



ERDF Interregional Innovation Investments Instrument (I3)

Call for proposals

Financial and advisory support for investments in interregional innovation projects for the development of value chains in less developed regions

**Strand 2
(I3-2026-INV2a)**

Version 1.0
13 May 2026



HISTORY OF CHANGES			
Version	Publication Date	Change	Page
1.0	13.05.2026	▪ Initial version.	
		▪	
		▪	
		▪	



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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

0. Introduction	5
1. Background.....	6
2. Objectives – Themes and priorities – Activities that can be funded – Expected impact	9
Topic: I3-2026-INV2a - Financial and advisory support for investments in interregional innovation projects for the development of value chains in less developed regions (Strand 2a)	9
Objectives	9
Themes and priorities (scope)	10
(i) Digital transition	11
(ii) Green transition	12
(iii) Smart manufacturing	13
Activities that can be funded (scope).....	14
Expected impact.....	19
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – at project level:.....	20
3. Available budget	21
4. Timetable and deadlines	21
5. Admissibility and documents	21
6. Eligibility.....	22
Eligible participants (eligible countries).....	23
Consortium composition	24
Eligible activities.....	24
Geographic location (target countries).....	25
Duration	25
Project budget.....	25
7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion.....	25
Financial capacity	25
Operational capacity	26
Exclusion	26
8. Evaluation and award procedure	27
9. Award criteria.....	28
10. Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreement	31
Starting date and project duration	31
Milestones and deliverables.....	31

Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount.....	32
Budget categories and cost eligibility rules.....	32
Reporting and payment arrangements.....	33
Prefinancing guarantees	34
Certificates	34
Liability regime for recoveries	34
Provisions concerning the project implementation.....	35
Other specificities	35
Non-compliance and breach of contract	35
11. How to submit an application.....	35
12. Help	36
13. Important	38
14. Delineation between the I3 Instrument Strands 1 and 2a.....	40

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 2024/2509 ([EU Financial Regulation](#))(¹)
- the basic act (ERDF Regulation [2021/1058](#)) (²).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2025-2027 I3 Instrument Work Programme (³) and will be managed by the **European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA)** ('Agency').

The call covers the following **topic**:

- **I3-2026-INV2a – Financial and advisory support for investments in interregional innovation projects for the development of value chains in less developed regions (Strand 2a)**

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)
 - criteria for financial and operational capacity and exclusion (section 7)

(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) 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).

(³) [Annex](#) to the Commission Implementing Decision [C\(2025\) 1575](#) of 18.3.2025 on the financing of the Interregional Innovation Investments Instrument by the European Regional Development Fund and the adoption of the work programme for 2025-2027.

- evaluation and award procedure (section 8)
- award criteria (section 9)
- legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreement (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*).

You are also encouraged to visit the following websites: [I3 Instrument](#), [I3 Support facility](#), [S3 Community of Practice](#), [S3 Thematic Platforms & Partnerships](#). The previously funded running I3 Instrument projects can be also consulted on the [EU Funding & Tenders Portal](#). The I3 Support Facility can be used to **identify partners** relevant for the development of I3 project proposals.

1. Background

Policy role of the I3 Instrument

The Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument is a funding instrument under the [European Regional Development Fund](#) (ERDF, article 13).

Implemented under Cohesion Policy, the I3 Instrument supports interregional cooperation in innovation by using **Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3)** ⁽⁴⁾ as a guiding framework to connect regional strengths, align complementary capabilities and strengthen EU value chains ⁽⁵⁾.

The I3 Instrument supports the scaling-up and commercialisation of interregional innovation projects in shared or complementary S3 areas. It promotes innovation diffusion and industrial deployment by mobilising coordinated investments across regions and enables innovation actors to move from validated solutions and investment ideas towards market uptake and economic impact.

This direction aligns with the Union's broader policy agenda on competitiveness, industrial transformation, innovation, security and resilience as reflected in the [Competitiveness Compass](#), the [Clean Industrial Deal](#), the [Single Market Strategy](#), the proposed [European Competitiveness Fund](#), the [Start-up and Scale-up Strategy](#), and the forthcoming [European Innovation Act](#). A core objective of the I3 Instrument is to

⁽⁴⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/communities-and-networks/s3-community-of-practice/about_en.

⁽⁵⁾ The term "value chain" is associated with both, a set of interdependent economic activities creating added value around a product, process or service, and a group of interlinked economic actors, operating in a strategic network across firms of different sizes, including SMEs, sectors and borders. (Strategic Forum for Important Projects of Common European Commission: [Report of the Strategic Forum for Important Projects of Common European Interest](#)).

strengthen EU and regional value chains and Europe's competitiveness through interregional cooperation that brings together less developed, transition and more developed regions ⁽⁶⁾.

In practice, the I3 Instrument focuses on bringing mature innovations into deployment across regions (move from TRL 6 to TRL 9)⁽⁷⁾. Projects are therefore expected to use I3 Instrument for validation, demonstration, adaptation, replication, scale-up and market uptake.

This approach helps connect companies, intermediaries and public authorities across regional ecosystems, with the aim of accelerating market uptake and strengthening European value chains. Over time, this should contribute to more diversified industrial activity and new business opportunities across EU regions.

Innovation deployment and replication

Thematically, the I3 Instrument addresses challenges linked to the twin transition and smart manufacturing. Projects may contribute to the critical technologies outlined in the [Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform](#) (STEP) ⁽⁸⁾, as well as to the key challenges identified in the [New European Innovation Agenda](#). These priorities reflect the need to strengthen EU value chains by accelerating the deployment, replication and scaling-up of innovative solutions in areas of strategic importance for the Union.

This also requires that cooperation builds on complementary Smart Specialisation priorities across regions, ensuring that S3 functions as a coordination and delivery mechanism rather than as a formal alignment only.

