



Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL)

Call for proposals

Accelerating the best use of technologies
(DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04)

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EUROPEAN HEALTH AND DIGITAL EXECUTIVE AGENCY (HaDEA)

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CALL FOR PROPOSALS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

0. Introduction	5
1. Background.....	6
2. Objectives — Scope — Outcomes and deliverables — KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables — Targeted stakeholders — Type of action — specific topic conditions	7
DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-EDMO-HUBS — European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) - national and multinational hubs.....	7
Objectives	7
Scope.....	8
Outcomes and deliverables	11
Targeted stakeholders.....	12
Type of action	13
Specific topic conditions.....	13
DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-NETWORK-OF-SICs — Network of Safer Internet Centres (SICs)	13
Objectives	13
Scope.....	14
Outcomes and deliverables	17
KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables.....	19
Targeted stakeholders.....	19
Type of action	19
Specific topic conditions.....	20
3. Available budget	20
4. Timetable and deadlines	20
5. Admissibility and documents	21
6. Eligibility.....	21
Eligible participants (eligible countries).....	21
Specific cases.....	22
Consortium composition	23
Eligible activities.....	23
Ethics	23
Security.....	24
7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion.....	25
Financial capacity	25
Operational capacity	26
Exclusion	26

8. Evaluation and award procedure	27
9. Award criteria.....	28
10. Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements.....	29
Starting date and project duration	29
Milestones and deliverables.....	30
Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount.....	30
Budget categories and cost eligibility rules.....	31
Reporting and payment arrangements.....	32
Prefinancing guarantees	32
Certificates	33
Liability regime for recoveries	33
Provisions concerning the project implementation.....	33
Other specificities	34
Non-compliance and breach of contract	34
11. How to submit an application.....	34
12. Help	35
13. Important	37
Annex 1	40
Annex 2	43

0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU **action grants** in the field of Accelerating best use of technologies under the **Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL)**.

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

- Regulation 2018/1046 ([EU Financial Regulation](#))
- The basic act (Digital Europe Regulation 2021/694¹).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2023-2024 Work Programme² and will be managed by the **European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HaDEA)** ('Agency').

The call covers the following **topics**:

- **DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-EDMO-HUBS** - European Digital Media observatory (EDMO) - National and multinational hubs
- **DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-NETWORK-OF-SICs** - 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** on the Funding & Tenders Portal Topic page carefully, and in particular this Call Document, the Model Grant Agreement, the [EU Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual](#) and the [EU Grants AGA – Annotated Grant Agreement](#).

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

- the [Call Document](#) outlines the:
 - background, objectives, scope, activities that can be funded and the expected results (sections 1 and 2)
 - timetable and available budget (sections 3 and 4)
 - admissibility and eligibility conditions (including mandatory documents; sections 5 and 6)
 - criteria for financial and operational capacity and exclusion (section 7)
 - evaluation and award procedure (section 8)
 - award criteria (section 9)
 - legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements (section 10)
 - how to submit an application (section 11)

¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/694 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2021 establishing the Digital Europe Programme (OJ L 166, 11.05.2021).

² Commission Implementing Decision C/2023/1862 of 24.03.2023 concerning the adoption of the multiannual work programme for 2023 - 2024 and the financing decision for the implementation of the Digital Europe Programme.

- 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 of the 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.

In 2023 the activities will be organised around five main strands:

- Blockchain
- Deployment of Public Services
- Interoperable Europe
- Justice and consumers
- Confidence in digital transition

This call covers:

1. European Digital Media observatory (EDMO) - National and Multinational hubs – Large-scale disinformation campaigns are a major challenge for Europe and require a coordinated response from EU countries, EU institutions, online platforms, news media and EU citizens. The Commission has developed several initiatives to tackle disinformation, including the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO).

EDMO was launched in 2020, as an independent observatory bringing together a multidisciplinary community with expertise in the field of disinformation and deploying a platform to support its work.

Through the Connecting Europe Facility programme, the European Commission has financed the first eight EDMO regional hubs which were officially announced in May 2021. In December 2022, six new EDMO hubs were established through the Digital Europe Programme. The 14 independent hubs currently cover all 27 EU Member States as well as Norway.

