



ERDF Interregional Innovation Investments Instrument (I3)

Call for proposals

Innovation investments Strand 2a
(I3-2021-INV2a)

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HISTORY OF CHANGES			
Version	Publication Date	Change	Page
1.0	dd.mm.2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial version. 	
2.0	21.01.2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarification of the conditions in Section 6 - Eligible activities, for the financial support to third parties. The following text has been deleted: - costs for providing financial support to third parties will be reimbursed at 100% within the limits of the overall co-funding rate fixed in the Grant Agreement; <p>The other conditions remain unchanged.</p>	26
3.0	26.01.2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extension of submission deadline for the 1st cut off until 22 February 2022 and reduction of subsequent periods in Section 4 - Timetable and deadlines. <p>The other conditions remain unchanged.</p>	21
4.0	14.03.2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated available budget (2021) Additional 3rd cut-off date (20. April 2022) and additional timelines for evaluation and grant preparation & signature. Clarification submission letter of endorsement <p>The other conditions remain unchanged.</p>	20 21 22
5.0	22.08.2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explanations on the role of SMEs, globalisation dynamics, cohesion dimension, value chain fragmentation, less developed regions' challenges, and interregional investment definition. Typo corrected Explanation on non-eligible activities. Change of date for informing applicants on 1st step evaluation results Explanation on consortium composition (ecosystem relevance) and RDA definition corrected (Regional Development Agency) 	9-10 11 22 22 27



EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL AND SMEs EXECUTIVE AGENCY (EISMEA)

EISMEA.I – Innovation ecosystems, SMP/Entrepreneurship and Consumers
EISMEA.I.01 – EU and place-based Innovation Ecosystems

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU **action grants** in the field of **Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument** under the **ERDF**.

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

- Regulation 2018/1046 ([EU Financial Regulation](#))
- the basic act (ERDF Regulation [2021/1058](#)¹).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2021-2022 I3 Instrument Work Programme² and will be managed by the **European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA)** ('Agency').

The call covers the following **topics**:

- Topic 1 - I3-2021-INV2a-DIGIT: Innovation investments Strand 2a – DIGIT (Digital transition)
- Topic 2 - I3-2021-INV2a-GREEN: Innovation investments Strand 2a – GREEN (Green transition)
- Topic 3 - I3-2021-INV2a-MANU: Innovation investments Strand 2a – MANU (Smart Manufacturing)

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](#).

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

- the [Call Document](#) outlines the:

¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund (OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 60–93).

² Commission Implementing Decision C(2021)6152 final of 25/08/2021 concerning the adoption of the work programme for 2021-2022 and the financing decision for the implementation of the Interregional Innovation Investments Instrument to be supported under the European Regional Development Fund.

- 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 [I3 website](#) and the [Smart Specialisation Platform](#).

1. Background

Europe is facing many challenges linked to the introduction of new technologies, digitalisation, an evolving trade environment, and the need to move to a climate-neutral economy, while ensuring quality jobs, health and well-being for its citizens. Europe must lead the transition to a healthy planet and a new digital world by bringing innovation actors together and upgrading our economy to fit its ambitions.

Regional economies need to innovate, transform and adapt to an ever-changing and more competitive and sustainable environment. In this context, the EU plays a key role by supporting all EU Member States and regions to activate their potential for

innovation, competitiveness and sustainable jobs and growth through smart specialisation.

[Smart specialisation strategies](#) (S3) are at the centre of this approach. In the framework of [Cohesion Policy](#) programmes, EU Member States and regions have identified priorities to build on their strengths in business, innovation and research in order to **move up value chains** and improve the competitive advantage of their territories. This approach can be reinforced by interregional collaboration.

In order to benefit from the globalised economy, EU regions and cities need to **create new value chains** that will allow them to scale-up their good ideas in the EU single market. This means bringing together businesses, innovators, researchers, public authorities and people from across the EU who work on developing smart specialisation priority areas in their territories for matching their competitive strengths and develop innovative projects.

In this context, the European Commission adopted the **Communication ["Strengthening innovation in Europe's regions: towards resilient, inclusive and sustainable territorial growth strategies"](#)**¹³ on 18 July 2017. The Communication seeks ways to enable all EU regions to build on smart specialisation to fully unlock their potential for technological change, digitisation, decarbonisation and industrial modernisation.

The Communication identifies, among other things, the need for stronger strategic interregional cooperation and for creating sustainable linkages between regional ecosystems along smart specialisation priority areas in order to increase their competitiveness and resilience.

General policy objectives of the I3 Instrument

The I3 Instrument focuses on the support to interregional innovation investment on the road towards **commercialisation and scale-up phases** giving them the **tools to overcome regulatory and other barriers** and bring their project to investment level by supporting interregional innovation investments at high technology readiness levels (TRL 6-9).

It represents an opportunity to support interregional portfolios of companies' investments bringing innovation to the market and boosting the competitiveness of EU interregional value chains.

