DECISION ON THE PILOT PHASE
OF THE HEI INITIATIVE

DECISION 38/2023

OF THE GOVERNING BOARD OF

THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY (EIT)

ON THE CONTINUATION AND SCALING UP OF THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY'S HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEI) INNOVATION CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVE BEYOND ITS PILOT PHASE

THE GOVERNING BOARD OF THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY,

HAVING REGARD to Regulation 2021/819 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 on the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (hereafter referred to as the "EIT Regulation (recast)")[1], in particular to Articles 3, 6(s) and (t), 7(1)(d), Section 2(1)(n) of the Statutes annexed thereto;

HAVING REGARD to Decision 2021/820 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 on the Strategic Innovation Agenda of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) 2021-2027: Boosting the Innovation Talent and Capacity of Europe (hereafter referred to as the "EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027")[2], in particular to Sections 3.4 thereof;

HAVING REGARD to Regulation 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1290/2013 and (EU) No 1291/2013[3];

HAVING REGARD to Decision 09/2021 of the Governing Board of the EIT of 2 March 2021 on the allocation of the 2021 financial contribution to the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs)[4];

HAVING REGARD to Decision 41/2021 of the Governing Board of the EIT of 25 November 2021 on the allocation of the 2022 financial contribution to the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs)[5];

HAVING REGARD to Decision 35/2022 of the Governing Board of the EIT of 24 November 2022 on the initial allocation of the financial contribution to the Knowledge and Innovation Communities' (KICs') Business Plans for 2023-2025 (Business Plans 2023-2024 for the first wave KICs), to Cross-KIC activities and shared services (including the Thematic Innovations) for 2023-2025, and to the pilot Higher Education Institutions (HEI) Initiative for 2023[6];

HAVING REGARD to Decision 04/2023 of the Governing Board of the EIT of 14 March 2023 on the principles for the determination of the additional EIT financial allocation for 2024 to the Knowledge and Innovation

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[1] OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 61-90.
[2] OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 91-118.
[3] OJ L 170, 12.5.2021, p. 1–68.
[4] Ref. Ares(2021) 157463
[5] Ref. Ares(2021)7374923
[6] Ref. Ares(2022)8603359

Communities' (KICs') Business Plans, to Cross-KIC activities and shared services, and to the Higher Education (HEI) Initiative[7];

HAVING REGARD to the Final report of the Evaluation of the Pilot Phase of the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) Innovation Capacity Building Initiative[8];

WHEREAS

(1)   In line with the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027, *"through the knowledge triangle integration model, the EIT is bridging the persistent gap between higher education, research and innovation. In particular, the EIT and the KICs are key tools for the development of human capital through their distinctive focus on innovation and entrepreneurial education. (…) The HEIs across Europe need to be innovative and entrepreneurial in their approach to education, research, and engagement with businesses and the broader regional and local innovation ecosystem, including civil society, public institutions and third sector organisations, in the most inclusive and gender balanced way, which is possible to be achieved through a clear strategy, a methodological framework and commitment of resources."*

(2)   Therefore, as of 2021, the EIT Regulation and the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027 have laid down a new specific objective and task for the EIT to "*increase the entrepreneurial and innovation capacity of higher education across Europe by promoting and supporting institutional change in HEIs and the integration of HEIs in innovation ecosystems*". This task must be implemented through open and transparent calls for proposals of the KICs.

(3)   The first three years of the Initiative have been designed as the pilot phase throughout which it shall be subject to monitoring and evaluation. The pilot HEI Initiative has started in mid-2021, and since then, funding was ensured via the funding allocation decisions 09/2021, 41/2021 and 35/2022 adopted by the EIT Governing Board. The pilot projects will be duly finalised in 2024.

(4)   The EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027 set out that the evaluation of the pilot phase shall be conducted by independent external experts. Based on the results of that evaluation, before the end of 2023, the EIT Governing Board shall decide whether the pilot Higher Education Initiative is to be either continued and scaled-up or discontinued. A positive decision from the EIT Governing Board is a precondition for the additional funding allocation for HEI activities beyond the pilot phase.

