



# European Social Fund+ (ESF)

## Call for proposals

Transaction costs to support social finance intermediaries  
(ESF-2022-SOC-FIN)

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**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
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EMPL.G – Funds: Programming and Implementation  
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## **CALL FOR PROPOSALS**

### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

0. Introduction .....	3
1. Background.....	4
2. Objectives — Themes and priorities — Activities that can be funded — Expected impact .....	4
Objectives (expected outcome) .....	4
Themes and priorities (scope) .....	5
Activities that can be funded (scope).....	5
Expected impact.....	6
3. Available budget .....	6
4. Timetable and deadlines .....	6
5. Admissibility and documents .....	6
6. Eligibility.....	7
Eligible participants (eligible countries).....	7
Consortium composition .....	9
Eligible activities.....	9
Financial support to third parties is not allowed. ....	9
Geographic location (target countries).....	9
Duration .....	9
Project budget.....	9
7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion.....	9
Financial capacity .....	9
Operational capacity .....	10
Exclusion .....	11
8. Evaluation and award procedure .....	12
9. Award criteria.....	13
10. Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements.....	14
Milestones and deliverables.....	14
Starting date and project duration .....	14
Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount.....	14
Budget categories and cost eligibility rules.....	14
Reporting and payment arrangements.....	15
Prefinancing guarantees .....	16

Certificates .....	17
Liability regime for recoveries .....	17
Provisions concerning the project implementation .....	17
Other specificities .....	17
Non-compliance and breach of contract .....	17
11. How to submit an application.....	18
12. Help .....	19
13. Important .....	20

## 0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU **action grants** in the field of social enterprise finance under the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**.

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

- Regulation 2018/1046 ([EU Financial Regulation](#))
- the basic act (ESF+ Regulation [2021/1057](#)<sup>1</sup>).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2022 Work Programme<sup>2</sup> and will be managed by the **European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL)**.

The call covers the following **topic**:

- **ESF-2022-SOC-FIN**

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) (OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 21).

<sup>2</sup> Commission Implementing Decision C(2021)8795 final of 08/12/2021 concerning the adoption of the work programme for 2022 and the financing decision for the implementation of the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) strand of the ESF+.

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

## 1. Background

This call for proposals is financed under the **Employment and Social Innovation ("EaSI") strand of the ESF+** which is a European-level financing instrument managed directly by the European Commission. It provides financial support to achieve high employment levels, fair social protection, a skilled and resilient workforce ready for the future world of work, as well as inclusive and cohesive societies aiming to eradicate poverty. Article 25 (g) of the ESF+ regulation on the EaSI operational objectives provides for support to develop social enterprises and the emergence of a social investment market, facilitating public and private interactions and the participation of foundations and philanthropic actors in that market. More concretely according to the 2022 work programme, the EaSI strand of ESF+ is expected to advise and assist microfinance and social enterprise finance providers, improve the quality of their operations to scale up and become sustainable, boost the capacity and facilitate the access to the EU level financial instruments under [InvestEU](#); as well as support the preparation and roll out of the [Action Plan for the social economy](#).

In addition, the social investment and skills' policy window of the InvestEU Fund is expected to provide a budgetary guarantee for equity and quasi-equity operations supporting the social enterprise finance investment market.

Moreover, in the 2021 [Communication from the Commission 'Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy'](#), the Commission announced its intention to complement equity investment instruments with grant support aimed at lowering transaction costs for risk-capital investments into social enterprises.

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

### *Objectives (expected outcome)*

The objective of the call is to develop the social enterprise finance market. It will catalyse risk capital investments below EUR 500 000 that otherwise would not happen in the area of social finance, by supporting transaction costs linked to these investments. This transaction cost support scheme takes the form of a grant and can be combined with financial instruments as a means to address the mismatch of needed and sustainable ticket sizes.

This is the third call targeting this priority; [the previous two were launched in 2017 and 2018](#).

