

THE STRATEGIC TECHNOLOGIES FOR EUROPE PLATFORM

Policy briefing

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Relevance	<input type="checkbox"/> National policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EU policy <input type="checkbox"/> other: _____
Briefing done by	Aurelija Bakutienė

Short summary of the policy

The Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)¹ is an initiative designed to enhance the EU's industrial competitiveness and reinforce European sovereignty by focusing on the development and manufacturing of critical technologies. STEP aims to bolster investments within three strategic sectors:

- Digital technologies and deep technology innovation,
- Clean and resource efficient technologies,
- Biotechnologies.

STEP also supports projects growing the skills necessary to develop those critical technologies. STEP introduces a new STEP Seal – an EU label for high quality projects granting STEP projects visibility and facilitating their access to other possible sources of funding.

STEP leverages and synergises resources from 11 existing EU funding programmes: the Digital Europe Programme, the European Defence Fund, the EU4Health Programme, Horizon Europe, the Innovation Fund, European Regional Development Fund, Cohesion Fund, European Social Fund+, Just Transitions Funds, Recovery and Resilience Facility, InvestEU.

The STEP Seal² is a recognition given to projects that contribute to STEP objectives and meet the minimum quality criteria set by calls for proposals under the 5 EU funding programmes: Digital Europe Programme, European Defence Fund, EU4Health, Horizon Europe and the Innovation Fund. This Seal is awarded irrespective of whether the projects receive direct funding from these programmes. The Seal is a quality label and a facilitator for accessing EU funds, making it easier for projects to receive combined or cumulative funding from various EU budgetary instruments. For example, projects awarded the STEP Seal can receive support from cohesion policy funds (e.g., ERDF or ESF+) by Member States without undergoing additional selection processes³.

¹REGULATION (EU) 2024/795 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 29 February 2024 establishing the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/strategic-technologies-europe-platform_en

²Sovereignty seal, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/strategic-technologies-europe-platform/sovereignty-seal_en

³ Provided these projects are aligned with the scope of ERDF or ESF+ and contribute to the programme objectives. The DEP4ALL project is funded by the European Commission under the Digital Europe Programme, under grant agreement no. 101167919. Any opinions expressed in these pages are those of the author/organisation and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.

A Guidance Note provides practical support in implementing the STEP Regulation, making it easier to navigate its key provisions.

Main objectives of the policy

The main objectives of the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform: Supporting the development or manufacturing of critical technologies throughout the Union, or safeguarding and strengthening their respective value chains.

STEP conditions

To qualify as critical under the STEP framework, technology must meet at least one of the two conditions below:

1. Innovativeness - brings to the internal market an innovative, emerging, and cutting-edge element with significant economic potential.
 - Technology should exhibit at least two of the following three characteristics: innovative, emerging, or cutting-edge.
 - It must also demonstrate significant economic potential by having a substantial impact on development or manufacturing, addressing various Union markets, and generating positive spillover effects across Member States.
2. Strategic dependencies - contribute to reducing or preventing the strategic dependencies of the Union. Technology should meet several of the following factors:
 - Enhancing Union industrial and technological leadership,
 - Supporting critical infrastructures,
 - Increasing manufacturing capacity (only where a strategic dependency has been identified)
 - Strengthening security of supply
 - Promoting positive cross-border effects within the internal market.

Authorities in charge of the programmes falling within the scope of the STEP Regulation set specific criteria for the above conditions in their funding processes (e.g., calls for proposals) and accordingly assess compliance in the evaluation of the submitted projects.

STEP National Contact Points

The STEP National Contact Points are designated officials in EU Member States responsible for overseeing and supporting the implementation of STEP at the national level.

Contacts: https://strategic-technologies.europa.eu/managing-authorities_en#paragraph_308

Context and relation to the Digital Europe Programme (DEP)

The Digital Europe Programme and the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform are interconnected in their objectives to strengthen Europe's digital, technological, and innovation capabilities, but they differ in scope and focus.

The Digital Europe Programme is a foundational component of STEP, focusing on Europe's digital capabilities, while STEP encompasses a broader, more strategic vision for Europe's technological future by integrating digital, green, and industrial priorities.

