Hard2Scale Accelerator Guideline

Third Open Call for Applications – **Molecular transformation industries (Chemicals, Petrochemicals, Biochemistry, Pharmaceuticals, Refining)**

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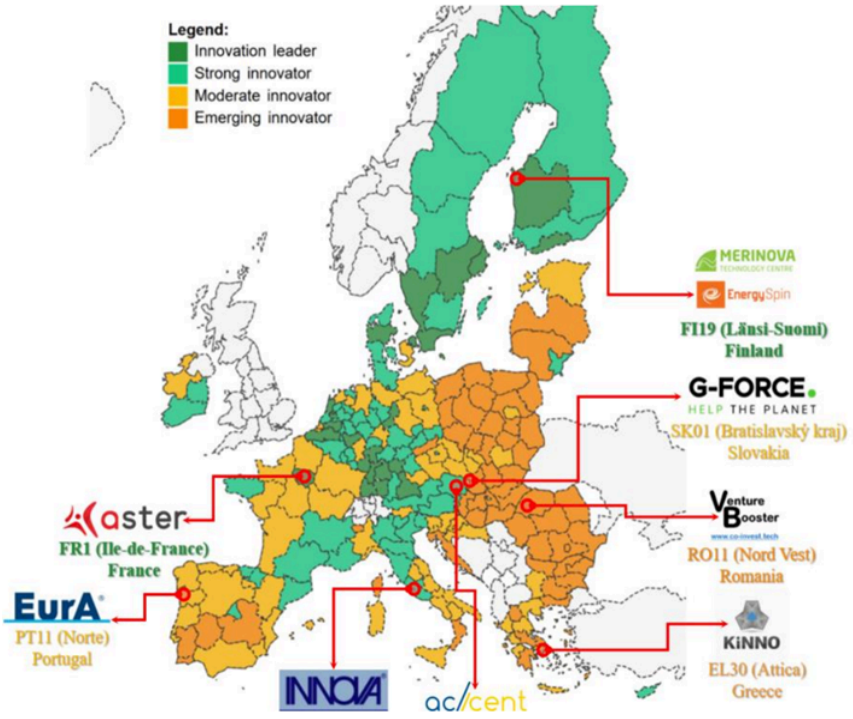
INTRODUCTION

The **Hard2Scale Macro-Regional Accelerator** is a specialised programme designed to support Startups that are developing **first-of-a-kind solutions** for **hard-to-abate** and **energy-intensive industries**.
These industries, such as Heavy-Duty Road Freight, Manufacturing, Chemicals, etc., face significant challenges in reducing their energy consumption, emissions and overall environmental footprint. Hard2Scale helps innovative companies overcome barriers to scale-up by providing:

- **Tailored support** for innovative companies developing solutions targeting the challenges faced by energy-intensive industries to achieve investment and market readiness.
- **Open Innovation Workshops** focused on creating business collaborations and opportunities for industrial deployment (through prototypes, demonstrators, pilots).
- **Matchmaking opportunities** with investors, corporates, and industry stakeholders interested in adopting emerging, disruptive technologies.
- **Access to regional, national and EU public funding opportunities** to support the development of (individual or collaborative) innovation projects at the regional/inter-regional level.

The accelerator aims to bridge the gap between breakthrough cleantech and digital solutions and **their adoption in industry**, simultaneously accelerating **decarbonization** and **industrial competitiveness**.

The Hard2Scale Consortium integrates 8 partners:



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Kinno (GR) KiNNO Innovation Intermediaries Ltd. is an Innovation Intermediary Company committed to accelerating the market deployment of innovative solutions. Acting as a strategic facilitator between key stakeholders of the 4-Helix, KiNNO bridges the gap between research and market to enhance innovations' impact. With a focus on deep-tech solutions, KiNNO ensures innovations' sustainable and scalable growth by guiding organisations to navigate the full innovation lifecycle towards commercialisation. By providing services that strengthen the Knowledge and Innovation Capacity of the innovation ecosystem stakeholders, KiNNO focuses on facilitating the market uptake of Deep Tech Innovation to support the goals of the European Twin Transition.

