



ERDF Interregional Innovation Investments Instrument (I3)

Call for proposals

Capacity Building Strand 2b under the Interregional Innovation
Investments (I3) Instrument
(I3-2026-CAP2b)

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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 the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument under the European Regional Development Fund (**ERDF**).

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

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

The call is launched in accordance with the 2025-2027 I3 Work Programme³ and will be managed by the **European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA)** ('Agency').

The call covers the following **topic**:

- **I3-2026-CAP2b — Capacity Building (Strand 2b)**

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

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

- the [Call document](#) outlines the:
 - background, objectives, scope, activities that can be funded, and the expected results (sections 1 and 2)
 - timetable and available budget (sections 3 and 4)
 - admissibility and eligibility conditions (including mandatory documents; sections 5 and 6)
 - criteria for financial and operational capacity and exclusion criteria (section 7)
 - evaluation and award procedure (section 8)

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

² Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund (OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 60–93).

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

- award criteria (section 9)
- legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements (section 10)
- how to submit an application (section 11)
- the Online Manual outlines the:
 - procedures to register and submit proposals online via the EU Funding & Tenders Portal ('Portal')
 - recommendations for the preparation of the application
- the AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement contains:
 - detailed annotations on all the provisions in the Grant Agreement you will have to sign in order to obtain the grant (*including cost eligibility, payment schedule, accessory obligations, etc*).

You are also encouraged to visit the [Smart Specialisation Community of Practice \(S3 CoP\)](#) and to consult the list of projects funded previously on the [I3 Instrument](#) web sites.

1. Background

The **Interregional Innovation Investments (I3)** Instrument is a funding tool under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Regulation (Article 13)⁴. It supports interregional cooperation in innovation, using Smart Specialisation Strategies⁵ (S3) as the guiding principle to connect regional strengths and align them with EU strategic priorities.

Implemented under EU Cohesion Policy, the I3 Instrument helps develop and strengthen EU and regional value chains⁶, with a particular focus on involving actors from less developed regions and outermost regions. It promotes innovation (creation and diffusion) and uptake by linking regions with shared or complementary capabilities and encouraging cooperation among stakeholders from across the quadruple helix⁷ — public authorities, businesses, academia, and civil society.

While Strands 1 and 2a provide financial and advisory support for investment-ready interregional innovation projects, this *Strand 2b* focuses on strengthening regional innovation ecosystems and building the capacity of actors in less developed regions (LDRs) and transition regions (TRs) to be part of EU value chains.

Regions targeted by this call for proposals under Strand 2b — LDRs and TRs, outermost regions, and those facing specific challenges — often show weaknesses to innovation diffusion and cooperation. These may include institutional and administrative shortcomings, fragmented ecosystems, human capital constraints, and a lack of supportive policy or regulatory frameworks. In many cases, there is a limited interregional collaboration with research and technology organisations, investors, and industry partners, which further constrains their innovation potential. This leads to their

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021R1058>

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/communities-and-networks/s3-community-of-practice_en

⁶ Value chain definition: combination of activities, actors, strategic networking and companies, interconnected across sectors and borders.

⁷ A well performing quadruple-helix ecosystem usually implies a network model with an exchange of skills, knowledge, business ideas and money between companies, public research, institutions, financial institutions, government bodies (at different levels) and final users.

underrepresentation in investment-focused EU funding instruments, restricts their access to new markets and larger European investment opportunities, and diminishes their capacity to tackle global economic challenges while enhancing Europe's competitiveness. Addressing these challenges requires not only building operational and technical capacities, but also reinforcing institutional and governance frameworks, fostering policy learning, and embedding effective practices (proven in other regions or countries), into policy design. By addressing these challenges, projects under *Strand 2b* help build the capabilities needed to participate in interregional innovation projects, paving the way for future applications under Strand 1, Strand 2a, other complementary EU programmes or direct cooperation projects, and creating stronger regional ecosystems that can find partners and develop projects also outside public funding schemes.

Structural challenges, such as institutional capacity or governance gaps, and thematic challenges, such as sector-specific barriers in S3 priority areas, can limit the ability of innovation actors to develop solid business cases or reach the necessary level of technological maturity.

