Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)

Call for proposals

Joint Cluster Initiatives (EUROCLUSTERS) for Europe's recovery
(SMP-COSME-2021-CLUSTER)

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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 cluster's support under the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs part of the **Single Market Programme** (**SMP COSME)**.

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

- − Regulation 2018/1046 (EU Financial Regulation)
- − The basic act (SMP Regulation 2021/690[1]).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2021-2024 Work Programme[2] and will be managed by the **European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA)** ('Agency').

The call covers the following **topic**:

- − **SMP-COSME-2021-CLUSTER-01 — Joint Cluster Initiatives (EUROCLUSTERS) for Europe's recovery**

The term 'Euroclusters' used in this call for proposals refers to the consortia of cluster organisations or their EU networks teaming up with other types of organisations supporting green and digital transition and building social and economic resilience[3].

The call is divided into 15 strands (see Section 2 below). One overall Open Strand covering value chains across industrial ecosystems and fourteen specific strands covering critical value chains within each of the industrial ecosystems as defined in the updated EU Industrial Strategy[4].

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)

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[1] 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).

[2] Commission Implementing Decision C(2021) 3046 final of 6.5.2021 concerning the adoption of the work programme for 2021 and the financing decision for the implementation of the Single Market Programme, subject to an amendment.

[3] For example, members of the Enterprise Europe Network or Digital Innovation Hubs.

[4] COM (2021) 350 final.

- evaluation and award procedure (section 8)

- award criteria (section 9)

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

- how to submit an application (section 11)

- the Online Manual outlines the:

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

  - recommendations for the preparation of the application

- the AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement contains:

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

You are also encouraged to visit the EISMEA and ECCP website to consult the list of projects funded previously.

1. Background

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis

The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated how deeply interlinked our European economies are: the importance of connections across European value chains and their dependence on a strong and open Single Market as well as on external supply sources.

European companies and especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) faced unexpected disruptions in their supply chains, for which many were totally unprepared. They were forced to adopt new processes and technologies to meet new customer expectations, and to gain or improve skills to cope with the new business circumstances. At a wider economic level, the EU needed to put in place massive production of innovative products such as COVID-19 vaccines. Cooperation between companies and networks of companies to address these problems proved crucial.

The updated EU Industrial Strategy[5]

It is crucial that the EU draws the lessons from the crisis for its overall industrial approach and takes a path that will allow its companies of all sizes to recover fully from the crisis, be more resilient to future shocks or crises and become sustainably and globally competitive.

In May 2021, the Commission therefore adopted an updated EU Industrial Strategy, building on the March 2020 industrial strategy and SME Strategy. It draws three key lessons from the crisis:

1. the essential need to uphold the Single Market and strengthen its resistance to disruption;

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[5]   https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-industrial-strategy_en#documents

2. the need to analyse and address strategic dependencies, both technological and industrial and enhance the EU's open strategic autonomy; and

3. the importance of the green and digital transition for companies.

It sets out a number of targeted measures to address these. At the heart of its approach is ensuring that our companies and markets are more **resilient**: not only able to withstand and cope with challenges but also to undergo transitions in a sustainable manner.[6]

As part of the EU's renewed industrial approach, there is a greater focus on industrial ecosystems, capturing the complex set of interlinkages and interdependencies among sectors and firms spreading across countries in the Single Market. Such ecosystems allow for a bottom-up approach that takes account of specificities of business models, the high percentage of vulnerable players such as SMEs.

The European Commission services have identified 14 industrial ecosystems: Tourism, Mobility-Transport-Automotive, Aerospace & Defense, Construction, Agri-food, Energy Intensive Industries, Textile, Creative & Cultural Industries, Digital, Renewable Energy, Electronics, Retail, Proximity & Social Economy, and Health. These industrial ecosystems have a marked pan-European nature, but their composition is very heterogeneous in terms of sectoral composition, size and scope. Industrial activities represent a significant share of course, but services play a fundamental role. Clusters are a very important part in each of these industrial ecosystems.

The role of clusters

Clusters are a significant part of the European industrial landscape[7]. They are dynamic geographic concentrations of interconnected firms and related economic entities that have reached a sufficient scale to develop specialised expertise, services, resources, suppliers and skills[8]. They include business companies of different size, but also other essential entities of an industrial ecosystem such as research and knowledge institutions, science and technology parks, talents and financial service providers, non-profit organisations, related public bodies.

Clusters connect all industrial players active in a specific industrial ecosystem, covering critical value chains in their or across ecosystems, with a broad variety of actors from smallest start-ups in social economy to the largest companies in traditional industries, from basic research in academia to commercial uptake of research, from input providers to users. They are represented by a balanced mix of cluster organisations[9] at different development stages i.e. potential, emerging, established or declining from more developed, transitional and less developed EU regions which operate across borders, inside and outside the EU.

Clusters have a positive impact on economies. The European Panorama of Clusters and Industrial Change[10] and SME barometer[11] provide evidence that companies within industrial groupings are more innovative than those operating alone, create more and better jobs, conduct more market research, register more international patents and

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[6] For more information please see 2020 Strategic Foresight Report:
https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/strategic-planning/strategic-foresight/2020-strategic-foresight-report_en.
[7] https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/policy/cluster_en.
[8] See Cluster Definitions at the European Cluster Collaboration Platform:
https://clustercollaboration.eu/cluster-definitions.
[9] This could include also associations of cluster organisations.
[10] https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/sites/default/files/news_attachment/european_panorama_2020.pdf
[11] https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/flash/surveyky/2244.

export more than other companies. Clusters are bridge-builders, change agents and multipliers. Cluster members employ over 50 million people. They account for almost every fourth job in Europe (61.8 million jobs or 23.4% of total employment) and about half of the jobs in exporting industries (50.3%)[12]. During the crisis, they were able to drive change and make European value chains more resilient.