By focusing on existing interregional partnerships that emerged around concrete smart specialisation strategies (see i.e. partnerships on the [S3 Thematic Smart Specialisation Platform](#)) the I3 Instrument combines the S3 bottom up approach with investment support in concrete EU strategic priorities. Building on unexploited regional innovation potential, the ambition is to mobilise synergies and complementarities with other EU funding programmes and initiatives such as: [Horizon Europe](#) (in particular [European Innovation Ecosystems](#)), [Digital Europe Programme](#), [Single Market Programme](#) and [Interreg Europe](#).

The objective of the I3 Instrument is to focus on supporting the demonstration, commercialisation and scale-up phases of interregional innovation investments. Therefore, the Instrument is aiming at a certain level of maturity (TRL 6-9) by providing the necessary tools to overcome regulatory and/or other barriers.

The I3 Instrument **will not support activities that do significant harm to environment objectives** within the meaning of Art.17 of the EU Taxonomy regulation. I3 funding therefore cannot be awarded to projects that do not comply with this principle (e.g. any proposal dedicated to increase the efficiency of fossil fuel technologies or of fossil fuels). Applicants will need to verify that their proposal complies with this requirement (see section 5 of mandatory documents).

Objective of this call

The overall objective of the call for proposals is to support interregional partnerships particularly through targeted investments aiming to accelerated market uptake and scale-up innovation solutions in high technology readiness levels (minimum TRL 6) in shared **smart specialisation priority areas** to help them address barriers to moving to market. The financial and advisory assistance shall contribute to accelerating the commercialisation and scaling up via interregional innovation investments with the potential to encourage the development of EU value chains. At least 70% of the grant must be allocated to investments in companies, in particular SMEs.

This call for proposals covers thematic EU priorities ("top-down" priorities emerged from [stakeholder consultation](#)) with the aim to establish a link with priorities identified in national/regional smart specialisation strategies (for the topics covered by this call see section 2). This linkage to smart specialisation strategies ensures a "bottom-up"

³ COM(2017)376 final

approach to identifying the needs and strengths, capabilities, knowledge, and innovative solutions that are available at national, regional and local levels.

This call has a strong cohesion dimension by putting particular emphasis on enhancing capabilities of less developed/transition or outermost regions by creating links with more developed ecosystem actors.

Specific objectives of the call are:

- Creation of structured links between **EU quadruple helix stakeholders**⁴;
- Helping ecosystems to overcome market failures, particularly by connecting demand and supply side;
- Supporting companies building interregional innovation investment in shared S3 priority areas;
- Accelerating innovation (demonstration activities needed to allow market uptake and scale up of innovative solutions);
- Increasing the capacities of less developed regions to participate in EU value chains contributing to cohesion policy objectives.

Synergies with other EU programmes:

The applicants are encouraged to seek **synergies and complementarities** with: [ERDF/CF](#), [Interreg Europe](#) and with other EU programmes, in particular [Horizon Europe](#), under pillar 2 and 3, [Single Market Programme](#), [ERASMUS+](#), [Digital Europe](#) or the Blueprint for blue economy related investments.

Additional explanations for the 3rd cut-off:

The Call objective is to provide financial and advisory support for interregional innovation investments along European value chains. Proposals have to focus on innovation uptake helping interregional **investments** to reach an increased level of technology maturity and/or market readiness.

At the centre of the digital and green transition are the **small and medium-sized enterprises** (SMEs), the backbone of our economy: SMEs are key actors of innovation dynamics and the EU must continue to support them in becoming large innovators.

⁴ A well performing quadruple-helix ecosystem usually implies a network model with an exchange of skills, knowledge, business ideas and money between companies, public research institutions, financial institutions, government bodies (at different levels) and final users.

Globalisation dynamics are producing the fragmentation of firms' value chains. Production processes are increasingly characterised by sequential production in different locations depending on local comparative advantages. Independently from where the production occurs, components and services needed for manufacturing come from many locations worldwide. World investments and productions are increasingly organised in "global value chains" (GVCs) covering all activities companies engage in, from conception to final use, to bring products to the market. More and more, these processes entail an increased number of cross-border flows of parts and components between different locations before a good is produced, assembled, shipped to the final consumer. In order to face the fragmentation due to globalisation dynamics, companies need to establish cross-border networks and increase the number of firms involved in their value chains.

Less developed regions⁵ and other categories of regions like transition regions and outermost regions face specific challenges and obstacles linked to fragmentation and sustainability of research & innovation infrastructures and often experience difficulties in building institutional and legal environments conducive to innovation. While smart specialisation is relevant to all regions, less developed regions require specific attention with regard to a more inclusive innovation process and a better integration into global value chains. Member States and regions have to address the needs of less developed regions by creating interregional investment opportunities. With a focus on the cohesion-related fragmentation, Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) has the ambition to support interregional innovation dynamics, using **S3 as a coordination principle**. The integration of less developed regions (and other regions facing specific challenges) in I3 investment projects and capacity building activities allows them to participate in EU value chains.

