Erasmus+ Programme (ERASMUS)

Call for proposals

[Virtual Exchanges in Higher Education and Youth]
(ERASMUS-EDU-2021-VIRT-EXCH)

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EUROPEAN EDUCATION AND CULTURE EXECUTIVE AGENCY (EACEA)

EACEA.A – Erasmus+ and EU Aid Volunteers
EACEA.A.2 - Platforms, Skills and Innovation

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU **action grants** in the field of higher education and youth under the **Erasmus+ Programme**.

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

− Regulation 2018/1046 (EU Financial Regulation)

− the basic act (Erasmus+ Regulation 2021/817[1]).

− Multiannual Indicative Programme for the external dimension of the ERASMUS+ Programme for the period 2021-2027[2]

The call is launched in accordance with the 2021 Work Programme[3] and will be managed by the **European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)** ('Agency').

The call covers the following **topics**:

− **ERASMUS-EDU-2021-VIRT-EXCH-NDICI Virtual Exchanges with other Specific Regions**

− **ERASMUS-EDU-2021-VIRT-EXCH-IPA Virtual Exchanges with the Western Balkans**

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

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

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[1] Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport (OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 1).

[2] Commission Implementing Decision C(2021) 6189 final of 27 August 2021 on adopting a Multiannual Indicative Programme for the external dimension of the ERASMUS+ Programme for the period 2021-2027.

[3] Commission Implementing Decision C(2021) 1939 final of 25 March 2021 concerning the adoption of the work programme for 2021 and the financing decision for the implementation of the Erasmus + Programme and Commission Implementing Decision C(2021) 7336 amending the Commission Implementing Decision C(2021)1939 on the financing of the 2021 Annual Work Programme for the implementation of "Erasmus+": the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport .

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

- the Call Document outlines the:

  - background, objectives, scope, activities that can be funded and the expected results (sections 1 and 2)

  - timetable and available budget (sections 3 and 4)

  - admissibility and eligibility conditions (including mandatory documents; sections 5 and 6)

  - criteria for financial and operational capacity and exclusion (section 7)

  - evaluation and award procedure (section 8)

  - award criteria (section 9)

  - legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements (section 10)

  - how to submit an application (section 11)

- the Online Manual outlines the:

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

  - recommendations for the preparation of the application

- the AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement contains:

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

You are also encouraged to visit the Erasmus+ Project Results website to consult the list of projects funded previously.

1. Background

Policy context

This call for proposals is part of the actions launched by the new Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 in order to boost international cooperation with countries not associated to it. It also finds itself embedded in a rich policy context that seeks to make the most of the opportunities and challenges of the ongoing transformations in the sectors of education, training and Youth.

With a significantly increased budget compared to its predecessor[4], the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027[5], has made it a priority to be even more inclusive and to support the green and digital transitions. Its launch has been marked by the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its enormous impact, in Europe and across the world, upon education and training systems, whose resilience the programme seeks to support. The new Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe[6] of the EU will contribute, in turn, to support the related

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[4] Over 28 billion EUR, compared to 14.7 EUR for 2014-2020.

[5] OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 1–33.

[6] OJ L 209, 14.6.2021, p. 1–78

challenges in countries not associated to Erasmus+, by boosting the international dimension of the programme. In addition, the new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) will continue supporting the implementation of Erasmus+ in candidate countries, both when it comes to associating them to the programme as when it comes to participating in its international dimension as non-associated countries, which is still the case in several countries of the Western Balkans.

The new programme is being deployed at a time when the EU has embarked itself in the far-reaching objective of establishing a European Education Area by 2025[7]. This European Education Area includes ambitious EU-level targets and it is guided by six dimensions, including an innovative geopolitical dimension. Through the latter, the EU will seek to exploit the huge untapped potential of EU cooperation across the world in different education and training sectors, with a view to build a positive image of Europe and spread its messages and fundamental values, as well as contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Another important ongoing initiative of the EU is the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)[8], which outlines the vision for high-quality, inclusive and accessible digital education in Europe. It is a call to action for stronger cooperation at European level and beyond to learn from the COVID-19 crisis, during which technology is being used at an unprecedented scale in education and training, and to make education and training systems fit for the digital age. The Digital Education Action Plan promotes global cooperation around these issues, particularly in priority regions such as the Western Balkans, Africa, and the Neighbourhood regions of the Eastern Partnership and the Southern Mediterranean. It also foresees making greater use of virtual exchanges between young people and education institutions in Europe, and around the world, to further engage young people in intercultural dialogue and improve their soft skills.

