SCALE'HER



SCALE'HER ACCELERATOR

Application Guidelines

About This Document

SCALE'HER is a Horizon Europe project powering the growth of women-led startups in Europe's most strategic digital and deep-tech markets through a bespoke acceleration programme tailored to the needs of scale-ready founders.

Designed for ambitious deep-tech scale-ups, SCALE'HER supports ventures with proven traction or access to funding to accelerate growth, sharpen leadership, and unlock cross-border opportunities. Through founder-first acceleration, high-impact cross-border initiatives, and bias-free blind pitch competition, SCALE'HER connects women founders with Europe's top investors, innovation ecosystems, and industry leaders, driving diversity, competitiveness, and the future of strategic digital technologies in Europe. These Application Guidelines outline the conditions for participation in the SCALE'HER Accelerator, including eligibility requirements, selection criteria, application procedures, and the evaluation process. They are intended to help prospective applicants understand whether the programme is the right fit for their company and how applications will be assessed and selected.

Funded by
the European Union

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Basic Information

CALL OPENING DATE

17 March 2026

CALL DEADLINE

31 May 2026 at 17:00 Brussels time

PROJECT WEBSITE

https://scale-her-project.eu/

PROJECT DIGITAL PLATFORM

http://scaleher.eu/

OPEN CALL PLATFORM

Apply here →

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Glossary of Terms

This section describes relevant terms used in the open call documentation. Unless otherwise stated, definitions of terms are as follows:

TERM	DEFINITION
Applicant	A woman founder or co-founder of a women-led startup that intends to submit or has submitted an application form to the acceleration programme implemented by the SCALE'HER Consortium.
SCALE´HER consortium	Group of legal entities that are cumulatively responsible for implementing the SCALE'HER project as defined in the Grant Agreement number No 101193274.
Women-led startup	An EU-compliant SME where at least one co-founder is a woman serving as CEO, CTO, CSO or equivalent. Women should hold at least 25% of the company's shares at the time of application. A woman is defined as a cis woman or a legally recognized transgender woman, verified by an official identity document. The company must be registered and established in an EU Member State or a Horizon Europe Associated Country for at least six months.
Co-founder	An individual who jointly establishes a company and shares responsibility for its formation, ownership, and key strategic decisions, as defined in formal legal agreements.
Deep-tech	Innovation rooted in significant scientific or engineering advances requires long development timelines, high technical uncertainty, and sustained research before reaching the market. Deep-tech is defined by the depth of technological novelty and its potential for transformative societal impact, rather than by R&D intensity alone.
Deep-tech venture	Built on advanced research with long and uncertain development cycles, often linked to universities or research ecosystems, and focused on solving specific problems through tangible technologies that are gradually de-risked over time.
Selection committee	Eligible applications will be reviewed by a Selection Committee composed of consortium partners and external industry experts. The committee brings expertise in deep-tech, startup acceleration, and gender inclusion.
Deep-tech scale-up	A company that: has reached TRL 6–9, with the core technology validated or demonstrated in a relevant or operational environment; demonstrates active market engagement beyond research activities (e.g. pilots, customers, strategic partnerships);

	is preparing for, currently engaged in, or strategically planning a fundraising process aligned with growth objectives.
Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise (SME)	As defined in Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC, a small enterprise has fewer than 50 employees and turnover or total assets up to €10 million, while a medium-sized enterprise has fewer than 250 employees and turnover up to €50 million or total assets up to €43 million.
Technology Readiness Level (TRL)	A scale used to assess the maturity of a technology, from early concept (TRL 1) to a fully proven system in operation (TRL 9), covering the path from research to market readiness.

About SCALE'HER

SCALE´HER project

SCALE'HER is a Horizon Europe–funded initiative supporting women-led startups in digital and deep-tech across the European Union. The programme addresses structural barriers in deep-tech scale-up, including access to specialised capital, validation, and growth support.

Our objectives and mission

SCALE'HER's mission is to increase the number and success rate of women-led deep-tech startups scaling in Europe. The project's objectives are to strengthen scale-up readiness, reduce structural barriers to capital and validation, and connect founders to specialised expertise and investors across the European innovation ecosystem.

What SCALE´HER offers

SCALE´HER Acceleration Programme

The **SCALE'HER Acceleration Programme** (SCALE´HER Accelerator) **supports 60 EU-based women-led deep-tech startups focused on growth, market validation, and cross-border scaling.**

The programme complements national accelerators by focusing on scale-readiness, leadership, and international market access, with content informed by structured input from founders and ecosystem stakeholders.

