

Public Consultation - EU funding for competitiveness

Fields marked with * are mandatory.

Introduction

In 2025, the European Commission will put forward a comprehensive proposal for the next long-term budget – the multiannual financial framework (MFF). This includes EU funding providing financial support to hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries, including research and technology organisations, small and medium/sized businesses, startups and scale-ups, educational and research institutions, industry clusters, and many others.

Today, EU funding in support of competitiveness is spread over too many overlapping programmes, many of which fund the same thing but with different requirements and difficulties in combining funding effectively, which hinders access to EU funding and limits the impact that the funding can have.

As highlighted in President von der Leyen's Commission's [Political Guidelines](#), as well as in the [Competitiveness Compass](#), the Commission will work on a simpler, more focused and impactful MFF that reflects the European strategic priorities (with the ambition of being an “investment-focused Commission”),

The guidelines also announced the creation of a European Competitiveness Fund, as part of the proposal for the next MFF. As set out in the Competitiveness Compass, this investment capacity should channel investment in strategic technologies along the entire investment journey, from research, through scale-up, industrial deployment, to manufacturing – using the power of the EU budget to de-risk and mobilise private investment for our common goals.

The Commission's proposal for the next MFF will be focused on the things that matter most, in areas where the EU can achieve more than Member States acting alone. This requires a careful assessment both of what has worked well in the past and what could be improved in the future. The next MFF will draw lessons from the current budget – notably in terms of simplicity and flexibility, speed and strategic focus.

As an integral part of the process, the Commission is launching a series of public consultations to gather views from all interested parties on the future EU budget. This consultation covers EU funding in support of EU competitiveness. The decision to cluster issues serves to support the preparatory work and does not pre-empt the architecture of future programmes. This questionnaire consists of 3 parts:

Part 1 collects some information about you Part 2 contains questions related to EU funding for competitiveness. Part 3 comprises 2 closing questions.

Your feedback will inform the analysis of the impact assessment for the European Competitiveness Fund.

You can save your replies as a draft and finish later. Please be concise in those questions with a free text box for additional comments. If you want, you can also upload a document with your views at the end of the survey.

About you

Part 1. Questions about you

Since 2021 have you applied for EU funding managed directly or indirectly by the European Commission?

Maximum 1 selection(s)

☒ Yes

☐ No

Which funds have you applied for?

☒ Horizon Europe

☒ Digital Europe

☐ Innovation Fund

☐ InvestEU

☐ LIFE

☐ Connecting Europe Facility

☐ European Defence Fund

☐ European Defence Industry Reinforcement Through Common Procurement Act (EDIRPA)

☐ Act in support of Ammunition programme (ASAP)

☐ IRIS²

☐ European Space Programme (including Cassini Initiative)

☐ Euratom Research and Training Programme

☐ ITER

☐ EU4Health

☒ Other

If other: please indicate which fund

CERV - Contract services

If other: please indicate which fund

CERV - Contract services

Was one or more of your application(s) successful? (Did you receive funding for your project?)

Maximum 1 selection(s)

☒ Yes

☐ No

For which programme(s)/fund(s)?

☒ Horizon Europe

☒ Digital Europe

☐ Innovation Fund

☐ InvestEU

☐ LIFE

☐ Connecting Europe Facility

☐ European Defence Fund

☐ European Defence Industry Reinforcement Through Common Procurement Act (EDIRPA)

☐ Act in support of Ammunition programme (ASAP)

☐ IRIS²

☐ European Space Programme (including Cassini initiative)

☐ Euratom Research and Training Programme

☐ ITER

☐ EU4Health

☒ Other

If other: please indicate which fund

CERV - Contract services

How would you describe your experience?

	Very positive	Positive	Negative	Very negative	No opinion
Identifying the funding opportunity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The relevance and clarity of the calls	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The duration of the procedure	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The application procedure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The evaluation of your proposal	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The implementation of the project	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The disbursement of the funding	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please describe what you consider to be the key challenges in this procedure

Local and regional governments (LRGs) often lack clear, accessible information on EU funding opportunities relevant to their competencies. The multiplicity of instruments

and fragmented portals and staff shortage make this process difficult, especially for smaller municipalities. In addition, the procedures are overly complex and resource-intensive, often requiring external costly consultants. For LRGs, the challenges are not only the relevance of EU funding, but its accessibility and complexity.

500 character(s) maximum

Part 2. EU funding on Competitiveness

Question: The Commission has preliminarily identified the following challenges linked to competitiveness. How important are these challenges in your view?

