



# Navigating EU Funding Opportunities for SMEs

Reference Guide for  
Grants on Energy Topics





## Introduction

The primary purpose of this guide is to collate key information and relevant resources for SMEs to access EU funding programmes including Horizon Europe, LIFE Programme, Single Market Programme, Connecting Europe Facility and Innovation Fund.

Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland (SEAI) and the International Energy Research team compiled the contents of the guide from publicly available information on EU portals and supporting materials<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This reference guide sources key information relevant to SMEs from EU platforms including [EU Funding & Tenders Portal](#), European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive agency ([CINEA](#)), and European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency ([EISMEA](#)), among others. Each section focuses on a specific EU Funding programme, highlights pertinent information around it and provides relevant resources for further reading.

# NAVIGATING EU FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMEs

Reference Guide on Grants for Energy Topics

May 2024

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Money in hand

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## Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland

SEAI is Ireland's national energy authority investing in, and delivering, appropriate, effective and sustainable solutions to help Ireland's transition to a clean energy future. We work with the public, businesses, communities and the Government to achieve this, through expertise, funding, educational programmes, policy advice, research and the development of new technologies.

SEAI is funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

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# 1. EU Support for SMEs

This chapter covers key information around SME eligibility for EU support, the nature of EU support available for SMEs and how to access the same.

## Are you an SME eligible for EU support?

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) make up the majority of all businesses in the EU. Every year the EU supports more than [200,000 businesses](#) across a wide range of industries. The definition of an SME is important for access to finance and EU support programmes targeted specifically at Small and medium-sized enterprises.

What is considered an SME:

- The main factors determining whether an enterprise is an SME are:
  - Staff headcount
  - either turnover **or** balance sheet total

**Table 1: Factors determining whether an enterprise is an SME:**

Company category	Staff headcount	Turnover	OR	Balance sheet Total
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ € 50 m		≤ € 43 m
Small	< 50	≤ € 10 m		≤ € 10 m
Micro	< 10	≤ € 2 m		≤ € 2 m

A link to a self-assessment tool can be found here.

[SME Self-assessment Tool](#)

EU funding is available for enterprises in any sector including entrepreneurs, start-ups, micro companies, small and medium-sized enterprises, and larger businesses.

## What help can SMEs receive?

- **Eligibility for support:** targeted specifically at SME e.g. research funding, competitiveness and innovation funding and similar national support programmes that could otherwise be banned as unfair government support.
- **Fewer requirements or reduced fees** for EU administrative compliance.
- **Network, tools, and other supports** including capacity building, knowledge sharing among others.

## What are the forms of EU funding available?

The various forms of funding **depend on each EU programme**. Below outlined are the most common forms of financial support extended via EU funding programmes – Grants.

**A grant** is a financial donation awarded by the contracting authority to the grant beneficiary.

There are two main types of grants:

- **Action grants** fund a specific action or project intended to help achieve the objectives of the respective EU programme.
- **Operating grants** fund the operating costs of an organisation pursuing objectives that support EU policies.

In addition, most programmes

- **Project Grants** are funds allocated for specific projects or activities. These grants typically require applicants to submit proposals outlining the objectives, activities, budget, timeline, and expected outcomes of their project.
- **Lump Sum Grants** provide a fixed amount of funding for a particular purpose without the need for detailed reporting on how the funds are spent. These grants are often used for simpler projects or initiatives where the costs are relatively predictable and easily quantifiable.
- **Unit Grants** are similar to project grants but are awarded on a per-unit basis rather than as a lump sum or based on project milestones. For example, unit grants may be provided for each student enrolled in an educational program, each kilometre of road built, or each ton of carbon dioxide emissions reduced.
- **Framework Partnerships Framework partnerships** are long-term collaborations between the EU and specific organisations, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), research institutions, or industry associations. Framework partnerships provide stable funding and support over several years, allowing partners to plan and implement strategic initiatives more effectively.

More information around standard rules for grants and grant management mode can be found [here](#).

### EU grants fund a variety of activities including:

- collaborative actions,
- coordination and networking actions,
- coordination and support actions,
- support to organisations,
- technical assistance and capacity building actions,
- mobility actions,
- co-fund actions to existing grant schemes/procurements of the beneficiaries,
- infrastructure actions, etc.

## How to access information around EU funding?



### 1. Know your funding programmes

- An overview of all EU funding opportunities and basic information around each programme can be found [here](#).
- Refer to Chapter 2 of this quick reference guide for key EU funding programmes relevant to SMEs focused on energy topics.



### 2. Identify suitable funding opportunity

- [EU Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal](#) is the single-entry point for applicants in funding programmes directly managed by the EU.
- Regularly monitor calls for proposals within targeted EU funding programmes. Pay attention to topics aligned with your expertise, innovation goals, and business needs.



### 3. Engage with support services

- Take advantage of available support services, such as [Local Contact Points](#), [Enterprise Europe Network \(EEN\)](#), and EU funding advisory services.
- These organisations provide guidance, training, partner search assistance, and feedback on funding proposals.



## How to apply for EU funding?

### Find a funding opportunity

Calls for proposals are regularly published on the EU [Funding and Tenders Portal](#). Scan the portal for open calls.

### Review conditions for funding

Carefully review the call text, which provides detailed information on the scope, objectives, eligibility criteria, and submission requirements.

### Find partners

Utilise the [partner search tool](#) and the Enterprise Europe Network [database](#).

### Submit proposal

The [EU Portal](#) is also the place to submit all applications for funding.

### Admissibility & eligibility check

### Evaluation & Ethics review

### Grant preparation & signature

**APPLY FOR FUNDING**

**SELECTION PROCESS**

For further detailed information and guidance refer to [Online Manual for EU Funding Programmes 2021 - 2027](#) & the [Funding & Tenders Portal](#)

## 2. Key EU funding programmes for SMEs

This chapter highlights key EU funding programmes including Horizon Europe; LIFE Programme; Single Market Programme; Connecting Europe Facility; and Innovation Fund.

### Horizon Europe

EU's Flagship funding programmes for **research and innovation**.

**€95 billion**

Budget  
(2021 – 2027)

### LIFE Programme

EU's funding instrument for the **environment and climate action**.

**€5.4 billion**

Budget  
(2021 – 2027)

### Single Market Programme

Funding programme to strengthen the governance of the **EU single market**.

**€4.2 billion**

Budget  
(2021 – 2027)

### Connecting Europe Facility

EU funding instrument to promote **growth, jobs and competitiveness** through targeted infrastructure investment at European level.

**€33.7 billion**

Budget  
(2021 – 2027)

### Innovation Fund

EU fund for climate policy, with a focus on **energy and industry**.

**€40 billion**

Budget  
(2020 – 2030)

## 2.1. Horizon Europe

This chapter provides the below information for the part of Horizon Europe funding programme which focuses on Climate, Energy & Mobility:

- Overview
- Irish Success Stories
- Award criteria/what to focus on?
- Useful Links and resources

### Overview

Horizon Europe is the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation. It tackles climate change, helps to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and boosts the EU's competitiveness and growth.

Horizon Europe funds projects across three pillars:

- (I) Excellent Science
- (II) Global Challenges & European Industrial Competitiveness
- (III) Innovative Europe.

Among the various themes funded under Pillar II of Horizon Europe, this section will focus on 'Climate, Energy & Mobility' (cluster 5). Refer to figure 1, for the programme's structure, the three pillars and themes funded under the three pillars.