It combines **tailored acceleration activities, cluster-based hands-on workshops, insight panels and webinars, expert mentoring**, **curated investor exposure, and informal peer-learning formats**.

The programme is structured as a **6-month integrated capital-execution pathway**, built around three interconnected streams critical for deep-tech scale-ups: **Capital & Fundraising Execution, Financial Leadership, and Market & Partnerships**. These streams are delivered through a recurring monthly rhythm of cluster workshops (appr. 20 founders per cluster) and full-cohort insight sessions, ensuring both depth of discussion and shared learning across the entire cohort.

The total founder commitment is approximately **4-5 hours per month (30 hours in total)**, combining workshops, panels, webinars, and peer-learning sessions. Following the core six-month phase, founders will enter a **dedicated mentoring phase**, receiving up to **6 hours of one-to-one mentoring over a three-month period**, focused on individual capital strategy, execution readiness, and scale-up priorities.

Details on structure, formats, delivery rhythm, and time allocation are provided in Section 5.

Blind Pitch Competition

Participants selected for the SCALE'HER Acceleration Programme **will automatically qualify for Round 1 of the Blind Pitch Competition**. Participation is **optional**, and founders may decline the invitation while still fully participating in the accelerator activities, mentorship programme, and learning modules.

As a separate opportunity within the programme, the Blind Pitch Competition allows founders to present their companies in a structured evaluation that considers commercial readiness, execution capability, and scale potential.

The format also helps reduce common evaluation biases by directing attention to the business itself rather than the presenter.

Finally, the Blind Pitch Competition is designed to provide an additional opportunity for founders to receive feedback from evaluators.

Who should apply

SCALE'HER Accelerator is designed for **women-led deep-tech scale-ups at a capital-execution stage**.

You should apply if:

You are a **woman founder or co-founder** with real strategic decision-making authority in your company.

Your venture is built on **advanced science or engineering**, with validated technology (TRL 6–9).

You are moving beyond technical validation toward **market deployment and growth**.

You are currently **raising capital** or preparing to raise within the next 12 months.

You are making critical decisions about **capital structure, runway, governance, partnerships, and scaling strategy**.

You are able to commit approximately **4–5 hours per month over six months**, followed by a structured mentoring phase.

The programme supports deep-tech ventures operating in **strategic domains** such as:

- Health and life sciences (including femtech and biotech)
- Environment and sustainability (energy, climate tech, green tech)
- Digital technologies (AI, machine learning, quantum, and advanced software)
- Transport and mobility
- Engineering, advanced materials, and space
- Agritech and food tech

If you are building an EU-based **technologically defensible company with scale ambitions**, and you are ready to professionalise your capital and growth strategy, this programme is designed for you.

Detailed eligibility requirements are provided in Section 8.

What´s in it for selected founders?

Selected women founders and co-founders join the **6-month SCALE'HER Accelerator**, gaining access to a structured capital-execution pathway tailored to the realities of deep-tech growth. Participants benefit from **cluster-based hands-on workshops**, **full-cohort expert insight sessions**, **curated investor exposure**, and **peer-learning formats** designed to strengthen capital strategy, financial leadership, and market positioning. Following the core programme phase, founders enter a dedicated mentoring period, receiving up to 6 hours of **one-to-one mentoring** focused on execution readiness, fundraising strategy, and scale-up priorities.

All selected startups are eligible to enter Round 1 of the Blind Pitch Competition, providing an additional opportunity to test their investor narrative in a bias-reduced evaluation environment.

SCALE'HER Accelerator prioritises depth, execution quality, and strategic relevance over volume, ensuring meaningful engagement for each participating venture.

Programme duration & format

Total duration: 6 months of structured acceleration activities (5 hours/founder per month), followed by a 3-month mentoring phase (6 hours/founder)

Cohort size: 60 founders

Structure: Three clusters of 20 founders each for practical workshops

Monthly programme components

Each month follows a structured delivery rhythm combining interactive and insight-based sessions.

6-Month acceleration phase

SCALE´HER Accelerator kick-off session (1 hour)

The acceleration programme will officially begin with an **online kick-off session**, to be organized in September 2026, marking the formal start of the 6-month acceleration phase.

