



Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)

Call for proposals

European Social Economy Missions (SMP-COSME-2023-RESILIENCE)

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EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL AND SMEs EXECUTIVE AGENCY (EISMEA)

EISMEA.I – Innovation ecosystems, SMP/Entrepreneurship and Consumers
EISMEA.I.02 –SMP/SME Pillar

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU **action grants** in the field of the Proximity and Social Economy industrial ecosystem under the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs strand of the **Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)**.

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

- Regulation 2018/1046 ([EU Financial Regulation](#))
- the basic act (SMP Regulation [2021/690](#)¹).

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

The call covers the following **topic**:

- **SMP-COSME-2023-RESILIENCE — European Social Economy Missions**

Applicants cannot participate in several proposals under this call with the exception of network or umbrella organisations entitled to participate in more than one proposal. Nevertheless, if this happens, the respective organisation will be excluded from all the proposals it applied. The respective consortia affected by the exclusion of (a) partner(s) must still fulfil all eligibility criteria as stipulated in section 6 to be considered eligible.

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)
 - evaluation and award procedure (section 8)
 - award criteria (section 9)
 - legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements (section 10)
 - how to submit an application (section 11)
- the [Online Manual](#) outlines the:
 - procedures to register and submit proposals online via the EU Funding & Tenders Portal ('Portal')

¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/690 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing a programme for the internal market, competitiveness of enterprises, including small and medium-sized enterprises, the area of plants, animals, food and feed, and European statistics (Single Market Programme) (OJ L 153, 3.5.2021, p. 1).

² Annex 2 to the Commission Implementing Decision C(2023)5702 of 25.08.2023 amending the Commission Implementing Decision C(2023)1119as regards the implementation of actions under the Single Market Programme (2023 SMP Work programme).

- 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 [EISMEA](#) website to consult the list of projects funded previously.

1. Background

The European Green Deal³ endorses the important role of rural areas in making the EU the first climate neutral continent by 2050. Small and medium-sized enterprises on their side play a crucial role in reaching the objectives of the Green Deal Industrial Plan⁴ which aims to enhance the competitiveness of Europe's net-zero industry and support the fast transition to climate neutrality.

The green transition will therefore require the development of partnerships in economic activities in rural areas, between businesses of all sectors, local authorities, researchers and services based on innovation, knowledge sharing and cooperation. However, SMEs' competitiveness is still affected by a limited exploitation of opportunities and innovation prospects in the Single Market and beyond.

There are several challenges that small and medium-sized enterprises face in rural areas. The most relevant are limited access to finance due to the presence of limited financial infrastructure, inadequate transportation, telecommunications, and energy supply as well as limited market access. Another element that hinders rural areas economic development is the shortage of skilled workers, particularly in high-tech fields. In addition, in many rural areas, SMEs are heavily dependent on agriculture, which can make them vulnerable to fluctuations in crop yields and commodity prices.

Finally, it is important to mention that rural areas are lagging behind in terms of connectivity, IT networks/ digital hubs. Digital social enterprises located in rural areas should be helped and supported as an important tool to provide an answer to several inherent challenges of those areas.

Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated effort by governments, private sector actors and other relevant stakeholders. The Long Term Vision for Rural Areas⁵ aims to address those challenges and concerns, by building on the emerging opportunities of the EU's green and digital transitions, and by identifying means to improve rural quality of life, achieve balanced territorial development and stimulate economic growth. In so doing, the Vision highlights Social Economy as one important area of policy intervention.

In this context, the Single Market Programme aims to promote growth and to strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs with various forms of support, promoting new business opportunities and developing industrial value chains. The Agency is entrusted by the European Commission with the implementation, *inter alia*, of parts of the SMP COSME programme.

Fostering social innovation at the local, regional and inter-regional level will be crucial to support green transition and stimulate cohesion and inclusiveness so that nobody is

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

⁴ [The Green Deal Industrial Plan \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁵ [The EU Rural vision \(europa.eu\)](#)

left behind. The Social Economy, in all its diversity of forms and business models, brings the potential for the necessary changes.

Awareness of the potential of social economy within the EU is not developed homogeneously though. Due to the presence of different sensibilities and definitions Member States apply different subsets of the social economy principles to define and support their social economy actors. Furthermore, the spread of existing EU tools and supportive schemes for social enterprises and stakeholders is far from being uniform in all EU countries and regions. This often results in limited collaboration initiatives of social economy networks in particular at regional and local level.

EU policies in support of social economy need to be reinforced. In this context, the European Commission launched targeted initiatives to raise awareness and build rural networks of social economy stakeholders at regional and local level⁶ and wishes to pursue awareness-raising campaigns and other initiatives to build and strengthen inter-regional collaboration.

