STEP SCALE UP DEFENCE CALL

INFO Session

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European Innovation Council

European Innovation Council

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EIC WORK PROGRAMME 2026 AMENDMENT

Policy context

Defence Mini-Omnibus

European Innovation Council

Adopted

19 Dec 2025

Amends several EU funding programmes — including **Horizon Europe** — to incentivise **defence-related investment** under the **ReArm Europe Plan**.

Responds to heightened geopolitical threats — particularly Russia's war against Ukraine — by strengthening the **European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB)**.

Fosters innovation in **dual-use and defence technologies**.

Defence Mini-Omnibus

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Where the omnibus opens the door — and one entry that concerns the EIC directly.

Programme	Full name	What changes
DEP	**Digital Europe Programme**	Expands dual-use digital projects and AI infrastructure.
HORIZON	**Horizon Europe (EIC)** ★ This is the EIC's slide	**Opens the EIC Accelerator to defence innovations and tightens eligibility for security-sensitive projects.**
EDF	**European Defence Fund**	Simplifies funding for disruptive technologies and associates Ukraine.
CEF	**Connecting Europe Facility**	Prioritises dual-use transport and digital infrastructure.
STEP	**Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform**	**Adds defence technologies as a fourth strategic sector.**

Main Novelties

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Three openings the EIC has never offered before.

1

Existing instrument · Expanded

EIC Accelerator

Opens to **dual-use technologies** — single companies with a credible case for civilian *and* defence markets.

2

Existing instrument · Expanded

EIC STEP Scale Up call

Also opens to **dual-use technologies** — co-investments up to **€30M** across the EIC's strategic sectors.

◆ New for 2026

3

Net-new instrument

STEP Scale Up Defence call

First-ever EIC instrument targeting **critical defence technologies** directly.

EIC Accelerator — broadening to dual-use

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How the opening actually works — eligibility, evaluation, and why.

A Scope & definition · 2026 WP

Eligible calls

Dual-use innovations are now eligible under **EIC Accelerator Open** & **EIC STEP Scale-Up** calls.

Operational definition

*"Technologies expected to have credible potential applications in **both civilian and defence/security contexts**."*

B Application & evaluation process

01 Declaration

Applicants must **indicate** whether their technology has potential markets or applications in the defence or security domain.

→

02 Evaluation

Treated on an **equal basis** with civilian-only applications — same evaluation criteria. Dual-use cases tracked internally.

Strategic rationale

Why broaden to dual-use?

01 Excellence-based · Modern reality

Preserves core funding principles without diluted criteria — and reflects the inherent dual-nature of advanced deep tech.

02 Simplicity · Competitiveness

Avoids unnecessary administrative complexity for applicants — strengthens Europe's technological sovereignty and market position.

03 Safeguards · Transparency

Fully respects existing ethical, legal, and security frameworks — encourages clear declaration rather than ambiguity.

WP 2026: Budget overview

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What's on the table for innovators in 2026.

Line 1 · Largest envelope

EIC Accelerator

€634 M

Accelerator open · €414 M · Accelerator challenges · €220 M

Line 2 · Strategic technologies

EIC STEP Scale Up

€300 M

Co-investments for dual-use scale-ups

◆ New 2026

EIC STEP Scale Up Defence

€100 M

First-ever EIC instrument dedicated to defence technologies

EIC WORK PROGRAMME 2026

STEP Scale Up Defence

EIC STEP Scale up Defence call objectives

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Help ambitious scale-up companies developing critical defence technologies to access significant equity investment and strategic support

Propel European defence innovators to become strategic leaders in their fields

Strengthen the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) and reduce strategic dependencies

EIC STEP Scale up Defence call priority capability areas*

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- **Air and missile defence**
- **Artillery & precision strike**
- **Missiles & ammunition**
- **Drones & counter-drones**
- **Strategic enablers**
- **Cyber, AI & electronic warfare**
- **Military mobility**
- **Ground combat**
- **Maritime**
- **Air combat**
- **Medical (incl. countermeasures)**