Finally, the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, as the framework for EU youth policy cooperation, based on the Council Resolution of 26 November 2018[9], has the goal of making the most of the potential of youth policy. It fosters youth participation in democratic life; it also supports social and civic engagement and aims to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to take part in society. The EU Youth Strategy focuses on three core areas of action, around the three words: Engage, Connect, Empower, while working on joined-up implementation across sectors. During a 2017-2018 dialogue process, which involved young people from all over Europe, 11 European Youth Goals were developed. These goals identify cross-sectoral areas that affect young people's lives and point out challenges. Goal 8, "Quality Learning", includes among its targets the promotion of open-mindedness and supporting the development of interpersonal and intercultural skills, as well as incorporating methods within formal and non-formal education settings that enable learners to develop personal skills, including critical and analytical thinking, creativity and learning.

At the same time, as part of Goal 9, "Space and participation for all", the EU will seek to ensure the existence of safe virtual youth spaces that are accessible to every young person and provide access to information and services, as well as ensure opportunities for youth participation.

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[7] See: Commission Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (COM(2020) 625 final), 30.9.2020; and Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) (OJ C 66/1, 26.2.2021).

[8] COM(2020) 624 final of 30.9.2020.

[9] OJ C 456 of 18.12.2018.

Virtual exchanges with Partner Countries in the field of higher education and youth

Against this background, many young people -especially in Partner Countries - have no access to physical mobility, a situation aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the goal of this call is to expand the reach and scope of Erasmus+, based on the experience of the 2018-2020 virtual exchange pilot project[10].

Virtual exchanges are online people-to-people activities that promote intercultural dialogue and soft skills development. They make it possible for every young person to access high-quality international and cross-cultural education (both formal and non-formal) without physical mobility. While virtual debating or training does not fully replace the benefits of physical mobility, participants in virtual exchanges ought to reap a number of the benefits of international educational experiences. Virtual exchanges also help spreading European values. Moreover, in some cases they can prepare, deepen and extend physical exchanges, as well as fuel new demand for them.

Virtual exchanges take place in small groups and are always moderated by a trained facilitator. They should be easily integrated into youth (non-formal education) projects or higher education courses. Virtual exchanges can draw participants from both sectors, even if, depending on specific projects, they could involve participants from either only one of them or from both. All projects under this call will involve both organisations and participants coming from EU Member States or third countries associated to the programme (Programme Countries) and from Partner Countries.[11]

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

- − ERASMUS-EDU-2021-VIRT-EXCH-IPA Virtual Exchanges with the Western Balkans

- − ERASMUS-EDU-2021-VIRT-EXCH-NDICI Virtual Exchanges with other Specified Regions of the World

Objectives

The specific objectives of this call are the following:

- encouraging intercultural dialogue with Partner Countries and increasing tolerance through online people-to-people interactions, building on digital, youth-friendly technologies;

- promoting various types of virtual exchanges as a complement to Erasmus+ physical mobility, allowing more young people to benefit from intercultural and international experience;

- Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particularly in the use of internet and social media, such as to counter discrimination indoctrination, polarization and violent radicalisation;

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[10] https://europa.eu/youth/erasmusvirtual

[11] The partner countries not associated to the programme targeted by this call are those from the Western Balkans, the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood, Russia and Sub-Saharan Africa. See point 6 for eligibility criteria.

- fostering the digital and soft skills[12] development of students, young people and youth workers[13], including the practice of foreign languages and teamwork, notably to enhance employability;

- promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education;

- strengthening the youth dimension in the relations of the EU with Partner Countries.

Themes and priorities (scope)

The Erasmus+ Virtual Exchanges are a bottom-up initiative. In this call, participating organisations are free to choose the topics on which they will focus, but proposals ought to convincingly demonstrate their expected impact in relation to one or more of the above-mentioned objectives (see 'Expected impact' section below). Gender aspects should be taken into account as needed, depending on the projects' scope and themes (e.g. by introducing gender sensitivity aspects in the trainings).

Activities that can be funded (scope)

Projects will be funded based on work plans that may integrate a wide range of online cooperation activities, including for example:

- online-facilitated discussions between young people of youth organisations based in different countries, as part of youth projects. They could include role playing simulations. Participating organisations must arrange virtual exchanges for people in the 13-30 age-range. If a project involves people under 18, participating organisations are required to obtain prior authorisation from their parents or those acting on their behalf;

- training for youth workers willing to develop a virtual exchange project with colleagues from other countries;

- online facilitated discussions between students of Higher Education institutions based in different countries, as part of higher education degrees;

- training for university professors/staff willing to develop a virtual exchange project with colleagues from other countries;

- interactive open online courses including traditional course materials such as filmed lectures, readings, and problem sets (like the well-known MOOCs, Massive Open Online Courses, but putting an emphasis on interactive user forums in small groups to support community interactions among students, professors, teaching assistants, young people and youth workers).