**Figure 1: Horizon Europe Funding Programme Structure (Pillar II, Cluster 5)**



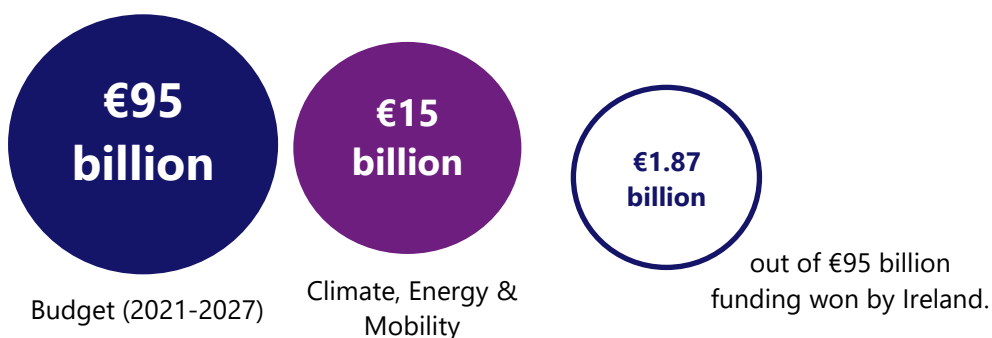
\* The European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) is not part of the Specific Programme

Source: [European Commission \(2020\)](#)

More information on the structure and missions of the funding programme can be found [here](#).

The EU institutions agreed<sup>2</sup> to set the budget for Horizon Europe at €95 billion, out of which €15 billion has been dedicated to topics related to Climate, Energy & Mobility. As of 2024, Ireland has won €1.87 billion through the Horizon Europe Funding programme.

**Figure 2: Horizon Europe budget**



Source: [Horizon Europe Dashboard](#)

**Horizon Europe – Climate Energy and Mobility (Pillar II Cluster 5):** With an overarching goal to achieve climate neutrality by 2050, Cluster 5 of Horizon Europe, aims to drive the twin green and digital transition for the benefit of our economy, industry, and society.

Through transformation of our mobility, energy, construction and production sectors, the programme strives to position Europe as the leading digitally enabled, circular, climate neutral and sustainable economy.

Climate, Energy & Mobility Cluster (Cluster 5) will deliver on six specific expected impacts. Each expected impact has been transformed into a specific destination or theme.<sup>3</sup>

Destination 3 and 4 focus mainly on energy issues:

### Destination 3: Sustainable, secure and competitive energy supply

- This Destination aims to create a **more efficient, clean, sustainable, secure and competitive energy supply** through the development of new solutions for smart grids and energy systems based on efficient renewable energy solutions.
- Destination 3's focus is to deliver impact across three main areas; global leadership in renewable energy; energy systems, grids and storage; and carbon capture, utilisation and storage. A few example topics under the three main areas have been elaborated below.

<sup>2</sup> The EU institutions reached a [political agreement on Horizon Europe](#) on 11 December 2020 and set the budget for Horizon Europe.

<sup>3</sup> Refer to Page 8 on the [Horizon Europe Work Programme](#) to read more about all expected impacts & destinations.

- **Renewable Energy Technologies:** Research and development of renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, hydroelectric, geothermal, and biomass.
- **Energy Storage Solutions:** Projects focusing on innovative energy storage technologies, including batteries, hydrogen storage, and thermal storage.
- **Smart Grids and Energy Systems Integration:** Projects that focus on the development of smart grid technologies, grid modernisation, and the integration of decentralised energy resources.
- **Carbon Capture, Utilisation, and Storage (CCUS):** Research and demonstration projects related to carbon capture technologies, carbon utilisation, and geological storage of CO<sub>2</sub>.
- **Energy Transition in Industry:** Projects focusing on decarbonising industrial processes, promoting circular economy principles, and fostering resource efficiency in manufacturing.
- **Socio-economic Aspects of Energy Transition:** Projects exploring the social, economic, and policy dimensions of the energy transition. This could include studies on the impact of energy policies on communities, equity considerations in energy access, and strategies for a just transition towards a sustainable energy future.

Above listed are examples of the various kind of projects that Horizon Europe Cluster 5 Destination 3 focuses on. Specific topics and calls for proposals are updated with every annual Work Programme. The Horizon Europe Work Programme (2023 - 2024) can be found [here](#).

## Destination 4: Efficient Sustainable and inclusive energy use

- Steered by EU policies such as the European Green Deal, the Renovation Wave and Industry Strategy, Destination 4 aims to ensure the efficient and sustainable use of energy, which is accessible for all, through a clean energy system and a just transition.
- The focus of this Destination is on innovations that boost energy efficiency and reduce energy demand across buildings and industry. A few example topics have been elaborated below.
- **Energy Efficiency in Buildings:** Projects focused on improving the energy performance of buildings through innovative technologies, materials, and design strategies.
- **Sustainable Urban Energy Systems:** Initiatives aiming to enhance the sustainability and resilience of urban energy systems. This could involve integrated approaches to urban planning, renewable energy integration, district heating and cooling systems.
- **Energy Poverty and Social Inclusion:** Projects addressing energy poverty and promoting social inclusion in energy access.
- **Consumer Behaviour and Energy Demand:** Research projects exploring consumer behaviour patterns, preferences, and decision-making processes related to energy use.

- **Digitalisation and Smart Technologies for Energy Efficiency:** Projects leveraging digital technologies, IoT, data analytics, and artificial intelligence to optimise energy efficiency in various sectors.
- **Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency:** Projects promoting circular economy principles and resource efficiency in energy production, consumption, and waste management.

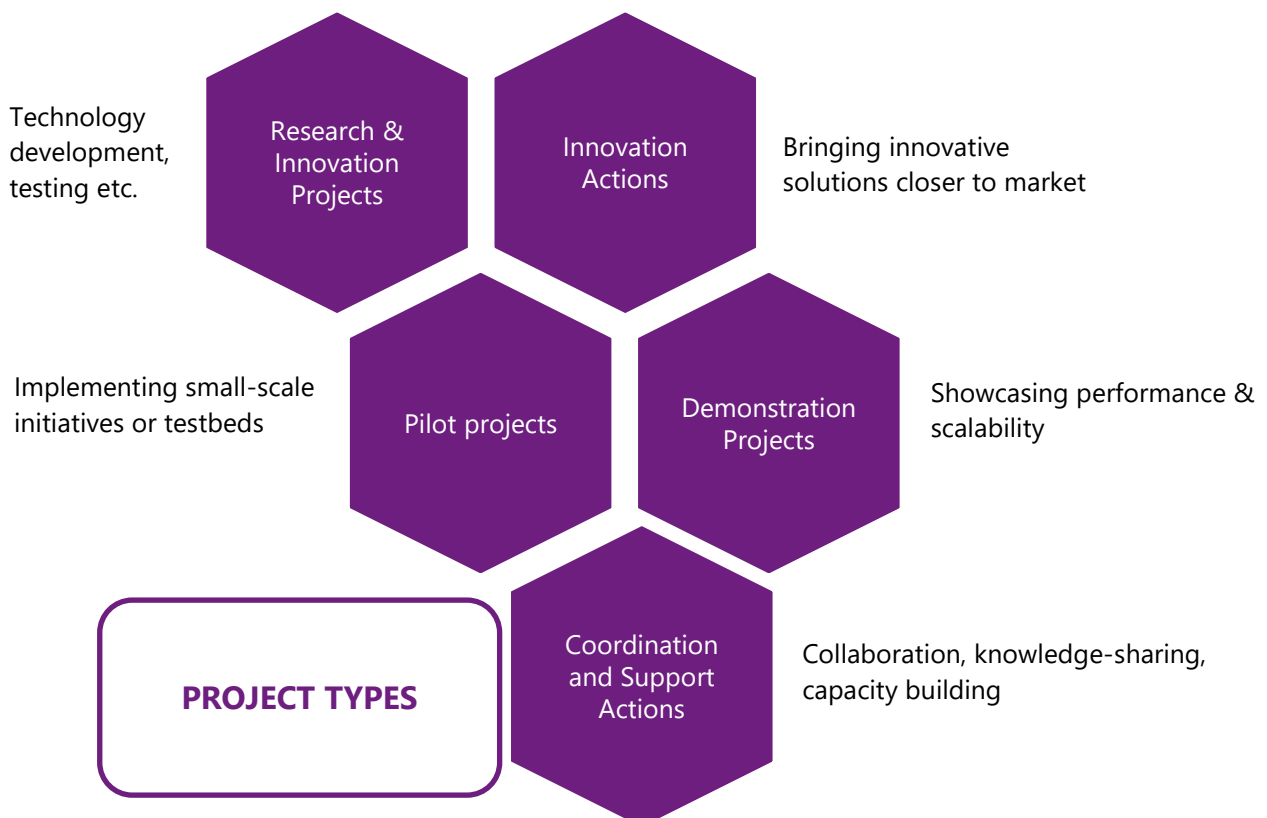
Above listed are examples of the various kind of projects that Horizon Europe Cluster 5 Destination 4 focuses on. Specific topics and calls for proposals are updated with every annual Work Programme. The Horizon Europe Work Programme (2023 - 2024) can be found [here](#).

