



ERDF Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument

Call for proposals

Financial and advisory support for investments in interregional innovation projects in shared or complementary smart specialisation areas, including in less developed regions (Strand 2a)
(I3-2023-INV2a)

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EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL AND SMEs EXECUTIVE AGENCY (EISMEA)

EISMEA.I – Innovation ecosystems, SMP/Entrepreneurship and Consumers
EISMEA.I.01 – EU and place-based Innovation Ecosystems

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU **action grants** in the field of the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument under the European Regional Development Fund (**ERDF**).

The regulatory framework for this EU Funding Programme is set out in:

- Regulation 2018/1046 ([EU Financial Regulation](#))
- the basic act (ERDF Regulation [2021/1058](#)¹).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2023-2024 I3 Instrument Work Programme² and will be managed by the **European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA)** ('Agency').

We invite you to read the **call documentation** carefully, and in particular this Call Document, the Model Grant Agreement, the [EU Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual](#) and the [EU Grants AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement](#).

These documents provide clarifications and answers to questions you may have when preparing your application:

- the [Call Document](#) outlines the:
 - background, objectives, scope, activities that can be funded, the expected results and key performance indicators (sections 1 and 2)
 - available budget and timeline (sections 3 and 4)
 - admissibility and eligibility conditions (including mandatory documents; sections 5 and 6)
 - criteria for financial and operational capacity and exclusion (section 7)
 - evaluation and award procedure (section 8)
 - award criteria (section 9)
 - legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements (section 10)
 - how to submit an application (section 11)
 - help (section 12)
 - glossary (section 13)
- the [Online Manual](#) outlines the:
 - procedures to register and submit proposals online via the EU Funding & Tenders Portal ('Portal')
 - recommendations for the preparation of the application
- the [AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement](#) contains:

¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund (OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 60–93).

² Commission Implementing Decision C(2023) 780 final of 6.02.2023 on the financing of the Interregional Innovation Investments Instrument by the European Regional Development Fund and the adoption of the work programme for 2023 – 2024.

- detailed annotations on all the provisions in the Grant Agreement you will have to sign in order to obtain the grant (*including cost eligibility, payment schedule, accessory obligations, etc*).

You are also encouraged to visit the [I3 website](#) and the [S3 Community of Practice website](#).

1. I3 Instrument: background and objectives

The I3 Instrument supports the cooperation between EU Member states regions and partners in policy areas supported by smart specialisation strategies (S3)³, with a particular focus on the participation in interregional innovation investments pipelines. It supports interregional innovation investments using S3 as the coordination principle.

The I3 Instrument addresses the innovation divide⁴ and serves to accelerate and strengthen innovation in connected regional Innovation Ecosystems across the EU.

Strand 1 of the I3 Instrument targets consortia of innovation actors from regions (of different levels of development and innovation performance) with shared or complementary smart specialisation areas, which are ready to make investments in interregional innovation projects. These investments can consist of a portfolio of coordinated and interlinked investments in the participating regions. This portfolio approach foresees the identification, within a specific thematic/technological area of cooperation, of a number of investment-ready sub-projects that address one or several bottlenecks identified in the project proposal. Typically, these investments will serve to strengthen, connect, or expand existing value chains, while creating local innovation and smart economic transformation opportunities.

Strand 2a focuses on supporting interregional innovation investments aiming at developing value chains in less developed regions and reinforcing the integration of innovation actors in EU value chains.

Activities funded under both strands can cover investments that are “new to Europe” or “new to the application sector”, as well as strengthen innovation diffusion channels and lead to multiple market applications of an innovation in less developed regions.

Both strands aim to support innovation actors whose investment ideas are ready to be developed into mature business cases.

These efforts will turn the diversity of the EU’s territories into a strength by leveraging the specific assets of each region and facilitating collaboration to build new and competitive EU value chains. This will enable regions with shared or complementary smart specialisation areas and with different levels of innovation performance, to collaborate and to take forward joint innovation projects targeting EU priorities.

³ Smart Specialisation Strategies foster knowledge-based growth in EU regions and countries. They are crucial to achieving a smarter, sustainable and inclusive Europe.

⁴ [Staff Working Document accompanying the New European Innovation Agenda](#), section 2.3.1 Innovation Divide

General policy objectives of the I3 Instrument

The objective of the I3 Instrument is to support interregional innovation investments by offering consortia of innovation actors from the quadruple helix ecosystems⁵ the necessary financial and advisory support to bring their innovations to a mature level, ready for commercialisation and scale-up, while bridging and reducing the innovation divide in Europe.

Projects resulting from other regional and EU programmes, such as [ERDF](#) funded national and regional or Interreg programmes, [Horizon Europe](#) and [Digital Europe Programme](#) have the opportunity to scale-up and to go for commercialisation under the I3 Instrument.

The I3 Instrument targets consortia of innovation actors from regions with shared (or complementary) smart specialisation areas. It puts a specific focus on reinforcing the integration of innovation actors from less developed regions⁶ in developing EU value chains while creating local opportunities for innovation and smart economic transformation.

The financial and advisory assistance is expected to lead to mature joint innovation investment projects in companies (especially SMEs). These projects must represent a meaningful progress toward commercialisation and scale-up. The I3 Instrument will thus support projects at a high technology readiness level⁷.

2. Objectives – Themes and priorities – Activities that can be funded – Expected impact

2.1 Objective of this call for proposals

The overall objective of Strand 2a is to provide financial and advisory support for demonstration activities, the commercialisation and upscaling of interregional innovation projects in shared or complementary smart specialisation areas, and the development of value chains in less developed regions.

An interregional investment is a combination of assets (time, money, effort, etc.) or items mobilised across borders with the view to generate income and/or to create future value for more than one region. It is a concrete concept to develop innovation and valorise available research results in a specific value chain. The development of the business and investment cases is facilitated by the regional innovation ecosystems with companies in the lead. I3 business investment cases have a **minimum TRL 6** and have the ambition to facilitate demonstration and to accelerate market uptake and commercialisation.

⁵ A well performing quadruple-helix ecosystem usually implies a network model with an exchange of skills, knowledge, business ideas and money between companies, public research institutions, financial institutions, government bodies (at different levels) and final users.

⁶ Less developed regions are those with a GDP per capita lower than 75% of the average GDP of the EU-27 as defined by the Art 108 of the [Common Provisions Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1060](#).

⁷ TRL 6 – technology demonstrated in relevant environment, TRL 7 – system prototype demonstration in operational environment, TRL 8 – system complete and qualified, TRL 9 – actual system proven in operational environment

The goal is to mobilise tangible and intangible investments in companies, in particular small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)⁸.

- To enable less developed regions to participate in EU value chains, contributing to cohesion policy objectives.
- To link and align the bottom-up process centred on “entrepreneurial discovery” that involves interactions among quadruple helix actors to identify new regional technological domains and market opportunities with the EU priorities⁹; and to bridge the gap between the supply and demand sides and help innovation ecosystems overcome market failures.
- To provide support for companies (in particular SMEs) in building portfolios of interregional innovation investments in shared or complementary S3 priority areas; and to support the demonstration, market uptake and scaling up of mature innovations to be brought on the market.