This call aims to support the work of independent national and multinational hubs operating in geographical areas covered by previous actions for which the funding is ending at the end of 2023 and in 2024.

2. Network of safer Internet Centres (SICs) – SICs provide online safety information, educational resources, public awareness tools and counselling and reporting services, through dedicated helplines and hotlines for children and youth³, 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+) strategy⁴. This includes providing support for EC priorities, such as the code of conduct, the age verification toolkit, and implementation of the relevant Digital Services Act⁵ (DSA) obligations.

Participation in this call for proposals 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 — specific topic conditions

DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-EDMO-HUBS — European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) - national and multinational hubs

Objectives

The European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) has been created with the aim of supporting an independent multidisciplinary community to tackle the phenomenon of disinformation. EDMO is composed of national and multinational hubs which, through a coordination service, create a network aiming at fighting online disinformation in the EU.

The objective of this topic is to finance the work of independent national and multinational EDMO hubs operating in geographical areas covered by existing EDMO hubs for which the funding is ending at the end of 2023 and in 2024⁶. In this regard, one Member State should be covered by only one hub (including existing hubs and hubs yet to be established), unless this can be duly justified by the media and information ecosystem. At the same time, one hub can cover more than one Member State.

A hub involves organisations active in one or several Member State(s), with experience carrying out the tasks described in the Objectives section, notably in view of providing specific knowledge of local information environments to strengthen the detection and analysis of disinformation campaigns, improving public awareness, and designing effective responses relevant for national audiences. The activities of the hubs are carried out in full independence from third-party entities including public

³ Those under 18 years of age, in accordance with the [UN convention on the rights of the child](#). Under the BIK+ strategy, 'youth' also refers to children below 18 years old. In legislation the term used is 'minors'.

⁴ [European Strategy for a Better Internet for Kids COM/2022/212 final](#)

⁵ [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 \(Digital Services Act\)](#)

⁶ Member States covered by the first eight hubs for which the funding is ending in 2023 and in 2024: Ireland, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, as well as Norway, in the EEA.

authorities. Building on previous work done by the existing hubs, in order to comply with these objectives, the EDMO hubs will:

1. Actively participate in the **governance** of EDMO and the reinforcement of the EDMO network.
2. Detect, **fact-check** and disclose harmful disinformation campaigns within the territory and/or linguistic area in which they operate and contribute to joint - across-hubs - fact-checking projects of the EDMO network.
3. Conduct **research** on the impact of disinformation campaigns on society and democracy within the territory and/or linguistic area in which they operate, contribute to joint across-hubs research projects of the EDMO network and to the EDMO network's activities aiming to improve the access to online platforms' data for researchers.
4. Conduct and support tailor-made **media literacy** campaigns within the territory and/or linguistic area in which they operate and contribute to joint - across-hubs - media literacy projects of the EDMO network.
5. Support the **monitoring** of online platforms' policies and implementation of the Code of Practice on Disinformation in the territory and/or linguistic area in which they operate. Contribute to monitoring activities coordinated by the EDMO network.
6. Pull together and foster the growth of a regional multidisciplinary independent **community** detecting and analysing disinformation campaigns.
7. **Communicate** through various channels (e.g. traditional and online media outlets, podcasts, social media etc.) and carry out communication campaigns with the aim to reach the public and promote their activities, as well as the EDMO networks' activities, where appropriate in coordination with the EDMO network.

The hubs will also carry out activities addressing current issues related to the disinformation phenomenon that emerge during the funding period and have local, regional or European importance. To this end, the hubs will accommodate requests agreed within the EDMO network to work on joint activities. They may also propose joint activities based on observed trends.

The hubs should report regularly to the EDMO network and the European Commission about their activities.

Scope

In order to fulfil the objectives of the call, the EDMO hubs will:

1. Reinforce the EDMO network by:
 - actively participating in the EDMO governance structure, including electing hub representatives.
 - contributing to the planning and implementation of the EDMO network long-term strategy.

