



**STARTUP
EUROPE**



**STARTUP
EUROPE
ACCELERATOR**
by Finnova

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

NOVA NEXT Startup Europe Awards 2025

GLOCAL CIRCULAR ECONOMY SUMMIT – RED-NOVA SUMMIT



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1. INTRODUCTION

1. 1. - ¿WHAT IS STARTUP EUROPE?

Startup Europe is an initiative of the European Commission aimed at connecting high-tech startups, scale-ups, investors, accelerators, corporate networks, universities, and media outlets.

1. 2. – WHARE ARE THE STARTUP EUROPE AWARDS (SEUA)?

The Startup Europe Awards (SEUA) are a methodology promoted by the European Commission's DG CONNECT and implemented by the Finnova Foundation in collaboration with Startup Europe, with institutional support from the European Parliament, the European Committee of the Regions, and the European Economic and Social Committee.

SEUA constitute an open innovation tool to identify disruptive startups, promote public-private collaboration, and raise awareness of entrepreneurship as a key driver of job creation. They also foster alliances that contribute to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the actions of the European Green Deal, thereby supporting the circular economy and the fight against climate change.

Our mission is to help entrepreneurs succeed and facilitate their access to European funding through calls aligned with their projects (LIFE, COSME, Horizon Europe, EIC, etc.).

These awards are an extremely useful tool to promote knowledge exchange, add value to the entrepreneurial ecosystem, and help startups grow and position themselves in the market.

The objective of the Startup Europe Awards is to promote sustainable entrepreneurship in the fields of circular economy, sustainability, mobility, and climate change mitigation in urban environments. The initiative also aims to provide national and international visibility to ideas that strengthen and consolidate the circular economy, based on the development of smart and green cities, enhancing competitiveness and social impact through technological innovation strategies.

2. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE CALL

The Ibagué Startup Europe Awards (SEUA) 2025 call invites entrepreneurs, startups, SMEs, and innovation stakeholders from Latin America and Europe to submit projects with high social, environmental, or technological impact.

This initiative seeks to identify and reward disruptive solutions addressing urban challenges related to circular economy, environmental sustainability, waste management, water, clean energy, and social housing, with particular attention to the context of Ibagué and its transition towards a more resilient and sustainable urban model.

Promoted by the European Commission and implemented by the Finnova Foundation, SEUA offers a unique platform for entrepreneurs to showcase their projects and connect with investors, business leaders, and industry experts.

Through this call, opportunities for interregional cooperation, talent development, and international projection of city-transforming ideas are fostered.

3. CHALLENGES

- 1) **Wasterwater Management:** Innovative systems for the efficient and environmentally responsible management of wastewater and sewage sludge, promoting initiatives such as greywater reuse, biogas generation for self-consumption, and biofertiliser production.

Target audience: Technology companies, startups, universities, public administrations, and associations with projects applicable to urban or peri-urban environments.

Proposals will be recognised that offer economically and environmentally efficient systems for wastewater and sludge management at treatment plants. Solutions may include greywater reuse for urban uses (irrigation, cleaning, cooling), biogas generation for self-consumption, biofertiliser production, or technologies that reduce energy consumption and improve water circularity.

- **EXAMPLE:**

- **RES4CITY: Sustainable Urban Innovation** – <https://www.res4city.eu/>
RES4CITY is a Horizon Europe–funded project with a €2.5 million budget, aimed at promoting renewable energy and sustainable technologies in urban environments. Within this framework, the RES4CITY STARTUP EUROPE ACCELERATHON has been created to identify innovative solutions to challenges such as land management, hydrogen production, greywater reuse, and optimisation of electric vehicle charging.

- 2) **Urban Waste Management:** Innovation in the management of organic waste, promoting solutions that enable its recovery as a useful resource.

Target audience: Startups, SMEs, universities, technology centres, and public or mixed entities with projects implemented or under development that improve local sustainability.

Solutions will be awarded that optimise the collection, treatment, and valorisation of organic waste, transforming it into useful resources. Projects may include conversion into energy (biogas, composting, anaerobic digestion), agricultural inputs, reusable materials, or initiatives that foster the circular economy and reduce the environmental burden of biodegradable waste.