With the Social Economy Action Plan⁷, released in December 2021, the Commission put forward concrete measures to help mobilise the full potential of the social economy sector, building on the results of the 2011 Social Business Initiative⁸ and the 2016 Start-up and Scale-up Initiative⁹. Moreover, the updated EU industrial strategy¹⁰ in May 2021, identified Proximity and Social economy among the 14 industrial ecosystems relevant for recovery post-COVID, resilience and the twin green and digital transitions.

This call for proposals, in particular, implements point 3.4 of the Social Economy Action Plan to enable social economy actors of the Proximity and Social Economy ecosystem to develop innovative business practices to boost rural growth and competitiveness and help driving the twin transition. It is aimed at fostering the exchange of good practices, success stories in the various policy domains contributing to reaching the goals of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas.

Social economy entities are fully part of the Proximity and Social Economy industrial ecosystem as they bring value to local and rural economies by fostering their inclusiveness, resilience and sustainability. They have strong local roots and primarily aim to serve the community where they are based, retaining population, economic activities and revenues locally. As such, they have potential to drive local economic development in rural areas in different areas such as agriculture, energy production, organic food etc.

The aim of the Social Economy Missions is to accelerate the development and acknowledgement of this potential via inter-regional learning and collaboration so contributing to a European Social Economy community and boosting innovation efforts, sustainable growth and creation of high-value jobs with particular focus on rural areas.

⁶ [European Social Economy Regions \(ESER\) 2023: Call for Expression of Interest \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁷ [Social Economy Action Plan - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁸ [Social enterprises \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁹ Idem

¹⁰ [European Commission updates the EU Industrial Strategy | Advanced Technologies for Industry \(europa.eu\)](#)

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

SMP-COSME-2023- RESILIENCE — European Social Economy Missions

Objectives

This call for proposals follows two successful "Social Economy Missions" calls launched in 2020 and 2021 aiming at developing inter-regional cooperation to scale up social economy business models in regional contexts.

The general objective of this call is to boost the development of social economy SMEs active in rural areas. The project is aiming at building a European network of regional and local authorities with converging priorities on social economy and creating space and opportunities at EU level for learning and collaboration.

This call for proposals will support consortia developing collaboration through sharing and replicating best practices and learning with focus on boosting the resilience, the greening and the digitalisation of social economy enterprises and SMEs active in rural areas.

Rural areas are characterised by complex social and economic relations, diverse functions, representations and meanings and varied levels of socio-economic development¹¹. While some European rural areas demonstrate higher levels of productivity, GDP, population growth and have ample access to services, others have lagged behind suffering downward spirals of economic decline, low employment rates, out-migration of the youth¹² and better educated, an ageing population and loss of private and public investment in infrastructure and services.

The capacity to foster rural social entrepreneurship, citizens collective mobilisation and enabling institutional frameworks that support community action have been stressed as elements that empower local communities and actors to be more resilient. In this regard, social enterprises have been identified as organisations that contribute to social inclusion and local development through social innovation, therefore providing new goods and/or services to meet community needs, boost a more sustainable green and digital transition and foster inclusive social and governance relations.

European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development ('EAFRD') and Cohesion policy funds in general can foster rural entrepreneurship and provide help in overcoming barriers, such as for example the difficulty in accessing funding. Single small municipalities or social economy SMEs and entities operating in rural contexts often encounter difficulties to benefit from EU funding opportunities as well. Providing them with this opportunity would be also an incentive for clusterisation, making it possible to access and absorb EU funds such as InvestEU¹³. Microfinance tools such as EaSI¹⁴ are also very relevant for rural communities.

Complementing the above, the specific objectives to be achieved through this call for proposals are the following:

¹¹ Olmedo, L., van Twuijver, M. and O'Shaughnessy, M. (2023). Rurality as context for innovative responses to social challenges – The role of rural social enterprises. Journal of Rural Studies. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.04.020>

¹² The phenomenon of leaving a region, community, etc., to move or settle into a different part of one's country or home territory is particularly relevant for rural and remote areas.

¹³ [About InvestEU \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁴ [EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation \(EaSI\) - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

- Taking stock of main recommendations and good practices from previous projects, carried out on the issue of social economy supporting resilience of rural communities, funded under Horizon Europe¹⁵, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)¹⁶, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)¹⁷, the Single Market Programme (SMP)¹⁸;
- Fostering the creation of social economy networks and stakeholders at regional and local level to boost resilience, greening and digitalisation of their members and improving collaboration between existing ones;
- Boosting inter-regional learning between social economy stakeholders (public and private sector);
- Contributing to a gradual social economy community building as an integral part of a sustainable European economic model with focus on rural communities' resilience through the development of social entrepreneurship.

Networks and umbrella organisations at various levels (European, national, regional, local) active in the field of social economy need to be encouraged to enrich the missions' exchanges and mutual learning within the established partnerships, including new, innovative approaches.

