EIC Pathfinder Challenges Introduction and evaluation

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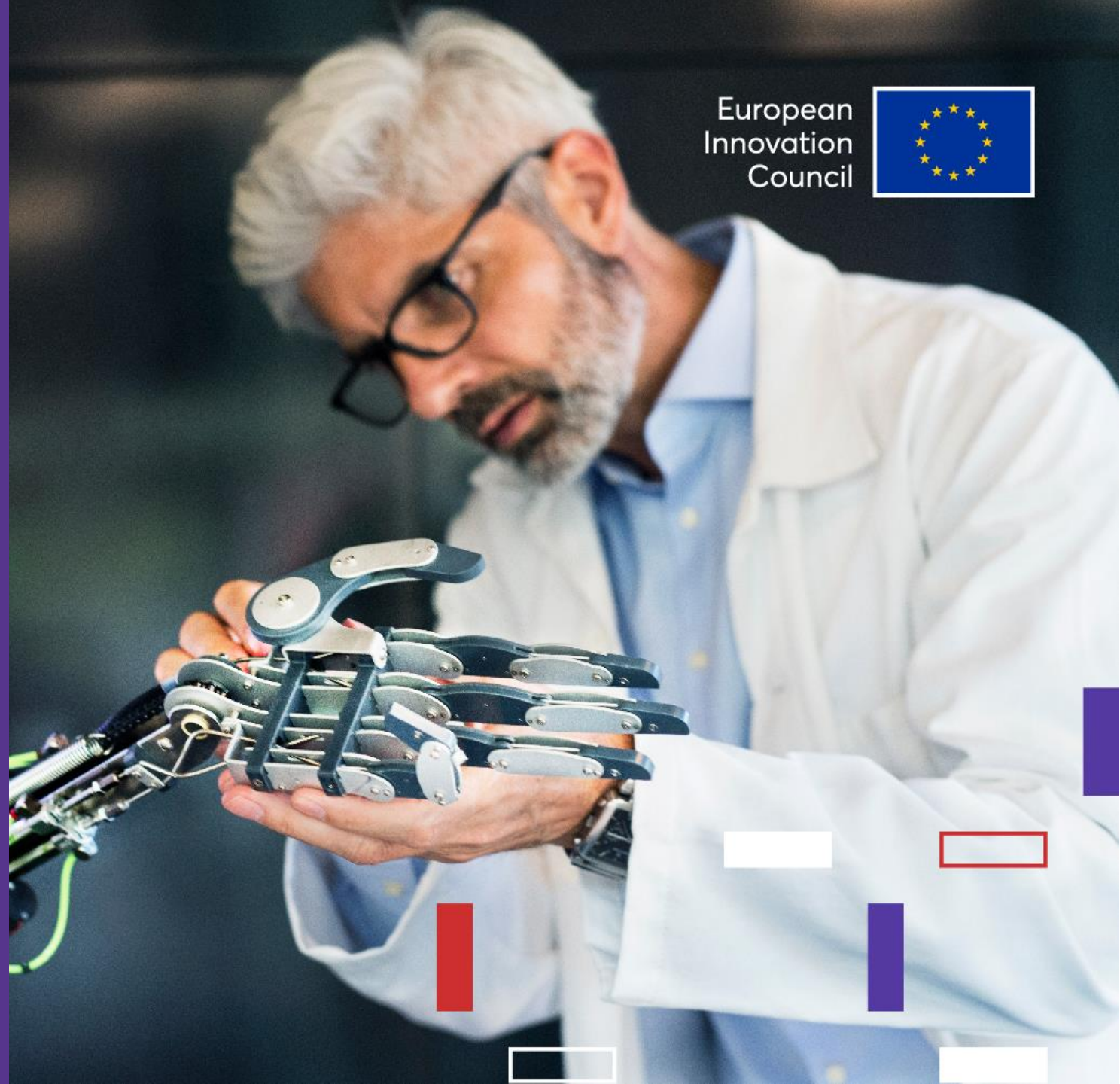
EISMEA E01



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#PathfinderChallenges

Funding schemes

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EIC Pathfinder Open	supports projects in any field of science, technology or application without predefined thematic priorities.
EIC Pathfinder Challenges	support coherent portfolios of projects within predefined thematic areas with the aim to achieve specific objectives for each Challenge.

