



European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)

Call for proposals

Maritime spatial planning (MSP) Projects

EMFAF-2024-PIA-MSP

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EUROPEAN CLIMATE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENT EXECUTIVE AGENCY (CINEA)

CINEA.D – Natural Resources, Climate, Sustainable Blue Economy and Clean Energy
CINEA.D.3 – Sustainable Blue Economy

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU **action grants** in the field of Maritime Spatial Planning under the **European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)**.

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

- Regulation 2018/1046 ([EU Financial Regulation](#))
- the basic act (EMFAF Regulation [2021/1139](#)¹).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2022-23 Work Programme² and will be managed by the **European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA)** ('Agency').

The call covers the following **topics**:

- **EMFAF-2024-PIA-MSP — Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) for the North Sea**

We expect to fund one project.

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

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

- the [Call Document](#) outlines the:
 - background, objectives, scope, activities that can be funded and the expected results (sections 1 and 2)
 - timetable and available budget (sections 3 and 4)
 - admissibility and eligibility conditions (including mandatory documents; sections 5 and 6)

¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (OJ L 247, 13.7.2021, p. 1).

² Commission Implementing Decision C(2022)371 of 26.01.2022 on the financing of the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and the adoption of the work programme for 2022 and 2023

- criteria for financial and operational capacity and exclusion (section 7)
- evaluation and award procedure (section 8)
- award criteria (section 9)
- legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements (section 10)
- how to submit an application (section 11)
- the Online Manual outlines the:
 - procedures to register and submit proposals online via the EU Funding & Tenders Portal ('Portal')
 - recommendations for the preparation of the application
- the AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement contains:
 - detailed annotations on all the provisions in the Grant Agreement you will have to sign in order to obtain the grant (*including cost eligibility, payment schedule, accessory obligations, etc*).

You are also encouraged to visit [EMFF Projects & Results](#) to consult the list of projects funded previously.

1. Background

The Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive³ entered into force in September 2014 and established a set of common minimum requirements. It represents an overarching governance framework for EU Member States, which were required to adopt maritime spatial plans by 31 March 2021 in all EU marine waters. Maritime spatial planning shall contribute to the achievement of good environmental status as envisaged by Directive 2008/56/EC⁴.

Among the requirements, Member States are requested to cooperate with bordering countries to ensure that coherent plans are set across the marine region concerned and, where possible, cooperation with third-country authorities. Furthermore, they are encouraged to make use of existing instruments and tools to organise the use of the best available data⁵, necessary for the setting up of the maritime spatial plans.

In August 2023 17 Member States have successfully adopted their Maritime Spatial Plans, 5 Member states did not adopt yet and 1 Member state failed to adopt the plan for their outermost region.

On 11 December 2019, the European Commission presented the European Green Deal⁶. It provides a roadmap with actions to boost the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy and stop climate change, revert biodiversity loss and cut pollution. It outlines investments needed and financing tools available.

Because of its spatial dimension, MSP can act as a powerful enabler of the European Green Deal. This is the case for several initiatives launched in the context of the

³ Directive 2014/89/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning.

⁴ Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of marine environmental policy.

⁵ Directive 2007/2/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 2007 establishing an Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community.

⁶ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - The European Green Deal Brussels, COM(2019) 640 final.

European Green Deal, such as the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030⁷, the Farm to Fork Strategy for sustainable food⁸ or the EU strategy on offshore renewable energy⁹. In May 2021, the Commission adopted a Communication on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy¹⁰. It is understood that MSP will be one of the components of this new approach.

With the new Biodiversity Strategy, the EU aims at increasing the network of marine protected areas and other effective conservation measures to reach 30% protection of the marine space by 2030. It is further proposed that 10% of this network would be under strict protection, this for areas of high biodiversity value or potential. In 2022 the European Commission proposed a Nature Restoration law, that aims to restore 20% of ecosystems by 2030. This may have an impact on maritime spatial planning as new areas for conservation and restoration will have to be identified.

The European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy underline the potential of farmed seafood as a source of protein for food and feed. As part of the Farm to Fork strategy, the Commission adopted revised guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030¹¹. Aquaculture also needs to have its presence in the Maritime Spatial Plans.

Regarding the EU strategy on offshore renewable energy, MSP has been explicitly identified as an essential and well-established tool to facilitate the development of offshore renewable energy in the EU in a sustainable way. Further decarbonisation of the energy system is essential to achieve the EU's climate objectives in 2030 and 2050.

