
NEWSLETTER

OFFICE TO SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS FOCUSED ON LIFE SCIENCES IN THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA

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2024 (3)

Current Calls

EC - 2 billion € call for AI factories

The European Commission has launched a call for proposals to set up 2 billion € worth of artificial intelligence factories, which will be built using the EU's cutting-edge high-performance computers. "Europe is already leading the way with the EU Artificial Intelligence Act, which makes artificial intelligence safer and more trustworthy," said European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. "AI factories will help secure our position at the forefront of this transformative technology."

Maximum grant contribution: The total budget available for this call is close to 1 billion € from the Digital Europe programme and Horizon Europe, and the same amount will be funded by EU Member States.

Deadline: 4 November 2024 (first deadline). Further closure dates will be set every three months until funding is available. In general, applicants have **until 31 December 2025** to apply for this rolling call.

Link: [EU boosts European AI developers](#)

UNDP - CZECH CHALLENGE FUND 2024

[The Czech-UNDP Partnership for SDGs](#) launches an annual Challenge Fund call for Czech private companies, universities, research centres and non-profit organisations. The Challenge Fund seeks innovative solutions for partner countries in many areas including technical innovation, agriculture, waste management, health, community planning or implementation of modern technologies in transport. Currently, the Challenge Fund supports projects in 6 partner countries. These are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Georgia, Cambodia, Moldova and Zambia. To participate in this year's Challenge Fund, as in the previous year, UNDP will require applicants to register with the [UNDP QUANTUM](#) system. Instructions on how to log in to the system can be found in the [User Guide](#). Potential applicants for Challenge Fund 2024 are therefore advised to complete the reg-

istration as soon as possible.

Maximum grant contribution: The possibility to receive up to 40 000 USD for the implementation of the project.

Deadline: 6. 12. 2024, 12:00 CET

Link: [Czech Challenge Fund](#)

EK - MSCA Staff Exchanges 2024

The MSCA Staff Exchanges 2024 call was launched on 19 September 2024. **The MSCA Staff Exchanges** scheme supports international staff exchanges between institutions participating in the research consortium. Its purpose is to deepen cooperation between the academic and non-academic sectors (including SMEs), to facilitate knowledge transfer between the two spheres and to enhance the innovative thinking of seconded staff. In preparing your project proposal, please follow the [MSCA Work Programme for 2023-2025](#). The call specifications can be found in the [Funding Opportunities and Procurement Portal \(FTOP\)](#), through which project proposals are submitted.

Maximum grant contribution: The expected EU contribution depends on the number of "person months" requested. The total indicative budget for 2024 is 99,5 million € and for 2025 it is 82,8 million €.

Deadline: 5. 2. 2025

Link: [MSCA Staff Exchanges 2024](#)

EK - Teaming for Excellence (HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-ACCESS-01-01-two-stage)

The Teaming action is designed to support the creation of new centres of excellence or modernising the existing ones in low R&I performing countries (except those centres of excellence that have already benefitted from previous Teaming calls). It is building on partnerships between leading scientific institutions in the European landscape and the main beneficiary institutions in low R&I performing countries that display the willingness to engage together for this purpose. This can help countries that are lagging behind in terms of research and innovation performance attaining a competitive position in the global value chains. Leading scientific institutions are established strategic partners that have developed an outstanding reputation in research and innovation excellence in the chosen scientific domain. Institutions that are still in the process of development or modernisation, e.g., those that are still receiving support as coordinators from widening actions under Horizon 2020 or Horizon Europe, are normally not considered leading institutions, unless a proper justification is provided in the proposal.

Maximum grant contribution: 8-15 million €

Deadline: 10. 4. 2025

Link: [HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-ACCESS-01-01-two-stage](#)

EFI - call for grants "G-07-2024 - Characterization of European forest disturbance"

The aim of this FORWARDS call is to support the compilation of a comprehensive, freely accessible reference dataset on European forest disturbance based on ground data. Such a dataset will allow (i) to develop statistically accurate estimates of disturbance in Europe, (ii) to develop and test new methods to quantify impacts and carbon losses due to disturbance and restoration, and (iii) to analyse the effects of different types of disturbance on different forest types in Europe. Data and results from the supported activities must be made publicly available at the end of the project and integrated into the ForestWard Observatory being developed under the FORWARDS project. The maximum grant value is 150 000 €. It is expected that up to 5 projects will be funded under this call (max 3 lots). Projects are expected to start in May 2025 and last a maximum of 24 months.