Projects supported under the I3 Instrument may build on preparatory work carried out under the I3 Capacity Building Strand (Strand 2b), on cooperation developed within [Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships](#), or on initiatives supported under other regional, national or EU programmes, including [ERDF](#), [Interreg](#), [Horizon Europe](#) and the [Digital Europe Programme](#). The I3 Instrument provides a framework for scaling such initiatives through coordinated interregional investments and accelerating their path towards commercialisation.

In this context, and based on implementation experience, intermediary organisations such as **clusters, innovation agencies, universities and other ecosystem actors** often play a key role in structuring interregional partnerships, supporting SMEs and facilitating the translation of innovation priorities into investable projects.

Structure of the I3 Instrument

In accordance with the 2021-2027 ERDF Regulation, the 2025-2027 I3 Work Programme covers the following key intervention areas and Strands:

- **Strand 1** provides financial and advisory support for interconnected interregional investments that de-risk innovation projects and strengthen EU competitiveness by

⁽⁶⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021D1130>

⁽⁷⁾ See table 14 at the end call document and [TRL | EURAXESS](#).

⁽⁸⁾ Regulation (EU) 2024/795 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 February 2024 establishing the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP).

supporting investments along existing value chains, including through the integration of innovation actors from less developed and transition regions.

- **Strand 2a** provides financial and advisory support for interregional investments supporting the creation of new value chains in less developed regions and improving the integration of actors from less developed regions into existing European value chains, with a strong focus on innovation diffusion and industrial deployment.
- **Strand 2b** strengthens regional innovation ecosystems by building capacities to identify, structure and prepare interregional innovation investment projects, paving the way for future applications under Strands 1 and 2a.

I3 supports integrated interregional investment projects where partners work together around shared priorities and a coherent investment logic. In practice, this means that work packages and activities across regions shall be clearly connected in purpose and content, so that they jointly deliver the overall project objectives and enable replication and scale-up in other regional contexts.

General policy objectives of this call – Strand 2a

The general policy objective of Strand 2a is to support the development and expansion of EU value chains by enabling interregional innovation investments that foster innovation diffusion, industrial deployment and scaling-up, with a particular focus on less developed and transition regions.

Strand 2a therefore supports projects that adapt and deploy innovative solutions in regions where uptake capacity and market integration need to be strengthened to enable participation in European value chains.

Strand 2a addresses structural and market barriers that limit the uptake and adaptation of innovative solutions in these regions by supporting coordinated interregional investments as identified in shared Smart Specialisation priorities. It aims to translate innovation developed in other regions into concrete deployment and market opportunities in less developed regions and transition regions, while strengthening their integration into European value chains.

Such investments shall also help complement and contribute to wider strategic industrial initiatives at European level. They should support the building of EU value chains that complement, among others, existing or future [Important Projects of Common European Interest \(IPCEIs\)](#). In doing so, they should strengthen SME participation and enable actors from less developed and transition regions to take concrete roles in European value chains.

Projects are therefore expected to demonstrate how their activities contribute to strengthening local industrial capacities, SME participation and long-term integration into interregional value chains.

Through this approach, Strand 2a contributes both to European competitiveness and to cohesion objectives, by enabling less developed and transition regions to take on concrete, sustainable roles within interregional value chains and benefit from innovation-driven growth.

In this context, successful projects are those where innovation deployment results in durable economic activities and business opportunities that remain visible in participating regions beyond the project lifetime.

For a detailed overview of the respective objectives and type of projects supported under Strands 1 and 2a please see section 14.

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

Topic: I3-2026-INV2a - Financial and advisory support for investments in interregional innovation projects for the development of value chains in less developed regions (Strand 2a)

Objectives

This call for proposals is for Strand 2a and focuses on reinforcing the integration of innovation actors from less developed regions and transition regions in developing EU value chains ⁽⁹⁾ while creating local opportunities for innovation and smart economic transformation in regions with shared (or complementary) smart specialisation areas.

The objective of the present I3 Instrument Strand 2a call for proposals is to support interregional innovation investments by offering consortia of innovation actors from the quadruple helix ecosystems ⁽¹⁰⁾ the necessary **financial and advisory support** to bring their innovations to a mature level, ready for scale-up and commercialisation. This call specifically aims at reducing the innovation divide in Europe, with a strong cohesion policy focus on integrating less developed and transition regions into European value chains.

Projects shall demonstrate how less developed and transition regions will take on concrete and sustainable roles in the targeted value chains, including through business opportunities, capability building and follow-up investment perspectives.

Thereby, proposals under this call for proposals seek to facilitate:

- the support of innovation actors with investment ideas that are ready to be developed into mature business cases;
- the identification of new regional technological domains and market opportunities with the EU priorities and bridging the gap between the supply and demand sides to help innovation ecosystems overcome market failures;
- the creation of new value chains in less developed and transition regions and the integration into interregional and cross border value chains with more developed regions;
- the improvement of knowledge and practical skills in business and investment planning, particularly for SMEs, as well as for other consortium partners.

⁽⁹⁾ The term “value chain” is associated with both, a set of interdependent economic activities creating added value around a product, process or service, and a group of interlinked economic actors, operating in a strategic network across firms of different sizes, including SMEs, sectors and borders. (Strategic Forum for Important Projects of Common European Commission: [Report of the Strategic Forum for Important Projects of Common European Interest](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁾ 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.

- the application and the deployment of innovative technologies and solutions in less developed and transition regions;
- the interaction and collaboration of SMEs from less developed and transition regions in interregional/multi-national value chains with innovation actors from more developed regions.

The focus is on technology transfer and highly specialised advisory support for the implementation of experiments and demonstration cases in companies. Participation of innovation actors is based on shared or complementary innovation priorities, as defined in their regional and/or national smart specialisation strategies. Projects shall show a balanced participation of regions with varying levels of development and innovation performance.