### Types of projects:

The specific project types and funding mechanisms available may vary depending on the objectives, priorities, and requirements of each call for proposals. Applicants should carefully review the call documentation and guidelines to determine the most suitable project type for their proposed activities and objectives.

Figure 3 highlights examples of the various types of projects that could be supported by the Horizon Europe Funding Programme.

**Figure 3: Types of projects**



## Irish Success Stories



### WinDTwin

#### Towards a digital twin for forecasting of power production to wind energy demand (2024 – 2027)

Project participant: **EPRI Europe DAC**

EU funding received **€346k**

WinDTwin, targets to develop and validate an offshore wind farm digital twin (DT) for highly accurate prediction of power production and energy demand of the end user. The DT will give users tailored access to high-quality information, services, models, scenarios, forecasts, and visualisations, as a central hub for offshore wind decision-makers.



### SunHorizon

#### Sun coupled innovative Heat pumps (2018 – 2023)

Project coordinator: **IES R&D**

EU funding received **€309k**

Demonstrates innovative and reliable Heat Pump solutions coupled and managed with advanced solar panels to provide heating and cooling for buildings – e.g. innovative gas-fired heat pump with high-vacuum solar panels.

More examples can be found in [Cordis](#) - a platform to find all past or on-going Horizon 2020 or Europe projects. The platform is searchable by pillar, theme, country, project size etc.

## Award Criteria

### What to focus on?

The specific award criteria for Horizon Europe Cluster 5, as with all Horizon Europe clusters, are outlined in the relevant work programs and calls for proposals. However, generally, Horizon Europe follows a set of common evaluation criteria for assessing proposals across all clusters.

These criteria are as follows:

- **Excellence:** This criterion assesses the quality, novelty, and originality of the proposed research or innovation activities. It evaluates the scientific or technological excellence, including the soundness of the theoretical framework, the methodology, and the feasibility of the proposed objectives.
- **Impact:** This criterion evaluates the potential impact of the proposed project in terms of societal, economic, and environmental benefits. It considers the relevance and significance of the expected outcomes, the potential for innovation, and the contribution to addressing societal challenges or market needs.
- **Implementation:** This criterion assesses the quality and effectiveness of the project implementation plan, including the feasibility, coherence, and appropriateness of the work plan, the allocation of resources, and the management structure.

- **Open Science Gender Ethics:** This criterion evaluates the extent to which the proposal incorporates open science principles, promotes gender equality and diversity, and addresses ethical issues related to research integrity, data protection, and societal implications.

*The weight and specific aspects of each criterion may vary depending on the specific call and funding scheme. Applicants are advised to carefully review the call documents and guidelines to understand the evaluation criteria and ensure that their proposals address them effectively.*

## Useful links & resources

The Horizon Europe programme guide and work programme annexes contain information on eligibility, the application procedure and award criteria:

- [Horizon Europe Programme Guide \(2021 -2027\)](#)
- [Horizon Europe Cluster 5 Work Programme 2023 - 2024](#)
- [European Commission's Horizon Europe page](#)
- [European Commission's research enquiry service](#)

**National Contact Point (NCP)** is the first point of contact for queries and guidance on Horizon Europe funding opportunities, including contractual and IPR issues, proposal development, consortium building, grant application and follow up support. For further information on current funding opportunities and how you can get involved, please contact your dedicated NCP:



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Up to date contact information can be found in the NCP Portal [here](#).



## 2.2. Horizon Europe – Pillar III

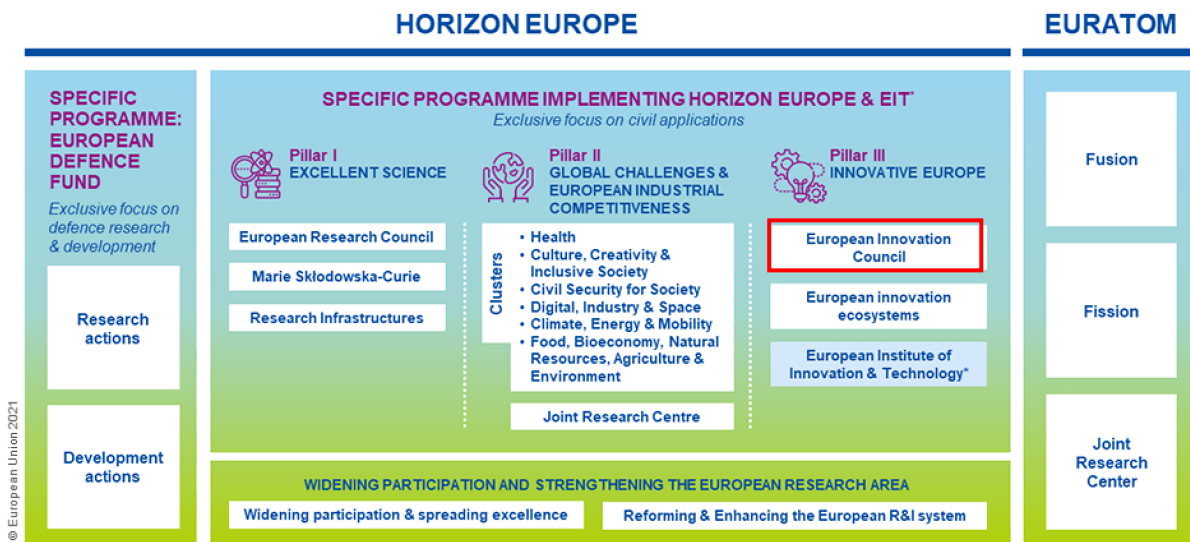
This chapter provides the below information for Horizon Europe, Pillar III, European Innovation Council, European Innovation Ecosystems:

- Overview
- EIC Pathfinder
- EIC Transition
- EIC Accelerator
- EIE CONNECT
- EIE INNOVSMEs
- Useful links & resources

### European Innovation Council (EIC)

**Pillar III Innovative Europe:** This pillar aims to make Europe a frontrunner in market-creating innovation via the **European Innovation Council (EIC)**. It helps to develop the overall European innovation landscape through the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, which fosters the integration of the knowledge triangle of education, research and innovation.

