



# Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)

## Call for proposals

Transitioning to a more sustainable and resilient ecosystem –  
empowering tourism SMEs  
(SMP-COSME-2023-TOURSME)

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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 tourism under the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs strand 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 basic act (SMP Regulation [2021/690](#)<sup>1</sup>).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2023 Work Programme<sup>2</sup> and will be managed by the **European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA)** ('Agency').

The call covers the following **topic**:

### **SMP-COSME-2023-TOURSME – Transitioning to a more sustainable and resilient ecosystem – empowering tourism SMEs**

Applicants can NOT 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)
  - 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:

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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(2023) 1119 final of 22.2.2023 on the financing of the 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 and the adoption of the work programme for 2023-2024, as amended by Commission Implementing Decision C(2023) 5702 final of 25.8.2023 as regards the implementation of actions under the Single Market Programme.

- 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

Tourism is one of the key ecosystems of the European economy, with an increasingly positive impact on economic growth, regional development and employment in the European Union. The EU tourism ecosystem faces challenges, common to other ecosystems, that will influence its development for the next years. Resilience, sustainability, digitalisation and innovation, including new business models, have been identified as some of these challenges, but also key success factors for the future of the tourism ecosystem.

The measures, actions and programmes to support the increase of resilience, sustainability and digitalisation of the tourism ecosystem need to consider its cross-cutting nature and the interdependencies between the tourism and a range of other ecosystems, such as transport, cultural and creative industries, agriculture, fisheries, sports, construction, textiles and furniture.

The COVID-19 pandemic severely and extensively impacted the tourism ecosystem in 2021 and 2022. Moreover, the Russian aggression towards Ukraine and escalating inflation and energy prices have further negatively impacted the tourism industry.

To address these challenges, in strict alignment with the priorities delineated in the European Commission's SME strategy<sup>3</sup> and the updated European Industrial Strategy<sup>4</sup>, the Commission published the Transition Pathway for Tourism<sup>5</sup> in February 2022. This document outlines 27 areas of work aimed at propelling the ecosystem towards resilience sustainability, digitalisation and innovation. In parallel, the SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe, adopted in March 2020, recognises the vital role of capacity building and support for SMEs in achieving the transition to sustainability and digitalisation.

Furthermore, in December 2022, the Council adopted conclusions on establishing a European Agenda for Tourism 2030<sup>6</sup>. This agenda encompasses a multi-annual EU action plan that assists Member States, public authorities, the Commission and stakeholders in making the tourism ecosystem more resilient, more sustainable, greener and digitalised.

In this context, augmenting resilience and economic sustainability in the tourism ecosystem and enhancing the competitiveness of the tourism SMEs requires raising awareness regarding current and future policies that will impact the tourism ecosystem, as well as available funding opportunities and procedures for accessing EU

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<sup>3</sup> [https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-strategy\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-strategy_en)

<sup>4</sup> [https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/industry/strategy\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/industry/strategy_en)

<sup>5</sup> [Transition pathway for tourism Publications Offices of the EU \(Europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Council Conclusions on a EU Agenda for Tourism 2030](#)

financing designed to support resilience, green and digital transition. Besides, green and digital transition will result in improving service quality and accessibility at tourist sites and destinations, as well as among tourism stakeholders.

The Guide on EU Funding for Tourism<sup>7</sup>, published in May 2021, and regularly updated, aims at facilitating the access to information on funding opportunities for the tourism ecosystem.

Enhancing SMEs' capacity to access these funding opportunities represents a significant step towards empowering micro enterprises and SMEs and enabling the tourism ecosystem to leverage available EU funding, forge partnerships and consortia, adopt best practices, and use other supportive tools.

Both public and private-sector funding play pivotal roles in the tourism ecosystem, and public-private partnerships are crucial drivers of the green and digital transition. Such partnerships facilitate the adoption of environmentally friendly practices, promote data sharing and digital innovation, and support research, innovation and skills development across all sectors and actors involved in the tourism ecosystem.

In the general context of increased awareness and changed consumer preferences, SMEs struggle with changing into more sustainable business practices and increase their resilience. This is due to administrative and legal procedures, besides a lack of clear understanding of issues to be addressed and best ways to implement such new practices. In that respect, SMEs need guidance and clear information.

### **1.1. Resilience, economic, environmental and social aspects of sustainability in tourism and digitalisation as an enabler for sustainability**

Resilience is the process of ensuring a positive outcome and successfully adapting to difficult or challenging experiences. To ensure the industry's resilience, it is essential to focus on risk management and preparedness that will allow, mainly for the SMEs, to create a better capacity to foresee, withstand and overcome unexpected challenges.

Innovation, financial robustness, behavioural flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands are crucial to ensure higher resilience.

The concept of 'sustainability' within the ecosystem is derived from the United Nations World Tourism Organisation's definition, which underscores the importance of considering the ecosystem's economic, social and environmental impacts in both the present and the future. This comprehensive approach accounts for the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities. Consequently, the correlation between a more sustainable tourism ecosystem and enhanced resilience is evident.

There are three aspects of sustainability:

- Economic sustainability is driven by business models with diversified and innovative tourism offers around the year and throughout the territory.
- Social sustainability is driven by better working conditions for tourism actors, and greater opportunities for up- and re-skilling. It also embeds the consideration of impacts of tourism on local communities, and their well-being.
- Green sustainability addresses environmental concerns and ways to decrease carbon footprint and improve respect for nature and the environment while contributing to economic development.

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<sup>7</sup> [Guide on EU funding for tourism \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

Digitalisation is a strategic area of collaboration to accelerate EU's growth, prosperity and employment. By prioritising the digital transformation of SMEs in the tourism ecosystem, the transition to sustainability and resilience can be accelerated.

Encouraging collaboration among stakeholders, fostering knowledge-sharing platforms, and providing dedicated support services can empower SMEs to capitalise on digital opportunities and navigate the challenges of the digital era. Ultimately, this comprehensive approach will contribute to the long-term competitiveness and growth of the tourism ecosystem while promoting a sustainable and innovative European tourism industry.

In the last years, the EU has been setting a series of new legislative packages<sup>8</sup>, targeting sustainability, that will impact all ecosystems, including tourism.

As regards the environmental aspect of sustainability strategies, the regulatory framework underpinning the transition of the tourism ecosystem, is included in the European Green Deal<sup>9</sup>.

The 'Fit for 55' package<sup>10</sup> proposes targeted amendments to Energy Efficiency and Buildings Directive, Energy Tax Directive and EU Emissions Trading System including maritime and aviation, which complements the Green Deal.

It also establishes rules, paths and measures to achieve the proposed objectives of climate neutrality in the EU by 2050, and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030.

Most of the EU climate and energy legislation is being revised, including the EU Emissions Trading System, the Effort Sharing Regulation, renewable energy and energy efficiency, transport and land use legislation.

Additional elaboration on how SMEs can increase their environmental sustainability can be found in the European Commission's publication Annual report on European SMEs 2021/2022: SMEs and Environmental Sustainability<sup>11</sup>.

