Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL)

Call for proposals

Accelerating the Best Use of Technologies
DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08

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EUROPEAN HEALTH AND DIGITAL EXECUTIVE AGENCY (HaDEA)

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CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU action grants in the field of Accelerating the Best Use of Technologies under the Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL).

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

– Regulation 2024/2509 (EU Financial Regulation)[1]

– the basic act (Digital Europe Regulation 2021/694[2]).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2025-2027 Work Programme[3] and will be managed by the European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HaDEA) (**'Agency'**).

The call covers the following topics:

– DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-FACTCHECKERS - European Network of Fact-Checkers

– DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-NETWORKSICs - Network of Safer Internet Centres (SICs)

Each project application under the call must address only one of these topics. Applicants wishing to apply for more than one topic, must submit a separate proposal under each topic.

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, outcomes and deliverables, KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables, targeted stakeholders, type of action and funding rate and specific topic conditions (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)

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[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) 2021/694 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2021 establishing the Digital Europe Programme (OJ L 166, 11.5.2021, p. 1).

[3]   Commission Implementing Decision C/2025/1839 final of 28 March concerning the adoption of the work programme for 2025 - 2027 and the financing decision for the implementation of the Digital Europe Programme.

- how to submit an application (section 11).

- the Online Manual outlines the:

- procedures to register and submit proposals online via the EU Funding & Tenders Portal (**'Portal'**)

- recommendations for the preparation of the application.

- the AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement contains:

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

1. Background

The roll-out and best use of digital capacities will focus on priority areas such as the support to SMEs and public authorities in their digital transformation and will also provide resources to activities started in previous programmes, for which the continuation of funding is essential to avoid disruption.

The activities under specific objective Accelerating the Best Use of Technologies will cover several work strands:

- European Digital Government Ecosystem, including the eID Wallet architecture and its European Trust Infrastructure, the Once Only Technical System Interoperable Europe
- Justice and consumers
- Confidence in digital transition

This call covers the following two topics:

1. DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-FACTCHECKERS - European Network of Fact-Checkers: The internet has revolutionized the way citizens access and engage with news, but it has also enabled the rapid dissemination of disinformation on an unprecedented scale. Through the Digital Services Act[4] and the Code of Conduct on Disinformation[5], the EU has a comprehensive framework in place for tackling disinformation while protecting freedom of expression and information.

   Fact-checking organizations play a crucial role in maintaining information integrity, and the EU supports their work through initiatives such as the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)[6]. Through EU funded pilot projects, such as "Integrity of Social Media"[7], the EU has furthermore supported the efforts of key stakeholders, such as the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN), to promote high ethical standards in fact-checking and strengthen the capacity of European fact-checking organisations.

   This call for proposals aims to contribute to the implementation of the Commission's 2024-2029 political guidelines[8], which include the creation of a European Network of Fact-Checkers. By funding the first multi-annual EU program for fact-checking, the EU seeks to build on past efforts and expand

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[4] Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act)
[5] https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/code-conduct-disinformation
[6] https://edmo.eu/about-us/edmoeu/
[7] The Integrity of Social Media call funds the 'FactCricis' project. For more information, you may consult https://efcsn.com/projects/factcricis/
[8] Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024–2029

support for fact-checking initiatives, ultimately contributing to a more trustworthy online environment.

2. **DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-NETWORKSICs — Network of Safer Internet Centres (SICs):** Safer Internet Centres (SICs) provide online safety information, educational resources, public awareness tools and counselling and reporting services, through dedicated helplines and hotlines for children and youth, parents/carers, teachers and educators, and other professionals working with children. This call contributes to building confidence in the digital transformation by supporting the implementation of the Better Internet for Kids (BIK+)[9] strategy. This includes providing support for EC priorities, such as tackling cyberbullying, age verification and age assurance, monitoring and support to mental health and well-being of children (e.g. related to addictive design and screen time) and support to the Commission regarding their tasks implementing and enforcing the relevant Digital Services Act (DSA)[10] obligations.

Participation is open to all eligible entities as established by Article 18 of the Digital Europe programme, in particular public sector as well as private sector organisations, including SMEs, NGOs and international organisations.

2. Objectives — Scope — Outcomes and deliverables — KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables — Targeted stakeholders — Type of action and funding rate — Specific topic conditions

DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-FACTCHECKERS — European Network of Fact-checkers

Objectives

The objective of this call is to support the growth of a European Network of Fact-checkers, which will deepen the language coverage and operational capacity of fact-checking in Europe.

The core objectives to achieve are:

1. Expand fact-checking capacity in Europe, and establish in particular more solid fact-checking capacity in Member States with insufficient fact-checking coverage

2. Support the capacity and readiness of European fact-checkers to respond to emergency situations or other particular disinformation pressures in one or more Member States

3. Provide support and protection for fact-checkers against harassment

4. Equip European fact-checkers with state-of-the-art skills, expertise and tools

5. Support cooperation, peer support and exchange within the European fact-checking community

6. Create a European repository of fact-checks, capable of aggregating content from associated fact-checking organisations

7. Explore sustainable business models for fact-checkers in Europe, including through dedicated use cases of the repository of fact-checks.

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[9] [European Strategy for a Better Internet for Kids COM/2022/212 final](#)
[10] [Digital Services Act Regulation (EU) 2022/2065](#)

Scope

The scope of this action is to support the capacity of the European fact-checking community while aiming towards making fact-checking available in all EU Member States and languages (where relevant covering also minority languages of EU Member States), building on, complementing and further expanding activities carried out by the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) and other European fact-checking initiatives like the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN).

The geographical scope comprises all EU Member States, as well as candidate and accession countries or EU neighbouring countries that are associated to the Digital Europe programme in view of the specific vulnerabilities to disinformation and Russian interference in this region.

As mentioned below, all activities implemented by the consortium or by third parties under this call <u>need to be complementary to actions carried out by EDMO and should explore cooperation with EDMO wherever possible</u> (See section below **'Outcomes and deliverables').**

Outcomes and deliverables

    A. Outcomes to be implemented directly via the consortium:

In addition to the administration of the project's implementation and the issuing of grants to third parties (c.f. 'Outcomes to be implemented via third parties', the consortium will be responsible for the delivery of at least the following three tasks:

    1. Implementing a Fact-Checkers Protection Scheme: The consortium will assume the responsibility for the implementation of a Fact-Checkers Protection Scheme. The scheme should develop concrete operational support actions accessible to fact-checkers and fact-checking organisations in the EU and EU candidate and accession countries or EU neighbouring countries that are associated to the Digital Europe programme, covering assistance in matters such as legal affairs, cybersecurity, psychological support, trainings on dealing with harassment and intimidation, and support for relocation. The protection scheme will be developed in cooperation with EDMO, building on the results of the EDMO pilot protection scheme. The consortium will be responsible of supporting the concrete actions described above, while EDMO will facilitate access to the scheme through the EDMO website. Finally, the consortium should conduct awareness raising, outreach and communication activities about harassment received by fact-checking organisations.