Innova (IT) INNOVA drives innovation, bridging the gap between research and industry, and contributing to technological advancements. Also, has built strong relationships with client companies, agencies, and institutions. The company offers unique outsourcing support from idea analysis to market launch, and its staff is highly qualified, experienced, multilingual, and multicultural. INNOVA's technology transfer & valorisation trademark is recognised at the European level.

accent (AT) - leads the building of ecosystems
Accent Inkubator GmbH operates as a high-tech incubator in Lower Austria. It offers business development support, IP strategy, funding and financing, access to investors, and training for various topics for startups. They are a partner at i2b and the AAIA, two large business angel networks in Austria, and provide startups with access to equity, know-how, and venture capital. Ascent's approach is profound and creative, focused and passionate, locally networked, internationally oriented, and always tailored to the specific needs of its founders.

Merinova (FI) - creates business opportunities
Merinova is a significant player in the EnergyVaasa cluster based in Vaasa, Finland. They bring together energy technology companies and organisations in the Vaasa region. Together, they form the leading energy cluster in the Nordic region, contributing to building a cleaner world. Merinova leads cooperation projects that often result in something groundbreaking: 1) **New Business**: These projects foster new business ventures in the energy sector. 2) **Technological Innovations**: They drive technological innovations on a global scale. Additionally, they collaborate with companies to build systems compliant with environmental and quality standards.

Aster (FR) - leads the readiness process and brings the VC's
ASTER is a Climate Tech venture capital firm based in France, focusing on transforming hard-to-abate industries. They have over two decades of experience and specialise in sectors that are traditionally resistant to

decarbonization. ASTER invests in mission-driven founders who are creating transformative change in sectors like energy, logistics, mobility, manufacturing, building, chemicals, and agriculture. Unlike traditional VCs, ASTER operates as an ecosystem VC, bringing together startups, corporates, and industry experts for mutual benefit. Their investment scope includes Climate Tech focus areas across Europe, the US, and Israel, from Seed to Series B stages.

G-Force (SK) - supports startups to scale
G-Force in Slovakia is a pre/seed investment and acceleration program that is part of the global Founders Factory network. They concentrate on decarbonising the grid, fixing food and agriculture, electrifying transportation, cleaning up industry & buildings, and protecting nature & removing carbon. G-Force provides €250k in capital to build out startups' propositions, products, teams, and momentum. Founders Factory has backed 300 founders with capital, hands-on support, and access to its global network since 2015. G-Force unlocks significant value from its network, connecting portfolio partners with investors, advisors, and industry leaders.

VBoost (RO) - gives access to funding and ecosystem collaboration
VENTURE BOOSTER is a startup support organisation with a mission to help the most promising tech startups from the Romanian ecosystem and Eastern European countries, increasing their chances to scale up and become competitive in the overall European landscape. Based on the experience of its founder in risk finance, VENTURE BOOSTER aims to support startups in getting the adequate mix of dilutive and non-dilutive financing, allowing them to achieve their ambitious goals, and allowing investors and large companies to identify "rising stars" corresponding to their focus and strategic goals.

EurA IE (PT) - provide partnership and best practices for the ecosystem
EurA Innovation Ecosystems (IE) is part of the EurA AG group, an innovation consulting company with over 20 years' experience in advising more than 1,000 startups and SMEs aiming for a successful market deployment of innovative products and services based on newly developed technologies. EurA IE specialises in innovation ecosystems, with extensive expertise acquired in the EIC Business Acceleration Services, EIC Scaling Club, and EIC Innovation Ecosystem Partnerships initiative, among other projects. The main focus of EurA is providing high-level business acceleration services to SMEs, including matchmaking, co-creation with corporates and partnership development.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACCELERATOR

The programme's main objectives are:

- **Support the commercialisation** of innovative solutions addressing hard-to-abate/energy-intensive sectors.
- **Facilitate partnerships** between innovators and industry players, getting support from intermediary organisations (incubators, accelerators, technology clusters, E-DIHs, …).
- **Enhance investment readiness**, refine business plans/strategies, connect startups with investors and create project collaboration opportunities.