*Communication from the Commission – Second Guidance Note on the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) clarifying elements of Regulation (EU) 2024/795 and Commission Communication C/2024/3209

EIC STEP Scale up Defence: critical innovations with a primary defence application

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- To be eligible under this call, the proposed products, technologies or services must have a **primary defence application**. Solutions with predominantly civilian or dual-use applications should refer to the general EIC STEP Scale Up call.
- In order to apply under the EIC STEP Scale Up Defence call, your innovation must also be **critical** thereby meeting either of the following conditions:
  - ➢ **It brings to the internal market an innovative, emerging and cutting-edge element with significant economic potential;** or
  - ➢ **It contributes to reducing or preventing strategic dependencies of the Union.**

The EIC STEP Scale up Defence Call: eligible countries

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MONOBENEFICIARIES

Participation is limited to **SMEs, including start-ups, and small mid-caps** **established in the Union, in Ukraine, or in an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe**.

This call has a general **exclusion rule**: **legal entities,** established in the Union, in Ukraine or in an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe, **that are directly or indirectly controlled by a third country other than Ukraine or an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe, or by legal entities** of such a third country cannot participate, unless they provide guarantees

Eligibility and admissibility criteria: guarantees 1/3

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- Should the applicant consider to be **directly or indirectly controlled by a third country** other than Ukraine or an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe or by legal entities of such a third country then the following steps should be taken:

  - **Carry out the self-assessment** to determine whether they are indeed directly or indirectly controlled by a third country other than Ukraine or an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe or by legal entities of such a third country.
  - **If applicants find this is the case, then applicant should submit guarantees at the time of application** in accordance with the national procedures of the Member State or the EEA member associated to Horizon Europe in which the legal entity is established.

Eligibility and admissibility criteria: guarantees 2/3

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- Should the applicant consider to be **directly or indirectly controlled by a third country** other than Ukraine or an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe or by legal entities of such a third country then the following steps should be taken:

  - If such guarantees are not submitted at application stage, applicants will be requested to provide them if invited to an interview with the EIC Jury **(failure to submit guarantees within two weeks from the end of the interview session will result in applications being deemed as non-eligible**). Guidelines concerning the submission of guarantees are available on the Funding & Tender Portal.
  - If you did not complete a self-assessment and it is found during the investment due diligence process that your company is directly or indirectly controlled by a third country other than Ukraine or an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe or by legal entities of such a third country, then **you will be requested to provide guarantees within two weeks of the date of the request (failure to submit guarantees will result in applications being deemed as non-eligible).**

Eligibility and admissibility criteria: guarantees 3/3

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GUARANTEE DECLARATION

We hereby confirm that:

1) our involvement will not contravene

– the following interests, as described in the call conditions:

strategic interests of the EU and its Member States

security and defence interests of the EU and its Member States in the framework of the CFSP pursuant to Title V TEU

– the objectives of the EU funding programme

and that

2) we have put in place all necessary measures to avoid issues such as concerning control, access to sensitive information and results, including IPR, as set out in the call conditions

3) the guarantees comply with Article 48 (2) of the HE Regulation.

Previous guarantees (no change)

Please comment on whether you have filled in a guarantee declaration for any EDF, ASAP, EDIRPA (or EDIP) application (refer to the details) and whether there have been any changes since your participation to that project.

Insert text

SIGNATURE OF THE AUTHORISED PERSON	
Name and function:	[name NAME], [function]
Date of signature:	[date]
Signature and stamp:	[signature and stamp]

The EIC STEP Scale up Defence Call: main elements

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- **Budget €100 m** (2026),
- **Equity only** support
- **Larger tickets** (EUR 10m-30m)
- Catalyze **rounds of €50-150m** or more

- **Pre-commitment** from single qualified investor required (min 20%)
- Facilitated **access to Invest EU Venture Debt**

EIC STEP Scale up Defence Call

STEP Sovereignty Seal (if fulfill necessary conditions)

Evaluation/ award criteria include specific STEP Defence conditions

Target beneficiaries

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Projects falling within the **defence strategic technology areas as described in STEP second guidance note**