    2. Building a repository of fact-checks: The repository should be designed based on the demands of the fact-checking community. Access to the repository should be designed to foster new commercial opportunities for the organisations injecting content in the repository as well as to support activities aiming at monitoring and analysing the phenomenon of disinformation for the public good. The repository should therefore have an Application Programming Interface (API) allowing for structured retrieval of relevant data. The consortium will ensure that the repository is effectively populated with fact-checks. Finally, the consortium will explore ways to use the repository also for means of informing the public, for example through the use of dashboards.

    3. Creation of fact-checking emergency response capacity: The consortium should build a framework capable of preparing for and responding

to any situation where a sudden increase of harmful disinformation occurs, including emergency situations. This capacity should cover all 27 EU Member States and in particular those more exposed to disinformation and with less fact-checking capacity. EU candidate and accession countries or EU neighbouring countries that are associated to the Digital Europe programme could be also covered. The emergency response capacity should deliver the capacity for a rapid expansion of fact-checking activities in the affected territory, as well as means to effectively communicate the fact-checking results to the public. While **the consortium will build and run the necessary framework, the 'on**-the-**ground'** fact-checking activities in an emergency situation can be run by the consortium, third party grantees, or a mix of both. The emergency response capacity should contribute to situational awareness at EU and Member State level with concrete – and to the extent possible, standardised – analysis products.

In addition to these tasks, the consortium may suggest other activities to be funded.

The successful consortium should cooperate with EDMO to ensure that the activities financed under this action benefit and enhance the EDMO network. Complementarity with the work of EDMO and its national and regional hubs <u>is essential</u>. No action undertaken by EDMO shall be duplicated through actions financed by this call. Complementing existing efforts of EDMO is possible, under the condition that the added value and efficient use of resources is demonstrated.

To achieve the required cooperation with EDMO, the successful consortium should **establish an appropriate interface with EDMO's governance.**

B. *Outcomes to be implemented via support to third parties:*

The project will issue grants to third parties to strengthen the capacity of European fact-checkers. Project applications should detail how the activities they propose meet the short-term and long-term needs of the European fact-checking community. The successful consortium should implement its activities through an inclusive process: Feedback on planned activities, their means of implementation and the achieved results should be continuously collected from European fact-checking organisations, and input from key stakeholders such as media organisations, social media platforms or policymakers should be sought whenever relevant.

The consortium should strive to achieve a more robust coverage of fact-checking in the Member States and languages of the EU and reach also candidate and accession countries or EU neighbouring countries that are associated to the Digital Europe programme. To this end, the project will disburse the **majority** – at least 60 per cent – of the funding to third parties, through an appropriate third-party funding as described in section 6, to support activities such as:

- Production of fact-checks in European countries and languages with a particular focus on those that are currently insufficiently covered by fact-checking activities

- Supporting fact-checking organisations contributions to in-depth investigations of disinformation campaigns

- Ad-hoc support to fact-checkers in Member States that face a particularly high volume of disinformation due to an election, emergency or other situations

- Support for meeting the requirements for certification of the EFCSN or IFCN[11], through training and other appropriate needs

- Production of fact-checks in European countries and languages that are currently insufficiently covered by fact-checking activities

- Facilitating in-depth investigations of disinformation campaigns

- Piloting innovative use of novel technologies, such as large language models, for fact-checking purposes, in view of increasing efficiency, language coverage, and scalability

- Integration of fact-**checking organisations' websites, as well as the EDMO** website, with the repository of fact-checks developed under this project

- Training activities for fact-checking organisations, including on communication activities

- Implementation of activities increasing the societal resilience of citizens, e.g. through, pre-bunking activities, crisis communication, and helping citizens identify mis- and disinformation

- Organisation of national or regional fact-checking conferences to foster exchange of best practices, peer support and joint projects

- Communication and outreach activities

- Expanding the reach and impact of fact-checking, including through cooperation with other stakeholders in the media ecosystem.

KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables

The proposal is expected to provide a list of KPIs. At the minimum, these should include proposals for indicators depicting:

- The number of organisations receiving operational support through this action.
- The number of languages and Member States/countries covered.
- The total number of fact-checks published under grants issued under this action.
- The number of trainings conducted under this action.
- The reach of communication activities supported by this action (measured in items such as views, likes and shares).
- The number of requests for support actions received under the fact-checking protection scheme, and the total number of support actions carried out.
- The number of fact-checking articles ingested by the central repository of fact-checks.
- The number of organisations linked to the fact-checking repository.

The consortium is furthermore encouraged to establish indicators capable of measuring the in-depth impact of the action. This could, for example, include the development of an indicator for emergency preparedness, performance and user experience metrics for the developed repository, or indicators assessing the uptake, impact and perception of the fact-checking protection scheme.

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[11] International Fact-checking Network https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/

Targeted stakeholders

Targeted stakeholders for the consortium are organisations such as: Fact-checking organisations certified by either the EFCSN or IFCN (see section 6 for more information), Civil society organisations, News Media, Academic institutions and commercial entities providing services which are relevant for the achievement of the call objectives.

The consortium should strive for a diverse set of participating organisations. Consortium members should embody a proper geographical balance and include organisations with proven expertise and experience related to the needs and specificities of the most vulnerable areas of the EU when it comes to exposure to disinformation and fact-checking capacity. In addition, consortium members should include applicants that cover the necessary expertise to implement the three consortium deliverables, namely: a fact-checking repository, a fact-checking protection scheme, and an emergency response capacity. Furthermore, the consortium must also identify the priorities for third-party funding grants, the tendering of the calls for proposals, and the selection of grantees.

The consortium <u>must involve at least one independent fact-checking organisation</u>.

The independence of the fact-checking organisation included in the consortium should be demonstrated either as:

a) Certified by the European Fact-Checking Standards Network or the International Fact-Checking Network, which are listed under https://ifcncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/signatories or under https://members.efcsn.com/signatories

b) Or, if the fact-checking organisation is not listed under any of the two links specified in point a) above, the organisation should then provide a certificate demonstrating its compliance with this criterion, i.e. proof of certification by EFCSN. The certificate can be included in Part B of the proposal.