(5)   In early 2023, the EIT contracted the independent expert evaluation of the HEI Initiative pilot phase to an external provider. The final report has been delivered in September 2023 and was then put forward to the EIT Governing Board for information. Additionally, in accordance with the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027, the results shall be communicated to the Member State Representatives Group (MSRG) and to the European Parliament.

(6)   The present Governing Board Decision shall lay down the key directions and recommendations for the continuation and scaling up of the HEI Initiative, taking into account results of the independent evaluation of the pilot phase of the HEI Initiative.

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[7] Ref. Ares(2023)1853153
[8] Ref. Ares(2023) 7260101

HAS DECIDED AS FOLLOWS:

Article 1
Endorsement of the results of the pilot phase of the HEI Initiative

The EIT Governing Board acknowledges and endorses the positive outcome of the independent evaluation of the HEI Initiative pilot phase.

Article 2
Continuation and scaling up of the HEI Initiative post its pilot phase

(1) The EIT Governing Board decides to continue and scale up the HEI Initiative beyond its pilot phase.

(2) The EIT Governing Board intends to allocate a similar amount to the post-pilot phase of HEI Initiate for 2024-2027 as it did during the pilot phase. The exact amount to be allocated overall and under the individual grant agreements will depend both on the overall availability of EIT funding as well as on the detailed proposal for the scaled up Initiative that will be developed under the lead of the coordinating KIC, EIT Raw Materials, in close consultation with the EIT. The EIT Governing Board expects that outcomes, results and impact of the Initiative will be scaled up compared to the pilot phase.

(3) Annex I to this decision provides for the key directions and recommendations that shall be taken into account for the continuation and scaling up of the Initiative beyond its pilot phase. The EIT and the KICs shall design the next processes and shall operationalise this Decision in line with Annex I.

Article 3
Entry into force

This decision shall enter into force on the day of its adoption.

Done in Budapest, 23 November 2023

(e-signed)
Nektarios Tavernarakis
Chairperson of the Governing Board

Annex I: The directions and key recommendations for continuation of the HEI Initiative beyond the pilot phase

Annex I:
Directions and key recommendations for the continuation and scaling up of the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) Innovation Capacity Building Initiative beyond its pilot phase

1. Description and the key recommendations

Building on the predominantly positive conclusions of the independent external evaluation of the pilot phase of the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) Initiative, following the decision of the EIT Governing Board (EIT GB) on the future of the HEI Initiative after finalizing the pilot phase, it lays down the following concrete **strategic recommendations** to reshape the concept and model of the Initiative implementation. The purpose of the strategic recommendations is the better integration of the Initiative in the EIT model and the alignment with other strategic priorities of the EIT Education Agenda.

The EIT GB acknowledges that the pilot phase showcases numerous positive developments, such as sufficient signs of participating universities and HEIs being on a good track to achieve systematic institutional impact in a long term, projects committed to completing their IVAPs (Innovation Vision Action Plans) in mid- and long-term, promising progress in achieving entrepreneurial results in terms of start-ups, striving partnerships between universities and non-academic partners as one of the results of projects implementation, visible increase in the role universities are assuming in their local innovation ecosystems, universities reporting significant improvements in HEInnovate tool self-assessment results, increased awareness of universities and HEI leaderships, who are fully committed to take actions strengthening their innovation capacity, clear vision of non-EIT financial commitment to continue IVAPs.

The **EIT GB recommends taking on board the following set of recommendations** based on the outcomes of the independent review, EIT monitoring and feedback from KICs:

- The establishment of a programme baseline through the requirement that all partners participate in the **HEInnovate workshops and develop an Innovation Vision Action Plan (IVAP) that is approved by the leadership of the HEI** is highly appreciated and very effective to trigger a systemic transformation of the HEIs. This approach should be maintained and reinforced as one of the key strengths.

- The initiative should remain focussed on **targeting new HEIs and an increased number of business partners** in future calls to multiply the results of the initiative across Europe.

