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Call for Applications

RefreSCAR 1st Hackathon

“Protein Value Chains: Global demand, Local challenges”

Application submission deadline: 12th October 2025, 21:00 CET

Event date: 20–21 November 2025

Location: Vienna, Austria

ABOUT REFRESCAR

RefreSCAR is a Horizon Europe funded Coordination and Support Action providing targeted support to the Working Groups (WGs) and Task Forces (TF) of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR). The WG/TFs are the backbone of SCAR, providing strategic policy advice, highlighting priority research and innovation (R&I) topics, and developing strategic R&I agendas across themes relating to agriculture, fisheries, food systems, forestry, and the wider bioeconomy. The project runs from September 2023 to August 2027 and brings together a consortium of 18 organisations from 14 European countries.

In line with its mission to strengthen SCAR’s strategic functioning and foster innovative approaches to European R&I challenges, RefreSCAR will host its first **Hackathon** in November 2025. The Hackathon will provide a platform for interdisciplinary collaboration, encouraging researchers, innovators, SMEs, and practitioners to co-develop solutions for Europe’s protein value chains.

BACKGROUND

Europe’s protein supply faces mounting pressure from sustainability goals, food security needs, and the demand for innovation. The European agricultural and food industry is facing a diverse set of barriers with regards to protein supply chains, including dependency on imported feed, climate change, agronomic limitations of domestic protein crops, economic and market barriers, policy and regulatory gaps, low consumer acceptance of alternative source proteins (such as plant-based or insects), and investment across sectors. Building robust, independent value chains is essential for securing financial stability and production autonomy in Europe’s protein production sector, as outlined in the [Food 2030 - Pathways for action 2.0: R&I policy as a driver for sustainable, healthy, climate resilient and inclusive food systems](#) as well as in [the European Parliament ‘Resolution on a European protein strategy](#).

The 1st RefreSCAR Hackathon supports the strategic aims of **SCAR (Standing Committee on Agricultural Research)** Working Groups and Task Forces in their roles providing strategic R&I policy advice.

While overarching **challenges** in protein production are shared, each segment of the value chain faces a distinct combination of barriers, with varying degrees of risk to competitiveness, sustainability, and productivity. In many cases, the first challenge is to pinpoint the bottlenecks that hinder production upscaling, limit revenue opportunities for grassroots communities, or slow the transition to green and resilient food systems and economy. Moreover, regional disparities still play an important role in driving the transition to competitive and sustainable production: differences in pedoclimatic conditions, dependency on import, cultural and traditional practices, incentive structures, policy frameworks, and the pace of technological adoption all demand a nuanced and transdisciplinary approach from farm to fork. Bottlenecks also occur in post-farm activities such as technical, marketing and regulatory challenges which can limit the potential development of the protein sector.

To this end, the 1st RefreSCAR Hackathon will invite a diverse set of actors such as post-graduate students, post-doctoral research fellows, researchers, small and medium enterprises, innovators, practitioners policymakers and practitioners, food and feed producers/processors and other value chain actors e.g. wholesalers, retailers, consumers to pair their knowledge and expertise in order to co-develop local protein value chain blueprints, identify priority interventions, and propose scalable, context-specific solutions aimed at enhancing Europe's protein sector.

ABOUT THE REFRESCAR HACKATHON

The RefreSCAR Hackathon will be a **two-day, in-person innovation event in Vienna, 20–21 November 2025**. It will convene up to six interdisciplinary teams to design practical and scalable solutions addressing critical barriers in Europe's protein value chains.

The Hackathon will encourage participants to address challenges across the protein value chains, including technological bottlenecks, sustainability barriers, regulatory gaps, and market uptake issues.

Outputs may include but are not limited to:

- Policy briefs or reports
- Digital tools (software, plug-ins, applications)
- Process-oriented technical innovations
- Innovative business models
- Training and capacity-building programmes
- Awareness campaigns

The Hackathon is aligned with SCAR's mission to provide policy advice, support R&I agendas, and contribute to the transition toward sustainable and resilient food systems.

WHO CAN APPLY

Applications are welcomed from diverse teams of:

- **Startups and SMEs Representatives** in agriculture, food, or biotech sectors
- **Post-graduate students, Post-doctoral research fellows and Researchers** in diverse scientific disciplines, including social sciences and humanities
- **Polymakers and Practitioners** with expertise in protein value chains
- **Food and Feed Producers/Processors** and other value chain actors e.g. wholesalers, retailers, consumers

Teams of 2 to 4 members **must be formed prior to application**, one application should be submitted **per team**.

APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

The Hackathon will consist of the following phases:

1. Open Call and Nomination Phase

Launch of the official open call inviting applicants to form interdisciplinary teams and propose challenge statements focusing on protein value chains, addressing specific technological, environmental, or socio-economic barriers.

In the Nomination Phase (September-October), the teams will join the competition by mapping a local protein value chain to identify bottlenecks and challenges. This could include technical barriers in production processes, environmental sustainability challenges (high carbon footprint, water usage, transportation costs, pesticide use and GHG emissions), low revenue for producers or inadequate business models, low utilisation of smart farming and AI tools, by-product management, processing challenges such as protein extraction and food formulation, consumer acceptance of alternative protein sources, marketing challenges, new-product development, local/national/EU-level regulatory and policy gaps resulting in insufficient production support frameworks etc.

