



Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions (PPPA)

Call for proposals

The European Union – the media freedom hub
PPPA-2026-MEDIA-FREEDOM-HUB

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ New text added under <u>Expected Impact</u>:“ Reflecting its overall objective (...) The purpose is to support them to continue operating within a safe working environment.” 	8



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology
CNECT.I – Media Policy
CNECT.I.1 – Audiovisual and Media Services Policy

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

0. Introduction	4
1. Background.....	5
2. Objectives — Themes and priorities — Activities that can be funded — Expected impact	6
PPPA-2026-MEDIA-FREEDOM-HUB—The European Union – the media freedom hub	6
Objectives	7
Themes and priorities (scope)	7
Activities that can be funded (scope).....	7
Expected impact	8
3. Available budget	8
Project(s) budget.....	8
4. Timetable and deadlines	8
Duration	9
5. Admissibility and documents	9
6. Eligibility.....	10
Eligible participants (eligible countries).....	10
Consortium composition	12
Eligible activities.....	12
Non eligible activities	13
Geographic location (target countries).....	13
Ethics.....	13
Security.....	13
7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion.....	13
Financial capacity	13
Operational capacity	14
Exclusion	15
8. Evaluation and award procedure.....	16
9. Award criteria.....	17
10. Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements.....	18
Starting date and project duration	18
Milestones and deliverables.....	18

Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount.....	18
Budget categories and cost eligibility rules.....	19
Reporting and payment arrangements.....	21
Prefinancing guarantees	21
Certificates	21
Liability regime for recoveries	22
Provisions concerning the project implementation.....	22
Other specificities	22
Non-compliance and breach of contract	22
11. How to submit an application.....	22
12. Help	23
13. Important	25

0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU action grants in the field of pilot projects and preparatory actions.

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

- Regulation 2024/2509 ([EU Financial Regulation](#))¹ Preparatory action within the meaning of Article 58(2)(b).

The call is launched in accordance with the Financing Decision² and will be managed by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CONNECT).

The call covers the following topic/action:

- **PPPA-2026-MEDIA-FREEDOM-HUB—The European Union – the media freedom hub**

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 and the expected results (sections 1 and 2)
 - timetable and available budget (sections 3 and 4)
 - admissibility and eligibility conditions (including mandatory documents; sections 5 and 6)

¹ Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the **Union (recast)** ('**EU Financial Regulation**') (OJ L, 2024/2509, 26.9.2024).

² Commission Decision C(2025) 1576 final of 18.3.2025 on the financing of pilot projects and preparatory actions in the field of "Communications Networks, Content and Technology".

- 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)
- 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:
 - 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*).

1. Background

The European Union (EU) has taken a leading role in safeguarding media plurality and independence in response to the repression of independent media in Russia and Belarus, exacerbated by Russia's war against Ukraine. The EU's commitment to freedom of expression is underscored as a fundamental value, driving its efforts to support journalists and media organisations fleeing these countries. The EU's aims to provide a safe haven for those striving for democracy and freedom of expression.

Russian authorities have implemented stringent laws to stifle independent journalism and dissenting voices. The 'foreign agent' legislation, for instance, restricts the activities of civil society organisations, journalists, and human rights defenders, undermining their financial stability and credibility. Following the invasion of Ukraine, Russia enacted laws banning the use of terms like 'war' and 'invasion' and prohibiting the dissemination of information deemed 'unreliable' by the authorities. Similarly, Belarus has systematically dismantled independent media, creating an environment where journalists face severe repression. These actions have forced many independent journalists to flee to the EU, where they continue their work from a safer location.

Numerous independent journalists and editorial newsrooms from Russia and Belarus have relocated to EU countries, seeking safety from repression. Several media hubs have been set up in Europe that provide support to exiled journalists from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and other countries. However, exiled journalists still face many difficulties, including securing financial stability or obtaining legal status in the EU. These exiled media organisations play a crucial role in providing accurate information to Russian-speaking audiences, countering state disinformation, and defending democratic values. The Russian-language audience, estimated at 188 million, includes users in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and several EU countries, underscoring the importance of their work.