### Themes and priorities (scope)

The grant is aimed at financial intermediaries that undertake long-term risk capital investments in ticket sizes of less than EUR 500 000 in the form of equity<sup>3</sup>, quasi-equity<sup>4</sup>, or hybrid financing<sup>5</sup> to social enterprises in the ESF+ Associated Countries. It will serve to lower the transaction costs for these small investment tickets and thus help overcome a market failure in the social enterprise finance market.

### Activities that can be funded (scope)

Activities related to the preparation, conclusion and follow-up of long term risk capital investments into social enterprises may be funded under this call for proposals. This may include a mix of activities such as:

- travelling to meet (potential) investees;
- screening and processing investment applications;
- preparing legal documents, potentially with a lawyers' advice;
- carrying out the due diligence, including assessing (potential) impact of the investment;
- providing investment readiness, scaling readiness or business restructuring support;
- bringing in co-investors;
- managing the investments and monitoring social impact.

The long term risk capital investments may take the form of equity, quasi-equity or hybrid financing (as defined above) of a maximum of EUR 500 000 per investment per social enterprise over a period of at least 18 months<sup>6</sup>.

In relation to the investees (the social enterprises that the grant beneficiaries will invest on), the following conditions apply:

- The selected investees must be social enterprises as defined in the ESF+ Regulation <sup>7</sup>. The social enterprises must be established / in the process of

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<sup>3</sup> The provision of capital to a firm, invested directly or indirectly in return for total or partial ownership of that firm and where the equity investor may assume some management control of the firm and may share the firm's profits.

<sup>4</sup> A type of financing that ranks between equity and debt, having a higher risk than senior debt and a lower risk than common equity. Quasi-equity investments can be structured as debt, typically unsecured and subordinated and in some cases convertible into equity, or as preferred equity.

<sup>5</sup> An instrument which combines the characteristics/features of at least two of the three financing instruments: grant, debt, and equity.

<sup>6</sup> This means that if a second investment in a social enterprise takes place within less than 18 months from the first investment and this raises the cumulative amount invested above the EUR 500 000 limit, the activities related to the first investment become ineligible for grant support, and any related payments already made by the Commission may be subject to recovery.

<sup>7</sup> 'social enterprise' means an undertaking, regardless of its legal form, including social economy enterprises, or a natural person which:

(a) in accordance with its articles of association, statutes or with any other legal document that may result in liability under the rules of the Member State where a social enterprise is located, has the achievement of measurable, positive social impacts, which may include environmental impacts, as its

being established and active in one or more of the ESF+ associated countries (see section 6).

- As an indication, the total transaction cost should not exceed 10% of the total expected amount of investments in social enterprises.

### *Expected impact*

The expected result is an increased number of risk-capital investments of below EUR 500 000 in social enterprises.

### **3. Available budget**

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

The Commission reserves 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**

<b>Timetable and deadlines (indicative)</b>	
Call opening:	06 April 2022
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>14 June 2022 – 17:00:00 CET</u> (Brussels)
Evaluation:	June-September 2022
Information on evaluation results:	October/November 2022
GA signature:	November/January 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.

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primary social objective rather than the generation of profit for other purposes, and which provides services or goods that generate a social return or employs methods of production of goods or services that embody social objectives;

(b) uses its profits first and foremost to achieve its primary social objective, and has predefined procedures and rules that ensure that the distribution of profits does not undermine the primary social objective;

(c) is managed in an entrepreneurial, participatory, accountable and transparent manner, in particular by involving workers, customers and stakeholders on whom its business activities have an impact.

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

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

- Application Form Part A — contains administrative information about the participants (future coordinator, beneficiaries and affiliated entities) and the summarised budget for the project (*to be filled in directly online*)
- Application Form Part B — contains the technical description of the project (*to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed and then assembled and re-uploaded*)
- **mandatory annexes and supporting documents** (*to be uploaded*):
  - detailed budget table/calculator: not applicable
  - CVs (standard) of core project team
  - activity reports of last year
  - list of previous projects (key projects relating to the subject of the call in the last 3 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 **40 pages** (Part B, annexes excluded). Evaluators will not consider any additional pages.

