>Consortia must have at least three (3) independent legal entities from different African Union member states.</p>
<i>Procedure</i>	<p>The procedure is described in General Annex F. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The granting authority can fund a maximum of one project.</p>

Expected Outcome: Strengthening Research and Innovation (R&I) cooperation between the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) is a key priority of the EU Communication Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa<sup>52</sup>, in which the role of R&I is recognised as a driver for sustainable and inclusive economic growth and job generation, thereby reducing poverty and inequalities. The first R&I Ministerial meeting of the AU-EU High-Level Policy Dialogue on Science, Technology and Innovation (HLPD on STI) agreed to focus cooperation in four priority areas: Public Health, Green Transition, Innovation & Technology, and Capacities for Science, and also agreed to the development of a joint AU-EU Innovation Agenda, which is currently under preparation, and expected to be adopted at the second AU-EU R&I Ministerial in early 2023.

This topic contributes to the priority areas of action (number 9) listed in the Council Conclusions on the Future Governance European Research Area<sup>53</sup> with regard to launching a pilot initiative on the Team Europe approach for a specific world region and/or topic.

<sup>51</sup> In the context of the conditions for this call topic, "African Union member states" includes countries whose membership has been temporarily suspended.

<sup>52</sup> [Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa JOIN\(2020\) 4 final.](#)

<sup>53</sup> More information under ["New Pact and governance structure for the European Research Area \(ERA\)."](#)

This topic is also in support of the key actions mentioned in the Council Conclusions on the Global approach to Research and Innovation - the EU's strategy for international cooperation in changing world<sup>54</sup>, in particular at point twenty-nine related to the AU-EU Partnership, aiming at developing a joint EU-AU Research and Innovation Agenda in support of building research capacities and translating research outputs, including those from the 'Africa Initiative' under the Horizon Europe Work Programmes 2021-2022, into socio-economic and environmental benefits, in line with the agreement reached at the 2020 EU-AU R&I Ministerial meeting.

The action funded under this topic will have the objective of supporting the implementation of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda. The action is expected to bring together a mix of EU and AU innovation stakeholders, from academia and business, including higher education establishments, public and private research entities, non-governmental organisations, international finance institutions, incubators and accelerators, technology transfer and capacity building and higher learning organisations.

The aim of the topic will be to foster the links and networks between innovation stakeholders from the AU and EU innovation ecosystems, also including the social innovation dimension.

Proposals addressing this topic should in particular contribute to the following outcomes:

- Support the implementation of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda by providing for a convening platform enabling the elaboration and proposal of implementation modalities of specific actions already included in the current AU-EU Innovation Agenda. In particular and in practice, this action would enable the attainment of several short-term actions foreseen in the working document of the Innovation Agenda for two thematic areas (e.g. "Cross-cutting issues" and "Capacities for science"), aiming to:
  - o Foster the establishment of links and networks among stakeholders across the innovation value chains, from the generation of ideas to development and implementation of innovations, including private and public sectors, higher education and research organisations, financial institutions, and civil society organisations;
  - o Involve citizens in the innovation ecosystems, to improve societal uptake of innovation outputs, and valorise creative and collective intelligence, ensuring also gender equality and active participation of youths;
  - o Strengthen coordination and cooperation between AU and EU innovation programmes and various implementing institutions, ensuring knowledge transfer, capacity building and mobility opportunities, consistent with the socio-economic needs of the concerned AU and EU countries or regions.
- Facilitate, conceptually and logistically, the organisation of annual or bi-annual meetings with key innovation stakeholders from the EU and the AU. By doing so, provide a forum

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<sup>54</sup> More information under ["Council agrees on a global approach to research and innovation."](#)

for discussion and planning of the implementation of other short-, medium- and long-term actions of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda;

- Provide further de-risking support to Eureka-funded small and medium sized-enterprises (SMEs), that have previously benefitted from Viability Assessment Projects (VAPs) under Eureka’s Innowide, by shortening the time-to-market of their innovative solutions and enhancing the uptake of innovations in European and African countries.

Scope: *Target group(s): Networks of start-ups, innovators, incubators, accelerators, academia, research and technology organisations (public and private sector), think tanks, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations, private and financial actors.*

With the objective of guaranteeing a multidisciplinary approach, the selected consortium should be composed of diverse stakeholders (e.g. networks of start-ups, innovators, incubators, accelerators, academia, research and technology organisations, think tanks, NGOs, private and financial sectors, the European Institute of Innovation and Technology's (EIT) Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), etc.).

Following the end of the project, this platform is expected to continue operations without funding from Horizon Europe. Therefore, the development of a sustainability plan is requested.

**HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-01-03: Startup Europe**

<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR 1.50 and 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.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 12.00 million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The following additional eligibility criteria apply:</p> <p>At least 50% of the beneficiaries in a consortium must be established in 'modest' or 'emerging' innovator countries or regions.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Regional Innovation Scoreboard</a> is taken as a reference, and in the case of entities representing national authorities, the <a href="#">European Innovation Scoreboard</a>. The applicants must use as a reference the latest version of the documents mentioned above at the time of the call closure. Associated Countries which are not included in the European</p>

	<p>Innovation Scoreboard and are ranked below 25 on the <a href="#">Global Innovation Index 2021</a> 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 (<a href="#">H2020 country profile</a>) will be taken as a reference and countries ranked below the average will be considered as ‘moderate’ or ‘emerging’ innovators.</p>
<p><i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i></p>	<p>The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Applicants opting for this non-compulsory financial support scheme must allocate at least 60% of the total proposed budget to financial support to third parties.</p>

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

- Increasing the market footprint of European start-ups in strategic digital technologies and deep tech<sup>55</sup> innovation, notably Artificial Intelligence, Advanced Computing, Cybersecurity, Next Generation Internet, Blockchain, Internet of Things, Metaverse, Energy, Greentech, AgriTech, and Fintech;
- Better connection of start-ups, including European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and European Innovation Council (EIC)-supported start-ups 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 start-ups 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, and start-up villages<sup>56</sup>.

