

EVENT REPORT



Biotech & Life-Sciences roadmap

how to improve investment into European biotech startups & scaleups

EuropaBio National Associations Council
Polish Presidency Summit 2025

Summary

The start of the European Commission mandate for 2024-2029 created unprecedented policy action for the biotech and life sciences sectors, with upcoming proposals and initiatives including a **European Startup and Scaleup Strategy**, **Life Sciences Strategy** and a **Biotech Act**.

On April 2, 2025, EuropaBio's **National Associations Council** hosted the fifth edition of its flagship Presidency event for the fourth consecutive year, together with BioForum, the Polish biotechnology association, in Warsaw, Poland. The session was an in-person, invite-only roundtable discussion.



It gathered participants from the Polish Agency for Medical Research, the Polish Ministry of Development and Technology, national biotech SMEs, mid-sized and multinational companies and national associations from Eastern Europe and the Baltic.

The discussion focused on **how Europe can improve public and private funding for biotech startups and scaleups**, with a focus on **Eastern Europe and the Baltic**.



This executive report reflects the exchanges of the participants, with further input from the EuropaBio biotechnology national associations and SME members.

National and regional context and sector visibility

Startups and SMEs are a core part of the biotech ecosystem as a source of innovation in delivering new products to the market. Through their contribution, the gross value added from EU biotechnology activities hit €38,1 billion in 2022, almost doubling since 2008. Healthcare biotech remains the dominant sector.¹

Participants noted that, while the **regional sector is growing**, it is **still lagging behind** its Western and Central European peers. The region's national ecosystems have fewer companies, that are less matured and have a lower revenue-generating profile (e.g., CROs, service providers that, although crucial for the value chain, do not originate high-revenue products like innovative medicines).

One of the main reported reasons behind this gap was at the governmental level as, despite its economic potential, biotech innovation is **not a national priority**.²

Governments do have Smart Specialisation Strategies in place, with working groups that include pharma and biotech stakeholders. However, they have not developed **long-term strategies**. For those that have, they have not **implemented** them or allocated **sufficient public investment** to achieve global competitiveness.

It was also noted that biotech **sector is under-represented in most governments and fragmented** across ministries, which disables coordinated discussion and support on governmental level.

¹ [Measuring the economic footprint of the biotechnology industry in Europe, WifOR Institute, 2025](#)

² Note, Baltic nations, such as Lithuania, enjoy stronger government support and broader political interest

Public funding: helping startups & Member States navigate EU funding

The European Union is streamlining and improving the accessibility of public funding for smaller companies to enhance their **global competitiveness**. As outlined in the latest European Commission Communication on the EU's "Competitiveness Compass"³. This effort is welcome and essential, as companies continue to report significant challenges in navigating public funding opportunities, both at the EU and national levels.

At the national level within this discussion, some of the most pressing challenges identified include **unsuitable criteria** for biotech startups, such as "**financial sustainability and profitability**" and "**company size**". Biotech startups often take decades to become profitable and may change their SME status multiple times during their early stages of growth. These criteria often **limit access to public funding**, particularly for scale-up, as funding conditions require applicants to indicate revenues as an eligibility criteria, which is not an accurate metric for companies in the development phase of drug candidates.

As companies also seek to expand operations across borders or partner with others, they encounter **inconsistencies** in national funding access **criteria among Member States**. This results in **divergent interpretations** and lost opportunities. Even when research and development priorities are shared, countries frequently duplicate efforts and allocate public resources inefficiently.

An additional challenge for startups, more severely felt in Eastern Europe, is the national application of **EU regional development funding**. Capital cities, which serve as innovation hubs able to develop and attract talent, are often excluded from these funds due to the State and Regional Aid rules.⁴

³ [Communication: A Competitiveness Compass for the EU, European Commission, 2025](#)

⁴ [SMEs in Europe's bioeconomy and agri-food landscape, EuropaBio, 2025](#)

Challenges for private capital

Early-stage biotech innovation is often considered **too risky for private investors**. It is extremely challenging to achieve large-scale, groundbreaking biotech innovation without public funding to de-risk early-stage research and development. Fortunately, public investment mechanisms are already in place in Europe. Including through the European Investment Bank and the European Innovation Council, in the form of both grants and loans.

