



Towards FP10: EU-LIFE's vision for the European Innovation Council (EIC)

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TOWARDS FP10: EU-LIFE's vision for the EIC

Creative solutions for the challenges of today and tomorrow require ground-breaking ideas and scientific results that are seamlessly integrated into the innovation process. The creation of Pillar III in Horizon Europe programme as a flagship for innovation, and in particular the establishment of the [European Innovation Council \(EIC\)](#), addressed this need for efficient collaboration between excellent research and innovation in Europe. In FP10, the next Research & Innovation programme, this vital bridging role of the EIC must be strengthened and maintained, by investing in strategies with long term impact.

We hereby outline EU-LIFE's views for the EIC in FP10 to secure high impact innovation, **from an overall vision to its implementation**. This is part of EU-LIFE's contribution to the policy debate on the next Framework Programme and follows the position paper [EU-LIFE's 10 Guiding Principles for FP10](#) launched in January 2024.

OVERALL VISION

- **Promote a solid EIC model, rebalancing public and private funding**
The structure of the EIC is fit for purpose and we support its continuation using three main instruments: Pathfinder, Transition and Accelerator. However, it is crucial to further recognize the vital bridging role of the EIC in **fostering efficient interplay between excellent research and innovation**, thereby providing the means for a smooth transition from ideas and scientific results to the innovation process.¹ ²This means that more emphasis should be placed on pathfinder and transition instruments, as these programmes ensure the development of breakthrough ideas and results leading to disruptive innovation.
In addition, **public funding through FP10 needs to focus on high impact/high risk research and innovation** – i.e. lower Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs), where it is challenging for the private sector to invest - while promoting private sector investments in the development and implementation of research findings at higher TRLs. Therefore, the **instruments Pathfinder and Transition should be strongly and solely supported by public funding**, whereas **Accelerator should rely on private investment**.
- **Commit to support long-term, high impact innovation, by allocating more resources to the EIC.** According to the Horizon Europe strategic plan 2025-2027 analysis³, the average success rate in the EIC is quite low at 8.8%, thus suggesting that higher funding is needed for the EIC to accomplish its role. Part of the increased funding, notably for the Accelerator schemes, must come from the private sector. In addition, a wider allocation from the FP10 budget could be envisaged for Pathfinder and Transition instruments **without jeopardizing the widely needed investment in discovery driven research** and instruments aimed at boosting researchers' careers such as in the ERC and MSCA programmes. In contrast, overly complex parts of

¹ <https://eu-life.eu/newsroom/publications/eu-life-wants-more-balanced-fp9>

² <https://eu-life.eu/newsroom/publications/how-ensure-health-safety-europe-vision-eu-life-research-institutes>

³ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b3baec75-fdd0-11ed-a05c-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-287596143>

Horizon Europe such as Pillar 2, and programmes with questionable impact such as the EIT should be restructured and/or deprioritized to provide more funds to the EIC.

