



# OPEN HORIZONS

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**Open Horizons Open Call #1**

SPLORO

May 2025



OPENING: 11 of June 2025

CLOSING: 21 of August 2025 at 17:00\* CEST (Brussels time)

*\*The deadline for submission is as stated in this Guidelines. Please note that the platform for submission's time depends on the user's configured zone and may or may not coincide with the correct time (this depends on the user, not the platform for submission). Any discrepancies in system time will not be grounds for deadline extension.*

**Project Website:** <https://www.openhorizonsproject.eu/>

**Apply:** <https://bit.ly/OpenCall1Applicants>

#### Disclaimer

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## **1. Introduction**

Open Horizons, funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme, aims to accelerate the growth of women-led digital and deep-tech startups by fostering collaboration with leading corporations through an open innovation framework. Despite rapid sector growth, women entrepreneurs face systemic barriers such as limited funding access and difficulties securing corporate clients, which hinder their scalability. This initiative addresses these challenges by enabling corporates to become first customers, thereby facilitating market validation and investment opportunities for startups.

The project will run three Open Calls, and the acceleration programme consists of two main phases: an initial development phase focused on refining tailored solutions to corporate challenges, followed by a five-month piloting phase where startups implement projects alongside corporate partners. Throughout, participants receive financial support, mentorship, and networking opportunities to strengthen their market position.

Running from February 2025 over 26 months with €1.2 million in funding, Open Horizons not only supports women-led startups but also enhances corporate innovation strategies, promoting a more inclusive and dynamic deep-tech ecosystem. The project is managed by PEDAL, SPLORO, INNOVX, and MIGROS in partnership with leading corporations.

## **2. General questions about the project**

### **2.1 What is Open Horizons?**

Open Horizons is an EU-funded initiative under Horizon Europe aimed at supporting women-led digital and deep-tech startups. The project connects startups with leading corporations through an open innovation process to help them scale and gain market traction. Open Horizons offers €1.2 million in funding, distributed through three Open Calls, to support the development and piloting of innovative solutions by selected startups.

### **2.2 How much funding will be distributed in OC#1?**

For the first Open Call (OC#1), Open Horizons has allocated a budget of €335,000. Funding will be awarded to 11 startups, with grants provided in tranches based on the

achievement of milestones and successful completion of pilot projects, ensuring progress-driven support throughout the programme.

### 3. General questions about the Open Call

#### 3.1 Relevant dates

- 1st Open Call launch: **11 June 2025**
- Open Call support channel: **11 June 2025 to 21 August 2025**
- Deadline for submission: **21 August 2025, 17:00H\* CEST (Brussels time)**
- Evaluation of proposals: **August 2025**
- Remote interviews: **September 2025**
- Communication of results to applicants: **September 2025**
- Legal validation and sub-grant agreement preparation: **October 2025**
- Start of the programme: **October 2025**

#### 3.2 Who can apply for the Open Horizons?

Open Horizons is open to early-stage digital or deep-tech startups founded or co-founded by women in top management roles (e.g., CEO, CTO). Eligible companies must be registered in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country for at least 6 months and no more than 6 years at the time of application.

Startups must meet Horizon Europe's SME definition, be autonomous, and have raised less than €1M in equity. Proposals must be unique and must not have received funding from Women TechEU, EmpoWomen, or similar initiatives. Any conflict of interest with consortium partners or failure to meet these criteria will result in ineligibility.

#### 3.3 My company is not legally registered yet. Can I still apply?

No. The company needs to be legally registered and officially recorded in a government business registry or database at least six months before the submission of the application and a maximum 6 years.

Should you be selected as a beneficiary, this will be checked during legal validation before signing sub-grantee agreement and registration documents will need to be presented to the consortium.

### 3.4 When can I apply?

The application period for Open Horizons OC#1 opens on June 11, 2025, and closes on August 21, 2025, 17:00h CEST (Brussels time). All applications must be submitted within its timeframe. Late submissions will not be considered. Applicants are encouraged to initiate the application process well in advance to ensure timely submission.

### 3.5 How can I apply?

Applications must be submitted through the official online submission [SPLORO platform](#), directly linked to the Open Horizons website. Only applications received through this platform are considered eligible. Before you begin, we strongly recommend carefully reviewing the guidelines and Annex 1, a preliminary version of the form, to familiarize yourself with key elements.

### 3.6 What does “women-led” mean?

A woman founder or co-founder must hold an executive role (CEO, CTO, etc.) and own at least 25% of the company shares. Both cis and trans women who are legally recognised as women are eligible.

### 3.7 What is considered a “deep-tech” or “digital” start-up?

A deep-tech company is one that builds on scientific research or disruptive technological innovation. Digital start-ups use existing technologies (software, apps, etc.) as the core of their business model.