Figure 4: Horizon Europe Funding Programme Structure (EIC)

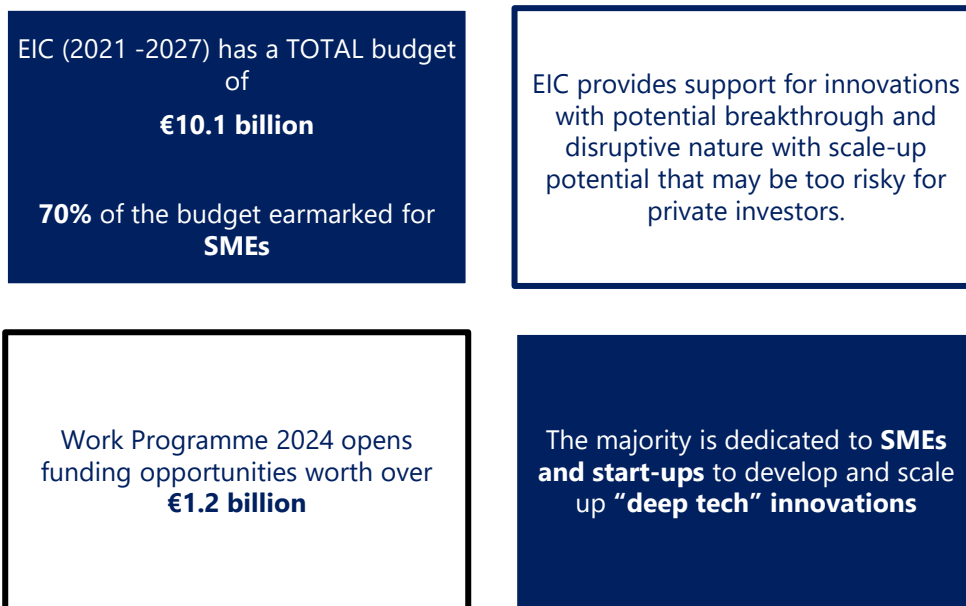


\* The European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) is not part of the Specific Programme

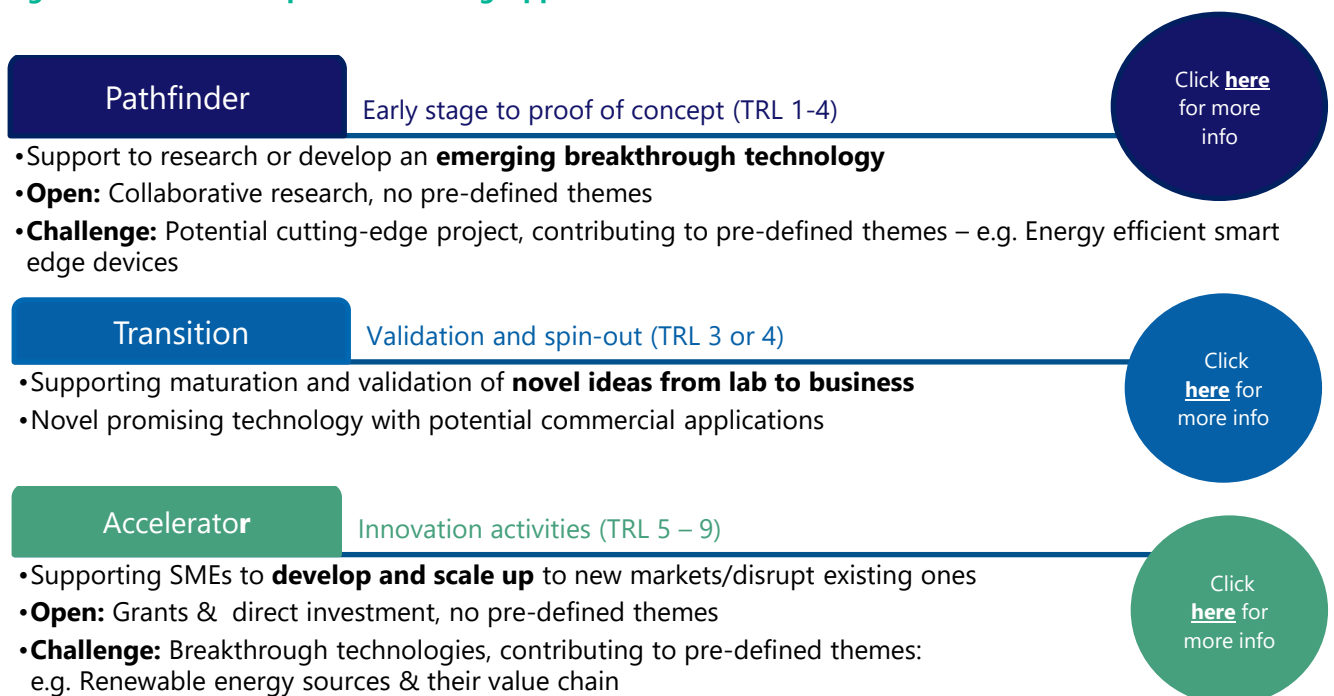
Source: [European Commission \(2020\)](https://ec.europa.eu/euro-iss/eic/eic-overview_en)

The EIC aims to identify and **support breakthrough technologies and game-changing innovations** with the potential to scale up internationally and become market leaders.

EIC supports **all stages of innovation**, from research and development on the scientific underpinnings of breakthrough technologies, to the validation and demonstration of breakthrough technologies and innovations to meet real-world needs, to the **development and scaling up of start-ups and SMEs**.

**Figure 5: Horizon Europe EIC – Key Information**

All EIC awardees, as well as selected applicants, have access to a range of EIC business acceleration services providing access to leading expertise, corporate entities, investors and ecosystem actors. The EIC also undertakes additional activities, such as the giving of prizes.

**Figure 6: Horizon Europe EIC – Funding Opportunities**

Information around budget, upcoming calls and themes for challenges are updated with every annual Work Programme. The EIC Work Programme (2023 - 2024) can be found [here](#).

## European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE)

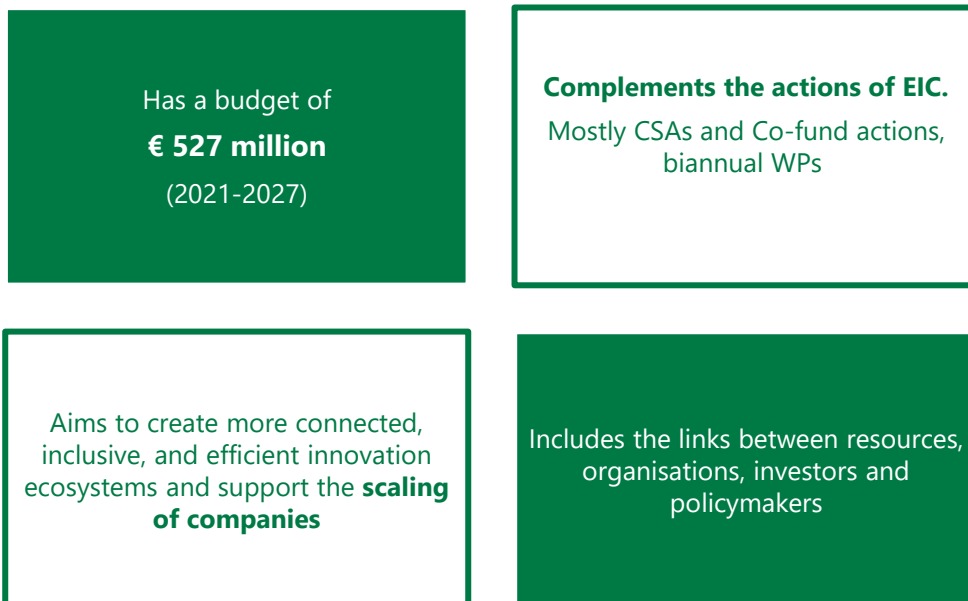
European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) will act in complement and synergy with the European Innovation Council (EIC) and European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and innovative activities across Horizon Europe and other EU funding programmes to improve the overall ecosystem for innovation in Europe.