EIC Pathfinder Challenges

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- Aim to build on **new, cutting-edge directions in science and technology** to disrupt a field and a market or create new opportunities by realising innovative technological solutions grounded in high-risk/high-gain research and development.
- Establish **a portfolio of projects** that explore different perspectives, competing approaches or complementary aspects of the Challenge.
- Proactively steered by **EIC Programme Managers**

Pathfinder Challenges for 2025 (1)

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1. *Biotech for Climate Resilient Crops and Plant-Based Biomanufacturing*

Programme Manager:

Ivan Stefanic

Pathfinder Challenges for 2025 (2)

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2. *Generative-AI based Agents to Revolutionize Medical Diagnosis and Treatment of Cancer*

Programme Manager:

Federica Zanca

Pathfinder Challenges for 2025 (3)

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3. *Towards autonomous robot collectives delivering collaborative tasks in dynamic unstructured construction environments*

Programme Manager:

Franc Mouwen

Pathfinder Challenges for 2025 (4)

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4. *Waste-to-value devices: Circular production of renewable fuels, chemicals and materials*

Programme Manager:

Carina Faber

Call statistics EIC Pathfinder 2021-2024

Open	eligible proposals	funded proposals	EU contribution	success rate
2021	868	60	180,2 M€	6,9%
2022	858	66	197,2 M€	7,7%
2023	783	61	177 M€	7,9%
2024	1100	45	138,1 M€	4,1%
Total	**3609**	**232**	**692.5 M€**	**6.4%**

Challenges	eligible proposals	funded proposals	EU contribution	success rate
2021	403	42	146,8 M€	10,4%
2022	436	49	178,2 M€	11,2%
2023	368	43	159 M€	11,7%
2024	401	32	119,9 M€	8,0%
Total	**1608**	**166**	**603.9 M€**	**10,3%**

Expected project outcomes

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- Expected outcomes defined in the respective Challenge WP
- Project results should include **top-level scientific publications** as well as an **adequate formal protection of the generated Intellectual Property as well as an assessment of relevant aspects related to regulation, certification, and standardization.**
- Projects are encouraged to involve and empower in their teams **key actors** that have the potential to **become future leaders** in their fields such as excellent early-career researchers or promising high-tech SMEs, including start-ups
- Project particularly encouraged to **empower female researchers** and to achieve gender balance among the work package leaders

Pathfinder Challenge Guides

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The Challenge Guide provides :

- **General context** of the EIC Pathfinder Challenge
- The **scope** as defined in the work programme
- **Portfolio considerations** used for the final selection of proposals to be funded

Challenge Guides have been published on the EIC website: https://eic.ec.europa.eu/eic-funding-opportunities/eic-pathfinder-new-template/eic-pathfinder-challenges_en

Can you apply?

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- **Single legal entities** established in a Member State or an Associated Country (mid-caps and larger companies will not be permitted) https://eic.ec.europa.eu/eic-2025-work-programme_en

- **Consortia of two entities** must be two independent legal entities from two different Member States or Associated Countries

- **Consortia of three or more entities** must include as beneficiaries at least three legal entities, independent from each other and each established in a different country as follows:
  - at least one legal entity established in a Member State; and
  - at least two other independent legal entities, each established in different Member States or Associated Countries.

- The legal entities may for example be universities, research organisations, SMEs, start-ups, industrial partners or natural persons.

Can you apply? (2)

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- **Important: associated partners** are not taken into account for eligibility rules!
- Examples of **ineligible** consortia:
  - 2 organisations from FR & 1 organisation from DE
  - 2 organisations from PL & 2 organisations from IT
  - 2 organisations from FR, 1 organisation from DE & 1 organisation from CA
- Examples of **eligible** consortia:
  - 1 organisation from MT & 1 organisation from CZ
  - 1 organisation from ES & 1 organisation from BE
  - 1 organisation from GR,1 organisation from SE & 1 organization from US

What support will you receive if your proposal is funded? (1)