The policy focus of capacity-building efforts may also cover areas linked to the EU's strategic priorities, as outlined in the [New European Innovation Agenda](#), the [Clean Industrial Deal](#), the [Competitiveness Compass](#), and the [Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform \(STEP\)](#). Areas such as the blue economy are also relevant, where approaches aligned with the [European Ocean Pact](#) can help strengthen regional innovation ecosystems and support innovation diffusion.

Strand 2b supports projects co-creating dynamics among all participating regions, ensuring that project development takes place on an equal footing regardless of their development status. The active participation of transition and more developed regions is encouraged, particularly in supporting less developed regions to strengthen their capacity and gain experience in engaging with European value chains and joint innovation investment projects.

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

I3-2026-CAP2b — Capacity Building (Strand 2b)

Objectives

General objective

The overall objective of the I3 Strand 2b is to build capacity in less developed regions to develop and strengthen their regional innovation ecosystems and value chains through coordinated and interlinked investments in several regions. It supports actions focused on SMEs to help them cooperate, grow, compete, and play an important role in Europe's economy. Together, these efforts help less developed regions connect to EU value chains and prepare for future interregional investment projects.

This call for proposals aims to improve the capacity of public authorities and innovation intermediaries (e.g. clusters⁸) to support companies in the identification of investment portfolios at an interregional scale.

The purpose of this call for proposals is to build capacities for a successful participation in Strand 1 or Strand 2a calls or other complementary EU programmes, enhancing interregional cooperation with a view to identifying and sharing good practices, deriving actionable policy recommendations, strengthening institutional capacities, and

⁸ See also <https://clustercollaboration.eu>.

experimenting new approaches. This will also help public authorities and innovation agencies to design evidence-based and targeted policy interventions in the long-term, including updates to regional Smart Specialisation Strategies and related innovation policy frameworks.

Projects submitted under this call for proposals are expected to offer an added value when promoting the participation of **EU outermost regions**⁹. Due consideration will be given to such added value during the evaluation of I3 project proposals (see section 9 of the call document). Projects can also offer an added value when supporting **regions with specific challenges**¹⁰, such as difficulties in retaining and attracting talents. The I3 Instrument, in particular *Strand 2b*, is integral part of support on the ground offered by the European Commission to cities, regions and Member States, through the **Talent Booster Mechanism**¹¹ where I3 Instrument with its capacity building component represents one of the pillars.

Specific objectives

Proposals submitted under this call for proposals shall:

Help create connected and well-performing regional innovation ecosystems, establishing the right framework conditions for interregional cooperation. This improved connectivity should support regions in aligning their innovation capacities and governance models to enable joint interregional innovation activities.

Contribute to the preparation of interregional innovation projects in shared smart specialisation areas. Proposals should lay the groundwork for future cooperation, in particular under Strand 2a, by focusing on areas of common interest and complementary strengths.

Facilitate the validation process of investment ideas through improved knowledge and practical skills in business and investment planning. This should include building concrete capacities by working with companies, in particular SMEs, in a specific value chain and defining a clear path towards developing I3 application(s).

Identify and address gaps and business opportunities that may hinder or enable the reinforcement of existing value chains or the creation of new ones. A clear link to smart specialisation priorities and value chain positioning is expected.

Experiment “out-of-the-box” approaches to deliver validated solutions and tested models that can increase the capacity of regional actors to engage effectively in interregional innovation processes.

Ensure that the knowledge and capabilities gained during the project can be replicated, adapted, and embedded in the regional ecosystem. This should contribute to long-term institutional learning, inform updates to Smart Specialisation Strategies, and support policy and ecosystem development beyond the project’s lifetime.

Ensure the **active involvement of companies and civil society**, alongside public administrations, academia, and other quadruple-helix stakeholders.

⁹ Article 349 TFEU highlights that the structural social and economic situation of the Outermost Regions is compounded by their remoteness, insularity, small size, difficult topography and climate, economic dependence on a few products, the permanence and combination of which severely restrain their development.

¹⁰ Specific challenges are not pre-defined. Specific challenges can vary from demographic, geographic, green, digital or being stuck in a development trap. Regions considering that they face such specific and possibly unique challenges are thus encouraged to outline these challenges in their I3 application.

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/communities-and-networks/harnessing-talent-platform/talent-booster-mechanism_en.

Themes and priorities (scope)

To support the EU's efforts to strengthen competitiveness and resilience, this call for proposals focuses on practical ways to improve how regions work together on innovation. This call focuses on creating the right conditions for technological progress and stronger innovation ecosystems, which are essential for building interregional innovation investment capacity.