Figure 7: Horizon Europe Funding Programme Structure (EIE)



Source: [European Commission \(2020\)](#)

Figure 8: Horizon Europe EIE – Key Information



The 2023-2024 European Innovation Ecosystems actions are grouped under two destinations: CONNECT and INNOVSMES.

### Figure 9: Horizon Europe EIE – Funding Opportunities

#### CONNECT

Click [here](#) for more info

- Focuses on building **interconnected & inclusive innovation ecosystems** across Europe.
- Draws on the existing strengths of national, regional and local ecosystems
- Pulls in new, less well-represented actors and territories to set, undertake, and achieve collective ambitions towards challenges for the benefit of society, including the green, digital, and social transitions.

#### INNOVSMES

Click [here](#) for more info

- Helps **innovative SMEs** and project partners (such as large companies, universities and research organisations) by **funding international collaborative R&D and innovation projects**.
- By participating, organisations can increase their research and innovation (R&I) capacity, their productivity and successfully embed in global value chains and new markets.
- This action is led by the Eureka Secretariat with the co-fund provided by the Member States.

Information around budget, upcoming calls and themes for challenges are updated. The bi-annual EIE Work Programme (2023 - 2024) can be found [here](#).

### Useful links & resources

The Horizon Europe EIC and EIE programme guide captures all steps and procedures to be followed by applicants.

- [EIC Guide for Applicants](#)
- [EIE Guide for Applications](#)
- [Open calls - EIC & EIE](#)

**National Contact Point** (NCP) is the first point of contact for queries and guidance on EIC & EIE funding opportunities. For further information on current funding opportunities and how you can get involved, please contact your dedicated NCP:

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## 2.3. LIFE Programme

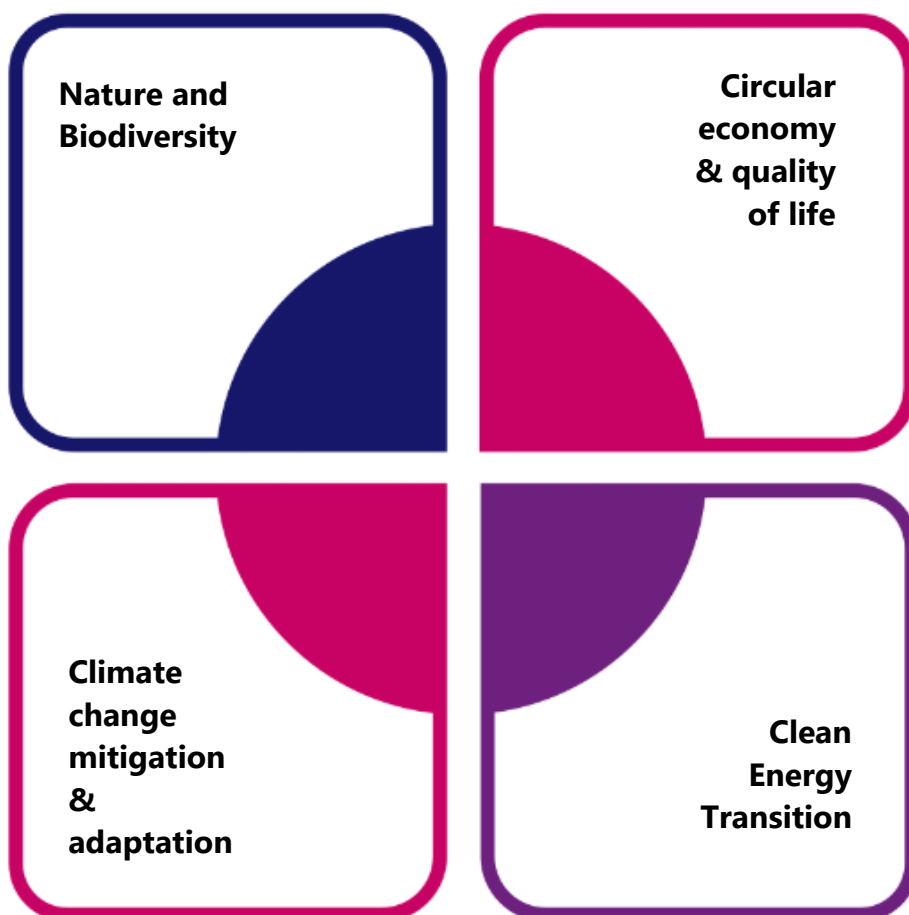
This chapter provides the below information for the LIFE programme:

- Overview
- Close to market projects
- Irish Success Stories
- Award criteria/what to focus on?
- Useful links & resources

### Overview

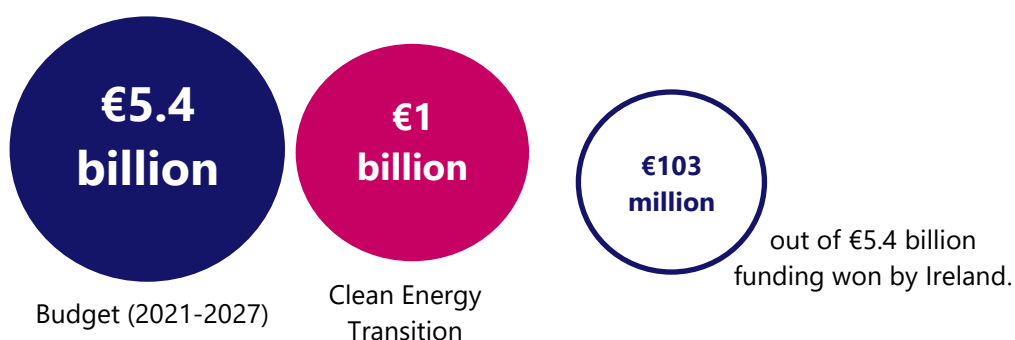
The LIFE Programme is the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action. To date, LIFE has co-financed more than **5,000 projects** across **four Sub-programmes**.

**Figure 10: LIFE - Sub-programmes**



Click [here](#) for more information

**The Clean Energy Transition (CET)** sub-programme is a new component of the LIFE programme. It is of particular relevance to hydrogen related projects.

**Figure 11: LIFE Programme budget**

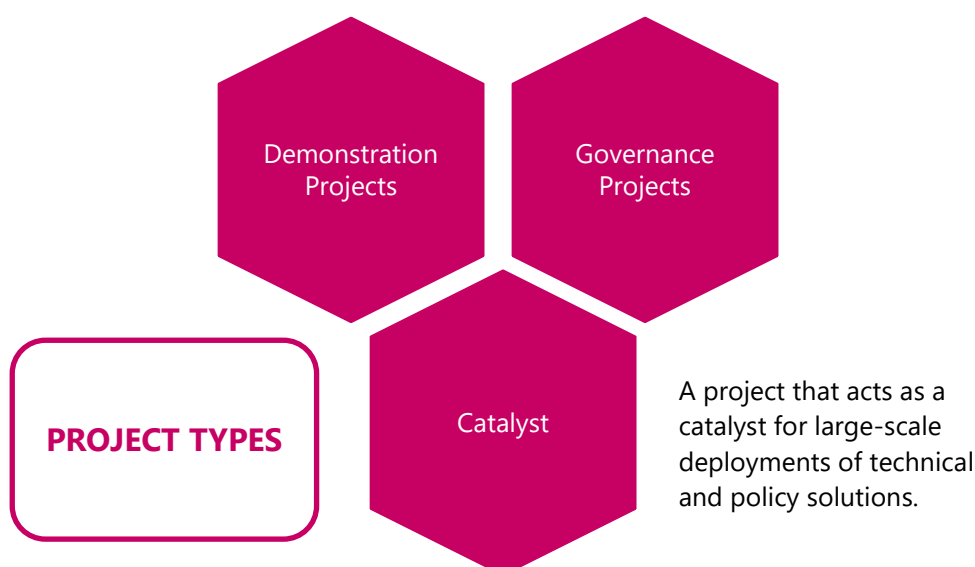
Source: [LIFE Dashboard](#)