- actively participating in relevant joint activities of EDMO in key areas, such as fact-checking, research, media literacy, policy analysis, as well as in specific thematic collaborative activities⁷.
 - contributing to the EDMO annual conference and participating with all the members of the consortium.
 - participating in and contributing to the EDMO hubs meetings (hosted twice per year by a different hub) and other relevant EDMO network events, including internal collaboration meetings of the EDMO network.
 - keeping the EDMO network and the European Commission informed with sufficiently advanced notice about all the initiatives and events organised by a hub.
 - using the EDMO secure online platform to share information and collaborate in joint fact-checking and research activities.
 - reporting regularly to the EDMO network and the European Commission about its activities in the form of brief quarterly updates as a minimum (e.g. newsletter or factsheets). These reports should also be published and distributed to various communication channels.
2. Detect, fact-check and disclose harmful disinformation campaigns at national, multinational and EU level, including disinformation created by using new technologies, such as deep fakes or generative AI. In particular, a hub should contribute to joint across-hubs fact-checking projects identified by the EDMO network. The hubs should also include their fact-checks in repositories of joint EDMO projects (e.g. regarding the war in Ukraine) and contribute in the periodic EDMO fact-checking briefs.

In addition, the hubs should include their fact-checks in the EU repository which will be set up based on the relevant commitments⁸ of the Code of Practice on Disinformation.

3. Analyse harmful disinformation campaigns at regional, national, multinational and EU level and their impact on society and democracy, in particular by:
- analysing relevant actors, vectors, tools, methods, dissemination dynamics and prioritised targets of disinformation campaigns by applying, when relevant and possible, a common methodology, established by the EDMO network.
 - analysing and exposing current disinformation narratives and trends.
 - monitoring the evolution of disinformation-related risks and harms on relevant audiences and new technologies such as deep fakes and generative AI etc.
 - actively contributing to EDMO joint research projects, such as repository of the scientific articles, surveys on disinformation trends, situational analyses.

The hubs should contribute to the EDMO network's activities aiming to improve the access to online platforms' data for researchers.

4. Conduct and support tailor-made media literacy campaigns for the covered territory or linguistic area in cooperation with the EDMO network, the European Commission and the Member States. Such campaigns should target both the general public and vulnerable groups. The hubs should also foster the growth of the local media literacy activities. The hubs will leverage on the exchange of good

⁷ Some of the current EDMO joint activities are related to the war in Ukraine, the upcoming European elections and various activities related to the monitoring and implementation of the Code of Practice on disinformation. New areas for joint activities might include for example activities related to climate change or health related matters and may be also proposed in view of other emerging current issues.

⁸ See measure 31.3 in the Code of Practice on Disinformation: <https://digitalstrategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/2022-strengthened-code-practice-disinformation>

practices and materials stored on the EDMO platform and contribute to the EDMO repositories with their own material.

5. Contribute to the monitoring of online platforms' policies and the implementation of the Code of Practice on Disinformation. The hubs' work should contribute to the assessment of the Code and the signatories' reports by the EDMO network and to the analysis of the European Commission.

The hubs should also contribute actively to the development of i) the structural indicators measuring the impact of the Code of Practice on Disinformation⁹ ii) the access to data framework.¹⁰

The hubs should provide, at the request of the European Commission, targeted information on disinformation in the regional landscape of a hub and on current issues related to disinformation and other issues relevant to the areas of their activity.

The hubs should disseminate information about the Code of Practice on Disinformation and related issues for relevant stakeholders.

The hubs should inform the European Commission about the upcoming events organised and invite the European Commission to those events linked to the Code of Practice on Disinformation.

6. Pull together and foster the growth of a regional multidisciplinary community composed of academic researchers, independent fact-checkers, media practitioners, media literacy experts and other relevant stakeholders based in the covered region to create a local network capable of quickly detecting and analysing disinformation campaigns, as well as producing content to expose harmful disinformation campaigns, including through mainstream and local media.

The applicants must have the ability to reach out to a large network of experts. To this end, the applicants must prove their ability to cooperate with at least 5 experts and/or organisations they intend to cooperate with, which are not involved in the proposal. Such cooperation should also provide expertise in relevant areas of investigation and research (e.g. security, health, climate change, migration, economics, European policies or other relevant areas prone to disinformation)¹¹. The applicants must include in their proposal a cooperation plan with those experts and letter of intent from the experts.