Aligned with the Competitiveness Compass priorities — closing the innovation gap, decarbonising the economy, and reducing strategic dependencies — the call aims to support projects that remove innovation barriers — such as fragmented ecosystems, limited investment readiness, and weak links to European value chains.

Successful projects improve the innovation and coordination capacity of all participating reinforce the competitiveness and resilience of regional innovation ecosystems, boost regional competitiveness and support SMEs. Priority is given to capacity building and investment-readiness efforts in shared smart specialisation areas, with a view to enabling interregional cooperation and better integration into EU value chains.

Thematic areas of focus (non-exhaustive list):

Strengthening regional innovation ecosystems by engaging stakeholders, improving governance, and reinforcing interregional links, particularly for less developed regions, to better connect with EU value chains. This can also involve using technical assistance from mainstream ERDF programmes to help public bodies structure and strengthen local ecosystems, improve framework conditions, and address governance or coordination challenges.

Increasing **investment readiness** through improved business and investment planning, building concrete capacities in SMEs and other actors, and enabling participation in interregional partnerships.

Facilitating **knowledge and talent mobilisation**, recognising human capital as a key driver of competitiveness and innovation, and promoting measures to retain, attract, and develop skills.

Enhancing **value chain integration** through ecosystem building and S3 partnerships to overcome fragmentation and reduce the innovation divide.

Activities that can be funded (scope)

Eligible activities include **coordination and support actions** targeting regional actors — such as small and medium-sized enterprises, research infrastructures, clusters, innovation agencies, ERDF managing authorities, and other organisations active in business development, territorial cooperation, or innovation. These activities aim at **strengthening regional innovation ecosystems** and improving the ability to identify relevant **investment portfolios** for future applications under the I3 Instrument (Strands 1 and 2a) or other EU funding schemes.

To promote a balanced approach and ensure a broader impact, proposals **must include at least one core action** and may be complemented by support actions. There is no obligation to cover all actions listed below, as these are indicative groupings to help structure the scope of activities.

A-Core actions

1-Ecosystem Building and Connection

- **Activating innovation intermediaries**
Mobilising regional development agencies, clusters, and private sector organisations to engage local stakeholders in interregional cooperation and investment processes.
- **Creating and reinforcing resilient interregional innovation ecosystems**
Actions that help regions strengthen their innovation ecosystems internally by building collaboration among key stakeholders and addressing fragmentation.
- **Cooperating with industry associations, Technology Transfer Offices and other key players at local/regional level**
Facilitate collaboration with business networks, clusters, research institutions and Innovation intermediaries to improve quadruple-helix connections.
- **Developing tools and know-how for participation in alliances and networks**
Design instruments that enable ecosystem actors to join European and global networks, enhancing cooperation in shared S3 domains.
- **Designing the policy mix for innovation and internationalisation in SMEs**
Develop frameworks that support SMEs in accessing EU and global value chains, including policies for innovation uptake.
- **Designing knowledge transfer activities**
Foster mutual learning within and beyond the consortium through structured knowledge exchange with regional and national actors.
- **Testing and piloting ecosystem initiatives**
Pilot new support schemes or cooperation mechanisms to improve innovation ecosystem coordination and prepare for future interregional projects.
- **Designing and piloting talent attraction and retention initiatives**
Develop and test measures to strengthen the regional workforce and align skills with smart specialisation priorities.

2-Investment Project Identification

- **Designing industry-driven value chain initiatives**
Identify and shape interregional value chains aligned with S3 priorities, building on regional strengths and complementarity.
- **Innovative project feasibility assessment**
Support early-stage work to assess market, technological, and business feasibility of potential investment projects.
- **Funding mix identification**
Prepare optimal financing structures, evaluate investment-readiness, and map possible co-financing sources across programmes.
- **Legal and technical support**
Address regulatory, legal or technical aspects of proposed project ideas.

B-Support actions:

1-Mapping, Benchmarking and Matchmaking

- **Mapping and benchmarking regional innovation performance**
Use tools such as the Regional Innovation Scoreboard (RIS), European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS) and Community Innovation Survey (CIS), to assess and compare the performance of local innovation actors.
- **Analysing interregional value chains and sub-value chain niches**
Identify challenges, gaps, and opportunities for regional ecosystems to engage in emerging or strategic value chains.
- **Matching supply-side competencies with business opportunities**
Map regional strengths and connect them with demand-driven investment opportunities across regions.
- **Mapping skills gaps and talent pipelines**
Identify regional skills gaps and labour market needs relevant to targeted value chains, and map potential talent pipelines to support ecosystem development.