The social economy missions will bring together actors such as social enterprises, cooperatives, etc., SMEs, regional, local authorities and representatives of social economy, social enterprises networks with matching and complementary priorities.

Themes and priorities (scope)

A proposal submitted under this call must focus on a **specific theme identified** by the applicant consortium, relevant for all consortium partners and with specified objectives to be achieved. The proposal must address one of the **themes listed below** or identify another theme of relevance to the consortium partners around **boosting social economy businesses in rural environment:**

1. Building clusters of social innovation and ecological innovation in rural areas
2. Boosting green, and digital transition through social economy in rural areas
3. Fostering social entrepreneurship, including for sustainable agriculture and food systems
4. Reinforcing education, training and skills development activities for unemployed people in rural areas, targeting in particular youth and women
5. Developing the New European Bauhaus and quality of life in rural environment
6. Other relevant theme.

Below in more detail the themes that are to be addressed by proposals submitted under this call:

1. Building clusters of social and ecological innovation in rural areas

Clusters are groups of specialised enterprises, often SMEs, and other related supporting actors (incubators, chambers of commerce, municipalities, etc.) in a given geographical area that cooperate closely. Operating within a cluster is a way for SMEs

¹⁵ [Horizon Europe \(europa.eu\)](https://europea.eu)

¹⁶ [European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development \(EAFRD\) \(europa.eu\)](https://europea.eu)

¹⁷ [European Regional Development Fund \(ERDF\) \(europa.eu\)](https://europea.eu)

¹⁸ [Single Market Programme \(europa.eu\)](https://europea.eu)

to become more innovative, create more jobs, and increase their patenting activities¹⁹.

However, social economy clusters go beyond the membership and formal aspect of a traditional cluster by linking the unique (and often complex) membership composition to innovation objectives in terms of social and ecological innovation. Such clusters are also called “Cluster of Social and Ecologic Innovation” (CSEI) and defined as *“Clusters of Social and Ecological Innovation (CSEI) group mainly social economy entities with mainstream enterprises, civil society organisations, public authorities, education and research institutions that cooperate in a particular location to improve local economic, ecological and societal prosperity and regeneration by facilitating cooperation, pooling of resources and enhancing innovation capacity.”*

The Expert group on social economy and social enterprises (GECES) published a mapping report on the phenomena of Clusters of Social and Ecological Innovation²⁰.

Business cooperation is important for the EU policy ambition to scale-up Social Economy and mainstream its activities within and across sectors, across borders and also in cooperation with traditional enterprises. Clusters could be considered as a way to integrate and promote cooperation between different enterprise models. The integration of social economy in such clusters has proven very fruitful as it could leverage interesting effects and exchanges between members.

In recent years, the establishment and growth of clusters organised mainly amongst social economy stakeholders in so called Clusters of Social and Ecological Innovation has been a strong factor of mainstreaming social economy in proximity ecosystems which should be further fostered.

The Building of Clusters of Social and Ecological Innovation missions will bring together actors from both categories below:

- Relevant regional and local public authorities and/or their entrusted agencies, research centres and universities;
- Social economy stakeholders (such as SMEs, social enterprises, etc.) and civil society organisations.

The mission will enable exchanges of good practices and peer learning between the project partners. Experience and good practice of a consortium leader will be presented and accompanied by site visits and/or hands-on trainings. Inter-active exchanges via different participatory methods (inter-active workshops, webinars, peer-to-peer learning etc.) will provide an opportunity for boosting learning and/or paving the way towards future inter-regional collaboration.

2. Boosting Green and digital transition through social economy in rural areas

Shifting towards a more sustainable and green economy is one of the key priorities of the European Commission. The European Green Deal²¹ package published in December 2019 enables European citizens and businesses to benefit from sustainable green transition.

In rural areas, social farming, agri-food cooperative businesses or local communities have an essential role to play in delivering the Green Deal’s ambitions. Indeed, many

¹⁹

https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/policy/cluster_en

²⁰ [Clusters of social and ecological innovation in the European Union, perspectives and experiences - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](#)

²¹ www.ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

existing social economy stakeholders provide sustainable development products and services (such as for example renewable energy cooperatives, alternative and sharing public/private transportation solutions, passive housing projects in cities and rural areas, active promotion of biodiversity), often also with a work integration function.

Targeted inter-regional learning and sharing good practices in this area is a prerequisite for new solutions, sustainable businesses and projects to address community needs and boost citizens-rooted green actions paving the way towards Europe as the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

The replication potential of such experiences and good practices is particularly relevant. Locally designed solutions and development models can be replicated in other parts of Europe even if not facing exactly the same challenges or opportunities.

The use of new technologies and digital innovations by rural social enterprises is worth also exploring.