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

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

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<sup>55</sup> Deep tech innovation aims to provide concrete solutions to our societal problems by finding its source in a deep interaction with the most recent scientific and technological advances and by seeking to produce a profound impact in the targeted application areas.

<sup>56</sup> More information under ["Start-up villages: a commitment to a long-term vision for rural areas."](#)

- Start-ups established in ‘moderate’ or ‘emerging’ innovator countries and/or regions; or
- Women-led start-ups<sup>57</sup>.

Scope: *Target group(s): Start-up ecosystem builders, business angel organisations, venture capital entities, accelerators, incubators, start-up associations, clusters.*

This action will connect local digital and deep tech start-up ecosystems and support cross-border acceleration activities for start-ups that demonstrate traction (i.e. market-product fit or at least a seed round raised). Among the start-up 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 start-ups demonstrating traction, the action will also target scale-ups identified in Horizon Europe (e.g. through the EIC (including the EIC Scaleup 100 action) and EIT-supported companies) and the Digital Europe Programme (e.g. from European Digital Innovation Hubs), and the use of Innovation Radar intelligence<sup>58</sup> and other relevant data sets<sup>59</sup>. Targeting of start-ups funded by national programmes, particularly those part of “Plug-in” certified programmes (see [EIC Work Programme 2022](#) Annex 5) should also be considered.

In terms of outreach and amplification, actions should be publicised where relevant in the EIC Community<sup>60</sup> and should actively engage with activities and events of the Europe Startup Nations Alliance<sup>61</sup>. Special attention will be given to support European digital and deep tech start-ups and scale-ups 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 start-ups 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 applicants should put in place proper communication and publicity of the actions engaged.

## **Call - Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems (2024.2)**

***HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-02***

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<sup>57</sup> Start-ups 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).

<sup>58</sup> [The EU Innovation Radar Platform](#) (Actions can also have Application Programming Interface (API) access to the Innovation Radar data sets).

<sup>59</sup> Including the work of the Joint Research Centre in the areas of innovative start-ups and scale-ups with high growth potential.

<sup>60</sup> More information under [“The EIC Community.”](#)

<sup>61</sup> More information under [“New European Alliance to accelerate startups growth.”](#)

## Conditions for the Call

### Indicative budget(s)<sup>62</sup>

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million)	Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million) <sup>63</sup>	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
		2024		
Opening: 06 Jun 2024 Deadline(s): 19 Sep 2024				
HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-02-01	CSA	2.50	Around 0.50	5
HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-02-02	CSA	1.00	Around 0.10	10
Overall indicative budget		3.50		

### **General conditions relating to this call**

<i>Admissibility conditions</i>	The conditions are described in General Annex A.
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	The conditions are described in General Annex B.
<i>Financial and operational capacity and exclusion</i>	The criteria are described in General Annex C.
<i>Award criteria</i>	The criteria are described in General Annex D.
<i>Documents</i>	The documents are described in General Annex E.
<i>Procedure</i>	The procedure is described in General Annex F.

<sup>62</sup> 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 years 2023 and 2024.

<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	The rules are described in General Annex G.
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Proposals are invited against the following topic(s):

**HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-02-01:            Expanding            Academia-Enterprise Collaborations**

<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 0.50 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 2.50 million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The following additional eligibility criteria apply:</p> <p>This action requires the participation of at least three (3) independent legal entities, of which at least one (1) is established in a 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovator region and at least one (1) in a 'strong' or 'innovation leader' innovator region.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Regional Innovation Scoreboard</a> is taken as a reference, and in the case of entities representing national authorities, the <a href="#">European Innovation Scoreboard</a>. The applicants must use as a reference the latest version of the documents mentioned above at the time of the call closure. Associated Countries which are not included in the European Innovation Scoreboard and are ranked below 25 on the latest <a href="#">Global Innovation Index</a> 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 (<a href="#">H2020 country profile</a>) will be taken as a reference and countries ranked below the average will be considered as 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovators.</p> <p>The following additional eligibility criteria apply:</p> <p>The consortium must include at least one (1) educational institution or research organisation and at least one (1) representative of the private sector (for-profit entity).</p>

<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:  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). <sup>64</sup> .
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Expected Outcome: Projects results are expected to contribute to four (4) or more of the following expected outcomes:

- Improved integration of research institutions, Higher Education Institutions, vocational schools, and similar organisations into Europe’s innovation ecosystems by establishing better links with start-ups and start-up networks, accelerators and incubators, business angels and investor communities;
- Improved flows of knowledge, skills, and talents between educational institutions and other innovation ecosystem actors at various levels of development, including in the deep tech<sup>65</sup> field in line with the New European Innovation Agenda<sup>66</sup>;
- Improved skills of all involved ecosystem actors to increase innovation potential, inter-sectoral mobility, and market uptake of new technologies; Targeted are skills necessary and responsive to innovation and labour market needs on digital, green, and entrepreneurial skills, networking skills, risk taking, and in particular in the deep tech field;
- Improved connections of educational institutions to high-quality remote testing, validation, and up-scaling of innovations delivered by research and technology infrastructures across the EU;
- Improved competence of students, graduates, researchers, and workforce to launch, run, and lead successful and profitable start-ups, including in the deep tech field;
- Enhanced availability of local talents equipped with skills to support business acceleration and digitalisation<sup>67</sup>;

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<sup>64</sup> This [decision](#) is available on the Funding and Tenders Portal, in the reference documents section for Horizon Europe, under ‘Simplified costs decisions’ or through this link: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision\\_he\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> Deep tech innovation aims to provide concrete solutions to our societal problems by finding its source in a deep interaction with the most recent scientific and technological advances and by seeking to produce a profound impact in the targeted application areas.

<sup>66</sup> [A New European Innovation Agenda COM\(2022\) 332 final](#).

<sup>67</sup> More information on entrepreneurial competences under the [Entrepreneurship Competence Framework](#).