An interregional investment is a combination of assets (time, money, effort, etc.) or items mobilised across borders with the view to generate income and/or to create future value for more than one region. It is a concrete concept to develop innovation and valorise available research results in a specific value chain. The development of the **business and investment cases** is facilitated by the regional innovation ecosystems with companies in the lead. I3 business investment cases have a minimum TRL 6 and have the ambition to facilitate demonstration and to accelerate market uptake and commercialisation.

⁵ Less developed regions are those with a GDP per capita lower than 75% of the average GDP of the EU-27 as defined by the Art 108 of the CPR.

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

1) I3-2021-INV2a-DIGIT: Topic 1 - Innovation Investments Strand 2a - DIGIT

Digital transition

Objectives

Digital technologies present an enormous growth potential for Europe. According to the [Europe fit for the digital age](#) strategy, this call for proposals targets investments in businesses and administrations. In order to unlock digital growth potential and deploy innovative solutions (both for businesses and citizens), to improve the accessibility and the efficiency of services and bridge the persisting digital divide, the present call under this topic will support interregional investments projects in the following areas:

- a) Digital economy and innovation
- b) Digitalisation of the public administration
- c) Digitalisation of healthcare

At least 70% of the grant must be allocated to investments in companies.

If the proposal is related to digital transition in the field of smart manufacturing, then the applicant should submit the proposal under the smart manufacturing topic 3.

Themes and priorities (scope)

The present call for proposals under this topic encourages applications in one or more or combination of the following investment areas (a), (b), (c) (non-exhaustive list):

a. Digital economy innovation

- The deployment of innovative solutions for businesses digitalisation and digital services, including the use of artificial intelligence;
- ICT up-take in SMEs applied to traditional and emerging sectors; B2B; B2C; Customer to Customer, including infrastructures and services (digital innovation hubs, living labs, etc.);

- Demonstration of innovative digital technologies in view of the commercialisation of research results and a better integration in EU value chains;
- User driven innovation and valorisation of traceability and big data;
- Companies reinforcing EU cybersecurity value chain and protecting from hacking, ransomware and identity theft;
- “Digital based” open innovation, supporting entrepreneurial discovery processes and cooperation between academia and businesses in the framework of smart specialisation;
- Digital skills for companies adopting innovative digital technologies (upskilling and reskilling) in the framework of investments relevant for Smart Specialisation.

b. Digital transformation of the public administration

- New or significantly upgraded services for e-government, including the take-up of Europe wide interoperable services which improve the efficiency of services delivered by public administrations to citizens, companies and other public bodies by using information and communication technologies such as artificial intelligence and cybersecurity;
- Investments in innovative solutions helping administrations to make services user-friendly, accessible and more interoperable. Those investments might include the demonstration of the validity of new digital technologies in view of the large-scale adoption of new IT systems.

c. Digitalisation of healthcare

- Innovative investments in security of health data across borders (including cybersecurity);
- Investments related to the use of digital tools to stimulate prevention, enable feedback and interaction with the healthcare providers;
- Investments connected to the digitisation of healthcare systems, providing solutions to interoperability issues;
- Investments in digital health infrastructure (needed for demonstration processes), telemedicine, m-health and other innovative solutions for personalised medicine;
- Investments related to the acquisition of digital skills needed for the adoption of innovative technologies in healthcare.

Activities that can be funded (scope)

The I3 Instrument funds interregional innovation investments projects under joint smart specialisation priorities (S3) in the area of **Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument** which take place in the S3 participating regions.

Thus, the I3 Instrument will help to promote enhanced interregional cooperation and sustainable connections between regional ecosystems, by building on the specific assets of EU regions. It aims to use the untapped potential of investments in innovation where the public and private sectors, as well as research and business from different countries, can work together. In order to accelerate market uptake of research results and stimulation of innovation, it supports companies in scaling up their ideas in the EU single market and in taking advantage of opportunities available at global level. At the same time, it helps to better align investment pipelines across borders to create opportunities in new EU value-chains.

Joint activities to be funded are described after the topics description.

Expected impact

Short-term

- Innovative technologies tested and adopted by companies and public administration
- Deployment of innovative solutions improving businesses confidence, competences and means to digitalise and grow
- Contribution to digitisation and health systems transformation, through various types of innovation and the supply of IT services

Medium-term

- Increased companies productivity and efficiency
- Improved user-friendly, accessible and interoperable public services
- Improved level of digital skills
- Improved EU innovation capacity and competitiveness

Long-term

- Improved way of living and of doing business
- Increased social and territorial cohesion as well as personal well-being
- Improved education and vocational training systems (indirectly).