Of particular importance are: Sustainable and smart mobility strategy, Sustainable Blue Economy Strategy, Circular Economy Action Plan, Renovation Wave for buildings, Biodiversity Strategy, EU Plastics Strategy, Farm to Fork Strategy, Long-term vision for Rural areas, European Climate Pact, Zero Pollution Action Plan, sustainable finance and taxonomy framework.

According to Flash Eurobarometer 498<sup>12</sup> (March 2022) there is hardly any strategic data about the environmentally friendly offer on the tourism ecosystem. This survey concluded that 9% of SMEs surveyed across the EU are not taking any action; 89% are taking at least one action, 2 % take more than one action. Of the actions taken, most are measures to be more resource efficient, the most common being resource efficiency measures such as minimising waste (64%), saving energy (61%), saving material (57%), recycling by reusing material or waste within the company (47%) and saving water (46%).

In the context of skills, upskilling and reskilling of workforce is a priority within the EU, with a view to improving working conditions and increase competitiveness. This is also paramount for the tourism ecosystem, namely when supporting SMEs. The EU Pact for Skills<sup>13</sup>, launched within the framework of the European Pillar of Social Rights on 10 November 2020, also extends its application to the tourism ecosystem.

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<sup>8</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal_en)

<sup>9</sup> [The European Green Deal \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2287)

<sup>10</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2021%3A550%3AFIN>

<sup>11</sup> [Annual report on European SMEs 2021/2022 \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2287)

<sup>12</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2287>

<sup>13</sup> [https://pact-for-skills.ec.europa.eu/index\\_en](https://pact-for-skills.ec.europa.eu/index_en)



PANTOUR<sup>14</sup>, the Pact for Next Tourism Generation Skills, is an Erasmus+ co-funded project developing a Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation to address skills needs in the tourism ecosystem. The following of its outputs are particularly relevant for this call for proposals: the Sectoral Skills Intelligence Monitor, the Skills Lab, a Resource Books for Trainers.

In 2021, the European Commission unveiled an ambitious roadmap for Europe's digital transformation, known as the Digital Compass 2030<sup>15</sup>. This comprehensive framework encompasses four key action areas, with specific targets to monitor progress: skilling and upskilling, secure and sustainable digital infrastructures, digitalisation of public services, and the digital transformation of businesses. For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), a crucial target is to ensure that at least 90% of them achieve a basic level of digital intensity<sup>16</sup> by 2030.

The Transition Pathway for Tourism aligns with this main framework, recognising the pivotal role of digitalisation in the tourism ecosystem.

## **1.2. Supporting initiatives for the twin transition in the tourism ecosystem**

For micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the prospect of transforming or adapting their business models to become more resilient, greener, more digital, more competitive, and inclusive can be challenging, despite the expected benefits within the single market and globally.

It is critical to provide a support strategy targeting the tourism ecosystem's specific challenges, given that it predominantly consists of small and medium-sized enterprises and other small stakeholders, representing 99.9% of the ecosystem. Another challenge of the tourism ecosystem are deep differences regarding subsectors like accommodation, restauration, tour guides or travel agencies, to name a few.

To address these challenges, partnerships with experts, innovation hubs, businesses in similar or different sub-sectors, and training centres, according to their specific needs can significantly contribute to SMEs' business development. Such support aligns seamlessly with the objectives of this call for proposals.

In support of SMEs' transition towards more sustainable business practices, the EU offers an extensive network of assistance at the European level. Here are a few (non-exhaustive) examples:

1. The European Commission supports access to funding for businesses through local financial institutions in EU countries. Many types of funding are available, including loans, microfinance and guarantees. These institutions determine the exact financing conditions – the amount, duration, interest rates and fees<sup>17</sup>.
2. The Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)<sup>18</sup> offers tailored services to SMEs, including dedicated sustainability advisors.
3. The European cluster collaboration platform<sup>19</sup> facilitates connections with sustainability-focused organisations.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://nexttourismgeneration.eu/pantour/>

<sup>15</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030_en)

<sup>16</sup> The digital intensity is a composite indicator, derived from the survey on ICT usage and e-commerce in enterprises: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20220826-1>

<sup>17</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/growth-and-investment/financing-investment/financing-programmes-smes\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/growth-and-investment/financing-investment/financing-programmes-smes_en)

<sup>18</sup> <https://een.ec.europa.eu>

4. The European Digital Innovation Hubs<sup>20</sup> enable companies to improve their processes, products and services using digital technologies through technical expertise and experimentation opportunities.
5. The competitions European Capital for Smart Tourism and European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism (successor of the European Destinations of Excellence - EDEN)<sup>21</sup> highlight the abundance of sustainable practices in the tourism ecosystem across the EU, promoting peer learning and knowledge sharing.
6. Initiatives targeting tourism businesses, co-funded by COSME (EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs) and Single Market programme, bring inspiring examples of support to SMEs in developing innovative and sustainable solutions. The following calls for proposals resulted in implementation of such projects:
  - Boosting sustainable tourism development and capacity of tourism SMEs through transnational cooperation and knowledge transfer (COS-TOURCOOP-2019-3-01)<sup>22</sup>.
  - Boosting the uptake of digitalisation, innovation and new technologies in tourism through transnational cooperation and capacity building (COS-TOURINN-2020-3-04)<sup>23</sup>.
  - COVID-19 Recovery through sustainable Tourism Growth and SME Support (SMP-COSME-2021-TOURSME)<sup>24</sup>.
  - Sustainable growth and building resilience in tourism – empowering support to SMEs to carry out the twin transition (SMP-COSME-2022-TOURSME)<sup>25</sup>.

These existing examples and models should also be considered and serve as inspiration for best practices under this call for proposals.

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

### ***2.1 Objectives***

The general objective of this call for proposals is to enhance the competitiveness of tourism ecosystem, in particular the SMEs in the tourism ecosystem. It aims at equipping and empowering SMEs to become more resilient by building capacity of SMEs to successfully carry out the twin transition towards more sustainable, digital and competitive practices as prioritised in the Tourism Transition Pathway.

Although there is plenty of information available on these topics, it is not easy for SMEs to access, understand and translate all this information into their daily activities.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://clustercollaboration.eu>

<sup>20</sup> <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/activities/edihs>

<sup>21</sup> [https://smart-tourism-capital.ec.europa.eu/index\\_en](https://smart-tourism-capital.ec.europa.eu/index_en)

<sup>22</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/other\\_eu\\_prog/cosme/wp-call/cosme-call-cos-tourcoop-2019-3-01\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/other_eu_prog/cosme/wp-call/cosme-call-cos-tourcoop-2019-3-01_en.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/other\\_eu\\_prog/cosme/wp-call/call-fiche\\_cos-tourinn-2020-3-04\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/other_eu_prog/cosme/wp-call/call-fiche_cos-tourinn-2020-3-04_en.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/smp/wp-call/2021/call-fiche\\_smp-cosme-2021-toursme\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/smp/wp-call/2021/call-fiche_smp-cosme-2021-toursme_en.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/smp/wp-call/2022/call-fiche\\_smp-cosme-2022-toursme\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/smp/wp-call/2022/call-fiche_smp-cosme-2022-toursme_en.pdf)

Tourism SMEs need support to incorporate models of management and behavioural change in their actions, in their management and in their economic activity, increasing their resilience, digitalisation and sustainability. In the broader context around these lines, SMEs shall be enabled to reflect on their overall impact on society and the economy. The new concepts, procedures and methodologies shall allow them to:

- be more resilient,
- be more sustainable,
- be more environmentally responsible,
- boost innovation and use of digital tools,
- improve quality along the tourism value chain.