- Enhanced entrepreneurial activity in developing innovation ecosystems and their upscaling and interconnectedness across the EU supported by citizens and local initiatives in order to build innovative solutions to current and future challenges;
- Increased engagement and connectedness with other ecosystem actors (e.g. other educational institutions, Technology Transfer Offices, Research and Technology Organisations, local and regional enterprises, private companies, start-ups, early-stage companies, accelerators, incubators, etc.) within and between regions;
- Increased youth (self) employability and gender balance in collaborations.

*Scope: Target group(s): Research and innovation ( related actors such as vocational schools, higher education institutions, public authorities in the field of education and employment, innovation agencies, SMEs, deep tech companies, the European Innovation Council (EIC) and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) start-ups and industry, research performing organisations, knowledge and technology transfer offices and associations, students and researchers.*

Educational and research institutions are considered key places for knowledge production and innovation, and should be well connected within and beyond their respective regional innovation ecosystems. By increasing the connectedness of educational and research institutions, host regions will be able to increase their competitive advantage by fostering and possibly attracting talent, high-tech companies, and boosting innovation output in the area;

However, due to the diverse innovation landscape in Europe, educational and research institutions from better-connected innovation ecosystems benefit from more local accelerators with greater funding opportunities and more qualified business support services compared to their counterparts in other areas, including rural or peripheral areas.

The action should foster the creation of innovation ecosystems with educational and research institutions, or strengthen their existing links. Proposals should outline activities for supporting educational and research institutions to take a greater entrepreneurial role, e.g. through boosting innovation and entrepreneurship within their activities. The action should also ensure that educational and research institutions' assets and vision are articulated clearly and in line with respective regional specialisations (such as smart specialisation strategies), so they can easily be integrated into innovation ecosystems and economic value chains.

The proposals should leverage best practices of the private and public sector in the EU's well performing innovation hubs and enhance collaborations between businesses with R&I actors in educational and research institutions. The proposals should build on the educational and research institutions' focus areas and relationship to innovation, matching regional and business interests (and where relevant complement smart specialisation strategies), in order to maximize each stakeholders' strengths and accelerate progress. The proposals should outline activities that will foster connectedness of the innovation ecosystems while preventing brain drain and encourage talent to stay in emerging regions, including rural areas. Only by providing local talents, including female talents, with knowledge and opportunities to

contribute to the local private sector or develop their own businesses, local innovation ecosystems can expand based on sustainable and inclusive growth. The proposals should valorise high levels of technical skills, including in deep tech, in developing innovation ecosystems with hands-on knowledge and experiences in business management and international scale-up processes.

The action supports co-designed programmes of activities of at least two (2) years, proposed jointly by educational institutions, research institutions, and other R&I actors from ‘emerging’ and ‘moderate’ innovation ecosystems and the private sector from innovation hubs (‘strong innovators’ and ‘innovation leaders’), to ensure better connectedness between higher education institutions and research organisation with other actors of innovation ecosystems, for example:

- Engagement of business experts into the implementation of networking activities and building innovation ecosystem around the university/research institution;
- Engagement of students, graduates, researchers and workforce from various disciplines and departments into the innovation ecosystem, with a focus on networking and building networks around educational and research institutions as centres of gravity, and engaging in companies’ structures and business processes;
- Engagement of students and researchers in start-ups from both their immediate local environment and beyond (regional, national, transnational) working with various actors from the innovation ecosystem to experience what starting and running a venture entails, such as raising funds, pitching events, creating, editing, and adapting business models in the creation process from idea to market, etc.;
- Creation of synergies between students, graduates, researchers, innovators, education institutes, research performing organisations, and business partners, locally, at EU level, and globally targeting the creation of networks and communities of practices in the field of deep tech to stimulate the market uptake of results and new technologies, as well as their co-creation.

The proposed programmes of activities should ensure gender-balanced participation opportunities.

To ensure that the impact of the action goes beyond consortium members and their respective countries, it is encouraged that the selected consortia work closely with innovation agencies from their respective territories and beyond, and seek synergies with relevant EU initiatives in the field of university-business cooperation, such as knowledge and innovation alliances under the Erasmus+ programme or the EIT Knowledge Innovation Communities (KICs) to allow for complementarities and possible use of already existing EIT KICs' knowledge, expertise, networks, communities or platforms such as those developed under the EIT Initiative on Innovation Capacity Building for Higher Education<sup>68</sup> that focuses on

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<sup>68</sup> More information under ["Pilot Call: HEI Initiative - Innovation Capacity Building for Higher Education."](#)

strengthening partnerships between higher education and businesses including developing innovation and business support services.

**HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-02-02: Mutual learning and support scheme for national and regional innovation programmes**

<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 0.10 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 1.00 million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Coordination and Support Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The following additional eligibility criteria apply:</p> <p>This action requires the participation of at least three (3) independent legal entities, of which at least one (1) is established in a 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovator region and at least one (1) in a 'strong' or 'innovation leader' innovator region.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Regional Innovation Scoreboard</a> is taken as a reference, and in the case of entities representing national authorities, the <a href="#">European Innovation Scoreboard</a>. The applicants must use as a reference the latest version of the documents mentioned above at the time of the call closure. Associated Countries which are not included in the European Innovation Scoreboard and are ranked below 25 on the latest <a href="#">Global Innovation Index</a> 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 (<a href="#">H2020 country profile</a>) will be taken as a reference and countries ranked below the average will be considered as 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovators.</p>
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	<p>The rules are described in General Annex G. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>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</p>

	Community (2021-2025). <sup>69</sup> .
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Expected Outcome: Projects results are expected to contribute to at least four (4) of the following expected outcomes:

- Reduced fragmentation of innovation ecosystems and national/regional start-up support schemes;
- Increased cooperation, learning, and exchange of knowledge between national and regional innovation support public authorities and agencies in order to ensure that their innovation funding schemes respond to the requirements of the Plug-in certification for step 2 of the European Innovation Council (EIC) Accelerator;
- Improved ongoing and/or set up of new national and regional innovation funding programmes whose criteria are fit to pass the certification for the Plug-in scheme;
- The use, requirements, and access to the Plug-in scheme are well communicated to the innovation ecosystem stakeholders, particularly start-ups and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs);
- A more homogeneous, equal, and aligned approach in the evaluation of projects under national and regional support schemes;
- Enhanced cooperation among national and regional public authorities and agencies and SMEs and start-ups, particularly between innovation 'leaders'/'strong' innovators and 'moderate'/'emerging' innovator countries<sup>70</sup>;
- Stable pipeline of high-quality projects to the EIC Accelerator Step 2.