Maximum grant contribution: 30 000 €

Deadline: 31. 1. 2025, 23:00 (Brussels time)

Link: [Characterization of European forest disturbances](#)

Events

RItrainPlus workshop: managing research infrastructure projects

The [RItrainPlus](#) project is organising an online workshop for staff involved in various research infrastructure projects, or those preparing to do so. The workshop includes several sessions and is open to participants from all scientific disciplines. Interested parties can register at:

- **Session 3:** How to ensure sustainability and long-term impact of a project, 29 November, 9:00 - 11:30 CET

European Innovation Council 2025 Challenges (webinar)

The European Council invites you to a webinar on 27 November 2024 from 10:00 - 15:00 to present the calls and new developments planned for 2025 under the European Innovation Council programmes, including support services and mechanisms available to applicants and project promoters. The **EIC Pathfinder** programme supports the exploration of new research directions and building the foundations for future breakthrough technologies. The **EIC Transition programme** provides key funding for the validation of new technologies with concrete applications and for the development of a business model for a future product. The **EIC Accelerator** focuses on funding the commercialisation of innovative solutions, particularly in the deep tech field, and the development of innovative companies. A new feature is the **STEP Scale-up** pilot call, which will allow fast-growing innovative companies in strategic sectors to receive up to 30 million € in investment. You will also learn about the upcoming Widening **Pre-Accelerator** call, schedule for the second quarter of 2025. See more information [here](#).

Online seminar focused on the preparation of projects for the TEAMING 2025 call

On 20 November 2024, the Prague Technology Centre in cooperation with the CVTI SR is organising an online seminar on preparing projects for the TEAMING 2025 call. The results of the 2023 call will be presented, including the Czech and Slovak projects that have been successful in this call. Furthermore, the content of the call itself, the most common comments of evaluators and recommendations on how to avoid mistakes will be explained in detail. The event programme can be found [here](#).

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION 2024 Conference

[Register](#) for the traditional conference focused on science communication, which the portal [Vědavyzkum.cz](https://vedavyzkum.cz) organizes for the fifth time. This year's edition will take place on 21 November 2024 and its main theme will be: "AI and new tools for science and research communication." At the conference, you will learn about modern tools based on artificial intelligence (AI) that can be used in PR and marketing communication in the science and research environment. Participation is recommended not only for PR and marketing specialists, but also for researchers and students.

Transfera Technology Day 2024

The fifth edition of Transfera Technology Day will take place in Prague again. This year, a total of 23 technologies from 13 different institutions have registered for Transfera Technology Day. After expert evaluation by the jury and evaluators, 11 technologies from 9 institutions were selected to advance to the competition day held on 2 December 2024 in Prague. The competition projects will receive expert feedback and evaluation of their commercial potential from organizations such as CzechInvest, I&I Prague, Neuron Foundation,

Technology Agency of the Czech Republic, Transfera.cz and other partners. More information about the event [here](#).

Space Tech Expo Europe

Space Tech Expo Europe is the leading B2B event focused on the European space sector. Once again held in Bremen, Germany, the event brings together space technology experts to learn about the wide range of technologies used in the manufacturing, testing and systems engineering of spacecraft, launch vehicles and satellite programmes. Highlights include the CASSINI Matchmaking meeting and speakers from organisations such as ESA, the European Commission, Ariane Group, OHB and Planet. This event is a key opportunity for networking and getting up-to-date information on developments in space technology. Registration and more information about the event can be found [here](#).

NINET - Mowing of the heads of project departments (HE, NCP TC Prague, CZELO AND MŠMT).

Technology Centre Prague, as the national contact organisation for the EU Framework Programmes, is organising a meeting of heads of project departments responsible for the Horizon Europe and H2020 agenda in their institutions on 9-10 December 2024. This meeting will take place within the framework of the activities of the [informal network NINET](#) (Czech National Information Network for EU Framework Programmes). The event represents an exceptional opportunity to obtain up-to-date information, share experiences and strengthen cooperation with the National Contact Points (NCPs) from the Prague Technology Centre, representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science and colleagues from the Brussels CZELO office.