7. Communicate through various communication channels (e.g. traditional and online media outlets, podcasts, social media etc.) and carry out related communication campaigns about its activities. This includes the dissemination of:
 - the fact-checks produced by the hub;
 - the results of research activities related to the analysis of disinformation campaigns as well as trends and risks related to the disinformation phenomenon;
 - media literacy related activities and material.

⁹ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/2022-strengthened-code-practice-disinformation>

¹⁰ EDMO report on Platform-to-Researcher Data Access <https://edmoprod.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Report-of-the-European-Digital-Media-Observatorys-Working-Group-on-Platform-to-Researcher-Data-Access-2022.pdf>

¹¹ Relevant information should be provided in the Application Form B Section 2.3

The communication activities should target the large public as well as specialists in the field, where appropriate by preparing targeted content for different audiences. Each hub should indicate in its proposal the type of collaborations intended for this purpose with independent media outlets operating within its territory or linguistic area.

The hubs will also coordinate their communication activities with the EDMO network as appropriate. In particular, the hubs should be involved in dissemination of the activities and results of the EDMO network, including, when relevant, activities of other EDMO hubs, and promote EDMO events to media professionals and citizens. To this end, the hubs will follow the requirements of the communication strategy designed by the EDMO governance.

Outcomes and deliverables

- Implement a **communication strategy** integrated to the EDMO network communication strategy. As part of its communication strategy each hub will establish a website and activate a variety of communication channels (traditional and online media outlets, podcasts, social media etc.) to share information regarding the outcome of its work regarding fact-checking, research, media literacy, policy support activities, etc. Each hub will provide an annual factsheet with the key metrics related to the implementation of the communication strategy which will include data about the number of communication items and the audience reached.
- Ensure the production of a continuous flow of **fact-checks** which will also be stored in the EDMO's repositories. Each hub will produce or contribute at least 100 fact-checks.
- Conduct or contribute to research activities to deliver at least 20 **analytical reports** on specific disinformation campaigns and/or **studies or investigations** linked to relevant disinformation phenomena.
- Conduct **media literacy** activities to deliver at least 10 media literacy events and/or campaigns at national/multi-national level to increase citizens' awareness and societal resilience.
- Support the **monitoring of online platforms' policies** and in particular of the implementation of the Code of Practice on Disinformation in the geographical area covered by the hub. In this regard, each hub should produce an **input to the assessment of each biannual report of the signatories** and contribute to relevant EDMO analysis. Each hub will also deliver an annual report on the activity done in this regard, including its contribution to the development of structural indicators and the data access framework.
- Deliver an annual report on the activities of the hub, including information on:
i) the cooperation with other hubs; ii) participation in the **EDMO governance body** and in joint projects; (iii) additional funds received by the hubs; and iv) the process put in place to preserve the independence of the hub; V) efforts to foster the growth of a regional multidisciplinary independent **community**.

Targeted stakeholders

Targeted stakeholders are European fact-checkers, preferably recognised by reputable fact-checking networks such as EFCNS or IFCN. Academic researchers working on disinformation, media practitioners, media literacy experts and other stakeholders which conduct relevant activities for tackling the phenomenon of disinformation including open-source intelligence in the area of disinformation. A hub should involve a data scientist and a communication specialist with expertise in collaborating with professional media outlets and in communication activities carried out through social media.

The following conditions are considered as important for the successful implementation of the hub activities described above:

- a) The entity coordinating the consortium must demonstrate its independence from public authorities. Although the coordinator may receive funding from external sources, it is crucial to demonstrate that its activities remain free from any external influence to ensure impartiality and maintain the integrity of its operations¹².
- b) At least one of the consortium applicants must be an independent fact-checking organisation or a fact-checking unit from an independent media organisation with proven fact-checking activities in the last 12 months¹³. The consortium must have fact-checking services covering all the geographical area of the hub.