2) I3-2021-INV2a-GREEN: Topic 2 - Innovation Investments Strand 2a -

GREEN

Green transition

Objectives

Turning climate and environmental challenges into opportunities is the ambition of the green transition. **The [European Green Deal](#) has the goal to make Europe a resource-efficient and competitive economy.** In this framework, the EU sets its targets to reach climate-neutrality by 2050, therefore this will require substantial investments. I3 intends to support innovative value chain investments, to boost the economy through green technology and to create sustainable industry/transport. It also intends to provide support to interregional investments in sustainable food systems, sustainable agriculture, clean and efficient energy, sustainable industry, building and renovating, sustainable mobility, eliminating pollution and climate action.

At least 70% of the grant must be allocated to investments in companies.

If the proposal is related to green transition in the field of smart manufacturing, then the applicant should submit the proposal under the smart manufacturing topic 3.

Themes and priorities (scope)

The present call for proposals under this topic encourages applications in one or more or a combination of the following investment areas (a non-exclusive list):

- Innovative investments in decarbonisation, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and contributing to improve air quality, health and wellbeing;
- Innovative investments in SMART cities;
- Innovative business investments related to smart, sustainable/efficient transport solutions and/or alternative fuels;
- Investments in climate action, environment, resource efficiency and raw materials;
- Investments in the management of natural resources, including the use of recycled materials, especially construction materials, plastics and textiles, to stimulate demand for secondary markets raw materials;
- Business investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency to make industry more sustainable;
- Business investments related to energy efficiency in buildings;

- Business investments related to a sustainable blue economy, contributing to the coastal protection;
- Business investments in circular economy to replicate and scale up successful circular economy solutions, which can generate EU added value;
- Investments in bioeconomy, efficient and sustainable agriculture and forestry, innovation in marine/ maritime and inland water sustainable solutions.

Activities that can be funded (scope)

The I3 Instrument funds interregional innovation investments projects under joint smart specialisation priorities (S3) in the area of **Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument** which take place in the S3 participating regions.

Thus, the I3 Instrument will help to promote enhanced interregional cooperation and sustainable connections between regional ecosystems, by building on the specific assets of EU regions. It aims to use the untapped potential of investments in innovation where the public and private sectors, as well as research and business from different countries, can work together. In order to accelerate market uptake of research results and stimulation of innovation, it supports companies in scaling up their ideas in the EU single market and in taking advantage of opportunities available at global level. At the same time, it helps to better align investment pipelines across borders to create opportunities in new EU value-chains.

Joint activities to be funded are described after the topics description.

Expected impact

Short-term:

- Deployment of innovative solutions compared to existing technologies/solutions;
- Uptake of technologically/economically reliable and viable solutions on the market.

Medium-term:

- Creating new market opportunities for EU companies;
- Reinforcing the capacity of regions to invest, joining forces around shared S3 investment priorities (interregional investments);
- Innovation diffusion.

Long-term:

- Reinforcing/reshaping EU value chains whilst increasing EU competitiveness in global markets;
- Unlocking the innovation potential of EU regions/countries;
- Contributing to the European Green Deal objectives;
- Positive impact on environment, health, climate, social and economy;
- Economic growth and job creation.

3) I3-2021-INV2a-MANU: Topic 3 - Innovation Investments Strand 2a – MANU

Smart manufacturing

Objectives

This topic focuses on improving the delivery of new or improved products, processes or services in the manufacturing industry. In the context of advanced manufacturing; knowledge and innovative technologies are used to produce complex products and improve processes to lower waste, pollution, material consumption and energy use. Robotics, 3D and 4D printing, artificial intelligence as well as high performance computing for modelling are important elements in advanced manufacturing.

The present call for proposals under this topic supports interregional innovation investments for the uptake of new or improved manufacturing solutions, as well as for supporting industry to face the challenge of digitalisation and to promote the shift towards a more environmentally sustainable production (zero pollution ambition for a toxic-free environment).

At least 70% of the grant must be allocated to investments in companies.

If the proposal is related to the topics of digital transition or green transition in the smart manufacturing, then the applicant should submit the proposal under the smart manufacturing topic.

Themes and priorities (scope)

The present call for proposals under this topic encourages applications in one or a combination of the following intervention areas (a non-exclusive list):

- Demonstration processes, i.e. helping new products to reach the market faster or having more efficient and sustainable processes adopted by the industry.

- Valorisation of research results and practical applications. This might include the active involvement of ecosystems and the co-creation process with stakeholders and end-users.
- Connecting or making complementary use of testing and demonstration facilities at interregional level. In this framework, synergies with circularity hubs are encouraged.
- Improving the use of natural resources and in the reuse of materials, promoting circularity models (de- and remanufacturing) and investments in carbon neutrality. Specific implementation (including funding) strategies can be envisaged, ensuring the participation of all stakeholders (industry, SMEs, local authorities, educational institutions and civil society).
- Implementation of interregional demonstration cases to test and replicate the results.
- Innovation diffusion and involvement of SMEs in EU value chains.