Beyond farming, technologies are key to making rural communities more attractive, smart and sustainable as well as to reduce problems related to remoteness and improving access to services.

Examples were already developed by the social economy, such as collaborative platforms for lowering consumption, co-ownership, circular economy, clean mobility or the use of blockchain²² for traceability in organic agriculture (traceability) and electricity provision within a cooperative context (fair pricing and distribution systems for clean energy), the rise of urban and rural fablabs²³ to foster low and high-tech (green) solutions servicing sectors such as sustainable agriculture, tourism, mobility, the circular economy and foster new and green local value chains.

Furthermore, the Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking (CBE JU) funds projects advancing competitive circular bio-based industries in Europe. In particular, the [call](#) "Cooperative business models for the sustainable mobilisation and valorisation of agricultural residues, by-products, and waste in rural areas"²⁴ offers opportunities of cooperation among primary producers to produce sustainable value-added bio-based products in fair bio-based value chains.

Access to healthcare is of utmost importance for all citizens and is also one of the fields where rural residents are often disadvantaged in comparison to urban populations. Rural areas often have difficulty accessing quality health care because of poor sanitary conditions and lack of social infrastructures such as hospitals but also educational institutions, and adequate housing facilities. Some cooperatives or social enterprises are efficiently experimenting with new digital technologies to facilitate access to health services.

This mission in the area of green and digital transition through social economy will bring together:

- Relevant regional and local public authorities;
- Social economy stakeholders (such as social enterprises, cooperatives, SMEs etc.)

This mission will enable exchange of good practices and peer learning between the project partners. Experience and good practice from a consortium leader' territorial district will be presented in close collaboration with relevant social economy stakeholders and accompanied by site visits and/or hands-on training.

²² <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/fr/agenda/our-events/events/blockchain-une-technologie-pour-une-economie-sociale-40>

²³ [Fab Labs: a flexible policy tool for place-based challenges | Interreg Europe - Sharing solutions for better policy](#)

²⁴ [Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](#)

Inter-active exchanges via new participatory methods (inter-active workshops, webinars, peer-to-peer learning etc.) will provide opportunities for learning and/or paving the way towards further inter-regional collaboration in order to develop social economy enterprises, cooperatives and SMEs located in rural areas.

3. Fostering social entrepreneurship, including for sustainable agriculture and food systems

The Farm to Fork Strategy²⁵ addresses different aspects of this transition. It is at the heart of the European Green Deal aiming to make food systems fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly.

Social enterprises can enable the development of a sustainable agriculture. They are key actors to move our modes of production, processing, marketing and consumption towards more sustainability and proximity.

They are also key to make food systems more sustainable and bring new opportunities for operators in the food value chain. New technologies and scientific discoveries, combined with increasing public awareness and demand for sustainable food, will benefit all stakeholders. Many SMEs in the social economy have already started developing alternative food systems. All over Europe Community Food Enterprises, social farms, participatory supermarkets, consumers' cooperatives, solidarity grocery stores that consider not only the environmental but also the social and economic dimensions of sustainability are on the rise.

Sharing regional and local good practices developed by such kind of social entities, enterprises and SMEs is a pre-requisite for an efficient rural transition towards sustainable agriculture.

This mission will enable exchanges of good practices and inter-regional learning between the project partners. Experiences and good practices from a consortium leader's territorial district will be presented in collaboration with relevant social economy stakeholders and complemented with site visits and/or hands-on training.

Inter-active exchanges via different participatory methods (inter-active workshops, webinars, peer-to-peer learning etc.) will provide opportunities for learning and/or paving the way for further inter-regional collaboration initiatives.

4. Reinforcing Education, training and skills development activities for unemployed people in rural areas, targeting in particular youth and women

Access to education and life-long learning opportunities is scarcer in rural areas than in urban ones. This is one of the causes of youth out-migration and influences the quality of life of adults and older residents who experience difficulties in engaging in life-long learning programmes. On the other hand, developing and strengthening a sense of community contributes to feelings of belonging, which can help retain the inhabitants of rural areas.

Rural social enterprises can play an important role in educating, re/up-skilling people, in particular the integration of unemployed people who are confronted with difficulties entering the labour market. They can provide a range of services and opportunities, including training and education programs, employment opportunities, mentoring and coaching, and business development support. By doing so, they can help to build a

²⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork_en

more resilient community and contribute to the sustainable development of the areas they operate in.

The Education, training and skills development activities for unemployed people mission will bring together:

- Competent regional and local public authorities;
- Social economy stakeholders and academic/education entities (such as SMEs, social enterprises, universities etc.)