Scope: *Target group(s): national or regional innovation agencies or similar organisations, national and regional authorities in charge of management of innovation programmes, EIC Plug-in contact points.*

Start-ups and SMEs are the primary source of innovation in the European Union (EU) and globally. However, the fragmentation of innovation ecosystems and the lack of connectedness among public national and regional agencies and innovation support schemes appear to be one of the main bottlenecks towards ensuring sufficient support of the most promising start-up and scale-up companies in the EU.

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<sup>69</sup> This [decision](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf) is available on the Funding and Tenders Portal, in the reference documents section for Horizon Europe, under 'Simplified costs decisions' or through this link: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision\\_he\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/ls-decision_he_en.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> References: the [Regional Innovation Scoreboard](#), and in the case of entities representing national authorities, the [European Innovation Scoreboard](#). Associated Countries which are not included in the European Innovation Scoreboard and are ranked below 25 on the [Global Innovation Index](#) 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 ([H2020 country profile](#)) will be taken as a reference and countries ranked below the average will be considered as 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovators

Building on the outcomes of different INNOSUP actions on peer learning of innovation agencies<sup>71</sup>, as well as the Horizon 2020 pilot action under the enhanced EIC Pilot Work Programme “Mutual learning and common tools and resources for national/regional schemes supporting innovation projects of start-ups and SMEs”, this action aims at bringing together public innovation authorities and agencies to increase the dialogue and networking towards the design and implementation of regional and national innovation funding programmes in line with the requirements of the Plug-in certification for step 2 of the EIC Accelerator. In line with previous activities supporting peer learning of innovation agencies, use of the 'Twinning+' methodology<sup>72</sup> is strongly encouraged in the context of this action. The project shall provide a Design Options Paper summarising the main findings in order to guide any innovation agency in translating and concretely implementing the identified good practices.

The pilot Plug-in scheme is a novelty under Horizon Europe and is a specific process applicable to the EIC Accelerator only. It applies to proposals that result from existing national or regional programmes and its specific modalities are outlined in the EIC Work Programme 2022 Annex 5<sup>73</sup>.

Under the 'Plug-in' scheme, applicants do not apply directly to the EIC Accelerator calls. Instead, a project review is carried out to assess the innovation or market deployment potential of an existing project at national or regional level to decide whether the project is suitable for support under the EIC Accelerator.

The first pilot results of a mapping of national and regional programmes by the European Commission in close cooperation with Member States has shown that although 31 out of 52 programmes submitted were certified, several programmes did not pass the certification and some Member States have not submitted any programme to the review at all. This action aims to assist Member States and Associated Countries to improve or create national and regional funding programmes that could qualify for certification under the Plug-in scheme of the EIC Accelerator. Applications from regional and national agencies from 'moderate' and 'emerging' innovator countries and regions are particularly encouraged.

The proposals are expected to include specific activities that will allow applicants to:

- Enhance the quality of support provided at national and regional levels to the most promising innovative start-ups and SMEs;
- To improve or set up national and regional funding programmes that could qualify for certification under the Plug-in scheme of the EIC Accelerator;
- To share best practices in terms of design, functioning, operation, and monitoring of such programmes;

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<sup>71</sup> Results summarised in the [“Handbook of service design for Innovation Agencies”](#)

<sup>72</sup> Further information and examples can be found in the [“Handbook of service design for Innovation Agencies.”](#)

<sup>73</sup> [EIC Work Programme 2022.](#)

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- To broaden access to information and communicate to the applicants (start-ups and SMEs) on the opportunities to access the national and regional funding programmes and have their chance to be selected under Plug-in scheme to apply to step 2 of the EIC Accelerator.

## **Destination: INNOVSMES - Partnership on Innovative SMEs**

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent the backbone of the European economy. They represent 99.8% of all enterprises in the European Union (EU) non-financial business sector and two thirds of employment. However, SMEs in Europe face obstacles to growth, expansion and scaling up, including lack of skills, administrative burden, and access to finance. Many lack capacity for innovation and struggle to enter international markets.

Greater cooperation with partners in Europe and beyond can help to address many of these issues. However, opportunities for bottom-up, international collaborations are limited. European SMEs can struggle to find support for their internationalisation efforts. At national level, support is often limited to collaboration among partners within the same Member State. Levels of investment to support internationalisation in European innovative SMEs vary and there is suboptimal co-ordination of national schemes. Overall, these issues weaken the resilience of the European innovation ecosystem.

The objective of this call is to continue to provide support to the European Partnership of Innovative SMEs identified in the Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2021-2024 and first implemented under the topic HORIZON-EIE-2021-INNOVSMES-01-01: European Partnership on Innovative SMEs, and in particular to fund additional activities (which may also be undertaken by additional partners) in view of its intended scope and duration, and in accordance with Article 24(2) of the Horizon Europe Regulation.

The proposal for the topic under this destination should cover a specific niche that other EU, national and regional interventions do not address for the benefit of innovative SMEs in Europe: cooperation among European and/or international partners, with at least one innovative SME as the project leader. The proposed additional activities would help innovative SMEs to increase their research and innovation (R&I) capacity and productivity and to become embedded in global value chains and new markets. It would achieve this by supporting innovative SMEs in developing products, processes and services through funding market-led, cross-border, R&I collaborative projects and providing accompanying measures. It would enable global collaboration and the commercialisation of new knowledge. It would thereby strengthen the overall resilience of the European innovation ecosystem.