For the purposes of this call, a fact-checking organisation is intended as an organisation that:

- Regularly publishes nonpartisan reports on the accuracy of widely circulated claims of interest to society and of statements by major institutions, public figures and/or other. This includes the verification of multimedia content that reached a wide public. Provide through online links: i) Proof of legal or organisational statute; ii) fact checks published in the previous three months.
- Fact-checks claims using the same standard for every fact check; adheres to the highest quality standard in journalism, content verification and/or research; does not concentrate fact-checking efforts on any one side; follows the same process for every fact check and lets the evidence dictate conclusions; does not advocate or take policy positions on the issues it fact-checks.
- Is transparent about its funding sources and states clearly where it's funding comes from. If it accepts funding from other organisations, it ensures that funders have no influence over the conclusions it reaches in its reports.
- It details the professional background of all key staff in the organisation and explains the organisational structure and legal status. It clearly indicates a way for readers to communicate with the organisation.

¹² Relevant information should be provided in the Application Form B Section 2.3.

¹³ The applicant must provide in the Application Form B Section 2.3: i) information that it is a fact-checker as per its statute and it fulfils the description given in the next subsection; ii) demonstrate that there is a publicly available statement or policy regarding advocacy/political positions from the organisation and its staff, iii) demonstrate that it has published at least 10 (ten) fact-checks in the previous twelve months; iv) information regarding the source(s) of its funding and demonstrate independence from external funders. The applicant should also include the information whether it is a member of IFCN or EFCNS. If an applicant is not yet a member of these networks, but commits to apply for EFCNS membership, it should indicate it here, in this section.

- Publishes its corrections policy and follows it scrupulously. It corrects clearly and transparently in line with the corrections policy, seeking so far as possible to ensure that readers see the corrected version.

Type of action

SME Support Actions — 50% and 75% (for SMEs) funding rate

 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*)
- 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-2023-DEPLOY-04-NETWORK-OF-SICs — Network of Safer Internet Centres (SICs)

Objectives

The objective of the topic is to continue to support national Safer Internet Centres (which may be composed of one or more NGOs, government bodies/agencies, private sector organisations) in providing 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. The activities performed by the Safer Internet Centres will help minors to tackle online risks and to become media-literate, resilient, digital citizens, and will allow citizens to anonymously report online child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

This call will 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 the code of conduct on age-appropriate design, the age verification toolkit, and implementation of the relevant Digital Services Act (DSA) obligations.

To reach all children, the Safer Internet Centres will pay particular attention to children with special or specific needs, including those from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds.

Scope

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

- A **centre for raising awareness** among children, youth, parents, carers, teachers and educators as well as other relevant professionals working with children about online opportunities and risks for those 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 emerging opportunities and risks (e.g. new apps and games, but also AI, virtual, augmented and extended reality, the internet of things and other technological changes raising new social and ethical challenges that impact children and youth);
 - issues such as mental and physical health risks related to the use of technologies (e.g. self-generated sexualised content, live streaming of violent and age-inappropriate content, self-harm, addiction, cyberbullying, hate speech, risky online challenges, promotion of eating disorders);
 - risks facing children as young consumers (e.g. incentives to spend money, aggressive marketing strategies, loot boxes¹⁴) on which specific attention will be paid.

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 rights, 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.

¹⁴ Loot boxes are features in video games, usually accessed through gameplay or which may optionally be paid for with real-world money

- 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.
- d. Organise training in line with UN General Comment No. 25¹⁵ 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. 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;
- g. 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. The helpline will also strengthen support to victims of cyberbullying, with closer cooperation with the national 116111 service being 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) platform¹⁶.
- A **hotline** for tackling 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 and the proposed new legislation.

The specific tasks for the hotline include the following:

¹⁵ [General comment No. 25 \(2021\) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/article/43c3e365/2021/01/2021-01-20-general-comment-no-25-on-childrens-rights-in-relation-to-the-digital-environment/)

¹⁶ <https://www.betterinternetforkids.eu/en/>

- 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;
- 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.