Core mandatory components:

1 cluster workshop/month (2 hours)

Delivered across three consecutive days (e.g., Monday–Wednesday), with one session per cluster (approximately 20 founders each) per month. Workshops are highly interactive and represent the core engagement element of the acceleration programme.

To qualify for the post-programme mentoring phase, founders **must attend at least 80%** of the live cluster workshops. Workshops are not recorded, as active participation and peer interaction are considered essential to the programme's impact.

Complementary insights sessions (strongly encouraged):

1 Panel discussion (1 hour)

Full-cohort expert session focused on investor, industry, or governance insights.

1 Webinar (1 hour)

Full-cohort knowledge session addressing capital strategy, financial leadership, or market execution topics.

Panels and webinars are recorded and made available on the SCALE´HER digital platform to provide flexibility across time zones and schedules.

Optional community component:

Monthly virtual coffee or informal networking sessions (1 hour)

Peer-connection formats designed to foster trust, exchange, and community building. Participation is voluntary.

Total time commitment during the 6-month acceleration phase: Approximately **24–30 hours** of live participation per founder (5 hours per month).

3-Month mentoring phase

Mentor will be matched with the founder based on the founder's identified priorities and strategic needs, assessed toward the end of the acceleration phase (around Month 5).

Founders and mentors may distribute these hours according to strategic needs (e.g., six 1-hour sessions or three 2-hour sessions), subject to mutual agreement.

Total time commitment during the 3-month mentoring phase: Allocation of up to **6 hours of 1:1 mentoring** per founder.

Attendance requirements

Founders are encouraged to attend **100% of programme activities** to maximise the value of the accelerator experience.

Workshops are particularly important, as they enable active interaction, applied learning, and peer relationship-building.

Webinars and panel discussions are recorded and made available on the digital platform to allow for flexible and asynchronous access.

Mentoring eligibility threshold: To qualify for the 3-month mentoring phase, founders must participate in **at least 80% of online cluster workshops**.

Additional offering

Blind Pitch Competition is an integrated programme feature providing structured, bias-reduced investor exposure. Participation in Round 1 is optional for all selected founders.

SCALE´HER Accelerator timeline

SCALE´HER Accelerator phase start: September 2026

SCALE´HER Accelerator mentoring phase start: March 2027

SCALE´HER Accelerator programme end: May 2027

Outcomes and expectations

By the end of the SCALE´HER Accelerator programme, participating founders are expected to have:

- A clearly defined **capital strategy and fundraising roadmap**, aligned with their growth stage and deployment milestones
- A structured and investor-ready **financial baseline, data room, and investment narrative**
- A well-considered **round design and capital structure**, including governance considerations
- A realistic **capital allocation and post-raise execution plan**
- **Increased readiness** for investor dialogue, including confidence in negotiation and positioning
- **Expanded connections** across relevant European investors, experts, and innovation ecosystems

SCALE'HER Accelerator does not guarantee funding, investment, or commercial partnerships. The accelerator programme focuses on strengthening capital readiness, execution discipline, and strategic capability to support informed fundraising and scale-up decisions.

SCALE´HER Accelerator components

The SCALE'HER Accelerator is designed as a **blended, execution-oriented learning environment.** Rather than relying on passive content delivery, the programme combines applied, interactive, and reflective formats tailored to the needs of deep-tech scale-ups, organized around three parallel streams (Capital & Fundraising Execution, Financial Leadership, and Market & Partnerships)

The programme is composed of the following core formats:

Cluster-based interactive workshops

Workshops represent the **central applied component of the programme**. They are delivered each month in three fixed clusters of approximately 20 founders to ensure meaningful interaction and direct expert feedback. Clusters will be formed based on the distribution of technology domains within the selected cohort (e.g. health, digital, climate, advanced engineering), allowing for more relevant discussions, expert input, and peer exchange. Startups

will be assigned to clusters based on their primary technology domain and industry application. The final cluster composition will depend on the distribution of selected companies.

Each workshop is structured as a working session built around critical deep-tech scale-up milestones, including:

- Defining capital strategy and establishing a financial baseline
- Designing and structuring the right fundraising round
- Mapping and leveraging strategic partnerships and pilot opportunities
- Preparing a structured data room and investment memo
- Planning disciplined capital deployment
- Simulating investor interactions and pitch dynamics

Workshops prioritise practical application, strategic clarity, and real-time expert challenge over theoretical input. Founders are expected to actively work on their own company materials and decisions throughout the session.