In order to carry out the above activities, projects should rely, as far as possible, on existing tools and platforms. Should there be a need to develop new tools or platforms for specific projects; this would have to be properly justified. Individual participants must be based in the countries of the organisations participating in the project.

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[12] Soft skills include the ability to think critically, be curious and creative, to take initiative, to solve problems and work collaboratively, to be able to communicate efficiently in a multicultural and interdisciplinary environment, to be able to adapt to context and to cope with stress and uncertainty. These skills are part of the key competences, as outlined in the Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (OJ C 189/1 of 4.6.2018).

[13] Youth workers are professional or volunteers involved in non-formal learning who support young people in their personal socio-educational, and professional development.

Expected impact

The activities and outputs of the different projects will aim at reaching a positive impact in relation to the objectives of the call that, while varying in accordance with the projects' specificities, should be closely connected to the learning dimension of the virtual exchanges. Each project proposal should include information on this expected impact. Applicants are encouraged to foresee feedback from participating individuals and organisations, particularly as for the learning value, when reporting about the projects' impact.

3. Available budget

The available call budget is **EUR 4 000 000**. This budget might be increased by maximum 20%.

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

Topic	Topic budget
1 — Virtual Exchanges with the Western Balkans[14]	**EUR 1 000 000**
2 — Virtual Exchanges With Other Specified Regions of the World[15]	**EUR 3 000 000** **(Distributed in the following indicative geographic envelopes: Eastern Neighbourhood EUR 750.000; Russia EUR 500.000, Southern Neighbourhood EUR 750.000, Sub Saharan Africa EUR 1.000.000)**

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

4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	03/11/2021
Deadline for submission:	22/02/2022 (Brussels)

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14   Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance (IPA III).

15   Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, OJ L 209, 14.6.2021.

Evaluation:	03-07/2022
Information on evaluation results:	08/2022
GA signature:	10-12/2022

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)*

- Part C *(to be filled in directly online)* containing additional project data

- **mandatory annexes and supporting documents** *(to be uploaded)*:

    - detailed budget table: not applicable

    - CVs of core project team: not applicable

    - activity reports of last year: not applicable

    - Annex 1: list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years) *(template available in Part B)*

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)*.

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

6. Eligibility

Eligible participants (eligible countries)

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

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

        The Partner Countries below are regrouped according to the single Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) that covers the ERASMUS+ actions financed by the EU external action instruments Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-GE) and Instrument of Pre-accession III (IPA III) for 7 years (2021 – 2027)[16]

Region	Countries
— **Western Balkans**	— Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo[17], Montenegro
— **Eastern Neighbourhood**	— Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Territory of Ukraine as recognised by international law
— **Southern Neighbourhood**	— Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine[18], Syria, Tunisia
— **Russia (Territory of Russia as recognised by International Law)**	—
— **Sub Saharan Africa**	— Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Congo - Democratic Republic of the, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea,

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[16]   Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance (IPA III).

[17]   This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

[18]   This designation is not to be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

	Guinea-Bissau, Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Eswatini, - Democratic Republic of, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

– For higher education institutions (HEIs) established in Erasmus+ Programme Countries *(see above)*: be holders of the ECHE certificate (Erasmus Charter for Higher Education)

– Public or private organisations active in the field of higher education or youth (non-formal education) in Programme Countries or the relevant Partner Countries

– Only applicants from Erasmus+ Programme Countries can take the role of coordinator

Higher education institutions, associations or organisations of higher education institutions, as well as legally recognised national or international rector, teacher or student organisations, established in Programme Countries or the relevant Partner 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. 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 persons[19]

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'[20]. ⚠ Please note that

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19 See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation 2018/1046.
20 For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation 2018/1046.

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

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

EU restrictive measures — Special rules apply for certain entities *(e.g. entities subject to EU restrictive measures under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU)[21] and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No 2013/C 205/05[22])*. 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 4 applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities) which complies with the following conditions:

- Only applicants from Erasmus+ Programme Countries can take the role of coordinator.

- The consortium must have a minimum of 2 higher education institutions or 2 youth organisations from two Programme Countries

and

- 2 higher education institutions or 2 youth organisations from 2 eligible Partner Countries within the same region.

- The number of organisations from the Programme Countries may not be higher than the number of organisations from the Partner Countries.

- In the case of Sub-Saharan Africa, applicants are encouraged to involve partners from a wider range of countries in their proposal, including least developed countries19 and/or partners that have less experience in Erasmus+.

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.