Already secured initial funding rounds

aim to raise major funding round (EUR 50-150 million or more) to scale up and become a global leader

Qualifying features

Both EIC Fund portfolio and new companies

companies with and without previous EIC Support

Significant risk for commercialising and scaling the technology

which cannot be financed from market investors along (no change in evaluation criteria on risk)

Eligibility and admissibility criteria

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PRE-COMMITMENT	PROPOSAL DOCUMENTS
➢ **From a single Qualified investor*** (not necessarily a new one nor the lead investor). ➢ The pre-commitment represents **at least 20% of the total target funding round** you are aiming to raise*. * Note: Moreover, the portion of the pre-commitment corresponding to at least 20% of the funding round must be fully uninvested as of the date of the pre-commitment letter. Syndicated pre-commitments, as long as no entity's individual contribution is equal or above the 20% threshold, will be deemed ineligible. ➢ The total targeted funding round, **must range between EUR 50 to 150 million or more, and be at least 3-5 times the EIC investment).** * Qualified Investor is an investor — public or private —which has been subject to KYC/AML screening and not considered high-risk. In case of high risk, such an investor can be exceptionally considered qualified if duly justified to protect against risks to economic security	➢ A full **business plan.** ➢ A **pitch-deck** (maximum 15 pages) in pdf format (this version will be presented to the jury if invited to interview). ➢ An pre-commitment from a **single qualified investor** (according to the official template). ➢ **A financial plan** (according to the template available on the EIC website). ➢ **Results of the freedom to operate** (FTO) analysis. ➢ CVs of key personnel: **Links to BIOs/LinkedIn** to be included in PART B ➢ **Self-assessment** document to determine whether or not the applicant is directly or indirectly controlled by a third country other than Ukraine or an EEA member associated to Horizon Europe. In case of direct or indirect control outcome, applicant is expected to submit the guarantee.

The EIC STEP Scale up Defence Call award criteria

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Excellence
Innovation — defence technology breakthrough: Is the proposed innovation deep tech in nature stemming from cutting-edge scientific or technological advances with a clear defence application? Does it represent a significant improvement in cost, performance or capability compared to existing or alternative defence solutions?
Technological feasibility & readiness: Has the technology been developed in a safe, secure and reliable manner? Has it been adequately assessed, validated, or certified for the intended defence application? Is the current Technology Readiness Level substantiated?
Intellectual Property: Does the innovation have an adequate IP protection and a sound IP strategy for defence markets? Has the applicant demonstrated freedom to operate and the ability to control its core technology without undue third-country dependency (absence of third-country export control such as ITAR/EAR)?

The EIC STEP Scale up Defence Call award criteria

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Impact
Market Opportunity: What and how big is the defence market addressed? What is the realistic expectation of the share of the total defence market (in the EU and globally) over the medium term? Does the company demonstrate **credible traction with defence end-users** on a realistic pathway to adoption and scale-up within the European defence ecosystem?
Business Model: Are the detailed business model and revenue strategy sound and adapted to defence-market specificities (procurement cycles, classification and security requirements, export-control constraints, certification and qualification pathways)? Are the financial projections realistic given these specificities?
STEP Defence Impact: Does the innovation have a clear and measurable positive impact on one or both of the following: (i) strengthening the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) by bringing to the EU internal market a cutting-edge defence technology with significant economic and security potential; or (ii) reducing or preventing strategic dependencies of the Union in defence-critical technologies or capabilities. applicants from Associated Countries will need to demonstrate contributions to the EU internal market or to reducing strategic dependencies on third countries. Does the applicant demonstrate a credible commitment and concrete ability to engage with EU defence innovation ecosystems?