The consortium should also provide 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. Adequate turnover and an open selection of participants is required. In addition, the Safer Internet Centres shall expand the

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

The consortium shall also support implementation of the relevant **Digital Services Act (DSA) obligations**, under guidance from the European Commission on the methodology to be applied. This may include carrying out tests related to certain specific provisions under the DSA aimed at protecting minors.

Safer Internet Centres 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, LGBTIQ+ 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 absence must be justified. 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

- National Safer Internet Centres as a one-stop-shop for reliable and age-appropriate information.
- Digital literacy in Member States and associated countries in formal and informal education settings (e.g., youth participation activities, workshops, classroom visits, competitions, peer to peer activities).
- Support to 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).
- Timely information to local, national, and European actors on emerging risks through the helpline service
- 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 child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

- Increased cooperation of the private sector with the Safer Internet Centres, including those recognised in the future as “trusted flaggers” to assist the public, in particular children, when confronted with harmful and illegal content.
- Support the Commission for the implementation of the certain specific provisions under the DSA aimed at protecting minors.

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.
- 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 - Milestones and deliverables.

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 handle by the co-funded helpline services. The minimum target is 63,000 requests every year combined by all EU co-funded helplines.
- Number of reports received by the co-funded hotlines. The minimum target is 200,000 reports every year combined by all EU co-funded hotlines.

Targeted stakeholders

Existing or new Safer Internet Centres in the eligible countries.

Type of action

Simple Grants – 50% co-funding rate



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

Specific topic conditions

- 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 available call budget is **EUR 26 200 000**. Specific budget information per topic can be found in the table below.

Topic	Topic budget
1 – DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-EDMO-HUBS	EUR 10 000 000
2 – DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-NETWORK-OF-SICs	EUR 16 200 000

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:	11 May 2023
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>26 September 2023 – 17:00:00 CEST</u> <u>(Brussels)</u>
Evaluation:	October - November 2023
Information on evaluation results:	December 2023
GA signature:	June 2024

5. Admissibility and documents

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

Proposals must be submitted **electronically** via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System (accessible via the Topic page in the [Search Funding & Tenders](#) section). Paper submissions are NOT possible.

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

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

- Application Form Part A — contains administrative information about the participants (future coordinator, beneficiaries and affiliated entities) and the summarised budget for the project (*to be filled in directly online*)
- Application Form Part B — contains the technical description of the project (*to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed and then assembled and re-uploaded*)
- **mandatory annexes and supporting documents** (*to be uploaded*):
 - detailed budget table/calculator: not applicable
 - CVs of core project team: not applicable
 - activity reports of last year: not applicable
 - list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years) (*template available in Part B*): for the topic **DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-EDMO-HUBS**

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

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

Proposals are limited to maximum **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*).

- ❗ 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))
 - listed EEA countries and countries associated to the Digital Europe Programme or countries which are in ongoing negotiations for an association agreement and where the agreement enters into force before grant signature (together 'DEP associated countries', see [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

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 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 above) may participate in the call and can sign grants if the negotiations are concluded before grant signature (with retroactive effect, if provided in the agreement).

Following the [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/2506](#), as of 16th December 2022, no legal commitments (including the grant agreement itself as well as subcontracts, purchase contracts, financial support to third parties etc.) can be signed with Hungarian public interest trusts established under Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity they maintain. Affected entities may continue to apply to calls for

¹⁷ See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

¹⁸ For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

proposals. However, in case the Council measures are not lifted, such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, affiliated entities, subcontractors, recipients of financial support to third parties). In this case, co-applicants will be invited to remove or replace that entity and/or to change its status into associated partner. Tasks and budget may be redistributed accordingly.

EU restrictive measures — Special rules apply for certain entities (e.g. entities subject to [EU restrictive measures](#) under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU)¹⁹ and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#)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).

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

Consortium composition

for topic **DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-EDMO-HUBS**:

Proposals must be submitted by:

- minimum 2 independent applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities).
- the coordinator of the consortium is established in a Member State to be covered by the hub.

Eligible activities

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).

Ethics

Projects must comply with:

- highest ethical standards and
- applicable EU, international and national law (including the [General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679](#))

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

Proposals under this call for proposals 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](#)²¹ 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 clearing (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 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 clearing may have to be provided before grant signature. The granting authority will assess the need for clearing in each case and will establish their delivery date during grant preparation.