Activities that can be funded (scope)

The I3 Instrument funds interregional innovation investments projects under joint smart specialisation priorities (S3) in the area of **Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument** which take place in the S3 participating regions.

Thus, the I3 Instrument will help to promote enhanced interregional cooperation and sustainable connections between regional ecosystems, by building on the specific assets of EU regions. It aims to use the untapped potential of investments in innovation where the public and private sectors, as well as research and business from different countries, can work together. In order to accelerate market uptake of research results and stimulation of innovation, it supports companies in scaling up their ideas in the EU single market and in taking advantage of opportunities available at global level. At the same time, it helps to better align investment pipelines across borders to create opportunities in new EU value-chains.

Joint activities to be funded are described after the topics description.

Expected impact

Short-term

- Deploying new green and digital technologies fostering the growth of Europe's manufacturing sector
- Innovative technologies adopted by SMEs

Medium-term

- Making the EU industry more efficient and sustainable
- Reinforcing the capacity of regions to co-invest together, joining forces on common S3 investment priorities (interregional investments).
- Innovation diffusion

Long-term

- Reinforcing/reshaping EU value chains whilst increasing the competitiveness of the EU in global markets.
- Unlocking the innovation potential of EU regions/countries.

Activities that can be funded (eligible activities) – same for all 3 topics:

The programme provides **financial and advisory support in form of grants** to **mature joint innovation projects** in shared smart specialisation areas structured in value-chain investment portfolios. Therefore, the main purpose is to directly contribute to actual concrete investments at high TRL levels (minimum TRL 6).

A project implemented under the I3 Instrument can be composed of a **portfolio of sub-projects** (portfolios of interregional investments activities – e.g. through distribution of funding by the consortium coordinator to the members of the consortium or in a form of financial support to third parties). These sub-projects are necessary to be carried out in order to accelerate demonstration processes for the uptake of innovation, thus increasing the competitiveness of EU value chains. This portfolio approach foresees the identification, within a specific thematic/technological area of cooperation, of a number of investment-ready sub-projects that address one or several bottlenecks identified in the project proposal by the consortium coordinator.

Open science policy approach will be supported under this instrument in the following way:

During the implementation of the project:

Beneficiaries are required to make their project results available in open access and make their data as open as possible and as closed as necessary. Open science require research data to be fair and open by default (with exceptions notable for commercial purposes). The programme also recognises and rewards the participation of citizens and end users in co-design and co-creation processes where needed. Taking into account the need to balance openness with the protection of project results (intellectual property rights, privacy concerns, security, as well data management

issues) in view of the commercialisation, I3 projects are required to develop in the beginning of their project implementation a **data management plan**, in which they will specify which project results will be open (publicly available) and which ones will be privately used with the proper justification.

After the end of the project:

Beneficiaries are required to comply with the objectives of the open science in line with their data management plan and their dissemination plan.

The action is aiming at generating and developing a portfolio of individual sub-projects to be implemented by third parties, namely the end-beneficiaries.

Funded activities shall not only cover investments that are “new to Europe” or “new to the application sector”. They should also strengthen innovation diffusion channels in less developed regions and lead to multiple market applications of an innovation that has already been applied elsewhere.

Target investments can be both **tangible and intangible⁶ investments** and must be related to the following:

- Advisory support for investment (developing or implementing interregional business and “go to market” investment plans in specific value chains);
- Financial support for production of plans and arrangements or designs of new, altered or improved products and services, that can include testing, demonstrating, piloting, large-scale product validation and market replication;
- Adaptation of existing prototypes (i.e. by combining two or more key enabling technologies) and tailoring them to the companies’ needs for the demonstration in real environment (ex-novo prototyping is not eligible);
- Development of portfolios of projects for close-to-market investments that deploy new or improved technologies or processes;
- Activities directly aiming at producing plans, arrangements or designs for new, altered or improved products, processes or services (adaptation to the companies’ needs). This can include testing, demonstration, piloting, large-scale product validation and market replication;
- Activities connecting or making complementary use of testing and demonstration facilities⁷ to accelerate market uptake and scale-up of innovation solutions in shared smart specialisation areas;

⁶ e.g. IPR, know-how, licensing

- Innovation services for the development of the business investment interconnecting value chains;
- Test beds related activities, needed to improve regulations and/or to remove barriers and bottlenecks to innovation;
- Any other activity needed to bring innovative ideas and new products to the market or instrumental to the development of value chains in less developed regions.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – at project level:

Investment maturity

The project should describe the progress towards commercialization of the innovative interregional investment. The innovation infrastructures and advisory services provided to companies must be linked to their actual business investments.

