



# Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)

## Call for proposals

Sustainability Partnerships for SMEs adopting more sustainable  
practices  
(SMP-COSME-2021-SPP)

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## EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL AND SMEs EXECUTIVE AGENCY (EISMEA)

EISMEA.I – Innovation ecosystems, SMP/Entrepreneurship and Consumers  
EISMEA.I.02 –SMP/COSME Pillar

### CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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## 0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU **action grants** in the field of support to SMEs for the sustainable transition under the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs part of the **Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)**.

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

- Regulation 2018/1046 ([EU Financial Regulation](#))
- the Single Market Programme (SMP) Regulation [2021/690](#)<sup>1</sup>).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2021 Work Programme<sup>2</sup> of the COSME pillar of the SMP and will be managed by the **European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA)** ('Agency').

The call covers the following **topic**:

- **SMP-COSME-2021-SPP— Sustainability Partnerships for SMEs adopting more sustainable practices**

Applicants cannot submit more than one proposal under this call. Applicants may not participate in several proposals.

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)

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/690 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing a programme for the internal market, competitiveness of enterprises, including small and medium-sized enterprises, the area of plants, animals, food and feed, and European statistics (Single Market Programme) (OJ L 153, 3.5.2021, p. 1).

<sup>2</sup> Commission Implementing Decision C(2021) 3046 final of 6.5.2021 concerning the adoption of the work programme for 2021 and the financing decision for the implementation of the Single Market Programme as last amended as last amended by Commission Implementing Decision C(2021)6940 of 29.9.2021.

- 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 [EISMEA](#) website to consult the list of projects funded previously.

## 1. Background

The European Union (EU) is in the process of making a major economic transition, spurred on by both opportunity and threat: opportunity from the rapid development of digital technologies and the enormous potential of innovation to change people's lives; and threat from climate change, loss of biodiversity, social pressures, increasing global competition and threats to its sovereignty. Europe's companies need to become more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable if they want to sustain the increasing competitiveness in the decades to come. At the heart of this change will be Europe's Single Market, offering the world's largest market for innovative and sustainable companies. The urgency of this transition has been underlined by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a devastating effect on businesses across Europe, and worldwide, with the impact likely to continue to be felt over the medium-term.

Europe's 25 million small and medium-sized enterprises ([SMEs](#))<sup>3</sup> have suffered particularly during the crisis, but they also have the potential to be the major winners from the transition to more sustainable business model. Making this transition will not be easy, as many SMEs are daunted by the cost and complexity of integrating sustainability into their business models. For this reason, in March 2020, the European Commission released two key communications: "[A New Industrial Strategy for Europe](#)"<sup>4</sup> and "[An SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe](#)"<sup>5</sup> setting out

<sup>3</sup> Commission Recommendation 2003/316 of 6 May 2003

<sup>4</sup> Commission Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions COM(2020) 102 final of 10 March 2020

<sup>5</sup> Commission Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions COM(2020) 103 final of 10 March 2020

key actions to address existing barriers and put in place the support that companies need. These strategies not only remain valid in the light of the crisis: their importance has strengthened.

Given the growing pressure on European companies to act sustainably, some of them are already trying to integrate sustainability into their business strategy as they see the business case, but many companies, especially SMEs, lack the knowledge and resources to do so, finding it difficult to assess and measure their social and environmental impact and/or put appropriate governance in place to avoid, remedy or mitigate any negative impacts.

The Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) Sustainability Advisors, together with other relevant initiatives such as the European Resource Efficiency Knowledge Centre (EREK) and the cleantech clusters, will help address this with practical advice and support. Equally, the cooperation with social economy actors and social enterprises can help SMEs in their transition.

However, there is another set of actors who can help, and whose expertise and support remain relatively untapped: environmental and/or social non-governmental organisations (NGOs)/civil society organisations (CSOs). Whilst many NGOs/CSOs have a specific political or lobbying mandate, there are others who have in their mandate a requirement to develop partnerships with business every year and actively look for companies to partner with to assist them in transitioning to more sustainable business models.

Such NGOs/CSOs can provide credibility, expertise, and a wider stakeholder perspective. They can help connect companies to certain actors normally not accessible both in the country where they are based and in the countries of their suppliers. In doing so, they can help the companies ensure that their suppliers/producers respect human and labour rights, do no harm to the environment, are not linked to corruption and that any audits are not biased. In other words such NGOs/CSOs can help companies in carrying out their human rights and environmental due diligence. They can facilitate the creation of long-term engagement between companies and local producers.

