ZAZ VENTURES
DEEP TECH INNOVATION. FUNDED

Securing EU funding for
deep tech startups
– purely success fee based

Innovation Fund, LIFE, EIC Accelerator

Contact: taha.adnan@zazventures.com

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ZAZ VENTURES
DEEP TECH INNOVATION. FUNDED

Why listen to us?

Leading EU funding specialists – purely success fee based

- Market-leading success rates
- 180+ startups (€1Bn+) funded since 2021
- Focus instruments:
  - EIC Transition
  - EIC Accelerator
  - EIC STEP Scale Up
  - LIFE
  - Innovation Fund

➢ Mission: Getting high-impact deep tech funded

Innovation Fund Webinar IF25

Matthew Gentry

ZAZ Ventures

Contents

ZAZ VENTURES
DEEP TECH INNOVATION. FUNDED

The Innovation Fund structure

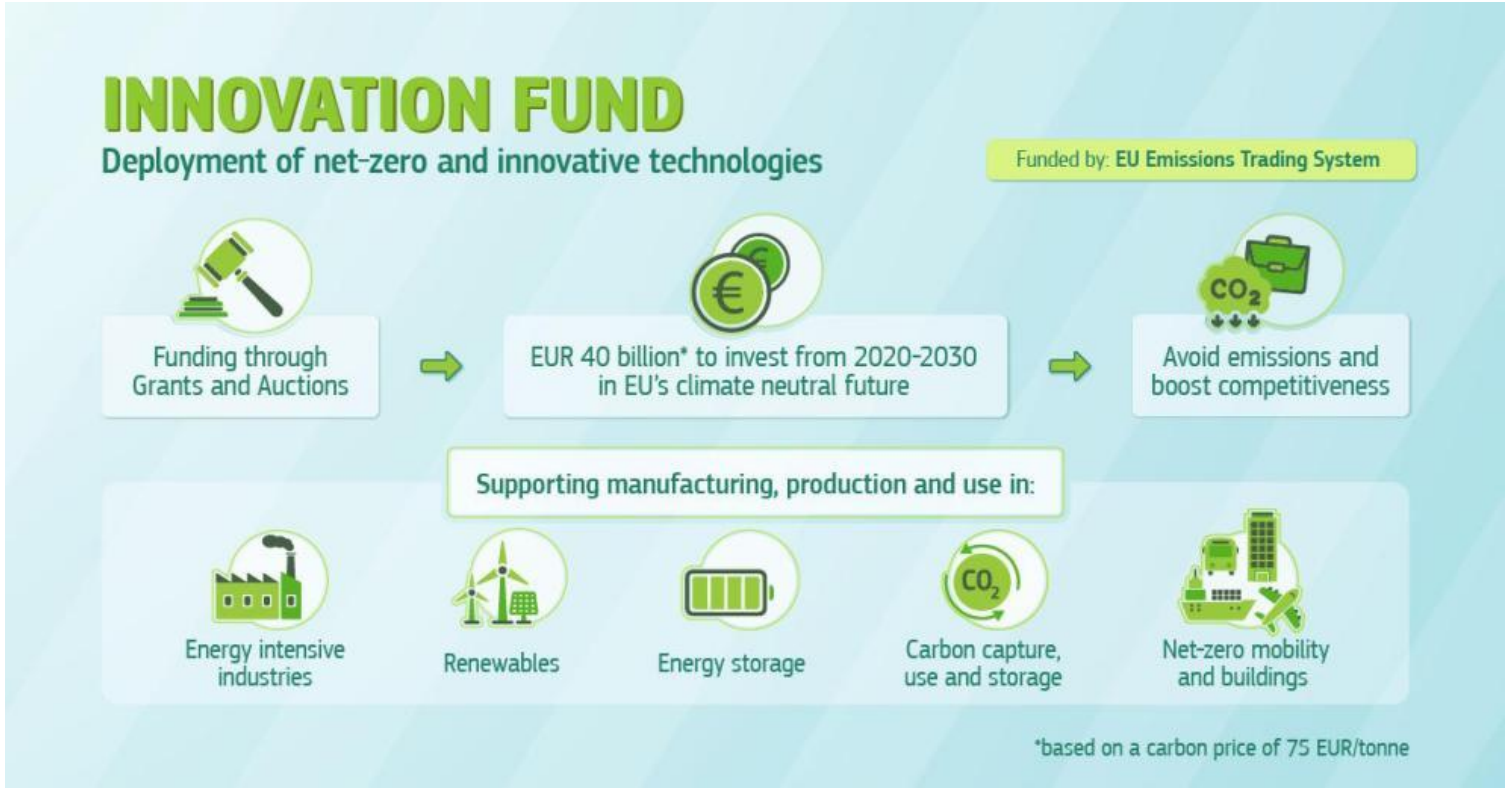
The Innovation Fund

- Focus on **highly innovative technologies** and **big flagship projects** with European value added that will lead to significant emission reductions.
- **Sharing the risk** with project promoters to help with the demonstration of first-of-a-kind highly innovative projects.

When? TRL 5-9
Who? Single applicants or consortia
Application process:
Single stage written application
Eligibility: project must be located in