Webinar: Transfer in Biotechnology

Following the recent Communication Building the Future with Nature: Boosting Biotechnology and Biomanufacturing in the EU, the European Commission is organising a [seminar](#) on "Supporting the translation of biotechnology R&D results into health innovations" on 26 November 2024 in Brussels. The aim of the seminar is to discuss the scientific needs to support the most promising biotechnological innovations in health, identify opportunities and identify gaps where EU support can bring the greatest benefits. The workshop is designed as an on-site discussion with participants and therefore only face-to-face participation is possible. Participants are responsible for their own travel costs.

News

Low participation of scientists in ERC grants

The NKC - Gender and Science Department at the Institute of Sociology of the CAS has published the results of an analysis of the low participation of Czech male and female scientists in the European Research Council (ERC) grant competition. These grants are among the most prestigious in the EU and represent an important indicator of the quality of research institutions. In the Czech Republic, however, participation in these grants - especially by female scientists - remains low. The report presents an analysis of the results of a questionnaire that identified specific factors influencing the low participation of male and female scientists in ERC grants. The questionnaire explored both the reasons why some chose not to apply for these grants (despite the potential to succeed) and the obstacles faced by those who did. 218 people participated in the survey, including 124 male and 94 female scientists. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions, which were then coded and analysed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The full analysis of the Low Participation of Women Scientists in ERC Grants questionnaire can be viewed [here](#).

MEP Christian Ehler was reelected as Chair of Panel for the Future of Science and Technology (STOA)

On 24 October 2024, Christian Ehler was re-elected as Chair of the European Parliament's Panel for the Future of Science and Technology (STOA), as were its Vice-Chairs Lina Gálvez Muñoz and Ivars Ijabs. The STOA panel, made up of 27 MEPs, plays a vital role in providing scientific advice and foresight to inform EU policy-making. Following his re-election, Ehler stressed the importance of a de-politicised platform to discuss key issues such as academic freedom. "The Panel on the Future of Science and Technology is a key tool for the European Parliament to analyse, anticipate, predict and plan for issues related to the future of science and technology," said Victor Negrescu, Vice President responsible for STOA. Last year, the panel was embroiled in a row over an assessment it commissioned to analyse the impact of pending legislation on the pharmaceutical industry. MEPs at the time accused the panel's management of overstepping its authority by withdrawing the independent report. The announcement of Ehlers' re-election can be found [here](#).

European Parliament approves 201 billion € research budget for 2025

At the end of October, the European Parliament voted for a 201 billion € EU budget for 2025, which allocates additional funding to key programmes such as Horizon Europe and Erasmus+. The 2025 budget as approved by the Parliament includes an increase of 242 million € for Horizon Europe, with 50 million € going to the health cluster. MEPs also want an additional 70 million € for Erasmus to expand access to the programme. "Today's vote sends a strong signal of support for a citizen-centred EU budget, focused on investing in economic development and improving people's lives," said Victor Negrescu, Chief Rapporteur for the EU budget 2025. Overall, MEPs restored the 1.52 billion € in funding cuts previously proposed by the Council. The Parliament's vote kicks off three weeks of talks with the Council to finalise an agreement on the EU budget for 2025 by the end of the year. More information can be found [here](#).

Research lobby groups call for stronger MSCA and European Research Council

The Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) and the European Council of Doctoral Students and Young Researchers (Eurodoc) have issued a statement responding to the interim evaluation report of the Horizon Europe programme by a group of experts chaired by Manuel c. The joint statement sets out a list of objectives for the next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation:

1. **Budget increase:** seek a significant increase in the MSCA budget to strengthen the European research and innovation environment.
2. **Independence of MSCA and ERC:** work to ensure the independence of Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and the European Research Council.
3. **Better career prospects:** pursue measures to improve career prospects and working conditions for researchers.
4. **Modernising research evaluation** to reduce administrative burden and foster innovation.

Read more about the Heitor report later in this newsletter.

EU opens Horizon Association negotiations with Egypt

The European Commission has [announced](#) that formal negotiations between the EU and Egypt on an association with the Horizon Europe programme have been launched. Negotiations will continue in the "coming weeks and months" and "may lead" to Egypt's association with the EU's research and innovation programme, the Commission said. The announcement comes more than six months after Commission President Ursula von der Leyen visited Cairo and signed a [joint declaration](#) on a "strategic and comprehensive partnership" between the EU and Egypt. If successful, the association with Horizon Europe would put Egyptian entities on an equal footing with those from EU Member States and give them direct access to funding and project coordination.