The ultimate purpose of this call for proposals is to help SMEs with their robust and lasting growth.

The specific objectives of this call for proposals are:

1. To collect best practices regarding resilience, digital and sustainable changes relevant to tourism SMEs in the tourism ecosystem, with a view to disseminating them amongst the tourism stakeholders, including tourism SMEs.
2. To organise specific training sessions for key tourism stakeholders on increasing resilience, sustainability (in its environmental, social and economic aspects), as well as on digitalisation as an enabler for sustainability. The purpose of this training is to enable these key stakeholders to act as multipliers, by becoming trainers and transferring the knowledge in their local ecosystems, with a view to reaching a high number of tourism SMEs.
3. To enable tailored capacity building for tourism SMEs to increase their resilience, sustainability (in its environmental, social and economic aspects), as well as on digitalisation, namely regarding tools and management strategies towards sustainability, consulting on certification, and on available funding that contribute to those goals.
4. To support SMEs in the tourism ecosystem to develop and implement new business strategies, new products and cross sectoral approaches that promote and increase resilient practices in their daily activities.

In light of the varying levels of maturity demonstrated by SMEs in the tourism ecosystem concerning resilience, digitalisation and sustainability practices, this call for proposals recognises the existence of a broad range of solutions that can contribute to achieve the described objectives.

There can be solutions based on innovation, such as highly sophisticated technological applications, resource-efficient operational methods, and public-private collaboration schemes or even cross-sectoral projects and new product development that integrates tourism activities with other ecosystems.

But there can also be approaches based upon efficient proven methodologies such as best practice sharing, cooperation and collaboration between subsectors and/or cross-sectors, and also promotion of integrated programmes by destinations or local authorities, or the implementation of environmentally compatible requirements as foreseen in EU Ecolabel<sup>26</sup> for tourist accommodation and/or Eco-Management and

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<sup>26</sup> [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/circular-economy/eu-ecolabel-home/eu-ecolabel-tourist-accommodation\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/circular-economy/eu-ecolabel-home/eu-ecolabel-tourist-accommodation_en)

Audit Scheme (EMAS)<sup>27</sup>.

## 2.2. Themes and priorities

The actions resulting from this call for proposals shall promote the following themes (the list is not exhaustive):

- To promote diversification in the tourism offer by:
  - implementing diversified business models;
  - tackling seasonality and fluctuations in seasonal tourist flows, be it throughout the year or throughout the territory;
  - targeting different market segments, such as types of clients, origin of clients and sources of income;
  - working with an increased variety of suppliers.
- To encourage regenerative tourism experiences that respect the authenticity of local tourism offerings while contributing to the well-being of host communities and promote cultural tourism encompassing both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.
- To support remote and rural regions within the EU, with their specific challenges as regards their transition towards a more sustainable and resilient ecosystem.

To meet the general and specific objectives of this call, the call sets the following priorities:

- To provide clear guidance on management and practical examples of actions and changes for more resilient business, greener and with a higher digital level.
- To advise tourism SMEs, in their transition towards more sustainable activities, such as regarding greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, energy efficiency, environmentally safe materials, waste management, water consumption.
- To promote the improvement of tourism SMEs' staff diversification, provide more equal opportunities for disabled and disadvantaged people, promote equality amongst the workforce by including all genders, creeds, colour, origins and identities.
- To support tourism businesses (small and large) in improving their staff's working conditions, as part of social sustainability measures. Specifically, it is paramount to provide ample opportunities for training, upskilling and reskilling. This is crucial to tackle the challenges regarding the workforce in the tourism ecosystem (staff shortages, under skilled workforce, under skilled management regarding resilience, digital and sustainability).
- To promote innovation, financial robustness, behavioural flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands.
- To increase the use and adoption of digital tools, platforms and smart technologies by transferring knowledge to the SME on how to better use and take advantage of the digital tools available. Being it for management or for day-to-day activities, this shall enable for tourists, for example, personalised experiences, seamless booking processes and real-time information sharing.
- To increase reliance on data: its generation, collection, use and re-use.

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<sup>27</sup> [https://green-business.ec.europa.eu/eco-management-and-audit-scheme-emas\\_en](https://green-business.ec.europa.eu/eco-management-and-audit-scheme-emas_en)

### 2.3. Activities that can be funded (scope)

The proposed actions shall contribute to the transition of the European tourism ecosystem by providing both direct and indirect support, be it consultative or financial.

The support must be provided to tourism stakeholders, in particular to SMEs, including start-ups and entrepreneurs, who wish to develop new business concepts, new products or to implement proven efficient projects based on best practices, contributing to the transition of EU tourism.

The proposed activities must reflect the current market trends and the latest state-of-the-art methodologies regarding the resilience, sustainability, digitalisation and upskilling in the tourism ecosystem.

As **mandatory activity**, beneficiaries must define a set of measurable indicators (KPI) that allows to obtain quantifiable data on the impact of the activities carried out under the action. Furthermore, the beneficiaries must develop a survey on a comprehensive list of sustainability issues (environmental, socio-cultural and economic) and resilience indicators, to be answered at the beginning of activities C Advising and tailored consulting activities, and technical support and D Direct support scheme for tourism SMEs (as described below) by the tourism SMEs supported by the action. The results shall then be compared with a later survey, to be completed at the end of the support programme, and thus measure the evolution and the impact of actions undertaken by the consortia on the supported SMEs. See also *section Expected impact*.

The applicant consortia must carry out the following mandatory activities:

- A.) Best practice collection and awareness raising** regarding resilience, digital and sustainable changes relevant to tourism SMEs in the tourism ecosystem.
- B.) Capacity building for key tourism stakeholders (train the trainers)** such as business associations, destination management organisation (DMO) and public authorities to carry on the raising awareness and knowledge spreading to the tourism ecosystems ('train the trainers' activities).
- C.) Advising and tailored consulting activities, and technical support** to the highest possible number of SMEs in the identified tourism subsectors (Nomenclature of Economic Activities (NACE) codes identified below under C) based on their needs, attempting to cover a wide geographical scope, from management consulting on sustainable measures, digital literacy or implementation of solutions proved efficient to the transition of EU tourism (e.g. Ecolabel/EMAS certification) by tourism SMEs.
- D.) Direct support scheme for tourism SMEs** to the development of new business concepts, projects creating/promoting new products and cross-sectoral cooperation aiming at projects that may increase resilience and develop tourism offer with other ecosystems (culture, agri-food, construction, proximity and social economy, textiles, just to name a few).