	Very important	Important	Moderately important	Not important	No opinion
The innovation and technological gap for the EU in strategic technologies, with respect to key competitors globally		x			
Underinvestment in research and innovation	x				
Disparities in innovation and industrial capacity across Member States	x				
Lack of fertilisation between civil and military research and development					x
Insufficient innovation and manufacturing capacity for strategic technologies					x
Insufficient focus of EU funding on EU strategic priorities		x			
Lack of coherence between EU, national and regional policies for competitiveness	x				

Climate resilience and costs associated with decarbonisation	X				
Excessive dependence of the EU on non-EU countries for critical inputs, raw materials and strategic technologies			X		
Access to finance for small businesses and for scale-up companies from research to manufacturing			X		
Attracting world class researchers, skilled workers and entrepreneurs from abroad		X			
Incapacity to translate innovation into marketable technologies, and failure to integrate these technologies into the EU's industrial base					X
Mismatch between skills and labour market demands	X				
Digitalisation and diffusion of advanced technologies in key sectors	X				
Insufficient private investment, including by institutional investors		X			
Challenges related to the effective protection of EU funds against fraud, corruption and other illegal activity					X
Other (please specify below)	X				

If other: please specify below

500 character(s) maximum

0 out of 500 characters used.

If other, please specify

To fully tap territories' potential for EU competitiveness, key challenges must be tackled: rigid regulations hindering innovation of public-private partnerships, limited capacities and resources of local government to access EU or national innovation funding, insufficient policy link between cohesion and competitiveness, urban-rural disparities in attractiveness for businesses and access to resources, and insufficient support for short supply chains and local value creation.

Question: Which development stages for technologies and products should be supported by the next MFF to support EU competitiveness?

	To a large extent	Somewhat	Very little	Not at all	Don't know/not applicable
Fundamental research		x			
Applied research	x				
Early-stage development of technologies	x				
Scaling up	x				
Industrial deployment		x			
Manufacturing capacities		x			
Other (please specify below)	x				

If other, please specify

The next MFF should strengthen support for the territorial uptake of innovation by enabling local and regional governments to act as facilitators and users of new technologies. Funding should target the development of local and regional innovation ecosystems, encourage cross-sector partnerships (e.g. between academia, SMEs, public services), promote pilot and demonstration projects (living labs), and support the creation of short supply chains that enhance local production and consumption. This place-based approach ensures that innovation translates into tangible solutions,

boosts regional competitiveness and sustainability, and contributes to the EU's strategic autonomy.

Question: To what extent does the current EU budget contribute to addressing the following challenges?

	To a large extent	Somewhat	Very little	Not at all
Attracting world class researchers, skilled workers and entrepreneurs from abroad		x		
Facilitating collaboration between research and industry		x		
Translation of innovation into marketable technologies, and integration of these technologies into the EU's industrial base		x		
Disparities in innovation and industrial capacity and resources across Member States			x	
Providing world class technological and research infrastructure across the EU		x		
Reducing excessive dependencies in critical inputs, raw materials and strategic technologies			x	
Fertilisation between civil and military research and development			x	
Ensuring continuity in EU funding across the stages from research to manufacturing		x		
Demand-side public initiatives for innovation and strategic technologies (e.g. procurement, standards)			x	
Decarbonisation and environmental sustainability of strategic sectors		x		

Digitalisation and diffusion of advanced technologies in key sectors		x		
Support for small businesses and for scale up companies from research to manufacturing			x	
Insufficient mobilisation of private financing (e.g. by de-risking private investment)		x		
Other (please specify below)				

If other, please specify

Strong single market requires that EU refocuses efforts on prioritizing policies and actions where the EU has greatest value, i.e. where private investment is lacking and market failure persists. It is therefore important for the EU to concentrate its investments where they are most needed in terms of sectors but also with a place-based approach, looking at how to support territories left behind or suffering from negative impact of the single market.

In this context, targeted support is needed in remote and less-connected regions to ensure social cohesion and balanced territorial development. At a same time, cities and metropolitan areas, with a growing share of the living and working population, also need increased support to implement successful climate adaptation and digital transformation to maintaining and enhancing European competitiveness.

Question: The Commission has identified a number of possible measures for EU funding to better support EU competitiveness. To what extent do you think such measures could have a positive impact?

	To a large extent	Somewhat	Very little	Not at all	Don't know/ not applicable
--	-------------------	----------	-------------	------------	----------------------------

Applying common rules, timelines and eligibility criteria to all relevant EU funds	X				
Increased focus of funding on key current and future strategic priorities		X			
Reducing the number of EU funding programmes		X			
Continuity in EU funding from research to manufacturing		x			
Aligning industrial and research policies and investment at EU and national levels		x			
Increase international collaboration with like-minded non-EU partners		x			
Targeted tools and measures to limit EU dependencies in strategic key sectors		x			
Strengthen business advisory support services (e.g. coaching, mentoring, training) for successful applicants		x			
User-friendly IT tools		x			
Better feedback to applicants	X				
Introduce more flexibility into resource allocation to react to crises and emerging needs		X			
Place greater focus on achieving results, including via performance-based funding (such as financing not linked to costs)		X			
Preventing and combat fraud and corruption better as well as other illegal activities targeting EU funds	x				

Other (please specify below)	X				
------------------------------	---	--	--	--	--

If other, please specify

It is important to look also at the factors driving and enabling local economic development such as quality infrastructure and public services, access to job but also leisure opportunities that are key attractiveness factors for businesses when deciding to settle or expend in a European region.

The role and potential of local and regional governments in enabling local business development must be recognised. Local authorities can facilitate long term collaboration arenas with the business community with the goal of creating a more resilient and sustainable business sector, more attractive jobs and a desirable and safe place to live.