Type of action and funding rate

The type of grant: Grants for financial support

Funding rate: 100% for the consortium, co-funding of 50% for the supported third party.

- Proposals should foresee at least a minimum of 60% of the **project's** total costs for the subgrants for third parties.

- The maximum amount of EU co-funding per third party is EUR 350.000, amounts of more than 60 000 EUR per third party are necessary because the nature of the actions under this call is such that their objectives would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult to achieve.

- A third party can be awarded more than once, provided that the total EU co-funding does not exceed EUR 350,000 per third party over the project duration, whilst ensuring that no double funding occurs.

- The distribution of the budget to third parties must be explicitly detailed in Part B of the proposal. The amount earmarked for third parties should be included in **the estimated budget "Resources table, column D1".** Moreover, a detailed

explanation on the activities to be carried out by third parties shall be included in part B under the respective Work Package (WP), as well as listed in Table **"Other cost categories".**

- The recipients of financial support to third parties are required to co-finance the activity by minimum 50% of the total costs of the activity.

ℹ️ For more information on Digital Europe types of action, *see Annex 1.*

Specific topic conditions

- For this topic, multi-beneficiary applications are mandatory and specific conditions for the consortium composition apply *(see section 6)*

- For this topic, following reimbursement option for equipment costs applies: full costs only *(see section 10)*

- For this topic, financial support to third parties is allowed *(see section 10)*

- The following parts of the award criteria in section 9 are exceptionally NOT applicable for this topic:

    - extent to which the project would reinforce and secure the digital technology supply chain in the Union*

    - extent to which the proposal can overcome financial obstacles such as the lack of market finance*

    - extent to which the proposal addresses environmental sustainability and the European Green Deal goals, in terms of direct effects and/or in awareness of environmental effects*

DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-NETWORKSICs — Network of Safer Internet Centres (SICs)

Objectives

The objective of the topic is to continue to support national Safer Internet Centres (SICs), which may be composed of one or more NGOs, government bodies/agencies, and/or private sector organisations. SICs provide online safety information, educational resources, public awareness tools and counselling and reporting services (through dedicated helplines and hotlines) for children, young people, educators and carers. The activities performed by the SICs help minors tackle online risks and become media-literate, resilient, digital citizens. The helpline work strand provides assistance and support to children, young people and their carers. The hotline work strand allows the public to anonymously report suspected online child sexual abuse material (CSAM) for assessment and takedown. The SICs also address the needs of children with specific or special needs, including those with disabilities and those hailing from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds, to ensure no child is left behind.

This call will continue to support the implementation of the Better Internet for Kids (BIK+) strategy, and the broader EU legal framework for child online protection and relevant EC priorities, such as action plan against cyberbullying, age verification and age assurance, as well as monitoring and support to mental health and well-being of children (e.g. related to addictive design and screen time). Considering the role of the Commission as an enforcement body for the Digital Services Act (DSA), where

applicable, the SICs will continue to strategically assist the Commission in this role, in particular through data collection in the EU member states.

Scope

The funding will ensure the continuation of the well-established European network of national SICs, by enabling the awarded consortia to provide at least:

A CENTRE FOR RAISING AWARENESS among children, parents/carers, teachers and educators as well as other relevant professionals working with children about online opportunities and risks for the under 18s. The focus will be to identify and address:

- online opportunities by fostering digital literacy to help children and youth to develop their digital skills and competences and to actively participate by giving them a say in the digital environment;

- specific and general known risks (e.g. harmful and illegal content; cyberbullying; age-inappropriate content; sexual extortion; addictive design and manipulation; disinformation; hate speech);

- specific and general emerging opportunities and risks (e.g. new apps; games; online challenges and trends; AI and generative AI, including AI generated pornographic and violent content; virtual, augmented and extended reality; the internet of things and other technological changes raising new social and ethical challenges that impact children);

- issues such as mental and physical health risks related to the use of technologies (e.g. self-harm; cyberbullying; risky online challenges; promotion of eating disorders; screen addiction; social isolation; exposure to age-inappropriate content online, including pornographic and violent content, and sexual extortion);

- risks facing children as young consumers (e.g. nudges to spend money; aggressive and/or manipulative marketing strategies; loot boxes[12]).

More specifically the awareness centre will:

a. Provide trustworthy resources for and carry out awareness campaigns targeting children, parents, carers and teachers, educators and other relevant contacts working with children (e.g. sports coaches, club leaders). The resources proposed should represent a balanced mix of different public friendly and accessible online and offline resources, such as, but not limited to: teaching resources, apps, booklets and leaflets, videos, games, blogs, vlogs, posters, etc. **The resources should address children's righ**ts, and a range of ages and topics.

b. Promote positive online experiences, for example through stimulating uptake of games and other engaging media to support awareness raising, and encouraging children to define their needs for better protection and empowerment in the digital transformation.

c. Engage directly with children from different demographic groups, including the organisation of regular youth participation activities, allowing them to express their views and pool their knowledge and experience of using online technologies.

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[12] Loot boxes are features in video games, usually accessed through gameplay or which may optionally be paid for with real-world money.

d. Organise training and awareness raising activities in line with UN General Comment No. 2515[13] **to create a stronger awareness that children's rights online** are the same as offline.

e. Promote the distribution of relevant online training modules (MOOCs) for teachers.

f. Organise training and awareness raising activities for parents.

g. Evaluate the impact of the awareness campaigns on the target groups and provide qualitative and quantitative feedback at European level on a regular basis as defined by the EU Better Internet for Kids (BIK) platform.

h. Establish and maintain partnerships and promote dialogue and exchange of information with key players (government agencies, private sector, user organisations and education stakeholders) at national level.

A HELPLINE to give advice and support to parents and children on issues related to children's use of digital technologies and services; to provide assistance on mental health issues relating to the exposure to age-inappropriate content online, including pornographic and violent content; to strengthen support to victims of cyberbullying, close cooperation with the national Child Helpline 116111 service is required.

More specifically the helpline will:

a. Offer one-to-one conversations via telephone, email and online chat services, with trained helpers to give advice and support to children and parents on online **related issues; solutions to offer a '24 hours a day / 7 days a week' support** should be explored, including using artificial intelligence together with human moderation when appropriate;

b. Develop/launch an ambitious national communication strategy including key performance indicators, both in terms of reach and impact to raise the visibility of the helpline services;

c. Draw up or update the operating guidelines in compliance with national law, including data protection rules;

d. Provide qualitative and quantitative feedback at European level on a regular basis on the main online risks and new trends as defined by the EU Better Internet for Kids (BIK) platform[14].