- **EXAMPLE:**
 - **LIFE Ecodigestion 2.0** - <https://www.lifecodigestion.com/>
 - **Objective:** Convert organic waste—such as biodegradable municipal waste fractions, sewage sludge, and agri-food by-products—into biogas through anaerobic digestion processes applied in wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs).
 - **Funding:** EU LIFE Programme (~€970,000), led by Global Omnium (Spain), with participation from the Finnova Foundation (Belgium) and Águas do Centro Litoral (Portugal).
 - **Impact and benefits:**
 - **Renewable energy:** Biogas production for self-consumption at WWTPs
 - **Circular economy:** waste recovery and greenhouse gas emissions reduction
 - **Scalability:** technology designed for adaptability and replicability across WWTP infrastructures
- 3) **WASTE2PROPTECH:** Development of new materials derived from waste for sustainable and energy-efficient construction, especially in social housing and public buildings, aiming to reduce construction and maintenance costs.

Target audience: Entrepreneurs, companies, research centres, technology developers, construction firms, and habitat sector stakeholders with impact projects in sustainable building.

This category promotes the development and use of innovative waste-derived materials (plastics, debris, organic, industrial, textile waste, etc.) applied to sustainable construction. Priority will be given to solutions focused on social housing and public buildings that improve energy efficiency, reduce environmental impact, and lower construction and maintenance costs.

- **EXAMPLE:**
 - **Advanced Emmedue Construction System** – <https://www.mdue.it/es/>
An innovative earthquake-resistant modular construction system based on expanded polystyrene (EPS) panels fixed between galvanised steel meshes and coated on-site with micro-concrete. With over 35–40 years of experience and more than 1 million buildings constructed worldwide, it is positioned as an efficient alternative to traditional construction methods.
 - **Key advantages:**
 - **Speed of installation:** modular panels facilitate fast assembly, reducing construction time and on-site costs.
 - **Architectural versatility:** allows load-bearing walls, partitions, slabs, staircases, and even curved shapes, adapting to a wide range of projects.

- **Thermal and acoustic insulation:** provides high thermal comfort and energy efficiency; it can reduce energy consumption by up to 65% over the building's lifetime.
- **Structural safety:** certified to withstand earthquakes, cyclones (winds of up to 106 km/h), fire (REI 120–150), and high loads.
- **Reduced environmental impact:** reduces CO₂ emissions by up to 40% during the construction phase and up to 65% during the use phase, thanks to its excellent insulation and eco-responsible processing of EPS.
- **Compatibility with other systems:** can be integrated with concrete, steel, or timber structures and supports a wide range of finishes (paint, stone, ventilated façades).

4. WHO CAN APPLY?

The call is open to startups, SMEs, scale-ups, spin-offs, universities, research centres, students, individual entrepreneurs and corporations, from both the public and private sectors, that carry out their activities or projects in sectors related to waste management, sustainable construction, energy efficiency, and water treatment.

Initiatives from countries of the European Union, Latin America, and other international regions may apply, provided that they present innovative and viable solutions that respond to the challenges defined in the call and that contribute to a more sustainable, circular, and resilient urban model.

4. 1. – PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS:

1. This call is addressed to startups, SMEs, scale-ups, companies, innovation centres, and entities operating in the field of the environment that demonstrate an innovation capacity, whether at local, regional, or international level, with a particular focus on urban contexts. Proposals must provide concrete and innovative solutions to the main challenges currently faced by society, contributing to collective well-being and sustainability from a collaborative perspective involving the public sector, the private sector, and citizens.
2. The profile of participants must be linked to sector such as:
 - Smart and sustainable cities
 - Environmental technologies
 - Circular economy
 - Sustainable urban mobility
 - Green architecture and urban planning
 - Energy efficiency and renewable energies
 - Water and waste management
 - Development of technologies applied to the transformation of the traditional economy.

Special consideration will be given to an integrated approach, the scalability of the project, its technical and financial feasibility, and its alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the European Green Deal.

4. 2. – SUBMISSIONS OF APPLICATIONS:

The deadline for submitting applications will be on Thursday, 19th March 2026, at 11:59 p.m. (Colombia time).

To apply, one of the forms published on the Startup Europe Awards website must be completed, according to the relevant language:

<https://form.jotform.com/241782707977371>

4. 3. – CANDIDATE SELECTION PROCESS:

Once the application submission period has ended, with a deadline of 19/03/2026, applications will be evaluated by the committee of experts based on the following criteria, distributed over a total of 100 points:

- Feasibility (up to 30 points)
- Response to the challenges (up to 25 points)
- Innovation (up to 30 points)
- Internationalisation (up to 5 points)
- Investment and viability of the business model (up to 10 points)

The committee of experts will have 15 days to evaluate the projects from the end of the registration deadline (19th March). Therefore, the winners will be notified 20 days after the closing of the registration period.