Clusters could therefore play a significant role in the economic recovery and longer term economic success: accelerating the twin green and digital transition and building resilience[13].

Joint Cluster Initiatives/Euroclusters

Over the last years, the European Commission has worked with cluster organisations and their members to promote the development of world-class clusters with competitive industrial value chains that cut across sectors and regions.

As part of this, under the 2014-20 Programme for the Competitiveness of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME) and under Horizon 2020, the European Commission promoted European cluster partnerships with the involvement of 530 different organisations, of which at least 340 were cluster organisations from the over 1,000 registered at the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP)[14].

These European cluster partnerships encouraged clusters to intensify collaboration across EU regions and covered a wider range of industrial sectors and thematic orientations with a focus on supporting innovation, internationalisation, smart specialisation investments and capacity building. These projects were funded under Horizon2020 with the 'Cluster facilitated projects for new industrial value chains' (INNOSUP-1) and under COSME with the European Strategic Cluster Partnerships – for Going international (ESCP-4i), for Smart Specialisation Investments (ESCP-S3) and Cluster Excellence (ESCP-4x)[15].

The European Commission would now like to build on this positive experience by establishing a number of **Joint Cluster Initiatives called 'Euroclusters'**: partnerships of cluster organisations which team up with other types of organisations.

The aim is to develop and implement supporting measures for companies in and beyond their industrial ecosystem, and by doing this, create and reinforce vital collaboration networks at EU-level with a view to improve the resilience of the European industrial ecosystems, and boost their green and digital transformation.

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

2.1   General Objective

To help in the implementation of the updated industrial strategy, the European Commission will launch around 30 cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary and trans-European strategic Joint Cluster Initiatives to be called '*Euroclusters*'.

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[12] 2020 edition of the *European Panorama of Clusters and Industrial Change,* European Observatory for Clusters and Industrial Change
https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/sites/default/files/news_attachment/european_panorama_2020.pdf.
[13] European Expert Group on Clusters - Recommendation Report.pdf (clustercollaboration.eu).
[14] www.clustercollaboration.eu.
[15] https://clustercollaboration.eu/eu-cluster-partnerships.

The Euroclusters will contribute to the implementation of the European Commission's New Industrial Strategy for Europe[16] as well as its updated Strategy that was published in May 2021[17] and the SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe[13] adopted in March 2020 by building resilience and accelerating transition to green and digital economy.

Euroclusters should put forward proposals for how to initiate, develop and maintain an EU-level long-term strategic partnership between companies of different kinds and sizes (with an emphasis on SMEs), and other organisations such as research and knowledge institutions, science and technology parks, business support organisations, financial service providers, non-profit organisations and related public bodies across different EU Member States and COSME participating countries, bringing together a critical mass of firms and societies in geographical and functional proximity, which are economically and socially interdependent.

They will be expected to demonstrate how they will work together effectively with other support actors and networks such as the European Cluster Collaboration Platform, Enterprise Europe Network, and European Digital Innovation Hubs.

Euroclusters must also support SMEs (please refer to sections 2.5 and 6 for more details) and they will be expected to demonstrate how they will organise such support in line with the overall Eurocluster long-term strategy.

2.2   Themes and priorities

Proposals must be focused on **only one of the 15 strands of the call** listed here below:

> ➢ **Open Strand**: this strand invites proposals focused on cross fertilisation of various industrial ecosystems with no specific focus on one industrial ecosystem.

> ➢ **14 Industrial Ecosystem Strands**:

- Tourism,
- Mobility-Transport-Automotive,
- Aerospace & Defence,
- Construction,
- Agri-food,
- Energy Intensive Industries,
- Textile,
- Creative & Cultural Industries,
- Digital,
- Renewable Energy,
- Electronics,
- Retail,
- Proximity & Social Economy, and
- Health.

Euroclusters must indicate for which of the 14 industrial ecosystems strands or open strand they apply in the *Annex 5 to Part B - Eligibility checklist*. This Annex 5 can

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[16] COM(2020) 102 final.
[17] COM(2021) 350 final.

be downloaded from EISMEA's page here and will need to be uploaded together (as a single document) with the technical annex of the proposal entitled **Application Form Part B (SMP COSME)** document. Please check carefully Section 6 'Eligibility' of this call for proposals.

2.3 Specific objectives

Proposals must aim at achieving **all of the following specific objectives**, with the focus on at least one leading objective:

1. **Network** for resilience to improve the resilience of the EU industrial ecosystems by developing value chains interlinkages in the EU Single Market;

2. **Innovate** for strategic autonomy to build capacity in the most critical supplies and technologies of their ecosystems;

3. **Adopt processes and technologies** to reinforce transformation into a greener and more digital economy;

4. **Train** to foster up- and re-skilling of the workforce whilst attracting talents;

5. **Go international** to boost access to global supply and value chains.

More in details:

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1. Network for resilience to improve the resilience of the EU industrial ecosystems by developing value chains interlinkages in the EU Single Market.

The aim is to improve the value chains' ability to cope with challenges and undergo transitions in a sustainable manner through the integration of different actors, competences and solutions.