I3 Instrument business investment cases start with a minimum TRL 6 ⁽¹¹⁾ and have the ambition to facilitate demonstration and to accelerate market uptake and commercialisation. The development of the business and investment cases is facilitated by the regional innovation ecosystems with companies in the lead. **Projects are expected to demonstrate a clear role for enterprises, in particular SMEs, in driving deployment, market uptake and scale-up activities.**

The support to be provided shall include one or both of the following forms:

- (a) financial support, through direct funding to consortium beneficiaries or through cascade funding/financial support to third parties (FSTP), and/or
- (b) non-financial support, such as coaching, mentoring, or matchmaking activities. See below sections.

This shall include a credible perspective for follow-up investment, wider deployment and long-term integration of project results into European value chains.

At the end of the project implementation, all involved regions and partners shall have a clear perspective on how to exploit and build on the I3 project results, including through the broad introduction of new products, services, or production processes.

Projects are expected to deliver action-oriented policy recommendations addressed to policymakers at **regional, national and European levels**. Recommendations shall be clear, practical and evidence-based, drawing on the project's implementation and deployment experience (including barriers, enabling conditions and market uptake constraints). They shall explain how each recommended action addresses the identified need and indicate where uncertainty remains. Recommendations shall link to relevant policy initiatives and strategic frameworks at regional, national and European levels, as appropriate, and connect project results to the proposed actions. A manageable number of recommendations should be provided, prioritised by impact or urgency, and shall clarify who shall act, at which level (regional, national or European), and through which instruments, including, where relevant, an indication of practical conditions for implementation and potential resource needs. Recommendations shall, where relevant, also identify conditions needed to support follow-up investment, wider replication and stronger participation of less developed and transition regions in European value chains.

⁽¹¹⁾ [Annex](#) (page 2) to the Commission Implementing Decision [C\(2025\) 1575](#) of 18.3.2025 on the financing of the Interregional Innovation Investments Instrument by the European Regional Development Fund and the adoption of the work programme for 2025-2027.

At the end of this call document **Section 14** summarises the different objectives, dimensions, leverage effects and expected impact of the Strand 1 and 2a of the present I3 calls for proposals.

Themes and priorities (scope)

To enhance the EU's competitive edge by strategically addressing the current challenges, proposals submitted under this call for proposals must tackle one or more of the designated thematic priorities:

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

Across these thematic priorities, projects are expected to contribute to the strengthening of resilient and competitive European value chains through concrete interregional investment cases with clear deployment and scale-up potential.

The thematic priorities encourage applications in the combination of the following investment areas (non-exhaustive lists):

(i) Digital transition

This thematic priority supports interregional investment projects that deploy and scale up digital technologies to strengthen Europe's competitiveness, productivity and resilience.

In line with EU policy orientations, actions under this priority shall contribute to one or more objectives:

- closing the innovation gap, by accelerating the translation of digital innovation into market-ready solutions;
- reducing dependencies and resilience by reinforcing European digital value chains.

Digital technologies present significant growth potential for Europe. This priority targets investments in businesses and public administrations, notably within innovation ecosystems, supporting the deployment of digital solutions that enhance efficiency, accessibility and quality of services. This includes digital technologies contributing to the security and resilience of critical infrastructures, improving accessibility, efficiency and quality of services for businesses and citizens, while contributing to cybersecurity and reducing the digital divide. Actions shall focus on deployment and scale-up through concrete investment cases and replication across participating regions in one or a combination of the following investment areas (a non-exhaustive list):

- Deployment and scale-up of innovative solutions for **business digitalisation and digital services**, including their application and integration in strategic sectors in line with the [Competitiveness Compass](#);
- Digital solutions **facilitating access to finance**, scaling and growth of innovative companies, including digital tools for investment readiness, financial management and cross border expansion, in particular for SMEs and scale-ups,

where these solutions contribute to the development, validation or scale-up of interregional investment cases;

- Deployment and practical use of **artificial intelligence solutions** that automate processes and support better decision-making (for example optimisation, forecasting and process automation), with a clear path towards market uptake and scaling;
- Digital solutions supporting the development and scaling up of innovative technologies with defence and dual-use relevance, contributing to the **resilience and security of critical infrastructures** and strategic value chains;
- **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**;
- Deployment and scale-up of **cybersecurity solutions** that help businesses protect their systems and data, such as tools for detecting cyberattacks, managing digital identities, responding to incidents and enabling secure data sharing, strengthening the resilience of companies and digital value chains;
- Investments in innovative technological solutions that increase the **security** and resilience of communication, transport and digital networks;
- Digital-based open innovation, supporting **entrepreneurial discovery processes** and cooperation between academia and businesses in the framework of smart specialisation;
- Support **upskilling and reskilling activities** that help the workforce adapt to evolving digital technologies, where these actions are directly linked to company investments in innovative digital solutions and aligned with Smart Specialisation priorities.
- New or significantly **upgraded services for e-government**, including the uptake 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;
- Investments in innovative solutions for **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.
- Demonstration and validation of new digital technologies enabling the large-scale deployment of upgraded IT systems in public administrations, including **cloud-based solutions**, data platforms and automation tools;
- Digital solutions supporting the **transformation of public services** in strategic sectors, including, for example, business-facing administrative and permitting services in less developed and transition regions, contributing to reduced administrative burden, improved transparency and faster service delivery.

(ii) Green transition

This thematic priority supports interregional investment projects that deploy and scale up innovative solutions contributing to the green transition, while strengthening Europe's competitiveness, industrial resilience and resource efficiency.

In line with EU policy orientations, actions under this priority shall contribute to one or more objectives:

- the decarbonisation and modernisation of European industrial value chains to reduce fossil fuel dependencies,
- the development and uptake of clean, circular and resource-efficient technologies to reduce dependencies and increase resilience of value chains.

The I3 Instrument supports innovative interregional value chain investments that reinforce resilient industrial ecosystems and enable the replication and scaling of sustainable solutions across participating regions.

