PhotonHub PHACTORY Press Release, April 2025

EU Invests €15M to Help Companies Supercharge Their Products with Light

New investment from the European Commission is helping innovators exploit the unique properties of light technologies to add smart features and improve the performance of their products through a proven 'one-stop-shop' photonics innovation factory.

Building on successes to date, a new PhotonHub framework has been launched to fund photonics innovation projects until December 2028 through a pan-European network of partners which includes III-V Lab.

Called "PhotonHub PHACTORY", the new €15 million initiative offers expert support, fast-track access to Europe's leading laboratories, and generous subsidies.

Delivered through a trusted one-stop-shop model, the initiative makes high-end photonics support faster, easier, and more accessible than ever.

As the science and technology of light, photonics is integral to many applications and is a key enabler to breakthroughs in emergency medical diagnostics, solar energy for a greener future, and quantum communications, for example.

This new programme dramatically lowers the barrier to entry, offering EU subsidies that can cover up to 85% of project costs, making it low-risk for businesses. It aims to help companies achieve a wider and faster uptake, integration, and deployment of photonic technologies, boost competitiveness and foster new business.

With over thirty European partners including III-V Lab, Palaiseau, France, the new framework covers the entire value chain from early-stage concept (TRL2) and prototyping (TRL3-4) to upscaling (TRL5-7). It spans a wide range of cutting-edge technology platforms, facilitating open access and guided orientation to the broadest possible range of photonics expertise, equipment and technologies available from the best facilities throughout Europe.

Led by Brussels Photonics (B-PHOT) at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), the initiative builds on the success of PhotonHub Europe, which to date has helped over 100 companies deliver more than €750 million in new revenues, create 1,000 jobs and raise €250 million in venture capital in just four years.

Professor Hugo Thienpont, Director of Brussels Photonics and coordinator of the PhotonHub programme, said: *"We are delighted to continue to promote and support photonics innovation through PhotonHub PHACTORY. This €15M programme funded by the European Commission will be instrumental in creating opportunities for collaborative innovation projects for wide-ranging sectors over the next four years, enhancing European sovereignty in this rapidly growing industry."*

Light Speed Innovation

By streamlining access to talent, facilities and funding, the new programme condenses what might normally take years — from a feasibility study to building and testing prototypes — into a matter of months.

"Because it's built on a cross-border network, a firm in the Netherlands could seamlessly partner with a German lab or Italian research team, accelerating collaborative outcomes across the EU.

"Building on our impact to date and in response to the needs of the market, we are extending PhotonHub's previous offering to also support entrepreneurially minded researchers and start-ups. We look forward to guiding these early-stage ventures as well as established SMEs and scaling companies in their commercial and technical development through photonics-led innovation," said Professor Thienpont.

Tailored Support Packages

The PhotonHub PHACTORY team is offering tailored support streams for EU companies, depending on their stage, technology readiness level (TRL) and strategic ambitions. These include a Launchpad for spinouts and start-ups, a Scaling Club for fast-growing ventures, and bespoke Business Coaching for established SMEs and some large-scale companies aiming for market growth.

"Our goal is simple: to help European businesses shine in the global marketplace – with photonics lighting the way," said Nathalie Debaes, Consortium Management Support Officer for PhotonHub PHACTORY. *"We facilitate direct access to the very best expert partners across Europe to support projects ranging from initial feasibility studies to prototype or demonstrator development to upscaling. Any interested companies can apply at www.photonhub.eu, and applications can be reviewed on a rolling basis. All support is cross-border, with companies collaborating with innovation partners elsewhere in the EU."*

Thomas Mérelle, Photonic Platform Manager, III-V Lab, added : "*III-V Lab is honoured to be part of the Photonhub Consortium in delivering photonics-led innovation support for the following industries: Defense & Space, Datacom-Telecom & Quantum telecommunications. Our message for European companies is that the possibilities with our III-V semiconductors industrial laboratory capabilities to deliver state-of-the-art photonic components are endless: monolithically integrated InP PICs, discrete III-V lasers, III-V on silicon substrate integration, and application-related base epitaxy. Whether your company is emerging or established, exploring the potential for innovation through photonics could be invaluable in accelerating your products development, expanding your offering to customers, and securing additional revenue. Our team is excited to have the opportunity to collaborate on photonics technology innovation projects supported through PhotonHub.*"

The framework, which runs until the end of 2028, targets small and mid-sized firms across all sectors, offering tailored support depending on their needs. This includes expert assessments

on technical and commercial viability at no cost, access to Europe's researchers and laboratories, and training and coaching across various industries.

PhotonHub operates a continuous open call – interested companies can apply online now as the first step on their photonics technology innovation journey. All discussions and correspondence are conducted in English. Learn more at **photonhub.eu**

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About PhotonHub

PhotonHub has been established to accelerate the uptake, integration, and deployment of photonic technologies in innovative products across a range of industry sectors for scaled-up business growth and production in Europe. The aim is to lower the innovation barriers for European industry by offering a one-stop-shop solution for exploiting the power of photonics in new "photonics-enabled" products and production methods. PhotonHub has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe programme under the Grant Agreement n° 101189537 in Public Private Partnership with Photonics21.

This unique pan-European photonics innovation hub combines the broadest possible range of photonics expertise, facilities and technologies from Europe's top existing networks of competence centres, as well as key technical, business, and training support services across the full value chain (TRL3-8), all under one roof. Technology innovation projects are heavily subsidised.*

PhotonHub PHACTORY is the latest in a long line of successful EU-backed innovation frameworks coordinated by Brussels Photonics at VUB. It builds on more than two decades of experience and a proven track record through earlier programmes, including ACTMOST, ACTPHAST, ACTPHAST4.0, ACTPHAST4Researchers and, most recently, PhotonHub Europe. Together, these initiatives have laid the foundation for a pan-European model of photonics innovation support — now brought to full scale under PhotonHub PHACTORY.

**Only approved technology innovation projects involving a cross-border collaboration can avail of financial support from PhotonHub.*