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- A **grant** for a **Research and Innovation Action** to cover eligible costs
- EIC considers proposals with an EU contribution of **up to € 4 million** as appropriate (larger amounts possible, if duly justified)
- Funding rate **100% of the eligible costs in the form of a lump sum.**
- Total indicative budget for this call: **€ 120 million** (expected to be allocated in approximately equal shares across the Challenges)
- Successful applicants will receive tailor-made access to a wide range of **Business Acceleration Services** and interactions with **EIC Programme Managers** and other actions in the portfolio of projects selected

What support will you receive if your proposal is funded? (2)

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- Eligible costs will take the form of a **lump sum** and **the amount will be determined during the evaluation process**.
- Applicants must **propose the amount of the lump sum** based on their estimated project costs.
- It is advised to include a **work package** dedicated to **portfolio activities** and allocate at least 10 person-month to it.

Additional Opportunities for Pathfinder Selected Projects:

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Projects funded through EIC Pathfinder are eligible:

- to receive **EIC Booster grants** (up to 3 per project or more if duly justified) of a fixed amount not exceeding EUR 50 000 to undertake complementary activities:
  - to explore potential pathways to commercialization
  - for portfolio activities
- to submit an **EIC Transition** proposal
- to submit an **EIC Accelerator** proposal via the **Fast Track** scheme
- to participate in '**Next Generation Innovation Talents**' scheme (personnel costs of participating researchers are eligible under Pathfinder grants)

How do you apply: how long does it take?

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- You must submit your application via the **Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal** before the given deadline.
- The call will open on 24 July 2025, and the deadline to submit the proposal is **29 October 2025 at 17.00 CET**.
- You will be informed about the outcome of the evaluation within **5 months from the call deadline** (indicative).
- If your proposal is selected for funding, you can expect your grant agreement to be signed by **8 months after the call deadline**.

Proposal submission

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- The Proposal Application Form is composed of **two parts**:
  - **Part A:** to be filled online (no page limit). It contains administrative details, the summarised budget and call specific questions.
  - **Part B:** to be uploaded as a single document (page limit: maximum of **30** A4 pages – Section 1 to 3). It contains the technical description of the project.
- The estimated budget must be described in a **detailed budget table per beneficiary and per workpackage**. This will be used as a basis for justifying and/or fixing the **lump sum amount**.
- Template will be available on the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal

Keeping records when implementing the action

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Applies for all Horizon Europe grants

To keep (e.g.)

- Technical documents
- Publications, prototypes, deliverables
- Documentation required by good research practices such as lab books
- ...any document proving that the work was done as detailed in Annex 1

No need to keep*

- Time-sheets
- Pay-slips or contracts
- Depreciation policy
- Invoices
- ...any documents proving the actual costs incurred

**Participants need to comply with financial record keeping obligations outside the grant agreement, if any (e.g., under national law or under internal procedures)*

How is proposal funding determined?

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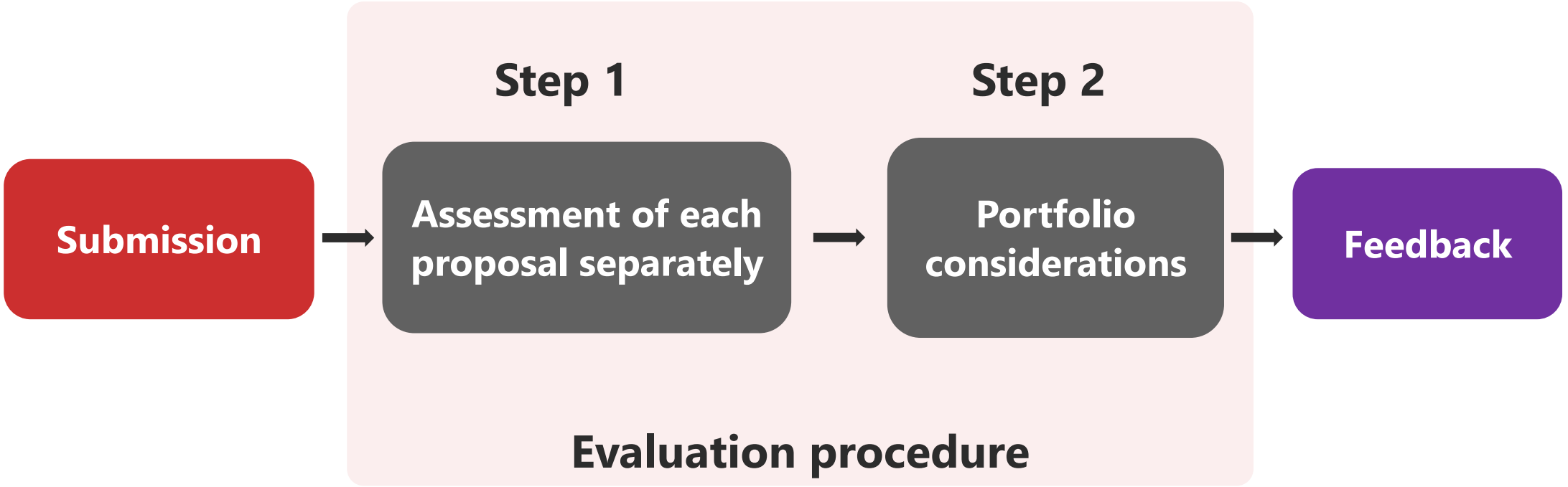