The EU has prioritised support for Russian and Belarusian independent media through various policy instruments and initiatives. The European Parliament's Resolution³ on the murder of Alexei Navalny and the need for EU action highlights the importance of

³ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0118_EN.html

supporting exiled media and civil society. Initiatives by organisations like the European Endowment for Democracy⁴, Prague Civil Society Centre⁵, and RSF's European Fund for Journalism in Exile⁶ have addressed the financial and resource challenges faced by exiled media.

Since 2020, the EU has provided substantial core support to the media in region, through bilateral schemes. Most of the funding has consisted of core support to sustain independent reporting and media operations.

Several media hubs have been created in EU Member States. These hubs are centres where newsrooms, journalists and media workers from these three countries can get tailored support in the form of e.g. legal assistance, emergency support, co-working spaces, training or job opportunities. Examples of these hubs are Riga, Berlin, Amsterdam or Prague. While all the above solutions have been effective in providing a framework to secure the continuation of the work by exiled journalists and media organisations, their functioning has lacked coordination.

In March 2023, the European Commission launched the Free Media Hub EAST project. **The project awarded over €2.2 million in grants** to exiled Russian and Belarussian media organisations between July 2023 and May 2025. The project provided assistance, psychological support, technological solutions, and strengthened cooperation among media hubs in the EU. It aimed to establish a structured and predictable support system for the longer term, ensuring the sustainability of exiled media. The project's outcomes included growing audiences for exiled media, the development of income-generation models, and high-level meetings with key stakeholders to advocate for the needs of exiled journalists, such as long-term visas and residence permits.

A second edition of this project launched in September 2025 and will last until August **2027. This second edition is set to award over €2 million in grants, and provide** additional funding for tailored trainings and workshops, visa and legal support, psychological support, as well as networking.

Now in its third edition, the call for proposals extends to Ukrainian journalists who carry out their work from within the EU. **In view of Russia's ongoing war of aggression** against Ukraine, which is accompanied by an information war, the working conditions of media in Ukraine have deteriorated over time, becoming more and more precarious. As such, the call aims to give those journalists and media who have relocated in the EU the necessary support to continue carrying out their work from a safer location.

Moreover, the need to continue supporting independent media from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, has become more acute following the US Government funding freeze on the independent media in countries of the EU Eastern Partnership.⁷

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

PPPA-2026-MEDIA-FREEDOM-HUB—The European Union – the media

⁴ [The European Endowment for Democracy \(EED\)](#)

⁵ [Home - Prague Civil Society Centre](#)

⁶ [RSF and partners launch the JX Fund, a European fund for journalism in exile | RSF](#)

⁷ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/us-aid-freeze-is-leaving-a-void.-europe-must-fill-it>

freedom hub

Objectives

The overall goal of this preparatory action is to continue the activities of the ongoing Free Media Hub EAST project, i.e. to sustain and improve existing financial and other kinds of support to exiled independent media from Russia, Belarus, as well as media from Ukraine that has relocated in the EU, and to foster the coordination and consolidation of a pan-European platform or network of media hubs to promote the preservation of a pluralistic media environment. It aims at creating the conditions for exiled independent media and journalists to work in the EU so that they can continue producing content and distributing it to their audiences without any editorial interference. In parallel, this year its scope is extended to provide a safe working environment for independent media and journalists who have relocated to the EU due **to precarious working conditions in light of Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine**. As such, the broader aim is to make Europe a safer place by helping the peoples of the countries in their democratic aspirations, where independent media play an indispensable role.

It should be noted that the preparatory action to be funded by this call can only start when the ongoing project is finished, i.e. not before September 2027.