ELIGIBLE DOMAINS

The accelerator focuses on technologies and business models with direct potential to reduce emissions, improve efficiency, and/or enable industrial transformation. The eligible domains for this call include:

- **Molecular transformation industries (Chemicals, Petrochemicals, Biochemistry, Pharmaceuticals, Refining)**

We expect you to cover the following **topics** (but are not limited to):

- Access to pilot and contract manufacturing facilities; staged scale-up roadmaps with validated milestones; industrial partnership agreements to co-develop and de-risk demonstration units; modular and flexible reactor architectures.
- Reliable and cost-competitive alternative feedstock sourcing; supply chain risk assessment and diversification tools; feedstock conversion technologies (biomass, CO_2, methanol); regulatory support for waste-to-resource valorisation pathways.
- Regulatory roadmapping and compliance support services; early engagement with ECHA and national authorities; standardised testing and characterisation frameworks for novel molecules; digital regulatory filing and data management tools.
- Structured corporate engagement and co-development frameworks; performance benchmarking against fossil-based alternatives; off-take or joint development agreements as credibility signals; techno-economic selling tools for procurement teams.
- Standardised LCA and bio-based content measurement tools; digital product passports for molecular and chemical products; real-time process monitoring and yield optimisation; compliance-ready sustainability reporting platforms.
- Shared access to pilot infrastructure and contract manufacturing capacity;
- Decarbonize molecular transformation: biocatalysis as a more sustainable synthesis method. Producing and purifying enzymes at scale, optimizing

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reaction conditions, and combining biocatalysis with organometallic chemistry remain technological hurdles that require interdisciplinary collaboration among chemists, biologists, and engineers (opportunities for startups in synthetic biology, enzyme engineering, solvent or CO_2 recovery, and carbon capture and utilization applied to fine chemicals).
- Accelerate the transition from the lab to the factory, particularly through continuous-flow chemistry (accelerates the synthesis, scale-up, and industrialization cycle, whether through flow chemistry, lab automation, high-throughput screening, or AI-assisted synthetic pathway design tools).
- Making the production of cell and gene therapies truly scalable and commercially viable (today, these conditions require highly personalized, patient-specific treatments).
- Identifying risks in a complex molecule early on (computational biology, antibody design platforms, predictive screening).

Targeted Challenges

As a direct outcome of the national and macro-regional focus group workshops organised during the preliminary part of HARD2SCALE that presented the results of the SWOT analysis in each country represented in the project and its broader EU macro-regional level, the discussions converged on a shared set of priority challenges perceived by stakeholders as critical for accelerating innovation and scale-up in energy-intensive and hard-to-abate sectors. These challenges, summarised hereafter, emerged as common macro-regional priorities, providing a robust basis for defining thematic focus areas and guiding subsequent HARD2SCALE activities and cross-border collaboration efforts.

Challenge Area	What Industry Needs	Relevant Startup Profiles to Attract
Scale-up from lab to industrial deployment	Long and capital-intensive scale-up pathways from laboratory validation (TRL 4–5) to near-industrial demonstration (TRL 7–8); complex regulatory processes for novel bio-based or chemical processes; risk of technology failure between pilot and first commercial unit.	Biotech and chemical process innovators with mid-TRL solutions; providers of modular bioreactors and continuous flow chemistry systems; startups leveraging existing industrial infrastructure (fermentation tanks, distillation units) for new processes.
Feedstock availability & supply chain reliability	Dependency on volatile fossil-based feedstocks (naphtha, natural gas); competition for biomass, CO_2, and green hydrogen feedstocks; geographic concentration of critical bio-inputs; regulatory uncertainty around waste and	Waste-to-feedstock and bio-refinery startups; CO_2 utilisation and Power-to-X solution providers; supply chain traceability and risk management platforms; enzymatic and biocatalytic process innovators using low-cost substrates.

	residue classifications as feedstocks.	
Capital intensity & misaligned investor expectations	High upfront capex for fermentation, bioreactor, and chemical plant infrastructure; long development and commercialisation timelines exceeding standard VC horizons; difficulty attracting growth capital between pilot completion and first commercial revenues.	Molecular technology ventures with niche, high-margin applications (enzymes, specialty chemicals, biosurfactants); startups with asset-light or contract manufacturing models; companies with early industrial partnerships reducing perceived financing risk.
Regulatory barriers to novel molecules & processes	Lengthy EU regulatory approval pathways for novel bio-based chemicals, biomaterials, and synthetic biology products; fragmented substance registration requirements under REACH; lack of harmonised certification for bio-based content claims and product standards.	Regulatory strategy and compliance startups for bio-based and chemical industries; AI-assisted REACH and substance registration platforms; certification and testing service providers; digital regulatory intelligence tools.
Market access & customer development in industrial B2B	Long B2B sales cycles in chemical, food, pharma, and materials industries; conservative procurement practices favouring established suppliers; difficulty demonstrating drop-in compatibility and cost parity with fossil-based incumbents; limited access to decision-makers in large corporates.	B2B commercial-stage ventures with early reference customers in specialty chemicals, food ingredients, or advanced materials; startups positioned as drop-in substitutes with validated performance data; ventures participating in corporate innovation programmes.
Measurement, traceability & bio-based claims	Inconsistent methods for quantifying bio-based content, biodegradability, and carbon footprint of molecular products; limited interoperability of life-cycle analysis tools; emerging but unharmonised requirements for digital product passports and sustainability disclosures.	LCA and sustainability analytics platforms for bio-based industries; IoT and sensor solutions for bioprocess monitoring; digital product passport providers for specialty chemicals and biomaterials; AI-based fermentation and yield optimisation tools.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Applicants must meet the following conditions:

- **Legal status**: The applicant is a legally established **small company**

registered in the EU.
- **Stage of development**: **Deep-tech** solutions positioned between **TRL 5 and 8**.
- The solution clearly addresses **hard-to-abate or energy-intensive industries**.
- The technology or business model demonstrates potential for **industrial scale-up** and **market deployment**.
- **Geographic scope**: We target (but not limited to) startups from moderate and emerging EU countries.
- **Commitment**: Willingness to actively participate in all programme activities (workshops, mentoring sessions, pitch events, etc.). The applicant agrees to sign the **participation agreement** and comply with program obligations.

The main definitions of the terms above are provided in **Annex A3** of the current document.

Application Process

Application form
Complete the official application form on the F6S platform: https://www.f6s.com/hard2scale/apply.

Supporting documentation
Applicants must provide a pitch deck (max 10 slides - please see the E*IC Accelerator model*[1]) including:
- The presentation of the challenges addressed and the solutions proposed
- The presentation of the technology and its competitive advantages
- Any supporting evidence of technology validation, pilots, or partnerships
- Business plan and strategy
- The public and private funding attracted up to now, the new funding needs and the planned use of money
- Profiles of the founding team and key experts

Submission
Applications must be submitted electronically via the F6S platform: https://www.f6s.com/hard2scale/apply.
Late or incomplete submissions will not be considered.

Deadlines

1 https://horizoneuropencpportal.eu/sites/default/files/2025-03/access2eic_eic-accelerator-annotated-template_short-proposal.pdf

Deadlines:

Applications open: 25 September 2026
Deadline for applications: 8 November 2026
Evaluation period: 9-20 November 2026
Notification of results: 23 -30 November 2026
Cohort start date: 1 December 2026

Evaluation criteria

Each eligible application will be assessed against the following criteria:

- **Innovation and uniqueness** (FOAK, novelty of the solution - incremental vs disruptive innovation, differentiation from existing approaches).
- **Potential impact** (contribution to decarbonization, energy efficiency, or circularity).
- **Team capacity** (expertise, execution capability, previous achievements).
- **Market relevance** (fit with industry needs, demand potential, scalability).
- **Business viability** (clarity of business model, revenue streams, financial sustainability).
- **Readiness for scale-up** (TRL level, risks map, pilot/demo results, potential industrial partnerships).

Evaluation process

The evaluation will consist of:

- **Eligibility screening**: verification of compliance with eligibility requirements.
- **Expert review**: a group of internal and external evaluators will assess each application according to the evaluation criteria.
- **Final selection**: a jury panel will have a consensus meeting to confirm the final selection for each cohort of startups and SMEs.
- Selected startups will be announced on the project website at: www.hard2scale.eu. All applicants will receive emails with the results of the evaluation process.

Financial and administrative aspects

Participation in the HARD2SCALE accelerator is **free of charge** for selected startups and SMEs.

The programme will **not take equity** in participating companies.

Selected participants must sign a **participation agreement** covering:

- Confidentiality obligations
- Intellectual property rights (applicants will fully keep the ownership of their IPR developed before or during the program)
- Commitments to attend programme activities

Participation in the travel and accommodation fees for the immersive discovery of the advanced ecosystems represented in the project – Finland and France – is foreseen (up to Eur 600 / startup).