This mission will enable exchanges of good practices and inter-regional learning between the project partners. Experiences and good practices of a consortium leader will be presented in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and academic entities and complemented with site visits and/or hands-on trainings. Inter-active exchanges using different participatory methods (inter-active workshops, webinars, peer-to-peer learning etc.) will provide opportunities for learning and/or paving the way for future inter-regional co-operation initiatives.

5. Developing the New European Bauhaus and quality of life in a rural environment

The New European Bauhaus²⁶ is an environmental, economic and cultural project, aiming to combine design, sustainability, accessibility, affordability and investment in order to help deliver the European Green Deal. It brings the European Green Deal to life in an attractive, innovative and human-centred way. This movement - based on sustainability, accessibility and aesthetics - brings the European Green Deal closer to people and make recycling, renewable energies and biodiversity natural.

European funds can finance the renovation of buildings in rural areas and contribute to the Green Deal objectives by increasing energy efficiency, local renewable energy production and reducing energy poverty in the EU. Rural areas are represented in the New European Bauhaus, which connects the European Green Deal to our living spaces, adapting buildings and public spaces.

Projects and actions to reinforce the development of rural SMEs in the social economy such as for example in renewable energies areas, affordable housing, reusing and recycling etc. targeting green and ecological objectives that fit to the European Green Deal goals can be proposed under this call for proposals.

This mission will enable exchanges of good practices and peer-to peer learning between the project partners. Experiences and good practices of a consortium leader will be presented in close collaboration with stakeholders and academic entities and complemented with visits and/or hands-on trainings. Inter-active exchanges using different participatory methods (workshops, webinars, peer-to-peer learning etc.) will provide the opportunity for boosting inter-regional learning and/or paving the way towards future further collaboration.

6. Other relevant theme

The proposal may address another relevant theme referring to the social economy businesses and communities' resilience in the rural environment as identified by the applicants and explained in the proposal.

²⁶ [New European Bauhaus: beautiful, sustainable, together. \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

Activities that can be funded (scope)

The above objectives of this call for proposals are to be achieved via 3 mandatory project activities that must **at minimum consist** of:

Activity 1)– Preliminary overview of existing projects

Perform an overview of existing materials (main recommendations and good practices) from previous projects on the issue of social economy and social innovation for resilience of rural communities funded under Horizon Europe, EAFRD, ERDF or SMP, as a base for the discussions during the mandatory workshops.

Activity 2) Minimum of three transnational workshops and learning activities

The workshops must be organised in the consortium partners' territorial districts²⁷ with the following objectives:

- to share best practices in the consortium partners' territorial districts;
- to present best practices in close collaboration with stakeholders via onsite visits to rural SMEs in the social economy (where appropriate) and/or hands-on training;
- to understand existing practices and/or challenges of other consortium partners through a set of parallel collaborative sessions (peer-to-peer learning).

The three compulsory workshops will be attended by at least 15 different travelling participants per workshop, invited by the consortium partners (target between 15-20 travelling participants). Regional and/or local governments acting as consortium partners are requested to participate in the social economy missions (workshops) with delegations consisting of social economy stakeholders active in a given territory. These delegations of social economy stakeholders active in a territory of a regional or local government must be identified in the proposals. They shall include social economy enterprises active in rural development, rural social enterprises and, where appropriate, regional and/or local network or umbrella organisation(s), universities and/or business, research, civil society, or other support organisations active in the area of social economy or social entrepreneurship.

Consortium partners must ensure that the composition of their delegation is balanced. Costs incurred by members of delegations that are not representatives or staff of consortia members (leader and partners) can be fully reimbursed as costs for financial support to third parties or purchase costs²⁸.

The methodology, duration and location of the compulsory workshops must be proposed by the applicants in their proposals.

The three compulsory workshops can be followed by additional learning activities among consortium partners such as additional workshops, webinars, peer-to-peer learnings, etc. or by other additional activities that would be beneficial for the project (for example on how to transfer collected good

²⁷ A district (region, city, municipality etc.) defined for administrative and legal purposes.

²⁸ As outlined in the respective sections of the call for proposals and at the corresponding financing rate.

practices from one region to another or how to prepare the ground for a future joint inter-regional project etc.).

Activity 3) Collecting of good practices and developing recommendations for replication

Based on the experience built during the project, resulting from transnational Social Economy Missions and elaboration of local thematic social economy action plans, the consortium must together at the end of the project gather a collection of good practices and formulate common key recommendations that could be replicable in other regions and local communities across Europe. The aim of the recommendations will be to share good solutions for building resilience of local rural communities through social economy across Europe.