Themes and priorities (scope)

Building on the assistance provided already by different stakeholders, for example through the media hubs and existing networks described in section 1, the preparatory action aims to provide appropriate help for the independent media and journalists from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine that have relocated and are working from the EU Member States. This will comprise in particular:

1. Monitoring, updating mapping as required, and sharing the needs and challenges of independent media who have relocated to the Member States. The mapping should include both short as well as mid- and long-term needs and explain how such needs are met (or not) by existing support schemes.
2. Providing financial and non-financial support to exiled journalists and media from Russia, Belarus and journalists and media who have relocated from Ukraine, based on the above needs assessment.
3. Strengthening existing media hubs and support networks, as well as fostering coordination between these support schemes and specific projects provided both by EU institutions and EU Member States to avoid overlaps. This would have the aim to provide a more systemic, structured, tailored, efficient and effective financial, material and technical support. Overall, the project would seek synergies and promote sharing of best practices and networking, in particularly among exiled media but also with EU local media, while ensuring media independence and fostering plurality. Support should focus on promoting content production and helping to introduce, to the extent possible, long term viable business models and innovative technical and content format solutions to continue reaching audiences, especially online, including those with possibly limited access to the Internet and other resources.

Activities that can be funded (scope)

The following types of activities are eligible under this call for proposals:

- research and mapping of the needs and challenges of independent newsrooms and professional journalists who have relocated their operations to a Member State;

- financial support to third parties (see section 6), which must be the most significant part of the project (minimum 70% of the total EU funding).
- strengthening media hubs and local support networks to provide practical support to journalists and other media practitioners, focusing on viable business models and innovative technical and content format solutions in order to reach audiences as well as on the sharing of best practices and networking;
- training activities for media hubs as well as for media organisations and journalists;

Expected impact

Reflecting its overall objective, the expected impact of the project is two-fold:

On one hand, it will ensure the provision of core funding for Russian, Belarusian in exile, creating the conditions for them to work, produce and distribute accurate information, and reach their audiences avoiding censorship and editorial influence.

In parallel, it will also ensure the provision of core funding for Ukrainian media who – in light of the ongoing war in their home country which has brought unprecedented challenges and complexities to their working conditions – have relocated to the EU. The purpose is to support them to continue operating within a safe working environment.

Furthermore, the project should result in a more effective and efficient use of the financial resources provided by different donors, including the European Union, improving the use of bridge and core funding and enabling the financial and economic viability of media outlets.

Period of time in which the activities are to take place

Activities funded under this preparatory action cannot start before September 2027.

3. Available budget

The available call budget is EUR 3 000 000. The EU co-financing is limited to a *maximum of 95%* of the total eligible costs.

Project(s) budget

We expect to fund 1 project.

We expect to fund 1 project for a maximum requested grant amount of EUR 3 000 000.

The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

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:	16 April 2026
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>28 May 2026 – 17:00:00 CEST</u> <u>(Brussels)</u>
Evaluation:	June-August 2026
Information on evaluation results:	September 2026
GA signature:	December 2026
Start date of the project	Earliest on September 2027

Duration

Projects should normally range between 22 and 24 months.

Extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment.

5. Admissibility and documents

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

Proposals must be submitted electronically via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System (accessible via the Topic page in the [Calls for proposals](#) 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:

- 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 (*template to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed, assembled and re-uploaded*)
- mandatory annexes and supporting documents (*templates to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed, assembled and re-uploaded*):
 - detailed budget table/calculator
 - CVs (standard) of core project team
 - applicants’ activity reports of last year
 - list of previous projects (key projects for the last 3 years) (*template available in Part B*).

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 all 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 (please check carefully the layout of the documents uploaded).

Proposals are limited to maximum 70 pages (Part B). Evaluators will not consider any additional pages. Shorter proposals are welcome.

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

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))

The call is open to legal entities established in the EU, in particular non-profit organisations; international organisations; public bodies; research centres.

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 documents showing legal status and origin.

Other entities may participate in other consortium roles, such as associated partners, subcontractors, third parties giving in-kind contributions, etc (*see section 13*).

Specific cases and definitions

Natural persons — Natural persons are NOT eligible.