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

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

## 6. Eligibility

### Eligible participants (eligible countries)

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

- be legal entities (public or private bodies)
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
  - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
  - non-EU countries:
    - listed EEA countries and countries associated to the ESF+ 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](#))

- be an investment fund, a Fund-of-Funds, a special purpose vehicle, or a (co-) investment scheme in any form. There are two options available:
  - either the legal entity of the investment fund, the Fund-of-Funds, the special purpose vehicle or the (co-) investment scheme can be an applicant;
  - or the organisation managing the investment fund, the Fund-of-Funds, the special purpose vehicle, or the (co-) investment scheme can be an applicant. For the avoidance of doubt, the managing organisation must already be an established and registered legal entity at the time of the submission of the application.

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<sup>8</sup>.

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'<sup>9</sup>.  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).

Social partner organisations — These include notably the European social partner organisations that are consulted in accordance with Article 154 TFEU (for the list, see [List of consulted organisations](#)) as well as other European-level social partner organisations that are not included in this list, but who are for example involved in the preparation and launch of European social dialogue at sector level. Social partner organisations without legal personality are eligible provided that the conditions for entities without legal personality (*see above*) are met.

Countries currently negotiating association agreements — Beneficiaries from countries with ongoing negotiations (*see list above*) may participate in the call and can sign

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<sup>8</sup> See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

<sup>9</sup> For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).



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)*<sup>10</sup> and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#)<sup>11</sup>). 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

Both applications by single applicants (single beneficiaries) and consortia are allowed. In the latter case, all members of the consortium shall comply with the eligibility criteria spelled out in Section 6.

### Eligible activities

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

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 taking place in the eligible countries (*see above*).

### Duration

Projects should normally range between 24 and 36 months (extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment).

### Project budget

Project budgets are expected to range between EUR 300 000 and EUR 650 000 per project, but this does not preclude the submission/selection of proposals requesting other amounts.

## **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,*

<sup>10</sup> 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](#).

<sup>11</sup> 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).

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 one or more participants' 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 the participants are replaced or, if needed, reject the entire proposal.

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

When those rules proposes a weak or insufficient financial capacity of a co-applicant, DG EMPL will complement the analysis with the following ratios:

A first ratio between the total assets of the co-applicant and his share of the total project cost. The co-applicant is confirmed to have an insufficient financial capacity when the ratio is lower than 0.70.

A second ratio between the share of the grant's 1st pre-financing and the co-applicant annual total revenue. The co-applicant is confirmed to have an insufficient financial capacity when the ratio is higher than 0.70.

A single applicant/consortium coordinator is confirmed to be of a weak or insufficient financial capacity if he failed in one or both of the two ratios and the application will be rejected as a whole.

### 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, 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.

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

- general profiles (qualifications and experiences) of the staff responsible for managing and implementing the project (CVs of the proposed persons who will perform the main tasks, notably project manager and key personnel detailing all their relevant professional experience);
- description of the consortium participants
- applicants' activity reports of last year
- list of previous projects (key projects relating to the subject of the call in the last 3 years): for example, a list of investments/investment projects in social enterprises, and/or social economy, and/or other forms of social impact investing<sup>12</sup> or impact first investing in the last three years; the list should include at least 5 investments per application (i.e. applicant or consortium (coordinator and beneficiary(ies) together)) and provide details such as the type of investment, type of investees, amounts;
- The minimum professional experience requirements are the following: The project manager must have been engaged in social enterprise finance or social impact finance for at least three years. The other members of the team must have been engaged in social enterprise finance or social impact finance for at least one year.

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

### Exclusion

Applicants which are subject to an **EU exclusion decision** or in one of the following **exclusion situations** that bar them from receiving EU funding can NOT participate<sup>13</sup>:

- 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<sup>14</sup> (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

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<sup>12</sup> Impact investments are investments made into companies, organizations, and funds with the intention to generate social and environmental impact at par with a financial return. Impact investment is further defined by the investor's commitment to measure and report the social and environmental performance and progress of underlying investments, ensuring transparency and accountability.