2-Networking and Staff Exchange

- **Strengthening participation in EU networks and platforms**
Support integration into S3 Thematic Platforms, European Technology Platforms, the EU Cluster Collaboration Platform and other relevant networks.
- **Fostering staff exchange and talent development**
- **Identify skills gaps and talent needs** and implement staff exchange and peer learning to strengthen human capital and transfer know-how across ecosystems.
- **Enabling cluster and company missions across regions**
Organise business or cluster visits to other regions or Member States, including visits to demonstration infrastructure.
- **Connecting regional ecosystems through twinning activities**
Facilitate direct cooperation between innovation ecosystems, including business and research actors.
- **Building capacity of innovation managers and business developers**
Equip key innovation actors with the skills and tools to engage in interregional investment processes.

Project proposals must describe in detail the coordinator's role and have to ensure shared understanding among all project members about the project tasks and responsibilities. For this purpose, when needed, consortium coordinators can delegate specific tasks and responsibilities to project partners, leveraging their expertise and resources to ensure successful implementation.

Consortia are encouraged to elaborate an **exploitation plan** which lays out how the project will tap into opportunities for further funding under the [European Regional Development Fund \(ERDF\)](#) and how it will explore **synergies with the ERDF and other EU funding programmes and instruments** (in particular with the [Interreg Europe](#) programmes). In addition, the consortia shall explain how they assure sustainability and a lasting effect on the regional innovation ecosystems.

Project proposals shall detail how the project will ensure the collaboration with the [Enterprise Europe Network](#) (e.g. the EEN Sector and thematic groups), [European Innovation Ecosystem stakeholders](#), [Horizon Europe](#) partnerships, [S3 Community of Practice](#) (S3 COP) and other relevant networks or partnerships. All proposed actions shall capitalise on already available information and should not be limited to duplicating what already exists.

Consortia are encouraged to develop **dissemination strategies**, going beyond traditional channels e.g. using social media platforms and events to promote EU funded activities for public awareness and engage a broader community through cross learning.

Expected impact

Measuring & Monitoring: Key Performance indicators (KPIs)

Proposals shall identify relevant KPIs and indicate **targets** that consortia plan to reach. All KPIs relate to the situation at the end of each project.

Output KPIs must be measured at the beginning and at the end of the project. The following 4 KPIs dimensions have been identified:

- **Interregional dimension**
 - Number of regions at different level of development¹².
- **Policy dimension**
 - Number of S3 Partnerships (or other relevant interregional working groups in networks and platforms) in which regions are actively participating;
 - Number of policy measures conceived to engage the ecosystems externally.
- **Socio-economic dimension**
 - Number of value chain analyses based on mapping and benchmarking activities;
 - Number of business cases identified in the framework of the given value chain developed;
 - Number of companies involved in the business cases;
 - Number of intermediaries engaged in interregional activities;
 - Number of interregional alliances established or in preparation.
- **Gender dimension** in innovation ecosystems (increasing women participation and gender mainstreaming), e.g:
 - Fixed targets in women's participation (e.g. women innovators involved);
 - Number of gender equality measures in participating organisations;
 - Gender-specific innovations (valorising knowledge based on gender and intersectional analysis).

Consortia are invited and encouraged to **identify and measure tailored KPIs** (quantitative and qualitative) in addition to the listed ones.

These can include action plans, indicators related to specific business cases, indicators on quadruple helix stakeholders' engagement, and ecosystem governance arrangements.

Output

In line with the specific objectives of this call for proposals, the expected outputs have to refer to the following output:

¹² Less developed, more developed, transition and outermost regions.