This priority encourages applications in one or a combination of the following investment areas (a non-exhaustive list):

- **Decarbonisation and low-carbon industrial transformation**, including investments reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving air quality and modernising energy-intensive industries through clean technologies;
- Scaling and industrial uptake of **sustainable blue economy solutions**, including innovative technologies and business models supporting sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, marine renewable energy, coastal resilience and circular use of marine resources, while strengthening regional value chains and competitiveness;
- **Sustainable urban and territorial solutions**, including innovative investments contributing to smart and sustainable cities, improved environmental performance and climate resilience;
- **Renewable energy and energy efficiency**, including investments in renewable generation, storage and system integration, energy-efficient industrial processes and energy-efficient buildings and renovation solutions;
- **Circular economy and sustainable use of resources**, including waste reduction, reuse and recycling solutions, use of secondary raw materials (for example in construction, plastics and textiles), industrial symbiosis and circular business models such as repair, leasing and modular design;
- **Sustainable and smart mobility solutions**, including clean transport systems, alternative fuels and intelligent mobility infrastructure contributing to zero-pollution objectives;
- Nature-based and **biodiversity-related solutions**, where linked to innovation, competitiveness and sustainable value chain development.

(iii) Smart manufacturing

This thematic priority supports interregional investment projects that accelerate the transformation of European industrial ecosystems towards digitally enabled, climate-neutral and resilient production systems, strengthening Europe's capacity to design, produce and scale critical technologies within its territory.

In line with EU policy orientations, actions under this priority shall contribute to one or more objectives:

- modernising European manufacturing ecosystems,
- accelerating the twin green and digital transition of industry,
- reinforcing the integration and resilience of European value chains.

Smart manufacturing refers to the industrial application of advanced technologies and knowledge-based systems to produce high-value and complex products, while improving resilience, efficiency, flexibility and sustainability.

This thematic priority encourages applications in one or a combination of the following investment areas (a non-exhaustive list):

- **Industrial demonstration and first industrial deployment**, including pilot lines, testbeds and real-environment validation processes that help new industrial products and manufacturing technologies reach the market faster and enable the adoption of more efficient, sustainable and digitally enabled production systems;
- **Digital and data-driven manufacturing systems**, including artificial intelligence, digital twins, advanced robotics, high-performance computing, and smart automation tools enhancing productivity, flexibility and resilience of industrial processes;
- Valorisation of **research results** and **industrial innovation diffusion**, including co-creation processes with industrial ecosystems, SMEs, clusters and end-users, supporting the scaling of advanced manufacturing solutions across regions;
- Interregional integration of **testing, pilot and demonstration facilities**, including complementary use of infrastructures across regions and synergies with circularity hubs, digital innovation hubs or industrial data spaces;
- Innovative investments in **advanced and sustainable materials**, including lightweight, recyclable, bio-based or high-performance materials strengthening strategic value chains;
- **Circular and resource-efficient manufacturing**, including de- and remanufacturing, industrial symbiosis, reduction of material consumption, waste and emissions, and investments contributing to carbon neutrality;
- Strengthening **strategic and resilient European manufacturing value chains**, including scaling production capacity in critical industrial ecosystems and integrating SMEs into competitive EU value chains.

Activities that can be funded (scope)

Projects selected under this call for proposals will be implemented through an investment portfolio approach, where beneficiaries (including the SMEs) as well as SMEs as third parties performing tasks complementing the main project investments activities (see below section on financial support to third parties - FSTP) can play a role in specific segments of EU value chains. Within a specific thematic/technological area of cooperation, the project portfolio might be composed of several investment-ready sub-projects that address one or several bottlenecks in a value chain identified in the application. These sub-projects are necessary to test and demonstrate the validity of technologies/solutions and accelerate innovation uptake, thus increasing the competitiveness of EU value chains.

The proposal must clearly describe the progress from innovation towards commercialisation and upscaling that is expected as a result of the project and its investment portfolio.

The proposal shall also explain how the project portfolio contributes to investment readiness and how successful investment cases could be taken forward through follow-up financing at regional, national, private or EU level.

Where relevant, this may include explaining how project results, sub-projects or participating actors contribute to, complement or connect with larger strategic European industrial initiatives, including IPCEIs or other coordinated value-chain investments.

The proposal must also provide an outline of an exploitation plan that sets out the expected way forward following the completion of the project, in particular, if the new products/processes or services supported by the I3 Instrument are not yet ready for the market ⁽¹²⁾. This may also include the involvement of public authorities or other relevant partners ⁽¹³⁾, whether as members of the consortium or through other forms of structured cooperation, in order to help assess the maturity and relevance of the proposed investment cases for future scale-up. This shall help prepare credible business and investment cases for the next stage and support the development of future investment pipelines, without implying any automatic access to further funding. Target investments can be both **tangible and intangible** ⁽¹⁴⁾ investments in the form of one or more of the **following activities**:

- 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 facilities ⁽¹⁵⁾ 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;

⁽¹²⁾ The consortium can use the "Innovation Radar" (<https://innovation-radar.ec.europa.eu/>) to explore value creation opportunities, the technology readiness, as well as the business and the market readiness of the innovation.

⁽¹³⁾ Managing authorities of Cohesion Policy programmes, regional innovation or industrial policy authorities, or equivalent public bodies responsible for investment support instruments may be well placed to contribute to assessing the maturity and strategic relevance of project investment cases.

⁽¹⁴⁾ e.g. IPR, know-how, licensing.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Depreciation costs for testing and demonstration facilities, as well as costs for the use of existing infrastructures.

- 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;
- Advisory support for investment (developing or implementing interregional business and “go to market” investment plans in specific value chains).
- Activities preparing follow-up investment pathways for mature sub-projects, including business planning, investor-oriented presentation of investment cases, and advisory support linked to future scale-up and market deployment.