A HOTLINE for tackling the spread of online CSAM (i.e., receiving, analysing, and processing reports of such material). Closer cooperation with law enforcement and the private sector should be further explored in the context of the EU strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse, proposed Regulation to prevent and combat child sexual abuse and recast of the Directive 2011/93/EU on child sexual abuse.

The specific tasks for the hotline include the following:

a. Establish or continue to operate a hotline to receive information from the public relating to potential CSAM (reports), and if deemed appropriate racism and xenophobia;

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[13] General comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment
[14] https://better-internet-for-kids.europa.eu/en

b. Draw up or update the hotline manual of procedures in cooperation with law enforcement authorities and in accordance with best practice guidelines;

c. Cooperate with the INHOPE network of hotlines and make full use of and connect to the technical infrastructure ICCAM;

d. Undertake a preliminary assessment of the legality of the content reported and trace its origin, and forward the report to the body for action (Internet Service Provider, law enforcement agency or corresponding hotline) including systematic notice to the host provider of content assessed as CSAM and monitoring of the take-down; forward suspicions of illegal content to certain stakeholders (Internet Service Provider, law enforcement agency or corresponding hotline) for further assessment;

e. Ensure compatibility with data formats of the technical infrastructure ICCAM and provide statistics required for measuring the impact and effectiveness of the network of hotlines (e.g. time to removal of the illegal content);

f. Develop/update and launch an ambitious national communication strategy including key performance indicators, both in terms of reach and impact to raise the visibility of the hotline services;

g. Develop/update and implement a proactive monitoring and follow-up procedure for the takedown of CSAM where legally possible, including the collection of statistical data (e.g. time of receipt of report, notice, takedown; number of reports transmitted to law enforcement, requests for takedown to hosting services, feedback to users);

h. Extend the notice and takedown procedure to child sexual exploitation material (CSEM) not qualified as illegal at national level (e.g. posing, nudity) where legally possible, in order to protect personal data of children;

i. Extend the notice and takedown procedure of CSAM to countries without a national hotline, where legally possible;

j. Propose a design enabling a high level of automation in the report handling process, so reducing manual tasks. The automation strategy shall take into **account the national legal environment, which sets the limits for the hotline's** operations.

As part of the awareness strand, a YOUTH PANEL to engage directly with children from different demographic groups, including the organisation of regular youth participation activities, allowing them to express their views and pool their knowledge and experience of using online technologies, in particular in relation to the DSA enforcement. Adequate turnover, geographic balance and an open selection of participants is required.

SICs shall strengthen their support to children in vulnerable situations (such as children with disabilities, children from a minority, racial or ethnic background, refugee children, children in care, LGBTQI+ children, as well as children from a disadvantaged socio-economic background, who all may face additional challenges in the digital environment). For example, to address the digital divide, they should offer non-formal education and training to these groups and communities.

Safer Internet Centres must be composed of an awareness centre and a helpline, and preferably a hotline. If a hotline is not part of the proposal, this must be justified in the proposal. Safer Internet Centres that have been awarded a grant under this call are expected to join the Insafe network of awareness centres and helplines, and the INHOPE network of hotlines.

The three strands of the Safer Internet Centre will be expected to cooperate by setting up or to continue to run a single Advisory Board with relevant national stakeholders (e.g. from public authorities; academia; private sector; civil society; representatives of parents, teachers, and children), and to actively contribute to the implementation of a European approach by sharing information, good practices, and resources with the EU Better Internet for Kids (BIK) platform, and by taking part in EU-level events.

Funding will be limited to one Safer Internet Centre per eligible country.

Outcomes and deliverables

The following outcomes are expected:

- **support the monitoring of the impact of the digital transformation on children's** well-being in cooperation with the BIK platform;

- support the implementation of relevant EU strategies, policy initiatives and legislation in particular the DSA;

- promote the distribution of relevant online training modules (MOOCs) for teachers;

- expand the role of BIK Youth Ambassadors and BIK Youth Panels to support peer-to-peer activities at national, regional and local level;

- provide trustworthy resources for and carry out campaigns targeting children, parents, carers and teachers, educators and other relevant contacts working with children (e.g. sports coaches, club leaders). Training and awareness raising activities on childr**en's rights online should also be included in these initiatives to create a stronger awareness that children's rights online are the same as offline, as stipulated by UN General Comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights** in relation to the digital environment (CRC/C/GC/25), and as protected under the DSA, as well as awareness of help and reporting resources and pathways;

- act as a one-stop-shop for reliable and age-appropriate information;

- provide digital literacy training in formal and informal education settings (e.g., youth participation activities, workshops, classroom visits, competitions, peer-to-peer activities);

- support parents, carers, teachers, educators and other professionals working with children to better understand the risks and opportunities of children accessing digital content and services (e.g., information sessions, train the trainers programmes, and online and offline material);

- identify and foster synergies and complementarities with other EU-funded projects under similar or different funding programmes (such as EDMO or other projects dealing with activities relevant to the SICs), and collaborate on similar topics to showcase added-value and achieve greater impact;

- contribute to the exchanges of best practices developed by the SIC and/or adapted from other SICs and facilitated by the BIK platform to promote the successful results of the SICs activities;

- identify emerging risks through the helpline service, and communicate this promptly to local, national, and European actors;

- support access to resources and services by public authorities, including law enforcement agencies, and exchanges with hotline analysts to develop better preventive measures and to remove online CSAM;

- cooperate with popular platforms and digital services to assist the public, in particular children, when confronted with harmful and illegal content. This will **include, but not be limited to, SICs formally recognised as "trusted flaggers"** under the DSA.

- Provide support to the European Commission in the context of the enforcement of the DSA through, for example:

    o Early identification of trends: providing information on emerging trends related to privacy, safety and security through participating in the Helpline Early Warning Group and Awareness Centre Early Warning Group.

    o Quarterly reporting: completing and submitting a periodic helpline report via the BIK platform to the European Commission. The report would be comprised of statistics and information on the prevalence of reports of different online harm, which platforms the harm occurs on, with particular reference to designated Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs)/ Very Large Online Search Engines (VLOSEs)[15], if information is available.

    o Surveys or consultations: where applicable[16], in surveys or studies, incorporation of questions to be agreed with the European Commission, including for:

        ▪ A consultation of children and young people about their views and experience on matters such as (but not limited to) emerging risks to privacy, safety and security on online platforms and in particular VLOPs/VLOSEs. The consultation with children should include the impact of social media on their wellbeing.

    o A mandatory annual survey (to be submitted tentatively in March of each **year) on children's and young people's experience as to the protection** measures taken by platforms in response to the Guidelines under article 28 of the DSA. The questions to be agreed with the European Commission.

    o Youth panels: the organisation of at least one youth panel per year to consult young people about their views and experience on matters such as (but not limited to) emerging risks to privacy, safety and security, on online platforms, and VLOPs/VLOSEs designated under the DSA in particular, and impact of social media on their wellbeing.