To preserve depth and interaction quality, workshops are not recorded. Their value lies in live discussion, peer accountability, and execution-focused feedback.

Workshops take place once per month, each focusing on a different topic relevant to deep-tech scale-up and capital execution. They are delivered during a dedicated week of the month over three consecutive days (Monday–Wednesday), with one session per cluster each day. This structure enables a balance between shared cohort learning and domain-relevant exchange.

Participation in **at least 80% of live online workshops in total** is required to qualify for the mentoring phase. If a founder is unable to attend the workshop scheduled for her assigned cluster, participation in another cluster's session during the same week is possible, subject to availability and prior coordination with the programme team.

Full-cohort insight panels

Insight panels bring together the full cohort of 60 founders and invited experts. These sessions provide:

Direct perspectives from **active investors, corporates, and scale-up operators** on what drives real investment decisions in deep-tech ventures.

Practical **insight into governance, valuation, and board dynamics**, including common negotiation traps and structural mistakes.

Exposure to real fundraising outcomes, capital allocation trade-offs, and post-raise execution lessons, including what typically goes wrong after a round closes.

Panels create shared reference points across the entire cohort and elevate the discussion beyond individual company challenges.

Expert webinars

Webinars complement the cluster workshops by providing **structured financial and governance frameworks essential for deep-tech scale-up**. Delivered to the full cohort, these sessions focus on building shared financial discipline and investor literacy across participants.

Each webinar addresses critical capital-readiness topics, including:

- Understanding runway dynamics and burn management fundamentals
- Evaluating equity, grants, and debt as complementary capital instruments
- Identifying the financial metrics investors prioritise in deep-tech ventures
- Designing appropriate governance and board structures
- Applying scenario planning to strengthen financial resilience
- Preparing a structured final deal-readiness checklist

Webinars are concise, content-focused sessions designed to provide clarity, terminology alignment, and practical decision-making tools. They are recorded and made available on the digital platform to ensure flexibility across time zones and founder schedules.

Peer learning and informal founder exchange

Peer learning is an intentional and structured element of the SCALE'HER Accelerator design. Beyond formal sessions, founders engage in **facilitated and informal optional exchange formats** (i.e. virtual coffee sessions, informal founder meet-ups) designed to strengthen cross-border trust, shared reflection, and strategic perspective.

Dedicated mentoring activities

Following the 6-month acceleration phase, founders who meet the eligibility requirements (min. 80% attendance rate in workshops) enter a **structured 3-month mentoring period**.

The mentoring phase is designed to translate structured programme learning into company-specific execution decisions.

Each founder receives:

- Up to 6 hours of one-to-one mentoring
- Delivered over a 3-month period
- Focused on capital execution, investor engagement, governance, and scale-up priorities

At the end of the acceleration phase, founders complete a structured mentoring needs assessment questionnaire designed to identify their key strategic priorities and execution bottlenecks (e.g. fundraising strategy, governance, investor negotiations, capital deployment, or partnership structuring).

Based on this assessment, each founder will be matched with a mentor whose expertise aligns with the identified needs and strategic focus areas.

Mentors are selected from a curated pool of experienced deep-tech founders, investors, and capital-market practitioners.

Matching is coordinated to ensure strategic fit and availability.

Curated investor exposure

Investor engagement is embedded throughout the SCALE'HER Accelerator in a structured and curated manner.

Rather than relying on high-volume pitching events, the **programme integrates investors across multiple touchpoints** designed to support capital readiness and meaningful interaction. Investor involvement includes:

1. Participation in programme sessions

Investors and capital-market experts contribute to:

- Insight panels and expert discussions
- Targeted thematic sessions on fundraising, governance, and valuation
- Strategic feedback environments within selected programme activities

These interactions provide founders with direct exposure to active investor perspectives and real-time market expectations.

2. Blind Pitch Competition

The Blind Pitch Competition represents a structured, bias-reduced investor evaluation process integrated into the programme. Key features include:

- Anonymous assessment in early rounds to minimise bias
- Progressive selection stages (60 → 12 → 6 → 3 → final winner)
- Structured expert and investor feedback at each stage

The competition allows founders to test their investor narrative and capital positioning in a controlled and constructive environment.

3. Mentoring phase of the programme

Selected mentors include:

- Deep-tech investors
- Experienced scale-up founders
- Financial and governance experts

Through the mentoring phase, founders gain direct access to capital-market insight and strategic sparring from practitioners actively engaged in investment decision-making.