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.), skills development are also encouraged, particularly when aimed at replicating project outcomes in less developed regions, for SMEs (through mentoring, coaching, training, accelerator programmes, ecosystem visits for customized innovation guidance and market readiness, etc.) and for beneficiaries and affiliated entities (through knowledge-sharing workshops, collaborative events, staff exchanges, ecosystem visits for effective interregional collaboration, etc.).

These support actions will only be eligible in combination with the implementation of the tangible and intangible investment listed above ⁽¹⁶⁾.

This I3 Instrument Strand 2a call for proposals **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 technologies or of fossil fuels). Applicants will need to verify that their proposal complies with this requirement.

Activities (financial and non-financial support) must reflect a balanced participation of beneficiaries from regions with varying levels of development and innovation performance, with a strong emphasis on supporting and leveraging the potential of less developed regions and other categories of regions. In this context, proposals are encouraged to actively involve **outermost regions** - with limited prior participation in interregional innovation investments - in line with the place-based and cohesion objectives of the I3 Instrument. Involvement of these regions shall be reflected both in terms of balanced budget distribution and ensuring that their participation leads to **tangible and concrete benefits** for the territories concerned.

Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) ⁽¹⁷⁾

I3 Instrument projects are implemented by the beneficiaries, in line with the project application. FSTP can be used to enable cascade funding where it offers an added benefit, e.g. in facilitating the involvement of SMEs, fostering replication and innovation diffusion ⁽¹⁸⁾.

However, FSTP is only allowed under the following conditions:

- Based on publication of one or more open call(s) that shall contribute to the objectives of the project, and provide solutions to the needs identified by the SMEs/companies in the project consortium;

⁽¹⁶⁾ The relevance, quality, cost effectiveness and impact of the proposed support actions will be evaluated according to the conditions laid down in the call document.

⁽¹⁷⁾ See also section 6 for eligibility conditions.

⁽¹⁸⁾ 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).

- Justified by the needs of the main investors involved in the consortium (addressing specific innovation challenges identified within the investment portfolio, exploitation, replication, etc.);
- The maximum amount of financial support per third party ('recipient') shall not exceed EUR 100 000;
- The direct recipients of the financial support must be SMEs that are established in EU Member States regions including overseas countries and territories (OCTs)⁽¹⁹⁾;
- The call(s) must be open, published widely and conform to EU standards concerning transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality;
- The call(s) must remain open for at least 2 months;
- The outcome of the call(s) must be made publicly available, in particular through the beneficiaries' websites, social media channels and other appropriate communication tools, including a description of the selected projects, award dates, project durations, and final recipient legal names and countries;
- The costs for Financial Support to Third Parties (i.e. SMEs) **cannot exceed 30%** of the total eligible costs.
- Financial Support to Third Parties may only aim at supporting SMEs able to provide an added value to the project, 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.

If the proposal includes Financial Support to Third Parties, it must specify why financial support to third parties is needed and how it will be managed. It also has to include estimates of the proportions of financial support allocated to third parties across various types of regions⁽²⁰⁾. The proposal must also describe the results to be obtained and the expected effects on the innovation ecosystems of the participating regions.

Specific requirements

- **At least 70%** of the total direct eligible costs must be allocated to investments in companies, with a focus on SMEs. The proposal shall describe how this requirement will be met, specifying the total eligible costs for:
 - SME consortium partners (beneficiaries and affiliated entities)
 - Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP)
 - non-financial support provided to the SMEs of the portfolio.
- **At least 50%** of the total eligible costs must be incurred in less developed regions either by beneficiaries directly or, where FSTP is included, by the beneficiaries' own costs and their costs of FSTP for third parties combined. In case FSTP is used, the proposal shall describe how this requirement will be met.
- Proposals must demonstrate a comprehensive strategy for **ensuring active participation of legal entities from less developed/transition/outermost regions** (notably regions with limited prior participation in interregional innovation investments)⁽²¹⁾ alongside specific measures for enhancing their active involvement and contribution to the consortium's objectives. This shall include plans for replication of results in participating regions and engagement

⁽¹⁹⁾ https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/countries/overseas-countries-and-territories_en.

⁽²⁰⁾ More developed, less developed, transition and outermost regions.

⁽²¹⁾ Participating regions can be found in the I3 Instrument Observatory, a dynamic dashboard, designed to present overview of I3 projects. The dashboard is based on the I3 project data 2021-2026: <https://interregional-innovation-investments.ec.europa.eu/i3-instrument-observatory>.

of relevant regional authorities for sustainable impact.

Interaction with the S3 Community of Practice and I3 Support facility

Applicants are encouraged to actively engage with the wider community, in particular in the framework of the Commission [Smart Specialisation Community of Practice \(S3 COP\)](#) and relevant [Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships \(TSSP\)](#).

S3 CoP is the central node on guidance, networking, support, and peer learning on Smart Specialisation within the EU. It offers policy advice, support to thematic platforms and partnerships and targeted support to regions which in turn facilitate links between innovation actors across all the regions.

Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs) foster interregional cooperation by bringing together regions to explore new value chains based on shared interests in smart specialisation strategies which facilitates finding partners for formulating funding proposals.

Successful applicants (beneficiaries) are expected to engage proactively with the I3 Support Facility (I3SF) throughout project implementation, making use of the support services and opportunities it offers. The aim is to help projects strengthen their interregional investment logic and implementation (for example, scale-up readiness, uptake conditions, and continuity beyond the project). The I3SF provides technical and policy-oriented support and facilitates peer exchange and connections across the I3 community, with particular attention to the needs of less developed and transition regions. Engagement may include participation in relevant I3SF activities and targeted exchanges with the I3SF team to support delivery and maximise project impact.