Support to biotech startups has also been significantly reinforced by the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) Seal.⁵ However, **most companies are not yet aware of these instruments or find them burdensome to navigate. Information is also not reaching them through their national channels**. Despite the significant interest of SME's in this programme, national criteria applied by local authorities constrain biotech SMEs from applying for this financing source.

In later development stages, beyond the initial scale-up, private investment becomes more accessible and more suited. **Private investors can offer not only funding, but also valuable experience and economic expertise**, which startups often lack. Nonetheless, companies continue to report that access to private capital remains constrained due to market barriers, despite significant investment interest.⁶

The most commonly reported challenges SMEs face in attracting global private investment include **regulatory complexity**, particularly in relation to **clinical trials** and the **permitting of manufacturing facilities, pricing and reimbursement uncertainty**, and limited opportunities to invest through unified EU capital markets.

⁵ The STEP Seal simplifies access to EU funding, by facilitating alternative cumulative or combined funding from several EU budget instruments. This includes possibility for direct support from Cohesion policy funds, without additional selection procedures. The STEP Seal also enhances project visibility. Increasing exposure that can attract public and private funding. More information [here](#).

⁶ Impact of the GPL on Europe's innovation ecosystem and biotechnology companies, Charles Rivers Associates, 2024

Recommendations for European and national policymakers

Sector visibility, political coordination and alignment

- Raise public and policymakers' **awareness** and **understanding** of the economic and societal benefits of biotech healthcare innovation.
National governments: consider **centralising biotechnology points of contact** within their administrations, for example, by establishing a **National Biotech Office**.
- The European Commission: assess establishing an **EU Biotech and Life Sciences Office**, led by a Chief Biotech Officer within the Commission's Secretariat-General, towards improving coordination, collaboration across all relevant directorates.
- Support biotech and life sciences clusters and ongoing policymaker discussions through new exchange platforms and events. These should help **align national funding priorities** and support joint **horizon-scanning** activities for **emerging technology platforms**.

Public and private investment

- Align national **funding criteria** for biotech startups and SMEs, ensuring that any temporary changes to their status does not exclude them from public funds.
- Assess and map areas of innovation where Europe holds a competitive advantage, with a view of creating **targeted funding programmes for new technology platforms** (e.g. mRNA). This can be achieved, for example, through investment in dedicated manufacturing infrastructure.

- Safeguard funding for life sciences innovation by **maintaining Framework Programme 10 funding levels**, supporting a dedicated health programme, and continuing investment in Public-Private Partnerships such as IHI and ERDERA.
- Establish a European Biotech and Life Sciences Index. A "**NASDAQ equivalent for biotech**", enabling companies to raise capital from EU investors through high-liquidity markets.

Business expertise – practical support for biotech start-ups

- Develop national and EU **programmes** to strengthen the **economic expertise of new biotech entrepreneurs**. These programs should focus on business model development, regulatory navigation, and funding applications.
- Create an **early partnership framework** for breakthrough biotech innovations to accelerate time-to-patient. Including early access to the European Health Data Space, clinical trials infrastructure, EMA procedures, health technology assessment, and pricing and reimbursement.
- Establish a **fast-track framework for building authorisations** related to new R&D and manufacturing facilities, to expand capacity for personalised medicines and address the fragmentation of national permitting processes.

Participants

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- Agnieszka Grzegorczyk, Strategic Initiatives Department, Polish Ministry of Finance
- Łukasz Kościjańczuk, CRIDO (Grants and EU Funds consultancy)
- Jeremy Launders, Bioton (Polish biotech manufacturing company)
- Eliza Milewicz, Syvento Biotech (Polish RNA vaccines CDMO company)
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