In return, NGOs/CSOs can gain access to financial resources, access new networks and new expertise, increase their visibility and of course be able to make progress towards their mission/goals.

Despite these benefits, the full potential of business-NGO partnerships has not yet been reached. There has been a low number of partnerships, limited to relatively few strategic NGOs and businesses associations, and even when partnerships are agreed, they can encounter problems, such as fear of greenwashing or general sustainability washing<sup>6</sup>, credibility issues, potential financial dependence of NGOs.

This call for proposals addresses this issue by fostering effective partnerships between SMEs and environmental and/or social non-governmental organisations (NGOs)/civil society organisations (CSOs) in the form of projects.

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

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<sup>6</sup> Greenwashing or sustainability washing describes the selective disclosure of positive information about a company's environmental and social performance, while at the same time withholding negative information.

### Objectives

The general objective of this call for proposals is to harness the expertise of NGOs/CSOs to assist SMEs in their transition to more sustainable business models. This will be achieved by funding practical projects able to impact the environmental and/or social performance of the SMEs. This call builds on the mission of the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) and gives to interested EEN members an additional tool to assist SMEs in their transition to more sustainable business models. Therefore, the projects will be implemented by consortia coordinated by an active EEN member and composed of interested SMEs, interested NGOs/CSOs and other relevant partners.


The project must impact the business model of the partner SMEs with the support of the NGO/CSO and other relevant actors involved in the project proposal. In addition to coordinating the project, the EEN partner will need to ensure proper business/technical support and advice to the partner SMEs related to this call.

The specific objectives to be achieved through this call for proposals are the following:

- Enhancing interaction and improving collaboration between small and medium-sized enterprises and NGOs/CSOs active in the same region;
- Strengthening or improving the environmental and social performance of the partner SMEs;
- Boosting capacity and knowledge on sustainable business models across SMEs;
- Contributing to the promotion of the benefits of sustainable business models among SMEs.

### Themes and priorities (scope)

The proposals must cover aspects of environmental, social or economic sustainability as defined by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

 *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go together with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests<sup>7</sup>. All actors in the society must contribute to the achievement of the goals, including governments, businesses and citizens.*

Proposals submitted under this call for proposals must clarify which of the SDGs and their specific targets they will effectively contribute to.

Proposals could cover **environmental objectives** such as the reduction of carbon emissions, the protection of biodiversity, the reduction of water and soil consumption, improved waste management and circularity of production models, the use of

<sup>7</sup> For more information, please visit: <https://sdgs.un.org>.

renewable energy sources, etc. or **social objectives** such as increased gender equality at the workplace, participation of vulnerable groups in employment opportunities, the protection of human rights along the value chain, improved social and labour rights and working conditions of employees, support to local community/ies, the employment of socially disadvantaged groups, promotion of intrapreneurship, support to shared engineering and open technology spaces for the benefit of local communities, etc.

Activities that can be funded (scope)

The proposal is expected to address as a minimum all the work packages and all the type of activities included listed below:

<b>Work packages</b>	<b>Type of activities included</b>
Work Package 1 (WP1) - Project management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Coordination of the consortium</li> <li>2. Steering committee meetings with the granting authority</li> <li>3. Grant management</li> <li>4. Monitoring of outcomes and reporting</li> <li>5. Provisional impact assessment of the project (to be included in the final report)</li> <li>6. Policy recommendations (to be included in the final report)</li> </ol>
Work Package 2 (WP2) - Implementation of sustainability support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identification of sustainability challenges faced by SMEs and NGO/CSOs</li> <li>2. Assessment of potential sustainable business model(s) and options for adoption (including an action plan)</li> <li>3. Advisory services for the SMEs and/or NGOs/CSOs</li> <li>4. Organisation of technical trainings for the SMEs and/or NGOs/CSOs</li> <li>5. Analyses and studies (including on challenges and lessons learnt)</li> <li>6. Innovation and sustainability support (including consultancy on technology uptake)</li> </ol>
Work Package 3 (WP3) - Promotion and community building	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Preparation of success stories (at least one)</li> <li>2. Development of promotional material and activities</li> <li>3. Community building activities</li> <li>4. Engagement with and promotion to other relevant actors/networks at regional/national/European level</li> <li>5. Cross fertilisation with other funded projects under the call for proposals</li> </ol>

**Work Package 1 (WP1) - Project management**

The coordinator needs to ensure a proper coordination between partners, including through the signature of a consortium agreement, and a proper and transparent grant management, following the rules outlined in this call for proposals and the requests of the contracting authority.