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 persons⁸.

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

Affiliated entities⁹

Legal entities having a legal or capital link with applicants, which is neither limited to the action nor established for the sole purpose of its implementation, may take part in the action as affiliated entities, and may declare eligible costs as specified in section 10.

For that purpose, applicants shall identify such affiliated entities in the proposal and application form.

Associations and interest groupings — Entities composed of members may participate as 'sole beneficiaries'¹⁰ or 'beneficiaries without legal personality'¹¹. ⚠ Please note that if the action is implemented by the members, they should also participate (either as beneficiaries or as affiliated entities, otherwise their costs will NOT be eligible).

EU restrictive measures — Special rules apply for 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)¹². 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).

EU conditionality measures — Special rules apply for entities subject to measures adopted on the basis of EU Regulation 2020/2092¹³. Such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, affiliated entities, subcontractors, recipients of financial support to third parties, etc). Currently such measures are in place for Hungarian public interest trusts established under the Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity they maintain (see [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/2506](#), as of 16 December 2022).

The indicative list of affected entities (the trusts and the entities they maintain) is available under this link¹⁴. This link will bring you to the official Annex to Hungarian Act IX of 2021.



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

⁸ See Article 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

⁹ In accordance with Article 190 FR, entities that satisfy the eligibility criteria and that do not fall within one of the situations referred to in Articles 138(1) and 143(1) FR and that have a link with the applicant, in particular a legal or capital link, which is neither limited to the action nor established for the sole purpose of its implementation, will be considered as entities affiliated to the applicant.

¹⁰ See Article 190.1 (a) EU Financial [Regulation - 2024/2509](#) - Entity which itself is not a legal entity, but is made up of several legal entities which satisfy the criteria for applying for a grant (e.g. European Research Infrastructure Consortia (ERICs), European economic interest groupings (EEIG), European groupings of territorial cooperation (EGTC), joint ventures, etc) does NOT mean the same as mono-beneficiary.

¹¹ For the definitions, see Articles 190(2) and 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

¹² 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](#).

¹³ Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2092 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2020 on a general regime of conditionality for the protection of the Union budget (OJ L 325, 20.12.2022, p. 94).

¹⁴ [2021. évi IX. törvény - Nemzeti Jogszabálytár](#)

Consortium composition

Proposals must be submitted by a consortium of at least 5 applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities), which complies with the following conditions:

- minimum 3 independent entities from 3 different eligible countries.

Affiliated entities to a beneficiary, if any, do not sign the grant and therefore do not become beneficiaries themselves, do not count for the minimum number of applicants¹⁵.

Associated partners, if any, are considered third parties (see section 13). They do not sign the grant and therefore do not become beneficiaries themselves, are not applicants, not part of the consortium and hence do not count for the minimum number of applicants.

Eligible activities

Applications will only be considered eligible if their content corresponds wholly (or at least in part) to the topic description for which they are submitted.

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

If applicable, 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*). Projects must also respect EU values and European Commission policy regarding reputational matters (*e.g. activities involving capacity building, policy support, awareness raising, communication, dissemination, etc*).

Financial support to third parties (FSTP) is allowed for grants or similar forms of support under the following conditions:

- FSTP must represent minimum 70% of the total EU funding
- the calls must focus on the needs of media organisations, journalists and media workers from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, established in the EU Member States as well as the media hubs established in EU Member States;

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.

- the applications must include:
 - a list of the types of activities for which a third party may receive financial support
 - the definition of the entities, persons or categories of persons which may receive financial support;
 - the criteria for awarding financial support.

¹⁵ **Except for the case of 'Sole' beneficiary.** Entity which itself is not a legal entity but is made up of several legal entities which satisfy the criteria for applying for a grant.

- the maximum amount to be granted to each third party and the criteria for determining it. The amount of financial support per third party can exceed EUR 60 000, because the nature of the actions under this call is such that their objectives would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult to achieve. No co-funding from the ultimate beneficiaries (i.e the third parties receiving the support) shall be required.