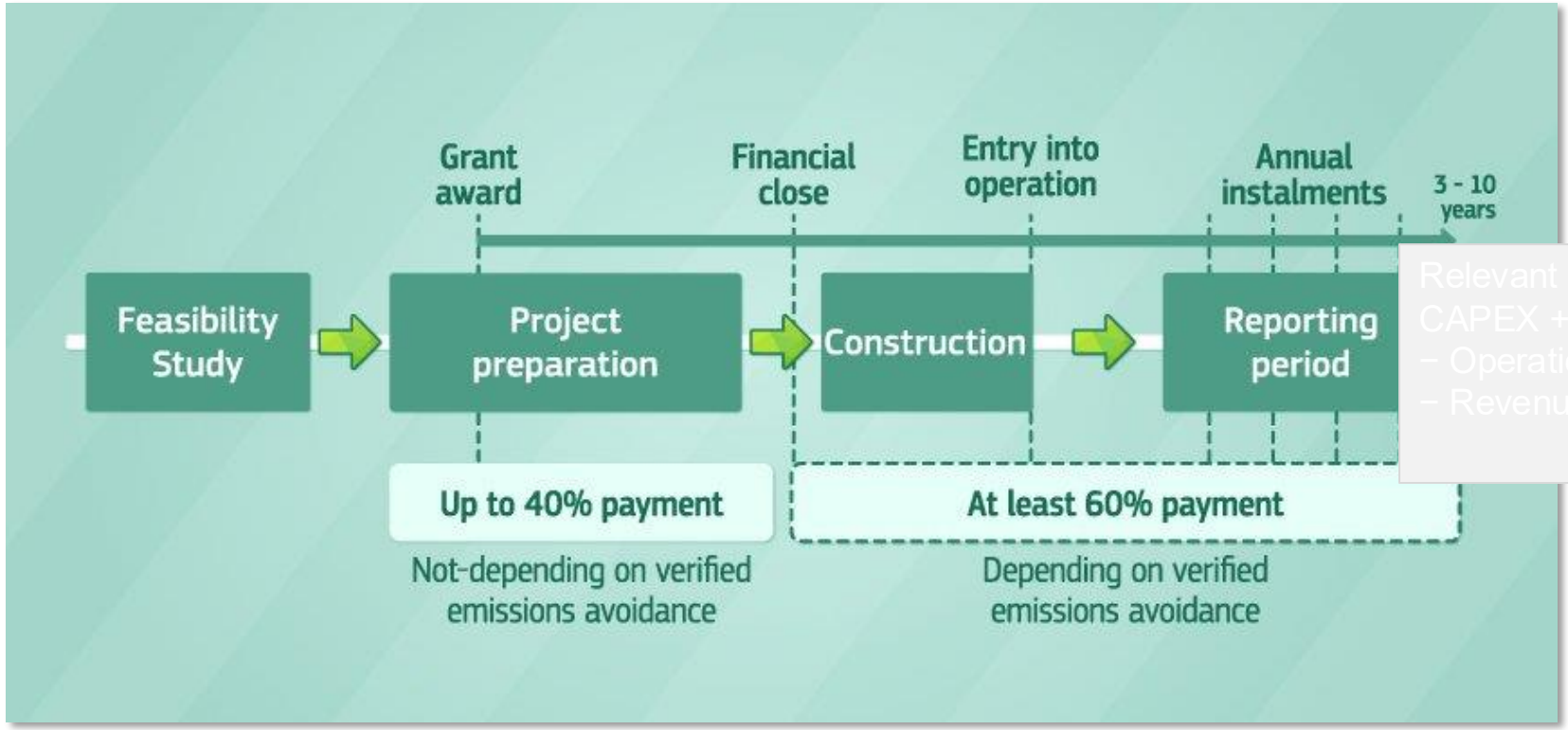
- EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories)
- EEA countries: Iceland and Norway

Deadline: April 2026 (estimated)
Evaluation: May – June 2026
Results: Oct 2026
GA signing Dec 2026 – March 2027



Funding mechanisms

- Up to 60% of relevant costs
  - Up to 60% of the additional capital and operational costs linked to innovation for up to 10 years.
    - Of which, up to 40% of the grant can be used for Devex

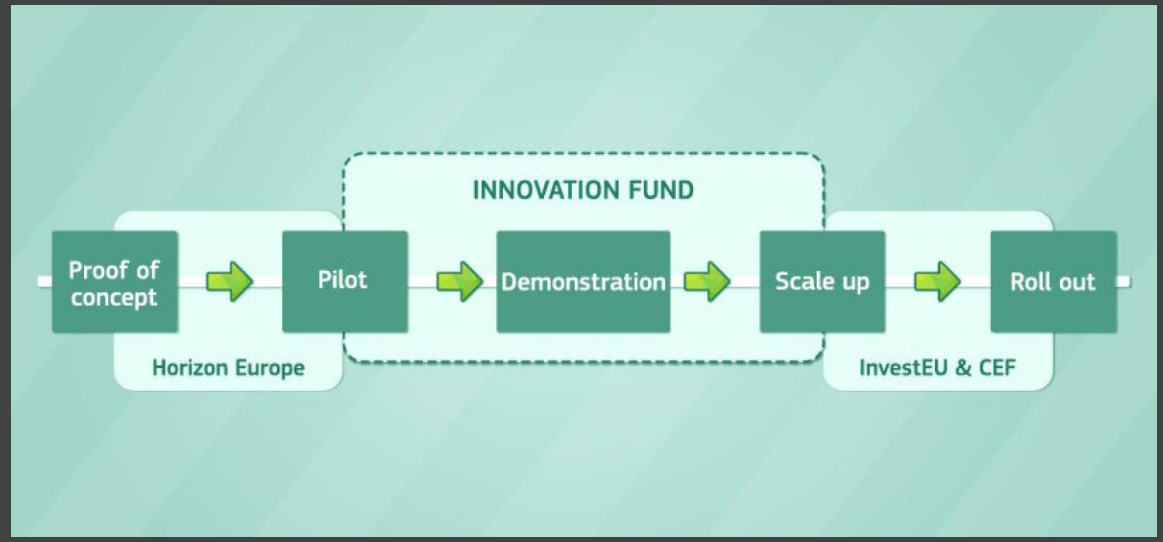


Relevant costs is defined as:
CAPEX + OPEX
− Operational Benefits
− Revenues

Innovation Fund: Co-financing

Innovation Fund regular grants can be combined with funding from other support programmes, for example:

- Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEI)
- Connecting Europe Facility
- Horizon Europe
- InvestEU
- Modernisation Fund
- Just Transition Fund
- Enhanced European Innovation Council (EIC) pilot
- Private capital



https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/eu-funding-climate-action/innovation-fund/what-innovation-fund_en#other-forms-of-support

Scope and objectives

The Innovation Fund focuses **on large-scale demonstration** of innovative clean technology solutions that can **significantly lower greenhouse gas emissions**.

It also supports the construction and operation of **pilot projects** that test, validate, or improve new technologies before they hit the market.

- Sub-topics are based on total CAPEX size (2024 call)

General decarbonisation:

- Large-Scale Projects >€100M
- Medium-Scale Projects €20-100M
- Small-Scale Projects €2.5-20M

Additional calls:

- Clean-tech manufacturing >€2.5M
- Pilot projects >€2.5M
- Battery manufacturing >€2.5M

IF2024 budgets

Topic	Topic budget
NZT-GENERAL-Large Scale Projects	EUR 1 200 000 000
NZT-GENERAL-Medium Scale Projects	EUR 200 000 000
NZT-GENERAL-Small Scale Projects	EUR 100 000 000
NZT-CLEAN-TECH MANUFACTURING	EUR 700 000 000
NZT-PILOTS	EUR 200 000 000
BATT-EV-CELLS	EUR 1 000 000 000

Comparison of the Innovation Fund topics

NZT

	Large scale call	Medium scale call	Small scale call	Clean-tech manufacturing	Pilot projects
Operation period	5–10 years	5–10 years	3–10 years	5–10 years	3–5 years
Capex size	€100M+	€20–100M	€2.5–20M	€2.5M+	€2.5M+
Focus	General decarbonisation projects			Favours innovation & project maturity	Favours highly innovative projects
	Large scale, first-of-a-kind commercial plants Very high commercial and maturity expectations	Industrial demonstrations, FOAK	First-of-a-kind demos and focused industrial pilots *May be changes to come*	Manufacturing only, components or complete systems	Lower absolute GHG avoidance requirements Higher relative avoidance Lower commercial expectation