²¹ See Commission Decision 2015/544/EU, Euratom of 13 March 2015 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 53).

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 clearing.

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 these projects.

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

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

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

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

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

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

or

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

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

Operational capacity

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

This capacity will be assessed together with the '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 operational 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 participate²²:

- 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 misconduct²³ (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)

²² See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

²³ Professional misconduct includes: violation of ethical standards of the profession, wrongful conduct with impact on professional credibility, false declarations/misrepresentation of information, participation in a cartel or other agreement distorting competition, violation of IPR, attempting to influence decision-making processes or obtain confidential information from public authorities to gain advantage.

- guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Regulation No [2988/95](#) (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- created under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant).

Applicants will also be refused if it turns out that²⁴:

- 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 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

²⁴ See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

geographical and thematic coverage and while respecting to the maximum possible extent the order of merit based on the evaluation of the award criteria.

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

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

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

If you believe that the evaluation procedure was flawed, you can submit a **complaint** (following the deadlines and procedures set out in the evaluation result letter). Please note that notifications which have not been opened within 10 days after sending are considered to have been accessed and that deadlines will be counted from opening/access (see also [Funding & Tenders Portal Terms and Conditions](#)). Please also be aware that for complaints submitted electronically, there may be character limitations.

9. Award criteria

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

- **Relevance**
 - 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*
- **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
- **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 call budget. Other proposals will be rejected.

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

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

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

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

Starting date and project duration

The project starting date and duration will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 1*). Normally the starting date will be after grant signature. Retroactive application can be granted exceptionally for duly justified reasons.

Indicative Project duration:

- 30 months for topic **DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-EDMO-HUBS**
- 18 months for topic: **DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-NETWORK-OF-SICS**

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 deliverables will be mandatory for all projects:

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

The following deliverables will be mandatory for:

The topic: **DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-NETWORK-OF-SICs**

1. National communication and dissemination plan for awareness raising activities, helpline and hotline including key performance and impact indicators;
2. Periodic helpline report;
3. Periodic hotline report;
4. Progress report on child sexual exploitation material (CSEM);
5. Youth Panel Report;
6. Safer Internet Day report;
7. Submission of SIC best practices (2 times a year); and
8. Long-term financial sustainability plan.

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 (indicative grant amount):

- for topic **DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-EDMO-HUBS**: between EUR 1,000,000 and EUR 1,300,000 per project.
- for topic **DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-NETWORK-OF-SICs**: between EUR 80,000 and EUR 1,350,000 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.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): Yes
 - SME owner/natural person unit cost²⁵: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit costs²⁶: No (only actual costs)
- equipment costs:
 - full cost for topics: **DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-EDMO-HUBS** and **DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-NETWORK-OF-SICS**
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties: not allowed.

²⁵ 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).

²⁶ 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).

- internally invoiced goods and services (costs unit cost according to usual cost accounting practices): 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 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.

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 **60%** of the maximum grant amount; exceptionally less or no prefinancing). The prefinancing will be paid 30 days from entry into force/10 days before starting date/financial guarantee (if required) – whichever is the latest.

There will be no **interim payments for the topic DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-NETWORK-OF-SICs**. There will be **one interim payment** (with cost reporting through the use of resources report) for the topic **DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-EDMO-HUBS**.

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

All payments will be made to the coordinator.

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

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

Prefinancing guarantees

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

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

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

Prefinancing guarantees are formally NOT linked to individual consortium members, which means that you are free to organise how to provide the guarantee amount (*by one or several beneficiaries, for the overall amount or several guarantees for partial amounts, by the beneficiary concerned or by another beneficiary, etc*). It is however important that the requested amount is covered and that the guarantee(s) are sent to us in time to make the prefinancing (scanned copy via Portal AND original by post).

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

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

Certificates

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

Liability regime for recoveries

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

For beneficiaries, it is one of the following:

- limited joint and several liability with individual ceilings — *each beneficiary up to their maximum grant amount*
 - unconditional joint and several liability — *each beneficiary up to the maximum grant amount for the action*
- or
- individual financial responsibility — *each beneficiary only for their own debts*.