- **Concrete output at the closure of the project (non-exhaustive list):**

- **Tailored policy measures** (in place or ready for adoption) to increase the innovation capacity of ecosystems and their ability to participate in interregional innovation projects.
- **Cooperation arrangements with industry associations** and other key players to enable participation in international expert networks and regional alliances.
- **Agreements with suitable partners** for cooperation with less developed regions on specific innovation topics.
- **Membership in relevant networks and innovation thematic platforms** supporting 1) innovation diffusion or 2) the development of policy measures to foster investments, open new markets, and promote value chain participation.
- Tested **tools for mapping demand-driven business opportunities** for interregional investments and matching them supply-side competencies.
- Identified pipeline for **I3 investment projects** based on value chain mapping and benchmarking activities.
- Identified **innovative and competitive products and services** relevant for interregional and European value chains.
- Concrete **business cases** prepared to apply to I3 investment calls.
- **Increased innovation maturity of business cases** (technology readiness, business readiness, and market readiness).
- **Dissemination plan** for sharing best practice examples, showcasing results, and promoting uptake and replication of I3 project outcomes.
- **Exploitation plan** for scaling up project results and leveraging further ERDF mainstream programme funding.

In addition, you will be expected to submit **one progress report not linked to payments** and a **report on annual cumulative expenditure**.

Outcome

The outcome of *Strand 2b* projects is expected to be the increased capacities of less developed regions. Regional innovation ecosystems are expected to strengthen their capacity to deliver concrete interregional innovation investments within EU value chains and the capacity to tap into other funding instruments, to cover additional funding needs (if necessary). Upon project completion, involved SMEs will possess **enhanced capacity to cooperate in interregional value chains and to attract private investments or to create public- private partnerships**.

Long term impact (non-exhaustive list)

- **Committed innovation intermediaries** (e.g. regional development agencies, industrial associations) to support companies engaging in innovation and interregional value chains.
- Increased capacity of regional ecosystems to contribute to Europe's innovation competitiveness through participation in interregional investment projects.
- Improved **support measures** for innovation diffusion, investment identification, interregional collaboration, and value chain participation.
- **Improved cooperation with interregional ecosystems to de-risk investments**¹³ and leverage European innovation and market potential
- **Improved business climate for competitive ecosystems**, including support to industries with corporate strategies in key thematic areas (such as innovation investments, internationalisation, customer orientation in EU and global markets, and personnel training through upskilling and reskilling).

¹³ Derisking investments refers to the process of reducing the potential losses in a portfolio or investment strategies. This can be achieved by financing testing and validation of innovative technologies and solutions in real operational environment, before the large-scale uptake of innovation.

- Reinforced **cooperation capacity of quadruple-helix ecosystems** in participating regions.
- Reinforced **capacity to engage with local SMEs and collaborate with other ecosystems** (e.g. to address interregional investments on shared S3 priorities) and improved **connections among innovation stakeholders** within **interregional** quadruple-helix ecosystems.
- Increased **readiness of I3 consortia to cooperate in globally competitive EU value chains**.

3. Available budget

The estimated available call budget is **EUR 9 800 000**.

We reserve the right not to award all available funds or to redistribute them between the I3 call strands, depending on the proposals received and the results of the evaluation.

4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	23 October 2025
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>19 March 2026 – 17:00:00 CET (Brussels)</u>
Evaluation:	March - July 2026
Information on evaluation results:	July 2026
GA signature:	October 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*)

- **Part C** — contains additional project data and the project's contribution to EU programme key performance indicators (*to be filled in directly online*)
- **mandatory annexes and supporting documents** (*templates to be downloaded from the Submission System, completed, assembled and re-uploaded*):

- **detailed budget table** (*template available in the Submission System*)
- **Endorsement letter** (mandatory letter from the Member States' or regional competent body responsible for the smart specialisation strategy (S3); *template available in the Submission System*)

The **endorsement letter** is required at appropriate **NUTS level**¹⁴ (NUTS level I, II or III) depending on the context of each Member State and/or region.

This is required for **all consortium members** to confirm the alignment with the national or regional S3 policies¹⁵, strategies and priorities of all Member States and Regions represented by organisations participating in this application.

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

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

Before signing the grant agreement, each beneficiary and affiliated entity must confirm this again by signing a **Declaration of Honour** (DoH). Proposals without this document 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, nor additional annexes. Shorter proposals are welcome.

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



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

6. Eligibility

Eligible participants (eligible countries)

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

- be legal entities (public or private bodies)

¹⁴ [NUTS](#): Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics, a geographical nomenclature subdividing the EU economic territory into regions at three levels (NUTS 1, 2 and 3).

¹⁵ [S3 observatory](#): List of competent regional or national institution, responsible for the management of S3.