Other possible - non mandatory additional project activities could include (this list is not exhaustive):

- Communication and awareness raising activities to reach out to potential social economy enterprises, organisations, SMEs and civil society about the project's objectives, activities and results;
- Organisation of activities to boost cooperation, transnational and inter-regional learning and capacity building in the field of social economy. This may include international, inter-regional and local travels to other rural areas and meetings with partners and communities, online and physical workshops, events, study visits, trainings, twinning, matchmaking, peer learning, knowledge sharing;
- Mapping of specific needs of social economy enterprises and support measures to improve their sustainable development and growth;
- Mapping of relevant initiatives, guidelines, good practices, main players, providers of green, digital solutions and new technologies, opportunities for social economy enterprises and organisations;
- Developing of digital solutions, platforms for knowledge and expertise sharing, and local community involvement (for example seeking feedback from local communities on project's priorities, encouraging participation of communities in local development, encouraging social innovation and development of new business models);
- Elaboration of a local Social Economy Action Plan for rural communities' resilience.
- Other activities proposed by project partners in line with the objectives of the call and justified by the project's objectives.

Timeline of these activities will be outlined in compliance with and respecting the project duration as specified on section 6.

Expected impact

The projects submitted under this call for proposals are expected to have the following general impacts:

- Increasing better, high-quality employment (tackling unemployment in rural areas);
- Supporting the green, social and digital transition at local level;
- Supporting resilient and sustainable business models based on social economy;
- Boosting the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy;
- Ensuring more community resilience and better living conditions for the rural population.

The impact of mandatory activities 2 and 3 listed above must be respectively assessed by each proposal against the following indicators:

Activity 2:

- Number of transnational missions organised with a mandatory minimum of 3 missions per project to achieve;
- Number of travelling participants invited by consortium partners with a mandatory minimum of 15 per mission;
- Number, geographical and typology variety of rural stakeholders involved, in particular rural social enterprises;
- Number of new inter-regional partnerships initiated during the missions;
- Number of Social Economy business and SMEs that participated in the missions;
- Diversity of partners from different industrial ecosystems.

Activity 3:

- Number and quality of collected good practices;
- Number of recommendations for replication created.

The proposal has to include target values and measurable quality standards for the proposed indicators when not mentioned above. A section in the final report addressing the expected impact of the project, the scalability and the replicability of its results must be provided.

3. Available budget

The estimated available call budget is **EUR 1 000 000**. This budget might be increased by maximum 20%.

We expect to fund a **maximum of 4 projects**.

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

4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	05 October 2023
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>07 December 2023 – 17:00:00 CET</u> <u>(Brussels)</u>
Evaluation:	December 2023 - March 2024
Information on evaluation results:	April 2024
GA signature and start of the action:	June 2024

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 [Search Funding & Tenders](#) section). Paper submissions are NOT possible.

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

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

- **Application Form Part A** — contains administrative information about the participants (future coordinator, beneficiaries and affiliated entities) and the summarised budget for the project (*to be filled in directly online*)
- **Application Form Part B** — contains the technical description of the project (*to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed and then assembled and re-uploaded*)
- **mandatory annexes and supporting documents** (*to be uploaded*):
 - detailed budget table/calculator (*mandatory excel template available in the Submission System*)
 - list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years) (*template available in Part B*)
 - *Annex 5 to Part B – Eligibility checklist (available at EISMEA's page [here](#)).*

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

At proposal submission, you will have to confirm that you have the **mandate to act** for all applicants. Moreover, you will have to confirm that the information in the application is correct and complete and that the participants comply with the conditions for receiving EU funding (especially eligibility, financial and operational capacity, exclusion, etc). Before signing the grant, each beneficiary and affiliated

entity will have to confirm this again by signing a declaration of honour (DoH). Proposals without full support will be rejected.

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

Proposals are limited to maximum **50 pages** (Part B). Evaluators will not consider any additional pages.

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

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

6. Eligibility

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

Eligible participants (eligible countries)

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

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

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

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

Specific cases

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

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

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

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

for the protection of the EU financial interests equivalent to that offered by legal persons²⁹.


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'³⁰. ⚠ Please note that if the action will be implemented by the members, they should also participate (either as beneficiaries or as affiliated entities, otherwise their costs will NOT be eligible).

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

EU restrictive measures — Special rules apply for certain entities (*e.g. entities subject to [EU restrictive measures](#) under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU)*³¹ and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#)³²). Such entities are not eligible to participate in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any).

Following the [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/2506](#), as of 16 December 2022, no legal commitments (including the grant agreement itself as well as subcontracts, purchase contracts, financial support to third parties etc.) can be signed with **Hungarian public interest trusts established under [Hungarian Act IX of 2021](#) or any entity they maintain**. Affected entities may continue to apply to calls for proposals. However, in case the Council measures are not lifted, such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, affiliated entities, subcontractors, recipients of financial support to third parties).