For each of the three strands of activities the proposals selected for funding will be required to demonstrate that they have achieved the following results by the end of the Action:

For the awareness centre

a. A dissemination and communication plan for the awareness activities including key performance indicators, both in terms of reach and impact for each of the proposed activities and resources targeting children, parents and teachers and other professionals working with children.

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[15] VLOPs designated under the DSA: https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/list-designated-vlops-and-vloses

[16] If the SIC intends to carry out surveys or consultations as part of their planned activities.

b. On a regular basis, provide qualitative and quantitative feedback at European level as defined by the EU Better Internet for Kids platform.

c. An evaluation of the impact of the awareness campaigns on the target groups and report on the key performance indicators.

d. A report on the partnerships established/maintained and on the exchange of information with key players (e.g. government agencies, private sector, user organisations, education stakeholders) at national level.

For the helpline

a. A national communication and dissemination strategy including key performance indicators, both in terms of reach and impact to raise the visibility of the helpline services.

b. A helpline operating guidelines in compliance with national law, including data protection rules.

c. On a regular basis, provide qualitative and quantitative feedback at European level as defined by the EU Better Internet for Kids (BIK) platform.

d. An evaluation of the impact of the national communication and dissemination strategy and report on the key performance indicators of the helpline.

For the hotline

a. A national communication and dissemination strategy including key performance indicators, both in terms of reach and impact to raise the visibility of the hotline services.

b. An evaluation of the impact of the national communication and dissemination strategy and report on the key performance indicators of the hotline.

c. A hotline manual of procedures in cooperation with law enforcement authorities and in accordance with best practice guidelines.

d. Regular and timely processing of reports received. Where legally possible, the hotline must make a preliminary assessment of the legality of the content reported, trace its origin, and forward the report to the appropriate body for action (Internet Service Provider, the law enforcement agency or corresponding hotline). This should include, where legally possible, systematic notice to the host provider of content assessed as CSAM, monitoring of the take-down, and/or forwarding suspected illegal content to certain stakeholders (Internet Service Provider, the law enforcement agency or corresponding hotline) for further assessment.

e. Compatibility with data formats of the technical infrastructure ICCAM and the production of statistics required for measuring the impact and effectiveness of the network of hotlines (e.g. time to removal of the illegal content).

f. A proactive monitoring and follow-up procedure for the takedown of CSAM, where legally possible, including the collection of statistical data (e.g. time of receipt of report, notice and takedown).

g. An extension of the notice and takedown procedure of CSAM to countries without a national hotline, where legally possible.

h. An extension of the notice and takedown procedure to CSEM, where legally possible, including the collection of statistical data (e.g. time of receipt of report, notice, takedown).

i. A report on the design and implementation of automated report handling.

A list of mandatory deliverables for this topic is available under Section 10, subsection entitled *Milestones and deliverables* in this call document.

KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables

- Number of new or updated online resources made available by the Safer Internet Centres (e.g. online trainings, videos, online tools, apps, etc.). The minimum target is 1,100 resources uploaded combined by all EU co-funded Safer Internet Centres per year.

- Number of people reached through events and training activities. The minimum target is 500,000 people reached through events and trainings per year combined by all EU co-funded Safer Internet Centres.

- Number of awareness-raising activities targeting children in vulnerable situations. The minimum target is 20% of the total awareness raising activities organised every year combined by all EU co-funded Safer Internet Centres to target children in vulnerable situations.

- Number of active youth participants. The minimum target is 1,250 youth participants per year combined from all EU co-funded Safer Internet Centres. The turnover rate of youth participants is at least 30% per year, compared to the previous year.

- Number of requests handled by the co-funded helpline services. The minimum target is 65,000 requests every year combined by all EU co-funded helplines.

- Number of reports received by the co-funded hotlines. The minimum target is 350,000 reports every year combined by all EU co-funded hotlines.

- Number of participants in surveys or studies[17] related to emerging risks to privacy, safety and security (support to enforcement of the DSA, where applicable). The minimum target per Safer Internet Centre is 500 participants.

- Number of participants in annual surveys on the protection measures taken by online platforms in response to the Guidelines under article 28 DSA. The minimum target per Safer Internet Centre is 500 participants.

Targeted stakeholders

Existing or new Safer Internet Centres in the eligible countries.

Type of action and funding rate

Simple Grants — 50% funding rate

ℹ️ For more information on Digital Europe types of action, *see Annex 1.*

Specific topic conditions

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[17]   If the SIC intends to carry out surveys or consultations as part of their planned activities.

- For this topic, following reimbursement option for equipment costs applies: full costs only

- The following parts of the award criteria in section 9 are exceptionally NOT applicable for this topic:

    - extent to which the project would reinforce and secure the digital technology supply chain in the Union*

    - extent to which the proposal can overcome financial obstacles such as the lack of market finance*

    - extent to which the proposal addresses environmental sustainability and the European Green Deal goals, in terms of direct effects and/or in awareness of environmental effects*

3. Available budget

The estimated available call budget is EUR 47 000 000.

Specific budget information per topic can be found in the table below:

Topic	Topic budget
1. DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-FACTCHECKERS - European Network of Fact-Checkers	EUR 5 000 000
2. DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-NETWORKSICs - Network of Safer Internet Centres (SICs)	EUR 42 000 000

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

4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	15 April 2025
Deadline for submission:	02 September 2025 – 17:00:00 CEST (Brussels)
Evaluation:	September - October 2025
Information on evaluation results:	November 2025
GA signature:	February 2026

5. Admissibility and documents

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

Proposals must be submitted electronically via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System (accessible via the Topic page in the Calls for proposals section). Paper submissions are NOT possible.

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

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

- Application Form Part A — contains administrative information about the participants (future coordinator, beneficiaries and affiliated entities) and the summarised budget for the project *(to be filled in directly online)*

- Application Form Part B — contains the technical description of the project *(template to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed, assembled and re-uploaded)*

- mandatory annexes and supporting documents *(templates to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed, assembled and re-uploaded)*:

    - detailed budget table/calculator: not applicable

    - CVs of core project team: not applicable

    - activity reports of last year: not applicable

    - list of previous projects: not applicable

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

Your application must be readable, accessible and printable (please check carefully the layout of the documents uploaded).