Under this call, applicants have the possibility to include Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) in the form of “Cascade funding” for grants in their proposal¹⁰. FSTP allows to select SMEs during the implementation phase in order to contribute to the investment project by carrying out necessary and missing tasks e.g., to complete a specific value chain and/or to offer a specific groundwork for testing and optimising products and production processes, or for the exploration of new processing technologies. The costs for financial support to third parties cannot exceed **30%** of the total eligible costs.

At least **70%** of the total eligible costs must be allocated to investments in companies, with a focus on SMEs.

In line with the New European Innovation Agenda¹¹, this call for proposals seeks to bring together regions at different levels of development and less and more innovative regions, which share an ambition to become Regional Innovation Valleys and reinforce coordination of research and innovation activities towards EU priorities and the most burning challenges facing the EU (namely reducing the reliance on fossil fuels¹², increasing global food security, mastering the digital transformation including cybersecurity, improving health care and achieving circularity). This call is about accelerating the development and deployment of innovation, including deep tech innovation¹³.

⁸ https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-definition_en

⁹ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024_en

¹⁰ FSTP is a mechanism that allows funding to beneficiaries that are not identified in the Grant Agreement as members of the eligible consortium (see section 6 for details).

¹¹ See Flagship on accelerating and strengthening innovation in European Innovation Ecosystems across the EU and addressing the innovation divide: [A New European Innovation Agenda: COM\(2002\)332final](#)

¹² Following the Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero Age, the I3 Instrument also supports investments in manufacturing net-zero technologies and products required to meet Europe's ambitious climate targets.

¹³ Deep tech innovation aims to provide concrete solutions to our societal problems by finding its source in an interaction with the most recent scientific and technological advances and by seeking to produce a profound impact in the targeted application areas. Deep tech is technology that is based on cutting-edge scientific advances and discoveries and is characterised by the need to stay at the technological forefront by constant interaction with new ideas and results from the lab. Deep tech is distinct from ‘high tech’ which tends to refer only to R&D intensity.

Applicants are therefore encouraged to actively engage with the wider community including innovation ecosystems and (future) Regional Innovation Valleys, in particular in the framework of the Commission [Smart Specialisation Community of Practice](#) and relevant Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships.¹⁴

This call for proposals is launched in coordination with the 2023-2024 Horizon Europe European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) Work Programme on Implementing co-funded action plans for connected Regional Innovation Valleys ¹⁵.

Under this call for proposals regions will be recognised as Regional Innovation Valleys under the following conditions:

- the competent regional or national institution or body, responsible for the management of the smart specialisation strategy (S3) confirms in the endorsement letter (see section 5) that its region wants to be recognised as a Regional Innovation Valley; and
- the grant agreement of the I3 project has been fully signed.

2.2 Thematic priorities - I3-2023-INV2a

Applications under this call for proposals must address one of the following thematic priorities:

- (i) Digital transition or
- (ii) Green transition or
- (iii) Smart manufacturing

linked to the burning challenges identified in the New European Innovation Agenda¹⁶.

Each project application under this call must address one thematic priority and at least one burning challenge. Applicants wishing to apply for more than one thematic priority, must submit a separate proposal.

(i) Digital transition

Objectives

Digital technologies present an enormous growth potential for Europe. In line with the Europe fit for the digital age priority¹⁷, this call for proposals targets investments in businesses and public administrations (notably in the part related to the innovation sector) with regards to the digital transition. Projects will unlock the potential for digital growth, deploying innovative solutions that improve accessibility and efficiency of services (both for businesses and citizens) while bridging the digital divide.

¹⁴ Where suitable partnerships do not yet exist, I3 consortia are encouraged to form new partnerships.

¹⁵ European Innovation Ecosystems (europa.eu), HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-03-01: Implementing co-funded action plans for connected Regional Innovation Valleys

¹⁶ A New European Innovation Agenda: reducing the reliance on fossil fuels, increasing global good security, mastering the digital transformation (including cyber security), improving healthcare and achieving circularity.

¹⁷ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age_en

The present call for proposals under this thematic priority encourages applications in one or more or a combination of the following investment areas (non-exhaustive list):

a. Digital economy innovation

- The deployment of innovative solutions for businesses digitalisation and digital services, including the use of artificial intelligence;
- ICT up-take in SMEs applied to traditional and emerging sectors; B2B; B2C; Customer to Customer, including infrastructures and services (digital innovation hubs, living labs, etc.);
- Demonstration of innovative digital technologies in view of the commercialisation of research results and a better integration in EU value chains;
- User driven innovation and valorisation of traceability and big data;
- Companies reinforcing EU cybersecurity value chain and protecting from hacking, ransomware and identity theft;
- "Digital based" open innovation, supporting entrepreneurial discovery processes and cooperation between academia and businesses in the framework of smart specialisation;
- Digital skills for companies adopting innovative digital technologies (upskilling and reskilling) in the framework of investments relevant for Smart Specialisation.

b. Digital transformation of the public administration

- New or significantly upgraded services for e-government, including the take-up of Europe wide interoperable services which improve the efficiency of services delivered by public administrations to citizens, companies and other public bodies by using information and communication technologies such as artificial intelligence and cybersecurity;
- Investments in innovative solutions helping administrations to make services user-friendly, accessible and more interoperable. Those investments might include the demonstration of the validity of new digital technologies in view of the large-scale adoption of new IT systems.

c. Digitalisation of healthcare

- Innovative investments in security of health data across borders (including cybersecurity);
- Investments related to the use of digital tools to stimulate prevention, enable feedback and interaction with the healthcare providers;
- Investments connected the digitisation of healthcare systems, providing solutions to interoperability issues;
- Investments in digital health infrastructure (needed for demonstration processes), telemedicine, m-health and other innovative solutions for personalised medicine;
- Investments related to the acquisition of digital skills needed for the adoption of innovative technologies in healthcare.

Expected impact

Short-term:

- Innovative technologies tested and adopted by companies and public administration
- Deployment of innovative solutions improving businesses confidence, competences and means to digitalise and grow
- Contribution to digitisation and health systems transformation, through various types of innovation and the supply of IT services

Medium-term:

- Increased companies' productivity and efficiency
- Improved user-friendly, accessible and interoperable public services
- Improved level of digital skills
- Improved EU innovation capacity and competitiveness
- Innovation diffusion.

Long-term:

- Improved way of living and of doing business
- Increased social and territorial cohesion as well as personal well-being
- Improved education and vocational training systems (indirectly).

(ii) Green transition

Objectives

Turning climate and environmental challenges into opportunities is the ambition of the green transition. The [European Green Deal](#)¹⁸ has the goal to make Europe a resource-efficient and competitive economy, while reducing EU reliance on fossil fuels. In this framework, the EU sets its targets to reach climate-neutrality by 2050. Therefore, this will require substantial investments. The I3 instrument intends to support innovative value chain investments, to boost the economy through green technology and to create sustainable industry/transport.