CONTACT INFORMATION

For any inquiries and clarifications, please contact:

Email:

ioana@co-invest.tech;

antonela@co-invest.tech;

hello@hard2scale.eu

Website: https://hard2scale.eu/acceleration-programme

Application portal: https://www.f6s.com/hard2scale/apply

Annexes

A1 Application Form

Company name:
Your company location:
Short description:
Phone number:
Website:
Founder details:
Your deck: *Please upload your current pitch deck (non-confidential version) up to 10 slides (See EIC Accelerator model access2eic_eic-accelerator-annotated-template_short-proposal.pdf)*

ADMINISTRATIVE AND ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

Are you a startup? (*Please check Annex 3 of the Application Guidelines for the definitions.*):
Country of incorporation:
Proposal title:
Provide a short summary of your solution (maximum 2000 characters). *Think of this as a written "elevator pitch". Please mention your motivation to enter our accelerator.*

COMPANY, SOLUTION AND TEAM

Challenges addressed by the company and the envisioned impact
Describe which elements of the challenge your technical solution intends to address. Explain what is novel or unique about your technical solution and the main risks in developing it.

Describe your solution's environmental and industrial impact (e.g., emissions reduction potential)
If you implemented the solution with your end users, please demonstrate how this helped them to reduce emissions (provide quantitative data); if not, please argue with data about what impact it will have on industry.

What is your technical solution and current TRL (Technology Readiness Level and associated type - prototype, demonstrator, pilot)?

Describe your technical solution and highlight what makes it unique/novel or FOAK - First of a Kind, different from your competitors.

Benchmark your solution against current SoA/existing solutions – disruptive or incremental innovation
Present an overview of the current State of the Art (SoA) and explain the differentiating factors of your solution (i.e. how your solution goes beyond the current SoA).

What are the results you have currently obtained (in the lab and/or with customers)?
Let us know the preliminary results of your solution, and illustrate its unique characteristics (such as the unprecedented/superior level of performance with respect to the state of the art/play).

Present your existing IP, IPR strategy, valuation/valorization
Do you have any intellectual property rights or dependencies on IPR (e.g. patent licenses) that impact the commercial value of the proposed solution? Please describe how you have protected or plan to protect your intellectual property.

Team backing up the solution
Provide a brief description of your team's experience and roles (e.g., scientific and technical expertise, business-related areas). Present the founders, current employees in key positions and external advisors. How will they succeed in scaling the solution? If there are any gaps in any of the key functions or expertise areas of your team, please present the recruitment and incentivization strategy.

BUSINESS AND MARKET

Present your beachhead market and existing customers (if you have any) and explain your development strategy.
Describe your market, the types of clients you have and how many. If you have commercialised your solution to end users, how do you sell or intend to sell your product to the clients?

Describe your solution value proposition
The Value Proposition should underline how your technical solution can resolve customers' pains and needs.

Describe your Business Model
Outline the specific way in which your business operates, including how it earns

revenue and generates profit. You may refer to the markets, customer segmentation, commercial channels, key resources and activities, key partnerships, resources and cost structure.

What is your scaling plan?
How do you intend to scale your solution? Do you have any industry partnerships and investors committed? If you have any pilots, please make a short description. What are the main risks in scaling your solution, and how do you intend to overcome them?

FUNDING

Present the sources and amounts of public funding obtained up to now. Have you previously participated in or received support from the EIT, EIC or EIC Programme (Beneficiary or Seal of Excellence)?
For each, please present the organisation offering the funding, the name of the instrument, the amount obtained and the date.

Present the current private funding obtained up to now.
For each round, please present: the overall amount of the round, the date, and the company valuation, the name of each investor (organisation or person name in case of business angels), the country they are based in, the amount invested and the shares.

What are your current funding needs?
Let us know the amount you are trying to raise, the planned use of money, and investors already committed.

Present your current business plan essentials (key metrics)
What is your current and anticipated revenue (including potential public funding opportunities) and current financial runway? Please describe the targeted market segments and geography, current traction and strategy to enter these markets.

By submitting this form, I hereby consent, in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), that my personal data will be processed solely for the purposes stated above and that I may withdraw my consent at any time, without affecting the lawfulness of processing based on consent before its withdrawal. I also acknowledge that I may exercise my GDPR rights (access, rectification, erasure, restriction, objection, and data portability) by contacting the project's data controller.
Yes/No

By submitting this form, in the case I am selected into the Hard2Scale Accelerator Programme, I consent to participate in its activities, sign an MoU or any documents needed with the Project Consortium.
Yes/No

A2 Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation process consists of three steps, each designed to progressively assess applicants on innovation potential, market readiness, and fit with the accelerator program.

Step 1: Review of Administrative and Eligibility Information:

Purpose:
To screen the applications based on eligibility, fit and relevance.