In line with the Horizon Europe objectives<sup>74</sup> it aims to generate knowledge, support the access to and uptake of innovative solutions by SMEs (including to address global challenges), facilitate technological development, demonstration, knowledge and technology transfer, and strengthen deployment and exploitation of innovative solutions.

In line with Horizon Europe Strategic Planning, the partnership aims to contribute to global and European policies. In particular the strategic priorities of the European Commission with a special focus on the ‘European Green Deal’ and ‘An economy that works for people’

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<sup>74</sup> [Horizon Europe Regulation](#), Article.3.2.(b), (c).

including the SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe, as well actions towards tackling the COVID-19 crisis and the post-COVID era.

In line with the Global Approach to Research and Innovation<sup>75</sup> the partnership aims to facilitate the internationalisation of European SMEs by establishing win-win international innovation partnerships, such as networks of incubators and accelerators with countries that offer reciprocal openness to entrepreneurship and investment, promoting mobility of innovators in both directions. The envisaged activities will build on tools developed and experience gained and by creating synergies with other supporting mechanisms.

**Expected impact**

The proposal for the topic under this destination should set out a credible pathway to contributing to the following expected impact:

To help European innovative SMEs to grow and successfully access European and international markets and to embed in global value chains by:

- Contributing to the strategic priorities of the European Commission with a special focus on the ‘European Green Deal’ and ‘An economy that works for people’ including the SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe, as well actions towards tackling the COVID-19 crisis and the post-COVID era.
- Strengthening the innovation performance, output, potential and resilience of the European innovation ecosystem;
- Addressing the productivity and internationalisation gap between innovative SMEs and large companies and aiming to improve SMEs’ global scale-up potential leading to increased employment and turnover;
- Leveraging investment for innovative SMEs.

The following call(s) in this work programme contribute to this destination:

Call	Budgets (EUR million)		Deadline(s)
	2023	2024	
HORIZON-EIE-2023-INNOVSMES-01	34.54	36.58	22 Mar 2023
Overall indicative budget	34.54	36.58	

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<sup>75</sup> [COM\(2021\) 252 final.](#)



**Call - Partnership on Innovative SMEs**

***HORIZON-EIE-2023-INNOVSMES-01***

**Conditions for the Call**

Indicative budget(s)<sup>76</sup>

Topics	Type of Action	Budgets (EUR million)		Expected EU contribution per project (EUR million) <sup>77</sup>	Indicative number of projects expected to be funded
		2023	2024		
Opening: 11 Jan 2023 Deadline(s): 22 Mar 2023					
HORIZON-EIE-2023-INNOVSMES-01-01	COFUND	34.54	36.58	Around 71.116079	1
Overall indicative budget		34.54	36.58		

<b>General conditions relating to this call</b>	
<i>Admissibility conditions</i>	The conditions are described in General Annex A.
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	The conditions are described in General Annex B.
<i>Financial and operational capacity and exclusion</i>	The criteria are described in General Annex C.
<i>Award criteria</i>	The criteria are described in General Annex D.

<sup>76</sup> 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 years 2023 and 2024.

<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.

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<i>Documents</i>	The documents are described in General Annex E.
<i>Procedure</i>	The procedure is described in General Annex F.
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements</i>	The rules are described in General Annex G.

Proposals are invited against the following topic(s):

**HORIZON-EIE-2023-INNOVSMES-01-01: European Partnership on Innovative SMEs**

<b>Specific conditions</b>	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of around EUR 71.116079 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 71.12 million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Programme Co-fund Action
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The following additional eligibility criteria apply:</p> <p>The proposal must be submitted by the coordinator of the consortium funded under HORIZON-EIE-2021-INNOVSMES-01-01: European Partnership on Innovative SMEs. This eligibility condition is without prejudice to the possibility to include additional partners.</p>
<i>Procedure</i>	<p>The procedure is described in General Annex F. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>If the proposal is successful, the next stage of the procedure will be grant agreement amendment preparations.</p> <p>If the outcome of amendment preparations is an award decision, the coordinator of the consortium funded under HORIZON-EIE-2021-INNOVSMES-01-01: European Partnership on Innovative SMEs will be invited submit an amendment to the grant agreement, on behalf of the beneficiaries.</p>
<i>Legal and financial set-up of the Grant</i>	This action is intended to be implemented in the form of an amendment of the grant agreement concluded pursuant to topic HORIZON-EIE-2021-INNOVSMES-01-01: European Partnership on Innovative SMEs.

<i>Agreements</i>	<p>For the additional activities covered by this action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beneficiaries may provide financial support to third parties (FSTP). The support to third parties can only be provided in the form of grants.</li> <li>• Financial support provided by the participants to third parties is one of the primary activities of this action in order to be able to achieve its objectives. The EUR 60 000 threshold provided for in Article 204(a) of the Financial Regulation No 2018/1046 does not apply.</li> <li>• The maximum amount of FSTP to be granted to an individual third party is EUR 25.000.000. This amount is justified since provision of FSTP is the primary activity of this action and it is based on the extensive experience under predecessors of this partnership.</li> <li>• At least two thirds (67%) of the projects supported through FSTP must involve at least two beneficiaries from Member States or Associated Countries.</li> <li>• The funding rate is 30 % of the eligible costs.</li> </ul> <p>The starting date of grants awarded under this topic may be as of the submission date of the application. Applicants must justify the need for a retroactive starting date in their application. Costs incurred from the starting date of the action may be considered eligible (and will be reflected in the entry into force date of the amendment to the grant agreement).</p>
<i>Total indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the duration of the co-funded Partnership EUR 250 million.