Euroclusters can contribute to building resilience by mobilising different actors who have complementary assets and talents. Euroclusters should create a strong result-oriented network able to ensure among others: the diversification of production inputs in different EU Member States; an increase in the customer base of companies within the ecosystem; the pooling of supply or demand; the mobilisation of joint investments in critical innovation and production facilities; the development of alternative EU technologies; the implementation of measures to increase environmental circularity; the supply of inputs or their substitutes; the introduction of new technologies, products or services; collaboration to reach international markets.

Preparedness/business continuity plans developed by the Euroclusters will ensure agile and adequate reactions in case of emergency, crises or other reasons for supply chain disruptions. In particular, and working together with European support networks for SMEs, Euroclusters should help SMEs put in place preparedness/business continuity plans. They should build linkages between SMEs and help them generate, take up and better capitalise on all forms of knowledge, creativity, craftsmanship and innovation.

Euroclusters should cooperate effectively with the reinforced action on resilience being carried out by the ECCP and EEN under the updated industrial strategy.

2. Innovate for strategic autonomy to build capacity in the most critical supplies and technologies of their ecosystems.

The aim is to reduce the dependency of companies in the ecosystem on critical inputs and critical technologies through a development of novel ideas, substitutes, innovative products or services.

Innovation is central to cope with disruptions in supply or to accelerate the uptake of green and digital technologies. Euroclusters should identify innovation potential in their value chains. They should undertake innovation activities i.e. all developmental, financial and commercial activities undertaken by a firm that are intended to result in an innovation for the firm.

Euroclusters should support companies, in particular SMEs, in a business innovation i.e. introducing on the market or bringing into use by the companies a new or improved product or business process (or combination thereof) that differs significantly from the firm's previous products or business processes and that contributes to the strategic autonomy of the EU industrial ecosystems as well as that of supported companies.

Euroclusters should look to cooperate effectively with local and other actors in this area which design or implement projects under the Horizon Europe or the national and regional smart specialisation strategies under the Cohesion policy funding.

3. Adopt processes and technologies to reinforce transformation into a greener and more digital economy.

The aim is to adopt process and technologies that improve the value chains' efficiency in the use of resources, open markets for green technologies and services and uptake of digital solutions.

To accelerate the green transition, the Euroclusters shall specifically contribute to improve resource efficiency, support green entrepreneurship and facilitate market access for SMEs offering green products and services.

The digital transition requires the uptake of solutions by virtually all businesses. The transformation generates new competitive fields as it brings in new opportunities and new ways to create value. Therefore, Euroclusters need to support their members in the uptake of digital solutions, adopting digital instruments and developing a digital component in their business models.

The objective of the Euroclusters will be to prepare and help businesses to adopt advanced technologies, e.g. Internet of Things (IoT), photonics, nanotechnologies, artificial intelligence. Euroclusters should foster the establishment of strategic collaboration between tech-savvy companies and traditional businesses, with particular attention to SMEs, focusing on the benefits of adopting advanced technologies.

In particular, the Euroclusters shall help build a portfolio of projects among traditional and tech-savvy companies to promote companies' collaboration and technology adoption within and across specific industrial ecosystems. Actions under this objective will not be to fund the purchase and installation of advanced technologies, but to raise awareness on existing solutions and help accelerate their uptake.

In these areas, it will be essential that they cooperate effectively with other support providers and networks and avoid unnecessary duplication.

4. Train to foster up- and re-skilling of the workforce whilst attracting talents.

The aim is to improve the cluster manager's skills and hence that of clusters' business support services in turn helping them to improve the skills of companies within the cluster.

Capacity building in skills of clusters and their members

The aim is to foster clusters' skills capacity-building and to promote cross-cluster learning in order to help cluster managers, cluster organisations and their members to acquire the necessary skills and take actions to explore and take up new solutions. This shall address trainings along the value chain which will enhance cluster managers' skills, develop and implement a comprehensive portfolio of new services for companies, organise twinning and learning activities and provide adequate support for the possible implementation of "ClusterXchange" to foster cross-cluster learning.

Reskilling and upskilling of the workforce

Partners of the Euroclusters are expected to share their experience in analysing, designing and delivering a common strategy and/or implementation roadmap on skills for the clusters. The Eurocluster is encouraged to jointly develop portfolio of services and implement collaborative actions to build up their training infrastructures, knowledge and capacities to facilitate the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce, to enhance the skills related services that they could provide to their members, to engage in regional skills ecosystems and in European and national level initiatives, and to cooperate with vocational training organisations.

Again, it will be important that they cooperate effectively with other actors and support networks on this objective.

5. Go international to boost access to global supply and value chains.

The aim is to reach collaboration agreements with third countries leading to market access for EU companies, to intensify cluster and business network cooperation across European countries and across sectorial boundaries and to support the establishment of the Euroclusters to lead international cluster cooperation in fields of strategic interest towards third countries beyond the European Union.

Euroclusters are invited to develop and implement a joint internationalisation strategy, support SME internationalisation towards third countries beyond Europe, and sign collaboration agreements with entities in third countries.

They are expected to develop a joint 'European' strategic vision with a global perspective and common goals towards specific third markets and explore ways of rebuilding and reconnecting international supply and value chains, reshaping their global possibilities to a new reality and taking rational positions in risk exposure.