The European Commission appoints two new members of the ERC Scientific Council

The European Commission has appointed two new members of the European Research Council (ERC) Scientific Council, Tomaž Prosen from the University of Ljubljana, an expert in statistical and quantum physics, and Maarit Karppinen from Aalto University, known for her work on inorganic materials. According to the ERC, their appointments aim to reinforce the ERC's mission to promote excellence in science, as both have been awarded ERC Advanced Grants for their pioneering research. "The ERC is a symbol of scientific excellence and the expertise and vision of these eminent scientists will further strengthen its mission," said EU Research Commissioner Iliana Ivanova. Read the announcement [here](#).

Independent experts call for increased investment to strengthen Europe's leadership in research and innovation (Heitor Report)

The Heitor report represents the most convincing vision yet of the future of the EU after Horizon", quoted by Times Higher Education. After a year of deliberations, a group of experts led by Manuel Heitor,

Portugal's former science minister, has drawn up recommendations for the European Union's next framework programme for research and innovation, known as FP10. Previous documents have already highlighted the urgency of investing in research and innovation at a time of increasing technological and economic global competition, including the [Draghi report](#) on European competitiveness and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's [strategy](#) for the next Commission. However, the Heitor report is the only one that provides a detailed framework for the proposal of the 10th Framework Programme. Read all twelve recommendations in an abridged version [here](#) or the full report [here](#).

OECD and UN join forces to work on global governance of artificial intelligence

On 22 September, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the United Nations announced an agreement to collaborate on global policy-making in the field of artificial intelligence. In a statement, the organisations said they would "focus on regular scientific and evidence-based assessments of risks and opportunities in the field of artificial intelligence. Both organizations will leverage their respective networks, convening platforms and ongoing work on AI policy and governance." In recent years, the Paris-based OECD has grown into one of the largest official centres for the study of AI policy development worldwide - and [earlier this year](#) combined its own policy research with a French-Canadian initiative called the Global Partnership for AI. Leading AI researchers have warned that any policy adopted should be coordinated internationally as AI crosses borders. Read the full OECD statement [here](#).

EIC publishes work programme for 2025

The European Innovation Council (EIC) intends to invest 1.4 billion € in deep and strategic technologies in 2025, as outlined in the EIC Work Programme adopted by the Commission on Tuesday 29 October 2024. This investment represents an increase of 200 million € compared to the previous year, with 300 million € earmarked for the new EIC STEP Scale-up programme, which is specifically aimed at supporting deep tech scale-ups. In addition, 120 million € will fund innovations such as autonomous robots and climate-resilient crops, while 250 million € will target early-stage companies working on technologies such as generative artificial intelligence and future mobility solutions. "Targeted support, in particular through the STEP scaling call, will help bridge critical funding gaps and build a stronger and more resilient innovation ecosystem in Europe," said Research Commissioner Iliana Ivanova. A working version of the Work Programme can be found [here](#). More information can be found [here](#).

ERC allocates 571 million € for collaborative research projects

The European Research Council (ERC) has announced that it will award 571 million € in Synergy Grants to fifty-seven research groups aiming to tackle today's most complex scientific challenges. These grants cover a wide range of disciplines and are designed to encourage collaboration between leading researchers, enabling them to pool expertise and resources. The funding is part of the EU's flagship research and innovation programme, Horizon Europe. "Innovation thrives through collaboration, especially in tackling the pressing scientific challenges of our time," said ERC Chair Maria Leptin.

"ERC Synergy Grants work with Horizon Europe funding to connect brilliant minds across borders and disciplines, enabling them to push the boundaries of knowledge together." You can read the ERC announcement [here](#).

CERN appoints new head

British physicist Mark Thomson has been appointed as the new Director General of the European Organization for Nuclear Research CERN on 6 November 2024. Thomson, who is executive chairman of the UK's Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) and a professor at the University of Cambridge, will take over the baton from current CERN Director General Fabiola Gianotti in January 2026. Thomson has been the UK's representative on the CERN Council since 2018. "I am honoured to become Director General of CERN and am committed to continuing the organisation's scientific mission, further developing technologies that will benefit society as a whole, while uniting nations in a shared commitment to develop science for the betterment of humanity," Thomson said. You can read CERN's announcement [here](#).