SCALE´HER Accelerator: 6-month capital execution pathway

SCALE'HER

ACCELERATION PROGRAMME

A 6-month accelerator programme with an extra 3 months of mentoring — powering the growth of 60 women-led deep-tech startups across Europe, from capital strategy to deal readiness.

60	3	6+3	5h
FOUNDERS	CLUSTERS	MONTHS	/MONTH

6 MONTHS ACCELERATION JOURNEY + 3 MONTH MENTORING PHASE

Capital & Fundraising · Financial Leadership · Market & Partnerships

M1
What Are We Raising For?
Capital strategy · Runway modelling · Bottleneck mapping
WORKSHOP · PANEL · WEBINAR · PEER EVENT

M2
How Should We Structure the Round?
Round design · Dilution & capital structure · Market leverage
WORKSHOP · PANEL · WEBINAR · PEER EVENT

M3
How Do We Increase Investor Confidence?
Investor positioning · KPI narrative · Partnership leverage
WORKSHOP · PANEL · WEBINAR · PEER EVENT

M4
Are We Truly Investor-Ready?
Data room · KPI clarity · Credibility signals
WORKSHOP · PANEL · WEBINAR · PEER EVENT

M5
Can We Deploy Capital Intelligently?
Post-raise execution · Capital allocation · Hiring & scaling
WORKSHOP · PANEL · WEBINAR · PEER EVENT

M6
Are We Deal-Ready?
Pitch rehearsal · Financial narrative · Strategic positioning
WORKSHOP · PANEL · WEBINAR · DEAL ROOM · PEER EVENT

MENTORING PHASE

M7
Post-Programme Support Begins
1:1 mentoring sessions · Action plan follow-up
1:1 MENTORING

M8
Deepening Connections & Progress
1:1 mentoring sessions · Peer networking
1:1 MENTORING

M9
Consolidation & Next Steps
1:1 mentoring sessions · Final reflections
1:1 MENTORING

18 WORKSHOPS | **6** PANELS | **6** WEBINARS | **30** SESSIONS | **6h** 1:1 MENTORING

THREE STREAMS

CAPITAL & FUNDRAISING
Investor targeting, pitch, data room & deal room

FINANCIAL LEADERSHIP
Runway, burn, capital allocation & governance

MARKET & PARTNERSHIPS
Pilots, cross-border expansion & credibility

MONTHLY RHYTHM

📅 WEEK 1 — CLUSTER WORKSHOPS
3 × Same Workshop
Delivered over **3 consecutive days**. Same content, facilitator & expert input. **20 founders** per session — real discussion.
2h per founder

⇅ WEEK 3 — FULL COHORT INSIGHT
Panel + Webinar
Delivered once to all **60 founders**. 1h Panel + 1h Webinar in same week. Connects to workshop outputs.
2h per founder

☕ MONTHLY — PEER BONDING (M1–M6)
Peer Networking Event
Informal monthly gathering for all **60 founders**. Building community, trust & cross-cluster connections.
1h per founder

CLUSTER MODEL

A 20 + B 20 + C 20

- Fixed clusters build peer trust & accountability
- Smaller groups enable real discussion & feedback
- Facilitators give personalised guidance
- Deeper connections over 9 months

KEY OUTCOMES

- ✓ **Capital strategy & roadmap** — aligned to company stage and market context
- ✓ **Investor-ready data room** — structured for due diligence and investor review
- ✓ **Round design & term clarity** — dilution, valuation, and instrument selection
- ✓ **Capital allocation plan** — post-raise deployment and hiring readiness
- ✓ **Investor dialogue readiness** — pitch, narrative, and financial credibility
- ✓ **European ecosystem connections** — cross-border partners and investors

★ CORE DESIGN RULES
❶ All 3 cluster workshops run in the same week — consistent energy across clusters.
❷ Insight week builds on workshop outputs — escalation, not repetition.

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Participation requirements

Participation in the SCALE'HER Accelerator **requires active engagement throughout the programme duration**.