Euroclusters shall strive to successfully support the internationalisation of their SME members towards specific third countries, and/or strengthen their resilience in global value chains that they are already active in, and/or attracting strategic foreign direct investment and cooperation partners and/or securing critical imports, knowledge and technologies with a view to support growth, jobs and investment in Europe.

In addition, the Euroclusters are expected to demonstrate swift adaptability to future developments in international trade and coherence of their strategic priorities with EU strategies, notably as regards trade policy. The Euroclusters should specifically play a role in helping SMEs benefit from the EU's existing and future free trade agreements, including through cooperation with other relevant support providers and networks both within the EU and beyond.

2.4   Actions that can be funded

The actions foreseen in this call for proposals will focus on the achievement of the specific objectives as described above.

Below we have listed a **mandatory action** for each objective (including two for skills), together with other **potential actions**. We have also listed a specific **mandatory action on communication**.

Euroclusters applying to this call are expected to address all five specific objectives and to deliver on all seven mandatory actions as well as several potential actions. Proposals should set out a coherent and well balanced mix of the mandatory and potential actions set out below.

Euroclusters can however place a specific focus on one or more of the mandatory actions, well justifying the choice made, explaining its rationale and the link between the proposed focus and the identified needs.

It is important that Euroclusters present relevant background information that explains how they intend to successfully implement the action/s.

These actions should lead to **specific deliverables** recorded with performance indicators – see section 2.6 below.

Proposals should demonstrate how the partnerships will work together effectively with other support actors and networks such as the European Cluster Collaboration Platform, Enterprise Europe Network, and European Digital Innovation Hubs to increase their impact for companies.

More details are outlined below:

> **1. Network** for resilience to improve the resilience of the EU industrial ecosystems by developing value chains interlinkages in the EU Single Market

Mandatory action 1:

Design and build new collaboration models between European cluster organisations and other key actors facilitating value chain interlinkages along and across different industrial ecosystems with a view of having resilience preparedness/business continuity plans.

Potential actions:

- establish connections among value chain actors in the form of contracts, agreements, platforms, forum etc.;

- create a mapping of supply and value chains that identifies strategic gaps, bottlenecks, disruptions, dependencies and opportunities for collaboration;

- provide access to market information to supported SMEs;

- establish marketing channel strategy (involves long-term attention to end-users' demands for products and services the value chain can offer);

- prepare resilience-related investment projects with a mix of private and public funding including business plan and market analysis;

- set up collaboration and networking activities for SMEs including matchmaking events aimed at improving the innovation potential of SMEs and facilitating value chain interlinkages along and across different industrial ecosystems;

- provide an in-depth review on the value chains in the industrial ecosystems providing further insights on the origin of strategic dependencies and their impact;

- carry out a "bottom-up" analysis based on various available data (e.g. trade, technological, market) to identify vulnerable products/services in the industrial ecosystem's EU dependency of critical inputs, technologies and infrastructure of the value chain;

- identify reasons for dependency of critical inputs, technologies or infrastructure of the value chain for the proposal in subject;

- align actions with the national/regional smart specialisation strategies and with the National Recovery Plans for greater impact;

2. Innovate for strategic autonomy to build capacity in the most critical supplies and technologies of their ecosystems

Mandatory action 2:

Identify product innovations[18] to reduce dependency on critical inputs and technologies in the Euroclusters' value chains with a view to introducing new-to-firm products or services.

Potential actions:

- carry out an analysis of the potential diversification or substitution of production inputs, technologies or infrastructure on different EU territories;

- scouting for input substitutes, alternative technologies, infrastructure providers;

- organize joint investments in critical innovation and production facilities and/or support sharing complementary and tailored infrastructure, suppliers and technologies; develop an action plan for the implementation of circularity measures across the ecosystem/s;

- help bring SMEs with common resilience, green or digital transformation challenges together to enable them to identify and implement the most competitive solutions;

- create a network of coordinated partners in quadruple helix (research, business, civil society, public bodies) with a view to generate innovation investments which address EU strategic autonomy in specific products, inputs, technologies and infrastructures;

- intensify collaboration in innovation activities where there is a high risk of short term disruption or long-term vulnerability in the value chain with high potential for further diversification and substitution.

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[18] OECD/Eurostat (2018), *Oslo Manual 2018: Guidelines for Collecting, Reporting and Using Data on Innovation, 4th Edition*, The Measurement of Scientific, Technological and Innovation Activities, OECD Publishing, Paris/Eurostat, Luxembourg, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264304604-en, p.70.

> **3. Adopt processes and technologies** to reinforce transformation into a greener and more digital economy

Mandatory action 3:

Foster the implementation of business process innovations tied to the adoption of technologies that help SMEs meet requirements for their successful green and digital transitions.

Potential actions:

- provide technical assistance to clusters to tackle identified needs within a specific industrial ecosystem or across them and find joint solutions. As an example, technical assistance may focus on developing resilient business models; tapping into sustainable investments; greening business processes; developing environmentally friendly products and services; optimising water and energy consumption; maximising energy efficiency; improving waste management; reducing waste; lowering carbon footprint; adopting circular economy solutions for materials; reducing harmful emissions and/or advancing sustainable innovation;

- support SMEs on their digital transition, e.g. through access to IT specialists who help small businesses identify what are the most suitable technologies and infrastructures they need;

- connect clusters and companies to EU Digital Innovation Hubs and other relevant support networks;

- develop and increase the uptake of advanced technologies by SME members of clusters;

- facilitate uptake of new products by pooling supply or demand; identify together with the cluster members specific opportunities to ensure the green transition such as improving resource efficiency, sustainable practices and a commitment to adaptation;