Parts of the policy directly related to specific objectives (SO) in DEP

1. Digital Europe Programme:

- **Focus:** DEP is a funding programme specifically aimed at building the digital capacities of Europe. It emphasizes: SO1: High-performance computing (HPC); SO2: Cloud, Data and Artificial intelligence (AI); SO3: Cybersecurity; SO4: Advanced digital skills; SO5: Deployment: digital transformation of public services and businesses; SO6: Semiconductors.
- **Purpose:** To ensure that Europe is globally competitive in the digital domain and to accelerate the digital transformation across sectors.
- **Budget:** ~€ 8,1 billion (2021–2027).

2. Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform:

- **Focus:** STEP is a broader initiative, building on 11 existing EU programmes, to support the development of critical and strategic technologies. It aligns with the European Union's industrial and strategic autonomy goals.
- **Purpose:**
 - To support investments in technologies that are essential for digital and green transitions.
 - To enhance Europe's competitiveness and reduce reliance on third countries for critical technologies.
 - To complement and consolidate funding across various programmes like Horizon Europe, InvestEU, and DEP.
- **Budget:** STEP doesn't have its own dedicated budget; instead, it integrates funding and priorities from existing EU programmes.

Relationship between DEP and STEP:

1. **Complementary Roles:** DEP is a key funding instrument under STEP, focusing on digital technologies. STEP leverages DEP's investments in digital transformation as part of its broader strategy to strengthen Europe's technological sovereignty.
2. **Strategic Alignment:** Both aim to ensure Europe's leadership in strategic and critical technologies, but STEP integrates DEP's digital focus into a more extensive framework that includes green technologies and industrial innovation.
3. **Funding Synergy:** Projects funded under DEP, especially those aligned with AI, HPC, and cybersecurity, may also support STEP's goals. STEP acts as an umbrella platform to channel resources from DEP and other programmes like Horizon Europe and InvestEU, etc.

4. **Policy Framework:** STEP reflects the EU's policy shift toward consolidating various initiatives to streamline funding, avoid duplication, and maximize impact. DEP's digital focus directly feeds into STEP's overarching goals.

Activities in the DEP Work Programme 2025-27 contributing to the objectives of the policy

A number of topics in DEP Work Programme 2025-2027 are designated as being in the scope of the STEP are given in the table below. Eligible proposals for those topics that exceed the evaluation thresholds will be awarded a STEP Seal and will be listed on the STEP portal⁴.

Table 1: Topics in the 2025-2027 WP that are under scope of the STEP Seal

Area	Topics
AI/Cloud-to-edge	Reference deployments of European cloud-edge services
AI/Data for EU	Data Space for Health: Data ingestion capacities and data services for the European genomic data infrastructure
	Data Spaces for manufacturing, use cases and converging landing zones of EU and national initiatives
AI/GenAI and applications	Testing genAI4EU application at scale and under real-world condition
	Deployment of cutting-edge multi-modal AI-based solutions in cancer and other medical imaging
	Virtual Human Twins and Artificial Intelligence in healthcare: platform validation and uptake incubator
	Virtual worlds test beds
AI/European Digital Innovation Hubs	Completion of the Initial Network of the European Digital Innovation Hubs
	Consolidation of the Network of European Digital Innovation Hubs (AI EDIHs)
Advanced Digital Skills	Sectoral digital skills academies
	Excellence in higher education and training programmes in key digital areas and applied technologies

The STEP policy aims to strengthen Europe's capacity in critical digital technologies and support strategic autonomy. DEP topics covered by STEP focus on deployment and large-scale use of AI, cloud-to-edge infrastructures, data spaces, advanced digital skills, and European Digital Innovation Hubs. These actions support STEP by boosting European technology development, uptake, and skills in key sectors such as health, manufacturing, and public services.

The STEP Seal helps high-quality DEP projects access additional EU and national funding, including cohesion funds, without extra selection steps. In this way, DEP topics directly contribute to STEP goals by turning EU policy priorities into concrete investments and deployments across Europe.

Related policies and further information

⁴ https://strategic-technologies.europa.eu/index_en

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For related events, please check out the following online calendars: [Shaping Europe's digital future](#), [STEP](#)

Related policy areas:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• EU Space Act• Biotech and biomanufacturing• European Chips Act• EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy• Competitiveness Compass• Union of skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Net-Zero Industry Act (NZIA)• Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA)• Advanced Materials for Industrial Leadership• European Defence Fund• ReArm Europe plan / Readiness 2030• Cohesion Policy mid-term review
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