We are only at the start of the development of offshore renewables in all EU sea basins. The allocation of maritime space for increasing marine renewable energy production as well as regional co-operation between Member States is essential - maritime spatial planning plays a key role in this regard. Besides the legal requirements laid down in the MSP Directive, it is therefore necessary for Member States to reflect in their Maritime Spatial Plans the ambition of the European Green Deal's objectives and energy and climate plans¹², alongside established activities and interests.

This is an ongoing process in several sea-basins. One of the examples in this regard is the cooperation in the North Sea basin, a particularly crowded sea. North Sea countries have announced¹³ combined targets for offshore wind of 120 GW by 2030 in the North Sea and at least 300 GW by 2050. This ambition is prompting them to

⁷ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 Bringing nature back into our lives COM (2020) 380 final.

⁸ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system COM (2020) 381 final.

⁹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – An EU Strategy to harness the potential of offshore renewable energy for a climate neutral future COM(2020) 741 final.

¹⁰ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU Transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future COM(2021) 240 final.

¹¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030 COM(2021)236 final.

¹² The national energy and climate plans (NECPs) were introduced by the Regulation on the governance of the energy union and climate action (EU)2018/1999;

¹³ <https://www.premier.be/en/north-sea-summit-23-declaration>.

reflect on the need for closer cooperation on how to tackle the energy-food-nature challenges in heavily used seas.

EMFAF support to Maritime Spatial Planning Projects continues to cover the needs of EU Member States in the implementation, monitoring and revision of their maritime spatial plans, as well as to support the cross-border cooperation and combined efforts of countries at sea-basin level to tackle the targets under the European Green Deal and the above described initiatives.

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

Objectives

The objective of this call for proposals is to facilitate the implementation of Maritime Spatial Planning in the EU, including through the effective application of Directive 2014/89 establishing a framework for MSP.

This call is intended to fund projects developing innovative responses to tackle specific challenges that EU Member States might encounter when putting into effect, monitoring and/or revising their maritime spatial plans.

Many of these challenges are common to coastal Member States. Therefore, there is a shared interest in developing innovative responses that can apply within a sea basin and/or across sea basins. This means that projects should bring together participants from different Member States, located in a sea basin, or from different sea basins.

To meet these challenges Member States will have to:

- ⇒ *Reflect and align their maritime spatial plans to the ambition of the European Green Deal* and the related initiatives in areas such as climate change mitigation and/or adaptation, biodiversity, food, mobility, energy transition, alongside established activities and interests. As a cross-cutting instrument with a legal basis in all these policy areas, MSP can act as a powerful enabler of the EU's "Green Deal". This means that it will be therefore necessary for Member States to reflect in their maritime spatial plans the ambition of the Green Deal's objectives, and energy and climate plans, alongside established activities and interests.
- ⇒ *Cater for cumulative impacts of ocean stressors*: promote the use of an ecosystem-based approach, including Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), strengthen the process of the Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs), which are an integral part of MSP and promote environmental monitoring to collect data and assess impacts (e.g. on offshore renewable energies).
- ⇒ *Reinforce the sea basin dimension of MSP*: meeting the above-mentioned challenges, and integrating the new EU initiatives, will require greater cooperation in planning activities in the different sea basins. A good example of this is the North Sea, where coastal Member States have set up structures to strengthen the coordination when deploying offshore wind energy¹⁴. Moving from a project approach, MSP should become a subject of discussion among Member States in sea basin governance bodies.

¹⁴ North Seas Energy Cooperation, with a dedicated support group on MSP (DG MARE is co-chairing this group).

⇒ *Making MSP digital and pan-European:* The aim of this "digitalisation" is to harmonise data and to disseminate the contents of these plans through a common or shared digital platform – the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet). This sharing of data will facilitate cross-border consultation and cooperation and allow for a greater participation of stakeholders in the establishment and implementation of maritime spatial plans.

Themes and priorities (scope)

Proposals are expected to develop innovative responses to tackle the above-mentioned specific challenges that EU Members States might encounter in the implementation and/or revision of their maritime spatial plans.

Hereunder is a list of priorities related to the aforementioned challenges:

1. *MSP as an enabler of the European Green Deal. Developing strategies and approaches to review/revise maritime spatial plans to make them future proof, more integrated and more coherent, especially in a sea basin context.* Contributing to the development or review of the MSPs, taking into account circular blue economy and nature-food-energy nexus, coherently in a sea-basin context. Climate proofing of MSP, including incorporating climate adaptation and mitigation actions and/or strategies.
2. *Facilitate/enable the development of marine protected areas and economic sectors (e.g. tourism and maritime/underwater cultural heritage, offshore energy, fisheries, aquaculture) in the maritime domain: ex-ante assessments (Strategic Environmental Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment) and environmental monitoring; multi-use in project design and licensing/permits; development of a regulatory framework for multi-use, including Land Sea Interactions (LSI); allocation of sufficient sea space, enabling synergies with other sectors / activities.*
3. *Applying an Ecosystems Based Approach (EBA) in MSP: designing maritime spatial plans to integrate objectives and measures of other EU instruments (e.g. the Marine Strategy Framework Directive) with the aim to reduce collective and cumulative pressures and ensuring that marine ecosystems are in a healthy, productive and resilient condition.*
4. *Analysing how maritime spatial plans identified and addressed existing and potential tensions between different sectors.* For example analysing the socio-economic implications of the offshore energy development and marine protected areas on recreation and tourism activities, boating, indigenous life, aquaculture and on fishing. *Developing strategies* on how to address those interactions, social and economic implications, increase the social acceptance and ensure perceived fairness¹⁵ in the MSP process.

Applicants should identify one among the above priorities, or address a combination thereof, and build their proposal around it.

Priority will be given to proposals that build on the outcome of prior MSP related projects, relevant to the objectives of the call. In this context, proposals should describe how they build on, complement and differ from finalised or ongoing research and innovation projects, including from EU programmes, where relevant. In case a proposal includes activities in a particular sea basin in which a dedicated sea basin strategy or similar initiative exists, priority will be given to proposals that explain how

¹⁵ Perceptions of fairness refer to any element of the environment perceived by individuals or collectives as fair according to previous norms or standards.

they contribute to the objectives of the relevant sea basin strategy or initiative.

Activities that can be funded (scope)

Applicants should explain in their proposal how they will implement the activities below described, resulting in concrete and measurable results within the project's duration.

Projects must undertake one or more of the following main activities as part of the project implementation:

- Specific activities aimed at implementing provisions set out in articles 6, 7, 8 and 9 of the MSP Directive, including the review and/or revisions of maritime spatial plans;
- Specific activities aimed at implementing provisions set out in article 10 of the MSP Directive (Data use and sharing);
- Specific activities aimed at implementing provisions set out in article 11 of the MSP Directive (Cooperation among Member States);
- Specific activities aimed at implementing provisions set out in article 12 of the MSP Directive (Cooperation with third countries).

In addition, applicants should include in their project the following complementary activities/tasks to support the above core activities:

- Establishment of a Steering Committee (SC) to ensure the overall strategic steering of the project. The SC should comprise relevant representatives of the Member States where the action takes place (such as MSP competent authorities), as well as the beneficiaries involved. The Commission and CINEA may participate in an observer capacity only.
- Establishment of an Advisory Committee (AC) to provide expert advice on the project's activities. The AC should be composed of a maximum of five recognised experts in MSP or in relevant fields of activity. The Commission and CINEA may participate in an observer capacity only.
- Working procedures defining how the project and the SC will operate (assigning clear roles and responsibilities, describing the decision-making process, frequency of meetings etc.);
- An opening and closing conference.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to assign dedicated staff to the development and implementation of the proposed communication and dissemination activities. This should be appropriately reflected in the proposed budget.

The list of complementary activities is non-exhaustive. Applicants may propose additional activities, as long as the proposed complementary activity is justified and establishes a coherent link with the project objectives and the objectives of this call.

Networking with other EU projects

During the lifetime of the projects funded under the MSP calls, a number of events (no more than once per year) may be organised at EU level for the grant beneficiaries to facilitate the exchange of experiences and good practices across sea basins, to foster mutual learning and to enhance the European dimension of Maritime Spatial Planning. Project beneficiaries are expected to participate in these events, which will be held in Brussels or other relevant locations.

Expected impact

Applicants have to list the main results expected from the project. The expected results to be achieved by the end of the project must be concrete, realistic and time bound and quantifiable, as far as possible.

In particular, proposals are expected to:

- Ensure that maritime plans are coherent and coordinated across the marine region concerned;
- Create a repository of best practices and lessons learnt from the project and a list of achievements of the projects, including in coordination with the European MSP platform;
- Produce two "policy briefs", one at mid-term and one at the end of the project, that summarise the main results of the project and their relevance for the implementation of the MSP Directive. These documents should include elements of "policy feedback", in particular suggestions for changes / improvements in the current EU policy instruments.

In addition, the proposals should identify specific expected impacts in relation to the targeted "Priorities".

3. Available budget

The available call budget is **EUR 2 500 000**.

We expect to fund one project.

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:	7 May 2024
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>11 June 2024 – 17:00:00 CET</u> (Brussels)
Evaluation:	June-July 2024
Information on evaluation results:	July 2024
GA signature:	September 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: not applicable
 - CVs of core project team: applicable
 - activity reports of last year: not applicable
 - list of previous projects: applicable

A detailed budget table is available for information on [Portal Reference Documents](#). You are NOT obliged to use it to prepare your project budget, nor upload it with your application, but you will be requested to provide it later on, if you are selected for funding.