It also intends to provide support to interregional investments in sustainable food systems, sustainable agriculture, clean energy, sustainable industry, building and renovating, sustainable mobility and eliminating pollution.

The present call for proposals under this thematic priority encourages applications in one or more or a combination of the following investment areas (non-exhaustive list):

- Innovative investments in decarbonisation, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and contributing to improve air quality, health and wellbeing;
- Innovative investments in SMART cities;
- Innovative business investments related to smart, sustainable/efficient transport solutions and/or alternative fuels;

¹⁸ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

- Investments in the management of natural resources, including the use of recycled materials, especially construction materials, plastics and textiles, to stimulate demand for secondary markets raw materials;
- Business investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency to make industry more sustainable;
- Business investments related to energy efficiency in buildings;
- Business investments related to a sustainable blue economy, contributing to the coastal protection;
- Business investments in circular economy to replicate and scale up successful circular economy solutions, which can generate EU added value;
- Investments in bioeconomy, efficient and sustainable agriculture and forestry, innovation in marine/ maritime and inland water sustainable solutions.
- Investments in sustainable business models and alternative modes of production and consumption (e.g. leasing, repair, modular design, industrial symbiosis...).

Expected impact

Short-term:

- Deployment of innovative solutions compared to existing technologies/solutions;
- Uptake of technologically/economically reliable and viable solutions on the market.

Medium-term:

- Creating new market opportunities for EU companies;
- Reinforcing the capacity of regions to invest, joining forces around shared S3 investment priorities (interregional investments);
- Innovation diffusion.

Long-term:

- Reinforcing/reshaping EU value chains whilst increasing EU competitiveness in global markets;
- Unlocking the innovation potential of EU regions/countries;
- Contributing to the European Green Deal objectives;
- Positive impact on environment, health, climate, social and economy;
- Economic growth and job creation

(iii) Smart manufacturing

Objectives

This thematic priority focuses on improving the delivery of new or improved products, processes or services in the manufacturing industry and fostering a circular economy approach. In the context of advanced manufacturing; knowledge and innovative technologies are used to produce complex products and improve processes to lower waste, pollution, material consumption and energy use. Robotics, 3D and 4D printing, artificial intelligence as well as high performance computing for modelling are important elements in advanced manufacturing.

The present call for proposals under this thematic priority supports interregional innovation investments for the uptake of new or improved manufacturing solutions, as well as for supporting industry to face the challenge of digitalisation and to promote the shift towards a more environmentally sustainable production (zero pollution ambition for a toxic-free environment). The present call for proposals under this priority encourages applications in one or a combination of the following intervention areas (a non-exhaustive list):

- Demonstration processes, i.e. helping new products to reach the market faster or having more efficient and sustainable processes adopted by the industry.
- Valorisation of research results and practical applications for innovation diffusion. This might include the active involvement of ecosystems and the co-creation process with stakeholders and end-users.
- Connecting or making complementary use of testing and demonstration facilities at interregional level. In this framework, synergies with circularity hubs are encouraged.
- Improving the use of natural resources and in the reuse of materials, promoting circularity models (de- and remanufacturing) and investments in carbon neutrality.
- Specific implementation (including funding) strategies, ensuring the participation of all stakeholders (industry, SMEs, local authorities, educational institutions and civil society).
- Implementation of interregional demonstration cases to test and replicate the results.
- Innovation diffusion and involvement of SMEs in EU value chains.

Expected impact

Short-term:

- Deploying new green and digital technologies fostering the growth of Europe's manufacturing sector.
- Innovative technologies adopted by SMEs.

Medium-term

- Making the EU industry more efficient and sustainable.
- Reinforcing the capacity of regions to co-invest together, joining forces on common S3 investment priorities (interregional investments).
- Innovation diffusion.

Long-term

- Reinforcing/reshaping EU value chains whilst increasing the competitiveness of the EU in global markets.
- Unlocking the innovation potential of EU regions/countries.

2.3 Activities that can be funded (scope) - Same for all thematic priorities:

The I3 Instrument provides financial and advisory support in form of grants. Projects selected under this call for proposals are implemented through a portfolio approach,

which foresees the identification, within a specific thematic/technological area of cooperation, of a number of investment-ready sub-projects that address one or several bottlenecks identified in the application by the consortium coordinator. These sub-projects are necessary to accelerate demonstration processes for the uptake of innovation, thus increasing the competitiveness of EU value chains.

Target investments can be both **tangible and intangible**¹⁹ investments in the form of one the following activities:

- Advisory support for investment (developing or implementing interregional business and “go to market” investment plans in specific value chains);
- Financial support for producing plans and arrangements or designs for new, altered or improved products, processes or services such as demonstrating, testing and piloting activities by companies, large-scale product validation and market replication (new to Europe and new to the application sector);
- Adaptation of existing prototypes (i.e., by combining two or more key enabling technologies) and tailoring them to the companies’ needs for the demonstration in a real environment (ex-novo prototyping is not eligible);
- Development of portfolios of projects for close-to-market investments that deploy new or improved technologies or processes;
- Activities directly aiming at producing plans, arrangements or designs for new, altered or improved products, processes or services (adaptation to the companies’ needs). This can include testing, demonstration, piloting, large-scale product validation and market replication;
- Activities connecting or making complementary use of testing and demonstration facilities²⁰ to accelerate market uptake and scale-up of innovative solutions in shared smart specialisation areas;
- Innovation services for the development of the business investment interconnecting value chains
- Test beds and complementary activities needed to improve regulations, standards and/or to remove barriers and bottlenecks to innovation;
- Activities bringing innovative ideas and new products to the market.

The focus of this call for proposals is to contribute to actual investments. Support actions for networking, for testing new approaches for better innovation support or for enhancing services to SMEs (through collaboration, peer-learning or matchmaking, etc.) might be only eligible in combination with the implementation of activities listed above²¹.

The I3 Instrument **will not support activities that do significant harm to environment objectives** within the meaning of Article 17 of the EU Taxonomy regulation. I3 funding therefore cannot be awarded to projects that do not comply with this principle (e.g. any proposal dedicated to increase the efficiency of fossil fuel

¹⁹ e.g. IPR, know-how, licensing

²⁰ Depreciation costs for testing and demonstration facilities, as well as costs for the use of existing infrastructures.

²¹ The relevance, quality, cost effectiveness and impact of the proposed actions will be evaluated according to the conditions laid down in the call document.

technologies or of fossil fuels). Applicants will need to verify that their proposal complies with this requirement (see section 5 of mandatory documents).

Open Science Approach

An open science policy approach will be supported under this instrument in the following way:

During the implementation of the project:

Beneficiaries are required to make their project results available in open access and make their data as open as possible and as closed as necessary. Open science requires research data to be fair and open by default (with exceptions e.g. for commercial purposes). The programme also recognises and rewards the participation of citizens and end users in co-design and co-creation processes where needed. Taking into account the need to balance openness with the protection of project results (intellectual property rights, privacy concerns, security, as well data management issues) in view of the commercialisation, I3 projects are required to develop in the beginning of their project implementation a **data management plan**, in which they will specify which project results will be open (publicly available) and which ones will be privately used with the proper justification.