Selected founders are expected to:

- Participate in the accelerator´s opening online kick-off session (second half of September 2026).
- Participate actively in programme activities, including cluster workshops, full-cohort sessions, and mentoring sessions.
- Attend at least 80% of online cluster workshops to qualify for the mentoring phase.
- Allocate sufficient time for strategic work related to capital strategy, financial structuring, investor readiness, and scale-up execution.
- Engage constructively with mentors and peers, sharing challenges, progress, and feedback.
- Use the programme for strategic reflection and decision-making, beyond day-to-day operations.
- Contribute to peer learning and group discussions within their cluster and the wider cohort.
- Respect programme timelines, preparation expectations, and required documentation where applicable.
- Consider participation in Round 1 of the Blind Pitch Competition (optional but encouraged).

Founders are expected to act with integrity, including accurate representation of their company's stage, technology, and fundraising status, and to respect confidentiality within the cohort.

The SCALE'HER Accelerator is **designed for founders prepared to engage seriously in capital execution discussions**, challenge assumptions, and translate structured input into concrete action.

Participation in the SCALE'HER Accelerator **does not require any equity transfer or ownership stake in the participating companies**. The programme is funded by the European Union under Horizon Europe and is free of charge for selected startups. It is designed to support women-led deep-tech scale-ups through acceleration activities, mentoring, and ecosystem access.

Eligibility criteria

Applicants must meet **all mandatory eligibility criteria** to be considered for the SCALE'HER Accelerator. These criteria ensure alignment with the programme objectives and effective use of resources.

Eligible applicants

- **A woman founder or co-founder of a women-led startup** — Woman legally recognised as founder or co-founder of the company, that is, one of the original shareholders at the inception of the business and listed on the company registration documents. The founder or co-founder of the company must also currently hold a top management position (CEO, CTO, CSO or equivalent) within the same company. It will be also required that women hold at least 25% of the shares in the CAP table (capitalization table) of the company.
- **Legal establishment** — The company is legally established in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe-associated country.

  EU Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.

  Horizon Europe Associated Countries: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Georgia, Iceland, Israel, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.
- **SME status** — The company qualifies as an SME under Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC, meaning it:
  - Employs fewer than 250 persons (Annual Work Units), and
  - Has an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, or an annual balance sheet not exceeding 43 million.

  The company must be autonomous within the meaning of Article 3 of the Annex to the abovementioned recommendation.
- **Eligible legal form** — Only private companies are eligible. Foundations, associations, federations, or other legal entities other than a private company will not be eligible.
- **Deep-tech focus** — The company is a deep-tech venture based on advanced research with long and uncertain development cycles, focused on tangible technological solutions. Eligible domains include:
  - Health and life science (including femtech, biotech)
  - Environment and sustainability (including energy, climate tech, green tech)

- Digital (including AI, machine learning, quantum)
- Transport and mobility (including automotive)
- Engineering, new material, and space
- Agritech and food tech

Purely service-based, consultancy, or non-technology-driven business models are not eligible.

- **Scale-up stage** — To qualify as a deep-tech scale-up, the company must:
  - Have reached TRL 6–9, with the core technology validated or demonstrated in a relevant or operational environment;
  - Demonstrate active market engagement beyond research activities (e.g., pilots, customers, strategic partnerships);
  - Be preparing for, currently engaged in, or strategically planning a fundraising process aligned with growth objectives.

  The programme is designed for companies transitioning from technical validation to structured capital execution and market deployment.

  Companies that remain primarily in early-stage research, proof-of-concept, or exploratory grant-based development without a clear commercial and capital strategy will not be considered eligible.
- **Financial standing** — The company is not under liquidation and does not qualify as an undertaking in difficulty within the meaning of Article 2(18) of Commission Regulation No 651/2014, nor is it excluded from receiving EU funding under applicable national or EU law.

Commitment and availability

Applicants must be able to **commit to the full duration of the programme**, including the 6-month acceleration phase and, where eligible, the subsequent 3-month mentoring phase.

Selected founders are expected to:

- Allocate approximately **4–5 hours per month** during the acceleration phase for live sessions and related strategic preparation.
- Attend and actively participate in **live cluster workshops** (minimum attendance of 80% required to qualify for mentoring).
- Engage constructively in **full-cohort sessions, peer-learning activities**, and (where applicable) the **mentoring phase**.
- Dedicate **sufficient time between sessions** to apply learning to their company's capital strategy, financial structuring, and investor readiness.

Founders applying on behalf of a company must have the authority to represent the company and make strategic and financial decisions within the scope of the programme.