Assessing project readiness

Scoring criteria

- Scoring cascade

1. Check eligibility and admissibility
(if all requirements are not met, the evaluation is stopped)

2. Assess **Degree of Innovation** criterion
(if the score is below threshold, the evaluation is stopped)

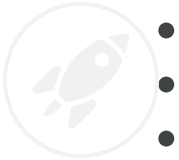
3. Assess **GHG Emissions Avoidance** and **Project Maturity** criteria
(if all requirements are not met or score is below threshold, the evaluation is stopped)

4. Assess **Replicability** and **Cost efficiency** criteria

Degree of innovation

Scoring criteria

Innovation Level



- State of the art
- Technical description
- Key metrics

Distinctiveness

- Innovation Fund projects
- Innovative elements

Breakthrough Potential

- Transform or create new markets
- Scalability and broader changes across sectors

Points to consider now

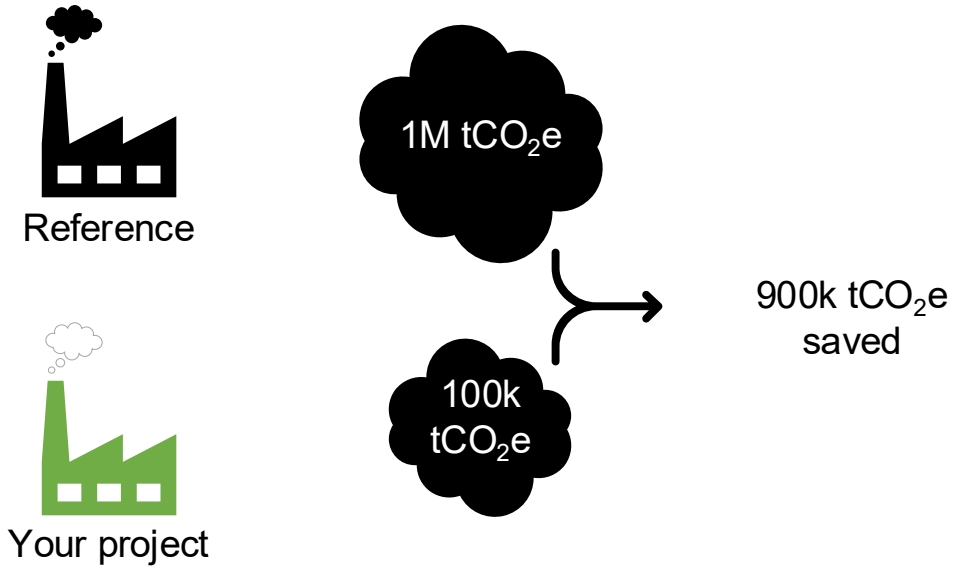
- What is the state of the art, including projects due to be online in the next few years?
- What makes your technoloy stand out? E.g., capacity, technology components, efficiency.
- What markets are you targeting? Is the use case innovative?
- Is your process unique in any way?

GHG emission avoidance

- Scoring criteria

Absolute GHG Emission Avoidance

- Difference between the GHG emissions expected from the **project** and those in the **reference scenario** over 10 years.



- Points to consider now
  - What is your production capacity?
  - What are you replacing?
  - Is the end use case confirmed? Does this affect the reference case?
  - Have you done an LCA?
  - What is your energy sourcing strategy?
    - Does it lead to additional RES?
  - What is your cost efficiency?
    - Grant ask versus tCO2e avoided

GHG emission avoidance

What is your cost efficiency?

Cost efficiency =

Requested Innovation Fund grant
+ other public support

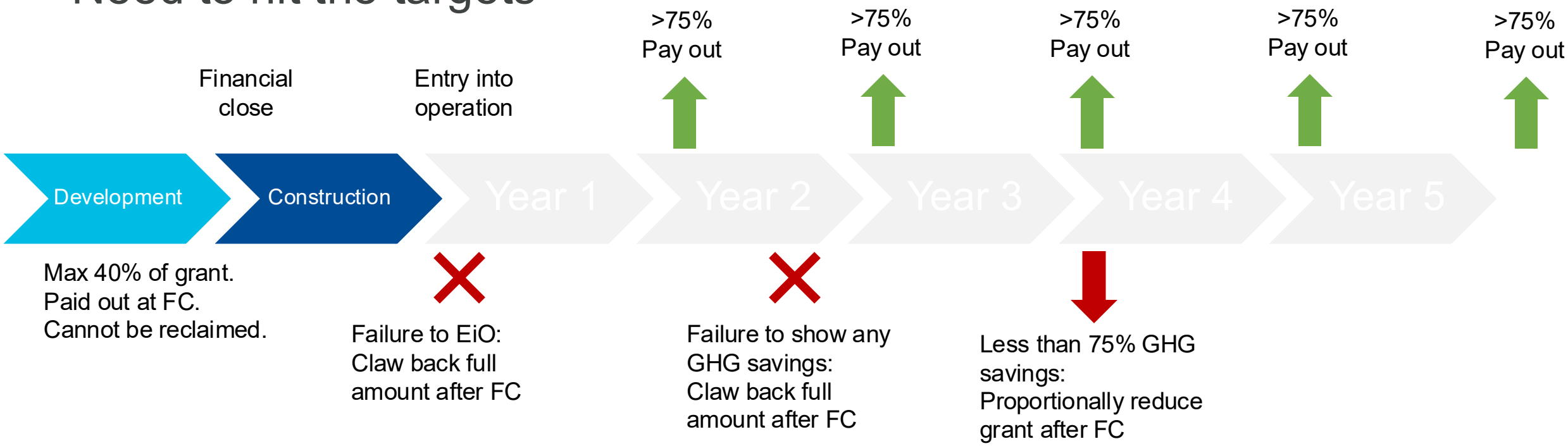
Absolute GHG emission avoidance
During 10 years after entry into operation (criteria 1)

C/E targets

Target score	NZT + Clean-tech	Pilot
Pass	<€200/tCO2	<€2000/tCO2
10/12	<€41/tCO2	<€415/tCO2
11/12	<€25/tCO2	<€248/tCO2
12/12	<€8/tCO2	<€82/tCO2

How does GHG reporting work?