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

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

ℹ 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 Digital Europe Programme (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 and definitions

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 NOT eligible, unless they are International organisations of European Interest within the meaning of Article 2 of the Digital Europe Regulation (i.e. international organisations the majority of whose members are Member States or whose headquarters are in a Member State).

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[18].

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'**[19]. ⚠️ 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 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)[20]. 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[21]. 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

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

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

[20]   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](#).

[21]   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).

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:

for topic DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-FACTCHECKERS:

— A minimum of three independent applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities) from at least three different eligible countries

— The coordinator must be based in an EU Member State

For complementary information refer to section 2 – Targeted stakeholders for consortia composition.

Eligible activities

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

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

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

Projects must comply with EU policy interests and priorities *(such as environment, social, security, industrial and trade policy, etc)*. Projects must also respect EU values and European Commission policy regarding reputational matters (*e.g. activities involving capacity building, policy support, awareness raising, communication, dissemination, etc*).

Financial support to third parties is allowed in DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-FACTCHECKERS for grants or similar forms of support under the following conditions:

— the calls must be open, published widely and conform to EU standards concerning transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality

— the calls must be published on the Funding & Tenders Portal, and on the **participants' websites**

— the calls must remain open for at least one month

— if call deadlines are changed this must immediately be published on the Portal and all registered applicants must be informed of the change

— **the outcome of the call must be published on the participants' websites,** including a description of the selected projects, award dates, project durations, and final recipient legal names and countries

— Applicants must be established in EU Member States or DEP associated countries

— the calls must have a clear European dimension.

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

Ethics

Projects must comply with:

— highest ethical standards and

— applicable EU, international and national law (including the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679).

Proposals under this call will have to undergo an ethics review to authorise funding and may be made subject to specific ethics rules (which become part of the Grant Agreement in the form of ethics deliverables, *e.g. ethics committee opinions/notifications/authorisations required under national or EU law*).

For proposals involving development, testing, deployment, use or distribution of AI systems, the ethics review will in particular check compliance with the principles of human agency and oversight, diversity/fairness, transparency and responsible social impact, while the experts performing the technical evaluation will assess the robustness of the AI systems (i.e. their reliability not to cause unintentional harm).

Security

Projects involving EU classified information must undergo security scrutiny to authorise funding and may be made subject to specific security rules (detailed in a security aspects letter (SAL) which is annexed to the Grant Agreement).

These rules (governed by Decision 2015/444[22] and its implementing rules **and**/or national rules) provide for instance that:

— projects involving information classified TRES SECRET UE/EU TOP SECRET (or equivalent) can NOT be funded

— classified information must be marked in accordance with the applicable security instructions in the SAL

— information with classification levels CONFIDENTIEL UE/EU CONFIDENTIAL or above (and RESTREINT UE/ EU RESTRICTED, if required by national rules) may be:

  — created or accessed only on premises with facility security clearance (FSC) from the competent national security authority (NSA), in accordance with the national rules

  — handled only in a secured area accredited by the competent NSA

  — accessed and handled only by persons with valid personnel security clearance (PSC) and a need-to-know

— at the end of the grant, the classified information must either be returned or continue to be protected in accordance with the applicable rules

— action tasks involving EU classified information (EUCI) may be subcontracted only with prior written approval from the granting authority and only to entities established in an EU Member State or in a non-EU country with a security of

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[22] See Commission Decision 2015/444/EU, Euratom of 13 March 2015 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 53).

> information agreement with the EU (or an administrative arrangement with the Commission)

> — disclosure of EUCI to third parties is subject to prior written approval from the granting authority.

Please note that, depending on the type of activity, facility security clearance may have to be provided before grant signature. The granting authority will assess the need for clearance in each case and will establish their delivery date during grant preparation. Please note that in no circumstances can we sign any grant agreement until at least one of the beneficiaries in a consortium has facility security clearance.

Further security recommendations may be added to the Grant Agreement in the form of security deliverables *(e.g. create security advisory group, limit level of detail, use fake scenario, exclude use of classified information, etc)*.

Beneficiaries must ensure that their projects are not subject to national/third-country security requirements that could affect implementation or put into question the award of the grant *(e.g. technology restrictions, national security classification, etc)*. The granting authority must be notified immediately of any potential security issues.

7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

Financial capacity

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

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

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

> — 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.

ℹ️ 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 'Implementation' award criterion**, on the basis of the competence and experience of the applicants and their project teams, including operational resources (human, technical and other) or, exceptionally, the measures proposed to obtain it by the time the task implementation starts.

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

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

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

- description of the consortium participants

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

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[23]:

- 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[24] (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

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[23] See Articles 138 and 143 of EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.
[24] '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.

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[25] 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[26]:

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

– they were previously involved in the preparation of the call and this entails a distortion of competition that cannot be remedied otherwise (conflict of interest).

8. Evaluation and award procedure

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

An evaluation committee (composed or 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 (for each topic) 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) Proposals focusing on a theme that is not otherwise covered by higher ranked proposals will be considered to have the highest priority.

2) The ex aequo proposals within the same topic will be prioritised according to the **scores they have been awarded for the award criterion '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 'Implementation'.**

3) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the overall proposal portfolio and the creation of positive

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[25] '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.

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

synergies between proposals, 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 topics 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. 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

   – Alignment with the objectives and activities as described in section 2

   – Contribution to long-term policy objectives, relevant policies and strategies, and synergies with activities at European and national level

   – Extent to which the project would reinforce and secure the digital technology supply chain in the EU*

   – Extent to which the project can overcome financial obstacles such as the lack of market finance*

2. Implementation

   – Maturity of the project

   – Soundness of the implementation plan and efficient use of resources

   – Capacity of the applicants, and when applicable the consortium as a whole, to carry out the proposed work

3. Impact

- Extent to which the project will achieve the expected outcomes and deliverables referred to in the call for proposals and, where relevant, the plans to disseminate and communicate project achievements

- Extent to which the project will strengthen competitiveness and bring important benefits for society

- Extent to which the project addresses environmental sustainability and the European Green Deal goals, in terms of direct effects and/or in awareness of environmental effects *.

May not be applicable to all topics (see specific topic conditions in section 2).

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	3	5
Implementation	3	5
Impact	3	5
Overall (pass) scores	10	15

Maximum points: 15 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 3/5, 3/5 and 3/5 points.