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

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

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

Proposals are limited to maximum **60 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*).

- ④ 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) endorsed by the public authorities or bodies in charge of maritime spatial planning at national level in the related coastal Member States.
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
 - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
 - non-EU countries in the Atlantic, Baltic Sea, Black Sea, North Seas and the Mediterranean, or having waters adjacent to EU Outermost Regions, under cross-border Maritime Spatial Planning cooperation and only when its participation is necessary for the objectives of a given action and link with activities undertaken under Regional Sea Conventions - Individual proposals by the non-EU countries are not eligible.
- be public authorities or bodies in charge of maritime spatial planning of coastal Member States.

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

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

Specific cases

Exceptional funding — Entities from countries mentioned in the work programme (if any) are only exceptionally eligible, if the granting authority considers their participation essential for the implementation of the action.

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

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

Entities without legal personality — Entities which do not have legal personality under their national law may exceptionally participate, provided that their representatives have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf, and offer guarantees for the protection of the EU financial interests equivalent to that offered by legal persons¹⁶.


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'¹⁷. ⚠ 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).

¹⁶ See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

¹⁷ For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

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)*¹⁸ and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#)¹⁹). Such entities are not eligible to participate in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any).

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

Consortium composition

Proposals must be submitted by a consortium of at least 2 applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities), which complies with the following conditions:

- minimum 2 entities from 2 different eligible countries
- Applicants must be public authorities or bodies in charge of maritime spatial planning of those coastal countries which are responsible for MSP in the selected area and/or a regional organisation that has competences in Maritime Spatial Planning or activities concerned by Maritime Spatial Planning (nature protection, development of offshore renewables, fisheries). Other public authorities or bodies shall be considered eligible applicants provided that they are endorsed by the public authorities or bodies in charge of maritime spatial planning at national level in the related coastal countries.

The coordinator must be established in an EU Member State.

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*).

Financial support to third parties is not allowed.

Geographic location (target countries)

Proposals must relate to activities concerning the following sea basin/area: North Sea. Proposals may include cooperation with other sea basins (Atlantic, Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Mediterranean, as well as the EU Outermost regions marine areas).

Applicants are encouraged to submit proposals that include cooperation and transfer of results between and/or among sea basins.

Proposals can focus on a part/sub-region of these sea basins/areas.

Activities should normally relate to the EU waters, but may extend into neighbouring waters, if this is necessary for the implementation of the projects (in view of their

¹⁸ 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](#).

¹⁹ 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).

nature and their objectives) and in particular where cross-border MSP cooperation requires third country involvement in the given sea basin.

Duration

Projects should normally range between 24 and 48 months (extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment).

Project budget

Project budgets (maximum grant amount) cannot exceed the available budget of the call of EUR 2 500 000, but this does not preclude the submission/selection of proposals requesting lower amounts.

Ethics

Projects must comply with:

- highest ethical standards and
- applicable EU, international and national law (including Directive 98/58²⁰, Regulation 1099/2009²¹, and Regulation (889/2008²²).

Projects must pay particular attention to the principle of proportionality, the need to ensure protection of the environment and high levels of animal welfare and human health protection.

Applicants must show in their application that they respect ethical principles and applicable regulatory framework.

Projects involving ethics issues may be made subject to specific ethics rules.

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.

²⁰ Council Directive 98/58/EC of 20 July 1998 concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes (OJ L 221, 8.8.1998, p. 23).

²¹ Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing (OJ L 303, 18.11.2009, p. 1).

²² Commission Regulation (EC) No 889/2008 of 5 September 2008 laying down detailed rules for the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products with regard to organic production, labelling and control (OJ L 250, 18.9.2008, p. 1).

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.

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

Operational capacity

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

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

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

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

- general profiles (qualifications and experiences) of the staff responsible for managing and implementing the project
- description of the consortium participants.
- list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years)

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

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

Exclusion

Applicants which are subject to an **EU exclusion decision** or in one of the following **exclusion situations** that bar them from receiving EU funding can NOT participate²³:

- 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)

²³ See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

- 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 misconduct²⁴ (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- committed fraud, corruption, links to a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Regulation No [2988/95](#) (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- created under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant).

Applicants will also be refused if it turns out that²⁵:

- 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** 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 score.

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


²⁴ 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.