#### **A.) Best practice collection and awareness raising**

Early after the project start, each consortium should collect best practices in the focus area of their planned activities, with the purpose of:

- providing policy makers with updated, empirical evidence of the implementation of the priorities set out in the Transition Pathway for Tourism;

- setting a basis and a pool of concrete, relevant, replicable and relatable best practice for the next eligible activities (*B*, *C* and *D*).

Optionally, the consortia may also use as source the solutions identified and developed through previous COSME and Single Market Programme tourism-related calls for proposals referred to above, at the end of *section 1.2*.

As transversal activity, consortia shall revise the initial set of best practices, in order to enrich it with the best practices identified throughout their own activities *B*, *C* and *D*. As example, the initial set of best practices may be tested via other consortium activities, such as training and consulting, with the purpose of proving their effectiveness, impact and replicability. Consulting activities to tourism SMEs may also bring further good practices, which should complete the final best practice collection.

Consortia shall raise awareness of the existing programmes at EU level, but also at national, regional and local level within Member States, regarding sustainable and resilient practices, relevant to SMEs in the tourism ecosystem, taking into consideration the barriers that SMEs face to access and understand the available information. Consortia shall incorporate the raise-awareness component about the identified good practices in all of its activities. They should also put a particular emphasis on the raise-awareness campaign about the action outcomes and results towards the end of the co-funding period.

Each consortium must also plan in their budget the participation in an in-person event organised by the European Commission or EISMEA (two days in Brussels, 5 participants per consortia) to share the results, conclusions, suggestions and an overview of the expected impacts of the activities taken. The scope, timing and further details about the event will be communicated to the beneficiaries in due time. At least two short videos (1-2 minutes each, at least one at the beginning and one towards the end of the project duration), shall be produced for communication purposes, to present the project and its results.

The raise-awareness activities may take different forms, such as events, info sessions, promotional campaigns in social media, elaboration of user-friendly guidelines, printed promotional materials.

## **B.) Capacity building for key tourism stakeholders (Train the trainers)**

The consortia shall organise training sessions to transfer knowledge to key tourism stakeholders (DMOs, business associations and public authorities), so the latter become multipliers in best practice sharing and pass on the knowledge by informing and training mainly tourism SMEs in their (local) ecosystems.

This training of the key tourism stakeholders is to enable them to then train and/or support tourism SMEs in developing resilience and capacities related to sustainable and digital tourism practices. Amongst other topics, this capacity building shall specifically cover skills development at the level of tourism SMEs, aligned with the Transition Pathway objectives (resilience, sustainability, digital transition and skills).

Consortia must strategically select **at least 20 key tourism stakeholders** for participating in the 'train the trainers' sessions:

- The key tourism stakeholders to be trained must have the capacity to engage with a high number of SMEs.
- The key tourism stakeholders to be trained should cover the largest geographical scope and diversity of tourism subsectors within the tourism ecosystem as possible.
- The key tourism stakeholders to be trained should have the capacity to organise training and knowledge transfer activities for SMEs in the tourism ecosystem.

- The key tourism stakeholders to be trained, should commit to follow up these sessions by providing training sessions to tourism SMEs.
- Travel and accommodation costs of participants who have been trained and who have successfully attended the full training are eligible.
- Consortia are encouraged to involve key players from other ecosystems, to foster cross-fertilisation and spill-over effects for the tourism ecosystem. As example, the stakeholders from other ecosystems than tourism may be:
  - Food and beverages stakeholders: A supplier of food and drinks for tourism companies should comply with the same sustainability norms and goals. By reinforcing its resilience, it will contribute to the improving of the sustainable goals throughout the value chain.
  - Construction stakeholders: A construction company that complies with the demands in greener, more sustainable materials and type of construction contributes to building hotels or other touristic infrastructure prepared for the 2055 environmental goals.

Once trained, the key tourism stakeholders shall organise the training for tourism SMEs. Consortia shall ensure that **at least four pilot training programmes** are delivered to tourism SMEs by the selected key tourism stakeholders trained. Applicants shall describe in their proposals the number of such pilot training programmes that they intend to carry out, the format, the geographical scope that this training will cover, approximate number and type of tourism SMEs that will benefit from this training.

The following categories of costs related to the organisation of such pilot training for tourism SMEs by the key tourism stakeholders trainers are eligible:

- venue rental,
- travel, accommodation and subsistence costs of speakers and trainers during the in-person training, provided their participation is foreseen in Annex 1,
- design and printing of any promotional and learning materials directly linked to the training (both for online and in-person training).

The training and the awareness-raising can be achieved through various means, such as developing content/guidance materials and the publication of user-friendly materials, communication campaigns, dissemination events, organising workshops, providing coaching and peer-to-peer learning, conducting training courses and webinars.

The capacity building activities shall cover **at least four** of the following elements:

- i. Through Risk Management Education and Planning provide guidance for the key tourism stakeholders on how to support SMEs to be better prepared to withstand unexpected impactful events (riots, pandemic, earthquakes, volcano eruptions, extensive fires, war or military aggressions, etc.).

In this regard, the training must cover 'resilience' in its broad concept, meaning the process of ensuring a positive outcome and successfully adapting to difficult or challenging experiences. Innovation, financial robustness, behavioural flexibility, and adjustment to external and internal demands are crucial to ensure higher resilience.

- ii. Share solutions and possible paths to develop responsible and diversified tourism offerings, paying particular attention to challenges related to seasonality and social impact of tourism pressure (overtourism) through diversification. E.g. provide guidance on possible options to create new and more diversified offers, stimulating year-round tourism to combat seasonality but also spread the touristic offer throughout the territory,

- promoting balanced offers that can provide positive experiences for tourists and for the communities, foresee different suppliers in case of disruption, market diversification - tourist origins, value chain position.
- iii. Provide training and knowledge on management of tourism offerings and visitor flows. There must be an awareness of the advantages of the integration of locally authentic experiences with the interests of visitors in a sustainable manner, and how to incorporate that in the companies' strategies.
  - iv. Promote skilling/reskilling and upskilling for the key stakeholders of tourism, at mid and top managerial level, providing training sessions and selection of relevant existing training opportunities on resilience and sustainability.
  - v. Help create campaigns to raise awareness of aspects undertaken nationally, regionally and locally, which contributes to the preservation and regeneration of natural heritage, biodiversity and climate-related actions.
  - vi. Help create tourism services that are open and accessible to diverse travel groups and cater to their specific needs, such as families, individuals with disabilities, the elderly, the LGBTQ+ community, and emerging trends like digital nomads (remote workers) and educational tourism. For instance, partnerships between childcare providers and tourism service providers can enhance the appeal of destinations and tourism services that were previously overlooked by families in need of child-friendly facilities during their stay.

The consortium must ensure that the pilot training will be delivered to tourism SMEs by the trained key tourism stakeholders during the implementation period of the grant and report on impact achieved in terms of the subsectors covered, type of audience (DMOs, business associations, unions, larger companies, national authorities, etc.), geographical origin, number of participants. This monitoring must include a survey for the participants to evaluate the training and provide suggestions.

The consortium is expected to showcase the benefits of collaboration and the sharing of good practices through knowledge exchange at cross-sectoral level (tourism and culture, tourism and mobility) to facilitate potential replication by other ecosystems that interact and directly economically relate to tourism.