Integrity and compliance

Applicants must:

- Provide accurate and truthful information during the application process
- Declare any potential conflicts of interest
- Comply with programme data protection, confidentiality, and ethical standards

Failure to meet eligibility requirements or misrepresentation of information may result in exclusion at any stage.

Selection criteria

Eligible applications are assessed through a transparent and structured evaluation process designed to identify women-led deep-tech scale-ups that can benefit most from the SCALE'HER Accelerator.

To reflect the characteristics of deep-tech venture development, evaluation recognises long development cycles, capital intensity, and non-linear scaling paths. Strong technical differentiation or strategic relevance may compensate for earlier-stage commercial validation.

The **evaluation is structured around three core assessment dimensions**:

- Technological Risk & Differentiation
- Market Risk & Strategic Relevance
- Execution Readiness & Accelerator Fit

Each dimension is assessed using qualitative evaluation criteria and scored on a 0–5 scale (0 = does not address the criterion; 5 = fully addresses all aspects).

Each application is evaluated independently by two evaluators from the Selection Committee. Final scores are calculated as the average of the evaluators' scores and weighted according to the predefined percentage allocation for each dimension.

To qualify for ranking, applications must achieve the minimum threshold score in each of the three assessment dimensions. Applications that meet all minimum thresholds will be ranked according to their final weighted score. The highest-ranking eligible applications will be selected

until the cohort capacity is reached. All applicants will be informed of the outcome once the evaluation process is completed.

Qualitative evaluation criteria

CRITERION: TECHNOLOGICAL RISK & DIFFERENTIATION		
Max. score: 5	**Threshold:** 3	**Weight:** 40%
Guiding questions: How novel and technically differentiated is the proposed solution compared to existing alternatives? Are the remaining technical risks clearly identified and realistically assessed?Is there a credible, milestone-based roadmap towards further validation, industrialisation, or deployment? Does the company demonstrate defensibility through IP, proprietary know-how, regulatory positioning, or structural barriers?		
Criterion: Market Risk & Strategic Relevance		
Max. score: 5	**Threshold:** 2,5	**Weight:** 35%
Guiding questions: Is the target customer clearly defined and is the market logic driven by structural long-term drivers (e.g. regulatory, technological, industrial shifts)? What concrete evidence exists of industry validation (e.g. paid pilots, LoIs, revenue, strategic partnerships, regulatory progress)? How strongly does the solution align with European strategic priorities such as technological sovereignty, green transition, digital transformation, or industrial resilience?		
Criterion: Execution Readiness & Acceleration Fit		
Max. score: 5	**Threshold:** 1,25	**Weight:** 25%
Guiding questions: Is there a clearly articulated fundraising timeline, defined round size, and logical linkage between capital raise and milestones? Is the planned capital allocation coherent and aligned with technical and commercial de-risking objectives? Are key strategic bottlenecks clearly identified, and are near-term decisions defined? Does the team demonstrate complementary expertise and governance awareness appropriate for a deep-tech scale-up stage? Is there strong alignment between the founder's expectations and the capital-execution focus of the SCALE'HER Accelerator?		
Max. total score		**5,00**

Scoring Scale

Scores are assigned on a 0-5 scale, as follows:

SCORE	TEXT EQUIVALENT	MEANING
0	Unacceptable	Fails to address the criterion
1	Poor	Unclear or incomplete; insufficient information
2	Fair	Addresses the criterion at a basic level with significant weaknesses
3	Good	Addresses the criterion well, with some gaps or weaknesses
4	Very Good	Well developed and convincing, with minor shortcomings
5	Excellent	Fully addresses all aspects of the criterion with high clarity and maturity

Wild card mechanism

To ensure alignment between the SCALE´HER Accelerator and the real needs of the women-led deep-tech scale-ups, the SCALE'HER consortium may allocate a limited number of wild-card places.

Wild cards may be awarded to a startup that:

Demonstrate high strategic relevance to programme objectives, and/or

Have contributed to the co-creation or validation of the SCALE´HER Accelerator methodology (e.g., through focus groups or preparatory activities),

even if they are not ranked among the highest-scoring applications.

Wild cards are limited to a maximum of 10% of the cohort (up to 6 startups). All wild card recipients must fully meet the eligibility criteria and are selected after completion of the standard evaluation and ranking process.

Selected Companies

In total, 60 companies will be selected to participate in the SCALE´HER Accelerator.

Application process and timeline

The application process for the SCALE'HER Accelerator is designed to be straightforward and proportionate to the programme scope.