- Need to hit the targets



CINEA prefer the minimum reporting period (3 or 5 years)

Project maturity

Technical Maturity

- Technical **feasibility of achieving expected project outputs**
- Technical risks and mitigation measures
- Reliability of the technical information provided

Provide evidence:
Main terms of supply, construction, technical feasibility reports, demonstration data

Points to consider now

- What is your current TRL?
  - Do you have a pilot system operational?
  - Has the whole system been validated?
- What makes you stand out (performance)?
  - How can you demonstrate that?
- Is there a FEED/pre-FEED study

Project maturity

Operational Maturity

- Credibility and detail of the **project implementation plan**, including milestones and deliverables
- **Project management team's track record**
- Strategy for obtaining required **permits**, **IP rights**, and other regulatory procedures.
- Examines the **strategy for ensuring public acceptance** and the project's ability to commence operations as per market standards or quicker.

Provide evidence:
Permits, licences, authorisations (e.g., building permit, EIA, LCA, technical feasibility reports)

Points to consider now

- Is the site secured?
- Is the EPC secured?
- Do you have a grid connection?
- What is the permitting state of play?
  - Environmental permit
  - Building permit
- Are you engaged with the local community, municipalities, etc?

Project maturity

Financial Maturity

- The **project's ability to reach financial close** within 4 years
- **Credibility of the business model, financial plan**
- Level of **support from project shareholders** and the solidity of expected debt terms relative to project risks and returns.
- Ensure that assumptions used for WACC adequately reflect the project risks
- Business and financial risks and mitigation measures

Provide evidence:
Support for the project, including, e.g. heads of terms, LoIs, off-take agreements and other key commercial contracts
Quotations, POs

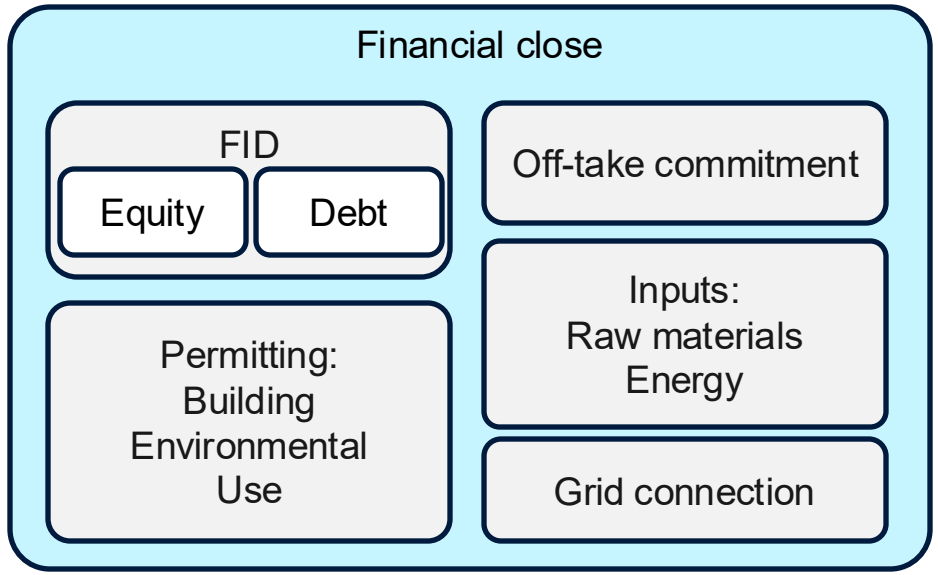
Points to consider now

- Have you secured the necessary financing?
  - IF grant will only be paid out after work packages are completed
- What is the off-take strategy?
  - Who can provide evidence of willingness to pay, pricing, and volume?
- Quotations for all project inputs
  - Raw materials
  - CAPEX
- Even projects with negative or low IRR can pass the Financial maturity sub criteria thanks to the solid letters of commitment from the project sponsors/shareholders

The route to financial close

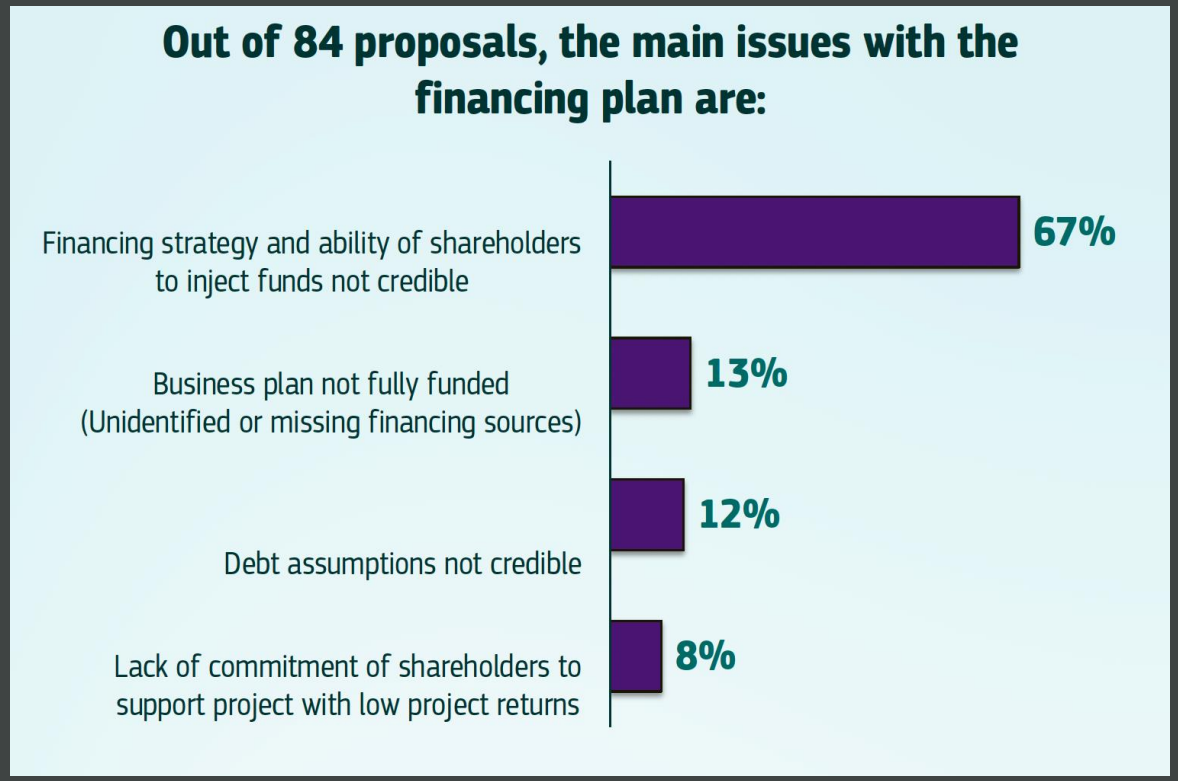
Must reach within 4 years*

- Project business plan and profitability
- Soundness of the financing plan
- Commitment of project funders
- Understanding of the financial and business risks