Interaction with the S3 managing authorities

During implementation, the projects must demonstrate the active involvement of ERDF managing authorities and the S3 competent body. This includes, among others, the organisation of meetings and information events with the S3 and managing authorities of the regions represented in the consortium. Applicants must, therefore, describe the approach how S3/ERDF managing authorities will be involved during project implementation and after the project's completion, ensuring that all involved regions and partners take an active role in building on the project results.

Open Science Approach

An open science policy approach will be supported under this I3 instrument call for proposals 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 I3 Instrument 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 shall 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 during the project implementation to complement the value chain of the companies (main investors) that are beneficiaries in the consortium.

Expected impact

FOR ALL THREE THEMATIC PRIORITIES:

Expected impact at the closure of the project (non-exhaustive list):

- Creation of new value chains in less developed regions and transition regions;
- Application and deployment of innovative technologies and solutions (new to the region) in less developed and transition regions (innovation diffusion);
- Exploitation of project results;
- Innovative technologies tested and adopted by the market ⁽²²⁾;
- Innovative solutions deployed 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;
- Uptake of technologically/economically reliable and viable solutions on the market;
- Deployment of new technologies fostering the growth of Europe's manufacturing sector;
- Innovative technologies adopted by SMEs;
- Identification of possible sources of funding/funding mix, to cover the residual investment needs (public-private partnerships for the deployment of innovation, the collaboration with venture capitals, EIB group loans etc);
- Strengthening innovation diffusion channels;
- Reinforcing the capacity of regions to co-invest together, joining forces on common S3 investment priorities (interregional investments).

Long-term impact (non-exhaustive list):

- Reduction of the innovation divide and of disparities between more developed and less developed regions;
- Increased companies' productivity and efficiency;
- Improved user-friendly, accessible and interoperable public services;

⁽²²⁾ Minimum TRL 6 with the ambition to facilitate demonstration and to accelerate market uptake and commercialisation, see section 2.4.

- Improved level of digital skills;
- Improved EU innovation capacity and competitiveness;
- Creating new market opportunities for EU companies;
- Making the EU industry more efficient and sustainable;
- 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);
- 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, security, health, climate, social and economy;
- Contribution to the twin transition and to the efficiency, sustainability and competitiveness of the EU manufacturing sector;
- Economic growth and job creation;
- Reinforcing/reshaping EU value chains whilst increasing the competitiveness of the EU in global markets.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – at project level:

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, EU associations and interest groups, other.

Innovation

- 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.

Socio-economic benefits

At the end of the project:

- 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.

Employment

At the end of the project:

- Number of jobs created (FTE) (male, female, non-binary).

Investments

At the end of the project:

- 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

At the end of the project:

- 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.

Gender ⁽²³⁾ (Persons reached)

At the end of the project:

- Number of persons reached: male, female, non-binary

3. Available budget

The estimated total available call budget for 2026 is **EUR 30.2 million**.

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

4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	13 May 2026
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>12 November 2026 17:00:00 CET</u> <u>(Brussels)</u>
Evaluation:	November 2026 – April 2027

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

Information on evaluation results:	May 2027
GA signature:	August 2027

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*)
- Part C – contains additional project data and the project's contribution to EU programme key performance indicators (*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*):
 - Consolidated budget table (*template available in the Submission System*)
 - Self-declaration, **only from the coordinator** to confirm the alignment with the national/regional S3 policies, strategies and priorities of all Member States and Regions represented by organisations participating in this application (*template available in the Submission System*).


Please note that the amounts entered the summarised budget table (filled in directly online) must correspond to the amounts calculated in the consolidated 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 agreement, each beneficiary and affiliated entity will have to confirm this again by signing a declaration of honour (DoH).

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))
 - non-EU countries:
 - listed EEA countries and countries associated to the I3 Instrument ([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 documents showing legal status and origin.

Entities from non-EU countries 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


Exceptional funding — Entities from non-EU countries are exceptionally eligible for funding, 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 persons ⁽²⁴⁾.

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' ⁽²⁵⁾.  Please note that if the action will be implemented by the members, they should also participate

⁽²⁴⁾ See Article 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

⁽²⁵⁾ For the definitions, see Articles 190(2) and 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

(either as beneficiaries or as affiliated entities, otherwise their costs will NOT be eligible).

Countries currently negotiating association agreements — Beneficiaries from countries with ongoing negotiations for participating in the programme (*see list of participating countries above*) may participate in the call and can sign grants if the negotiations are concluded before grant signature and if the association covers the call (i.e. is retroactive and covers both the part of the programme and the year when the call was launched).

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) ⁽²⁶⁾. 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 2020/2092 ⁽²⁷⁾. 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).

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

Consortium composition

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

- Minimum 3 independent entities established in 3 different regions of 2 eligible countries.
- The consortium must have at least one entity established in a more developed region ⁽²⁸⁾.

The coordinator must be a:

- Public body or
- Non-for-profit organisation or
- Entity entrusted by national or regional governments to develop or implement innovation and investment actions for SMEs ⁽²⁹⁾ (i.e. cluster organisations, public-private partnerships, development agencies, innovation agencies, etc.).

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.

⁽²⁶⁾ 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](#).

⁽²⁷⁾ 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).

⁽²⁸⁾ 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.

⁽²⁹⁾ Tasks transferred by means of an individual act of a public legal nature (concession, administrative agreement) or private law (contract). This list is not exhaustive.

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

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

- activities that are excluded from the scope of the ERDF according to Article 7 of the ERDF Regulation, and
- activities that do not comply with the do no significant harm principle.

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*).

Geographic location (target countries)

Proposals must relate to activities taking place in the eligible countries (*see above*) and regions covered by the consortium. For FSTP, activities may take place in all EU regions or overseas countries and territories (OCTs) ⁽³⁰⁾, if they are complementary to the main activities of the consortium (*see section 2 on FSTP*).

Duration

Projects normally range between 18 and 36 months.

Extensions are possible, if duly justified and only through an amendment to the grant agreement.