After the end of the project:

Beneficiaries are required to comply with the objectives of the open science in line with their data management plan and their dissemination plan.

The action aims at generating and developing a portfolio of investments and individual sub-projects to be complemented by third parties, namely the end-beneficiaries. In this framework, Financial Support to Third Parties can be used to complement the value chain of the companies (main investors) that are partners of the consortium.

2.4 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – at project level:

Investment maturity

The project must describe the progress towards commercialisation of the innovative interregional investment. The innovation infrastructures and advisory services provided to companies must be linked to their actual business investments.

At the end of the project, if the new products/processes or services supported by the I3 instrument are not yet ready for the market, the consortium can use the “Innovation Radar”²² to explore value creation opportunities, the technology readiness, as well as the business and the market readiness of the innovation. Furthermore, the consortium must identify possible sources of funding/funding mix, to cover the residual investment needs. This might include the use of public-private partnerships for the deployment of innovation, the collaboration with venture capitals, EIB group loans etc.

²² <https://www.innoradar.eu/>

The following Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) have been identified (where applicable):

Location - Interregional dimension

- Number of regions involved in the value chains (NUTS1, NUTS2 - less developed/more developed/transition/outermost region)
- The interregional character of the project, considered at portfolio level (quadruple helix stakeholders from different regions participating in the investment portfolio).

Type of project participants

- Type of organisations representing both demand and supply side: SMEs and start-ups, public authorities, universities, research and technology organisations, Industry and large companies, intermediaries (regional development agencies, innovation agencies, cluster organisations, business associations, etc), civil society and end users, associations and interest groups, other.

Innovation

- Type of innovation: product innovation, process innovation, marketing innovation, organisational innovation, other;
- Innovation path: new to Europe, and/or new to the market and/or new to company;
- Innovation maturity-market readiness: time to market (months), types of market needs addressed (prepare for market entry, secure capital, scale up market opportunities, other);
- Innovation maturity-technology readiness: TRL at project start (minimum TRL 6), TRL at project end (TRL 7-9);
- Innovation maturity-business readiness: infrastructure and equipment/skills/financial commitment to co-invest/standardisation and certification/other.

Socio-economic benefits

- Number of value chain investments in the portfolio;
- Number of new regions/regional ecosystems integrated into the value chain;
- Number of companies involved in the value chain;
- Number of SMEs involved in the value chain.

Investments

- Investment dimension: Regional, National, European, International;
- Investments mobilised: Private financing mobilised (in EUR), Public financing mobilised (in EUR), Total investment mobilised (in EUR).

IPR dimension

- Number of patents exploited or valorised;
- Number of licences;

- Number of designs;
- Number of trademarks;
- Number of geographical indications;
- Number of copyrights, trade secrets, NDAs exploited or valorised.

Gender²³

- Number of companies led by female leaders involved in the project;
- Gender-balance at consortium staff level;
- Gender-balance at project activities level.

3. Available budget

The estimated total available call budget for 2023 is **EUR 31 000 000**.

We reserve the right not to award all available funds or to redistribute them between the call priorities, depending on the proposals received and the results of the evaluation.

4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	17 May 2023
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>17 October 2023 17:00:00 CET</u> <u>(Brussels)</u>
Evaluation:	October 2023 – February 2024
Information on evaluation results:	March 2024
GA signature:	June 2024

5. Admissibility and documents

Proposals must be submitted before the **call deadline** (cut-off dates) (see *timetable section 4*).

Proposals must be submitted **electronically** via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System (accessible via the Topic page in the [Search Funding & Tenders](#) section). Paper submissions are NOT possible.

Proposals (including annexes and supporting documents) must be submitted using the forms provided inside the Submission System (⚠ NOT the documents available on the Topic page — they are only for information).

Proposals must be **complete** and contain all the requested information and all required annexes and supporting documents:

²³ [The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#)

- Application Form Part A — contains administrative information about the participants (future coordinator, beneficiaries and affiliated entities) and the summarised budget for the project (*to be filled in directly online*)
- Application Form Part B — contains the technical description of the project (*to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed and then assembled and re-uploaded*)
- Part C contains additional project data (*to be filled in directly online*)
- **mandatory annexes and supporting documents** (*templates available to be downloaded from the Submission System, completed, assembled and re-uploaded*):
 - Detailed budget table
 - CVs (short outlines) of core project team
 - Outline of a project dissemination and exploitation plan
 - Letter of support (endorsement letter from the competent regional or national institution or body, responsible for the management of the smart specialisation strategy (S3)). The purpose of the endorsement letter is to ensure that the investment priority identified in the I3 proposal is coherent with the priorities identified in the S3 strategy.
 - The project coordinator must submit the support letter from the competent regional or national institution or body, responsible for the management of the smart specialisation strategy (S3) before the call deadline (see sections 2 & 4).
 - Members of the consortium must submit the support letter²⁴ from their S3 authority provided that the corresponding region agrees to be identified as “Regional Innovation Valley” (see section 2).

Please note that the amounts entered into the summarised budget table (filled in directly online) must correspond to the amounts calculated in the detailed budget table. In case of discrepancies, the amounts in the online summarised budget table will prevail.


At proposal submission, you will have to confirm that you have the **mandate to act** for all applicants. Moreover, you will have to confirm that the information in the application is correct and complete and that the participants comply with the conditions for receiving EU funding (especially eligibility, financial and operational capacity, exclusion, etc). Before signing the grant, each beneficiary and affiliated entity will have to confirm this again by signing a declaration of honour (DoH). Proposals without full support will be rejected.

Your application must be **readable, accessible and printable**.

²⁴ In case of multiple consortia members coming from the same region, only one letter is required

Proposals are limited to maximum **60 pages** (Part B). Evaluators will not consider any additional pages.

You may be asked at a later stage for further documents (*for legal entity validation, financial capacity check, bank account validation, etc*).

 For more information about the submission process (including IT aspects), consult the [Online Manual](#).

6. Eligibility

Applications will only be considered eligible if their content corresponds to the thematic priority for which it is submitted.

Eligible participants (eligible countries)

In order to be eligible, the applicants (beneficiaries and affiliated entities) must:

- be legal entities (public or private bodies)
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
 - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
 - non-EU countries:
 - listed EEA countries and countries associated to the I3 Instrument or countries which are in ongoing negotiations for an association agreement and where the agreement enters into force before grant signature ([list of participating countries](#)).

Beneficiaries and affiliated entities must register in the [Participant Register](#) — before submitting the proposal — and will have to be validated by the Central Validation Service (REA Validation). For the validation, they will be requested to upload official establishing documents showing legal status and origin.

Other entities may participate in other consortium roles, such as associated partners, subcontractors, etc. (*see section 13*).

Specific cases

Exceptional funding — Entities from other countries (not listed above) are exceptionally eligible, if the granting authority considers their participation essential for the implementation of the action.