The pilot on the rebuttal ("right to react") process has been discontinued

Step 1: Assessment of each proposal separately

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- At least three EIC expert evaluators evaluate and score **each proposal individually** with respect to the award criteria
- After the individual evaluation, these evaluators will get together in a **consensus group** to agree on a common position on comments and scores.
- The **evaluation committee** (composed of EIC expert evaluators and EIC Programme Managers) will check consistency across the evaluation of each individual proposal and **finalise the scores and comments** for all proposals

Award criterion “Excellence”

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Threshold **4/5**

Weight **60%**

- **Objectives and relevance to the Challenge:** How clear are the project’s objectives? How relevant are they in contributing to the overall goal and the specific objectives of the Challenge?
- **Novelty:** To what extent is the proposed work ambitious and goes beyond the state-of-the-art?
- **Plausibility of the methodology:** How sound is the proposed methodology, including the underlying concepts, models, assumptions, appropriate consideration of the gender dimension in research content, and the quality of open science practices?

Award criterion “Impact”

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- **Potential Impact:** How credible are the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts of the Challenge? To what extent would the successful completion of the project contribute to this?

Threshold **3.5/5**

Weight **20%**

- **Innovation potential:** How realistic is the proof of principle for demonstrating the potential impact of the technology for the challenge? How adequate are the proposed measures for protection of results and any other exploitation measures to facilitate future translation of research results into innovations with positive societal, economic or environmental impact? How suitable are the proposed measures for involving and empowering key actors that have the potential to take the lead in translating research into innovations in the future?

- **Communication and Dissemination:** How suitable are the proposed measures, including communication activities, to maximise expected outcomes and impacts for raising awareness about the project results’ potential to establish new markets and/or address global challenges?

Award criterion "Quality and efficiency of the implementation"

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Threshold **3/5**

Weight **20%**

- **Work plan:** How coherent and effective are the work plan (work packages, tasks, deliverables, milestones, timeline, etc.) and risk mitigation measures in order to achieve the project objectives?
- **Allocation of resources:** How appropriate and effective is the allocation of resources (comprising person-months and other cost items) to work packages and consortium members?
- **Quality of the applicant/consortium (depends if mono or multi-beneficiaries):** To what extent does the applicant / do all the consortium members have the necessary capacity and high-quality expertise for performing the project tasks?

Step 2: Portfolio considerations

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- All proposals that meet the thresholds defined in the award criteria will be considered in step 2
- **Mapping of proposals in categories** stemming from overall goal and specific objectives of the Challenge (e.g., building blocks or subsystems, technical areas and/or competing technologies, platforms, applications areas, risk level and stage of technology readiness level, size)
- A **suitable portfolio of proposals** to be selected by evaluation committee by applying **portfolio considerations** in order to propose for funding a coherent set of projects that will achieve expected outcomes and impacts of the Challenge and maximise their impact.
- Further information and details about categories and portfolio considerations to be detailed in **EIC Pathfinder Challenge Guides**, which will be topic and domain specific
- Evaluation committee may also **propose some minor adjustments** to the proposals.

