



# EmpoWomen Open Call #2

## Frequently Asked Questions

OPENING: 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2024

CLOSING: 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 2024 at 17:00 CET

Project Website: [www.empowomen.eu](http://www.empowomen.eu)

Open Call platform: [Apply here](#)

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## Table of Contents

<b>1. Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2. FAQs</b> .....	<b>4</b>
2.1 Application .....	4
2.1.1 Relevant dates.....	4
2.1.2 Who can apply for the EmpoWomen programme? .....	4
2.1.3 What is considered as a “startup”? .....	4
2.1.4 What is understood by “Women Leadership”? .....	4
2.1.5 What is your definition of a woman? .....	5
2.1.6 Does the founder of the company have to currently hold a top management position in the company? .....	5
2.1.7 What do you mean by early-stage startup? .....	5
2.1.8 My company is not yet registered, can I apply?.....	5
2.1.9 What is understood by deep-tech? .....	5
2.1.10 What are the eligible countries? .....	6
2.1.11 I obtained previously an EU grant. Can I apply for the EmpoWomen? .....	6
2.1.12 What language may I submit my application in?.....	6
2.1.13 Can I update my application after submission? .....	6
2.1.14 Can I submit more than one application? .....	6
2.2 Evaluation.....	7
2.2.1 Evaluation Process .....	7
2.2.2 Who will assess my evaluation?.....	7
2.2.3 When will I receive the results of my application? .....	7
2.3 Programme .....	7
2.3.1 What activities can we fund with the EU grant of EUR 45,000? .....	7
2.3.2 Are the grants awarded to the woman-founder or to the company? .....	9
2.3.1 How many companies will be awarded by the EmpoWomen 2 <sup>nd</sup> Open call? .....	9
2.3.1 How does the funding support work? .....	9
2.3.2 Which are the payments conditions?.....	9
2.3.1 Which are the vouchers offered in the programme? .....	10



## 1. Executive Summary

The **main objective of EmpoWomen OC#2** is to actively involve women-led deep-tech early-stage startups in the widening areas. This call seeks to identify and choose promising startups to participate in the second edition of the EmpoWomen acceleration programme. The overarching goal is to offer support that nurtures the development and investment potential of these startups, with the ultimate aim of cultivating them into leading female figures in deep-tech innovation within Europe

This document provides a compilation of **frequently asked questions (FAQs)** regarding the EmpoWomen program and the application process. It is intended to offer guidance and clarify any common concerns or doubts you may have while preparing your application.

We encourage you to use this FAQ document as a helpful reference to address general questions. However, if you require specific assistance or further clarification, we recommend reaching out through the official channels ([helpdesk@empowomen.eu](mailto:helpdesk@empowomen.eu)) to ensure that your application aligns with the program's expectations.

**Please note that this document is for informational purposes only and is meant to complement the official Guidelines for Applicants available on the project website. In the unlikely event of any discrepancies between this document and the official guidelines, the Guidelines for Applicants will take precedence.**



## 2. FAQs

### 2.1 Application

#### 2.1.1 Relevant dates

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Open call launch: **1<sup>st</sup> October 2024**
- Open call support channel: **1<sup>st</sup> October 2024 to 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2024**
- Deadline for submission: **2<sup>nd</sup> December 2024**
- Evaluation of proposals: **December 2024 – January 2025**
- Remote Interviews: **Mid-January 2025**
- Communication of results to applicants: **February 2025**
- Legal validation and Sub-grant agreement preparation: **February 2025**
- Start of the programme: **March 2025**

#### 2.1.2 Who can apply for the EmpoWomen programme?

EmpoWomen focuses on supporting **women-led, deep-tech startups in widening areas, particularly at the early stages**. The company must be registered and established in one of the target countries of the programme (See FAQ- 2.1.10) for at least two months at the time of the submission.

#### 2.1.3 What is considered as a “startup”?

Under EmpoWomen, and according to Horizon Europe, a 'startup' should be understood as an SME in the early stage of its life cycle, including those that are created as spin-offs from university research activities, which aims to find innovative solutions and scalable business models, and which is autonomous within the meaning of [Article 3 of the Annex to Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC\(9\)](#).

#### 2.1.4 What is understood by “Women Leadership”?

EmpoWomen supports women in all their diversity, including cisgender and transgender women legally recognized as such. To meet the female founder or co-founder requirement, women applicants must provide evidence of being legally acknowledged as founders or co-founders of the company applying from an eligible country/region.