**bonus if <2 years in manufacturing cases*

Main fail points:



Preparing the application

The Innovation Fund application

Supporting documents

Feasibility study
Business plan } 60 pages each

GHG avoidance calculation (excel format)

Financial Information File (excel format)
Detailed financial model (own template)

Participant Information File

Main proposal

Section A – administrative information
Section B (80 pages max)

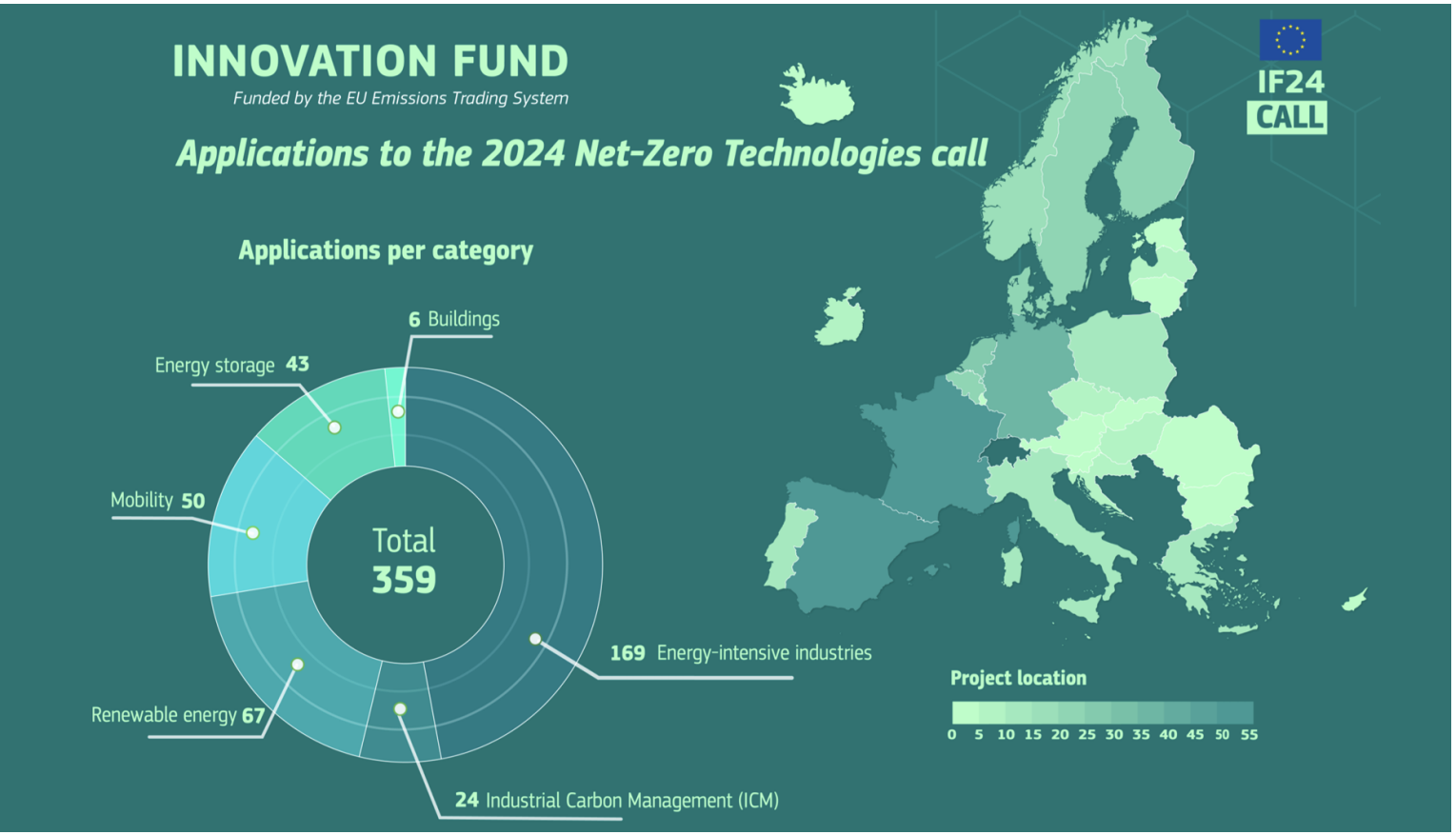
1. Project applicant
2. GHG emission avoidance
3. Degree of innovation
4. Project maturity
5. Replicability
6. Cost efficiency
7. Work Packages

Section C – Gathering indicators

Annexes

- Documents indicating support for the project, including, e.g. heads of terms (if already available), LoIs
- Main terms of supply, construction and off-take agreements and other key commercial contracts
- Permits, licences, authorisations (e.g., building permit, EIA, LCA, technical feasibility reports)
- Third party due diligence reports