Applicants must explain in their proposal the way they plan to execute this activity, including the intended number of key players to be reached, in particular other ecosystems that may be reached (e.g. agri-food, culture, retail) and the geographical scope. The activities supported by the consortia must be in line with the 27 key areas of action identified by the Transition Pathway for Tourism, and each proposal must specify which specific theme or focus area they intend to cover.

### **C.) Advising and tailored consulting activities, and technical support**

This activity can be achieved through various means, such as, providing tailor-made consulting for SMEs, coaching and peer-to-peer learning, technical support and offering support in various areas based on the specific needs of SMEs.

This activity shall aim to reach the highest possible number of tourism SMEs based on their needs, attempting to cover a wide geographical scope.

This consulting activity can cover a wide range of activities, from management consulting on sustainable measures, digital literacy or implementation of solutions



proved efficient to the transition of EU tourism (e.g. Ecolabel/EMAS certification, among others). These are non-exhaustive examples.

The applicants shall provide the advisory and consulting services to:

- **at least 50 SMEs** operating:
- in **at least four different eligible countries** (see section 6. Eligibility), with **minimum 5 SMEs per each country**,
- within **at least four** out of the following NACE classes<sup>28</sup>:
  - I5510 — Hotels and similar accommodation
  - I5520 — Holiday and other short-stay accommodation
  - I5530 — Camping grounds, recreational vehicle parks and trailer parks
  - I5610 — Restaurants and mobile food service activities
  - I5630 — Beverage serving activities
  - N79 — Travel agency, tour operator reservation service and related activities
  - R90 - Creative, arts and entertainment activities
  - R93 - Sports activities and amusement and recreation activities.

For the purpose of this call for proposals, NACE classes serve to identify the tourism subsectors. The supported SMEs do not need to be registered under one of those NACE classes, provided that they can prove that they have active economic activities in the relevant NACE class.

Consortia can provide the advisory and consulting services to businesses from other tourism-related sectors, as long as the minimum requirements for the number of SMEs and subsectors (identified via NACE classes) mentioned above are covered.

The following actions illustrate potential approaches for the promotion of sustainable tourism that contribute to the transformation of the tourism ecosystem, namely the capacity of tourism SMEs to become financially sustainable to attract investment, thereby enhancing its overall resilience. The list below is not exhaustive - applicants may propose other approaches provided that they are aligned with the call objectives:

- Provide support to tourism SMEs, through consulting or tailored guidelines to the development, execution, and scaling-up of products, processes, services, and business models that encourage sustainable, digital, and inclusive tourism.
- Enhance the development of digital competences and skills in tourism businesses, especially SMEs, by advising on digital skills training programmes tailored for tourism SMEs, fostering collaborations between SMEs and technology providers, and facilitating access to financing mechanisms.
- Support tourism SMEs to increase their presence in digital networks and online markets and distribution channels and enabling the take-up of innovation and digitalisation in tourism.
- Design a feasible plan that allows SME to skill/reskill and upskill at work force level, but also at mid and top managerial level, while maintaining business running and help them select relevant existing training opportunities on resilience and sustainability that will fit their needs.

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<sup>28</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Tourism\\_industries\\_-\\_employment#Data\\_sources](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Tourism_industries_-_employment#Data_sources)

- Provide support for SMEs to implement their business ideas, new product development and market studies.
- Support in development and analysis of business plans: Developing tourism business models that positively contribute to the regeneration and conservation of biodiversity, including the preservation of protected areas such as education on habitat loss, involvement in tree planting initiatives, or support for local animal species and wildlife protection.
- Support in resilience management programming (contingency money, earthquakes info and escape routes, wildfires prevention or security, heat waves mitigation, flood barriers, etc.).
- Demonstrate how SMEs can utilise digital channels, including entertainment platforms/streaming, to generate interest in culturally specific environments, local histories, and culturally authentic experiences. These initiatives aim at promoting cultural tourism encompassing both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.
- Support in intellectual property development.
- Develop and implement due diligence.
- Support initiatives that enhance the attractiveness and visibility of the tourism product.
- Carry out promotion and communication activities linked to the areas identified above, in line with the call objectives.

Examples of consulting and advisory services on simple actions which can be taken by tourism SMEs to improve environmental performance, with potentially big impacts in the long term can be:

- Developing the use of locally supplied ingredients with low environmental footprint to reduce the environmental impact of food services;
- Reducing food waste in the hospitality industry;
- Reducing and separating overall waste from tourism-related services;
- Increasing water efficiency, reducing water stress and pollution, and improving sanitation;
- Improving food supply systems, and services, reliable local supply chains and reduced food waste for hospitality;
- Increasing more sustainable and resilient tourism infrastructures by implementing green materials and energy efficiency in new construction or in building renovating.

Based on the lessons learnt and outcomes from the consulting activities (activity C), consortia shall update the train the trainers programme (activity B) to better align it with the needs of tourism SMEs.

Applicants must explain how they plan to develop and execute these activities, ensuring broad reach and effective implementation.

#### **D.) Direct support scheme for tourism SMEs**

On the top of the consulting activities described in *section C* above, each consortium shall put in place a support mechanism to **provide direct financial and technical support** and ad-hoc mentoring **to innovative collaborative projects involving tourism SMEs ('collaborative projects')**. This support shall be tailored to the needs of the tourism SMEs. It shall serve to enable tourism SMEs to plan and implement improvements in terms of sustainability, resilience and digitalisation. The

collaborative projects may include a variety of activities contributing to the achievement of objectives of this call for proposals (increase resilience, promote sustainability and the twin transition).

Applicants must include in their proposal at least the following elements about the financial support to third parties:

- a fixed and exhaustive list of the different types of activities for which a third party (partner involved in the collaborative project) may receive financial support;
- the definition of the persons or categories of persons which may receive financial support (as mentioned above);
- the criteria and modalities (form of financial support) for awarding financial support;
- the criteria for calculating the exact amount of the financial support;
- the conditions for participation;
- the results to be obtained.

#### Collaborative projects requirements

Applicant consortia must support **minimum 30 collaborative projects** which **must represent a balanced distribution of the number of supported tourism SMEs per eligible country**. To ensure this, the collaborative projects must represent as a minimum:

- **at least two geographical areas,**
- **at least six projects in each geographical area,**
- **at least four different eligible countries** defined in *Section 6*.

The geographical areas are defined as follows:

- Area 1: Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain;
- Area 2: Austria, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Ireland;
- Area 3: Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland, Romania;
- Area 4: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden;
- Area 5: non-EU eligible countries as per *Section 6*.