- The Initiative has demonstrated efficiency in meeting KPIs, with targets often exceeded. However, in the case of targets focusing on the support or creation of start-ups, it was noted that it was difficult to find further funding support after project completion. Offering further funding or exploring other support for successful projects and 'innovative' start-ups may be beneficial, recognizing that they often require

sustained financial assistance to navigate the path to profitability, especially if they face challenges in reaching maturity within the market. To achieve this, **promising start-ups emerging from the HEI Initiative should be better linked to other EIT KIC programmes**.

- **Stronger incentives should be set by the Initiative for HEI partners to become more active in technology transfer structures**, such as academic accelerators for creating startups from validated ideas. This could become one of the priority areas for a scaled-up HEI Initiative to focus upon.

- As projects completed their activity within the first cohort, it was recommended to explore the potential of **creating a well-functioning alumni network of organisations**: stakeholders were keen to continue the collaboration after the funding period and would be open to the possibility of becoming part of a wider network of alumni institutions, effectively creating and HEI community. Equally, in the future, **the graduates from the HEI Initiative trainings should be associated to the EIT Alumni** to strengthen the Community and encourage networking across different EIT entrepreneurship and education programmes.

- The **Initiative should more strongly ensure synergies and links with existing initiatives at EU, national and regional level,** such as the European Universities Initiative, the European Education Area, the European Research Area and the European Innovation Area beyond the structural link that exists with HEInnovate. Some suggestions on how this may be resolved include: collaborating closely with the European Commission and other relevant stakeholders to ensuring coherence and complementarity with other EU programmes, promoting and communicating the value of the HEI Initiative to key actors, and encouraging applicants to connect with EIT Label programmes and EIT KIC business creation instruments. Exploring collaborative frameworks & alliance building with existing actors could be beneficial for future calls, including Erasmus+, Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA), European Universities Initiative (EUI)[1].

- There is a **need for enhanced dissemination of results and best practices** achieved under the Initiative. Stakeholder feedback suggests a demand for greater visibility of projects and more effective dissemination of project results. Investing additional financial support in these activities, organising demonstration events, and hosting thematic conferences for projects could also prove beneficial for promoting the Initiative's EU-added value. In this context and in order to gain more insight into the impact of the Initiative, it is recommended that data is collected on the extent to which project partners become members of the KIC(s) after the funding period.

- **Lengths of calls and implementation in phases shall continue** as in the pilot phase (up to 2-year project duration, with IVAPs aiming for mid-term and long-term impact). The optimal duration of projects could be 18-24 months with a midterm monitoring review. It is recommended to better align the timeline of cohorts with the academic calendar to facilitate timely implementation of the project and minimise delays.

- The Initiative involves many regions and many networks of HEIs. Inevitably there will be regional overlaps and the risk of missed opportunities of **synergies between projects** are not exploited. This may happen between projects, but an overall regional/ geographical management from the EIT community would certainly be beneficial, particularly as projects are incrementally added to the Initiative through the future calls.

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[1] A recent evaluation of the European Universities Initiative identified a number of areas for improvement: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/733105/IPOL_STU(2023)733105_EN.pdf

- **Bring the Initiative fully under the umbrella of EIT Campus** and link the Initiative more strongly with EIT Academies and the Deep Tech Talent Initiative, beyond what was done in Call 3. Future calls could have again a thematic focus, for example on priority topics like Deep Tech Skills, AI, the New European Bauhaus, Climate Neutrality or Water.

- More **strongly link the HEI Initiative with the EIT Label**, which has been expanded, i.e. ensure that the EIT Label becomes more visible via the HEI Initiative and is adopted more widely across HEIs. To design and implement processes and actions to support widening the scope of the EIT Label beyond the KICs to include the HEIs participating in the Initiative. With the involvement of actors from across the knowledge triangle, link the support for developing innovation capacity in higher education to the EIT Label. The activities in the Initiative should further support expanding the EIT Label to lifelong learning activities. Effective tools should be in place to increase the number of HEIs in the Initiative that implement or participate a) in the EIT Label degree programmes (Master and Doctoral), b) in the non-degree EIT Label education models (lifelong learning activities, such as mentoring, vocational training, skilling, re-skilling and up-skilling programmes, massive open online courses, involving and reaching out to a wider target group of students, adult learners and institutions).