At the end of the project, if the new products/processes or services supported by the I3 instrument are unready for the market, the consortium will have to use "[Innovation Radar](#)" and to identify possible sources of funding/funding mix, to cover the residual investment needs. This might include the use of public-private partnerships for the deployment of innovation and the collaboration with venture capitals or e.g. the EIB group.

The following Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) have been identified (where applicable):

Interregional dimension:

- Geographical coverage of participating regions (number of regions involved in the value chains);
- The interregional character of the project, considered at portfolio level (companies from different regions participating in the investment portfolio).

Innovation dimension:

- Innovativeness of the project (broad concept as defined by the [Oslo manual](#)⁸);
- Innovation diffusion: new to market and/or new to the company;

⁷ Depreciation costs for testing and demonstration facilities as well as costs for the use of existing infrastructures.

⁸ As defined in the OECD Oslo Manual: <https://www.oecd.org/science/oslo-manual-2018-9789264304604-en.htm>

- Innovation maturity/ Technology Readiness Level (TRL);
- Impact of innovative solutions brought to the market.

Investment dimension:

- Evidence to be provided on the basis of a market analysis)/ time to market (progress from the TRL of departure);
- Multilevel architecture of the investment project (regional, national, European/ Private-Public);
- Private investment leveraged by the project, involvement of impact investors in the consortium;
- Portfolio balance across geographical regions, more and less developed regions;
- Evidence based, expected territorial impact (e.g. ESPON indicators).⁹

Value chain dimension:

- Number of co-investment projects developed and implemented in the portfolios;
- Integration of new regions/ countries in EU value chain (based on S3 priorities¹⁰);
- Integration of new regional actors in EU globally competitive value chains.

IPR dimension

- Business Plan/IP Strategy: how is your IP strategy reflected in your business plan;
- How is the IP protected (designs/trademarks/copyrights/trade secrets & NDAs (Non Disclosure Agreements)/geographical indications);
- Patent & utility models: the quality of the patents & utility models in the sense of efficiency, economic value and scope of protection;
- Number of applications delivered (sector, TRL, IP);
- Freedom-To-Operate Analysis, especially in the sense of territory, time and scope of patents.

Gender balance dimension:

- The applicants should outline how **gender balance** and the participation of women innovators will be promoted.

⁹ ESPON indicators for integrated territorial and urban development can be used to measure the impact of integrated investments. ISBN: 978-99959-55-21_2

¹⁰ Several tools available on JRC S3 Platform: <https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/tools>

Additional explanations for the 3rd cut-off:

Supporting networking activities, testing new approaches for better innovation support or enhancing services to SMEs (through collaboration platforms, peer-learning or matchmaking, etc.) are not priorities for this call and might be funded only as accompanying measures. The focus of this call is to contribute to actual investments.

3. Available budget

The available call budget is **EUR 20 000 000** for 2021 and **EUR 32 897 448** for 2022.

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:	23 November 2021		
Deadline for submission:	1st cut-off date	2nd cut-off date	3rd cut-off date
	<u>22 February 2022</u> <u>17:00 CET (Brussels)</u>	<u>20 April 2022</u> <u>17:00 CET (Brussels)</u>	<u>18 October 2022</u> <u>17:00 CET (Brussels)</u>
Evaluation:	Step 1: March 2022 Step 2: June 2022	Step 1: May 2022– June 2022 Step 2: June 2022– August 2022	Step 1: November 2022 – December 2022 Step 2: January 2023 – March 2023
Information on evaluation results:	Step 1: April 2022 Step 2: June 2022	Step 1: June 2022 Step 2: August 2022	Step 1 & Step 2: April 2023
GA signature:	November 2022	December 2022	June – July 2023

5. Admissibility and documents

Proposals must be submitted before the **call deadline** (cut-off dates) (*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 — contains additional project data (to be filled in directly online).
- **mandatory annexes and supporting documents** (*to be uploaded*):
 - detailed budget table (*template available in the Submission System*)
 - CVs (short outlines) of core project team
 - letter of support (endorsement letter from the MS authority responsible for the regional smart specialisation strategy (S3)).

The purpose of the endorsement letter is to ensure that the investment priority identified by the I3 project is coherent with the priorities identified in the S3 strategy of the participating region. Further to that, it shall endorse the entities (including companies) belonging to the regional innovation ecosystem that will benefit from the grant support.

- The endorsement letter is required per each regional innovation ecosystem at appropriate NUTS level (NUTS level I, II or III depending on the context of each Member State and/or region) and

it is a requirement for all regions/countries members of an I3 project consortium.

- Since the update of several national/regional S3 strategies for the period 2021 - 2027 is still ongoing, only the timely (before the deadline of the relevant cut-off date) submission of the support letter from the MS authority responsible for the smart specialization strategy of the regional innovation ecosystem in which the project coordinator resides is mandatory.
- The endorsement letters of the other regions/countries members of an I3 project consortium must be submitted in any case before the end of the evaluation procedure at the latest.