Natural persons — Natural persons are NOT eligible (with the exception of self-employed persons, i.e. sole traders, where the company does not have legal personality separate from that of the natural person).

International organisations — International organisations are eligible. The rules on eligible countries do not apply to them.

Entities without legal personality — Entities which do not have legal personality under their national law may exceptionally participate, provided that their representatives have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf and offer guarantees

for the protection of the EU financial interests equivalent to that offered by legal persons²⁵.

EU bodies — EU bodies (with the exception of the European Commission Joint Research Centre) can NOT be part of the consortium.

Associations and interest groupings — Entities composed of members may participate as 'sole beneficiaries' or 'beneficiaries without legal personality'²⁶. ⚠ Please note that if the action will be implemented by the members, they should also participate (either as beneficiaries or as affiliated entities, otherwise their costs will NOT be eligible).

Countries currently negotiating association agreements — Applicants from countries with ongoing negotiations (*see above*) may participate in the call and can sign grants if the negotiations are concluded before grant signature (with retroactive effect, if provided in the agreement).

EU restrictive measures — Special rules apply for certain entities (*e.g. entities subject to [EU restrictive measures](#) under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU)*²⁷ and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#)²⁸). Such entities are not eligible to participate in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any).

Following the [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/2506](#), as of 16 December 2022, no legal commitments (including the grant agreement itself as well as subcontracts, purchase contracts, financial support to third parties etc.) can be signed with Hungarian public interest trusts established under Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity they maintain. Affected entities may continue to apply to calls for proposals however, in case the Council measures are not lifted, such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, affiliated entities, subcontractors, recipients of financial support to third parties). In this case, co-applicants will be invited to remove or replace that entity and/or to change its status into associated partner. Tasks and budget may be redistributed accordingly.

 For more information, see [Rules for Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment](#).

Consortium composition

Proposals must be submitted by a consortium of applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities), which complies with the following conditions:

²⁵ See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

²⁶ For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

²⁷ Please note that the EU Official Journal contains the official list and, in case of conflict, its content prevails over that of the [EU Sanctions Map](#).

²⁸ Commission guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#) on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards (OJEU C 205 of 19.07.2013, pp. 9-11).

- at least three independent legal entities established in three different regions²⁹ in at least two eligible countries.
- the consortium should represent at least one more developed region and must have a strong involvement of less developed regions and focus on their needs.

The consortium coordinator must be a:

- Non-profit organisation including research bodies and innovation intermediate organisation (i.e. a cluster organisation, an innovation agency etc.) or
- Member State Organisation acting under indirect management³⁰ or
- Public authority.

Eligible activities

Eligible activities are the ones set out in section 2 above.

The following activities are not eligible for funding under this call for proposals:

- activities that are excluded from the scope of the ERDF according to Article 7 of the ERDF Regulation
- activities that do not comply with the “do no significant harm principle”, as defined in section 2.

Projects should take into account the results of projects supported by other EU funding programmes. The complementarities must be described in the project proposals (Part B of the Application Form).

Projects must comply with EU policy interests and priorities (*such as environment, social, security, industrial and trade policy, etc*).

Financial support to third parties is allowed for grants (Cascade funding) under the following conditions:

- the maximum amount of financial support for each third party ('recipient') may not exceed EUR 60 000;
- the recipients must be SMEs that are established in the regions covered by the consortium or in another less developed region or in an outermost region;
- the calls must be open, published widely and conform to EU standards concerning transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality;
- the calls must remain open for at least 2 months;

²⁹ Stage of development of EU regions can be found by using the interactive map at https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/how/is-my-region-covered_en.

³⁰ “Member State organisation” means an entity established in a Member State as a public law body or as a body governed by private law entrusted with a public service mission and provided with adequate financial guarantees from the Member State ([Article 2\(42\) of the EU Financial Regulation](#)).

- the outcome of the call must be published on the participants' websites, including a description of the selected projects, award dates, project durations, and final recipient legal names and countries;
- the calls must have a clear European dimension and need to contribute to the objectives of the project;
- the costs for financial support to third parties cannot exceed 30% of the total eligible costs.

Your project application must clearly specify why financial support to third parties is needed, how it will be managed and provide a list of the different types of activities for which a third party may receive financial support. The proposal must also clearly describe the results to be obtained.

Geographic location (target countries)

Proposals must relate to activities taking place in the eligible countries (*see above*) and regions covered by the consortium. For Financial Support to Third Parties, activities can also take place in another less developed region or in an outermost region.

Duration

Projects are expected to range between 18 and 36 months.

Project budget

Project budgets (maximum grant amount) are expected to range between EUR 2 000 000 and EUR 10 000 000 per project, but this does not preclude the submission/selection of proposals requesting other amounts, if duly justified in the application.

The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

Financial capacity

Applicants must have **stable and sufficient resources** to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share. Organisations participating in several projects must have sufficient capacity to implement all these projects.

The financial capacity check will be carried out on the basis of the documents you will be requested to upload in the [Participant Register](#) during grant preparation (*e.g. profit and loss account and balance sheet, business plan, audit report produced by an approved external auditor, certifying the accounts for the last closed financial year, etc*). The analysis will be based on neutral financial indicators, but will also take into account other aspects, such as dependency on EU funding and deficit and revenue in previous years.

The check will normally be done for all beneficiaries, except:

- public bodies (entities established as public body under national law, including local, regional or national authorities) or international organisations

- if the individual requested grant amount is not more than EUR 60 000.

If needed, it may also be done for affiliated entities.

If we consider that your financial capacity is not satisfactory, we may require:

- further information
- an enhanced financial responsibility regime, i.e. joint and several responsibility for all beneficiaries or joint and several liability of affiliated entities (*see below, section 10*)
- prefinancing paid in instalments
- (one or more) prefinancing guarantees (*see below, section 10*)

or

- propose no prefinancing
- request that you are replaced or, if needed, reject the entire proposal.

 For more information, see [Rules for Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment](#).

Operational capacity

Applicants must have the **know-how, qualifications** and **resources** to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share (including sufficient experience in projects of comparable size and nature).

This capacity will be assessed together with the 'Quality' award criterion, on the basis of the competence and experience of the applicants and their project teams, including operational resources (human, technical and other) or, exceptionally, the measures proposed to obtain it by the time the task implementation starts.

If the evaluation of the award criterion is positive, the applicants are considered to have sufficient operational capacity.

Applicants will have to show their capacity via the following information:

- general profiles (qualifications and experiences) of the staff responsible for managing and implementing the project
- description of the consortium participants

Additional supporting documents may be requested, if needed to confirm the operational capacity of any applicant.

Public bodies, Member State organisations and international organisations are exempted from the operational capacity check.

Exclusion

Applicants which are subject to an **EU exclusion decision** or in one of the following **exclusion situations** that bar them from receiving EU funding can NOT participate³¹:

- bankruptcy, winding up, affairs administered by the courts, arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities or other similar procedures (including procedures for persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)
- in breach of social security or tax obligations (including if done by persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)
- guilty of grave professional misconduct³² (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- committed fraud, corruption, links to a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of EU Regulation [2988/95](#) (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making- or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- created under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant).