LIFE Programme supports several energy topics via Clean Energy Transition (CET) sub-programme. A few examples have been outlined below:

- **Renewable Energy Deployment:** Projects aimed at deploying renewable energy technologies such as solar, wind, hydroelectric, biomass, and geothermal energy. This could include the installation of renewable energy infrastructure, development of renewable energy storage solutions, or demonstration projects showcasing innovative renewable energy technologies.
- **Energy Efficiency Improvement:** Initiatives focused on improving energy efficiency across various sectors, including buildings, industry, transportation, and agriculture. This may involve implementing energy-efficient technologies, upgrading infrastructure, conducting energy audits, promoting energy-saving behaviours, and integrating smart energy management systems.
- **Low-Carbon Transport:** Projects targeting the reduction of emissions from transportation by promoting the use of low-carbon and alternative fuel vehicles, developing sustainable transportation infrastructure, supporting modal shifts towards more environmentally friendly modes of transport (e.g., public transit, cycling, walking), and implementing policies to encourage sustainable mobility.
- **Clean Energy Innovation:** Funding for research, development, and demonstration of innovative clean energy technologies and solutions. This could encompass a wide range of areas such as advanced renewable energy systems, energy storage technologies, smart grids, sustainable biofuels, and carbon capture and storage (CCS) technologies.
- **Sustainable Urban Development:** Initiatives focused on promoting sustainable urban development practices, including the integration of clean energy solutions into urban planning, the development of low-carbon urban infrastructure, the implementation of energy-efficient building codes, and the promotion of sustainable transportation options within cities.
- **Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing:** Projects aimed at building institutional capacity, fostering collaboration between stakeholders, raising awareness about clean energy transition opportunities and challenges, providing training and technical assistance, and facilitating knowledge exchange and best practice sharing among EU member states and other relevant actors.

*Above listed are examples of the various kind of projects that LIFE CET focuses on. Specific topics and calls for proposals are updated with every annual Work Programme.*

*Information around LIFE Programme call for proposals can be accessed [here](#).*

**Figure 12: Types of Projects**

## LIFE – Close-to-market projects

As well as supporting public authorities, NGOs, universities and institutes, the LIFE programme helps companies bring their green products, technologies, services, and processes to the market.

These so called [Close-to-market projects](#) launch innovative, demonstrative solutions that offer clear environmental and/or climate benefits.

**Over 40 projects** supported **across 15 countries** through:

- Business plan development advice
- Business coaching, presentation guidance
- Expert connections
- External debt financing

Applicants for close-to-market projects can apply in the areas of:

- Climate change mitigation and adaptation
- Circular economy and quality of life

Click [here](#) for more information.

These projects have a high level of technical and business readiness - i.e. solutions could be implemented in close-to-market conditions (at industrial or commercial scale) during the course of the project or shortly after its completion.

Example of Close to Market projects funded by LIFE Programme can be accessed [here](#).



## Irish Success Stories



### Local Energy Agencies for Peripheral Regions (2022 – 2026)

Project coordinator: **Aran Islands Renewable Energy Ltd**

EU funding received **€400k**

LEAP will create 3 Local Energy Agencies in the North and West of Ireland to support “**integrated home renovation services**” and in-turn create a continuous pipeline of neighbourhood-based projects.



### Transforming Renovation in the Southern Seaboard Region-Ireland (2023 – 2026)

Project participant: **Vivid Edge Ltd**

EU funding received **€390k**

The project will deliver facilitation support and drive collaboration, for **renovation of public buildings** across multiple local authority regions and public bodies in Ireland.

More examples can be found in Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA) Project [Database](#). CINEA is the executive agency responsible for managing European Union funding programs in the fields of climate action, infrastructure, and environment.

## Award criteria

### What to focus on?

The award criteria for the LIFE Programme Clean Energy Transition (CET) may vary slightly depending on the specific call for proposals, but generally, they revolve around the following key aspects:

- **Relevance:** The extent to which the proposed project addresses the objectives and priorities of the LIFE Programme CET, including its contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting energy efficiency, and transitioning towards renewable energy sources.
- **Innovation:** The degree of novelty and innovative approach demonstrated by the project in implementing clean energy solutions or technologies, as well as its potential to generate new knowledge, practices, or methodologies that can be replicated or scaled up.
- **Environmental Impact:** The expected environmental benefits and impacts of the project, such as reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, improvements in air and water quality, protection of biodiversity, and mitigation of climate change-related risks.
- **Sustainability & replicability:** The project's potential for long-term sustainability beyond the funding period, as well as its replicability and scalability in other regions or sectors, including its ability to catalyse broader clean energy transitions and foster innovation diffusion.

- **Partnership & Stakeholder involvement:** The strength and adequacy of the project's partnerships, including the involvement of relevant stakeholders such as local communities, industry actors, research institutions, and public authorities, as well as the extent of collaboration and coordination among partners.

*The weight and specific aspects of each criterion may vary depending on the specific call and funding scheme. Applicants are advised to carefully review the call documents and guidelines to understand the evaluation criteria and ensure that their proposals address them effectively.*

## Useful links & resources

The LIFE programme - Support for applicants page captures steps and guidance around how to apply for funding:

- [LIFE - Support for applicants](#)
- [LIFE - Close to market projects: Examples & Guidance](#)
- [LIFE YouTube Channel](#) includes information about LIFE funded projects and information session on the programme.
- [CINEA information days](#)

**National Contact Point (NCP):** For support and guidance with applications for LIFE program and to participate in information/networking events and proposal writing workshops get in touch with your NCP.

They also support in communicating and disseminating your project results.

General contact email: [LIFE@dccae.gov.ie](mailto:LIFE@dccae.gov.ie)

The NCPs for LIFE CET are from Mr Philip Cheasty,

**Enterprise Ireland** and Ms Aideen Reilly

**Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.**

Their contact information can be found [here](#).

List of NCPs for all sub-programmes of LIFE: [Country factsheet with contact information](#)

## 2.4. Single Market Programme

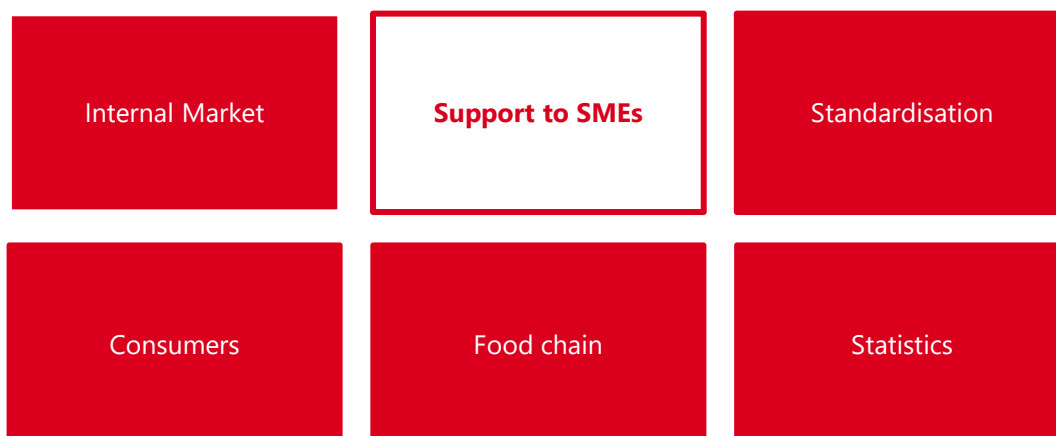
This chapter provides the below information for the Single Market Programme with focus on the SME pillar:

- Overview
- Irish Success Story
- Award criteria/what to focus on?
- Useful links & resources

### Overview

The Single Market Programme is a modern, simple and flexible programme, which consolidates a large range of activities that were previously financed separately<sup>4</sup>, into one coherent programme. It aims to promote Effective internal market & SMEs competitiveness.