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

[Consortium composition](#)

Proposals must be submitted by a consortium of minimum 4 and up to around 10 applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities), which complies with all the following conditions:

- (a) at least **three regional or local public governments** (such as regions, municipalities, cities, etc.) validated as public entities in the [Participant Register](#) from at least three different eligible countries;
- (b) at least **one business related organisation** such as SMEs organisation or association, social enterprises organisation, chamber of commerce, etc. relevant for this call topic;
- (c) **additional applicants** can be other economic operators such as network or umbrella organisations, SMEs organisations, SMEs, social economy organisations or enterprises, cooperatives, NGOs, civil society organisations,

²⁹ See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

³⁰ For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

³¹ 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](#).

³² Commission guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#) on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards (OJEU C 205 of 19.07.2013, pp. 9-11).

local rural development and innovation agencies, technology centres and service providers, digital innovation hubs, fablabs, science parks, local industrial clusters, educational institutions, educational or vocational training organisations, chambers of commerce, etc. relevant for this call topic;

- (d) each eligible applicant under (b) and (c) in the consortium must be established in the **same territory** covered by the regional or local public administration participating as applicant under (a), except in case of participating network or umbrella organisations³³.

Eligible activities

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

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

Financial support to third parties is allowed under the following conditions:

- financial support is provided directly to third parties, meaning the members of the delegations participating in the workshops organised by project partners who are not representatives or staff of project partners;
- financial support to third parties must be included in the project costs under the corresponding cost heading;
- financial support to third parties can only cover the travel, accommodation and subsistence costs necessary for members of delegations to participate in activities necessary to bring together partners and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. workshops or study visits), as indicated in the description of the action; the activities organised by the consortium within this action must be free of participation or registration fees for stakeholders participating in these activities.

Project applications must clearly specify why the financial support to third parties is needed, for which category of persons and which activities, how it will be managed, how the members of the delegation will be selected and provide a list of the different types of activities for which a third party may receive financial support. The maximum amount per third party is EUR 60.000.

Geographic location (target countries)

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

Duration

Projects are expected to last either 18 or 24 months (extensions are possible, only if duly justified and through an amendment).

Project budget

Project budgets (maximum grant amount) are expected to be around EUR 250.000 per project, but this does not preclude the submission/selection of proposals requesting other amounts. The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

³³ A country in which a participating network or umbrella organisation is established does not have to be represented by its regional or local public administration.

7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

Financial capacity

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

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

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

- public bodies (entities established as public body under national law, including local, regional or national authorities) or international organisations
- if the individual requested grant amount is not more than EUR 60 000.

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

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

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

or

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

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

Operational capacity

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

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

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

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

- list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years).

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

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 participate³⁴:

- 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 misconduct³⁵ (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 Regulation No [2988/95](#) (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- created under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant).

Applicants will also be refused if it turns out that³⁶:

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

³⁴ See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

³⁵ Professional misconduct includes: violation of ethical standards of the profession, wrongful conduct with impact on professional credibility, false declarations/misrepresentation of information, participation in a cartel or other agreement distorting competition, violation of IPR, attempting to influence decision-making processes or obtain confidential information from public authorities to gain advantage.

³⁶ See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

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

For proposals with the same score (within a topic or budget envelope) a **priority order** will be determined according to the following approach:

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

- 1) Projects focusing on a theme that is not otherwise covered by higher ranked projects will be considered to have the highest priority.
- 2) The *ex aequo* proposals with the same theme will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the award criterion 'Relevance'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Impact'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Quality'.
- 3) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the overall project portfolio and the creation of positive synergies between projects, or other factors related to the objectives of the call. These factors will be documented in the panel report.
- 4) After that, the remainder of the available call budget will be used to fund projects across the different themes in order to ensure a balanced spread of the geographical and thematic coverage and while respecting to the maximum possible extent the order of merit based on the evaluation of the award criteria.

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

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

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

If you believe that the evaluation procedure was flawed, you can submit a **complaint** (following the deadlines and procedures set out in the evaluation result letter). Please note that notifications which have not been opened within 10 days after sending are 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:

- **Relevance:** clarity and consistency of project, objectives and planning; extent to which they match the themes and priorities and objectives of the call; contribution to the EU strategic and legislative context; European/transnational dimension; impact/interest for a number of countries (EU or eligible non-EU countries); possibility to use the results in other countries; potential to develop mutual trust/cross-border cooperation (**30 points**).
- **Quality:**
 - **Project design and implementation:** technical quality; logical links between the identified problems, needs and solutions proposed (logical frame concept); methodology for implementing the project (concept and methodology, management, procedures, timetable, risks and risk management, monitoring and evaluation); feasibility of the project within the proposed time frame; cost effectiveness (sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; best value for money) (**30 points**).
 - **Project team and cooperation arrangements:** quality of the consortium and project teams; appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams and consortium (**30 points**).
- **Impact:** ambition and expected long-term impact of results on target groups/general public; appropriate dissemination strategy for ensuring sustainability and long-term impact; sustainability of results after EU funding ends (**10 points**).