How to apply

Applications are submitted through the designated Google Form, accessible through the SCALE'HER Digital Platform at https://scaleher.eu/. Having a Gmail account in order to fill out the Google Form and receive a copy of your response to the form is necessary. Once you have submitted your application in the SCALE'HER Accelerator Google Form, you will receive a confirmation of submission. If you are approved for the SCALE'HER Accelerator, you will be able to sign up to use the digital platform, where the programme will be held.

The **application form** is structured to assess alignment with the selection criteria and deep-tech scale-up readiness. It includes a combination of multiple-choice and open questions to assess:

- Basic information about the company, its legal status, and the founding team
- Description of the technology, innovation differentiation, and technical development roadmap (including TRL)
- Information on market logic, target customers, and evidence of industry validation or traction
- Capital strategy details, including fundraising plans, round size, runway, and financial planning
- Planned use of funds and capital deployment logic
- Identification of key bottlenecks and near-term strategic decisions
- Team composition and governance structure
- A short statement explaining expected outcomes from participation in the SCALE'HER Accelerator
- Upload of a pitch deck and a short founder video

The application is designed to assess fit and readiness and does not require extensive documentation. The empty application form for reference is available at: https://scaleher.eu/.

Application timeline

The indicative timeline for the call is as follows:

Call opening: 17 March 2026

Application deadline: 31 May 2026 17:00 (Brussels time)

Evaluation period: 1-30 June 2026

Communication of results: July 2026

SCALE´HER Accelerator start: September 2026

Any updates to the timeline will be communicated via official SCALE'HER channels.

Evaluation steps

The selection process consists of the following steps:

Eligibility check

Verification of compliance with the formal eligibility criteria of the programme (e.g. legal status, SME definition, deep-tech scale-up stage, women-led requirement).

Qualitative evaluation

Independent assessment of eligible applications by two evaluators based on the selection criteria outlined in Section 9.

Each application is scored across the three assessment dimensions using the defined scoring framework and minimum thresholds.

Ranking of eligible applications

Applications meeting all minimum threshold requirements are ranked according to their final weighted score.

Final selection of participants

The highest-ranking applications are selected until the cohort capacity is reached.Where relevant, the wild card mechanism may be applied.

Applicants will be informed of the outcome following completion of the evaluation process.

Communication with applicants

All applicants will receive formal notification of the outcome of their application within the timeframe indicated in the call.

Due to the expected number of applications, individualised feedback may be limited. The evaluation process is designed to ensure fairness, transparency, and consistency across all applications.

The evaluation results are final and not subject to appeal.

Contact

For any questions or support needs, applicants may contact the SCALE'HER team at contact@scale-her-project.eu.

Selection process and decision making

Selection decisions are made by the Selection Committee appointed by the SCALE'HER consortium, based on the evaluation process described in this document.

The Selection Committee reviews the ranking results and confirms the final list of selected participants in accordance with the defined thresholds, ranking methodology, and applicable mechanisms (e.g. wild cards).

Selected applicants will receive:

- Formal notification of selection
- Information on next steps and onboarding
- Confirmation of programme start and participation requirements

Participation becomes effective only after formal acceptance by the selected founder and completion of the required administrative steps.

If a selected startup withdraws or fails to confirm participation within the specified timeframe, the consortium reserves the right to offer the place to another eligible applicant.

Ethics, data protection, and confidentiality

Ethics and Integrity

SCALE'HER upholds high ethical standards. Participants are expected to:

- Act with integrity and professionalism
- Respect diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunity
- Engage in the programme in a respectful and collaborative manner

The consortium reserves the right to exclude participants in cases of serious ethical misconduct, misrepresentation, or behaviour that undermines the programme's objectives or integrity.

Confidentiality

Information shared during the application process and programme activities is treated as confidential and used solely for evaluation, selection, and programme implementation.

Participants must respect the confidentiality of other founders, mentors, and partners. Sensitive business information disclosed within the programme must not be shared externally without prior consent.

Data Protection

Personal data collected during the application and implementation of the programme will be processed in accordance with applicable European data protection legislation, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Data will be used exclusively for the management and implementation of the SCALE'HER Accelerator programme and will not be shared outside the consortium, except where required by law or with the explicit consent of the data subject.

Applicants have the right to request access to, rectification, or deletion of their personal data in accordance with applicable data protection regulations.