Data from the IF24 call

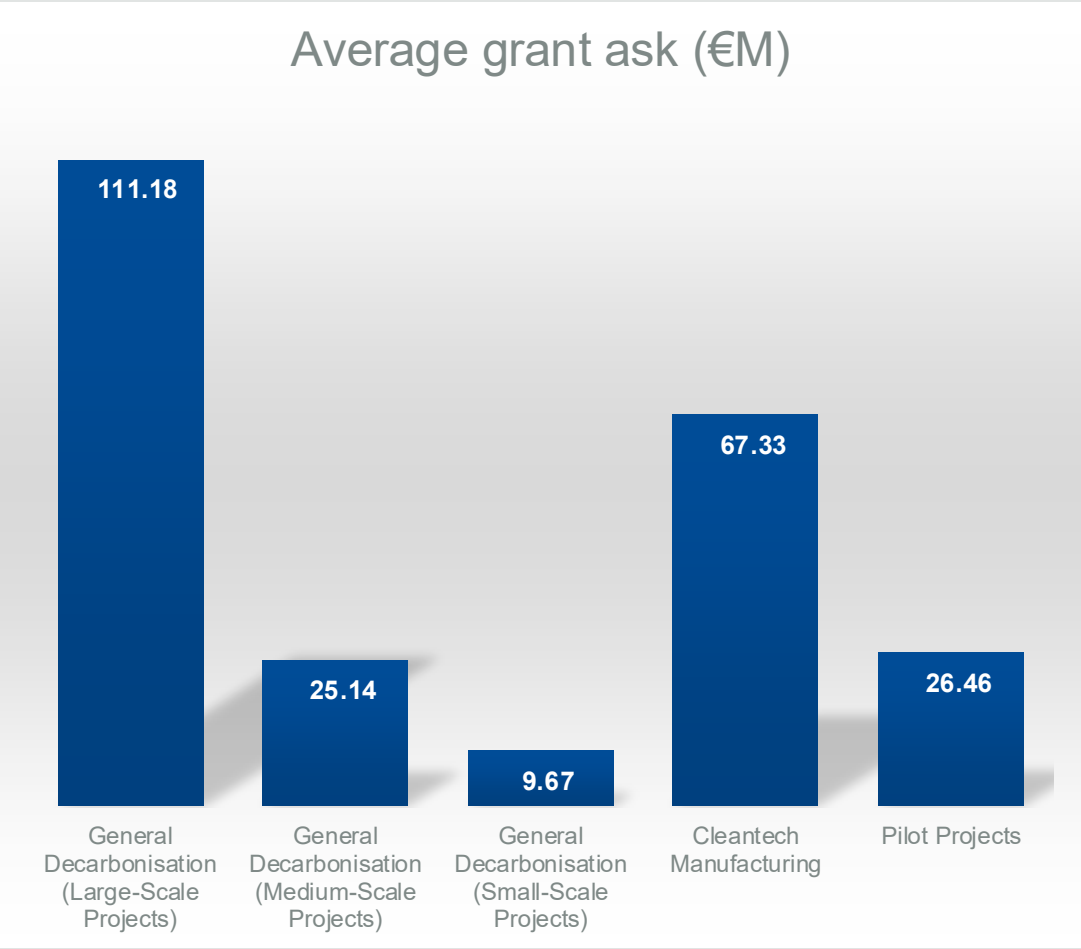


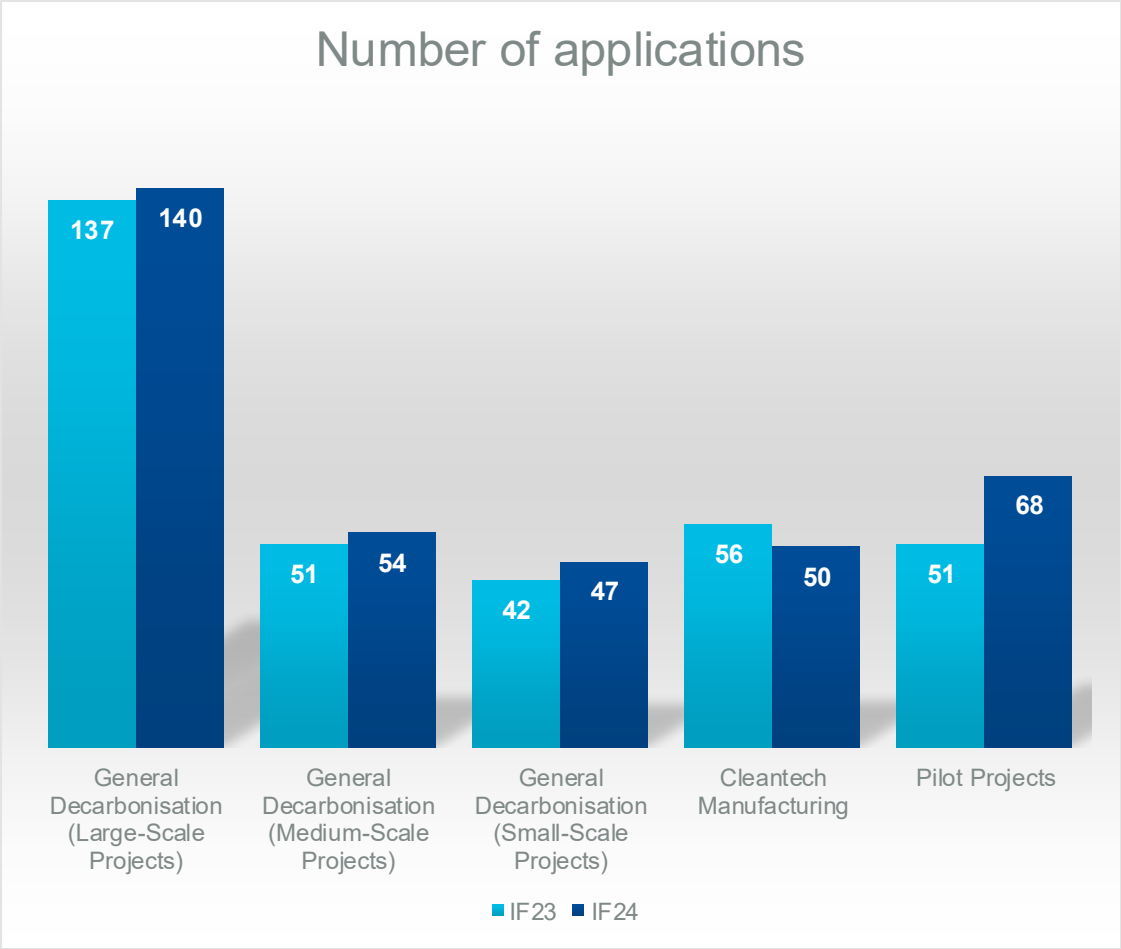
- Eastern and Southern Europe underrepresented in applications (and funding!)
- EII remains the largest sector

EU Policy framework supports EII challenges

- Clean Industrial Deal Sectoral Frameworks
  - Automotive Action Plan
  - Steel and Metals Action Plan
  - Chemicals Industry Package (Q4/2025)
- Industrial Decarbonisation Accelerator Act
- Existing initiatives
  - EU ETS, CBAM, RED III
  - Trade defence instruments

How much do projects ask for?





Previous Zaz Ventures successes

- **Liquid Wind AB**: Large scale call
  - First of a kind e-Methanol plant in Sweden (50k tpa)
  - **Awarded PDA** in IF22
- **Vertoro B.V**: Small scale call
  - Cellulose to crude sugar oil (CSO®) technology
  - **Awarded €4M** in IF22
- **Madoqua/Power2X**: Large scale call 2022, 2023
  - Set to be the world's largest Green Ammonia plant
  - Part of a large Hydrogen hub in Portugal
  - Winner of the first Hydrogen Bank Auction (competing funding)
  - **Received PDA** and **STEP Seal of excellence** in IF23 call
- **Elcogen**: Clean-tech manufacturing call 2023
  - Solid-oxide electrolyser manufacturer in Estonia
  - **Received €25M** funding under **IF23 Manufacturing call**
- **Plagazi:** Pilot call 2023
  - Waste to hydrogen plant based in Sweden
  - **Awarded €29.5M** funding under **IF23 Pilot call**