- Promote **synergies across pillars** to support the **transition from knowledge and technology to implementation**. Promising, innovative research outcomes (lower TRLs) mainly supported by the ERC in Pillar I need follow-up instruments to fully develop their potential before implementation is possible (higher TRLs). This is mainly promoted by the EIC Transition, and it is crucial to safeguard the real use of this instrument as a true *transition* tool for those innovative ideas. Currently, the eligibility criteria for EIC Transition are too restrictive to achieve its intended goal. In FP10, the EIC Transition schemes should be **open to all ERC grantees and to any funded project** within the framework programme with innovative potential. This innovative potential could be certified for e.g., by awarding a “**Seal of Innovation**” at the end of FP10 projects with innovation potential.
- **Rethink the EIC Challenges schemes to achieve the most impact**. The rationale behind the EIC Challenges schemes conflicts with the exploratory nature of projects grounded in high-risk/high-gain research, which have the most innovative potential through a bottom-up approach. Thus, for lower TRL projects, the focus needs to be on the Open modality to support the first steps of the innovation process. On the contrary, Challenges can have the most impact on technologically advanced projects close to commercialization (higher TRLs), where support for specific areas aligned with EU priorities is clear. **We recommend that in FP10 the EIC Pathfinder is based solely on an open approach**. If the Challenges are nevertheless to be continued, it will be key to **broaden the focus areas** to include at least the life sciences for projects with lower TRLs, as discovery-driven research has proven to be of great importance to tackle EU objectives related to e.g., health and environment.
- **Leverage the potential of the EIC for capacity building in the research community**. Sustainable actions are essential to effectively foster the transition from scientific results to the innovation process. The EIC offers a unique opportunity to build capacity within the research community towards innovation. At the organizational level, **Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) must continue to be strengthened and empowered**. In addition, we envision the need to further support expertise building in research performing organizations at the project level, for EIC Pathfinder funded projects led by researchers and focused on lower TRLs. At this level, there is often a lack of expertise in innovation that is not bridged by the various training opportunities offered/mandated during the execution of the projects. According to feedback from the EU-LIFE community, these training courses are often too numerous and too intensive for the duration of the project. Instead, it would be beneficial to foster the role of an “**innovation manager**” at the project level. This role would complement the project manager role to comprehensively monitor project outcomes with an innovation angle within the consortium, bridging the project team and results to the point where the work of the TTO begins at host institutions; and engaging relevant stakeholders at key points. This position would be vital to leverage the innovation impact of the project by **early identification of the needs and eventual success of EIC Pathfinder projects**, serving as a bridge between the researchers, the coordination manager and the EIC programme. The implementation of this role should have a flexible approach depending on the already existing technology transfer expertise and support at host

institutions, have clearly defined tasks to avoid overlaps and should not deviate funding allocated to research & innovation aspects of the projects.

- **Facilitate the development of skills needed for researchers to become innovators.** If researchers are to develop effective innovation strategies, they must acquire the necessary skills. However, although the training offered by the EIC is highly valuable, currently its delivery is not fully effective. The training portfolio needs to be easier to navigate for the project teams to understand what is on offer, by when it must be achieved and who it is aimed at. Also, the amount of training needs to be realistic for researchers' context, i.e., less intensive, allowing them time to carry out their project. The figure of the "innovation manager", if created, could be the missing bridge to take over the core of the training to build capacity and disseminate knowledge within the consortium to ensure an optimal uptake. In addition, the timing of the trainings offered should be reconsidered. For example, key training modules could be available at the application level to help researchers prepare their projects' innovation edge for the interviews stage.

IMPLEMENTATION

Pave the way for a **smoother and more realistic project implementation**. This should be achieved at two levels.

At project level

- **Ease the burden on project coordination, which is still heavy and time-consuming.** To facilitate the implementation, the administrative load needs to be reduced by for example, simplifying the reading of the numerous reference documents, optimizing audit processes, facilitating project amendment procedures and minimizing the additional requirements to complete after the proposal is granted.
- **Consider that using lump-sum in projects with lower TRLs might increase the management burden,** as projects such as EIC Pathfinder, which focus on fundamental research, usually need a higher degree of flexibility in the activities of the consortium. Therefore, implementation of the lump-sum model must be monitored and evaluated in close consultation with end users before becoming the norm.

During the application and evaluation process

- **Decrease the expectations for projects with lower TRLs** such as EIC Pathfinder projects **to outline fully developed business and IP strategies** at the application step. Instead, transform the excessive amount of detail required in the exploitation section into a description on how the possible exploitation paths for the outcomes of the project are envisioned, i.e. ensure it allows to critically develop a sound scientific strategy towards a truly translational direction at the proposal stage without excessive detail.
- For at least some instruments, such as the EIC Pathfinder open calls, **revise the requirements of the call** to avoid the usage of "gatekeepers" that artificially raise the success rate by restricting the sample of eligible/potentially successful researchers/projects.
- Provide evaluators with **robust evaluation guidelines** and review examples, that ensures high quality review regarding innovation and research criteria.



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EU-LIFE is an alliance of research centres whose mission is to support and strengthen European research excellence (www.eu-life.eu). EU-LIFE members are leading research institutes in their countries and internationally renowned for producing excellent research, widely transferring knowledge and nurturing talent.

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