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[21] 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.

[22] 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).

 Geographic location (target countries)

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

Duration

Projects should normally last 36 months (extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment).

Ethics

Projects must comply with:

— highest ethical standards and

— applicable EU, international and national law.

7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

Financial capacity

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

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

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

— public bodies (entities established as public body under national law, including local, regional or national authorities) or international organisations

— if the individual requested grant amount is not more than EUR 60 000.

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

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

– further information

– an enhanced financial responsibility regime, i.e. joint and several responsibility for all beneficiaries or joint and several liability of affiliated entities *(see below, section 10)*

– prefinancing paid in instalments

– (one or more) prefinancing guarantees *(see below, section 10)*

or

– propose no prefinancing

– request that you are replaced or, if needed, reject the entire proposal.

For more information, *see Rules for Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment*.

Operational capacity

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

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

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

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

- profiles (qualifications and experience) 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 participate[23]:

- bankruptcy, winding up, affairs administered by the courts, arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities or other similar procedures (including procedures for persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)

- in breach of social security or tax obligations (including if done by persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)

- guilty of grave professional misconduct[24] (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant

- committed fraud, corruption, links to a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making 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,

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

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 that[25]:

    – 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

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

An **evaluation committee** (assisted by independent outside experts) will assess all applications. Proposals will first be checked for formal requirements (admissibility, and eligibility, *see sections 5 and 6*). Proposals found admissible and eligible will be evaluated (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 geographic budget envelope) a **priority order** will be determined according to the following approach:

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

  1) Projects focusing on a theme that is not otherwise covered by higher ranked projects will be considered to have the highest priority.

  2) The ex aequo proposals 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 'Quality. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Impact'.

  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.

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

⚠ 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:**

   The application is relevant to the chosen general and specific objectives of the call. The project proposal is consistent with the requirements of the call. The proposal is clearly explained.

‒ Consistency: The different components of the application are coherent and consistent. The application is based on an adequate analysis of challenges and needs; the objectives are realistic and address issues relevant to participating organisations and the direct and indirect target groups. Evidence of the effectiveness of the proposed virtual exchange approach is provided.

‒ Scaling up: The application demonstrates the potential for scaling up its practice(s) at different levels (e.g. local, regional, national, EU) and its transferability to different sectors. The scaling up is likely to generate impact not only at the level of the different partner organisations but also at system and/or policy level. The proposal has the potential to develop mutual trust and enhance cross-border cooperation.

‒ European added value: The application brings added value at EU level, through results that would not be achieved at country level alone, and there is potential for transferring results to countries not involved in the project. The project outcomes have the potential to feed into relevant EU policy agendas

   (30 points)

‒ **Quality:**

‒ **Project design and implementation:**

‒ Strategic plan: The application establishes a clear strategy building on a feasibility analysis and identifies the necessary activities for testing, adapting, and/or scaling up the virtual exchange practice(s) in the new context of the project partnership.

- Needs: The different needs of the different partners have been identified and are well taken into account. A clear concept of how these different needs will be managed has been developed. The pedagogical approach(es) chosen are also in keeping with these different needs.

- Structure: The work programme is clear and intelligible and covers all project phases. Indicators of achievement and means of verification have been clearly defined for each outcome.

- Management: The project management plan is sound, with adequate resources allocated to the different tasks. Effective cooperation and decision-making processes have been put in place, that are comprehensible for all stakeholders. The budget shows cost effectiveness and value for money. There is coherence between tasks, roles and financial resources allocated to partners. The financial management arrangements are clear and appropriate.

- Evaluation: Specific measures for monitoring processes and deliverables (i.e. Indicators of achievement and means of verification) ensure that the project implementation is of high quality. Learning outcomes are evaluated and recognised. There is a clear quality assurance plan which also covers project management adequately. The monitoring strategy includes risk identification and a mitigating action plan.
  (20 points)

- **Partnership and cooperation arrangements:**

- Configuration: The partnership is capable of ensuring full achievement of the project's objectives. The consortium has all the necessary skills, expertise and experience in the areas covered by the project. Adequate allocation of time and input among the partners is ensured. Skills and competences of the partnership are complementary.

- Commitment: Each participating organisation demonstrates full involvement corresponding to its capacities and specific area of expertise.

- Cooperation: The cooperation arrangements are balanced. Effective mechanisms are proposed to ensure coordination, decision-making and communication between the participating organisations, stakeholders and any other relevant party.

  (20 points)

- **Impact:**

- Dissemination: A clear awareness raising, dissemination and communication strategy ensures reaching the relevant target groups, as well as the general stakeholders and the public during the lifetime of the project. This strategy includes plans for making any produced materials accessible through open licenses.