Expected Outcome: Projects results are expected to contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

- Improved knowledge transfer in the European innovative Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) ecosystem, through increased and sustained collaboration between SMEs, public research partners and academia;
- Mitigation of difficulties in access to finance for European innovative SMEs and thus contribute to enhanced growth and expansion of European innovative SMEs;

- Improved European innovative SME access to new international markets or value chains thus leading to improved market share and sales for European innovative SMEs increasing their employment capacity;
- Increase public research and innovation funding to European innovative SMEs, to spur more high-quality collaborations and more innovative solutions;
- Pull together national efforts to spur internationalisation and collaboration in European innovative SMEs, avoiding unnecessary duplication leading to a simplified offer to beneficiaries, achieving a more balanced geographic participation, ensuring complementarity and improved innovation ecosystems across Europe;
- Identify and better exploit existing or emerging opportunities in the global markets and establish win-win international innovation partnerships, such as networks of incubators and accelerators with the help of the INNOWWIDE instrument and other existing support mechanisms.

Scope: The objective of this action is to continue to provide support to the European Partnership of Innovative SMEs identified in the Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2021-2024 and first implemented under the topic HORIZON-EIE-2021-INNOVSMES-01-01: European Partnership on Innovative SMEs, and in particular to fund additional activities (which may also be undertaken by additional partners) in view of its intended scope and duration, and in accordance with Article 24(2) of the Horizon Europe Regulation.

The consortium which applied to and received funding under the European Partnership on Innovative SMEs topic of the European Innovation Ecosystems Work Programme 2021-2022 is uniquely placed to submit a proposal to continue the envisioned partnership. Not only did this consortium submit the proposal leading to the identification of the partnership in the Horizon Europe strategic planning 2021-2024, it has also implemented the partnership through co-funded calls in 2021-2022 based on this planning and further to the European Partnership on Innovative SMEs topic. It is also deemed relevant that the same consortium was responsible for carrying out the Horizon 2020 predecessor programme EUROSTARS 2. In this context, the current consortium has particular expertise in relation to the objectives of the Partnership, the activities to be implemented and other relevant aspects of the action. In practice, another consortium could not continue the activities of the Partnership underway without significant disruption to the ongoing activities, if at all.

The proposal should cover all the additional activities which will be implemented using the budget and in the framework of the amendment to the existing grant agreement that will result from this proposal, and which are not covered in the existing grant agreement. The proposal should address time, resources and activities building on the two main types of activities from the previous period. These are largely additional calls for proposals covering the 2023- 2024 period (Eurostars and INNOWWIDE projects) resulting in international collaborative research and innovation projects. While these projects should further contribute to the results which were achieved in the previous period, the scope should in addition include the lessons learnt from the initial three Eurostars calls of this partnership in the first period of implementation,

in order to potentially improve the activities during the forthcoming period. Furthermore, as second additional activity, it would be beneficial to analyse the results and lessons learnt from the very first Eureka-INNOWIDE call with a new pilot phase focusing on Africa. These additional activities should contribute to the further development of the “Eureka-INNOWIDE” scheme including its further possible evolution. Coordination and support activities, the creation of synergies between and synchronisation of national programmes, and a better cooperation and knowledge exchange between national intermediaries should be continued through new or repeated activities and additional events during the forthcoming period.

Collaborative research and innovation activities and a strong focus on support to the internationalisation of European innovative SMEs should drive the additional activities and calls for proposals during the period 2023 to 2024 in line with the overall call schedule until the end of the partnership. There is a clear added value and ‘selling point’ for the continuation and additional calls under this initiative to further address gaps towards a better alignment and increased focus on internationalisation. This reflects and recalls the definition of European Partnerships in the Horizon Europe regulation<sup>78</sup> as initiatives where the union and its partners ‘commit to jointly support the development and implementation of a programme of research and innovation activities, including those related to market, regulatory or policy uptake.’

The below list of specific activities, going beyond research and innovation activities, can therefore be implemented under the period of 2023-2024 (continuation of the partnership) and are anticipated as expected outputs to:

- Support transnational near-market collaborative research and innovation addressing technological and societal challenges;
- Enhance SME readiness (absorptive capacities in all participating countries),
- Attract wide range of beneficiaries by country and SME type and age;
- Create synergies among national programmes by streamlining their execution;
- Enhance cooperation and knowledge exchange at level of national intermediaries.
- Lessons learnt concerning proposals and project implementations for future improvements.

The proposed continuation of the initiative will help innovative SMEs to further increase their research and innovation capacities and productivity, shorten the time to market of their innovations and to become embedded in global value chains and new and/or expanded markets. It will achieve this through additional support to innovative SMEs in developing products, processes and services through funding market-led, cross-border, research and innovation collaborative projects and providing accompanying measures. The initiative

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<sup>78</sup> Definition as per Article 2(47) of the [Horizon Europe Regulation](#).

addresses collaboration in Europe and beyond, and the commercialisation of new knowledge. Thereby it will strengthen the overall resilience of the European innovation ecosystem.

The overall objective of the initiative, to be conducted during the full duration of Horizon Europe, is to implement a co-funded European Partnership for Innovative SMEs to stimulate economic growth and job creation by enhancing the competitiveness of innovative SMEs while contributing to deliver a positive economic, societal and environmental impact in Europe and beyond.

In order to address that objective, the initiative should:

- Enable innovative SMEs to develop all forms of innovation, including breakthrough innovation, and strengthen market deployment of innovative solutions;
- Foster the internationalisation of European innovative SMEs;
- Connect national programmes to unlock the potential of all partners.

While the award of a grant to continue the Partnership in accordance with this call should be based on a proposal submitted by the coordinator of the consortium funded under European Partnership on Innovative SMEs and the additional activities (which may include additional partners) to be funded by the grant should be subject to an evaluation, this evaluation should take into account the existing context and the scope of the initial evaluation as relevant, and related obligations enshrined in the grant agreement.

Taking into account that the present action is a continuation of the topic HORIZON-EIE-2021-INNOVSMES-01-01: European Partnership on Innovative SMEs and foresees an amendment to an existing grant agreement, the proposal should also present as an Annex the additional activities (including additional partners) to be covered by the award in terms of amendments to the grant agreement that would result from the action.