#### Eligibility requirements for third parties involved in collaborative projects

**A partnership** of third parties involved in a collaborative project must comply with the following requirements:

- ✓ Must be composed of:
  - ✓ *tourism SMEs pursuing the same objective* within the eligible activities for the financial support scheme defined below, with the purpose of sharing the best practices and experiences and peer-review, such as aiming at compliance with the same certification scheme, creating new business models or products to become more resilient and reduce seasonality in their offer; OR
  - ✓ *a tourism SME with another tourism business/entity* (e.g. a larger company, or a national authority, or a regional association, or a DMO,

etc.) pursuing the same objective within the eligible activities for the financial support scheme defined below; OR

- ✓ *a tourism SME and a business/entity from other ecosystems* such as culture, handicrafts, digital entertainment agri-food, proximity and social economy, textiles, just to name a few. The aim of cross sectoral cooperation is to promote the development of new products and increase resilience and sustainability throughout the value chain.
- ✓ Must contain **minimum two (2) and maximum five (5) partners.**
- ✓ **At least half of the partners in each partnership must be tourism SMEs.** When a partnership includes other partners than tourism SMEs, the financial support provided to the partnership must be directed principally towards the tourism SMEs to address tourism SMEs needs and serve to reach tourism SMEs' objectives in line with this call for proposals.

For example, in a partnership of tourism SMEs with a DMO, the role of the DMO will be limited to providing guidance and eventual future scale-up of the project to further SMEs. It shall not serve to finance the DMO's activities in a form of a service fee, it shall not create profit or revenue for the DMO as a principal objective of support.

Beneficiaries shall take this requirement into account when evaluating collaborative projects proposals and their budgets.

- ✓ **Tourism SMEs** eligible are defined in line with the EU Recommendation 2003/361<sup>29</sup> and operating within the NACE classes identified in activity C.
- ✓ The partners involved must be based in one of the eligible countries as defined in Section 6. One partnership may cover several eligible countries.
- ✓ The partners involved in the same partnership shall be independent from each other (e.g. no structural, legal, financial control between them).
- ✓ Normally, each legal entity shall be involved in one collaborative project only, unless justified by the concept of the action and agreed with the Agency.

The 'partnership' may pre-exist (e.g. tourism company with their current food supplier) or may result from a match-making process supported by the consortium.

Applicants should encourage the companies (SMEs) that have benefited from activity *C Advising and tailored consulting activities, and technical support* to apply for the direct support scheme and present a structured, well-elaborated proposal for a collaborative project.

#### Selection process of the collaborative projects

The selection process can be organised through various means, such as a competition or a call for proposals. Applicants must explain how they intend to select the collaborative projects and on which criteria, ensuring transparency and equal treatment, and avoiding conflicts of interest. For instance, staff members or subcontractors who supported tourism SMEs in *activity C.) Advising and tailored consulting activities, and technical support*, cannot be part of the evaluation committees.

The criteria to select the collaborative projects must include amongst others:

- feasibility,

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<sup>29</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32003H0361>

- replicability,
- collaboration potential, participants' capacity, competence and commitment,
- efficiency,
- effectiveness to generate resilience gains, sustainable improvement or digital increase,
- contribution to the Transition Pathway objectives at the EU level.

If the financial support is awarded on the basis of an open call, it must comply with the 'Guidelines for awarding financial support to collaborative projects submitted by third parties', available at, and must comply with the following conditions:

- the calls must be open, published widely and conform to EU and national applicable standards concerning transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality;
- the calls must remain open for at least two months;
- the outcome of the call must be published on the beneficiaries' websites, including a description of the selected projects, award dates, project durations, and final recipient legal names and countries.

#### What activities and eligible costs can be funded

In their proposal, the applicants are expected to elaborate on the type of technical support and mentoring intended to be provided to the SMEs and on the NACE classes from which the tourism SMEs will come. Applicants should favour a balanced mix of eligible activities and costs in collaborative projects supported via the action. It should be avoided to finance only one type of costs per collaborative project and to finance the same and only type of activities and costs in all the collaborative projects.

**The duration of the collaborative projects shall be at least three months.** Consortia shall plan the finalisation of the collaborative projects in a way to ensure all the checks of their results, in order to finalise the payments to the collaborative projects partnerships. Besides, consortia shall have enough time to process the outcomes from the collaborative projects for their own monitoring purposes, including final project deliverables, and to ensure dissemination of the project results and best practices identified during the implementation period of the grant.

The type of activities and costs that can be funded via **direct financial support** to the collaborative project partnership(exhaustive list):

- Implementation of new business ideas, new products development, market studies;
- Development and analysis of business plans;
- Intellectual property development;
- Design and implementation of measures on corporate social responsibility, ethic and conduct codes; due diligence (OECD guidelines<sup>30</sup>) women's role in management jobs, accessibility (disable, elderly, children), LGBT, socially responsible job offers, value chain integration of social responsibility;
- Digital innovative projects that promote accessibility;
- Acquisition of software licenses;

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<sup>30</sup> <https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/OECD-Due-Diligence-Guidance-for-Responsible-Business-Conduct.pdf>

- Development and implementation of new digital tools for tourism such as artificial intelligence, augmented reality, fine tuning algorithms;
- Entry fees and travel costs to business meetings, trade fairs, training, provided that these are related specifically to the activities eligible for the financial support and they are organised externally to the consortium;
- Certification costs and implementation costs related to the certification schemes compliance relevant to sustainability, digitalisation and resilience;
- Promotion and communication activities relevant to the activities in this list;
- Purchase costs of consumables/goods are eligible only if they contribute to resilience, green or digital transformation, and they must arise from the capacity building actions carried out by the consortium such as training, coaching or tailored consulting for SMEs.

The following are some non-exhaustive examples:

- after a profiling and training on water management, tourism SMEs may receive financial support to purchase water flow reducers as part of a pilot project;
- after coaching regarding risk management implementation, the participating tourism SMEs may receive financial support to purchase the corresponding software;
- resulting from tailored consultation on digital control of suppliers and stock management, tourism SMEs may receive financial support for the purchase of such digital fine-tuning control mechanism.

Costs and activities not eligible under costs of direct financial support to third parties:

- Capacity-building activities provided by the consortium or by the trainers trained as part of activities *B Capacity building for key tourism stakeholders (train the trainers)*;
- Coaching and consulting services provided by the consortium as part of activities *C Advising and tailored consulting activities, and technical support*;
- Services provided by consortium or subcontractors;
- Vouchers or other non-financial support (see further below for the definition of the financial support);
- Purchase of infrastructure.

#### Form of the direct financial support

The direct financial support:

- must be in a form of a lump sum. It is recommended to plan for a break-down of the lump sum for different types of activities, costs, outcomes and partners, where applicable;
- must **range between minimum EUR 15 000 and maximum EUR 25 000 per collaborative project**;
- **cannot be used to reimburse or purchase services provided by the consortia.**

As direct financial support to third parties (the collaborative project partnership) is understood a monetary, financial transaction from the beneficiaries directly to the supported collaborative projects. Costs for non-financial support or support given in-kind (e.g. vouchers for services paid to the service providers different from the partners involved in the collaborative project) must be declared under other

categories (e.g. as a cost for purchases of vouchers) and must comply with the rules of that category.

If applicable to the specific type of costs and activities, the partners involved in collaborative projects identify autonomously and freely the service provider(s) from whose services or products they will benefit. If beneficiaries want to advise the collaborative projects on the selection of service providers or products, the list(s) of such providers must be established in a transparent way, with a pre-defined criterion, e.g. via a publication of an open call for service providers. The consortium cannot impose the use of any particular provider on the collaborative projects.