²⁵ See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

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

- 1) Projects focusing on a theme and/or priority (as indicated in section 2) that is not otherwise covered by higher ranked projects 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 'Quality'.
- 3) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the overall project portfolio and the creation of positive synergies between projects, or other factors related to the objectives of the call. These factors will be documented in the panel report.
- 4) After that, the remainder of the available call budget will be used to fund projects across the different topics in order to ensure a balanced spread of the geographical and thematic coverage and while respecting to the maximum possible extent the order of merit based on the evaluation of the award criteria.

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

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

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

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

9. Award criteria

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

- **Relevance:**
 - clarity and consistency of project, objectives and planning; extent to which they match the themes and priorities, and objectives of the call/topic; contribution to the EU strategic and legislative context, including, where relevant, to the objectives of sustainable blue economy and sea basin strategies or initiatives²⁶

²⁶ For sea basins strategies and other relevant sea basin information for the Atlantic, Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Mediterranean or North Sea, see [Europa website](#).

- identification of specific needs/challenges of the policy domains/sea basins/areas targeted in the call; European/trans-national dimension
- extent to which the proposal differentiates from other initiatives in the field and provides added value; quality of proposed coordination and support measures; potential to develop mutual trust/cross-border cooperation (10 points)
- **Quality:** quality and effectiveness of the methodology for implementing the project (concept and methodology, management, procedures, timetable, risks and risk management, monitoring and evaluation); feasibility of the project within the proposed time frame; cost effectiveness (sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; best value for money); quality of the consortium (if applicable) and project teams; appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams and consortium (if applicable) (10 points)
- **Impact:**
 - extent to which the outputs of the project contribute to each of the expected impacts of the call/topic; suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts;
 - possibility to use/transfer the outcomes to other countries/regions; appropriateness of the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities and, if applicable, measures linked to intellectual property and knowledge protection and regulatory issues; sustainability of results after EU funding ends;
 - ambition and expected long-term impact of results on target groups/general public; (10 points).

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	6	10
Quality	6	10
Impact	6	10
Overall (pass) scores	21	30

Maximum points: 30 points.

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

Overall threshold: 21 points.

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

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

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

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

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

Starting date and project duration

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

Project duration: between 24 and 48 months (extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment).

Milestones and deliverables

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

The following deliverables will be mandatory for all projects:

- a policy brief at the end of each reporting period
- a project factsheet at the beginning of the project.

Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount

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

Project budget (maximum grant amount): *see section 6 above*. The grant 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 (**80%**).

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
- E. Indirect costs

Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:

- personnel costs:
 - SME owner/natural person unit cost²⁷: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost²⁸: Yes
- equipment costs: depreciation
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties: not allowed
- indirect cost flat-rate: 7% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteers costs and exempted specific cost categories, if any)
- VAT: non-deductible 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; dedicated website of the project or integrated within the beneficiaries' own pre-existing ones are eligible
 - other ineligible costs: see article 6.3 in the model GA.

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 **40%** of the maximum grant amount; exceptionally less

²⁷ 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).

²⁸ 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).

or no prefinancing). The prefinancing will be paid 30 days from entry into force/financial guarantee (if required) — whichever is the latest.

There will be one or more **interim payments** (with detailed cost reporting).

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

All payments will be made to the coordinator.

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

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

Prefinancing guarantees

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

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

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

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

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

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

Certificates

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

Liability regime for recoveries

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

For beneficiaries, it is one of the following:

- limited joint and several liability with individual ceilings — *each beneficiary up*

to their maximum grant amount

- unconditional joint and several liability — *each beneficiary up to the maximum grant amount for the action*

or

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

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

Provisions concerning the project implementation

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):*

- rights of use on results: Yes

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

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

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

- specific rules for blending operations: No

Other specificities

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; not applicable for actions by invitation)
- [Portal FAQ](#) (for general questions).

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

Contact

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

Non-IT related questions should be sent to the following email address: CINEA-EMFAF-CALLS@ec.europa.eu.

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

13. Important

IMPORTANT

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

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

- **Coordinator** — In multi-beneficiary grants, the beneficiaries participate as consortium (group of beneficiaries). They will have to choose a coordinator, who will take care of the project management and coordination and will represent the consortium towards the granting authority. In mono-beneficiary grants, the single beneficiary will automatically be coordinator.
- **Affiliated entities** — Applicants may participate with affiliated entities (i.e. entities linked to a beneficiary which participate in the action with similar rights and obligations as the beneficiaries, but do not sign the grant and therefore do not become beneficiaries themselves). They will get a part of the grant money and must therefore comply with all the call conditions and be validated (just like beneficiaries); but they do not count towards the minimum eligibility criteria for consortium composition (if any).
- **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](#).