A kick-off meeting and regular Steering Committee meetings between the main consortium partners, EISMEA (the granting authority) and the European Commission has to be planned.



In the final report a **provisional impact assessment** of the project will be included. If the nature of the activities is medium/long term and the objectives cannot be achieved or are not necessarily visible by the end date of the grant agreement, the impact assessment will include an analysis of the objectives achieved by the end date of the grant agreement and a provisional projection of the future impact on the partners, the environment, the local community and/or the society as a whole.

In the final report **policy recommendations** following the achievements of the project will also be included. The policy recommendations will reflect on the successes and challenges of the implemented project and include suggestions on how to:

- enhance the interaction and improve the collaboration between small- and medium-sized enterprises and NGOs/CSOs active in the same region;
- facilitate the transition of business models towards stronger environmental and social principles;
- increase the awareness and capacity of SMEs on environmental and social principles and sustainable business models;
- improve legislative and financial support to SMEs to favour the adoption of more sustainable business model.

The policy recommendations will be used by the granting authority and the European Commission to evaluate the sustainability of this pilot project and possible future supportive measures.

## **Work Package 2 (WP2) - Implementation of sustainability support**

After identifying the challenges and needs of the partner SMEs in the proposal, the coordinator and the relevant partners will assess the current business model of the partner SMEs and propose improvements to increase the sustainability performance, including for example through the preparation of an action plan.

The EEN partner as well as the NGO/CSO need to assist the SMEs along the whole process with, for example, relevant advisory services, technical analyses and studies, innovation and sustainability support services, technical trainings, partnership services, etc.

## **Work Package 3 (WP3) - Promotion and community building**

### **Promotion**

The project must prepare at least one **success story** with relevant information and visual elements. The success story is a mandatory deliverable of this work package and shall be delivered by the end of the project. Essential elements of the success story are: clear identification of involved parties and roles, contribution to the sustainable transition of the SME and steps taken to include the transition into the SME business model, contribution to the SDGs, key message to the policy makers, namely the Commission.

The project can also propose to produce other relevant offline and online promotional material, such as brochures, leaflets, short videos, social media content, etc. that can be used by the granting authority for promotional purposes during and after the project implementation.

### **Community building**

During the implementation of the project and the roll-out of the related services shall facilitate the cooperation between stakeholders in the local/regional ecosystem and be

responsible for creating a community of practice around its project involving actors in the ecosystem that can contribute to the project or more in general to the objectives of this call. This cooperation should not be limited to members of the consortium but also include external stakeholders. The final objective of this cooperation is to create a community of actors able to assist each other in the medium/long-term to enhance the uptake of sustainable business models.

As part of the community building efforts, at local/regional/national level, the project should explore possible collaboration and promote engagement with actors such as:

1. Local business support organisations
2. Local public authorities
3. Local associations, foundations, NGOs and other civil society actors
4. Social economy actors and hubs
5. Local clusters

At European level, the project, together with the contracting authority, should explore possible collaboration and promote engagement with actors such as:

1. Other partners and consortia of the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)
2. European cluster networks, in particular green clusters, cleantech clusters and social economy clusters
3. The European Resource Efficiency Knowledge Center (EREK)
4. The SME Envoy Network

The community should become a place that can facilitate exchange of knowledge, best practices and technical know-how. It should also promote synergies on activities of common interest.

A **map of the actors involved** in the implementation of the action and in the community of practice shall be provided as deliverable (mandatory).

### **Cross-fertilisation with other funded projects**

The project has to ensure communication and cross-fertilisation with other projects funded under this call for proposals.

Regular meetings between projects funded under this call should take place to ensure a coordinated approach of the projects. The projects should explore any opportunity for synergies and economies of scale and facilitate exchange of knowledge and best practices with the aim of improving the quality of the respective projects.

### *Expected impact and indicators*

The project is expected to have an impact on the environmental/social performance of the partner SMEs. In particular, after the implementation of the project, the SMEs should be able to permanently transform its business model transitioning to a more sustainable model.

The project should also foster the adoption of more sustainable business models and showcase the potential of business-civil society cooperation. More specifically, the project should be able to promote sustainable business models as a beneficial and profitable solution for businesses of all sizes. The effect of this impact should be multiplied thanks to the community building activities.