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	16	30
Quality — Project design and implementation	16	30
Quality — Project team and cooperation arrangements	16	30
Impact	6	10
Overall (pass) scores	70	100

Maximum points: 100 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 16/30, 16/30, 16/30 and 6/10 points.

Overall threshold: 70 points.

Proposals that pass the individual thresholds AND the overall threshold will be considered for funding — within the limits of the available call budget. Other proposals will be rejected.

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

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

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

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

Starting date and project duration

The project starting date and duration will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 1*). Normally the starting date will be after grant signature. Retroactive application can be granted exceptionally for duly justified reasons — but never earlier than the proposal submission date. **Estimated start date is 1 June 2024.**

Project duration: *see section 6 above.*

Milestones and deliverables

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

Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount

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

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

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

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 **90%** for all other costs 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 cost³⁷: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost³⁸: Yes
- equipment costs: depreciation
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties: allowed as actual costs; maximum amount per third party EUR 60.000, 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 volunteers costs and exempted specific cost categories, if any)
- VAT: non-deductible VAT is eligible (but please note that since 2013 VAT paid by beneficiaries that are public bodies acting as public authority is NOT eligible)
- other:
 - in-kind contributions for free are allowed, but cost-neutral, i.e. they cannot be declared as cost
 - kick off meeting: costs for kick-off meeting organised by the granting authority are eligible (travel costs for maximum 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
 - project websites: communication costs for presenting the project on the participants' websites or social media accounts are eligible; costs for *separate* project websites are not eligible
 - other ineligible costs: No.

³⁷ 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)7715).

³⁸ Commission [Decision](#) of 12 January 2021 authorising the use of unit costs for travel, accommodation and subsistence costs under an action or work programme under the 2021-2027 multi-annual financial framework (C(2021)35), as amended by Commission [Decision](#) C(2023)4928 of 26 July 2023.

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/10 days before starting date/financial guarantee (if required) — whichever is the latest.

There will be no **interim payments**.

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

All payments will be made to the coordinator.

 Please be aware that payments will be automatically lowered if one of your consortium members has outstanding debts towards the EU (granting authority or other EU bodies). Such debts will be offset by us — in line with the conditions set out in the Grant Agreement (*see 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 formally NOT linked to individual consortium members, which means that you are free to organise how to provide the guarantee amount (*by one or several beneficiaries, for the overall amount or several guarantees for partial amounts, by the beneficiary concerned or by another beneficiary, etc*). It is however important that the requested amount is covered and that the guarantee(s) are sent to us in time to make the prefinancing (scanned copy via Portal AND original by post).

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

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

Certificates

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

Liability regime for recoveries

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

For beneficiaries, it is one of the following:

- limited joint and several liability with individual ceilings — *each beneficiary up to their maximum grant amount*
- unconditional joint and several liability — *each beneficiary up to the maximum grant amount for the action*

or

- individual financial responsibility — *each beneficiary only for their own debts.*

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

Provisions concerning the project implementation

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

- list of background: No
- rights of use on results: Yes
- access rights to ensure continuity and interoperability obligations: No

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

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

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

- specific rules for PPI Grants for Procurement: No
- specific rules for blending operations: No

Other specificities

n/a

Non-compliance and breach of contract

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



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

11. How to submit an application

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

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

a) **create a user account and register your organisation**

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

Once you have an 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 [Search Funding & Tenders](#) section (or, for calls sent by invitation to submit a proposal, through the link provided in the invitation letter).

Submit your proposal in 3 parts, as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

12. Help

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

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

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

Contact

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

Non-IT related questions should be sent by 30 November 2023 to the following email address: EISMEA-SMP-COSME-ENQUIRIES@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).
- **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).
- **No-profit rule** — Grants may NOT give a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). This will be checked by us at the end of the project.
- **No double funding** — There is a strict prohibition of double funding from the EU budget (except under EU Synergies actions). Outside such Synergies actions, any given action may receive only ONE grant from the EU budget and cost items may under NO circumstances declared to two different EU actions.
- **Completed/ongoing projects** — Proposals for projects that have already been completed will be rejected; proposals for projects that have already started will be assessed on a case-by-case basis (in this case, no costs can be reimbursed for activities that took place before the project starting date/proposal submission).
- **Combination with EU operating grants** — Combination with EU operating grants is possible, if the project remains outside the operating grant work programme and you make sure that cost items are clearly separated in your accounting and NOT declared twice (*see [AGA — Annotated Model Grant Agreement, art 6.2.E](#)*).
- **Multiple proposals** — Applicants cannot participate in several proposals under this call with the exception of network or umbrella organisations which are entitled to participate in more than one proposal.
- **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](#).