The Commission envisages to include new actions in its future work programmes to provide continued support to the partnership for the duration of Horizon Europe.

#### Type and range of activities

A main activity would be to run calls for proposals, organise the evaluation process and enable collaborative cross-border research and innovation projects. Beyond providing funding to innovative SMEs for cross-border research and innovation (R&I) collaboration, they should include further promotion of the programme in underrepresented Member States, including but not limited to, through dissemination events, mutual learning seminars or roadshows.

The initiative should exploit synergies with cohesion policy funds and significantly support the widening aspect. In any case, links with regional smart specialisation strategies should be a priority.

Accompanying measures such as INNOWWIDE should be included in the proposal.

### Expected partner composition and geographical coverage

- National administrations and National Funding Bodies (NFBs).

The private sector and research actors would need to be mainly drawn from the activities of the national and/or regional funding organisations. The effort, networks and judgements of these organisations are key to initiate cross-border research collaborations, to help prepare applications and to fund successful participants. The success of the initiative depends largely on these organisations.

A dedicated implementation structure may notably support them through various activities and services such as to organise calls, manage funding, monitor payments and projects and implement dissemination events, roadshows, matchmaking events, webinars etc.

The initiative should have an extended geographical coverage beyond Member States and Associated Countries, and the potential to evolve towards a global programme under Horizon Europe, including through possible involvement of additional partners during the lifetime of the programme. Third countries are welcome to participate in the Partnership in line with the standard criteria related to co-funded partnerships in Horizon Europe. The initiative should promote the ambition towards more projects involving other partners than those in geographical proximity and the sufficient utilisation of the potential of the extended Eureka network.

### Types and levels of contributions from partners

Proposals should mobilise the necessary financial resources from participating national (or regional) research programmes with a view to implementing joints call for transnational proposals resulting in grants to third parties.

Member States are invited to maximise the financial support provided to innovative SMEs through increased national funding during the selection process.

### International dimension

Proposals should focus on supporting international, projects led by innovative SMEs. They should enable international cooperation, enabling small businesses to learn, combine and share expertise and benefit from working beyond national borders.

In line with the ambitions of the partnership to foster international collaboration and the provisions of the model grant agreement, projects involving one legal entity established in a Member State or Associated Country as beneficiary and one legal entity established in a non-associated third country as partner may be supported in the same manner as under Eurostars 2. As per Horizon Europe rules, projects with no participants from Member States or Associated Countries are not eligible for participation in the partnership. At least two thirds (67%) of the projects supported must involve at least two beneficiaries from Member States or Associated Countries.

### Synergies

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Focussing on helping European innovative SMEs to grow and successfully embed in international markets and value chains by developing methodologies and technologies, the partnership is expected to collaborate closely with other relevant European Partnerships, missions and the European Innovation Council in order to ensure coherence and complementarity of activities. Proposals must describe the methodology for their collaboration and the aims the project wants to achieve with this kind of collaboration.

Proposals should include only their commitments for the period covered by the present work programme.



## **Other actions not subject to calls for proposals**

### **1. EU Intellectual Property Helpdesk**

In the European Union (EU), Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), including start-ups, 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)<sup>79</sup> 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 in setting up an EU IP Helpdesk based on the experience of the previous initiatives, inspired by the activities of the existing IP Helpdesk<sup>80</sup>, 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)<sup>81</sup>, the European Patent Office (EPO)<sup>82</sup> and other EU-funded IP support services (namely International IP Helpdesks<sup>83</sup> and IP Scan<sup>84</sup>) and implement promotional activities in coordination with the action "Awareness raising on IP management for European research and innovation (R&I)".<sup>85</sup>

The IP Helpdesk should aim at the following:

- 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);

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<sup>79</sup> On SME challenges with IP, see the joint European Patent Office (EPO)-European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) study "[Intellectual property rights and firm performance in the EU](#)".

<sup>80</sup> More information under "[European IP Helpdesk](#)."

<sup>81</sup> [European Union Intellectual Property Office](#).

<sup>82</sup> [European Patent Office](#).

<sup>83</sup> More information under "[IP Helpdesk](#)."

<sup>84</sup> More information under "[Horizon IP Scan](#)."

<sup>85</sup> 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 start-ups and scale-ups) 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 start-ups (applicants, together with the universities), start-up 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<sup>86</sup> 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: First quarter of 2023

Indicative budget: EUR 4.00 million from the 2023 budget (EU IP Helpdesk)

## **2. Mapping of regulatory compliance advisory services and identification of gaps**

Regulatory compliance oftentimes remains a hurdle for innovators and innovative enterprises to commercialize products and services, and to scale up internationally. Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), startups, and innovators do not always have the necessary knowledge of relevant European Union (EU), national, regional, or local rules that might affect their products or services. Despite harmonisation efforts within the Single Market, innovators and ventures frequently run into a multitude of issues including difficulties in meeting requirements to sell goods or services, insufficient information about applicable rules, fragmentation of rules for cross-border (e-)commerce, and complex administrative procedures when planning their expansion to foreign markets. Enhanced regulatory compliance advisory services can remedy this situation and help innovators to navigate the EU's complex regulatory environment.

This action funds a study and mapping of existing regulatory compliance services across the EU, with the aim to identify existing gaps. In doing so, this action will serve as a basis for potential future actions to provide innovators, startups, and innovative enterprises with

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<sup>86</sup> References: [European Innovation Scoreboard \(EIS\)](#), [Global Innovation Index \(GII\)](#).

optimal support to better position and promote their products or services and to help create better connected support structures for innovators.

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

Indicative timetable: Third quarter of 2023

Indicative budget: EUR 0.50 million from the 2023 budget (Regulatory compliance advisory services )

### **3. Towards a Pilot European Start-up Scoreboard**

There is a growing need for better data collection and analysis with regards to start-ups, scale-ups and their ecosystems. Currently, there are some existing initiatives by both public and private organisations that track the development of the European Union's (EU) startup ecosystem more broadly. However, due to the use of diverging data and definitions, and a number of different methodologies, they are often incompatible and unable to provide a clear picture on the European start-up landscape.

