

EIT GOVERNING BOARD VISION FOR A COMPETITIVE EUROPE

LEVERAGING EUROPE'S LARGEST INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

Europe needs to become more competitive to address the major **global challenges** facing the EU and its citizens in all Member States. The European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) does just that; as an independent body created by the European Union in 2008, it strengthens Europe's ability to innovate and empowers its next generation of entrepreneurs. The EIT's aim is to 'increase Europe's competitiveness, sustainable economic growth and job creation by promoting and strengthening cooperation among leading business, education and research organisations and power innovation and entrepreneurship in Europe by creating environments for creative and innovative thoughts to thrive.'

The Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029 backed by The Future of European Competitiveness report by Prof. Mario Draghi **confirm that the EIT's mission remains fully relevant**. Both reports have highlighted the root causes hindering Europe's competitiveness and that 'Europe needs to redress its slowing productivity growth by closing the innovation gap'. The findings are stark:

- 'The commercialisation of research results is insufficient. Much of the knowledge generated in research institutions remains commercially unexploited...The links between higher education and business are weak and researchers have few incentives to become entrepreneurs'.
- 'The limited development of angel investors, venture capital (VC) and growth finance is an important driver of the financial gap of innovative start-ups in the EU'.

- Europe is suffering from skills gaps across the economy, reinforced by a declining labour force. The European economy displays persistent skills shortages in several sectors and occupations, for both low- and high-skilled workers'.

As Europe's largest innovation ecosystem with activities in all EU Member States and beyond, the EIT directly addresses these shortcomings to strengthen Europe's innovation landscape and to boost its competitiveness:

DRAGHI REPORT

Improve the commercialisation of research results

EIT strengthens **collaboration** between business, education and research in **impact-driven partnerships** to accelerate the journey from lab to market.

Strengthen links between higher education & business

EIT advances the cooperation between **education and business**, education and skills programmes **respond to today's market demands**.

Step up and streamline support to innovative start-ups

EIT supports **start-ups** through funding, coaching, business plan development, connections to new markets and customers **for future scaling** through investors, incl. EIC and EIB.

Close the skills gap

EIT tackling the shortage of skilled workers through:

- **Entrepreneurship skills development**
- **New European Innovation Agenda's**

Deep Tech Talent Initiative skilling 1 million learners in deep tech skills by the end of 2025

- **Dedicated sector-specific Academies for the delivery of skilled learners** supporting the implementation of the Net Zero Industry Act (European Battery Academy, European Solar Academy, European Raw Materials Academy European Advanced Materials Academy)

EIT ADDED-VALUE

To address the pressing social and economic challenges they are facing, the **European Union and its Member States** must leverage instruments, such as the EIT, which are **designed for purpose and prove that they deliver**. In this paper, the EIT Governing Board outlines the EIT's main strengths and the added-value it brings to the EU research and innovation landscape whilst looking ahead at the key contribution it should play during the EU's next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation 2028-2034.

EIT IMPACT & ADDED VALUE

Since 2010, the EIT has been **enhancing Europe's competitiveness** by building and steering pan-European innovation partnerships. Its approach **connects organisations from business, education, and research** across Europe through ten thematic EIT KICs. These partnerships (EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities) are dynamic public-private partnerships dedicated to driving innovation and addressing global challenges facing our societies:



COMING SOON

The EIT is Europe's largest pan-European innovation ecosystem, combining unparalleled local reach with a strong focus on tackling societal challenges. As the only EU innovation instrument dedicated to integrating education and skills with research and business, the EIT's activities cover the entire innovation pipeline from skills to initial idea to scalable market-ready products and services. Since 2008, the EIT has built **Europe's largest innovation network**, bringing together more than **2 400** key organisations in business, education, and research from across Europe and beyond. The EIT has skilled over **880 000** learners in innovation, entrepreneurship, and deep tech across all its education and training initiatives.