The EIC STEP Scale up Defence Call award criteria

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Level of risk, implementation, and need for Union support
Team capability: Does the company have the necessary team to develop the innovation and scale the company within defence markets? Does the team have relevant defence sector expertise and, where and if needed, appropriate security clearances? Have skills or competence gaps been identified with a credible plan to fill them?
Risk level of the investment: Is the investment of a nature and risk level — including defence-specific factors such as longer procurement cycles, classification constraints and limited exit pathways — that European market actors will not finance in full without EIC Fund participation?
Investment leverage: Does the proposal provide a convincing and realistic plan for raising an equity financing round using the EIC Fund investment to attract- at least 3 to 5 times the amount from other investors? What is the anticipated timeline for concluding the financing round? How many investors have committed or are engaged in advanced discussions? How pressing is the timeline for finalising this deal?
Defence-specific risk management: Has the applicant identified the main defence-specific risks (export controls and licensing, classification and security clearances, certification pathways, and procurement timelines) and proposed concrete and proportionate mitigation measures?

Supporting Documentation Including Classified Information

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- **If in your proposal you wish to include any supporting documentation as classified information as governed by Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/444, you must contact EISMEA at least 30 working days before the deadline submission** in order to arrange the delivery of the classified documents. Guidelines concerning the handling of classified information are available on the Funding & Tender Portal (including the relevant contact information). Classified information must not under any circumstances be submitted online though the Funding & Tenders.

Additional conditions and safeguards

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- **Specific safeguards may be introduced in the investment agreement**, in accordance with the EIC Investment Guidelines (at least one safeguard measure) and the provisions set out in the Introduction (Economic Security).

  - **When implementing investments, the EIC Fund will ensure that supported companies keep most of their value, including their IP, in the EU, EEA countries associated to HE and Ukraine** in order to contribute to their economic growth and job creation.

  - **Such safeguards may be tailored to the specific technology and risk profile of the company and may include provisions related to ownership changes, governance, intellectual property, location of activities, or supply-chain security.**

Additional requirements on ethics

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- **For proposals submitted under the EIC STEP Scale up Defence call additional ethics requirements will apply, in particular regarding the respect of international humanitarian law and the use of artificial intelligence-based systems** which must ensure that AI-enabled functions related to weapon systems do not render weapons without possibility for meaningful human control.

Evaluation process and possible outcomes

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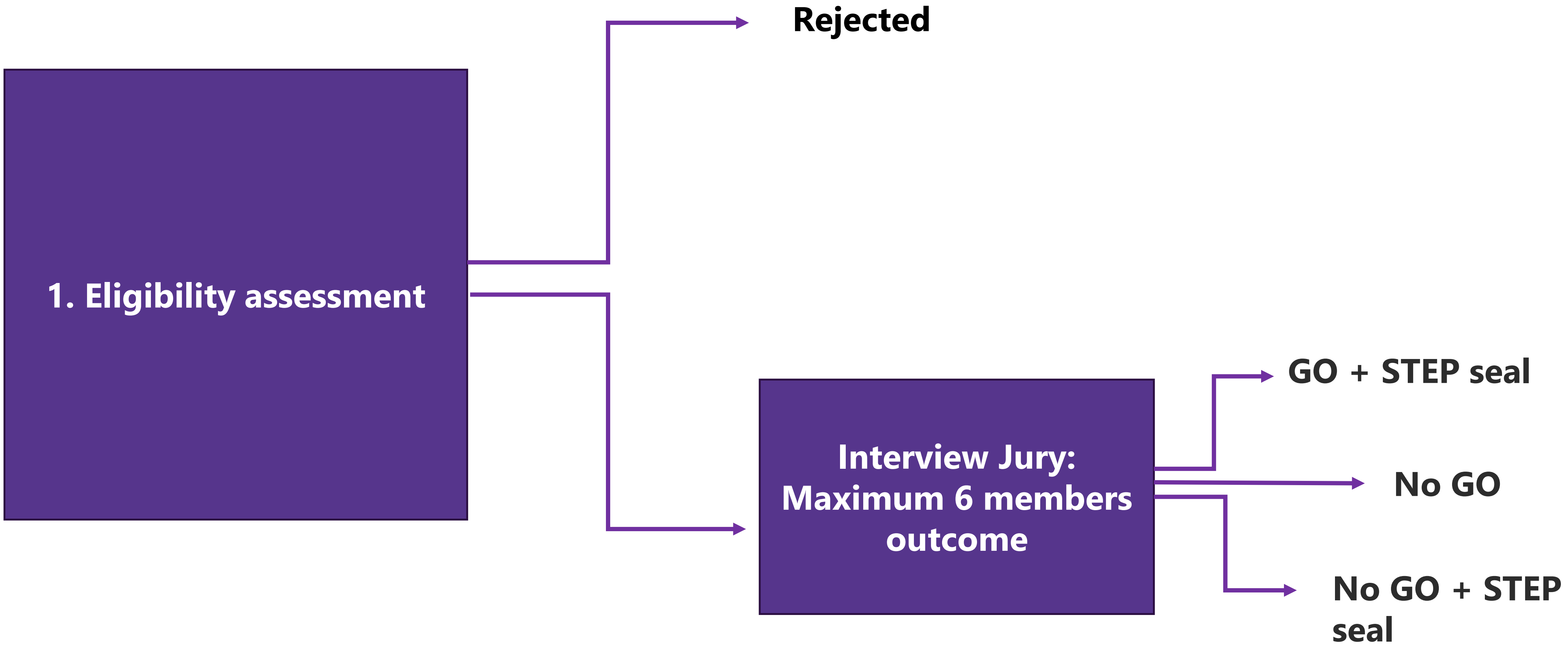