Feedback to Applicants

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- Applicants will receive an **Evaluation Summary Report** that will comprise of:
  - the **final score;**
  - **comments endorsed** by the evaluation committee;
  - **additional comments.**
- Applicants will also be informed about the **underlying portfolio considerations** in case their proposal was either retained for funding or not retained for funding while it received a score that was higher than other proposals retained for funding under the same Challenge.
- Comments on the detailed lump sum budget table will be provided in the Evaluation Summary Report only for proposals invited to grant agreement preparation (or placed in the reserve list) and ones rejected (in part) due to significant overestimation or underestimation of costs.

What happens after a proposal is evaluated and retained for funding?

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- Successful applicants will be contacted and supported by **Project Officer** and relevant **EIC Programme Manager** during grant agreement preparation
- Planning of **portfolio activities** - all projects in the Challenge Portfolio are expected to collaborate with each other
- Start of preparation of **Challenge roadmap**, which will define collective deliverables, activities and objectives of the portfolio of projects
- During the execution of the project: **continuous interaction** with Project Officer assigned to your project and the EIC Programme Manager assigned to the Challenge Portfolio of your project, who will oversee all the portfolio projects

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Thank you !

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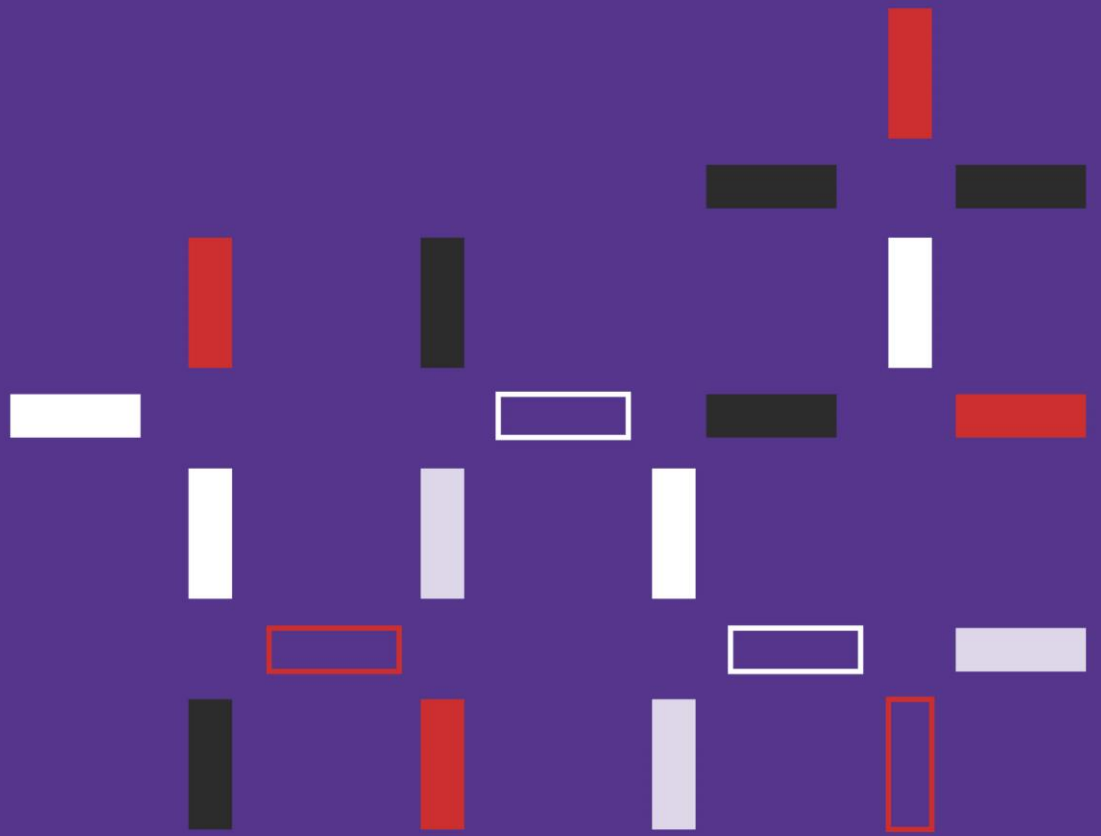

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