2. Challenge Proposal Submission

Each team will submit an application, describing their identified protein value chain and highlighting the key bottlenecks to be addressed (e.g., technological gaps, infrastructure needs, policy barriers, GHG mitigation opportunities, market access issues).

Following the submission of challenge summaries, the Hackathon Evaluation Committee will select the most promising proposals. The proposing teams will then be invited to further develop solutions during the Hackathon event in Vienna on 20-21st November.

3. Evaluation and Team Selection

The Evaluation Committee will assess submitted applications based on:

- The **relevance** to the hackathon challenge (0-5 points)
- **Quality** and **innovativeness** of the team's proposal and the potential value for Europe's protein sector (0-5 points)
- **Experience, diversity and gender balance*** of the team (0-5 points).

Shortlisted teams will be invited to participate in person at the Hackathon event in Vienna on 20–21 November 2025.

***Gender balance**

The RefreSCAR project aligns with the strategic goals of the European Commission and aims to provide and promote equal opportunities and gender equality. Thus, we urge participants to consider gender balance in their teams. This is imperative as participants will be supported within the RefreSCAR project in various activities and financial mechanisms and thus, equal opportunities should be considered.

4. Team Invitation and Preparation

The shortlisted teams will receive formal invitations and onboarding materials. A preparatory webinar will be organised to align expectations, introduce challenge guidelines, and provide teams with guidance on the Hackathon methodology and deliverables (e.g., blueprint templates, solution outlines). Transport (flights/trains) and accommodation expenses for invited participants will be booked directly by the RefreSCAR project. Meals will also be provided to invited participants. Selected participants are responsible for their own insurance (travel, health etc.) and securing all necessary travel permissions (visas). No visa or insurance costs will be covered.

5. Hackathon Event (Vienna, 20–21 November 2025)

A dynamic, collaborative event will be organised where the teams will develop practical solutions to their chosen challenges. The outputs may include policy briefs/reports, software/plugin/applications, process-oriented technical innovations, innovative business models or training programmes and will be tailored to the corresponding challenges identified in the Nomination Phase.

The 1st RefreSCAR Hackathon will be an in-person participatory innovation event held on 20th–21st November 2025 in Vienna.

The Hackathon Jury members will assess the solutions according to the following criteria:

- **Contextual relevance & challenge definition** – evaluation of the depth and clarity of the value chain analysis and EU strategic relevance (0-5 points)
- **Solution quality and innovativeness** – level of innovation, feasibility, scalability, outputs, stakeholder engagement, and wider EU impacts (0-5 points)
- **Presentation pitch** by the team (0-5 points)

6. Follow-up and Promotion

Following the hackathon, the winning solutions and the outcomes will be featured across RefreSCAR's social media platforms and shared with the members of the SCAR Working Groups and Task Forces. These solutions will be incorporated into a range of promotional

activities designed to raise awareness and engage a broader audience. By showcasing the innovative ideas, RefreSCAR aims to highlight the impact of the hackathon innovations and further amplify their role in driving forward research and policy discussions.

What does the RefreSCAR Hackathon offer?

- A total prize fund of €2250 which will be distributed to the winning teams
- Certificates of attendance from the RefreSCAR Hackathon organisers
- Winning solutions and Teams will also receive visibility through RefreSCAR's social media and communication channels
- Opportunity to network with fellow innovative thinkers and SCAR members
- Hear from leading experts in the protein value chain
- Practise creativity and diversify skills as part of a team
- Transport (flights/trains), meals and accommodation expenses for invited participants will be booked directly and covered by the RefreSCAR project

PRELIMINARY AGENDA

Day	Time	Activity
Day 1	09:00–09:30	Registration and networking coffee
	09:30–10:15	Opening Ceremony: Welcome words by organisers
	10:15–10:45	Setting the scene Expert keynote speech
	10:45–11:15	Coffee break
	11:15–12:00	Introductory Session: Jury members introduction, elaboration of the Hackathon challenge “Protein Value Chains: Global demand, local challenges”, expectations
	12:00–13:00	Lunch
	13:00–17:00	Hackathon Work Time: Breakout sessions and team brainstorming
Day 2	09:00–09:30	Welcoming and networking coffee
	09:30–12:30	Hackathon Work Time: Teams work intensively on their solutions
	12:30–13:30	Lunch break
	13:30–15:00	Pitch Preparation: Teams finalise their solutions and prepare pitch presentations or demos (10 min per team)
	15:00–16:00	Pitch Presentations: Teams present their solutions to the Hackathon Jury members and audience

	16:00–17:00	Coffee break and solution evaluation
	17:00–18:00	Award Ceremony: Announce winners, distribute awards, closing speech

HOW TO APPLY

Interested applicants are invited to complete the online application form at:

👉 [EU Survey Application Link](#)

Applications must include:

- Name and Team Information
- Individual team member Information
- Short motivation statement of each team member (max. 200 words)
- Challenge proposal outline

Deadline for applications: 12th October 2025, 21:00 CEST

Important Dates

Date	Event
8 September	Call for Hackathon applications is launched
8 September - 12 October	Formation and application from teams
2 October	1st Info-webinar
12 October	Deadline for hackathon team applications
13-22 October	Applications are evaluated
23 October	Successful applicants are notified and travel arrangements are made for attending in-person in Vienna
28 October	2nd Info-webinar

CONTACT

For additional information, please contact:

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🌐 <https://scar-europe.org/home-scar/refrescar>