Evaluation focus:

Eligibility check: Is the applicant an SME (according to the European criteria)?

Outcome:

Eligible / Not eligible

Relevance: Does the solution address hard-to-abate or energy-intensive industries?

Fit: Does the solution fall within the scope of the accelerator? Is it innovative enough?

Content reviewed:

Short description of solution and targeted industry
Motivation to join the accelerator
Country of residence

Step 2: Review of the Company, Solution and Team; Business and Market; Funding

Purpose:

Conduct a detailed evaluation of the solution's innovation, market potential, team capacity, financial sustainability, and tracking of public and private funding.

Content reviewed

- Alignment with call challenges and topics;
- Detailed description of solution, novelty and environmental impact
- Market analysis and industry relevance
- Business model and financial sustainability
- Scalability, validation and risk
- Team composition and expertise
- Current partnerships, pilots, or traction

Evaluation criteria (scored on a 1–5 scale):

Company, solution and team (Uniqueness and Sustainability Impact of the technical solution; Industry fit and demand; Team skills and execution ability)

Business and Market (Market relevance; Business model viability; Scale-up Readiness and Risks)

Funding (Capacity of funding traction; Partnership capacity with industry and investors; Financial Sustainability)

Scoring:

Each criterion scored 1–5

Evaluation Scoring Matrix

Purpose: Detailed assessment of innovation, impact, market, team, business, funding sustainability.

Scoring scale (per criterion):

1 = Very weak (unclear, no evidence)
2 = Weak (partially relevant, low potential)
3 = Moderate (some strengths, some gaps)
4 = Strong (convincing, well-documented)
5 = Excellent (highly convincing, strong evidence)

Criterion	Description	Score (1–5)
Company, solution and team	▪ Uniqueness and Sustainability Impact of the technical solution; ▪ Industry fit and demand; ▪ Team skills and execution ability	
Business and Market	▪ Market relevance; ▪ Business model viability; ▪ Scale-up Readiness and Risks	

Criterion	Description	Score (1–5)
Funding	▪ Capacity of funding traction; ▪ Partnership capacity with industry and investors; ▪ Financial Sustainability	

Total Score: 3/5

Beneficiaries must achieve a minimum of average 3 points out of 5 to qualify for the programme.

Outcome: A ranking of the applicants according to the total score.

STEP 3: RANKING REVIEW AND CONSENSUS

Purpose:

To review the ranking, eliminate inconsistencies and differentiate between applicants with the same evaluation score. A particular emphasis will be placed on alignment with **industry needs, accelerator objectives, and the geographical area** (targeting less developed ecosystems - 70%-60% of the final selected startups), as well as investment and market readiness.

Format:

Jury panel

Evaluation criteria:

Fit with accelerator objectives, industry needs and geographical area;
Overall readiness for scale-up, investments and market access.

Outcome:

Jury validates/consolidates the scores and selects the final cohort.

The final results are communicated by email to the applicants, and the list of selected startups/SMEs is published on the project website.

Transparency and Fairness

Each application will be reviewed by at least one consortium partner's representative and, according to the possibilities, one external evaluator.

The final selection will be made by a jury panel seeking to involve diverse expertise (industry, investment, innovation).

All applicants will be informed of the outcome at each stage.

Evaluation results will remain confidential.

A3 Definitions

*A **startup** typically refers to a young, innovation-focused company aiming for scalability and rapid and exponential growth.*
Key characteristics:

- *Generally less than 7 years old from the date of their first commercial sale*
- *Newcomer with innovative product, service or process*
- *Owned and operated by the founder/s holding the majority of shares*
- *In most cases (especially from the legal perspective) qualified as SME (Small and Medium Enterprise).*

*The concept of an **SME** is defined in the Annex to the COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION (2003/361) of 6 May 2003 concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.*

Enterprise category	Headcount: annual work unit (AWU)	Annual turnover	Annual balance sheet total
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ EUR 50 million	≤ EUR 43 million
Small	< 50	≤ EUR 10 million	≤ EUR 10 million
Micro	< 10	≤ EUR 2 million	≤ EUR 2 million