  Exploitation: The application demonstrates that the selected virtual exchange approach(es) can be successfully disseminated and/or scaled up, that it creates a wider impact and influences systemic change. The exploitation approach is clearly described and the proposed measures to exploit the project results are potentially effective.

— Impact: The foreseeable impact, notably for the identified target groups is clearly defined and measures are in place to ensure that the impact can be achieved and evaluated. Learning outcomes are clearly defined before each virtual exchange activity and measured after each activity, progress recorded and achievements recognised. The results of the activities are likely to be significant. The project outcomes have the potential to support long-term changes, improvements, or developments for the benefit of the target groups and systems concerned. The application also explains how the impact of learning (learning outcomes) through virtual exchange will be evaluated in order to make (data) informed recommendations to improve virtual exchange teaching & learning beyond the project.

— Sustainability: The application includes appropriate measures and resources to ensure that the results and benefits can be sustained beyond the project lifetime

(30 points)

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	15	30
Quality — Project design and implementation	10	20
Quality — Partnership and cooperation arrangements	10	20
Impact	15	30
Overall (pass) scores	**60**	**100**

Maximum points: 100 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 15/30, 10/20, 10/20 and 15/30 points.

Overall threshold: 60 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: projects should normally last 36 months (extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment).

Milestones and deliverables

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

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): EUR 500.000 per project. The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

The grant will be a budget-based mixed actual cost grant. 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 (95%)

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

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

Budget categories and cost eligibility rules

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

Budget categories for this call:

- – A. Personnel costs
    - – A.1 Employees, A.2 Natural persons under direct contract, A.3 Seconded persons
    - – A.4 SME owners and natural person beneficiaries
- – B. Subcontracting costs
- – C. Purchase costs
    - – C.1 Travel and subsistence
    - – C.2 Equipment
    - – C.3 Other goods, works and services
- – D. Other cost categories
- – E. Indirect costs

Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:

- – personnel costs:

- SME owner/natural person unit cost[26] Yes

- travel and subsistence unit cost[27]: Yes

- equipment costs: depreciation

- other cost categories:

- indirect cost flat-rate: 7% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteers costs and exempted specific cost categories, if any)

- VAT: non-deductible VAT is eligible (but please note that since 2013 VAT paid by beneficiaries that are public bodies acting as public authority is NOT eligible)

- other:

  - in-kind contributions for free are allowed, but cost-neutral, i.e. they cannot be declared as cost

  - kick off meeting: costs for kick off meeting organised by the granting authority are eligible (travel costs for maximum 2 persons, return ticket to Brussels and accommodation for one night) only if the meeting takes place after the project starting date set out in the Grant Agreement; the starting date can be changed through an amendment, if needed]

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

  - other ineligible costs: No

⚠️ Volunteers costs — Volunteers costs are not a classic cost category. There are no costs because volunteers work for free, but they may nonetheless be added to the budget in the form of a pre-fixed unit cost (per volunteer) and thus allow you to benefit from the volunteers' work for the grant (by increasing the amount of reimbursement up to 100% of the normal costs, i.e. cost categories other than volunteers). More information is available in the AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement, art 6.2.A.5.

If indirect costs for volunteers costs are eligible, you can add them manually to the volunteers costs category in Annex 2 (calculate the 7% flat-rate on the amount of volunteers costs calculated as unit costs, and then add them on top).

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

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[26] 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).

[27] 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).

There will be one or more **interim payments** (with cost reporting through the use of resources report). There will be one or more **additional prefinancing payments** linked to a prefinancing report.

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

All payments will be made to the coordinator.

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

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

Prefinancing guarantees

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

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

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

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

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

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

Certificates

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

Liability regime for recoveries

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

For beneficiaries, it is one of the following:

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

- unconditional joint and several liability — *each beneficiary up to the maximum*

grant amount for the action

or

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

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

Provisions concerning the project implementation

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

− rights of use on results: Yes

− access to results for policy purposes: Yes

− access rights to ensure continuity and interoperability obligations: Yes

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

− additional communication and dissemination activities: Yes

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

EU restrictive measures: Yes

Non-compliance and breach of contract

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

For more information, *see AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement*.

11. How to submit an application

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

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

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

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

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

b) **submit the proposal**

Access the Electronic Submission System via the Topic page in the 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 4 parts, as follows:

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

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

– Part C containing additional project data. To be filled in directly online.

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

The proposal must 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: [

EACEA-EPLUS-VIRTUAL-EXCHANGES@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 calls). Outside such Synergies calls, 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 proposal 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 Regulation 2018/1725. 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.