**Figure 13: Six Pillars of the Single Market Programme:**



- **SME Pillar** aims to boost the competitiveness of businesses, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- **24%** of the Single Market Programme budget dedicated to competitiveness of SMEs.
- **850k SMEs** in 35 countries have been supported through the SME pillar.

#### Forms of support that the SME pillar provides to the SMEs:

- Financial support – grants & loan guarantees
- Access to markets
- Reduced administrative burden
- Debt & equity financing
- Network to provide integrated package of advice
- Advanced tools and capacity building

<sup>4</sup> The Single Market Programme pools crucial activities financed under [several previous programmes](#).

**An overview of the areas that Single Market Programme SME pillar focuses on:**

- **Innovative Technologies and Products:** SMEs developing innovative technologies, products, or services across various sectors, such as advanced manufacturing, digitalisation, biotechnology, and clean technologies.
- **Digital Transformation:** Initiatives focusing on helping SMEs leverage digital technologies and embrace digital transformation to improve their competitiveness, productivity, and market reach. This may include projects related to digitalisation of processes, adoption of e-commerce solutions, and development of digital skills.
- **Internationalisation and Market Access:** Projects focused on helping SMEs expand into new markets, both within the EU and globally, through market research, export promotion activities, trade missions, and support for participation in international trade fairs and exhibitions.
- **Skills Development and Training:** Initiatives aimed at enhancing the skills and capabilities of SMEs' workforce through training programs, vocational education, and knowledge-sharing platforms, with a focus on fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and adaptability to market changes.
- **Sustainability and Green Transition:** SMEs in adopting sustainable business practices, reducing their environmental footprint, and transitioning towards a circular economy model. This could include projects related to eco-design, resource efficiency, and renewable energy adoption.
- **Regulatory Compliance and Standards:** Initiatives may aim to help SMEs navigate regulatory requirements and standards, particularly in the context of the Single Market, by providing information, guidance, and support for compliance with relevant regulations and quality standards.

*These are a few examples of the areas the Single Market Programme prioritises. The specific topics and the themes are updated regularly. Information around the same can be accessed in the call for proposals section on the programme's page [here](#).*

**Irish Success Story****InnoBroker**

**Procurement  
Transformation  
Institute Ireland  
received nearly €600k  
in EU contribution  
(2018 and 2020)**

InnoBroker aimed to establish the Innovation Procurement Broker (IPB) business model that will:

- bring together and facilitate the procurement of innovative goods and services between contracting authorities, suppliers of innovation
- with a special focus on SMEs and start-ups, investors, and researchers.

## Useful links & resources

Below provided are list of useful links about the various tools and support made available for SMEs through the Single Market Programme:

- [The Single Market Programme Factsheet](#) covers the objectives, focus areas and budget breakdown of the various pillars of the programme.
- [Featured programmes & initiatives](#) under the SME support pillar of the Single Market Programme.
- Grants are awarded to co-finance specific projects or objectives through [calls for proposals](#). Information around open and closed calls are regularly updated in the above page.
- [Single Market Programme: Background](#) provides the basis for the programmes and its various activities.
- The Programme is managed by: [Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs](#).
- The Programme is implemented by: [European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency \(EISMEA\)](#).

## 2.5. Connected Europe Facility

This chapter provides the below information for the funding programme – Connected Europe Facility (CEF) with focus on CEF Energy:

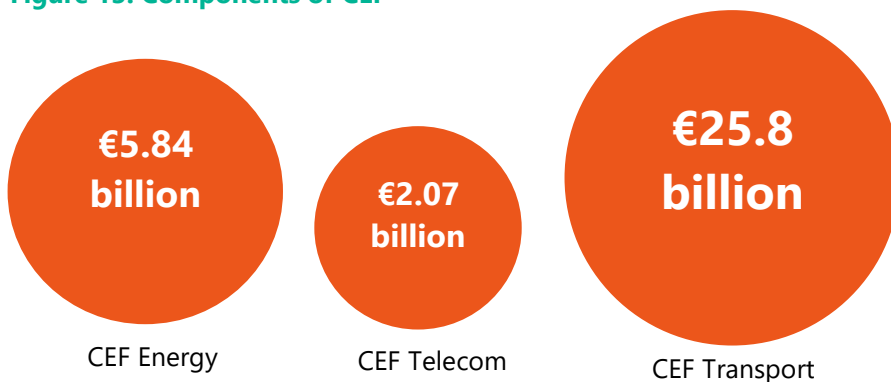
- Overview
- Objectives & Scope
- Types of funding

### Overview

The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) fund promotes growth, jobs and competitiveness by developing high-performing, sustainable and efficiently interconnected trans-European networks in the fields of transport, energy and digital services.

The total budget for this fund (2021 - 2027) **€ 33.7 billion**

**Figure 13: Components of CEF**



Source: [CINEA Programmes](#)

### About CEF Energy

CEF Energy offers financial support to close the investment gap in cross-border energy infrastructure projects that are on the EU list of projects of common interest.

- It improves the EU's energy security in the context of increasing energy demand and supports the integration of renewable energy sources.
- CEF Energy also includes a policy window on cross-border renewable energy projects, with the aim to foster Member States' cooperation on cross-border renewable energy technology projects, ensuring a lower cost for renewables integration and enabling the strategic uptake of renewables technologies.

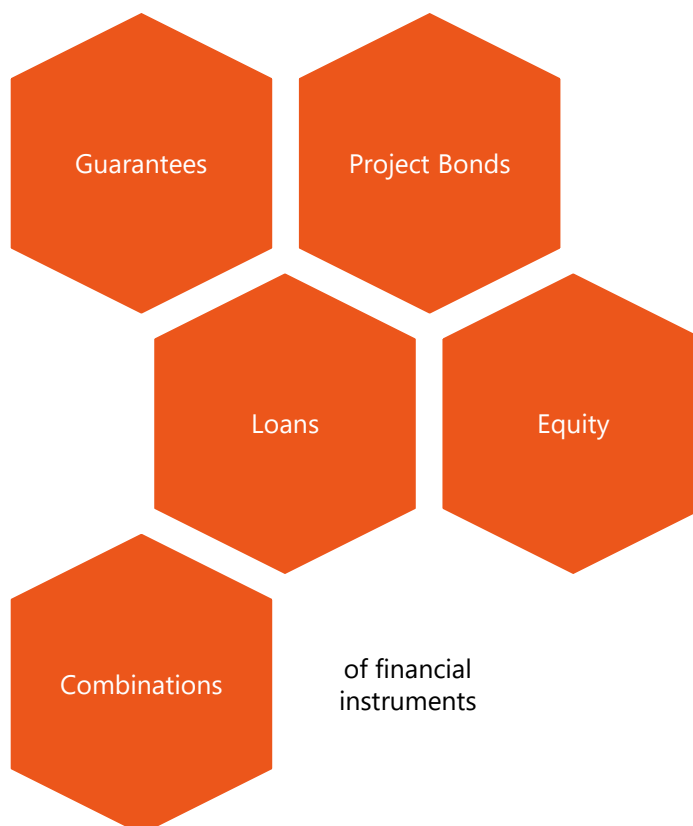
## Objectives & scope:

- The general objectives of the CEF to build, develop, modernise and complete the trans-European networks in the transport, energy and digital sectors.
- One of the priorities of the CEF is to enable and strengthen the synergies between the energy, transportation and digitalisation sectors.
- Actions across sectors may allow costs or results to be optimised through the pooling of financial, technical or human resources, thus enhancing the effectiveness of EU funding.