Overall threshold: 10 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 Agreements

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

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

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

Starting date and project duration

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

Project duration:

- for topic DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-FACTCHECKERS: between 30 to 36 months

- for topic DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-NETWORKSICs: 36 months

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

Milestones and deliverables

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

The following deliverable is mandatory for the topic: DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-FACTCHECKERS for all projects:

– additional deliverable on dissemination and exploitation, to be submitted in the first six months of the project

The following deliverables are mandatory for the topic: DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-NETWORKSICs for all projects:

1. National communication and dissemination plan for awareness raising activities, helpline and hotline including key performance and impact indicators (one deliverable for all strands);

2. Periodic helpline report;

3. Periodic hotline report;

4. Annual awareness raising report;

5. Annual report on emerging trends on child sexual exploitation material (CSEM), including AI-generated material;

6. Annual Youth Panel report;

7. Safer Internet Day report;

8. Submission of SIC best practices (once a year);

9. Long-term financial sustainability plan; and

10. Annual report on the support activities to the implementation of the DSA (where applicable).

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):

– for topic DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-FACTCHECKERS: EUR 5 000 000 per project

– for topic DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-NETWORKSICs: between EUR 300,000 and EUR 3,700,000 per project

The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

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 rate fixed in the Grant Agreement. This rate depends on the type of action which applies to the topic *(see section 2)*.

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 and art 6)*.

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 for topic: DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-FACTCHECKERS
    - D.2 Internally invoiced goods and services
- E. Indirect costs

Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:

- personnel costs:
    - average personnel costs (unit cost according to usual cost accounting practices)[27]: Yes
    - SME owner/natural person unit cost[28]: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit costs[29]: No (only actual costs)
- equipment costs:
    - full cost for topics DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-FACTCHECKERS and DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-NETWORKSICs

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[27] Decision of 29 June 2021 authorising the use of unit costs based on usual cost accounting practices for actions under the Digital Europe Programme.

[28] 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).

[29] 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).

- other cost categories:

  - costs for financial support to third parties: allowed for grants or similar for the topic DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-FACTCHECKERS:

    - Proposals should foresee at least a minimum of 60% of the overall project budget for the subgrants for third parties.

    - The maximum amount of EU co-funding per third party is EUR 350.000, amounts of more than 60 000 EUR per third party are necessary because the nature of the actions under this call is such that their objectives would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult to achieve.

    - A third party can be awarded more than once, provided that the total EU co-funding does not exceed EUR 350,000 per third party over the project duration, whilst ensuring that no double funding occurs.

    - The distribution of the budget to third parties must be explicitly detailed in Part B of the proposal. The amount earmarked for third **parties should be included in the estimated budget "Resources table, column D1".** Moreover, a detailed explanation on the activities to be carried out by third parties shall be included in part B under the **respective Work Package (WP), as well as listed in Table "Other cost categories".**

    - The recipients of financial support to third parties are required to co-finance the activity by minimum 50% of the total costs of the activity

- internally invoiced goods and services (unit cost according to usual cost accounting practices)[30]: Yes

- 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/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

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

  - other ineligible costs: No.

Reporting and payment arrangements

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

After grant signature, you will normally receive a prefinancing to start working on the

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[30] Decision of 29 June 2021 authorising the use of unit costs based on usual cost accounting practices for actions under the Digital Europe Programme.

project (float of normally 65% 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.

For the topic DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-FACTCHECKERS there will be one or more **additional prefinancing payments** linked to a prefinancing reports.

For the topic DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-NETWORKSICs there will be one or more **interim payments** (with cost reporting through the use of resources report).

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

Security rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 13 and Annex 5)*

Ethics rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 14 and Annex 5)*

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

- background and list of background: Yes

- protection of results: Yes

- exploitation of results: Yes

- rights of use on results: Yes

- access to results for policy purposes: Yes

- access to results in case of a public emergency: 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

- dissemination of results: Yes

- additional dissemination obligations: No

- additional communication activities: Yes

- special logo: No

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

- specific rules for Grants for Financial Support for the topic: DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-FACTCHECKERS: Yes

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

b) submit the proposal

Access the Electronic Submission System via the Topic page in the Calls for proposals section (or, for calls sent by invitation to submit a proposal, through the link provided in the invitation letter).

Submit your proposal in 3 parts, as follows:

- Part A includes administrative information about the applicant organisations (future coordinator, beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners) and the summarised budget for the proposal. Fill it in directly online

- Part B (description of the action) covers the technical content of the proposal. Download the mandatory word template from the Submission System, fill it in and upload it as a PDF file

- Annexes (*see section 5*). Upload them as PDF file (single or multiple depending on the slots). Excel upload is sometimes possible, depending on the file type.

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

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

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

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

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

12. Help

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

- Online Manual

- Topic Q&A on the Topic page (for call-specific questions in open calls; not applicable for actions by invitation)

- Portal FAQ (for general questions).

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

Contact

For individual questions on the Portal Submission System, please contact the IT Helpdesk.

Non-IT related questions should be sent to the following email address: HERE

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 (except under 'EU Synergies actions').** Outside such Synergies actions, any given action may receive only ONE grant from the EU budget and cost items may under NO circumstances be declared under two EU grants; projects must be designed as different actions, clearly delineated and separated for each grant (without overlaps).

- Combination with EU operating grants — Combination with EU operating grants is possible, if the project remains outside the operating grant work programme and you make sure that cost items are clearly separated in your accounting and NOT declared twice *(see AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement, art 6.2.E)*.

- 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.

<div align="right">Annex 1</div>

<div align="center">Digital Europe types of action</div>

The Digital Europe Programme uses the following actions to implement grants:

Simple Grants

Description: Simple Grants (SIMPLE) are a flexible type of action used by a large variety of topics and can cover most activities. The consortium will mostly use personnel costs to implement action tasks, activities with third parties (subcontracting, financial support, purchase) are possible but should be limited.

Funding rate: 50%

Payment model: Prefinancing – (x) interim payment(s) – final payment

SME Support Actions

Description: SME Support Actions (SME) are a type of action primarily consisting of activities directly aiming to support SMEs involved in building up and the deployment of the digital capacities. This type of action can also be used if SMEs need to be in the consortium and make investments to access the digital capacities.

Funding rate: 50% except for SMEs where a rate of 75% applies

Payment model: Prefinancing – (x) interim payment(s) – final payment

Coordination and Support Actions (CSAs)

Description: Coordination and Support Actions (CSAs) are a small type of action (a typical amount of 1-2 Mio) with the primary goal to support EU policies. Activities can include coordination between different actors for accompanying measures such as standardisation, dissemination, awareness-raising and communication, networking, coordination or support services, policy dialogues and mutual learning exercises and studies, including design studies for new infrastructure and may also include complementary activities of strategic planning, networking and coordination between programmes in different countries.