Additionally, EmpoWomen requires substantial female leadership within the startup, with at least one woman holding a key role—whether as a co-founder, core management team member, or a board director. However, having women on the board alone is not sufficient; these board members must demonstrate a significant connection to the project or founding team, rather than simply representing incubators, accelerators, or VC firms.

### 2.1.5 What is your definition of a woman?

EmpoWomen supports women in all their diversity. The word 'woman' equates to a cis woman, or a transgender woman who is legally defined as a woman.

### 2.1.6 Does the founder of the company have to currently hold a top management position in the company?

In order to apply to EmpoWomen, the (co)-founder of the company must also currently hold a top management position (CEO, CTO, CFO, COO, or similar) within that same company.

### 2.1.7 What do you mean by early-stage startup?

Early-stage refers to the phase of startup development generally preceding the rapid growth phase. On an indicative basis, for the purpose of the EmpoWomen project, we would consider - amongst others – the following criteria to define an early-stage start-up:

- start-ups that have been established and operating for not more than 6 years,
- start-ups that have raised limited funding (up to 1 million EUR),
- before reaching a high-fidelity MVP (Minimum Viable Product), or TRL from 2 to 6.

### 2.1.8 My company is not yet registered, can I apply?

To apply, your company must have been officially registered and established at least two months before the submission deadline, so on or before 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2024.

### 2.1.9 What is understood by deep-tech?

Deep tech is technology that is based on cutting-edge scientific advances and discoveries and is characterised by the need to stay at the technological forefront by constant interaction with new ideas and results from the lab. Deep tech is distinct from 'high tech' which tends to refer only to Research & Development intensity.



Sectors, that are covered in the EmpoWomen applications are defined in the Guidelines for Applicants (Section 4.1).

#### 2.1.10 What are the eligible countries?

Only applicants legally established in any of the following countries/regions are eligible for funding:

- **Widening Area Countries:** Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.
- **Associated countries:** Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Georgia, North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Tunisia, Turkey and Ukraine.
- **Outermost regions:** Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Réunion, Martinique, Mayotte and Saint-Martin (France) and the Canary Islands (Spain).

#### 2.1.11 I obtained previously an EU grant. Can I apply for the EmpoWomen?

If you have previously benefitted from the EU funding, you can apply for EmpoWomen. However, the application and any ensuing grant can cover only activities that are not / have not been funded by other EU grants.

#### 2.1.12 What language may I submit my application in?

English is the official language for the EmpoWomen open call. Submissions in any language other than English will not be eligible for evaluation.

#### 2.1.13 Can I update my application after submission?

Applicants may submit a revised version of their application, provided the submission deadline has not yet passed. To facilitate this, please contact the official support channel through the designated support channel to request the reopening of your application. Only the final version submitted prior to the deadline will be considered for evaluation.

EmpoWomen offers a dedicated **support channel** available for applicants at [helpdesk@empowomen.eu](mailto:helpdesk@empowomen.eu).

#### 2.1.14 Can I submit more than one application?

No, only one application will be accepted per women/company.



## 2.2 Evaluation

### 2.2.1 Evaluation Process

The evaluation process has 5 different steps:

1. **Step 1: Eligibility criteria** - An automatic filter will check the eligibility of proposals.
2. **Step 2: Experts' remote evaluation** - The proposals that pass the eligibility check will move to the remote evaluation stage. Applications will be assessed by a group of external and independent evaluators with an entrepreneurial, investment or innovation background. Evaluators will assess the proposals based on 3 different evaluation criteria (Excellence, Impact and Implementation).
3. **Step 3: Normalisation score** - Method to ensure a more balanced distribution of scores and reduces the possibility of biases and distortions.
4. **Step 4: Interview stage** - Top-ranked projects from the remote evaluation will be invited to participate in an online interview. Evaluators individually determine if the proposal should move forward based on a yes/no decision.
5. **Step 5: Final Selection** - All proposals are ranked based on their remote evaluation scores and interview stage. In the event of a tie, a series of rules will be followed that will make it possible to reach a tiebreaker.

### 2.2.2 Who will assess my evaluation?

Depending on the stage of the evaluation process, your evaluation will be evaluated by the EmpoWomen open call managers (eligibility check), and by a group of external and independent evaluators with an entrepreneurial, investment or innovation background (remote evaluation and interview).

### 2.2.3 When will I receive the results of my application?

The results of the EmpoWomen 2<sup>nd</sup> open call will be communicated in February 2025.