Entrepreneurs and innovators across Europe have received critical support from the EIT Community. Research results have been turned into ground-breaking products whilst also creating thousands of highly skilled jobs. The EIT fosters this innovation ecosystem by providing innovators and start-ups with key resources, enabling them to successfully commercialise their technologies and guiding them towards public and private players that can support their scale-up phase. This EIT support has resulted in the launch of more than **2400 new products and services on the market** and directly **supported over 9900 companies**. These companies have raised almost **€10 billion** in external funding and resulting in the creation of unicorns and innovative **companies worth €71.2 billion today**. In December 2024, the EIT was recognised as the top performing investor in the Financial Times backed Sifted ranking behind Europe's fastest-growing start-ups and in January 2025, the European Patents Office found the EIT among the top 5 investors in Europe in its latest 'Mapping Europe's Investors' report.

The **EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS)** is a proven instrument effectively reducing Europe's innovation capacity divide. This scheme has helped to significantly widen the participation of EIT activities, creating impact and openness. Accumulated data from 2021-2023 shows that EIT RIS-eligible countries attracted an unprecedented amount of over 40% of the total EIT grant, a significant over achievement under Horizon Europe.



EIT Impact over 15 years

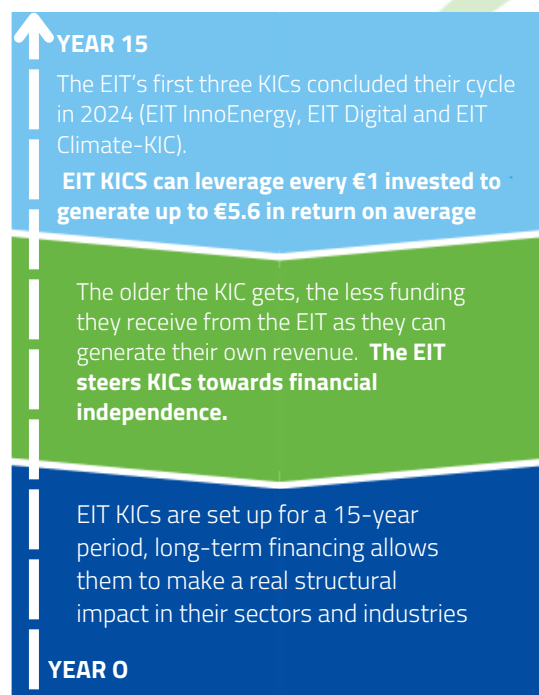
In addition to its core mission to deliver education and skills, innovation, and business creation activities, the EIT has also established itself as a reliable partner in implementing EU policy priorities. Drawing upon the EIT's innovation ecosystem, its proven track record, and flexibility, the European Commission has mandated the EIT to meet growing industrial needs and implement new skills development initiatives: the European Battery Academy, the European Solar Academy, the European Raw Materials Academy, and the European Advanced Materials Academy.

The EIT fosters collaboration, encouraging active commitment and shared responsibility from all participants, most evidenced by EIT KICs eventual need to sustain their activities as financially sustainable partnerships without EIT funding. In a first for EU funding, the EIT has also steered and managed three of its KICs to achieving financial sustainability by the end of 2024. The EIT's first three KICs (EIT Climate-KIC, EIT Digital, and EIT InnoEnergy) have **achieved financial sustainability following a unique model tailored to the characteristics and players in their respective markets.** This significant achievement highlights the EIT's ability to deliver significant return on investment

Independent studies have positively assessed the EIT KICs' progress towards financial sustainability, highlighting their ability to generate significant private and public investments:

- **EIT Climate-KIC** has become a key public-private partnership focused on climate innovation. It has helped build over 2300 start-ups, which have generated EUR 1.1 billion of investment, created 15 000 full-time jobs and powered 790 new products.
- **EIT Digital** has upskilled hundreds of thousands of people through its education portfolio, helped create 275 start-ups and supported the scale-up of over 720 ventures, which have collectively raised EUR 660 million in external investment.
- Finally, **EIT InnoEnergy** is an active sustainable energy investor and one of the largest cleantech investors with more than 200 portfolio companies that have collectively raised over EUR 4.8 billion from public and private sources.

None of this would have been possible without the EIT in the driver's seat, steering the EIT KICs as an independent EU body led by its Governing Board. The EIT is administratively efficient, managing 10 European Partnerships with 77 staff, using only 2.5 % of its budget for the programme's administration.