Besides the findings of the mapping of needs and challenges of independent newsrooms and professional journalists, applications should explain how they will take into account the results of other projects supported by other EU funding programmes¹⁶ to avoid that beneficiaries of financial support to third parties under this project are financed twice for the same purpose.

Non eligible activities

Activities directed at EU institutions such as sending letters, organising meetings or providing advocacy material to EU institutions or specific members of an institution, or identifying specific members or officials of an institution to evaluate or describe their positions, or to discuss specific political content or outcome, are not eligible.

Geographic location (target countries)

Proposals must relate to activities taking place in the eligible countries (*see above*).

Ethics

Please refer to the general provisions in the MGA (Art. 14)

Projects must comply with:

- highest ethical standards and
- applicable EU, international and national Law.

Security

Please refer to the general provisions in the MGA (Art. 13).

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 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:

¹⁶ [Funding | Shaping Europe's digital future](#)

- public bodies (entities established as public body under national law, including local, regional or national authorities) or international organisations
- if the individual applicant 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
 - reject the participation of the applicant in the proposal and request reallocation of the tasks to another applicant of the consortium or his replacement without compromising the quality of the proposal;
 - request that you are replaced or, if needed, reject the entire proposal.

If the financial capacity of the consortium as a whole or of the coordinator or single or **“sole applicant/beneficiary”** is considered insufficient, the Authorised Representative Officer of the Commission may reject the application.

 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
- **applicants’ activity reports of last year**
- list of previous projects (key projects for the last 3 years) (*template available*)

in Part B).

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

In the event of an application grouping several applicants (consortium), the above requirements shall apply to the combined capacity of all members of the consortium. Combined capacity means that individually, each member of the consortium should comply with the criteria corresponding to its task in the project.

In the case of legal entities forming one **applicant (the "sole applicant/beneficiary")**, as specified in section 6, the above requirements apply to each one of those entities.

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 participate¹⁷:

- bankruptcy, winding up, affairs administered by a liquidator or by a court arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities or other similar procedures (including procedures for persons with unlimited liability for the **applicant's** debts) provided for under Union or national law
- 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 misconduct¹⁸ (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,

¹⁷ See Articles 138 and 143 of EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

¹⁸ 'Professional **misconduct**' includes, in particular, the following: violation of ethical standards of the profession; wrongful conduct with impact on professional credibility; breach of generally accepted professional ethical standards; false declarations/misrepresentation of information; participation in a cartel or other agreement distorting competition; violation of IPR; attempting to influence decision-making processes by taking advantage, through misrepresentation, of a conflict of interests, or to obtain confidential information from public authorities to gain an advantage; incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence or similar activities contrary to the EU values where negatively affecting or risking to affect the performance of a legal commitment.

decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)

- intentionally and without proper justification resisted¹⁹ an investigation, check or audit carried out by an EU authorising officer (or their representative or auditor), OLAF, the EPPO, or the European Court of Auditors.

Applicants will also be rejected if it turns out that²⁰:

- 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 have to follow the standard submission and evaluation procedure (one-stage submission + one-step evaluation).


An evaluation committee 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) Projects focusing on a theme that is not otherwise covered by higher ranked projects will be considered to have the highest priority.
- 2) The *ex aequo* proposals within the same topic will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the award criterion 'Quality'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Relevance'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Impact'.
- 3) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the overall project portfolio and the creation of positive synergies between projects, or other factors related to the objectives of the call. 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.*

¹⁹ '**Resisting an investigation, check or audit**' means carrying out actions with the goal or effect of preventing, hindering or delaying the conduct of any of the activities needed to perform the investigation, check or audit, such as refusing to grant the necessary access to its premises or any other areas used for business purposes, concealing or refusing to disclose information or providing false information.