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

Beneficiaries and affiliated entities must register in the [Participant Register](#) — before submitting the proposal — and will have to be validated by the Central Validation Service (REA Validation)¹⁶. 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*).

Associated Partners from non-EU Member States can participate but they need to bear their own costs (*see section 13*).

Specific cases and definitions

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

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

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

Entities without legal personality — Entities which do not have legal personality under their national law may exceptionally participate, provided that their representatives have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf and offer guarantees for the protection of the EU financial interests equivalent to that offered by legal persons¹⁷.

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'¹⁸.  Please note that if the action will be implemented by the members, they should also participate (either as beneficiaries or as affiliated entities, otherwise their costs will NOT be eligible).

Countries currently negotiating association agreements — Beneficiaries from countries with ongoing negotiations (*see 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).

¹⁶ At the latest before grant signature in case of invitation to grant agreement preparation.

¹⁷ See Article 200(2)(c) EU <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32018R1046> Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

¹⁸ For the definitions, see Articles 190(2) and 200(2)(c) EU <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32018R1046> Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

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)¹⁹. 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 2020/2092²⁰. Such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, affiliated entities, subcontractors, etc.). Currently such measures are in place for Hungarian public interest trusts established under the Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity they maintain (see [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/2506](#), as of 16 December 2022).

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

Consortium composition

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

- minimum **two independent legal entities** representing **two regional ecosystems** from **two different eligible countries**,
- representing **at least one “less developed region”** and **one “more developed region”** of an EU Member State,
- include **quadruple-helix innovation actors** such as public administrations, research and academia, industry, and end users,
- include **innovation intermediaries with an umbrella role** (e.g. clusters representing companies, universities, RTOs) to maximise the representation of quadruple helix stakeholders from less developed regions,
- the **coordinator** must be established in an **EU Member State** from a **“less developed region”** or **“outermost region”** and either be
 - a **public body**, or a
 - **non-for-profit** organisation, or an
 - entity **entrusted by a national or regional government** to develop or implement innovation and investment actions for SMEs²¹ (i.e. cluster organisations, public private partnerships, development agencies, innovation agencies etc.), or a

¹⁹ 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](#).

²⁰ 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).

²¹ Tasks transferred by means of individual act of public legal nature (e.g. concession, administrative agreement) or private law (contracts). EISMEA reserves the right to check the relation between the coordinator and the region.

- **Member State Organisation**²² acting under indirect management, or
- **European association or international organisation.**

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.

The following activities are considered **NOT eligible** for funding under this call:

- activities that are excluded from the scope of the ERDF according to Article 7 of the ERDF Regulation
- activities that do not comply with the do no significant harm principle
- funding for research per se are not eligible.

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*)²³.

Financial support to third parties is NOT allowed.

Geographic location (target countries)

Proposals must relate to activities taking place in the **eligible countries** (*see above*) and S3 participating regions covered by the consortium.

Duration

Projects should range between **18 and 24 months**. Proposals with a different duration can be considered. Extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment of the grant agreement.

Project budget

Project budgets (requested grant amount) are expected to range between **EUR 500,000** and **EUR 1,500,000** per project, but this does not preclude the submission/selection of proposals requesting other amounts, if duly justified in the proposal. The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

²² "Member State organisation" means an entity established in a Member State as a public law body or as a body governed by private law entrusted with a public service mission and provided with adequate financial guarantees from the Member State (Article 2(42) of the EU Financial Regulation).

²³ See, for instance, Guidance on funding for activities related to the development, implementation, monitoring and enforcement of Union legislation and policy.

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 agreement 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 the financial capacity is not satisfactory, we may require:

- further information
 - an enhanced financial responsibility regime, i.e. joint and several liability for all beneficiaries or joint and several liability of affiliated entities (*see below, section 10*)
 - prefinancing paid in instalments
 - (one or more) prefinancing guarantees (*see below, section 10*)
- or
- propose no prefinancing
 - request that you are replaced or, if needed, reject the entire proposal.



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

Operational capacity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Exclusion

Applicants which are subject to an **EU exclusion decision** or are in one of the following **exclusion situations** that bar them from receiving EU funding can NOT participate²⁴:

- 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 misconduct²⁵ (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- committed fraud, corruption, links to a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Regulation No [2988/95](#) (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision -making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- created under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation,

²⁴ See Articles 138 and 143 of EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

²⁵ 'Professional misconduct' includes, in particular, the following: violation of ethical standards of the profession; wrongful conduct with impact on professional credibility; breach of generally accepted professional ethical standards; false declarations/misrepresentation of information; participation in a cartel or other agreement distorting competition; violation of IPR; attempting to influence decision-making processes by taking advantage, through misrepresentation, of a conflict of interests, or to obtain confidential information from public authorities to gain an advantage; incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence or similar activities contrary to the EU values where negatively affecting or risking to affect the performance of a legal commitment.