The EIT's added value has been examined and summarised by independent experts for publications published by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation ([Study for the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe](#), [Biennial monitoring report 2024 on partnerships in Horizon Europe](#) and the [Final Evaluation Report of Horizon 2020](#)). The evidence from these reports confirmed the EIT's key role in bridging the fragmentation in innovation ecosystems and nurturing Europe's innovation and talent pipeline. The reports highlighted that:

- The EIT is '**successful in unifying and integrating the Knowledge Triangle and in supporting the development of long-term pan-European innovation ecosystems**'. The EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) add value beyond national support initiatives by operating across borders and connecting EIT Community partners and beneficiaries with organisations and networks across the entire EU and beyond that they would otherwise find difficult to access.
- The **EIT demonstrates one of the highest leverage effects in Horizon Europe**. According to the reports, EIT KICs stand out with a full leverage of 5.6 compared to co-programmed partnerships with 3.55, co-funded partnerships with 2.21 and institutionalised partnerships (excluding KICs) with 1.64.
- **EIT education activities are tailored to industry needs and highly relevant** given the shortage of skilled workers in high-tech and deep-tech sectors in the EU.

FUTURE EIT VISION: BOOSTING EUROPE'S COMPETITIVENESS

With only three out of ten EIT KICs reaching full maturity, the EIT is just getting started. Building on the EIT's added-value, its impact, the lessons learnt as part of Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe and required simplification measures, the EIT Governing Board proposes that the EIT continue its core mission of building thematic ecosystems dedicated to solving global challenges under the EU's next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

Leveraging the EIT model to address new thematic challenges, **the EIT should enhance efforts to the areas where it stands out in the EU innovation landscape**, mainly **(1) closing the EU's innovation gap** to strengthen the European innovation ecosystem and **(2) closing the skills gap** to meet the EU's talent need. In order for this to take place, **synergies between the EU innovation instruments must be strengthened with a common framework to be implemented**.

1. Close the innovation gap

Through an unparalleled local presence across Europe and beyond, the EIT connects entrepreneurs, industry, academics and researchers to an integrated pan-European network, reducing existing barriers in the EU's fragmented innovation landscape. Focus should be put towards evolving the EIT's local presence and further developing the European innovation ecosystem model by linking investors into the innovation value chain. The EIT will step up and streamline support to innovative start-ups and entrepreneurs in innovation ecosystems. In this way, it contributes to the following objectives:

- **Regaining Europe's competitiveness:** Over the past 15 years, the EIT has codified a unique approach and established itself with an expertise in building trusted networks. To help Europe regain its competitiveness, the innovation potential of several thematic areas has been identified ([Policy Guidelines of the new Commission](#)). The EIT should be leveraged as an asset towards bringing innovations to market in these areas through existing EIT KICs and the establishment of new EIT KICs. **The EIT proposes five areas** where its impact-driven approach could break down fragmentation and boost Europe's competitiveness:



Security & Resilience



AI & Robotics



Space & Aerospace



Rural Innovation



Bio-based Industry

- **Accelerating innovation:** To boost innovation, the EIT proposes transforming the EIT Regional Innovation Scheme into the European Regional Innovation Booster. This shift will move the focus from increasing EIT participation and capacity building in widening countries to achieving greater impact for Member States with lower innovation capacities. As highlighted in the The Future of European Competitiveness report by Prof. Mario Draghi, “Policies should be crafted to ensure that all groups within the EU, including underrepresented regions and demographics, have access to opportunities in R&I, thus preventing widening disparities”. The emphasis will be put on providing in-depth support to the most promising early-stage start-ups within the EIT RIS region and steering their growth towards future support from the European Innovation Council and European Investment Fund, and other relevant public and private investors.
- **Addressing emerging global challenges:** New global challenges and opportunities for innovation are rapidly emerging and can only be addressed through collaboration. The EIT is a strategic asset to rapidly implement policy priorities by mobilising and coordinating an agile ecosystem consisting of new, existing and mature EIT KICs and their thousands of partners across Europe. The EIT is well positioned to serve as a platform of knowledge and exchange, beyond funding. As the largest innovation ecosystem, with thousands of partners, the EIT can ensure learnings and good practices from its activities are captured and shared widely across the European innovation landscape, aiding decision-makers in understanding and addressing multifaceted issues.