Applicants will also be rejected if it turns out that³³:

- during the award procedure they misrepresented information required as a condition for participating or failed to supply that information
- they were previously involved in the preparation of the call and this entails a distortion of competition that cannot be remedied otherwise (conflict of interest).

8. Evaluation and award procedure

The proposals will follow a two-step evaluation procedure.

³¹ See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

³² Professional misconduct includes: violation of ethical standards of the profession, wrongful conduct with impact on professional credibility, false declarations/misrepresentation of information, participation in a cartel or other agreement distorting competition, violation of IPR, attempting to influence decision-making processes or obtain confidential information from public authorities to gain advantage.

³³ See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

In the first step, there will be a pre-selection on the basis of only two award criteria, namely the 'Relevance' in view of the overall general objectives of this call for proposals and the 'Quality of the Project team and cooperation arrangements'. In the second step, the successful proposals will be assessed against the 'Relevance' in view of the specific objectives of this call for proposals, the 'Quality of the Project design and implementation', the 'Cost Effectiveness' and the 'Impact'.


An **evaluation committee** assisted by independent outside experts will assess all applications. Proposals will first be checked for formal requirements (admissibility, and eligibility, *see sections 5 and 6*). Proposals found admissible and eligible will be evaluated against the operational capacity and award criteria (*see sections 7 and 9*) and then ranked according to their scores.

For proposals with the same score a **priority order** will be determined according to the following approach:

Successively for every group of *ex aequo* proposals, starting with the highest scored group, and continuing in descending order:

- 1) Proposals focusing on a thematic priority that is not otherwise covered by higher ranked projects will be considered to have the highest priority.
- 2) Geographical diversity, defined as the number of less developed regions represented in the proposal, not otherwise receiving funds from projects higher up the ranking list.
- 3) The scores for the award criterion 'Impact'.
- 4) The scores for the criterion 'Relevance'.
- 5) The gender balance among the personnel named in the proposal who will be primarily responsible for carrying out the innovation activities, and who are included in the proposal. The mention to gender equality plans in participating organisations can also be considered.
- 6) The creation of positive synergies between projects and involvement of SMEs or other factors related to the objectives of this call for proposals. These factors will be documented in the panel report.

All proposals will be informed about the evaluation result (**evaluation result letter**). Successful proposals will be invited for grant preparation; the other ones will be put on the reserve list or rejected.

 No commitment for funding — Invitation to grant preparation does NOT constitute a formal commitment for funding. We will still need to make various legal checks before grant award: *legal entity validation, financial capacity, exclusion check, etc.*

Grant preparation will involve a dialogue in order to fine-tune technical or financial aspects of the project and may require extra information from your side. It may also include adjustments to the proposal to address recommendations of the evaluation committee or other concerns. Compliance will be a pre-condition for signing the grant.

If you believe that the evaluation procedure was flawed, you can submit a **complaint** (following the deadlines and procedures set out in the evaluation result letter). Please

note that notifications which have not been opened within 10 days after sending will be considered to have been accessed and that deadlines will be counted from opening/access (see also [Funding & Tenders Portal Terms and Conditions](#)). Please also be aware that for complaints submitted electronically, there may be character limitations.

9. Award criteria

The **award criteria** for this call are as follows:

For step 1:

- **Relevance (5 points):** extent to which the proposal matches the thematic priority and the general objectives of the call; extent to which the proposal matches the smart specialisation strategies of the regions covered by the consortium; contribution to the EU strategic and legislative context; European/interregional dimension; extent to which the project promotes the participation of EU outermost regions; impact/interest for a number of countries (EU or eligible non-EU countries); potential to develop mutual trust/cross-border cooperation
- **Quality (5 points):** quality of the consortium and project teams; appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams and consortium

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	2,5	5
Quality	2,5	5
Overall (pass) scores	7	10

For step 2:

- 1. Relevance (5 points):** clarity and consistency of project, objectives and planning; extent to which the proposal matches the specific objectives of the call, notably regarding its contribution to the integration of less developed regions in EU value chains; extent to which the project address specific needs and challenges of outermost regions or challenges that are specific and unique for regions involved in the project, such as difficulties in retaining and attracting talents; relevance and effectiveness of the proposed innovation (product, process, marketing, organisational) in terms of novelty and ambition; extent to which it fits the detailed expectations/needs of the identified target groups; involvement of potential end users or uptake by final users after the project end
- 2. Quality (5 points):** technical quality; logical links between the identified problems, needs and solutions proposed (logical frame concept); methodology for implementing the project (concept and methodology, management,

procedures, timetable, risks and risk management, monitoring and evaluation); feasibility of the project within the proposed time frame

- 3. Cost effectiveness (5 points):** cost effectiveness; sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; best value for money
- 4. Impact (10 points):** ambition and expected long-term impact of results on target groups/general public, dissemination and exploitation strategy for ensuring sustainability and long-term impact; potential for replication and perspectives for up-scaling, sustainability of results after EU funding ends.

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	2,5	5
Quality	2,5	5
Cost effectiveness	2,5	5
Impact	5	10
Overall (pass) scores	17,5	25

Maximum points: 10 points (step 1); 25 points (step 2).

Individual thresholds per criterion: 2,5/5, 2,5/5 points (step 1); 2,5/5, 2,5/5, 2,5/5, 5/10 points (step 2).

Overall threshold: 7 points (step 1); 17,5 points (step 2).

Proposals that pass the individual thresholds AND the overall threshold will be considered for funding — within the limits of the available budget (i.e. up to the budget ceiling). Other proposals will be rejected.

10. Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements

If you pass evaluation, your project will be invited for grant preparation, where you will be asked to prepare the Grant Agreement together with the EU Project Officer.

This Grant Agreement will set the framework for your grant and its terms and conditions, in particular concerning deliverables, reporting and payments.

The Model Grant Agreement that will be used (and all other relevant templates and guidance documents) can be found on [Portal Reference Documents](#).

Starting date and project duration

The project starting date and duration will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 1*). Normally the starting date will be after grant signature. A retroactive starting date can be granted exceptionally for duly justified reasons — but never earlier than the proposal submission date.

Project duration: *see section 6 above*.

Milestones and deliverables

The milestones and deliverables for each project will be managed through the Portal Grant Management System and will be reflected in Annex 1 of the Grant Agreement.

The following deliverables will be mandatory for all projects:

- business and investment plan
- report on the implementation of the business investments belonging to the portfolio (for publication)
- assessment of the market readiness at the end of the project
- list of remaining bottlenecks
- progress report at project mid-term
- data management plan
- full dissemination and exploitation plan
- yearly report for cumulative payments (for projects with more than EUR 5 million requested EU contribution)

Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount

The grant parameters (*maximum grant amount, funding rate, total eligible costs, etc*) will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 3 and art 5*).

Project budget (maximum grant amount): *see section 6 above*.