### **Qualitative and quantitative indicators for the action**

### 1. Number of SDG specific targets covered by the project

The 17 SDG and their 169 SDG specific targets can be consulted at the following link: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

### 2. Effective and expected quantifiable impact on partner SMEs involved in the project, according to the identified SDG specific targets

Beneficiaries can make reference to the SDG Impact Assessment Tool developed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UNSDSN) available at the following link: [http://www.unsdsn-ne.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/SDG-Impact-Assessment-Tool-Guide-1-0\\_final\\_ver02\\_mini.pdf](http://www.unsdsn-ne.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/SDG-Impact-Assessment-Tool-Guide-1-0_final_ver02_mini.pdf).

### 3. Type of advisory services involving partner SMEs

### 4. Number of actors in the ecosystem involved in the community building.

### 5. Potential long-term sustainability of the project, beyond the duration of EU funding

Beneficiaries will need to explain how they are planning to ensure the project's continuation and for how long they think the project can be continued. For example, the ultimate long term continuation of the project could be embedding the activities and results into the EEN client journey<sup>8</sup> offered to SME clients.

## 3. Available budget

The available call budget is **EUR 400 000**. This budget might be increased by maximum 20%.

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:	15 December 2021
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>15 March 2022 – 17:00:00 CET</u> (Brussels)
Evaluation:	March-May 2022
Information on evaluation results:	June 2022
GA signature:	August/September 2022

<sup>8</sup> The *EEN client journey* is the company's growth path realised with the help of the EEN services. It is a sum of all EEN services – advisory and partnering, achievements and touchpoints between the EEN advisors and a client SME. Every EEN partner involved in the client journey of a company has a specific role and leads it towards a tangible impact and positive results in terms of: market share, turnover, optimised costs or realised savings in international activities, job creation or maintenance, improved quality of products, services or processes, introduced product or service innovations related to international activities.

## 5. Admissibility and documents

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

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

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

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

- Application Form Part A — contains administrative information about the participants (future coordinator, beneficiaries and affiliated entities) and the summarised budget for the project (*to be filled in directly online*)
- Application Form Part B — contains the technical description of the project (*to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed and then assembled and re-uploaded*)
- **mandatory annexes and supporting documents** (*to be uploaded*):
  - detailed budget table (*template available in the Submission System*)
  - CVs (short outlines) of core project team
  - list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years) (*template available in Part B*)
    - i) For SMEs, supporting documents that will allow to assess or confirm that the applicant is an SME according to the [Commission Recommendation 316 of 6 May 2003](#).
    - ii) For EEN partners, the reference to the signed EEN grant agreement with EISMEA to prove their active participation in the EEN for the period 2022-2025. The EEN grant agreement must be signed and in force for any grant agreement under this action to be signed.
    - iii) For NGOs/CSOs:
      - proof that they are officially registered with the legal status of non-governmental organization/civil society organization (or equivalent) according to their national legislation
      - proof that they are in active business – e.g. link to a website, relevant articles/papers, etc.
      - proof that they have been involved in projects with businesses before – e.g. project report, article/paper describing the project, etc.

All these documents (i.e. i); ii); iii)) should be uploaded in the submission tool “other annexes” as a single pdf document and according to the type of applicant.

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 **50 pages** (Part B, including all annexes). 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 COSME part of the Single Market Programme ([associated countries](#)) or countries which are in ongoing negotiations<sup>9</sup> for an association agreement and where the agreement enters into force before grant signature.

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 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


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<sup>9</sup> In the context of this call, "ongoing negotiations" means that negotiations for an association to the SMP have been formally initiated and confirmed by both sides (the country and the European Commission) and a first negotiating meeting was held (virtually or physically).

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>10</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>11</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).

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

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>12</sup> and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#)<sup>13</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

Proposals must be submitted by a consortium of at least **three eligible applicants** (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities), and must comply with the following conditions:

- The **coordinator** must be an entity that is member of the Enterprise Europe Network (a grant agreement must have been signed by EISMEA and the entity for the period 2022-2025). Entities who are in an ongoing grant agreement preparation for EEN membership in 2022-2025 but have not signed a grant agreement yet may submit an application under this action. However, if selected, their EEN grant agreement must be signed and in force for any grant agreement under this action can be signed;
- The consortium partners must include **at least one small and medium-sized enterprise** (according to the EU definition<sup>14</sup>) and one CSO/NGO willing to collaborate on a project of common interest;
- The consortium must be composed of minimum three entities from a coherent

<sup>10</sup> See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

<sup>11</sup> For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

<sup>12</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>13</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).

<sup>14</sup> Commission Recommendation 2003/316 of 6 May 2003

geographic area part of one or more of the eligible countries indicated above.