## Types of funding

The CEF provides grants. In addition to grants, the CEF offers financial support to projects through innovative financial instruments such as:

**Figure 14: Nature of support provided by CEF**



Click [here](#) for more information.

## 2.6. Innovation Fund

- [Overview](#)
- [Objectives & Scope](#)
- [Types of funding](#)

### Overview

The Innovation Fund (IF) aims to **deploy innovative net-zero technologies** for climate neutrality. Annually IF provides grants for projects to invest in the deployment of next-generation technologies for the EU's **transition towards climate neutrality**.

It is open for project proposals from individual businesses and consortia, including **SMEs and mid-caps** across all EEA Member States.

The Innovation Fund focuses on highly innovative technologies and large flagship projects in the following sectors:

- **Energy-Intensive Industries:** (steel, cement, glass, chemicals, paper, etc.), including products substituting carbon-intensive ones.
- **Renewable Energy Generation**
- **Energy Storage**
- Construction & operation of **Carbon Capture and Storage**
- **Carbon Capture and Utilisation**

### Objectives & scope

The overall goal for each funded project is to contribute to greenhouse gas reduction, decarbonise Europe and support its transition to climate neutrality.

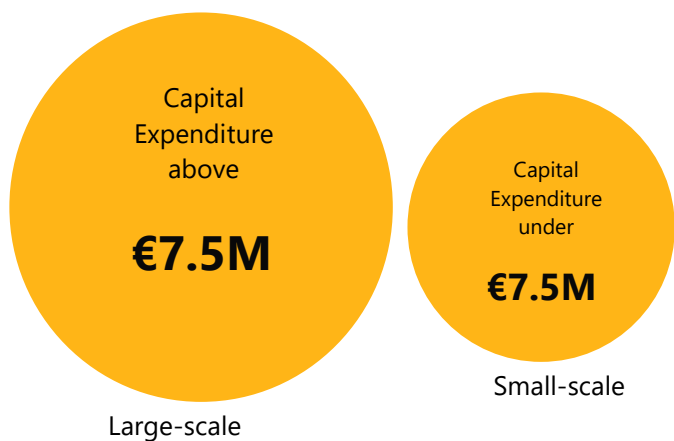
For that, the Innovation Fund seeks to:

- Create the right financial incentives for new investments in the next generation of technologies for the EU's transition to climate neutrality;
- Boost growth and competitiveness by empowering companies with a first-mover advantage to become global leaders in innovative clean technologies;
- Support innovative low-carbon technologies in all Member States in taking off and reaching the market.



## Types of funding

The Innovation Fund supports projects mainly via grants. The Innovation Fund supports both large-scale and small-scale projects:



The fund covers up to:

- 60 % of the relevant additional capital and operational costs of large-scale projects
- 60 % of the capital costs of small-scale projects.

Click [here](#) for more information.

## 3. European Innovation Council & SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA)

- [Overview](#)
- [EU Programmes managed by EISMEA](#)
- [Interregional innovation investments \(i3\) instrument](#)

The European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA) is responsible for developing and implementing the European Innovation Council and manages other EU programmes with focus on SME support, innovation and single market.

EU Programmes managed by EISMEA:

Identify & support breakthrough tech with the potential to scale up internationally.



Enable innovation ecosystem actors to work together across Europe.



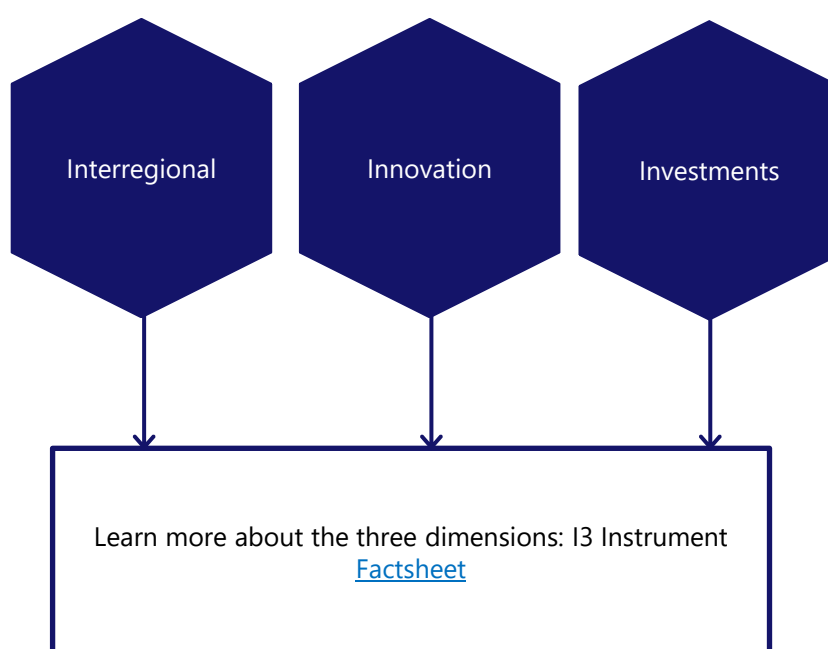
Strengthen economic cohesion in the EU by helping businesses work with innovation actors in other regions.

Help SMEs make the most of business opportunities. EISMEA only covers the SME pillar.

Click [here](#) for more information.

## 4. Interregional Innovation Investments Instrument (I3 Instrument)

The Interregional innovation investments instrument as part of the European Regional and Development Fund ([ERDF](#)) aims at supporting interregional innovation projects in their commercialisation and scale-up phases giving them the tools to overcome regulatory and other barriers and bring their project to investment level.



### Funding opportunities

- **Strand 1:** Financial and advisory support for investments in interregional innovation projects;
- **Strand 2a:** Financial and advisory support to the development of value chains in less developed regions.

Click [here](#) for more information & guidelines for applicants.

## 5. Other tools & support for SMEs

The below EU tools, support and resources have been dedicated to SMEs:

- [EU Entrepreneurship & SMEs](#) page consolidates key information for SMEs including access to funding, and key support, networks and information for SMEs.
- [EISMEA](#) manage EU programmes with SME focus and regularly share updates and announcements for SME.
- [Enterprise Europe Network](#) will provide an integrated package of advice to SMEs on how to innovate and grow internationally.
- [SME envoy network](#) to promote SME-friendly regulation and policy-making at EU and national level.
- [Joint cluster initiatives](#) - a new generation of actions involving industrial clusters - groups of specialised enterprises, often SMEs, and other related supporting actors in a location that cooperate closely.
- [SME events](#) page highlights upcoming and ongoing event relevant to SMEs and SME networks.

**Click below to read EU's SME strategy:**  
[Unleashing the full potential of European SMEs](#)

## Disclaimer

This guide has been compiled as of May 2024. The Work Programmes referenced in the document are for the period (2023 -2024).

Work programmes referenced herein may be updated or modified by EU authorities without prior notice. For the most up-to-date and relevant information regarding funding opportunities, eligibility criteria, and application procedures, we recommend consulting the official EU portal. This guide serves as a general reference and should not be considered exhaustive or definitive.

**For more information & support:**

[EU Funding & Tenders Portal](#)



**Rialtas na hÉireann**  
Government of Ireland

Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland

Three Park  
Place Hatch  
Street Upper  
Dublin 2  
Ireland  
D02 FX65

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