

EU research funding possibilities for the European weighing industry

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The European Union provides a wide range of opportunities to receive funding for innovative projects. This document provides an overview of the main EU funding instruments that could be of interest for the European Weighing Industry.

1. Horizon 2020 & Horizon Europe

Horizon 2020 (H2020) and its successor Horizon Europe are the most relevant and largest EU research and Innovation programmes. Where the H2020 programme will last from 2014 to 2020 the Horizon Europe programme will last from 2021 to 2027. The budget for H2020 is around 80 billion euro and the exact budget of Horizon Europe is still being negotiated, but the proposal is to have a budget of around 95 billion euro available. The programmes are used to provide funding to a large number of projects that are open for everyone. Projects that receive funding are mostly projects carried out by consortia. The consortia that apply for these types of funding normally consists of a variety of stakeholders such as academia, NGOs and companies.

It is rather difficult for a company to apply all alone for this funding or set-up a consortium. Therefore, the most feasible option for weighing instrument manufacturers is to participate as partner in a project set-up by larger organisations or academia.

Participation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)¹ is highly demanded in the programmes and encouraged by the European Commission. This makes it also be possible to participate as SME. It needs to be noted that these projects require severe administration to participate.

The Horizon 2020 work programmes focus on three main pillars:

- Excellent science
- Industrial Leadership
- Societal challenges

Within these pillars there are focus areas such as 'Digitising and transforming European industry and Services.

¹ Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are defined by the EU as companies with less than 250 employees and either a turnover below 50 million euro or a balance sheet total below 43 million euro.

For Horizon Europe three other pillars are introduced, which are:

- Open science
- Global challenges and European industrial competitiveness
- Open innovation

Within these Horizon Europe pillars there are different clusters where the one on digital and industry seems the most suitable for the weighing industry.

Every two years a work programme is published that includes calls for proposals on specific issues within these pillars and clusters. Consortia can come with a proposal for a project that fits one of these calls. After preparing the project proposals it will be sent to the European Commission and the European Commission will select the best projects matching the calls' objectives. You can find [here](#) the latest H2020 work plan.

Missions under Horizon Europe

A new element that will be part of Horizon Europe is the work on missions. Where there will be a mission or final goal and applicants have more freedom to apply with projects that contribute to this mission. Five missions will be selected and one of the missions that is apparently suggested to be part of these five is metrology. The aim would be to develop new tools for the speed, accuracy and cost of measurement. However, the definite missions are still being discussed and several missions might be added later during the lifetime of Horizon Europe.

More information on Horizon Europe can be found [here](#).

1.1. SME instrument

An interesting part of Horizon 2020 is 'Innovation in SMEs' which is part of the pillar 'Industrial leadership'. The main project is the SME instrument. Considering the large number of SMEs in the weighing industry this might be of interest.

The SME instrument aims at funding high-potential innovation. The grants are lower than within Horizon 2020, and the administrative burden is also reduced. To receive this type of funding it does not require cooperation with other partners and SMEs can apply by themselves on several moments a year. Moreover, if the first time the funding is not granted, it is possible to apply again later. There are four options to receive direct support via the SME instrument:

- Business innovation grants for feasibility assessment purposes (phase I): EUR 50,000 (lump sum) per project (70% of total cost of the project). It includes exploring and assessing the technical feasibility and commercial potential of a breakthrough innovation that a company wants to exploit and commercialize.
- Business innovation grants for innovation development & demonstration purposes (possible phase II): an amount in the indicative range of EUR 500,000 and 2,5 million (70% of total cost of

the project as a general rule). This is mostly innovation projects underpinned by a sound and strategic business plan (potentially elaborated and partially funded through phase 1 of the SME Instrument)

- Free-of-charge business coaching (optional) in order to support and enhance the firm's innovation capacity and help align the project to strategic business needs;
- Access to a wide range of innovation support services and facilitated access to risk finance, to facilitate the commercial exploitation of the innovation.

For most existing SMEs in the weighing industry the phase II projects are probably the most interesting. In the last round 65 phase 2 projects out of the 1664 that applied were selected by the European Commission to receive funding. To give you an idea of the projects funded you can find [here](#) the list of funded project.

More information on the SME instrument can be found [here](#).

Since negotiations on Horizon Europe are still ongoing it is not certain yet in what form the SME instrument or support for SMEs will be arranged after 2020. However, it seems that there will be a part dedicated to SMEs in the programme.

2. European Metrology Programme for Innovation and Research

The European Metrology Programme for Innovation and Research (EMPIR) is a programme that is partially supported by the EU via Horizon 2020 and partially via the Member States. Both contribute with around 300 million euro in the period 2014 to 2020. EURAMET is responsible for implementing EMPIR. An example of a project that is supported by EMPIR is SmartCom.

The aims of the projects supported by the EMPIR programme are:

- *Provide appropriate, integrated and fit-for-purpose metrology solutions supporting innovation and industrial competitiveness, as well as measurement technologies addressing societal challenges such as health, environment and energy, including support to policy development and implementation;*
- *Create an integrated European Metrology Research system with critical mass and active engagement at regional, national, European and international level.*

Within EMPIR there are several priority areas and each year the focus of the calls is on different areas. The priority areas are: health, energy, environment, industry, fundamental metrology, standardisation, capacity building and dissemination. More information on the priority areas can be found [here](#).

The process to obtain funding for the EMPIR projects mostly starts with a public stakeholder consultation on the targeted programmes in the beginning of the year. All stakeholders can give input and based on this input the EMPIR committee will develop a list of selected research topics. After the research topics are selected, consortia can work together to prepare a project proposal for a specific research topic. To support interested participants networking events are organised to form consortia.

After the project proposals are submitted, they are evaluated according to the H2020 rules and the best ones are selected. Those projects will receive the funding. A more elaborate explanation of the process can be found [here](#).

This year's priority areas are: energy, environment, normative, research potential and networks. [Here](#) you can find the calls for 2019. Stage 1 where input can be given on the ideas for calls is open for most priority areas until 18 February 2019. Stage II deadlines for handing in project proposals are 30 September 2019.

It is not yet known if and how the EMPIR programme will continue or a similar programme will follow when the Horizon Europe programme is in place.

3. European Investment Bank credit lines

The European Investment Bank (EIB) credit lines are an instrument making it easier to obtain loans for small and medium sized companies. It aims amongst others at stimulating investments in innovative projects. The projects that can be financed under this programme normally are worth no more than 25 million, of which the EIB can finance max 50%. It is important to know that this is not direct funding, but it makes it easier for SME's to receive loans for more risky projects with positive externalities.

These loans are provided via intermediaries and not the European Investment Bank itself. These intermediaries are mostly banks. The intermediaries in all European countries can be found on the website of the EIB [here](#).

Loans are to finance investments by SMEs (including micro-enterprises) and/or Midcaps¹¹ (including small Midcaps) into tangible and intangible assets, including purchase or renovation of assets, long-term working capital, etc. These must at least fit with one of the EIB's public policy goals:

- Increase in growth and employment potential – including SME and Midcap support
- Economic and social cohesion by addressing economic and social imbalances, promoting the knowledge economy/skills and innovation and linking regional and national transport infrastructure
- Environmental sustainability - including supporting competitive and secure energy supply
- Action for climate-resilient growth

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