STEP Scale up Defence call Timeline

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- **STEP Scale-up Defence Call opens on 30 June 2026**
- **Batch: 28 October 2026 at 17h00:00 Brussels local time***
- **Eligibility checks November-December 2026**
- **Interview with Jury January 25-29 2027**

*Note: for classified documents, contact EISMEA at least **30 working days** in advance

Defence Experts

European Innovation Council

Defence experts needed for upcoming evaluations

NEWS ARTICLE

15 April 2026 — European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency — 2 min read

The European Innovation Council (EIC) is looking for expertise in critical defence technologies to contribute to Europe's innovation landscape. Experts will help assess which companies should receive direct equity investments to scale up disruptive innovations in defence.

EIC WORK PROGRAMME 2026

STEP Dual-use

What is STEP?

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The Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)
Regulation entered into force in March 2024

1. Three main strategic technology areas:
   - **Digital and deep tech**
   - **Clean tech**
   - **Biotech**
2. Aims to **bring major new technologies to Single Market** and **avoid technology dependencies** on other regions
3. Implemented **in a coordinated way across 11 EU programmes** (including Horizon Europe/ EIC) and through Structural Funds (ERDF)
4. The Commission uploaded also the STEP guidance to provide more insights on the main elements of the programme.

The EIC STEP Scale up Call: main elements

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MONOBENEFICIARIES

Single companies classified as **SMEs or small mid-caps** (up to 499 employees) established within a Member State or Associated Country. **Holding entities** serving investment purposes are allowed as long as they are established in a Member State or Associated Country

An **investor** may submit a proposal on behalf of an **eligible SME or small midcap** as defined above, provided that a prior agreement exists with the company. The investment agreement will be signed with the **selected SME** or **small mid-cap**

Novelties in the WP 2026 amendment

Main novelty in the award criteria:

IMPACT : Market Opportunity

- What and how big is the market addressed? What is the realistic expectation of the share of the total market?

- <u>Where relevant, this includes addressable demand across civilian and defence end-users where a credible business case exists in both.*</u>

Evaluation form novelties

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Main novelty in exclusive focus on civil applications:

- Do the activities proposed have an exclusive focus on civil applications except if applying to a call where military applications are explicitly permitted in the call conditions (activities intended to be used in military application or aiming to serve military purposes cannot be funded, unless explicitly mentioned in the call documents)?

NB: dual use proposals must not contain EU classified information!

Summary Implementation Timeline

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Call	Implementation
EIC Accelerator Short proposal	Call open to dual use from the amendment publication (17 June)
EIC Accelerator Full proposal	Call open to dual use from 09/07/2026
EIC STEP Scale up call	Call open to dual use from the amendment publication (17 June)
EIC STEP Scale up Defence call	Call opening on 30 June, deadline October 28, 2026

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Thank you !