## 2.3 Programme

### 2.3.1 What activities can we fund with the EU grant of EUR 45,000?

You are free to decide and indicate which activities needed to grow your business you see as the most appropriate for the development and sustainability of your company, taking into account your particular needs and requirements. You can spend this grant on:



- Developing and refining products/services.
- Improving design, and user experience.
- The development, testing, and validation of technical and economic viability of prototype systems (Minimum Viable Product - MVP).
- Design, development and/or refining of new products and services.
- Validation or constructive inquiry into existing or novel technical solutions.
- SW engineering aimed at adapting to new regulations, markets, technologies or improving software quality.
- Understanding user requirements and improving usability/inclusive design.
- Formal security proofs, security audits, setup and design of software testing and continuous integration.
- Necessary measures in support of (broader) deployability (e.g. packaging).
- Product-market fit and market validation activities.
- Upgrading the business model.
- Development or improvement of the business plan and growth strategy.
- Market research and internationalisation activities.
- Finding new partners and key stakeholders abroad.
- Investment roadshows and finding investors.
- Investment rounds preparation.
- Strategic consultancy services.
- Events attendance, including the ones organised during the project.
- Other activities that are relevant to adhering to robust business development and deployment practices.
- Project management linked to project execution.
- Out-of-pocket costs for infrastructure essential to achieving the above.





### 2.3.2 Are the grants awarded to the woman-founder or to the company?

Grants will be awarded to the companies.

### 2.3.3 How many companies will be awarded by the EmpoWomen 2<sup>nd</sup> Open call?

In this OC#2, EmpoWomen is dedicated to offering equity-free funding to empower up to 14 women-led startups.

### 2.3.4 How does the funding support work?

Each company can receive **up to €60,000** which is disbursed depending and based on the achievement of KPIs, participation in programme activities, and performance in the final demo day.

Payments and vouchers will be distributed in multiple stages throughout the project's timeline, contingent on the achievement of specified milestones, KPIs, and the attainment of specific results. These disbursements will occur in parallel with the execution of the acceleration program.

	MONTH 1	MONTH 3	MONTH 6
	<i>Coaching Plan &amp; KPIs definition</i>	<i>Mid-term Review</i>	<i>Final Review</i>
Output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- D1. Individual Programme KPIs</li> <li>- Participation of the startup in the first event of the project, if it occurs within the first month of the program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participate in at least 80% of the project acceleration activities until month 3.</li> <li>- Achievement of the established KPIs for month 3.</li> <li>- D2. Progress Report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participate in at least 75% of the project acceleration activities until month 6.</li> <li>- Achievement of the established KPIs for month 6.</li> <li>- Participation in the Final Demoday</li> <li>- D3. Final Report</li> </ul>
Grant (€)	€5,000	€20,000	€20,000
Vouchers	- Vouchers will be unlocked progressively during the programme. Startups will be allowed to request the voucher depending on the stage of the programme reached.		

### 2.3.5 Which are the payments conditions?

The grant is disbursed throughout the EmpoWomen project using a **"flat rate" approach**. This means funding is gradually released based on the achievement of specific outcomes and milestones, rather than administrative justifications of time or expenses.



**Participation in project activities is mandatory.** If the required participation percentage is not met, KPIs will not be reviewed, and the grant will be suspended.

Payments will be made based on the evaluation results of the deliverables, scheduled for the beginning of the months following the delivery (e.g., beginning of Month 2 and Month 4). The final payment to startups will be made when the consortium receives the final payment from the EC.

A 100% completion of the KPIs will trigger the correspondent payment at each stage. A lower completion rate will result in a proportional payment. If the KPIs are met by less than 50%, the payment will be retained until the end of the phase. If less than 25% of the KPIs are met, the team will be automatically disqualified from the programme.

### 2.3.6 Which are the vouchers offered in the programme?

- **Voucher 1. Access to Events:** Covering expenses for attending EU tech summits. Participation in at least 2 events per startup. Participation in these events (different from the Demo Day) will be coordinated and managed directly by the EmpoWomen consortium during the execution of the acceleration programme. Event's participation is mandatory. **Valued at €5,000 per startup.**
- **Voucher 2. Business Angels Investment Readiness Programme:** Dedicated programme on business angels' investment provided directly by real angel investors who have an overlap within their expertise/geography. **Valued at €2,400 per startup.**
- **Voucher 3. Mentoring:** up to 16 sessions of a dedicated mentor for the company. **Valued at €5,000 per startup.**

Vouchers will be directly paid by EmpoWomen consortium to the providers of services (events, mentors, etc.). The value of the vouchers is added on top of the cash received by the startups, never deducted.