- identify and exchange best practices on boosting the resilience, green and digital transformation of SMEs;

- offer green tech services to SME members of the cluster;

- offer support based on a clear outline for added value and business case prepared by the members of clusters for obtaining the support (for example, step up towards a resource efficiency strategy, demonstrate specific need for resource efficiency and commitment to adaptation);

- develop and implement support measures for digital transformation, digital tools, digital training, digital expertise;

- promote among industry the use of digital strategic foresight and trend monitoring tools;

- support clusters to upgrade their business services provision in the field of digitalisation;

- work with clusters on the development of 5G connection and broadband connectivity and other IT infrastructure which are necessary for the digital transformation;

- connect to and develop business services that help companies to progress in the IT transition and in IT based smart manufacturing;

- map out any potential digital competencies or innovation background of clusters;

- provide for awareness raising on digital transformation opportunities, the development of a digital culture and staff training on digital competencies, vouchers for digitalisation, demonstration projects, provide "non-commercial" information on potential technologies to be used (e.g. cloud services, cybersecurity, etc.);

- initiate new and reinforce existing Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for boosting digital and advanced technologies value chains and technological platforms.

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4. Train to foster up- and re-skilling of the workforce whilst attracting talents

4a. Capacity building of clusters and their members

Mandatory action 4a:

Build up the cluster managers' skills to offer better services for up / re-skilling and attracting talents.

Potential actions:

- develop and implement a comprehensive portfolio of services for cluster members with regards to up and re-skilling as well as the attraction of talents in SME members;

- conduct training for cluster managers on contingency planning/network analysis;

- foster the involvement of clusters in the Pact for Skills initiatives carried out in the different Member States/Regions;

- match and develop skills and talents.

4b. Reskilling and upskilling of the workforce

Mandatory action 4b:

Establish joint services for SMEs (e.g. trainings, courses, recruitment, job facilitation, etc.) for up / reskilling the workforce and talent management.

Potential actions:

- develop strategies and actions to engage in regional skills ecosystems and establish cooperation with educational (universities, VET, lifelong learning) and research institutions to foster the development of skills related services;

- engage in joint participation in actions under the EU Pact for Skills;

- establish 'train-the–trainer' programme in clusters to train SMEs on technology uptake, digitalisation, and sustainable business models;

- develop training programmes for cluster members on digitalization and digital skills.

5. Go international to boost access to global supply and value chains

Mandatory action 5:

Establish services that support international trade, investment and partnering opportunities for European SMEs to facilitate the signature of cooperation agreements between European entities (intermediaries and/or businesses) and entities in third countries.

Potential actions:

- develop a joint internationalisation strategy for the partnership, defining a joint European strategic vision with a global perspective and common goals and actions towards specific third markets as well as an implementation roadmap;

- sign business agreements[19] and develop joint collaborative agreements[20] between the partnership's SME members or business members and other relevant partners from third countries (i.e. from non-SMP COSME pillar countries[21]), leading to increase either exports, investment opportunities and international ventures generating employment for European businesses; conduct intelligence gathering (e.g. market analysis of global demand; study about competing players, relative positioning, market trends and opportunities, and defining the added value of the Partnership's combined competencies in relation to this);

- identify the right partners in third countries, notably through tailored fact-finding missions and joining relevant networks;

- boosting internationalisation of SMEs by facilitating access and a new strategic positioning in global value chains and by building a recognisable brand to attract talents and investments worldwide;

- provide technical assistance or other forms of support to SME members to implement and make the business agreements and joint collaborative projects commercially viable;

- prepare tailored identity shaping and joint promotional activities such as the development of a joint communication/marketing and branding strategy to promote business cooperation as well as attract talents and investments worldwide;

- collaborate with other local, regional, national and European support providers on matchmaking and other efforts.

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[19] A **business agreement** is a negotiated and usually legally enforceable understanding between two or more parties. It typically documents the give-and-take of a negotiated settlement. For the purpose of this Call, these agreements are, in principle, between SMEs in COSME countries and international SMEs in third countries, as a result of the ESCP internationalisation activities during the lifetime of the COSME project.

[20] A joint **cooperation agreement** is a roadmap of projects and activities where two or more parties work together towards a jointly established goal. For the purpose of this Call, a cooperation agreement can take the format of a Memorandum of Understanding, a contract, etc., which may include for example, inter alia, the organisation of joint match-making events; preparation of joint studies, analyses and surveys; preparation of a joint branding and marketing strategy, etc. For the purpose of this Call, cooperation projects are between the Euroclusters (including their member SMEs) and international cluster or intermediary organisations, as a result of the Euroclusters internationalisation activities during the lifetime of Joint Cluster Initiative.

[21] SMP COSME pillar countries can be found here: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/smp/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_smp_en.pdf.

6. Communication

Mandatory action 6:

Communicate effectively about the work and results of the Eurocluster.

Euroclusters must demonstrate how they will achieve the highest visibility of the Eurocluster' activities and achievements, with particular attention to their industrial ecosystem/s. In particular, proposals must elaborate on:

• How to achieve the key communication objectives of the Eurocluster;

• Target audience for communication;

• The communication channels and tools to be used and how the Eurocluster will exploit the visibility opportunities offered by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform;

• How to measure the results of the communication activities and define success.

Euroclusters must appoint a communications correspondent.