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

- intentionally and without proper justification resisted²⁶ 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 be rejected from the award procedure if it turns out that²⁷:

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

8. Evaluation and award procedure

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

An **evaluation committee** (assisted by independent outside experts) will assess all applications.

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

For proposals with the same score, 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) **Geographical diversity**, defined as the number of less developed regions and outermost regions represented in the proposal and not otherwise receiving funds from projects higher-ranked projects.
- 2) The scores for the award criterion '**Impact**'.
- 3) The scores for the criterion '**Relevance**'.
- 4) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the **gender balance** among the personnel named in the proposal who will be primarily responsible for carrying out the innovation activities. Mentioning gender equality plans in participating organisations can also be considered.
- 5) If a distinction still cannot be made, further prioritisation can be done by considering the creation of positive synergies between projects and involvement of SMEs or other factors related to the objectives of this call for proposals.

²⁶ '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.

²⁷ See Article 143 EU <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32018R1046> Financial Regulation [2024/2509](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32024R2509).

All proposals will be informed about the evaluation result (**evaluation result letter**). Successful proposals will be invited for the grant agreement 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 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 based on the ESR. 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 are considered to have been accessed and that deadlines will be counted from opening/access (see also [Funding & Tenders Portal Terms and Conditions](#)). Please also be aware that for complaints submitted electronically, there may be character limitations.

9. Award criteria

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

- 1. Relevance (5 points):** extent to which the project aligns with the objectives and priorities of this call, and contributes to the EU strategic context; consistency of the project concept, objectives and planning; relevance and effectiveness of the proposed capacity-building action in terms of ambition and suitability for the targeted ecosystems; extent to which the project promotes the participation of EU outermost regions; extent to which the project offers added value in regions facing specific challenges, such as industrial transition or difficulties in retaining and attracting talent; European and interregional dimension; value chain dimension; potential to develop mutual trust and cross border cooperation; extent to which the project addresses the detailed expectations and needs of the identified target groups, and ensures the involvement of stakeholders from relevant innovation ecosystems or regions with similar or complementary S3 priorities.
- 2. Quality (5 points):** feasibility of the project within the proposed timeframe; consortium expertise and defined roles in the project team; demonstration of the consortium coordinator's capacity and leadership, and complementary expertise of the consortium as a whole; clear and coherent methodology for implementing the project and achieving its objectives, including concept, management, procedures, timetable, risk analysis and mitigation, monitoring, and evaluation; coherence and complementarity of planned activities; technical quality and clarity of the proposed activities; clear and logical links between the identified problems, needs, proposed activities, and expected solutions (logical framework) and European added value of the cooperation; appropriate cooperation arrangements and problem-solving mechanisms within the project teams and the consortium.
- 3. Cost effectiveness (5 points):** efficient use of resources (minimise the resources used – time, money and effort) and value for money (achieving the best possible outcome for the resources invested); sufficient and appropriate budget for proper implementation; allocation of resources proportionate to the scale of planned activities; appropriate distribution of the budget among project

partners according to their roles; well-described and proportionate financial and budgetary control mechanisms.

- 4. Impact (10 points):** reduction of the innovation divide; contribution to economic, social, and territorial cohesion through strengthened innovation ecosystems and improved organisational capacity to participate in future interregional innovation investment projects; ambition and expected long-term impact on target groups, regional stakeholders, and integration into European value chains; sustainability of results after EU funding ends; appropriate dissemination strategy and planned scale-up/exploitation activities including a policy learning component to generate implementable policy recommendations, strengthened framework conditions for innovation, updated S3 roadmaps or related policy support measures; potential for replication in other less developed and outermost regions and in regions facing specific and unique challenges (via S3 CoP and I3SF); communication strategy to ensure visibility of results.

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

Maximum points: 25 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 2,5/5, 2,5/5, 2,5/5, 5/10 points.

Overall threshold: 17,5 points.