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

Provisions concerning the project implementation

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 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 PAC Grants for Procurement: No
- specific rules for Grants for Financial Support: No
- specific rules for blending operations: No

Other specificities

n/a

Non-compliance and breach of contract

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



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

11. How to submit an application

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

Submission is a 2-step process:

a) create a user account and register your organisation

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

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

Submit your proposal in 3 parts, as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

12. Help

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

- [Online Manual](#)
- [FAQs on the Topic page](#) (for call-specific questions in open calls);
- [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 contact: [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).
- **Associated partners** — Applicants may participate with associated partners (i.e. partner organisations which participate in the action but without the right to get grant money). They participate without funding and therefore do not need to be validated.
- **Consortium agreement** — For practical and legal reasons it is recommended to set up internal arrangements that allow you to deal with exceptional or unforeseen circumstances (in all cases, even if not mandatory under the Grant Agreement). The consortium agreement also gives you the possibility to redistribute the grant money according to your own consortium-internal principles and parameters (for instance, one beneficiary can reattribute its grant money to another beneficiary). The consortium agreement thus allows you to customise the EU grant to the needs inside your consortium and can also help to protect you in case of disputes.

- **Balanced project budget**— Grant applications must ensure a balanced project budget and sufficient other resources to implement the project successfully (*e.g. own contributions, income generated by the action, financial contributions from third parties, etc*). You may be requested to lower your estimated costs, if they are ineligible (including excessive).
- **No-profit rule**— Grants may NOT give a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). This will be checked by us at the end of the project.
- **No double funding**— There is a strict prohibition of double funding from the EU budget (except under EU Synergies actions). Outside such Synergies actions, any given action may receive only ONE grant from the EU budget and cost items may under NO circumstances declared to two different EU actions.
- **Completed/ongoing projects** — Proposals for projects that have already been completed will be rejected; proposals for projects that have already started will be assessed on a case-by-case basis (in this case, no costs can be reimbursed for activities that took place before the project starting date/proposal submission).
- **Combination with EU operating grants**— Combination with EU operating grants is possible, if the project remains outside the operating grant work programme and you make sure that cost items are clearly separated in your accounting and NOT declared twice (see [AGA — Annotated Model Grant Agreement, art 6.2.E](#)).
- **Multiple proposals** — Applicants may submit more than one proposal for *different* projects under the same call (and be awarded a 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 one of them (or it 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](#).

Annex 1

Digital Europe types of action

The Digital Europe Programme will use the following actions to implement grants:

Simple Grants

Description: The Simple Grants 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: 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: 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: Type of action for which 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: Specific type of action for procurement in grant agreements by 'contracting authorities/entities' 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: Type of action with 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

Framework Partnerships (FPAs) and Specific Grants (SGAs)

FPAs

Description: An FPA establishes 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 coordinator of the FPA has to be the coordinator of each SGA signed under the FPA and will always take the role of single contact point for the granting authority. All the other partners of the FPA can participate in any SGA. 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

Lump Sum Grant

Description: Lump Sum Grants 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). The granting authority defines a methodology for calculating the amount of the lump sum. There is an overall amount, i.e. the lump sum will cover the beneficiaries' direct and indirect eligible costs. 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: 50%

Payment model: Prefinancing – second (third) prefinancing (as there is no cost reporting) – final payment

Annex 2

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 associated country, or established in the EU territory but *controlled* by a third country or third country legal entities (including associated countries)²⁷.

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 EU MS or EU legal entities will be able to participate — with no exceptions.
- In SO1 and SO2, entities controlled by third countries or third country legal entities may be able to participate if they comply with certain conditions set up in the Work Programme. To that end, additional rules will be imposed on those legal entities, which need to be followed if they want to participate.

The activation of this article 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.

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 reasons²⁸.

The application of this article 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 *the Guidance on ownership control restrictions in EU grants*.

²⁷ See Article 12(5) and (6) of the Digital Europe Regulation 2021/694.

²⁸ See Article 18(4) of the Digital Europe Regulation 2021/694.