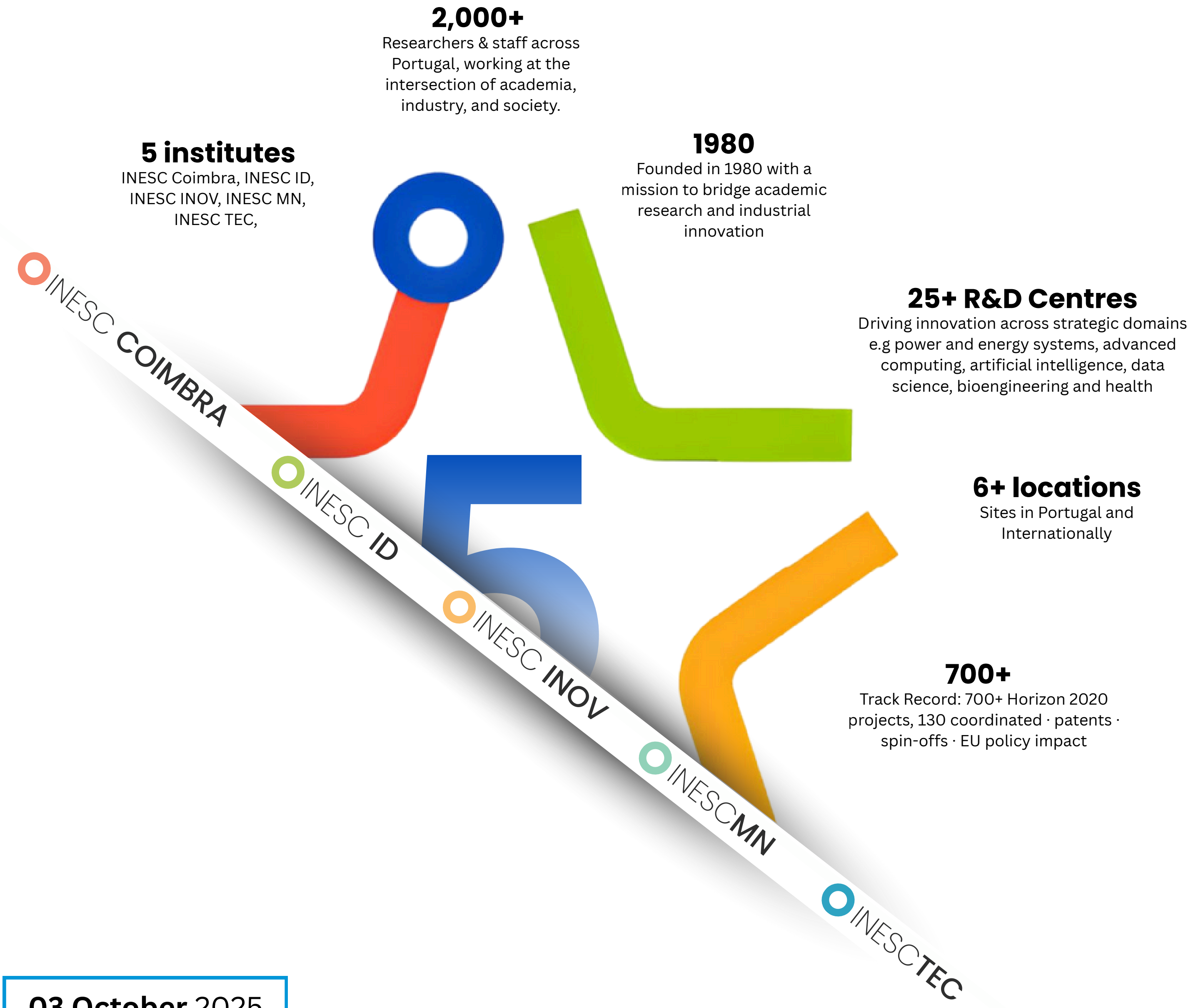

03 October 2025

Position Paper on the European Innovation Act

INESC Brussels HUB

Liaison office of the INESC Research & Innovation Ecosystem. The INESC Brussels HUB is a strategic bridge between INESC – Portugal's leading research and technology organisation – and European and global stakeholders. It is a vital partner to universities and companies, a continuous supporter of science-based policy-making, and a trusted contributor to key dialogues about future R&I agendas and priorities.

INESC welcomes the European Commission's ambition to establish a European Innovation Act (EIA). For Portugal, and for Europe's research and innovation ecosystem, this initiative must go beyond the familiar calls for more start-ups, more venture capital, and more spin-offs. Europe already produces excellent science and competitive ideas; what it lacks is a functioning market for research services, infrastructures, and translation capacity. From INESC's perspective as a leading Portuguese Research and Technology Organisation (RTO), the EIA must create practical tools that allow RTOs to sell their services across borders, expose their infrastructures as bookable European capacity, and help less-developed ecosystems strengthen their ability to translate science into innovation. This is the only way the EIA will deliver both competitiveness and cohesion.