Project budget

Project budget (requested grant amount) normally range between EUR 2 million and EUR 10 million 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.

The costs for financial support to third parties cannot exceed 30% of the total eligible costs.

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

⁽³⁰⁾ https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/countries/overseas-countries-and-territories_en.

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 responsibilities 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 (see sections 2.2 and 2.3 of the Application form):

- 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 participate ⁽³¹⁾:

- 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 misconduct ⁽³²⁾ (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)
- intentionally and without proper justification resisted ⁽³³⁾ 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 that ⁽³⁴⁾:

- during the award procedure they misrepresented information required as a condition for participating or failed to supply that information

⁽³¹⁾ See Articles 138 and 143 of EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

⁽³²⁾ '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.

⁽³³⁾ '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.

⁽³⁴⁾ See Article 143 EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

- 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** assisted by independent external 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) The *ex-aequo* proposals will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the award criterion 'Impact'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Relevance'.
- 2) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the gender balance among the personnel named in the proposal who will be primarily responsible for carrying out the innovation activities. The reference to gender equality plans in participating organisations can also be considered.
- 3) Any further prioritisation will be based on geographical diversity, defined as the number of Member States represented in the proposal, which do not already receive funds from projects higher up the ranking list.
- 4) If a distinction still cannot be made, further prioritisation can be done by considering the overall project portfolio, and the creation of positive synergies between projects and involvement of SMEs 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.*

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 (5 points):

The degree to which the proposal is strategically relevant for the overall call objectives and the themes and priorities of the call by fostering regional integration, innovation, and investment

1.a. Interregional Dimension. The proposal aligns with the objectives of the I3 Instrument and the specific call objectives (as outlined in Sections 1 and 2), by outlining credible key performance indicators (KPIs), and by integrating less developed regions (LDRs), outermost regions, fostering innovation within these territories, and contributing to the reduction of the innovation divide between more developed and less developed regions. This includes how well the proposal promotes interconnected investments across complementary regional innovation ecosystems, builds on similar or complementary Smart Specialisation priorities, and strengthens the competitiveness and resilience of European value chains, thereby generating clear EU added value.

1.b. Innovation Dimensions. The proposed innovation — whether in product, process, marketing or organisational terms — demonstrates novelty and ambition within the above-described thematic areas and progress beyond the current state of innovation. The extent to which the proposal accurately describes the initial and final Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) in accordance with the innovation call requirements.

1.c. Investment Dimension. The proposal demonstrates a clear and credible investment dimension at regional, national, and/or EU level, including well-defined pathways from investment concepts or business cases to concrete implementation. This encompasses up-scaling supported by robust business plans and appropriate derisking measures. Additionally, the extent to which the project shows financial solidity, including a clear understanding of the financial risks, such as those linked to external factors, regulatory constraints, market developments, and reliance on public or private financing.

2. Quality (5 points):

The degree to which the proposal exhibits a well-founded approach and organisation to achieve project objectives.

2.a. Methodology and Technical Quality. The proposal clearly presents a sound concept and methodology, demonstrating strong technical quality. It shows a comprehensive understanding of the technical requirements and outlines a realistic approach to implementing and achieving the project's objectives.

2.b. Quality & Composition of the Consortium. The proposal details a well-structured consortium, with a clear division of tasks and responsibilities. This includes the operational capacity, ability to work together effectively and the presence of appropriate decision-making mechanisms. The proposal also demonstrates a well-performing quadruple-helix ecosystem model, incorporating companies, public research institutions, financial institutions, public bodies, and final users.

2.c. Feasibility and Risk management. The extent to which the proposal demonstrates the feasibility of completing the project within the proposed time frame, with a clear monitoring roadmap for achieving the objectives. This includes

the soundness of the milestones, the adequacy of the resources allocated within the work plan, and a credible risk management and mitigation plan.

3. Cost effectiveness (5 points):

The degree to which the proposal demonstrates prudent and strategic allocation and management of financial resources, aligned with the project's objectives.

3.a. Appropriateness. The proposal illustrates how the proposed actions represent the best value for money. This means that the overall budget and grant requested are appropriate for the results and impacts.

3.b. Allocation of resources. The proposal illustrates how clear and justified the management and allocation of financial resources are between the activities and within the consortium.

3.c. Subcontracting. The proposal explains the justification and proportionality of subcontracting, ensuring it constitutes a limited part of the action and is carried out by third parties.

3.d. FSTP. Where applicable, the proposed cascade funding is appropriately designed and justified in relation to the objectives of the project, including its capacity to reach a critical mass and effectively complement the exploitation and uptake of the project's results.

4. Impact (10 points):

The extent to which the project is expected to generate substantial and lasting benefits, fully aligned with the call's strategic objectives.

4.a. Long-term Impact. The proposal clearly defines its goals, expected results, and the short-, medium-, and long-term effects. This includes alignment with the workplan, emphasizing contributions to regional development and integration, particularly in LDRs.

4.b. Target Groups and Stakeholders. The proposal clearly identifies and describes the impact on the target groups, potential users, stakeholders, and multipliers.

4.c. Environmental, social, territorial and economic impact. The proposal clearly demonstrates credible economic, social and territorial cohesion impacts, and explains the expected wider economic, environmental and societal effects. Extend to which, the territorial effects arising from the creation and supporting of value chains in LDRs (INV2a) is effectively addressed.

4.d. Replication and Sustainability beyond EU funding. The proposal demonstrates the potential for replication and upscaling across all regions, with particular emphasis on less developed and transition regions. It outlines a clear plan for the project's continuation and sustainability once EU funding concludes, integrating strategies within the workplan that support ongoing development and long-term impact.

4.e. Communication, Dissemination, and Exploitation Strategy ⁽³⁵⁾. The proposal presents a robust strategy for communication, dissemination, and exploitation and of high quality; the exploitation strategy is robust and convincingly presented, with clear measures to maximize expected outcomes.