The Euroclusters will make a strategic use of marketing tools[22], including social media and speaking at events, to inform about their work and share results. Euroclusters will create a clear value proposition to ensure an EU-wide reach out to SMEs, researchers and potential investors.

The Euroclusters must use a common "look and feel" (to be provided by EISMEA to awarded applicants) in order to ensure maximum visibility to the initiative and enhance single project's visibility and recognition. Euroclusters must develop their individual logos and visual identities using this common "look and feel". The created visual identity must be declined into all communication materials needed (e.g. printed documents, websites, social media channels, promotional materials, events, emails, newsletters and any other communication means produced by the Euroclusters).

All individual partners of the Eurocluster must feature the Eurocluster in their websites.

Euroclusters consortia must fill in their profile on the European Cluster Collaboration Platform within 15 days following the signature of the Grant Agreement. The profile must be 100% completed within 1 month following the signature of the contract.

Euroclusters will be able to exchange lessons learnt and experiences through meetings and the chat of the Euroclusters Forum managed by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform.

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[22] Several Horizon 2020 Innosup-1 'cluster facilitated projects' projects involved 'ambassador clusters' that were not part of the actual consortium but rather helped with the communication in the non-consortia Member States.

2.5   Support to third parties (SMEs)

At least 75% of the grant must be directed to SMEs to finance services in support of their greater resilience and green and digital transformation, e.g. vouchers for support services, or free access and support to use testing facilities directly to SMEs.

IMPORTANT: The support to third parties cannot be provided through services offered by the consortium directly.

The support to third parties could be channelled through a combination of tools such as: high added-value support services (e.g. IPR, financial engineering); innovation vouchers; lump sums; prizes; boot camps; customized trainings; coaching; mentoring; investor pitching events; matchmaking; hackathons; innovation clubs; peer-to-peer evaluation by entrepreneurs; crowdfunding; dedicated business mentors with public and private capital expertise; organising online training courses, webinars, virtual matchmaking platforms and marketplaces; living labs; technology showcase; internationalisation; trade fairs; meet-the-buyer fairs; entrepreneurial/customer awareness campaigns; market replication; soft landing schemes; other customized support for specific challenges; proof of concept; validation; prototyping; first client search; placement of post-graduate students; in-service training support; innovation management support.

Proposals must clearly detail:

- the mix of proposed support,

- the objectives,

- conditions for participation,

- the results to be obtained, and

- the reasons why financial support to third parties is needed and how it will be managed.

In case of a direct financial support to third parties, Euroclusters must award it on the basis of an open call fulfilling the conditions described in section 6 below.

Moreover, the proposal must include at least the following elements:

- a fixed and exhaustive list of the different types of activities for which a third party may receive financial support,

- the definition of the persons or categories of persons which may receive financial support,

- the criteria for awarding financial support,

- the criteria for calculating the exact amount of the financial support,

- the maximum amount to be granted to each third party (may not exceed EUR 60 000 for each third party unless it is necessary to achieve the objectives of the action) and the criteria for determining it.

Further conditions regarding the above-listed elements or other elements may be laid down in the calls beneficiaries must publish in order to award the financial support. The beneficiary of the EU grant must ensure that the recipients of the financial support allow the Agency, the Commission, the European Anti-fraud Office (OLAF)

and the Court of Auditors to exercise their powers of control on documents, information, even stored on electronic media, or on the final recipient's premises.

2.6   Compulsory reporting requirements

The proposal must include all of the following compulsory deliverables.

- Two **mid-term technical reports and presentations on the progress implementation of actions** (including deliverables and key performance indicators) undertaken by beneficiaries and support directed to SMEs and lessons learned, at the end of the first and second year of implementation (in month 10 and month 28);

- **Mandatory deliverables as per section 2.4 above:**

1. Resilience preparedness/business continuity plans[23] in the industrial ecosystem/s;

2. New-to-firm products and/or services[24] in the industrial ecosystem/s;

3. Business process innovations[25] adopted in the industrial ecosystem/s;

4a. Training for cluster managers[26];

4b. Developed portfolio of services regarding reskilling and upskilling offered by cluster organisations to SMEs; [27]

5. Services portfolio to implement internationalisation actions[28];

6. Communication outreach[29].

In addition to the above, the proposal must include also all deliverables stemming from the potential actions chosen.

The deliverables (mandatory and non-mandatory) must appear in the Deliverables table of the Application Form.

Key Performance Indicators

Proposals must measure the following overarching indicators from the Single Market Programme[30]:

1. Number of SMEs, clusters and business network organisations, and business support organisations receiving support from the programme, in particular for internationalisation, digitalisation and sustainability

2. Number of companies supported having concluded business partnerships

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[23] Examples: Preparedness (europa.eu).

[24] OECD/Eurostat (2018), *Oslo Manual 2018: Guidelines for Collecting, Reporting and Using Data on Innovation, 4th Edition*, The Measurement of Scientific, Technological and Innovation Activities, OECD Publishing, Paris/Eurostat, Luxembourg, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264304604-en, p.70.

[25] OECD/Eurostat (2018), *Oslo Manual 2018: Guidelines for Collecting, Reporting and Using Data on Innovation, 4th Edition*, The Measurement of Scientific, Technological and Innovation Activities, OECD Publishing, Paris/Eurostat, Luxembourg, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264304604-en, p.72.

[26] Skills | European Cluster Collaboration Platform.