5. SELECTION OF THE WINNER

The winner will be selected according to the criteria followed by the committee of experts, and one winner will be selected per thematic area.

- The winning startups will receive specialised training, valued at €400, aimed at preparing their proposals and strengthening their presentation skills. Completion of this training will be mandatory; in the event that it is not completed, the startup must pay €300.
- The three projects selected as winners of each category will be awarded access to an acceleration process, with the aim of converting their project into a European project proposal initiative.

6. AWARDS JURY:

The jury, within a public–private collaboration framework, will be composed of representatives from public administrations, universities, local media, and technological experts.

7. AWARDS:

Specifically, the winning companies (first place) in each of the challenges will receive the following from Finnova and its accelerator, Startup Europe Accelerator:

1. Mentoring

- Finnova will carry out mentoring through a videoconference or in-person meeting on different European funding opportunities that may be viable for converting the company's proposal into a European project.

This mentoring does not include the drafting of the proposal or the application process.

Once participants are announced as winners, they must inform the organisation whether they will be able to participate in the course.

In the event of unjustified withdrawal, participants must pay the amount of €300 to cover the corresponding costs.

2. European funds training course

- Finnova will provide the company with a licence for an online European funds course from the EU-Training Platform (licence currently valued at €400).

Once participants are announced as winners, they must inform the organisation whether they will be able to participate in the course.

In the event of unjustified withdrawal from the course, participants must pay the amount of €300 to cover the corresponding costs.

3. Visibility

- Finnova will provide visibility to the project through its social media channels and other media at its disposal.

4. Invitation to participate in the Summit

- Winners will be invited to participate in the First Glocal Circular Economy Summit – NOVA NEXT SUMMIT, to be held in Ibagué, Colombia, from 21st to 23rd April 2026. The company responsible for logistics, travel, and accommodation, Ibagué Limpia, will contact each of the winners in order to coordinate the details.

8. IMPLEMENTATION DATES:

- Deadline for submission of applications: Thursday, 19th March 2026 (UTC-05:00).
- The final will take place in person from 21st to 23rd April 2026, during the International Circular Economy Summit – Red Nova Summit, where the winners will be announced.

9. OBLIGATIONS OF PARTICIPANTS:

Participation in this competition implies full acceptance of these rules and the participation rules for Fairs and Events of Fundación Finnova.

By accepting these rules, participants in the Startup Europe Awards authorise Finnova to invite specialised and/or general media to cover the activities carried out during the acceleration process. Likewise, they authorise the dissemination and publication in media and social networks of their image, first and last names of the promoting members, as well as references to the project.

10. OWNERSHIP OF THE PROJECTS:

Industrial and intellectual property rights over the submitted initiatives belong to the authors of the respective projects and their contents. All participants in the call guarantee the originality of the submitted projects and that they do not infringe third-party rights or regulations.

11. REGLAMENTO GENERAL DE LA PROTECCIÓN DE DATOS:

In compliance with Organic Law 3/2018 of 5th December on the Protection of Personal Data and the Guarantee of Digital Rights and the European General Data Protection Regulation, participants are informed of the incorporation of their data into a file named “IBAGUÉ STARTUP EUROPE AWARDS”, owned by Finnova.

The purpose of the processing is to manage and respond to enquiries, suggestions, requests for information, or services requested through this form.

By ticking the box, you freely, specifically, and unequivocally accept that your data will be processed in accordance with the purposes of this form.

Any data transfers that may be carried out will be those necessary for the development of the existing legal relationship between the parties, as well as those provided for by law.

You have the right to access, rectify, erase, and object to the processing of your data by submitting a request to digital@finnova.eu, attaching in all cases a copy of your identity document and indicating “GDPR Request” in the subject line. In the event of any modification of your data, you must notify the same address, and the organisation shall not be held liable in the event of failure to do so. You may also consult additional information in our Record of Processing Activities.

Finnova shall under no circumstances assume travel, accommodation, or subsistence expenses of participants, finalists, or winners, and such costs shall be the sole responsibility of the company organising the Glocal Circular Economy Summit.