The grant will be a budget-based mixed actual cost grant (actual costs, with unit costs and flat-rate elements). This means that it will reimburse ONLY certain types of costs (eligible costs) and costs that were *actually* incurred for your project (NOT the *budgeted* costs). For flat-rates, you can charge the amounts calculated as explained in the Grant Agreement (*see Article 6 of the grant agreement and Annex 2 and 2a*).

The costs will be reimbursed at the funding rates fixed in the Grant Agreement (**100%** for the costs of providing financial support to third parties and **70%** for all other cost categories).

Grants may NOT produce a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). For-profit organisations must declare their revenues and, if there is a profit, we will deduct it from the final grant amount (*see art 22.3*).

Moreover, please be aware that the final grant amount may be reduced in case of non-compliance with the Grant Agreement (*e.g. improper implementation, breach of obligations, etc*).

Budget categories and cost eligibility rules

The budget categories and cost eligibility rules are fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 3, art 6 and Annex 2*).

Budget categories for this call:

- A. Personnel costs
 - A.1 Employees, A.2 Natural persons under direct contract, A.3 Seconded persons
 - A.4 SME owners and natural person beneficiaries
- B. Subcontracting costs
- C. Purchase costs
 - C.1 Travel and subsistence
 - C.2 Equipment
 - C.3 Other goods, works and services
- D. Other cost categories
 - D.1 Financial support to third parties
- E. Indirect costs

Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:

- personnel costs:
 - SME owner/natural person unit cost³⁴: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost³⁵: Yes
- equipment costs: depreciation
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties: allowed for grants; maximum amount per third party EUR 60 000,
- indirect cost flat-rate: 7% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteers costs and exempted specific cost categories, if any)
- VAT: non-deductible VAT is eligible (but please note that since 2013 VAT paid by beneficiaries that are public bodies acting as public authority is NOT eligible)
- other:
 - in-kind contributions for free are allowed, but cost-neutral, i.e. they cannot be declared as cost
 - kick-off meeting: costs for kick-off meeting organised by the granting authority are eligible (travel costs for maximum two persons, return ticket to Brussels and accommodation for one night) only if the meeting takes place after the project starting date set out in the Grant Agreement; the starting date can be changed through an amendment, if needed

³⁴ Commission [Decision](#) of 20 October 2020 authorising the use of unit costs for the personnel costs of the owners of small and medium-sized enterprises and beneficiaries that are natural persons not receiving a salary for the work carried out by themselves under an action or work programme (C(2020)7115).

³⁵ Commission [Decision](#) of 12 January 2021 authorising the use of unit costs for travel, accommodation and subsistence costs under an action or work programme under the 2021-2027 multi-annual financial framework (C(2021)35) **as amended by Commission Decision [C\(2023\)4928](#) of 26 July 2023.**

- project websites: communication costs for presenting the project on the participants' websites or social media accounts are eligible; costs for *separate* project websites are not eligible.

Reporting and payment arrangements


The reporting and payment arrangements are fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4 and art 21 and 22*).

After grant signature, you will normally receive a **prefinancing** to start working on the project (float of normally **70%** of the maximum grant amount; exceptionally less or no prefinancing). The prefinancing will be paid 30 days from entry into force/financial guarantee (if required) — whichever is the latest.

There will be no **interim payments**.

Payment of the balance: At the end of the project, we will calculate your final grant amount. If the total of earlier payments is higher than the final grant amount, we will ask you (your coordinator) to pay back the difference (recovery).

All payments will be made to the coordinator.

 Please be aware that payments will be automatically lowered if one of your consortium members has outstanding debts towards the EU (granting authority or other EU bodies). Such debts will be offset by us — in line with the conditions set out in the Grant Agreement (*see Article 22*).

Please also note that you are responsible for keeping records on all the work done and the costs declared.

Prefinancing guarantees

If a prefinancing guarantee is required, it will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4*). The amount will be set during grant preparation and it will normally be equal or lower than the prefinancing for your grant.

The guarantee should be in euro and issued by an approved bank/financial institution established in an EU Member State. If you are established in a non-EU country and would like to provide a guarantee from a bank/financial institution in your country, please contact us (this may be exceptionally accepted, if it offers equivalent security).

Amounts blocked in bank accounts will NOT be accepted as financial guarantees.

Prefinancing guarantees are formally NOT linked to individual consortium members, which means that you are free to organise how to provide the guarantee amount (*by one or several beneficiaries, for the overall amount or several guarantees for partial amounts, by the beneficiary concerned or by another beneficiary, etc*). It is however important that the requested amount is covered and that the guarantee(s) are sent to us in time to make the prefinancing (scanned copy via Portal AND original by post).

If agreed with us, the bank guarantee may be replaced by a guarantee from a third party.

The guarantee will be released at the end of the grant, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the Grant Agreement.

Certificates

Depending on the type of action, size of grant amount and type of beneficiaries, you may be requested to submit different certificates. The types, schedules and thresholds for each certificate are fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4 and art 24*).

Liability regime for recoveries

The liability regime for recoveries will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet point 4.4 and art 22*).

For beneficiaries, it is one of the following:

- limited joint and several liability with individual ceilings — *each beneficiary up to their maximum grant amount*
 - unconditional joint and several liability — *each beneficiary up to the maximum grant amount for the action*
- or
- individual financial responsibility — *each beneficiary only for their own debts*.

In addition, the granting authority may require joint and several liability of affiliated entities (with their beneficiary).

Provisions concerning the project implementation

IPR rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 16 and Annex 5)*:

- rights of use on results: Yes

Communication, dissemination and visibility of funding: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 17 and Annex 5)*:

- communication and dissemination plan: Yes
- additional communication and dissemination activities: Yes

Specific rules for carrying out the action: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 18 and Annex 5)*:

- specific rules for blending operations: No

Other specificities

n/a

Non-compliance and breach of contract

The Grant Agreement (chapter 5) provides for the measures we may take in case of breach of contract (and other non-compliance issues).



For more information, see [AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement](#).

11. How to submit an application

All proposals must be submitted directly online via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System. Paper applications are NOT accepted.

Submission is a **2-step process**:

a) create a user account and register your organisation

To use the Submission System (the only way to apply), all participants need to [create an EU Login user account](#).

Once you have an EULogin account, you can [register your organisation](#) in the Participant Register. When your registration is finalised, you will receive a 9-digit participant identification code (PIC).

b) submit the proposal

Access the Electronic Submission System via the Topic page in the [Search Funding & Tenders](#) section (or, for calls sent by invitation to submit a proposal, through the link provided in the invitation letter).

Submit your proposal in 4 parts, as follows:

- Part A includes administrative information about the applicant organisations (future coordinator, beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners) and the summarised budget for the proposal. Fill it in directly online
- Part B (description of the action) covers the technical content of the proposal. Download the mandatory word template from the Submission System, fill it in and upload it as a PDF file
- Part C containing additional project data. To be filled in directly online.
- Annexes (*see section 5*). Upload them as PDF file (single or multiple depending on the slots). Excel upload is sometimes possible, depending on the file type.

The proposal must keep to the **page limits** (*see section 5*); excess pages will be disregarded.