- **Improved monitoring and evaluation:** It is recommended to develop and implement more effective tools and methods how to measure impact considering the key strategic objective of the Initiative – the KIC HEI team complementary measures and indicators at the project level (while in full alignment with the EIT Impact Framework). This will allow to better monitor and demonstrate the impact achieved. The focus should be on measuring how the participating HEIs' leadership is actively engaged in the projects throughout their lifetime and beyond. It should prioritize actions aiming specifically at HEIs' strategic documents and the relationship with the Innovation Ecosystem should be adequately supported by the HEI governance. The activities should be increasingly linked to regional strategies and smart specialisation strategies (S3).

2. Expectations and benefits of the continuation of the HEI Initiative

- **The EIT GB intends to allocate a similar amount to the post-pilot phase of HEI Initiate for 2024-2027 as it did during the pilot phase.** The exact amount to be allocated overall and under the individual grant agreements will depend both on the overall availability of EIT funding as well as on the detailed proposal for the scaled up Initiative that will be developed under the lead of the coordinating KIC, EIT RawMaterials, in close consultation with the EIT. The EIT GB expects that outcomes, results and impact of the initiative will be scaled up compared to the pilot phase.

- The increased use of **co-financing and additional funding sources besides EIT funding** will help to scale up the results and impact.

- Initial monitoring shows promising sign towards **systemic change, which shall be multiplied** in other HEI projects.

- Positive results, **know-how and knowledge base shall be replicated** in wider audience of universities not benefiting from the Initiative or EIT activities so far.

- Universities and projects participating in the HEI so far will receive **further benefit from the continuation beyond financial support**: they will benefit from further achievements, know-how and cooperation efforts, systemic changes may be sustained.

- **Continuation of the Initiative shall help the EIT to reinforce its position** among the specific innovation and entrepreneurship EU instruments. The EIT will get more visibility and positive reputation in being effective in supporting universities and HEIS becoming more innovative and entrepreneurial.

- The EIT, KICs and participating institutions shall **build on synergic effect with other standard activities**, as well as with initiatives outside the EIT.

- Building on the learnings from the pilot, during the continuation, **further efficiency and effectiveness gains will scale up the impact.** Investment made into creating the infrastructure of the Initiative (financial and non-financial) will not be lost.

- The improved model and recommendations will allow for **better integration of the Initiative into the current portfolio of the EIT strategic initiatives** and EU policy priorities (New European Innovation Agenda, DTTI) and will lead to a better holistic approach. It will also improve the integration of the Initiative into the KICs' standard portfolio and other existing EIT community activities ranging from EIT Campus over EIT Alumni to Synergies with other EU programmes.

- The **improved model will enable a better differentiation** between the HEIs at different levels of innovation and better address geographical disparities (with focus on capacity building of RIS, Western Balkans, and Ukraine areas).

3. **Risk and challenges of the continuation of the HEI Initiative to be addressed**

- The ability of KICs to address the recommendations in the improved model in an effective way (more resources will be needed on both the EIT and KIC side to make improvements work) will be not only an opportunity but also a risk. Both EIT and KICs will have to keep significant internal resources specifically dedicated and focused on the Initiative.

- Reaching out to wider audience of HEIs beyond universities already involved so far will become increasingly challenging (the pool of HEIs in Europe is limited).

- Need to balance the Initiative in the new scope with the other EIT strategic priorities and activities (New Innovation Agenda, Deep Tech Talent Initiative, etc.) will be difficult.

- Resources, including EIT funds, allocated to the HEI Initiative affects the funding for the KICs' main activities and make it challenging for the KICs to become financially sustainable.

- Financial investment needed will limit use of EIT resources for other actions, including any potential funding of first wave KICs after 15 years.

- Since, according to the EIT, the available staff resources allocated by the EU to the EIT under the Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027 are insufficient to manage effectively the continuation and scaling up of the HEI Initiative after the pilot phase, the Commission is requested to make every effort to provide the EIT with further staff resources at the required level and numbers to manage the programme until 2027.