Building on the outcomes of the feasibility study for developing a European Start-up Scoreboard<sup>87</sup>, this action aims at establishing a set of innovation ecosystem specific indicators supported by consistent sources of data to embrace the development of methodological approaches to track, analyse and model innovation ecosystems policies at regional, national and European level with a specific focus on start-ups. This action should establish a credible methodology to monitor and evaluate the quality and inclusivity of start-up ecosystems. It should provide policy makers with insights regarding the short, medium, and longer-term effects and benefits of innovation ecosystems related policies and instruments targeting start-ups and pay particular attention to their efforts and contributions towards the green and the digital transitions and the deep tech<sup>88</sup> sector. The results should include definitions of the data collection methods linked to the proposed indicators that should rely more on microdata gathering improved linking to external databases.

The action should take into account other similar start-up activities covered by Horizon Europe (e.g. Startup Europe, European Startup Nations Standard<sup>89</sup>), and by the Joint Research Centre, including its on-going cross-cutting start-up research and its activities in the context of the Clean Energy Technology Observatory (CETO) and the European Climate Neutral Industry Competitiveness Scoreboard (CIndECS).

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<sup>87</sup> The feasibility study was carried out under Specific Contract No RTD/2021/SC/032 - LC-01864764 “Development of the European Innovation Scoreboard” implementing framework contract No 2018/RTD/A2/OP/PP-07001-2018 (Lot 2: Exploring, Documenting and Analysing R&I policy issues (EDAR)), whose results will be published.

<sup>88</sup> Deep tech is technology that is based on cutting-edge scientific advances and discoveries and is characterised by the need to stay at the technological forefront by constant interaction with new ideas and results from the lab. Deep tech is distinct from ‘high tech’ which tends to refer only to R&D intensity.

<sup>89</sup> More information under [Startup Nations Standard](#).

This action should provide a basis for a European Start-up Scoreboard that will provide European, national and regional policymakers, innovation practitioners and all interested public with a solid, EU-wide analytical tool to help monitor, measure and benchmark the innovation performance of the EU's start-up ecosystem, including individual Member States and their regions, as well as countries associated to Horizon Europe and other key international economic partners.

Form of Funding: Procurement

Type of Action: Public procurement

Indicative timetable: Fourth quarter of 2023

Indicative budget: EUR 0.50 million from the 2023 budget (Pilot European Start-up Scoreboard)

#### **4. Use of individual experts on assisting with the monitoring of actions (2023 & 2024)**

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.

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

Form of Funding: Other budget implementation instruments

Type of Action: Expert contract action

Indicative timetable: First quarter of 2023 and first quarter of 2024

Indicative budget: EUR 0.20 million from the 2023 budget (Monitoring (2023)) and EUR 0.20 million from the 2024 budget (Monitoring (2024))

#### **5. Use of individual experts in support of the EIC FORUM support (2023 & 2024)**

The European Innovation Council (EIC) Forum fosters in an informal manner, 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. The Forum acts as an interface between the sections of Pillar III of Horizon Europe, ensuring coordination between the EIC and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), as well as with other relevant sections of Pillar I and II. By involving also other relevant Directorates Generals (DGs) from the Commission, the Forum aims at promoting a coherent and inclusive approach to the European Union's innovation ecosystems, by co-creating and co-designing policies and instruments.

Experts will provide intelligence in support of the work of the EIC Forum and/or its working groups. Their aim will be to gather new or more robust evidence and / or to produce analyses in support of policy discussions.

A special allowance of EUR 450 in the form of a daily unit cost for each full working day spent will be paid to the individual experts appointed in their personal capacity who act independently and in the public interest.

Form of Funding: Other budget implementation instruments

Type of Action: Expert contract action

Indicative timetable: First quarter of 2023 and first quarter of 2024

Indicative budget: EUR 0.30 million from the 2023 budget (EIC Forum Support (2023)) and EUR 0.30 million from the 2024 budget (EIC Forum Support (2024))

## **6. Commission fee as EUREKA member (administrative costs)**

This action will cover the Commission fee as a member of Eureka (administrative costs). This action will support coordination activities aimed at increasing complementarities and synergy between EUREKA and the Horizon Europe in areas of common interest.

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.

The European Union is a member of EUREKA and, as such, contributes to the budget of the EUREKA Secretariat.

Type of Action: Subscription action

Indicative timetable: First quarter of 2023 and first quarter of 2024

Indicative budget: EUR 0.50 million from the 2023 budget (EUREKA membership) and EUR 0.50 million from the 2024 budget (EUREKA membership)

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**Budget<sup>90</sup>**

	Budget line(s)	2023 Budget (EUR million)	2024 Budget (EUR million)
<b>Calls</b>			
HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-01		21.00	
	<i>from 01.020302</i>	<i>21.00</i>	
HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-02		8.00	
	<i>from 01.020302</i>	<i>8.00</i>	
HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-01			44.50 <sup>91</sup>
	<i>from 01.020302</i>		<i>44.50</i>
HORIZON-EIE-2024-CONNECT-02			3.50
	<i>from 01.020302</i>		<i>3.50</i>
HORIZON-EIE-2023-INNOVSMES-01		34.54	36.58
	<i>from 01.020302</i>	<i>34.54</i>	<i>36.58</i>
<b>Other actions</b>			
Public procurement		5.00	
	<i>from 01.020302</i>	<i>5.00</i>	
Expert contract action		0.50	0.50
	<i>from 01.020302</i>	<i>0.50</i>	<i>0.50</i>
Subscription action		0.50	0.50
	<i>from 01.020302</i>	<i>0.50</i>	<i>0.50</i>
<b>Estimated total budget</b>		<b>69.54</b>	<b>85.58</b>

<sup>90</sup> 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 years 2023 and 2024.

<sup>91</sup> To which EUR 25.00 million from the 'European Innovation Council (EIC)' budget will be added making a total of EUR 69.50 million for this call.