[27] idem

[28] https://clustercollaboration.eu/eu-cluster-partnerships/escp-4i/first-generation/achievements and https://clustercollaboration.eu/eu-cluster-partnerships/escp-4i/second-generation/achievements

[29] IoT4Industry wins 2020 "European cluster partnership of the year" | European Cluster Collaboration Platform.

[30] See Annex IV of the Regulation establishing the Single Market Programme.

3. Number of entrepreneurs benefitting from mentoring and mobility schemes, including young, new and female entrepreneurs, as well as other specific target groups

In addition to the above, Euroclusters must monitor the results of their actions and elaborate a comprehensive set of indicators, benchmarks and targets to do so (that include the 3 above but encompasses them). Indicators and targets included in the proposal must be coherent with the proposed mix of actions and the key focus of each Eurocluster.

However, **all proposals must monitor as a minimum the following Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**:

1. Number of resilience preparedness/business continuity plans

2. Number of new-to-firm products/services identified

3. Number of SMEs supported which undertook business process innovation tied to technological adoption leading to higher sustainability and digitalisation

4.a. Number of employees in cluster organisations which received trainings

4.b. Number of SMEs investing in skill development of their employees in the scope of the project 5a. Number of collaboration agreements signed with entities in third countries.

5b. Number of SMEs that benefited from internationalisation services

6a. Number of Social Media followers (per Social Media channel used)6b. Number of SMEs directly supported coming from regions and countries different from those of individual Euroclusters' partners.

The set of proposed indicators, including the above listed compulsory KPIs, must be included in the Application Form (Section 3.1.Impact and Ambition).

It is strongly suggested to propose **output indicators** per action that are easily measurable.

A non-exhaustive list of additional optional indicators per objective can be found here below:

> 1. **Network** for resilience to improve the resilience of the EU industrial ecosystems by developing value chains interlinkages in the EU Single Market:

- number of resilience preparedness/business continuity plans in the industrial ecosystem/s (*compulsory*);

- number of business and non-business actors linked to existing or new value chain;

- number of partnerships/agreements (contract farming/subcontracting, other schemes) that formalise relationships between producers and other value chain actors (input suppliers, processors, buyers);

- volume of production/services under agreements;

- number of and type of additional market channels established (virtual platform, marketplace, fair trade, etc.);

- number of SMEs accessing market information;

- number of policy forums among value chain actors held to identify and address constraints at micro and macro level (regulatory framework, trade policy etc.);

- number of policy papers addressing key value chain constraints submitted to regional, national and EU authorities.

2. Innovate for strategic autonomy to build capacity in the most critical supplies and technologies of their ecosystems:

- number of new-to-firm products/services identified(*compulsory*);

- number of businesses/SMEs directly benefitting from new value chains interlinkages developed by the Partnership;

- number of and type of SMEs new innovation projects and new collaboration partnerships developed by businesses/SMEs directly benefitting from the action;

- number of and type of new or significantly improved products (goods and/or services), processes, new marketing methods, or new organisational methods, or eco-innovative and resource-efficient solutions developed by businesses/SMEs directly benefitting from the action;

- number of and type of alternative technologies or suppliers identified in the value chain to increase diversification of supply sources;

- number of SMEs networked to support each other in supply chain disruption;

- the contingency plan signed by consortia partners and SMEs supported.

3. Adopt processes and technologies to reinforce transformation into a greener and more digital economy:

- number of SMEs supported which undertook business process innovation tied to technological adoption leading to higher sustainability and digitalisation (*compulsory*);

- number of projects based on specific needs selected for technical assistance;

- number of SMEs that received the knowledge/training in each clusters;

- added value/total investment generated also as a percentage compared to this Action's budget;

- quantitative reduction of GHG emission. International standards of measurements have to be applied;

- quantitative reduction in the use of resources: energy, water, materials;

- number of green products and services commercialised under legally binding contracts;

- number of support projects launched that foster the digital transition among clusters and their members, especially SMEs;

- number of businesses/SMEs directly benefitted from support services offered through the project;

- expected increase in the uptake of digital solutions, progress in digitalisation, number of digital solutions developed and brought to the market.

> **4. Train** to foster up- and re-skilling of the workforce whilst attracting talents:

- number of employees in cluster organisations which received trainings (*compulsory*);

- number of SMEs investing in skill development of their employees in the scope of the project (*compulsory*);

- number of Pact for Skills including a clear reference and role to clusters with regards to up and re-skilling;

- number of training plans supported for clusters and their managers/staff;

- number of clusters applying for a cluster Excellence management label and/or upgrade;

- in the case consortia are running clusterXchange, a minimum of 50 short-term exchanges has to be supported per the Eurocluster;

- in the case consortia are running clusterXchange, at least 50% of those exchanges should involve SMEs (either as Host or Visiting Organisation);

- number of businesses/SMEs directly benefitted from joint skills related services offered through the project;

- number of workers that received training, upskilling and reskilling as a result of the joint activities of the project.

> **5. Go international** to boost access to global supply and value chains:

- number of collaboration agreements signed with entities in third countries (*compulsory*);
- number of SMEs that benefited from internationalisation services (*compulsory*);

- number of SMEs having directly benefited from the supported actions resulting in cooperation projects with third countries;

- number of (a) business agreements (or equivalent formal cooperation documents) (b) joint collaborative projects and (c) business contracts signed between the Partnership SME members and business and other relevant stakeholders from third countries (i.e. from non-COSME countries), leading to increase exports, investment opportunities and international ventures generating employment for European businesses;

- expected impact of business agreements and joint collaborative projects supported through this action in terms of increased exports, increased jobs in Europe, new talents attracted, critical imports secured and direct foreign investments.