- Under Horizon Europe, a *start-up* is understood as a small or medium-sized enterprise (SME) in the early stages of its life cycle. This includes newly established companies, particularly those created as spin-offs from university research activities, that aim to deliver innovative solutions and develop scalable business models. Such entities **must be autonomous** within the meaning of [Article 3 of the Annex to Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC](#).

- In addition, start-ups must meet the criteria of an SME as defined in [Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC](#), namely:
  - Employing fewer than 250 persons (measured in Annual Work Units – AWU);
  - Having an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 43 million.

### 3.8 What type of funding counts towards the limitation of €1M equity for startup eligibility?

Only equity-based funding is taken into account when calculating the €1 million threshold. This means funding received in exchange for ownership or shares in the company.

If your company has raised more than €1 million through the sale of equity (such as common or preferred shares), it will not be eligible.

Other types of funding that do not involve giving up ownership — such as grants, loans, venture debt, or convertible instruments (like SAFEs or convertible notes that have not yet been converted into shares) — are not considered equity and do not count towards the limit.

Please note: Only private companies are eligible. Foundations, associations, federations, or other legal entities that are not private companies will not be accepted.

### 3.9 Which countries are eligible?

All EU Member States and countries associated with Horizon Europe. Please refer to the most up-to-date list from the European Commission at the time of application:

- **Member States:** Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.
- **Horizon Europe Associated Countries:** Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Georgia, Iceland, Israel, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

*\*List of [Horizon Europe Associated Countries](#) as published by the European Commission on the opening date.*

### 3.10 Can I apply if I have received previous funding from Women TechEU or EmpoWomen?

No. Start-ups that have already been supported under similar EU programmes are not eligible to avoid double funding.

### 3.11 What happens if I don't meet one of the eligibility criteria?

Your proposal will be automatically rejected. There is no flexibility regarding eligibility requirements. Therefore, all potential applicants are advised to read in detail the eligibility criteria to be found on page 12 of the Guidelines.

### 3.12 Where and when can I get support in case of questions?

A dedicated support channel is available for applicants at [info@openhorizonsproject.eu](mailto:info@openhorizonsproject.eu). Support requests receive a response within 72 hours. While efforts are made to respond promptly, applicants are advised to plan their submissions with sufficient time before the deadline. Inquiries received two days before the call closure time may not be considered or answered.

## 4. Questions related to the challenges

### 4.1 What are the corporate challenges in Open Horizons?

As part of the Open Horizons programme, selected startups will address specific challenges defined by participating corporate partners. These challenges reflect real-world industry needs and are designed to foster the co-development of innovative, market-ready solutions.

Each challenge is framed by a corporate partner looking for cutting-edge solutions in the digital or deep-tech space. Startups are expected to propose how their technology or solution can respond to one or more of these challenges.

The challenges are published on page 16 of the official Guidelines. Applicants must clearly indicate which challenge they are addressing in their proposal (only 1).



#### 4.2 Can I apply if my solution does not fit any of the listed challenges?

No. Startups must apply to one specific corporate challenge. Applications not aligned with a published challenge will not be considered eligible. The programme is designed to foster direct collaboration between startups and corporates, and therefore alignment with a defined challenge is essential.

#### 4.3 Can I address more than one challenge?

No. Each applicant must select **only one** challenge to address in their proposal. While your solution may be relevant to multiple use cases, the Open Horizons Open Call requires startups to focus on a single corporate challenge to ensure alignment and effective collaboration during the co-creation and piloting phases.

#### 4.4 Will I work directly with the corporate defining the challenge?

Yes. Selected startups will collaborate closely with the corporate partner during the co-creation and piloting phases. This includes regular communication, mentoring, and joint definition of the pilot's scope and implementation.

### 5. Questions related to the programme

#### 5.1 How much funding is available and how is it disbursed?

Up to €55,000 per start-up:

- Inception Stage (1 month): up to €10,000
- Piloting Stage (5 months): up to €45,000 (in 3 instalments)

For information on disbursement, please consult the Guidelines, page 37.

#### 5.2 How many startups will be awarded by the Open Horizons OC#1?

Under Open Horizons Open Call #1 (OC#1), funding will be awarded to 11 women-led start-ups that are in the inception stage.

Out of these, 5 start-ups will be selected to move forward to the piloting stage.

#### 5.3 What are the phases of the programme?

The programme is structured in three key phases:

- Inception Stage: A 1-month collaborative phase where selected start-ups work closely with a corporate partner to explore potential pilot ideas.
- Piloting Stage: A 5-month phase dedicated to the technical implementation of the pilot project with the corporate partner.

#### 5.4 What kind of support will I receive?

Selected start-ups will benefit from a comprehensive support package, including:

- Tailored training and mentoring
- Opportunities for networking with corporates and investors
- Participation in a high-visibility Demo Day
- Visibility and promotion through the Open Horizons consortium network

#### 5.5 I have other questions

If you have any other questions, first read the guidelines. If you don't find the answer there, contact the helpdesk by email to [info@openhorizonsproject.eu](mailto:info@openhorizonsproject.eu).