EU Competitiveness Fund should be designed in complementarity with other policies and funds implemented in decentralised management. Therefore, to receive competitiveness funds allocation, Member States should ensure (as part of the reforms component in the next MFF) that they will support local and regional governments in their countries in developing integrated competitiveness investment plans.

A component of the EU Competitiveness fund should also be dedicated to correcting the negative impacts of the Single market by targeting investments at regions stuck in development trap and towards unlocking the competitiveness opportunities of places suffering from market failure.

The EU Competitiveness fund should also give full and equal access to EEA EFTA States (Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway) and their local and regional authorities, as set out in Article 81 of the EEA Agreement (further information on [EEA EFTA Comment](#)) to foster cross-border cooperation and boost innovation ecosystems.

Part 3. Closing questions

Question If you would like to add further information – within the scope of this questionnaire – feel free to do so here.

As the EU prepares for the next MFF, it is essential that the Competitiveness Fund supports sustainable, inclusive, and resilient economic growth across all regions. Local and regional governments, which account for over 50% of public investment in the EU,

play a central role in driving innovation, local economic development and industrial transformation. However, current EU funding frameworks often overlook their potential. This contribution highlights with 4 key points how the next MFF can better leverage the strengths of LRGs (Local and Regional Governments) to enhance EU competitiveness while ensuring fair access, territorial cohesion, and alignment with the EU's Green Deal and digitalisation goals.

1. Empowering LRGs to enhance regional competitiveness and resilience

LRGs are key enablers of local economic growth, yet their role in EU competitiveness policy is often undervalued. The *Competitiveness Compass* illustrates this trend, with limited recognition of LRGs beyond administrative efficiency. However, start-ups, universities, and industries operate in real places — cities, regions, and municipalities — that require public services, infrastructure, and quality of life to attract talent and investment. In addition, the competence for economic development is often devolved to regions in EU Member States (see <https://terri.cemr.eu/en/>)

The next MFF must ensure that LRGs are fully integrated into the allocation of the Competitiveness Fund. EU funding should support bottom-up and place-based approaches, allowing LRGs to tailor initiatives to regional needs. Besides allocation in the framework of the competitiveness funding, Member States should ensure that their national investment plans will support LRGs to boost competitiveness at the territorial level. They need to be meaningfully and systematically involved at all stages – from planning and implementation to monitoring and evaluation through an inclusive governance. The principles of a multi-level governance must be upheld and operationalised more consistently across all EU programmes and instruments to ensure effective and territorially balanced outcomes that reflect the real needs on the ground.

This includes strengthening the provisions on Multilevel Climate and Energy Dialogues under art^o 11 of the Governance Regulation on Energy Union and Climate action, by enhancing its reporting requirements to ensure real involvement of LRGs. This would contribute to further alignment of EU and national policies, on a place based and bottom-up fashion, making best use of available funding and increasing effectiveness in overcoming implementation barriers to strengthen territorial resilience.

Additionally, ensuring further alignment, integration and mutual benefits between EU Missions with other EU existing initiatives supporting medium and smaller sized local and regional governments achieving national and EU targets, such as the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy Europe, with harmonised reporting requirements and dedicated guidance to funding for local and regional authorities.

2. Supporting the proximity economy and digital transformation

A resilient economy is grounded in proximity—where businesses, services, and production are located close to consumers. Supporting the proximity economy strengthens local production and shortens supply chains, boosting resilience. At the same time, digital transformation is crucial for maintaining competitiveness. Expanding broadband, enhancing digital infrastructure, and supporting digital upskilling are essential to ensure all regions benefit from the digital economy.

EU funding must therefore prioritize local supply chains, circular economy, digital infrastructure, and upskilling initiatives, especially in underserved areas, to ensure no region is left behind.

3. Reducing bureaucracy and strengthening capacity

Both LRGs and SMEs face significant bureaucratic hurdles in accessing EU funds, undermining their ability to effectively support local businesses and drive local economic growth. To make EU funding more effective, the next MFF must focus on simplifying procedures and supporting capacity-building for LRGs and public administrations. The competitiveness compass identified the role of local and regional governments to ease administrative burden for SMEs, the EU and Member States should therefore ensure (for instance as part of the reform component of their single national plans) simplification of regulations and administrative processes for local and regional administrations.

4. Ensuring a green, inclusive, and territorially balanced transition

The EU's transition to a green economy must be fair, ensuring that all regions have the resources to adapt. EU competitiveness funding must align with the EU Green Deal objectives, supporting sustainable solutions and fostering a just transition for all regions. This includes prioritizing green technologies, sustainable mobility, and local green business networks.

Annexes: to further illustrate these points, please find attached CEMR position on the future MFF and the Local Green Transition Report.

Question Attach any relevant documents to support your replies

Only files of the type pdf,txt,doc,docx,odt,rtf are allowed

Select file(s) to upload

CEMR MFF contribution

Green Deal report

If you're human, leave this field blank

Contact

SG-MFF-PUBLIC-CONSULTATIONS@ec.europa.eu