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

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

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

Proposals are limited to maximum **60 pages** (Part B). Evaluators will not consider any additional pages.

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



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 I3 Instrument or countries which are in ongoing negotiations for an association agreement and where the agreement enters into force before grant signature ([list of participating countries](#))

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

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

Specific cases

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

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

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

Entities without legal personality — Entities which do not have legal personality under their national law may exceptionally participate, provided that their representatives have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf, and offer guarantees for the protection of the EU financial interests equivalent to that offered by legal persons¹¹.

¹¹ See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

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'¹². ⚠ Please note that if the action will be implemented by the members, they should also participate (either as beneficiaries or as affiliated entities, otherwise their costs will NOT be eligible).

Countries currently negotiating association agreements — Beneficiaries from countries with ongoing negotiations (*see list of participating countries*) 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)*¹³ and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#)¹⁴). 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 applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities), which complies with the following conditions:

Minimum 3 entities from 3 different regions in 2 eligible countries

The coordinator must be either a public body, private non-profit organisation or international organisation.

Therefore, the consortium must be composed as follows:

Consortium Coordinator	Geographical Consortium Composition	Type of Consortium / Partners
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¹² For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

¹³ 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](#).

¹⁴ 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).

<p>The Coordinator must be a non-profit organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A public authority or - A research body or - A non-profit innovation intermediate organisation (i.e. a cluster organisation, an innovation agency etc.) <p>and:</p> <p>The Coordinator must be located in a less developed, transition or outermost EU region/country.</p>	<p>Minimum 3 Partners from 2 different eligible countries representing 3 ecosystems from 3 different regions.</p>	<p>The consortium must involve various components of the quadruple-helix¹⁵ and must always cover both, the demand and supply side, such as (non-exhaustive list):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public authorities (national/regional/local) - Universities, Research and Technology Organisations (RTO), Innovation agencies - Cluster organisations, SMEs, start-ups, - Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) - Any other entity that resembles the nature of the above mentioned entities. <p>At least 1 partner must be established in a more developed region/country.</p>
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Please check the category of your region/country here: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/how/is-my-region-covered/.

The EU reserves the right to get in touch with the applicants to verify their status (in case of doubt).

Eligible activities

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

The following activities are not considered as eligible for funding under this call:

- activities that are excluded from the scope of the ERDF according to Article 7 of the ERDF Regulation
- activities that do not comply with the “do no significant harm” principle, as defined in Section 2.

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).

¹⁵ A model of cooperation between public authorities, industry, academia, and civil society (see also footnote 4).

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 allowed in all the three topics covered by this call for proposals under the following conditions:

- costs for providing financial support to third parties cannot exceed 30% of the total grant amount;
- the maximum amount of financial support for each third party ('recipient') may not exceed EUR 60 000, unless a higher amount is required because the objective of the action would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult to achieve and this is duly justified in the Application Form;
- financial support to third parties must be limited to the following persons or categories of persons:
 - the recipients must be SMEs that are established in the S3 participating regions covered by the consortium;
- the calls must be open, published widely and conform to EU standards concerning transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality;
- the calls must remain open for at least 2 months;
- the outcome of the call must be published on the participants' websites, including a description of the selected projects, award dates, project durations, and final recipient legal names and countries;
- the calls must have a clear European dimension and need to contribute to the objectives of the project.

Your project application must, in addition, clearly specify why financial support to third parties is needed, how it will be managed and provide a list of the different types of activities for which a third party may receive financial support. The proposal must also clearly describe the results to be obtained.

Geographic location (target countries)

Proposals must relate to activities taking place in the eligible countries and S3 participating regions covered by the consortium.

Duration

Projects should normally range between 30 and 36 months (extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment).

Project budget

Project budgets (maximum grant amount) are expected to range between EUR 2 million and EUR 3 million 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, 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 capacity via the following information:

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

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

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

Exclusion

Applicants which are subject to an **EU exclusion decision** or in one of the following **exclusion situations** that bar them from receiving EU funding can NOT participate¹⁶:

- 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 misconduct¹⁷ (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- committed fraud, corruption, links to a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Regulation No [2988/95](#) (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- created under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant).

Applicants will also be refused if it turns out that¹⁸:

¹⁶ See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

¹⁷ 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.

- 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 + a two-step evaluation procedure).

In the first step, there will be a pre-selection on the basis of only 2 award criteria, the 'Relevance' in view of the overall objectives of the call and the 'Quality of the Project team and cooperation arrangements'. In the second step, the successful proposals will be assessed against the 'Relevance' in view of the specific objectives of the call, the 'Quality of the Project design and implementation', the 'Cost Effectiveness' and the 'Impact'.

An **evaluation committee** assisted by independent outside experts will assess all applications. Proposals will first be checked for formal requirements (admissibility, and eligibility, *see sections 5 and 6*). Proposals found admissible and eligible will be evaluated against the operational capacity and award criteria (*see sections 7 and 9*) and then ranked according to their scores.