<sup>13</sup> See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

<sup>14</sup> 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.

- 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, decisionmaking- 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, decisionmaking- 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, decisionmaking- 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<sup>15</sup>:


- 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 against the operational capacity and award criteria (*see sections 7 and 9*) and then ranked according to their scores.

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

<sup>15</sup> See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

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; contribution to the EU strategic and legislative context; impact/interest for a number of countries (EU or eligible non-EU countries); possibility to use the results in other countries; potential to develop mutual trust/cross-border cooperation (Min. 14 points Max. 20 points)]
- **Quality:**
  - **Project design and implementation:** [technical quality; logical links between the identified problems, needs and solutions proposed (logical frame concept); 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) (Min. 28 points Max. 40 points)]
  - **Project team and cooperation arrangements:** [quality of the consortium and project teams; appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams and consortium (Min. 14 points Max. 20 points)]
- **Impact:** [ambition and expected long-term impact of results on target groups/general public; appropriate dissemination strategy for ensuring sustainability and long-term impact; sustainability of results after EU funding ends; link or synergies with [InvestEU](#) (Min. 14 points Max. 20 points)]

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	14	20
Quality — Project design and implementation	28	40
Quality — Project team and cooperation arrangements	14	20
Impact	14	20
<b>Overall (pass) scores</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

Maximum points: 100 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 14/20, 28/40, 14/20 and 14/20 points.

Overall threshold: 70 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](#).

### 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.

### 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][XX] and [36][XX] months (extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment).

### 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, 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
- 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 cost<sup>16</sup> : No
  - volunteers unit cost<sup>17</sup> : No
- travel and subsistence unit cost<sup>18</sup> : 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 kickoff 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
  - EU Synergies call: No
  - other ineligible costs: No

*Reporting and payment arrangements*

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<sup>16</sup> 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).

<sup>17</sup> Commission [Decision](#) of 10 April 2019 authorising the use of unit costs for declaring personnel costs for the work carried out by volunteers under an action or a work programme (C(2019)2646).

<sup>18</sup> 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).

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


Payment of the grant is generally made in **prefinancing** instalments and a final payment (the balance). The aim of the prefinancing is to provide the beneficiaries with a float. The prefinancing remains the property of the EU until the payment of the balance. The frequency and size of prefinancing will depend upon the project duration but may be adjusted in case of risk:

- **actions of 12 months** : one prefinancing payment of 70% paid within 30 days from the entry into force of the grant agreement or after receiving the financial guarantee (if required), whichever is the latest
- **actions between 12 and 24 months**: prefinancing payments linked to annual reporting periods will be made as follows:
  - 40% from the entry into force of the grant agreement or after receiving the financial guarantee (if required), whichever is the latest
  - 40% after receiving a additional prefinancing report. Where the consumption of the previous prefinancing is less than 70%, the amount of the new prefinancing payment will be reduced by the difference between the 70% ceiling and the amount used
- **actions between 24 and 36 months**: prefinancing payments linked to annual reporting periods will be made as follows:
  - 30% from the entry into force of the grant agreement or after receiving the financial guarantee (if required), whichever is the latest
  - a second and third prefinancing of 40% and 20% after receiving additional prefinancing reports. Where the consumption of the previous prefinancing is less than 70%, the amount of the new prefinancing payment will be reduced by the difference between the 70% ceiling and the amount used.

There will be no **interim payments**.

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

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

### Provisions concerning the project implementation

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

- rights of use on results: Yes

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

- 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 ESF+ actions: Yes
- specific rules for financial support to third parties: 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 EU Login account, you can [register your organisation](#) in the Participant Register. When your registration is finalised, you will receive a 9-digit participant identification code (PIC).

### b) submit the proposal

Access the Electronic Submission System via the Topic page in the [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:

- general questions on ESF+: EMPL-EaSI@ec.europa.eu
- call-specific questions: EMPL-SOCIAL-ENTERPRISE@ec.europa.eu.



Please:

- send your questions at the latest 7 days before the submission deadline (see *section 4*)
- 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](#).