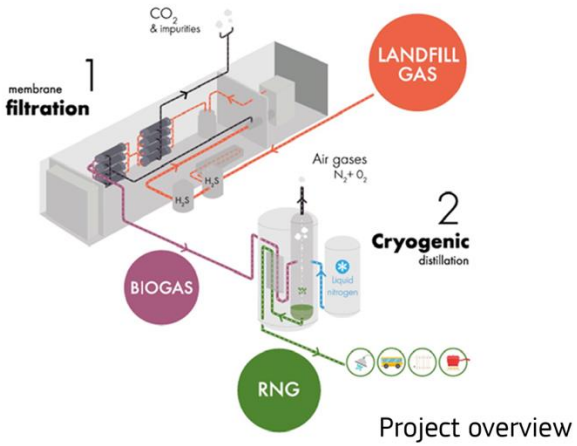
Bio-based industries in the Innovation Fund

Lignin Industries AB - Renol®

- **Project location**: Sweden
- **Description**: This project involves constructing a biorefinery to produce RENOL, a renewable and **biodegradable biomaterial from kraft lignin** to replace fossil-based plastics (e.g., polyethylene). It uses under-valorised lignin from pulp industries to produce thermoplastics for packaging.
- **EU contribution**: €4,386,624

W4W – Waga 4 World

- **Project location**: Spain
- **Description**: This project deploys the next generation of the WAGABOX technology to **recover biomethane from landfill gas**. It turns waste into renewable gas, substituting fossil gas, without relying on feed-in tariffs, thereby encouraging landfill gas recovery and reducing methane emissions.
- **EU contribution**: €2,452,401



Project overview

LIFE Programme

Luisa Marques

LIFE Programme

Contents

- Programme overview
- Eligibility & Conditions
- Circular Economy and Quality of Life
- Preparing a proposal
- Evaluation criteria
- Project exemples
- Comparison with EIC-Accelerator

LIFE Programme

Overview

- LIFE is the only EU programme dedicated specifically to the environment and climate action
- Managed by CINEA
- Over 3000 projects funded over 33 years
- Total LIFE Budget 2021-2027 5.43B EUR
- Different grant types:
  - Action grants;
  - Operating grants (NGOs).
- Standard Action Projects (SAP) are the most common
- Annual calls

LIFE Programme

Overview

Four sub-programmes

- Nature and biodiversity (977.2M EUR*)
- Climate Mitigation and Adaptation (367.7M EUR*)
- Clean Energy Transition (413.3M EUR*)
- Circular Economy & Quality of Life (568.5M EUR*)

↳ Standard Action Projects (SAP):

- CEQL SAP 2025-2027: 250M EUR
- Deadline: Sep (single-stage)
- Evaluation: Fev/Mar
- Grant signature: June

*Grants only Multi-Annual Work Programme 2025-27

LIFE Programme

Eligibility

Entities; beneficiaries and project implementation

- Single entity or consortium
- All entity types (private, public, NGOs, and Academia) except natural persons
- Eligible countries:
  - EU countries,
  - Iceland,
  - Moldova,
  - North Macedonia
  - Montenegro and
  - Ukraine.
- UK, Switzerland and Norway and Liechtenstein do not participate

Close-to-market projects

- Companies can participate or lead projects
- Close-to-market projects driving economy, as well as society take up of solutions through an explicit market-oriented approach

LIFE SAP funding

Conditions

- Funding rate: 60% + 7% indirect costs (Circular Economy SAP projects)
- Project duration: 2-10 years
- Indicative range of funding: 2-10M EUR (record 500k-5M EUR)
- Funds development, demonstration, and promotion of innovative solutions that:
  - Drive environmental impact
  - Align with EU Policy

Project alignment

- Policy alignment (EU Green Deal, Circular Economy Action Plan, Zero Pollution Action Plan)
- Alignment with priority topics (2025-2027) assessed under Relevance evaluation criteria
- In some cases, needs to be innovative at a Member State or industry level to maximise on Relevance criteria
- Research activities are not eligible
- New technology development projects need to be taken to Operational scale to realise impacts

LIFE SAP funding

Circular Economy & Quality of Life

Priority Topics

- Circular Economy and Waste
  - Recovery of resources from Waste
  - Circular Economy and the Environment
- Zero Pollution and sustainable management of natural resources
  - Air
  - Water
  - Soil
  - Waste
  - Chemicals
  - Industrial Emissions and Safety
  - A new European Bauhaus (separate envelope)

Bioeconomy specific

2.1.2 Circular Economy and the Environment

- the implementation of business and consumption models, systems, solutions to support value chains, **inc bio-based ones** (in particular EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy) aiming at reducing or preventing resource use and waste
- implementation of designs and plans that mitigate environmental impacts at unit or societal level, including **the use of sustainable bio-based materials to replace fossil-based materials in new products**

LIFE SAP funding

Preparing a proposal

- Significant effort
  - 120-pages main application
  - Detailed budget
  - Credible intervention logic
  - Baseline assessments and estimations for environmental KPIs
- Putting together a consortium to cover the value chain and to maximise impact

- Programme is getting more competitive with record level of applications in 2025

LIFE SAP funding

Evaluation criteria

Min pass 10, max 20 points

- Relevance (Policy + Project macro approach)
- Quality (Impact + Sustainability; Exploitation + Replication)
- **Impact** (Clarity +Feasibility + Appropriateness few specific aspects **(weighted 1.5)**
- Resources (Project team + Budget + Project env.footprint)

Bonus points

0 or 2 points per criterion

- Builds up or scales an EU funded project
- Delivers synergies between LIFE sub-programmes
- Transnational cooperation
- Catalytic effect
- Implemented in Outermost Regions

LIFE SAP funding

Project Examples

Acronym: **LIFE RESTART**
Country: **Italy**
Turning beer industry waste into high-performance bioplastic

Acronym: **LIFE ECOFFEED**
Country: **Spain**
Spent coffee grounds into animal feed

Acronym: **LIFE WASTE2PROTEIN**
Country: **Germany**
Pilot plant for insect protein production from biowaste as sustainable alternative to fish and soy meal for animal feed

Acronym: **LIFE COMPOLIVE**
Country: **Spain**
transforming olive pruning waste into high-value bio-composites for industrial applications

LIFE SAP vs EIC-Accelerator

LIFE SAP CEQL

- Development and demonstration, into operational scale
- Single-beneficiary or consortium
- All entity types
- Solutions or best practices
- 60%+7% funding rate
- 2-10 years duration
- 2-10M EUR average grant

EIC-Accelerator

- Later stages of development (TRL 6) and scale-up
- Single-beneficiary
- SME’s only
- Deep tech
- 70%+25% funding rate
- up to 2 years
- 2.5M EUR grant + 10M EUR equity

European Innovation Council (EIC)

The EIC instruments explicitly targets deep tech innovation.

What is Deep Tech?

Innovation based on scientific discovery or technological breakthrough with...