#### Monitoring of the collaborative projects

Each consortium must monitor closely the partnerships participating in the support scheme, as regards the implementation of their collaborative projects, and report regularly (every 3 months after the start of the collaborative project) on the progress to the Agency. The consortium must also support the collaborative projects to ensure their successful outcome and achievement of the expected results.

Applicants must set up and impose **indicators** for the supported collaborative projects to ensure their monitoring and to measure their outcome and impacts. Here are some examples of (but not limited to) areas that these indicators and impacts should target:

- Help design and implement measures applied relevant to: energy efficiency/consumption; water usage/optimisation; waste management; single use plastics; food waste; carbon footprint; sustainable mobility mitigation measures; response climate change extreme events, ESG indicators (Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance); evaluate digital literacy index of the companies; inquire about innovation policies and incentives.
- Help design and implement measures enforced on: corporate social responsibility, ethic and conduct codes; due diligence (OECD guidelines) women's role in management jobs, accessibility (disable, elderly, children), LGBT, socially responsible job offers, value chain integration of social responsibility; etc.
- Promote existing programmes, projects and their outcomes or certification schemes that are available and support objectives for green, social, digital and resilience, such as (but not limited to) EU Ecolabel, EMAS or Green Key.
- Promote and help designing partnerships with tourism companies and other ecosystems such as culture, handicrafts, digital entertainment agri-food, proximity and social economy, textiles, just to name a few.
- Develop cooperation between tourism companies and other companies to increase resilience. To illustrate, creating new business models or new products integrating multiple sectors will help reduce seasonality.
- Developing instruments for innovative tourism including advanced technologies developing new digital tools for tourism, such as artificial intelligence, augmented reality, fine tuning algorithms.

#### Expected impact

- Enhanced resilience and competitiveness of tourism SMEs through better uptake of sustainability principles, innovation and digitalisation (i.e. use of new technologies, greening, data).
- Increase capacity of tourism SMEs to successfully improve their resilience and capability to withstand unexpected impactful challenges.

- New business models in tourism building on sustainability, digitalisation, new technologies, circularity, involvement of local communities and long-term visitors.
- Improved SMEs' usage of available tools and management strategies to increase their competitiveness and promote growth.
- Advanced twin green and digital transition of the tourism ecosystem, including SMEs.
- Boosted quality along the tourism value chain.
- Increased awareness of tourism SMEs about existing EU programmes on sustainability, digitalisation and resilience.
- Best practises regarding resilience and the twin transitions replicated in the tourism ecosystem.
- Enhanced cooperation along the tourism value chain: improved transnational and cross-sectoral cooperation, knowledge transfer and peer learning.

Consortia are also encouraged to contribute to the commitments and pledges for the transition of EU tourism<sup>31</sup>, as part of Transition Pathway for Tourism. This can be done at the level of the beneficiary, project, tourism SMEs supported by the action and other stakeholders involved in the action.

#### *Deliverables (compulsory)*

- A comprehensive list of indicators to measure resilience and different sustainability issues (environmental, social and economic) to obtain quantifiable data on the impact of the actions, including a survey to answer by the supported tourism SMEs.
- A compendium of lessons learnt and/or best practices, responding to the needs of tourism SMEs regarding sustainability, digitalisation and resilience. The list or compendium should be organised in thematic axes, as defined in the Transition Pathway for Tourism, to facilitate browsing, and should help assess the success and replicability of the collaborative projects supported and of the support activities directed towards tourism SMEs. The deliverable must be scheduled two months prior to the end of the co-financing period.
- Content/guidance materials and the publication of user-friendly materials, communication campaigns, dissemination events, that are usable as a tool to transfer knowledge to key tourism stakeholders (DMOs, business associations and public authorities), so they become multipliers in best practice sharing and pass on the knowledge by informing and training mainly tourism SMEs.
- A guide on Risk Management Education and Planning, for the key stakeholders on how to support tourism SMEs to be better prepared to withstand unexpected impactful events (extreme weather, pandemic, riots, earthquakes, volcano eruptions, extensive fires, war or military aggressions, etc.). The guide may focus on a selection of events or themes or tourism subsectors.
- A technical progress report (not linked to a payment) covering the first third of the project duration reporting, among others, on the capacity-building activities and the identified needs of tourism SMEs.

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<sup>31</sup> [https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/tourism/eu-tourism-transition/tourism-transition-pathway/commitments\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/tourism/eu-tourism-transition/tourism-transition-pathway/commitments_en)



- A deliverable giving details on the selection of collaborative projects to be awarded financial support. This deliverable must be scheduled at least one month prior to the expected date of publication or opening of the call(s) for selection or the competition (or other form of selection described in the proposal), and must include a draft of the announcement, full details (including the applicable methodologies, timeline and criteria for selection and evaluation) and a reference to the relevant webpage where the full details are to be published. In case of calls for proposals, additional details are provided in 'Guidelines for awarding financial support to collaborative projects submitted by third parties', available at [EISMEA webpage](#).
- A deliverable reporting on the evaluation and selection, and, where possible, development of the collaborative projects under *activity D) Direct support scheme for tourism SMEs*, and, if applicable, of the thematic area identified by the applying partnerships, to be submitted one month after the conclusion of the selection process or in month 20 at the latest.

### 3. Available budget

The estimated available call budget is **EUR 8 500 000**. This budget might be increased by maximum 20%.

We expect to fund four (4) projects.

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:	12 December 2023
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>21 February 2024 – 17:00:00 CET</u> (Brussels)
Evaluation:	March-May 2024
Information on evaluation results:	June-July 2024
GA signature:	September-October 2024

### 5. Admissibility and documents

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

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

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

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

- Application Form Part A — contains administrative information about the participants (future coordinator, beneficiaries and affiliated entities) and the summarised budget for the project (*to be filled in directly online*)
- Application Form Part B — contains the technical description of the project (*to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed and then assembled and re-uploaded*)
- **mandatory annexes and supporting documents** (*to be uploaded*):
  - detailed budget table/calculator (*template available to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed, assembled and re-uploaded – use and upload only 'Detailed Budget Table SMP COSME GFS 90 template'*)
  - CVs (short outlines) of core project team (*to be uploaded in the Submission System*)
  - list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years) (*template available in Part B*)
  - supporting document related to the operational capacity (*see section 7 Financial and operational capacity and exclusion – template available on [EISMEA website](#)*)
  - activity reports of last year: not applicable.

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). 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

Applications will only be considered eligible if their content corresponds wholly (or at least in part) to the topic description for which they are submitted.

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

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 persons<sup>32</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>33</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 for participation in the programme (*see list of participating countries above*) may participate in the call and can sign grants if the negotiations are

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<sup>32</sup> See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

<sup>33</sup> For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

concluded before grant signature (with retroactive effect, if provided in the agreement and covering the budget year of the call).

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>34</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).