Documents must be uploaded to the **right category** in the Submission System otherwise the proposal might be considered incomplete and thus inadmissible.

The proposal must be submitted **before the call deadline** (*see section 4*). After this deadline, the system is closed and proposals can no longer be submitted.

Once the proposal is submitted, you will receive a **confirmation e-mail** (with date and time of your application). If you do not receive this confirmation e-mail, it means your proposal has NOT been submitted. If you believe this is due to a fault in the Submission System, you should immediately file a complaint via the [IT Helpdesk webform](#), explaining the circumstances and attaching a copy of the proposal (and, if possible, screenshots to show what happened).

Details on processes and procedures are described in the [Online Manual](#). The Online Manual also contains the links to FAQs and detailed instructions regarding the Portal Electronic Exchange System.

12. Help

As far as possible, ***please try to find the answers you need yourself***, in this and the other documentation (we have limited resources for handling direct enquiries):

- [Online Manual](#)
- FAQs on the Topic page (for call-specific questions in open calls; not applicable for actions by invitation)
- [Portal FAQ](#) (for general questions).

Please also consult the Topic page regularly, since we will use it to publish call updates. (For invitations, we will contact you directly in case of a call update).

Contact

For individual questions on the Portal Submission System, please contact the [IT Helpdesk](#).

Non-IT related questions should be sent at the latest three working days before the submission deadline to the following email address: EISMEA-I3-INSTRUMENT@ec.europa.eu.

Please indicate clearly the reference of the call to which your question relates (see *cover page*).

13. Important



IMPORTANT

- **Don't wait until the end** — Complete your application sufficiently in advance of the deadline to avoid any last minute **technical problems**. Problems due to last minute submissions (*e.g. congestion, etc*) will be entirely at your risk. Call deadlines can NOT be extended.
- **Consult** the Portal Topic page regularly. We will use it to publish updates and additional information on the call (call and topic updates).
- **Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Exchange System** — By submitting the application, all participants **accept** to use the electronic exchange system in accordance with the [Portal Terms & Conditions](#).
- **Registration** — Before submitting the application, all beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners must be registered in the [Participant Register](#). The participant identification code (PIC) (one per participant) is mandatory for the Application Form.
- **Consortium roles** — When setting up your consortium, you should think of organisations that help you reach objectives and solve problems.

The roles should be attributed according to the level of participation in the project. Main participants should participate as **beneficiaries** or **affiliated entities**; other entities can participate as associated partners and subcontractors, third parties giving in-kind contributions. **Associated partners** and third parties giving in-kind contributions should bear their own costs (they will not become formal recipients of EU funding). **Subcontracting** should normally constitute a limited part and must be performed by third parties (not by one of the beneficiaries/affiliated entities). Subcontracting going beyond 30% of the total eligible costs must be justified in the application.

- **Coordinator** — In multi-beneficiary grants, the beneficiaries participate as consortium (group of beneficiaries). They will have to choose a coordinator, who will take care of the project management and coordination and will represent the consortium towards the granting authority. In mono-beneficiary grants, the single beneficiary will automatically be coordinator.
- **Affiliated entities** — Applicants may participate with affiliated entities (i.e. entities linked to a beneficiary which participate in the action with similar rights and obligations as the beneficiaries, but do not sign the grant and therefore do not become beneficiaries themselves). They will get a part of the grant money and must therefore comply with all the call conditions and be validated (just like beneficiaries); but they do not count towards the minimum eligibility criteria for consortium composition (if any).
- **Associated partners** — Applicants may participate with associated partners (i.e. partner organisations which participate in the action but without the right to get grant money). They participate without funding and therefore do not need to be validated.
- **Consortium agreement** — For practical and legal reasons it is highly recommended to set up internal arrangements that allow you to deal with exceptional or unforeseen circumstances (in all cases, even if not mandatory under the Grant Agreement). The consortium agreement also gives you the possibility to redistribute the grant money according to your own consortium-internal principles and parameters (for instance, one beneficiary can reattribute its grant money to another beneficiary). The consortium agreement thus allows you to customise the EU grant to the needs inside your consortium and can also help to protect you in case of disputes.

- **Balanced project budget** — Grant applications must ensure a balanced project budget and sufficient other resources to implement the project successfully (*e.g. own contributions, income generated by the action, financial contributions from third parties, etc*). You may be requested to lower your estimated costs, if they are ineligible (including excessive).
- **No-profit rule** — Grants may NOT give a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). This will be checked by us at the end of the project.
- **No double funding** — There is a strict prohibition of double funding from the EU budget (except under EU Synergies actions). Outside such Synergies actions, any given action may receive only ONE grant from the EU budget and cost items may under NO circumstances be declared to two different EU actions.
- **Completed/ongoing projects** — Proposals for projects that have already been completed will be rejected; proposals for projects that have already started will be assessed on a case-by-case basis (in this case, no costs can be reimbursed for activities that took place before the project starting date/proposal submission).
- **Combination with EU operating grants** — Combination with EU operating grants is possible, if the project remains outside the operating grant work programme and you make sure that cost items are clearly separated in your accounting and NOT declared twice (see [AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement, art 6.2.E](#)).
- **Multiple proposals** — Applicants may submit more than one proposal for *different* projects under the same call (and be awarded a funding for them).

Organisations may participate in several proposals.

BUT: If there are several proposals for *very similar* projects, only one application will be accepted and evaluated; the applicants will be asked to withdraw one of them (or it will be rejected).

- **Resubmission** — Proposals may be changed and re-submitted until the deadline for submission.
- **Rejection** — By submitting the application, all applicants accept the call conditions set out in this this Call Document (and the documents it refers to). Proposals that do not comply with all the call conditions will be **rejected**. This applies also to applicants: All applicants need to fulfil the criteria; if any one of them doesn't, they must be replaced or the entire proposal will be rejected.
- **Cancellation** — There may be circumstances which may require the cancellation of the call. In this case, you will be informed via a call or topic update. Please note that cancellations are without entitlement to compensation.
- **Language** — You can submit your proposal in any official EU language (project abstract/summary should however always be in English). For reasons of efficiency, we strongly advise you to use English for the entire application. If you need the call documentation in another official EU language, please submit a request within 10 days after call publication (for the contact information, see *section 12*).

- **Transparency** — In accordance with Article 38 of the [EU Financial Regulation](#), information about EU grants awarded is published each year on the [Europa website](#).

This includes:

- beneficiary names
- beneficiary addresses
- the purpose for which the grant was awarded
- the maximum amount awarded.

The publication can exceptionally be waived (on reasoned and duly substantiated request), if there is a risk that the disclosure could jeopardise your rights and freedoms under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights or harm your commercial interests.

- **Data protection** — The submission of a proposal under this call involves the collection, use and processing of personal data. This data will be processed in accordance with the applicable legal framework. It will be processed solely for the purpose of evaluating your proposal, subsequent management of your grant and, if needed, programme monitoring, evaluation and communication. Details are explained in the [Funding & Tenders Portal Privacy Statement](#).