Funding rate: 100%

Payment model: Prefinancing – (x) interim payment(s) – final payment

Grants for Procurement

Description: Grants for Procurement (GP) are a special type of action where the main goal of the action (and thus the majority of the costs) consist of buying goods or services and/or subcontracting tasks. Contrary to the PAC Grants for Procurement *(see below)* there are no specific procurement rules (i.e. usual rules for purchase apply), nor is there a limit to 'contracting authorities**/entities'**. Personnel costs should be limited in this type of action; they are in general used to manage the grant, coordination between the beneficiaries, preparation of the procurements.

Funding rate: 50%

Payment model: Prefinancing - second prefinancing (to provide the necessary cash-flow to finance the procurements) – payment of the balance

PAC Grants for Procurement

Description: PAC Grants for Procurement (PACGP) are a specific type of action for procurement in grant agreements by 'contracting authorities/entit**ies'** as defined in the EU Public Procurement Directives (Directives 2014/24/EU, 2014/25/EU and 2009/81/EC) aiming at innovative digital goods and services (i.e. novel technologies on the way to commercialisation but not yet broadly available).

Funding rate: 50%

Payment model: Prefinancing - second prefinancing (to provide the necessary cash-flow to finance the procurements) – payment of the balance

Grants for Financial Support

Description: Grants for Financial Support (GfS) have a particular focus on cascading grants. The majority of the grant will be distributed via financial support to third parties with special provisions in the grant agreement, maximum amounts to third parties, multiple pre-financing and reporting obligations.

Annex 5 of the model grant agreements foresees specific rules for this type of action regarding conflict of interest, the principles of transparency, non-discrimination and sound financial management as well as the selection procedure and criteria.

In order to assure the co-financing obligation in the programme, the support to third parties should only cover 50% of third party costs.

Funding rate: 100% for the consortium, co-financing of 50% by the supported third party

Payment model: Prefinancing - second prefinancing (to provide the necessary cash-flow to finance sub-grants) – payment of the balance

Lump Sum Grants

Description: Lump Sum Grants (LS) reimburse a general lump sum for the entire project and the consortium as a whole. The lump sum is fixed ex-ante (at the latest at grant signature). on the basis of a methodology defined by the granting authority (either on the basis of a detailed project budget or other pre-defined parameters). The lump sum will cover all **the beneficiaries' direct and indirect costs** for the project. The beneficiaries do not need to report actual costs, they just need to claim the lump sum once the work is done. If the action is not properly implemented only part of the lump sum will be paid.

Funding rate: 100%/50%/50% and 75% (for SMEs)

Payment model: Prefinancing – (x) interim payment(s)– final payment

Framework Partnerships (FPAs) and Specific Grants (SGAs)

FPAs

Description: FPAs establish a long-term cooperation mechanism between the granting authority and the beneficiaries of grants. The FPA specifies the common objectives (action plan) and the procedure for awarding specific grants. The specific grants are awarded via identified beneficiary actions (with or without competition).

Funding rate: no funding for FPA

SGAs

Description: The SGAs are linked to an FPA and implement the action plan (or part of it). They are awarded via an invitation to submit a proposal (identified beneficiary action). The consortium composition should in principle match (meaning that only entities that are part of the FPA can participate in an SGA), but otherwise the implementation is rather flexible. FPAs and SGAs can have different coordinators; other partners of the FPA are free to participate in an SGA or not. There is no limit to the amount of SGAs signed under one FPA.

Funding rate: 50%

Payment model: Prefinancing – (x) interim payment(s) – final payment

<div align="right">Annex 2</div>

Eligibility restrictions under Articles 12(5) and (6) and 18(4) of the Digital Europe Regulation

Security restrictions Article 12(5) and (6)

If indicated in the Digital Europe Work Programme, and if justified for security reasons, topics can exclude the participation of legal entities *established* in a third country or DEP associated country, or established in the EU territory but *controlled* by a third country or third country legal entities (including DEP associated countries)[31].

This restriction is applicable for SO1 (High Performance Computing), SO2 (Artificial Intelligence) and SO3 (Cybersecurity), but at different levels.

- In the case of SO3, the provision is implemented in the strictest way. When activated, only entities established in the EU AND controlled from the EU will be able to participate; entities from associated countries (which are normally eligible) can NOT participate — unless otherwise provided in the Work Programme.

- In SO1 and SO2, entities established in associated countries and entities controlled from non-EU countries may participate, if they comply with the conditions set out in the Work Programme (usually:

    - for the associated countries: be formally associated to Digital Europe Programme and receive a positive assessment by the Commission on the replies to their associated country security questionnaire.

    - for the participants: submission of a guarantee demonstrating that they have taken measures to ensure that their participation does not contravene security or EU strategic autonomy interests).

⚠️ EEA countries (and participants from EEA countries) are exempted from these restrictions (and additional requirements) because EEA countries benefit from a status equivalent to the Member States.

In order to determine the ownership and control status, participants[32] will be required to fill in and submit an [ownership control declaration]*as part of the proposal (and later on be requested to submit supporting documents) *(see [Guidance on participation in DEP, HE, EDF and CEF-DIG restricted calls])*.

In addition, where a guarantee is required, the participants will also have to fill in the [guarantee template]*, approved by the competent authorities of their country of establishment, and submit it to the granting authority which will assess its validity.

The activation of these restrictions will also make a number of specific provisions in the Grant Agreement applicable, such as country restrictions for eligible costs, country restrictions for subcontracting, and special rules for implementation, exploitation of results and transfers and exclusive licensing of results.

Thus:

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[31] See Article 12(5) and (6) of the Digital Europe Regulation [2021/694].
[32] Beneficiaries and affiliated entities, associated partners and subcontractors — except for entities that are validated as public bodies by the Central Validation Service.

–   participation in any capacity (as beneficiary, affiliated entity, associated partner, subcontractor or recipient of financial support to third parties) is also limited to entities established in and controlled from eligible countries

–   project activities (included subcontracted work) must take place in eligible countries

–   the Grant Agreement provides for specific IPR restrictions.

Strategic autonomy restrictions Article 18(4)

If indicated in the Digital Europe Work Programme, calls can limit the participation to entities *established* in the EU, and/or entities established in third countries associated to the programme for EU strategic autonomy reasons[33].

The activation of these restrictions will make a number of specific provisions in the Grant Agreement applicable, such as country restrictions for eligible costs, country restrictions for subcontracting, and special rules for implementation, exploitation of results and transfers and exclusive licensing of results.

⚠ For more information, *see Guidance on participation in DEP, HE, EDF and CEF-DIG restricted calls*.

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[33]   See Article 18(4) of the Digital Europe Regulation 2021/694.