We propose five measures to make this possible:

1. **EU RTO services passport & marketplace** – an EU-wide system allowing SMEs and public buyers to procure accredited RTO services (testing, validation, AI/energy services) across borders, with model contracts and vouchers.
2. **Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS) for R&I** – turn Europe's RIs and TIs into bookable facilities with transparent pricing and OPEX support, using JRC/TEFs as a model.
3. **EU "Use-the-Lab" vouchers** – redeemable across borders at listed RIs/TIs, ensuring that SMEs and start-ups can access cutting-edge infrastructures without administrative hurdles.
4. **Translational capacity accelerator for widening regions** – embedded "Innovation Ops Teams" pairing strong RTOs with weaker institutions to build durable translation capacity (prototypes, SME support, procurement pilots).
5. **Procurement-as-a-Platform (PaaP)** – pre-approved EU innovation procurement frameworks, enabling public buyers to source not just products but also RTO services and infrastructure access.

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INESC and the European Innovation Act

We operate at the **interface of science and application**: not just publishing research, but providing services to industry, managing advanced infrastructures, and translating knowledge into companies, products, and policies. This dual role — science generator and service provider, makes INESC a natural test case for the EIA. Yet today, our ventures and infrastructures face persistent barriers:

- **For spin-offs and start-ups**: Portuguese companies often struggle to attract international investors, in part because legal and financial instruments are fragmented and unfamiliar abroad. They also lack predictable pathways for employee ownership and second chances after failure.

- **For services and infrastructures**: INESC's advanced labs in energy, production technologies, robotics, micro-nano systems, among others, would benefit from a European mechanism to sell capacity or offer cross-border access in a structured way. SMEs, in particular, rarely have the means to buy in.

- **For translation capacity**: While Portugal has excellent science, the systemic ability to move from publication to prototype, from prototype to market, remains weak. This leaves value untapped.

The EIA must therefore do three things that are vital from INESC's perspective:

1. **Create real markets for RPO and RTO services and infrastructures**, so that INESC and similar organisations can sell capacity across borders as easily as companies sell products.
2. **Provide practical tools for translation in less-developed regions**, ensuring that widening countries can move from knowledge to innovation with the same intensity as Europe's leading hubs.
3. **Align supply with demand** by connecting public funding, innovation procurement, and SME vouchers directly to RTO capacity and services.

Our proposals:

EU RTO services passport & marketplace

INESC and other RTOs already provide critical services, from advanced simulations of energy systems, to validation of AI models, to testing micro-nano components. Yet selling these services across borders is complex and costly: every contract is bespoke, legal frameworks differ, and SMEs lack the confidence to buy from foreign providers. The EIA should establish an EU RTO services passport & marketplace:

- A passport that certifies accredited RTOs as trusted providers of research-based services.
- A marketplace where services are listed with transparent pricing, quality guarantees, and model contracts.
- Procurement integration, allowing SMEs and public buyers to purchase directly under harmonised rules.

Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS) for R&I

Europe's research infrastructures (RIs) and technology infrastructures (TIs) are world-class, but access is fragmented and often limited to project-based participants. The EIA should create an **Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS)** model:

- Facilities become **bookable capacity**, with time-slot scheduling, transparent pricing, and remote access tools.
- Access covered by **OPEX support**, so infrastructures are sustainable beyond project grants.
- A **multi-annual EU instrument** dedicated to TIs,

EU "Use-the-Lab" vouchers

SMEs and start-ups often lack the budget or administrative bandwidth to access advanced infrastructures. This perpetuates Europe's innovation gap, especially in widening regions. The EIA should introduce **EU "Use-the-Lab" vouchers**:

- Redeemable at any accredited RI/TI across Europe.

- **Automatically accepted** by providers, with capped co-pay and minimal paperwork.

- Financed through EU funds, with cohesion-linked envelopes to ensure uptake in less-developed regions.

Translational Capacity Accelerator

Many countries in the EU excel in science but face systemic weaknesses in **translation capacity**: the ability to turn excellent knowledge into prototypes, demonstrators, and market-ready solutions.

The EIA should create a **Translational Capacity Accelerator**:

- Fund **Innovation Ops Teams**, embedded for 12–24 months, twinning strong RTOs with less-developed institutions.

- Focus on measurable outputs: **X prototypes validated, Y SMEs supported, Z procurement pilots launched**.

- Integrate with Smart Specialisation and cohesion policy to ensure sustainability.

Procurement-as-a-Platform (PaaP)

Innovation in Europe too often stalls at the door of public procurement. Buyers fear risk, lack templates, and default to the lowest-cost solutions. For Portuguese SMEs and INESC-developed technologies, this means fewer chances to scale. The EIA should create a **Procurement-as-a-Platform (PaaP)** model:

- Publish **ready-to-use playbooks** for innovation procurement.

- Establish **pre-approved multi-buyer framework contracts**, so municipalities or hospitals can join forces.

- Create a **green lane** for small-scale pilots, reducing legal risk for public buyers.

- Crucially, make **RTO services and lab access eligible outputs** of innovation procurement.

This would create a demand-side engine for innovation. Instead of waiting for grants, INESC's solutions in energy, AI, and digital systems could be pulled directly into European markets by public buyers.