The consortium can include other entities such as:

- Additional small and medium-sized enterprises and CSOs/NGOs;
- Regional or local public administration (such as municipality, city, region, etc.);
- Social economy actors;
- Business support organisations;
- Public agencies or bodies (such as environmental agencies, research agencies, etc.).

#### 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.*).

#### Geographic location (target countries)

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

#### Duration

Projects' duration should normally range **between 12 and 24 months** (extensions by mutual agreement reflected in a grant amendment are possible, if duly justified).

#### Project budget

Project budgets (maximum grant amount) are expected to be **EUR 100 000** per project, but this does not preclude the submission/ selection of proposals requesting other amounts.

The call is expected to fund maximum four proposals.

## **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:

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

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

### 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>15</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)

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<sup>15</sup> See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).



- in breach of social security or tax obligations (including if done by persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)
- guilty of grave professional misconduct<sup>16</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 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 that<sup>17</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** (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 (within a topic or budget envelope) a **priority order** will be determined according to the following approach:

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<sup>16</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.

<sup>17</sup> See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

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

- 1) Projects focusing on a theme that is not otherwise covered by higher ranked projects will be considered to have the highest priority.
- 2) The *ex aequo* proposals will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the award criterion 'Relevance'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Impact'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Quality'.
- 3) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the overall project portfolio and the creation of positive synergies between projects, or other factors related to the objectives of the call. These factors will be documented in the panel report.
- 4) After that, the remainder of the available call budget will be used to fund projects across the different topics in order to ensure a balanced spread of the geographical and thematic coverage and while respecting to the maximum possible extent the order of merit based on the evaluation of the award criteria.

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



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

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

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

## 9. Award criteria

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

- **Relevance:** clarity and consistency of project, objectives and planning; extent to which they match the themes and priorities and objectives of the call; contribution to the EU strategic and legislative context; European/trans-national dimension; 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 (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) (30 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 (30 points)
- **Impact:** ambition and expected impact of results on target groups/general public; potential sustainability of results after EU funding ends (20 points).

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	11	20
Quality — Project design and implementation	16	30
Quality — Project team and cooperation arrangements	16	30
Impact	11	20
<b>Overall (pass) scores</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

Maximum points: 100 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 11/20, 16/30, 16/30 and 11/20 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 the 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 12 and 24 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 have to be provided:

- Technical progress report (after half of the project duration) not linked to a payment
- Provisional impact assessment of the project
- Policy recommendations
- Success story(s)
- Map of actors involved in the implementation of the project and in the community of practice

### 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 (**90%**).

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
- E. Indirect costs

*Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:*

- personnel costs:
  - SME owner/natural person unit cost<sup>18</sup>: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost<sup>19</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-C, except exempted specific cost categories, if any)
- VAT: non-deductible VAT is eligible (but please note that since 2013 VAT paid by beneficiaries that are public bodies acting as public authority is NOT eligible)
- other:
  - in-kind contributions for free are allowed, but cost-neutral, i.e. they cannot be declared as cost
  - kick off meeting: costs for kick-off meeting organised by the granting authority are eligible (travel costs for maximum 2 persons, return ticket to Brussels and accommodation for one night) only if the meeting takes place after the project starting date set out in the Grant Agreement; the starting date can be changed through an amendment, if needed
  - project websites: communication costs for presenting the project on the participants' websites or social media accounts are eligible; costs for *separate* project websites are not eligible
  - other ineligible costs: No

***Reporting and payment arrangements***

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

After grant signature, you will normally receive a **prefinancing** to start working on the project (float of normally **60%** of the maximum grant amount; exceptionally less or no prefinancing). The prefinancing will be paid 30 days from entry into force/10 days before starting date/financial guarantee (if required) — whichever is the latest.

There will be no **interim payments**.


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<sup>18</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>19</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).

**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):*

- list of background: No
- rights of use on results: Yes
- access rights to ensure continuity and interoperability obligations: No

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

- communication and dissemination plan: Yes
- 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 PPI Grants for Procurement: 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).

Applicants who already have an EU Login user account and a valid PIC can use these and do not need to repeat this step.

### **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 before 11 March 2022 to the following email address: [EISMEA-SMP-COSME-ENQUIRIES@ec.europa.eu](mailto:EISMEA-SMP-COSME-ENQUIRIES@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 cannot submit more than one proposal under this call. Multiple proposals will be rejected.  
Organisations may not participate in several proposals.
- **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](#).