²⁰ See Article 143 EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

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. Full 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:

1. Relevance (40 points):

- Clarity and consistency of the action
- Objectives and extent to which they match the themes and priorities and objectives of the call
- Contribution to the EU strategic and legislative context
- European/trans-national dimension
- Impact/interest for a number of countries (EU or eligible non-EU countries); possibility to use the results in other countries; potential to develop mutual trust/cross-border cooperation

2. Quality (40 points):

- Logical links between the identified problems, needs and solutions proposed (logical frame concept)
- Quality of the consortium and project teams²¹
- Appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams and consortium
- Methodology for implementing the project (concept and methodology, organisation of the work (procedures and allocation of resources), management, involvement of subcontractors, timetable, risks and risk management, monitoring and evaluation)
- Cost effectiveness (sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; best value for money)

3. Impact (20 points):

- Ambition and expected long-term impact of results on target groups/general public
- Appropriate dissemination strategy

²¹ This includes the operational capacity (know-how, qualifications, human and technical resources, EU dimension), as indicated in Section 7.

- Sustainability of results after EU funding ends.

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	24	40
Quality	28	40
Impact	12	20
Overall (pass) scores	64	100

Maximum points: 100 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 24/40, 28/40 and 12/20 points.

Overall threshold: 70 points.

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) and the number of projects to be funded, as announced in section 3. 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 date²² 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.

Indicative project starting date: *see timetable section 4 above*

Indicative project duration: *see section 4 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.

Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount

²² The project start date must normally be the first day of a month and later than the entry into force of the agreement. The Commission can decide on another date, if justified by the applicants. However, the starting date may not be earlier than the submission date of the grant application – except if provided for by the basic act or in cases of extreme urgency and conflict prevention (Article 196 EU Regulation - 2024/2509).

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 (requested grant amount): *see section 3 above*.

The grant will be a budget-based mixed actual cost grant (actual costs, with unit cost 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 unit costs and flat-rates, you can charge the amounts calculated as explained in the Grant Agreement (*see art 6 and Annex 2 and 2a*).

All costs categories will be reimbursed at a single funding rate fixed in the Grant Agreement (maximum 95%).

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
 - A.5 Volunteers – N/A
- 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 cost²³: No

²³ 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

- volunteers cost: N/A
- subcontracting costs:
 - additional subcontracting rules: Yes
 - o subcontracting may not cover core tasks of the action²⁴
- travel and subsistence unit cost²⁵: Yes²⁶
- equipment costs: depreciation
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties (FSTP): allowed for grants or similar; maximum amount per third party EUR 300.000; amounts of more than 60 000 EUR per third party are necessary because the nature of the actions under this call is such that their objectives would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult to achieve. In addition, FSTP must represent minimum 70% of the total EU funding, i.e. minimum two million one hundred thousand euro,
- indirect cost flat-rate: 7% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteers costs and exempted specific cost categories, if any)

 **Applicants' attention is drawn to the fact that if they are receiving an operating grant financed by the EU or Euratom budget, they may not declare indirect costs for the period(s) covered by the operating grant, unless they can demonstrate that the operating grant does not cover any costs of the action. If you intend to also apply for action grants while receiving an operating grant, please make sure that you either have the accounting tools in place to combine them (or that the operating grants pays off — meaning that it covers enough of your general running costs and overheads to compensate the loss of the indirect costs in the action grants).**
- VAT: non-deductible/non-refundable 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 2 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

receiving a salary for the work carried out by themselves under an action or work programme (C(2020)7115).

²⁴ See also section 13- Subcontracting going beyond 30% of the total eligible costs must be justified in the application.

²⁵ 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).

²⁶ See [EU Grants AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement](#), art 6 on eligible costs: travel and subsistence costs must be declared using the unit cost according to Annex 2a of the grant agreement. If a particular instance of travel, accommodation or subsistence in the action is not covered by one of the unit costs mentioned in Decision C(2021)35 the actual costs may be used.

- 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
- other ineligible costs: No

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 50% of the maximum grant amount; exceptionally less or no prefinancing). The prefinancing will be paid 30 days from entry into force /10 days before starting date / financial guarantee (if required) — whichever is the latest.