For proposals with the same score a **priority order** will be determined according to the following approach:

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


- 1) Proposals 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 'Impact'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Relevance'.
- 3) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the gender balance among the personnel named in

¹⁸ See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

the proposal who will be primarily responsible for carrying out the innovation activities, and who are included in the proposal, will be used as a factor for prioritisation. The mention to gender equality plans in participating organisations can also be considered.

- 4) Any further prioritisation will be based on geographical diversity, defined as the number of Member States represented in the proposal, not otherwise receiving funds from projects higher up the ranking list.
- 5) If a distinction still cannot be made, further prioritisation can be done by considering the overall project portfolio, and the creation of positive synergies between projects and involvement of SMEs or other factors related to the objectives of the call. These factors will be documented in the panel report.

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

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

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

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

9. Award criteria

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

For step 1:

- **Relevance (5 points):** extent to which the proposal matches the themes and priorities and general objectives of the call; contribution to the EU strategic and legislative context; European/interregional dimension; impact/interest for a number of countries (EU or eligible non-EU countries); potential to develop mutual trust/cross-border cooperation
- **Quality (5 points):** quality of the consortium and project teams; appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams and consortium

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	2,5	5
Quality	2,5	5
Overall (pass) scores	7	10

For step 2:

- **Relevance (5 points):** clarity and consistency of project, objectives and planning; extent to which the proposal matches the themes and priorities and specific objectives of the call; relevance and effectiveness of the proposed innovation (product, process, marketing, organisational) in terms of novelty and ambition; extent to which it fits the detailed expectations/needs of the identified target groups; involvement of potential end users or uptake by final users after the project end
- **Quality (5 points):** 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 (5 points):** cost effectiveness; sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; best value for money
- **Impact (10 points):** 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.

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

Maximum points: 10 points (step 1); 25 points (step 2).

Individual thresholds per criterion: 2,5/5, 2,5/5 points (step 1); 2,5/5, 2,5/5, 2,5/5, 5/10 points (step 2).

Overall threshold: 7 points (step 1); 17,5 points (step 2).

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

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

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

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

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

Starting date and project duration

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

Project duration: between 30 and 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.

The following deliverables will be mandatory for all projects:

- business and investment plan
- report on the implementation of the business investments belonging to the portfolio
- assessment of the market readiness at the end of the project (Innovation radar)
- list of remaining bottlenecks

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 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 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 (**70%**).

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
 - D.1 Financial support to third parties
- E. Indirect costs

Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:

- personnel costs:
 - SME owner/natural person unit cost¹⁹: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost²⁰: Yes
- equipment costs: depreciation
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties: allowed for grants; maximum amount per third party EUR 60 000, unless a higher amount is required because the objective of the action would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult to achieve and this is duly justified in the Application Form

¹⁹ 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).

²⁰ 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).

- 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: YES, costs for infrastructure, land purchase, equity, prototypes (except a combination of two key enabling technologies).

Reporting and payment arrangements

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

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

There will be no **interim payments**.

In addition, you will be expected to submit one or more progress reports not linked to 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 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

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

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

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

- specific rules for blending operations: No other specificities

n/a

Non-compliance and breach of contract

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



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

11. How to submit an application

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

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

a) create a user account and register your organisation

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

Once you have an 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 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. Filled it 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 3 working days before the submission deadline to the following email address: EISMEA-I3-INSTRUMENT@ec.europa.eu.

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

13. Important



IMPORTANT

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

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

- **Coordinator** — In multi-beneficiary grants, the beneficiaries participate as consortium (group of beneficiaries). They will have to choose a coordinator, who will take care of the project management and coordination and will represent the consortium towards the granting authority. In mono-beneficiary grants, the single beneficiary will automatically be coordinator.
- **Affiliated entities** — Applicants may participate with affiliated entities (i.e. entities linked to a beneficiary which participate in the action with similar rights and obligations as the beneficiaries, but do not sign the grant and therefore do not become beneficiaries themselves). They will get a part of the grant money and must therefore comply with all the call conditions and be validated (just like beneficiaries); but they do not count towards the minimum eligibility criteria for consortium composition (if any).
- **Associated partners** — Applicants may participate with associated partners (i.e. partner organisations which participate in the action but without the right to get grant money). They participate without funding and therefore do not need to be validated.
- **Consortium agreement** — For practical and legal reasons it is recommended to set up internal arrangements that allow you to deal with exceptional or unforeseen circumstances (in all cases, even if not mandatory under the Grant Agreement). The consortium agreement also gives you the possibility to redistribute the grant money according to your own consortium-internal principles and parameters (for instance, one beneficiary can reattribute its grant money to another beneficiary). The consortium agreement thus allows you to customise the EU grant to the needs inside your consortium and can also help to protect you in case of disputes.

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