***Hard to abate** are sectors that are trying to meet increasing demand while lowering their greenhouse gas emissions.*

***Energy-intensive industries** are sectors that consume a large amount of energy relative to their economic output.*

***Technology readiness levels** (**TRLs**) are a method for estimating the maturity of technologies during the acquisition phase of a program. TRL1 - Basic principles observed; TRL2 - Technology concept formulated; TRL3 - Experimental proof of concept; TRL4 - Technology validated in lab; TRL5 - Technology validated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies); TRL6- Technology demonstrated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies); TRL7 - System prototype demonstration in operational environment; TRL8 - System complete and qualified; TRL9 - Actual system proven in operational environment (competitive manufacturing in the case of*

key enabling technologies; or in space)

***Deep technology (deep tech)** is a classification of organisation with the expressed objective of providing **technology solutions based on substantial scientific or engineering challenges.** They present challenges **requiring lengthy research and development and large capital investment** before successful commercialisation.*

***European Union Countries,** see:*
https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/eu-countries_en

***Moderate and emerging EU countries**. The European Innovation Scoreboard categorises EU countries into four innovation groups based on their scores: Innovation Leaders, Strong Innovators, Moderate Innovators, and Emerging Innovators.*

See the website:
https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/statistics/performance-indicators/european-innovation-scoreboard_en

A4 STARTUPS AND SMES ACTIVITIES WITHINHARD2SCALE ACCELERATOR

What you have to do in the programme

- **Enrol in** the programme
- Work on your **upscale road map**
- **Update** your business plan and strategy
- Participate in the **programme events, pitch sessions and open innovation workshop**
- **Find and contact** potential clients and investors (a database will be at your disposal)
- **Design two concept notes** (one for industry demonstrator and one for public funding project)

Month 1
#1: Individual meeting | 1h ● Preparation of a Draft Action Plan by mentee before the meeting (reception of the Action Plan template after the Kick-off meeting) ● Introductory meeting with programme manager ○ Discussion of startups' current status, needs, challenges, and expectations ○ Presentation, review and refinement of the Action Plan ***#2: Optional Individual meeting***

- Refinement and finalisation of the Action Plan

#3: Group session - Workshop | 1h
- Strategy and OKRs (6th May)

Month 2

#1: Individual meeting | 1h-1h30
- Business Development and Strategy Plan: Market
  - Market identification and assessment
  - Product-market fit and go-to-market strategy
  - Scaling and internationalisation
- Business plan, hypotheses, track record and funding needs
  - Presentation of Business Plan and hypotheses by mentee
  - Presentation of Track Record and funding needs by mentee

#2: Individual meeting | 1h-1h30
- Business Development and Strategy Plan: Customer traction
  - Customer pipeline development
  - Early traction and commercialisation
  - Sustainable and scalable business models
- Financial feedback and review
  - Feedback on BP, hypothesis, track record and funding needs
  - Joint review and agreement on next steps

Month 3

#1: Individual meeting | 1h-1h30
- Overall review and refinement of the Business Development & Strategy Plan
- Review and refinement of business and financial strategy as agreed upon in month 1 by mentee
- Optional topic(s) of startup choice

#2: Individual meeting | 1h
- Introduction and preparation for the open innovation workshop (month 4)
- Optional topic(s) of startup choice

Month 4

#1: Open Innovation workshop | 1h30
- Open innovation workshop participation

#2: Individual meeting | 1h
- Pitch deck structure
  - Presentation of pitch deck by mentee
  - Challenge and review with mentor
- Review and finalisation of Open innovation workshop concept note (one concept note per startup)

#3: Individual meeting | 1h

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- Pitch & Investor self-readiness assessment
    - Startup presents its reviewed pitch deck & self-assessment
- Introduction and preparation of the Collaborative Project
    - Presentation of funding opportunities & learn how to read a call

Month 5

#1: Individual meeting | 1h-1h30

- Collaborative project idea
    - Project idea design (proposal), objectives & KPIs, potential project partners mapping
- Introduction to the networking event (Helsinki in November 2026)

#2: Individual meeting | 1h-1h30

- Collaborative project idea
    - Project idea refinement, structure & timeline, partners coordination
- Pitch deck rehearsal with mentor

Month 6

#1: Online pitch session to corporates

- Pitch to panel of experts (pitch prepared & rehearsed)

#2: Individual meeting

- Reflection on the Action Plan
    - Review the reflection and KPIs evaluation (completed prior to the session) ● Finalisation of collaborative project ideas (completed prior to the session)
    - Budget design, refining proposal and partner coordination
- Discuss the logistics of the networking event (Helsinki) with the mentee

Note: The programme may be subject to modifications.