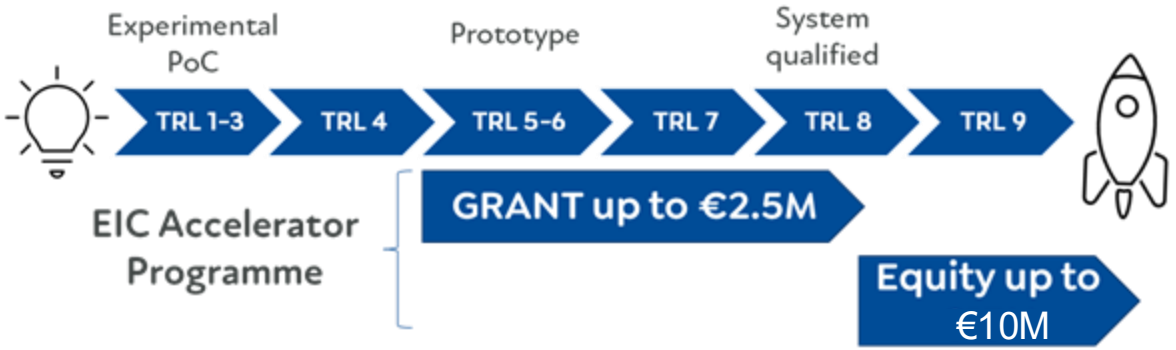
- R&D risk
- Product/market fit risk

The EICA deeptech definition:

Innovation based on scientific discovery, radical thinking or technological breakthroughs

EIC Accelerator

Bringing deep tech innovation to market



- Supporting future deep tech champions
- Great economic and wider impact potential (low-carbon, health, strategic independence etc.)
- Market creation or disruption
- Significant funding for high-risk / high-impact innovation projects

Grant Component

- Up to €2.5M*
- Only for TRL 6 to 8 activities
- Funding 70% of project costs (typically 2 years)
- Pre-Financing at M_0= 45% of total grant
- Lump sum grant

Equity Component

- Up to €10M
- Typically for deployment and scale-up (TRL 9)
- 1 : 1 co-funding by external investors

Depending on funding needs and maturity, one can apply for **Grant only, Blended Finance or EIC equity only**

* Grant amount can exceptionally be higher if well-justified, but only for blended case

EIC Accelerator

Who should apply?

Innovation:

- Deep tech with strong IP
- Strategic development project to derisk technology:
  - High risk and high return
  - Capital intensive (€2M–3.5M grant project)
  - TRL 6 – 8 activities in grant project

Commercial & Impact Potential:

- Economic potential at international scale
- Transforming, creating or disrupting markets
- Addressing major societal challenges in line with EU priorities

Team:

- Strong & Complimentary core team covering both business and technical aspects
- Good communicators

EIC Accelerator

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Team:

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- Good communicators

When should you apply?

Mature applicants often have a better funding chance, but you can also be too late

- Minimum: TRL 5 completed !
- Clear Go-to-Market strategy
- Provable traction with pioneer customers (LOIs)

- Seed funding raised (ideally)
- Funding gap exists

- Strong commitment from management team (EICA application is very demanding)
- Detailed materials available such as business plans

Budgets, Process and Deadlines

Budgets 2026:

- Open ~ €414M
- Challenges ~ €220M

A highly competitive instrument…

- Last years: about 5% of applicants funded per cut-off, Likely more competitive going forward

Full application cut-offs:

- 6 cut-offs per year (Short Stage apply anytime)
- 3 interview dates

2026 cut-offs:

- 7 Jan, 4 Mar (Interview in Apr)
- 6 May, 8 July (Interview in Aug)
- 2 Sep, 3 Nov (Interview in Dec)

EIC Accelerator

Budgets, Process and Deadlines

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2026 cut-offs:

- 7 Jan, 4 Mar (Interview in May)
- 6 May, 8 July (Interview in Sep)
- 2 Sep, 3 Nov (Interview in Jan27)

An application process in three stages

1. Short Stage – 3min video, pitch deck, 12-page pdf – key questions

➢ Note: Schemes to skip the Short Stage: *Plug-in* (beneficiaries of selected national funding programmes), *Fast-track* (EIC Transition or EITs prgs)

2. Full application – 50-page pdf (detailed business plan + budgeted work plan), financial forecast, pitch deck, FTO, video
3. Interview – 10min pitch and 35min Q&A

Total of 3 application attempts at EICA across all stages (then excluded till end of 2027)

EIC ACCELERATOR CHALLENGES

Dedicated budgets for innovation in specific strategic areas

- Yearly changing topics
- Dedicated budgets:
  ~ €220M in 2026: 5 Challenges
- Application process: Like the Open call plus additional impact questions at full application stage
- Competitiveness vary strongly by Challenge

⇒ Funding chances can be much higher, if strong fit

Challenges for 2026

1) Climate Adaption

Technologies to address extreme heat; climate smart agriculture; water management and remediation; flood & coastal protection.

2) Critical Raw Materials

Extraction to the recycling of CRMs and SRMs.

3) Regenerating Agri-Soils

Biotech driven solutions to improve soil health, address soil pollution and reduce dependency on synthetic chemicals.

4) Advanced Materials for Energy and Storage

Developing advanced materials with added functionalities for energy storage or energy harvesting systems.

5) Fusion

Advancing new fusion reactor concepts and key enabling technologies for fusion power plants.

New: EIC STEP Scale Up

Facilitates large equity raises for strategic technologies for Europe

Funding?

- €10M – 30M equity from EIC for €50M – 150M rounds
- EIC contribution: max 1/3 of the round, ideally 1/5

Who?

- SMEs including startups or small midcaps
- HQ in EU or associated country (+ ownership)
- Strategic technologies (as defined by STEP, Strategic Technology for Europe Platform)

Key requirement: Pre-commitment from investors, minimum 20% of total round

New: EIC STEP Scale Up

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Key requirement: Pre-commitment from investors, minimum 20% of total round

Application process:

- Written application: Business plan (50p), financials, pitch deck, pre-commitment letters…
- Interview

Submit anytime – applications batched every quarter

Strategic tech areas:

- Digital & Deeptech: Semicon, AI, quantum, advanced connectivity, sensing, robotics…
- Cleantech: Net-zero solutions like solar, wind, batteries, geothermal, H2, biogas, CC, nuclear…
- Biotech: Includes critical medicines, DNA/RNA, proteins, cell engineering, gene vectors…

Special focus 2025: semiconductors & quantum

ZAZ VENTURES
DEEP TECH INNOVATION. FUNDED

Why we deliver the best chances for EU funding success

Our distinctive “no win no fee” model:

- Careful qualification: Ensuring fit
- Strong alignment for success
- Outstanding consultants supported by domain experts
- Well-structured process: from funding case development through to interview preparation
- Focus and scale: profound understanding of key EU instruments for high-impact deeptech

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