Following the [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/2506](#), as of 16 December 2022, no legal commitments (including the grant agreement itself as well as subcontracts, purchase contracts, financial support to third parties etc.) can be signed with *Hungarian public interest trusts* established under [Hungarian Act IX of 2021](#) or *any entity they maintain*. Affected entities may continue to apply to calls for proposals. However, in case the Council measures are not lifted, such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, affiliated entities, subcontractors, recipients of financial support to third parties). In this case, co-applicants will be invited to remove or replace that entity and/or to change its status into associated partner. Tasks and budget may be redistributed accordingly.

 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 all following conditions:

- minimum five (5) and a maximum eight (8) independent entities from minimum three (3) different eligible countries
- minimum two (2) business support organisations (BSO)<sup>35</sup> from two (2) different eligible countries
- minimum two (2) destination management organisations (DMO)<sup>36</sup> from two (2) different eligible countries
- minimum one (1) training institution with training or research as principal function, such as an education institution, university, training centre or research centre.

### Eligible activities

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

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<sup>34</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>35</sup> Within the scope of this call for proposals, a **BSO** relates to a business incubator/accelerator, start-up, lab, innovation hub, university or educational institution, research centre and any other relevant organisation with a proven capacity and experience in running business support activities focused on SMEs.

<sup>36</sup> Within the scope of this call for proposals, a **DMO** is defined as a public or private stakeholder, an authority that manages a local, regional or national tourism strategy in one of the countries forming part of the consortium. DMO responsibilities may include, but are not limited to, taking responsibility for the local tourism offer, sustainable tourism planning/development, and the impact tourism has on the territory. The DMO typically also undertakes additional activities such as business analysis, marketing, strategic and policy implementation, inter-institutional and international relationships.

Projects should take into account the results of projects supported by other EU funding programmes. The complementarities must be described in the project proposals (Part B of the Application Form).

Projects must comply with EU policy interests and priorities (*such as environment, social, security, industrial and trade policy, etc.*).

Financial support to third parties is allowed under the conditions set out in *section 2 and 10* of this call for proposals.

The proposal must 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 (*see above*).

#### Duration

Projects should normally range between 30 months 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 1 700 000 and EUR 2 125 000 per project.

This does not however preclude the submission/selection of proposals requesting other amounts. The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

## **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*)
  - pre-financing 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:

1. profiles (qualifications and experience) of the staff responsible for managing and implementing the project, including:
  - CVs (short outlines) of the core project team
2. description of the consortium participants, including specifically:
  - **at least one training institution** with training or research as principal function, such as an education institution, university, training centre or research centre, experienced in training the trainers (with recognised training capacity and knowledge transfer), **having trained at least 50 trainers in the past 3 years,**
3. list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years; *template available in Part B*).

The applicants have to clearly indicate that operational capacity requirements are appropriately met. In this regard, it is **strongly recommended that consortia download and complete the model template concerning the 'Training institution'** from the [EISMEA website](#). Applicants shall convert the document in pdf and upload it under the 'Other Annexes' section of the submission tool.

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>37</sup>:

- bankruptcy, winding up, affairs administered by the courts, arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities or other similar procedures (including procedures for persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)
- in breach of social security or tax obligations (including if done by persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)
- guilty of grave professional misconduct<sup>38</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>39</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).

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<sup>37</sup> See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

<sup>38</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>39</sup> See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).


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:

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

- 1) Projects focusing on a theme that is not otherwise covered by higher ranked projects will be considered to have the highest priority.
- 2) The *ex aequo* proposals within the same topic will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the award criterion 'Relevance'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion '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 themes 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 will be 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:

1. **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 (**30 points**)

## 2. 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**)

**3. Impact:** ambition and expected long-term impact of results on EU tourism ecosystem, in particular tourism SMEs, on their business management processes and practices and on their increased resilience; SMEs ability to participate and drive the twin transition of EU tourism; appropriate dissemination strategy for ensuring sustainability and long-term impact; sustainability of results after EU funding ends (**10 points**).

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	16	30
Quality – Project design and implementation	16	30
Quality – Project team and cooperation arrangements	16	30
Impact	6	10
<b>Overall (pass) scores</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

Maximum points: 100 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 16/30, 16/30, 16/30 and 6/10 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 budget (i.e. up to the budget ceiling). 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. A retroactive starting date can be granted exceptionally for duly justified reasons — but never earlier than the proposal submission date.

Project duration: *see section 6 above*.

#### 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.

A list of compulsory deliverables is provided in *section 2-Deliverables (compulsory)*.

#### 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 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 rates fixed in the Grant Agreement (**100%** for the costs for providing financial support to third parties and **90%** for all other cost categories).

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 cost<sup>40</sup>: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost<sup>41</sup>: Yes
- equipment costs: depreciation
- other cost categories:
  - costs for financial support to third parties: allowed (under the conditions set out in *section 2*) with a maximum amount per collaborative project of EUR 25 000. In no circumstances can the amount of financial support per third party (participating in collaborative projects) exceed EUR 60 000.
  - indirect cost flat-rate: 7% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteers costs and exempted specific cost categories, if any)
  - VAT: non-deductible VAT is eligible (but please note that since 2013 VAT paid by beneficiaries that are public bodies acting as public authority is NOT eligible)
  - other:
    - in-kind contributions for free are allowed, but cost-neutral, i.e. they cannot be declared as cost
    - kick-off meeting: costs for kick-off meeting organised by the granting authority are eligible (travel costs for maximum 2 persons, return ticket to Brussels and accommodation for one night) only if the meeting takes place after the project starting date set out in the Grant Agreement; the starting date can be changed through an amendment, if needed
    - project websites: communication costs for presenting the project on the participants' websites or social media accounts are eligible; costs for *separate* project websites are not eligible
    - other ineligible costs: No.

***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 **50%** of the maximum grant amount; exceptionally less or no prefinancing). The prefinancing will be paid 30 days from entry into force/10

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<sup>40</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)7115).


<sup>41</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) as amended by Commission Decision C(2023) 4928 of 26.7.2023.

days before starting date/financial guarantee (if required) — whichever is the latest.

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

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

All payments will be made to the coordinator.

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

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

### Prefinancing guarantees

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

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

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

Prefinancing guarantees are normally requested from the coordinator, for the consortium. They must be provided during grant preparation, 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 (*art 23*).

### 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: 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 PPI Grants for Procurement: No
- 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 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 at the latest 3 working days before the call deadline (*see section 4*) to the following email address: [EISMEA-SMP-COSME-ENQUIRIES@ec.europa.eu](mailto:EISMEA-SMP-COSME-ENQUIRIES@ec.europa.eu).

Call: SMP-COSME-2023-TOURSME— Transitioning to a more sustainable and resilient ecosystem – empowering tourism SMEs

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).
- **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).
- **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 cumulation of funding/no double funding** — It is strictly prohibited to cumulate 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 be declared under two EU grants. If you would like to nonetheless benefit from different EU funding opportunities, projects must be designed as different actions, clearly delineated and separated for each grant (without overlaps).
- **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 Grant Agreement, art 6.2.E](#)).
- **Multiple proposals** — Applicants can NOT submit more than one proposal under this call. Multiple proposals will be rejected.  
Applicants 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](#).