There will be one interim payments (with detailed cost reporting) for a maximum of 30% of the maximum grant amount. Pre-financing and interim payment may not exceed 80% of the maximum grant amount.

In addition, you might be expected to submit one or more progress reports not linked to 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 you or 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 art 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.

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

Prefinancing guarantees are normally requested from the coordinator, for the consortium. They must be provided during grant preparation, 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 (*art 23*).

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

Security rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 13)*

Ethics rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 14)*

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):*

- additional communication and dissemination activities: Yes

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

- durability: No

Other specificities

Consortium agreement: Yes

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 EU Login 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 [Calls for proposals](#) section (or, for calls sent by invitation to submit a proposal, through the link provided in the invitation letter).

Submit your proposal in 3 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
- 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 may 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](#)
- Topic Q&A 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 to the following email address: CNECT-I1-CALLS@ec.europa.eu.

Please indicate clearly the reference of the call and topic 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, 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). Entities that satisfy the eligibility criteria and that do not fall within one of the situations referred to in Articles 138(1) and 143(1) FR and that have a link with the applicant, in particular a legal or capital link, which is neither limited to the action nor established for the sole purpose of its implementation, will be considered as entities affiliated to the applicant (See Article 190.1 (b) EU Financial [Regulation - 2024/2509](#)). If affiliated entities participate in your project, please do not forget to provide documents demonstrating their affiliation link to your organisation as part of your application.
- Sole beneficiaries - Associations and interest groupings (EEIG): Entities **composed of members may participate as 'sole beneficiary'** (see [Article 190.1 \(a\)](#) EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509). Please note that if the action will be implemented by the members, they should also participate (either as beneficiaries or as affiliated entities (if foreseen in the call), otherwise their costs will NOT be eligible). A "sole" beneficiary is a legal entity, whether established specifically or not for the action, and which is:

- formed of several legal entities complying with the eligibility, non-exclusion and selection criteria set out in this call for proposals, and implementing together the proposed action;
 - and whose participating members are identified in the grant application (Part A and B)
- 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 may implement action tasks but in contrast to affiliated entities they do not need to have a capital or legal link to a beneficiary and cost incurred by Associated Partners can NOT be declared as eligible cost. In contrast to third parties giving in-kind contributions, the associated partners are fully named in the grant agreement and may implement important tasks by themselves. Entities that do not request funding or are not eligible for funding may participate in an action as Associated Partners, for example out of interest in contributing to the objectives of the action, gaining visibility, or participating due to ongoing (scientific) cooperation with a beneficiary. As with any other participant that does not sign the grant agreement, the beneficiaries need to ensure (e.g. through the consortium agreement) that Associated Partners implement their assigned action tasks in accordance with the grant agreement. The tasks must be set out in Annex 1.
- Consortium agreement — For practical and legal reasons it is 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).
- 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).
- 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 cumulation of funding/no double funding — It is strictly prohibited to cumulate **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 under two EU grants; projects must be designed as different actions, clearly delineated and separated for each grant (without overlaps).
- 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](#)). In order to demonstrate that the operating grant does not cover any costs of the action, the beneficiary should:
 - a. use analytical cost accounting that allows to separate all costs (including overheads) attributable to the operating grant and the action grant. For that purpose the beneficiary should use reliable accounting codes and allocation keys ensuring that the allocation of the costs is done in a fair, objective and realistic way.

b. record separately:

- all costs incurred for the operating grants (i.e. personnel, general running costs and other operating costs linked to the part of its usual annual activities), and
- all costs incurred for the action grants (including the actual indirect costs linked to the action)

If the operating grant covers the entire usual annual activity and budget of the beneficiary, the latter is not entitled to receive any indirect costs under the action grant.

- **Multiple proposals** — Applicants may submit more than one proposal for *different* projects under the same call (and be awarded 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 the others (or they 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 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](#).