2. Close the skills gap

The EIT’s unique approach to education lies in the deep understanding that EIT KICs have of their respective sectors, enabling them **to customise training programmes to meet the specific needs of key European industries**. The strong connections between industry and higher education within the EIT ecosystem facilitates the

rapid identification of emerging trends, allowing these insights to be seamlessly integrated into training programmes. This ensures that **learners are equipped with the most relevant skills**.

Meeting Europe’s increasing need for skilled talent will be achieved by consolidating the EIT’s existing education and skilling programmes into the, **EIT Innovation Campus**, a coherent portfolio of coordinated education initiatives focused on **boosting Europe’s workforce and competitiveness**. EIT education programmes combine innovation and entrepreneurship skills with industry-specific knowledge, addressing the evolving needs of each sector. These programmes are tailored to market demands, innovation training, and industry-recognised qualifications and certifications, promoting **the European Degree criteria and facilitating skills portability**.

The EIT Innovation Campus will become a hub where Europe’s higher education institutions, vocational training and private sector education providers come together to deliver the talent Europe needs to meet its innovation and competitiveness ambitions. It will build on existing programmes such as the EIT Higher Education Initiative, the EIT Deep Tech Talent Initiative, the Girls Go Circular programme and sector specific programmes and courses.

Strengthen synergies & implement common framework across EU innovation instruments

The European innovation landscape can better leverage its impact by catalysing a critical mass of start-ups, scale-ups along with public and private funding, through the development of a common framework across the three key areas of the integrated innovation funnel:

- Generation of ideas and excellent research results (e.g., ERC, MSCA, Erasmus+, European University Alliances),
- Valorisation of knowledge, research and innovation, start-up creation and support, and skills development (EIT, European Partnerships) through stronger connectedness between innovation ecosystems.

- Innovative company scale-up and growth through financial support and investments (European Innovation Council, European Investment Fund & European Investment Bank).

Competitiveness Funnel



A common framework with an impactful strategy and effective governance with other EU innovation instruments is urgently needed to maximise opportunities for European innovators from idea to scale-up in all sectors. This will require the commitment of all current programmes, including the EIT, to **simplify and adjust their processes** to effectively deliver on both their mandates and **synergy opportunities** with others.

Based on stakeholder feedback, this will require important simplification of operations for the EIT and KICs so that the administrative burden to participate in its activities are minimised and so that shared services within and across programmes can be strongly enhanced. To achieve this, the EIT Governing Board will propose a concrete set of measures based on **lessons learnt**.

The EIT's role as an independent EU body is a critical component of its ability to deliver impact, as it ensures meaningful involvement of the private sector and allows for efficient, agile, and impact-driven decision-making. The EIT Governing Board, comprising 15 independent members from business, education and research provides strategic, multidisciplinary leadership. **The financial sustainability achieved by the first three EIT KICs**

EIT Climate-KIC, EIT Digital, and EIT InnoEnergy, would not have been possible without the Board's strategic guidance and the unique model developed and implemented by the EIT. The EIT's governance model has proven to be robust and reliable, also evidenced by its quick time to grant.

CONCLUSION

At the heart of European innovation is collaboration. Through a distinct blend of partnership, thematic expertise, and a shared funding model, the EIT is well positioned to be one of the key drivers for the EU's competitiveness, delivering results and impact. Achieving the needed advancements in innovation in Europe, demands bold investments in innovation ecosystems. The EIT stands ready to deliver on this common European agenda and further build on its strong foundation and results, along with learnings from the past 15 years.

The EIT model has been built with collaboration and connectivity. As such, the EIT Governing Board invites its stakeholders and innovators over the coming months to continue collaborating on our shared vision, and provide inputs on the future of the Europe's innovation landscape, and the EIT's enhancement

BACKGROUND

The EIT strengthens Europe's ability to innovate by powering solutions to pressing global challenges and by nurturing entrepreneurial talent to create sustainable growth and skilled jobs in Europe. The EIT is an EU body and an integral part of Horizon Europe the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

This document was authored by the EIT Governing Board. The EIT Governing Board is the decision-making body of the Institute made up of 15 independent experts from higher education, research, business, and innovation.