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: 25 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 2.5/5, 2.5/5, 2.5/5, 5/10 points.

Overall threshold: 17.5 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). Other proposals will be rejected.

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

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

⁽³⁵⁾ **Communication** involves broadly informing and engaging stakeholders about the project's objectives and achievements. **Dissemination** focuses on actively distributing knowledge and project results to target audiences to maximise visibility and impact. **Exploitation** refers to utilising project outcomes for maximum benefit, including commercialisation, policy development, or further research and innovation initiatives.

The milestones, deliverables and reports 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 are mandatory** for all projects:

- Annual report on the engagement with the managing authorities of ERDF programmes and the authorities responsible for S3 in the regions represented in the consortium
- data management plan
- full dissemination and exploitation plan
- yearly report for cumulative payments (for projects with more than EUR 5 million requested EU contribution) (only for projects with at least one project period of >18 months).
- business and investment plan
- report on the implementation of the business investments belonging to the portfolio
- assessment of the innovation readiness at the end of the project (technology, market or investment readiness)
- list of remaining bottlenecks.

Their timing and format for submission will be further agreed, in coordination with the Granting Authority and the relevant Project Officer.

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 (requested 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 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*).

The costs will be reimbursed at the funding rates fixed in the Grant Agreement (**100%** for the costs for 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 cost ⁽³⁶⁾: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost ⁽³⁷⁾: Yes ⁽³⁸⁾
- equipment costs: depreciation
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties: allowed for grants or similar; maximum amount per third party EUR 100 000, unless a higher amount is required because the objective of the action would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult to achieve and this is duly justified in the Application Form
- indirect cost flat-rate: 7% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteer's costs and exempted specific cost categories, if any)
- 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
 - European Commission events: costs for meetings organised by the granting authority are eligible (travel costs for a project representative, return ticket to Brussels and accommodation for one night) only if the meeting takes

⁽³⁶⁾ [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).

⁽³⁷⁾ 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).

⁽³⁸⁾ 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.

place after the project starting date set out in the Grant Agreement. Where the events take place in Brussels on different dates, eligibility shall apply to each event accordingly. The starting date can be changed through an amendment, if needed

- 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 one **interim payment** (with detailed cost reporting).

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. 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 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

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): not applicable*

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 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 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 at the latest 4 working days before the call submission deadline to the following email address: EISMEA-I3-INSTRUMENT-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). 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.
- **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 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, 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](#)).
- **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 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](#).

14. Delineation between the I3 Instrument Strands 1 and 2a

	Strand 1	Strand 2a
General Objective	<p>Increase of the competitiveness and resilience of EU value chains, in shared smart specialisation areas</p> <p>Commercialisation and scaling up of innovation for the development of European value chains</p>	<p>Creation of new value chains in less developed regions (LDR)</p> <p>Commercialisation and scaling up of innovation in European value chains</p>
Interregional Dimension	<p>Interconnected investments, to de-risk investments and to maximise the exploitation of technologies/solutions developed in Europe</p>	<p>Interconnecting LDR and more developed regions (MDR), innovation followers and innovation leaders, SMEs to multinational companies (MNC)</p>
Value Chain Dimension	<p>Focus on value chain related investments to make EU value chains more competitive</p> <p>Interconnection of regional value chains to create EU added value, including LDRs in the creation of value</p>	<p>Creating new Value chains in LDR, connecting those value chain to MDRs</p> <p>Creating interconnection between SMEs from LDR and FDI driven value chains (Multinationals)</p>

<p>Innovation Dimension</p>	<p>Innovation Creation, TRL 6-9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New to Europe or new to the application sector • Valorisation of research results • Increasing technology readiness • Exploitation and deployment strategies in the internal market and outside Europe 	<p>Innovation Diffusion TRL 6-9 ⁽³⁹⁾</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploitation of research results • Application of innovative technologies and solutions in LDRs (in the same sector) • New to the region when an innovative technology is deployed (adaptation to the needs of companies of LDRs) • New to the application sectors (adaptation of technology to the needs of a specific sector in LDRs)
<p>Smart Specialisation dimension</p>	<p>Similar or complementary S3 priorities</p> <p>S3 as coordination principle for interregional collaboration</p>	<p>Similar or complementary S3 priorities</p> <p>S3 as coordination principle for interregional collaboration</p>
<p>Investment Dimension</p>	<p>Piloting and demonstration, innovation upscale</p> <p>Pilot plants, testbed for small and large scale demonstration in real environment</p> <p>Highly specialised advisory support for the implementation of experiments and demonstration cases in companies</p> <p>Tangible and intangible investments (depreciation) to increase market readiness</p> <p>Skills development for the uptake of innovative technologies/solutions and processes in companies</p>	<p>Piloting and demonstration, innovation upscale</p> <p>Pilot plants, testbed for small and large scale demonstration in real environment</p> <p>Tech transfer and highly specialised advisory support for the implementation of experiments and demonstration cases in companies</p> <p>Tangible and intangible investments for innovation deployment (depreciation)</p> <p>Skills development for the deployment of innovative technologies/solutions and processes in companies</p>
<p>Leverage effects on mainstreaming funding</p>	<p>I3 Instrument project as concrete business and investment cases to leverage investments from mainstream funding</p>	<p>I3 Instrument project as concrete business and investment cases to leverage investments from mainstream funding</p>

⁽³⁹⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2014_2015/annexes/h2020-wp1415-annex-g-trl_en.pdf.

Expected impact	Contribution to the twin transition and to the efficiency, sustainability and competitiveness of the EU manufacturing sector Increasing EU competitiveness	Contribution to the creation of new value chains in LDRs, contribution to the twin transition and to the efficiency, sustainability and competitiveness of the EU manufacturing sector Reduction of the innovation divide Reduction of disparities between MDR and LDR
------------------------	---	--