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

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

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

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

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

Starting date and project duration

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

Project duration: *see section 6 above*.

Milestones and deliverables

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

The following **deliverables will be mandatory** for all projects:

- action plan (for the improvement of the regional innovation ecosystem)
- report on internal reforms implemented during the project (to be included in the final report)
- dissemination plan to outline the projects results and maximise the impact
- exploitation plan, to explain how the results will be valorised and maintained after the end of the project. This will include an outlook on value chains (or niches/Value Chains segments) identified for possible future investments will be implemented e.g. under the strand 1 or strand 2a.

Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount

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

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

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

The costs will be reimbursed at the **funding rate** fixed in the Grant Agreement (**100%**).

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

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

Budget categories and cost eligibility rules

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

Budget categories for this call:

- A. Personnel costs
 - A.1 Employees, A.2 Natural persons under direct contract, A.3 Seconded persons
 - A.4 SME owners and natural person beneficiaries
- B. Subcontracting costs
- C. Purchase costs

- C.1 Travel and subsistence
- C.2 Equipment
- C.3 Other goods, works and services
- D. Other cost categories: n/a
- E. Indirect costs

Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:

- personnel costs:
 - SME owner/natural person unit cost²⁸: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost²⁹: Yes ³⁰
- equipment costs: depreciation
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties: not allowed
- 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 / not 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 a cost.
 - kick off meeting: costs for kick off meeting organised by the granting authority are eligible (travel costs for maximum 2 persons per beneficiary organisation, 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 decided during the GAP or 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 (domain name) are not eligible.

Reporting and payment arrangements

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

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

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)7715).

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).

³⁰ See [EU Grants AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement](#), art 6 on eligible costs: travel and subsistence costs must be declared using the unit cost according to Annex 2a of the grant agreement. If a particular instance of travel, accommodation or subsistence in the action is not covered by one of the unit costs mentioned in Decision C(2021)35 the actual costs may be used.

guarantee (if required) — whichever is the latest.

There will be no interim payment.

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

All payments will be made to the coordinator.

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

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

Prefinancing guarantees

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

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

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

Prefinancing guarantees are normally requested from the coordinator, for the consortium. They must be provided during grant preparation, in time to make the prefinancing (scanned copy via Portal AND original by post).

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

The guarantee will be released at the end of the grant, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the Grant Agreement (*art 23*).

Certificates

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

Liability regime for recoveries

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

For beneficiaries, it is one of the following:

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

or

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

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

Provisions concerning the project implementation

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

- rights of use on results: Yes

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

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

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

- specific rules for blending operations: No.

Other specificities

Consortium agreement: Yes

Non-compliance and breach of contract

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



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

11. How to submit an application

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

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

a) create a user account and register your organisation

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

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

b) submit the proposal

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

Submit your proposal in 4 parts, as follows:

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

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

Documents must be uploaded in 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.

Contact

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

Non-IT related questions should be sent not later than 5 working days before the submission deadline to the following email address: EISMEA-I3-INSTRUMENT-CALLS@ec.europa.eu.

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

13. Important



IMPORTANT

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

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

- **Coordinator** — In multi-beneficiary grants, the beneficiaries participate as consortium (group of beneficiaries). They will have to choose a coordinator, who will take care of the project management and coordination and will represent the consortium towards the granting authority. In mono-beneficiary grants, the single beneficiary will automatically be coordinator.

As outlined in the [General Model Grant Agreement](#) (MGA), Chapter 4, Section 1, Article 7, coordinators may delegate some tasks. Therefore, project proposals shall describe in detail the coordinator's role and ensure shared understanding among all project partners about the project tasks and responsibilities.

- **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 highly recommended to set up internal arrangements that allow you to deal with exceptional or unforeseen circumstances (in all cases, even if not mandatory under the Grant Agreement). The consortium agreement also gives you the possibility to redistribute the grant money according to your own consortium-internal principles and parameters (for instance, one beneficiary can reattribute its grant money to another beneficiary). The consortium agreement thus allows you to customise the EU grant to the needs inside your consortium and can also help to protect you in case of disputes
- **Balanced project budget** — Grant applications must ensure a balanced project budget and sufficient other resources to implement the project successfully (*e.g. own contributions, income generated by the action, financial contributions from third parties, etc*). You may be requested to lower your estimated costs, if they are ineligible (including excessive).
- **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. 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 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](#).