2.7 Recap table: Mandatory actions, deliverables and indicators

The table below summarises the key objectives of this call for proposals, the compulsory actions, deliverables and indicators that proposals must elaborate on as a minimum.

Compulsory overarching indicators from the Single Market Programme:

1. number of SMEs, clusters and business network organisations, and business support organisations receiving support from the programme, in particular for internationalisation, digitalisation and sustainability

2.   number of companies supported having concluded business partnerships
3.   number of entrepreneurs benefitting from mentoring and mobility schemes, including young, new and female entrepreneurs, as well as other specific target groups

Specific Objectives	Mandatory Actions	Mandatory Deliverables	Mandatory Indicators
1. Network for resilience: Improve the resilience of the EU industrial ecosystems by developing value chains interlinkages in the EU Single Market	1. Design and build **new collaboration models** between European cluster organisations and other key actors facilitating value chain interlinkages along and across different industrial ecosystems with a view of having resilience preparedness/ business continuity plans.	1. **Resilience preparedness/business continuity plans** in the industrial ecosystem/s.	1. Number of resilience preparedness/business continuity plans
2. Innovate for strategic autonomy: To build capacity in the most critical supplies and technologies of their ecosystems	2. Identify **product innovations** to reduce dependency on critical inputs and technologies in the Euroclusters' value chains with a view to introduce new-to-firm products or services	2. **New-to-firm products or services** in the industrial ecosystem/s	2. Number of new-to-firm products/services identified
3. Adopt processes and technologies to reinforce transformation into a greener and more digital economy	3. Foster the implementation of business process innovations tied to the **adoption of technologies** that help SMEs meet requirements for their successful green and digital transitions.	3. Business **process innovations** adopted in the industrial ecosystem/s	3. Number of SMEs supported which undertook business process innovation tied to technological adoption leading to higher sustainability and digitalisation
4.Train to foster upskilling and re-skilling of the workforce whilst attracting talents	4a. To **build up the cluster managers' skills** to offer better services for up / re-skilling and attracting talents. 4b. To establish concrete joint **services for SMEs** (e.g. trainings, courses, recruitment, job facilitation, etc.) for up / reskilling the workforce and talent management.	4a. **Training** for cluster managers 4b. Developed **portfolio of services** regarding reskilling and upskilling offered by cluster organisations to SMEs	4a. Number of employees in cluster organisations which received trainings 4b. Number of SMEs investing in skill development of their employees in the scope of the project
5. Go international to boost access to global supply and value chains	5. To establish concrete **services that support international trade, investment and partnering** opportunities for European SMEs to facilitate the signature of cooperation agreements between European entities	5. **Services portfolio** to implement internationalisation actions	5a. Number of collaboration agreements signed with entities in third countries. 5b. Number of SMEs that benefited from internationalisation

	(intermediaries and/or businesses) and entities in third countries		services
Communication actions	6. Communicate effectively about the work and results of the Eurocluster.	6. Communication outreach	6a. Number of Social Media followers (per Social Media channel used). 6b. Number of SMEs directly supported and coming from regions and countries different from those of individual Euroclusters' partners
-	-	Two mid-term technical reports and presentations on the progress implementation of actions	-

3. Available budget

The available call budget is **EUR 42 000 000**.

This budget might be increased by a maximum 20%.

The availability of the call budget still depends on the adoption of the budget for 2022, 2023 and- 2024 by the EU budgetary authority.

Around 30 projects are expected to be fund under this call for proposals: at least one project for each of the Industrial Ecosystem Strand and at least 16 in the Open Strand.

If there are no sufficient proposals passing the overall and individual thresholds of the award criteria in any of the Strands, the budget available can be used to support proposals in any other Strand.

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

4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	29 September 2021
Deadline for submission:	30 November 2021 – 17:00:00 CET (Brussels)
Evaluation:	December 2021 -March 2022
Information on evaluation results:	April 2022
GA signature:	July 2022

5. Admissibility and documents

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

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

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

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

- Application Form Part A — contains administrative information about the participants (future coordinator, beneficiaries and affiliated entities) and the summarised budget for the project *(to be filled in directly online)*

- Application Form Part B — contains the technical description of the project *(to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed and then assembled and re-uploaded)*

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

  - detailed budget table *(template available in the Submission System)*
  - CVs (short outlines) of core project team: not applicable[31]
  - activity reports of last year: not applicable
  - list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years) *(template available in Part B)*
  - Annex 5 to Part B - Eligibility checklist (*available from EISMEA's page here*).

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.**

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[31] A description of the profiles (qualifications and experience) of the staff responsible for managing and implementing the project and a description of the members of the consortium is required in the application form part B and must be duly filled.

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

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

6. Eligibility

Eligible participants (eligible countries)

In order to be eligible, the applicants (beneficiaries and affiliated entities) must:
- be legal entities (public or private bodies)
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
    - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
    - non-EU countries:
        - listed EEA countries and countries associated to the COSME part of the Single Market Programme or countries which are in ongoing negotiations for an association agreement and where the agreement enters into force before grant signature (list of participating countries)
- be or represent a cluster organisation (see definition below), a Single Market Programme (SMP) cluster network[32], or other types of organisations supporting green and digital transitions and build EU resilience.

Definition

For the purpose of this call, *cluster organisations* have to be understood as the legal entities that support the strengthening of collaboration, networking and learning in innovation clusters and act as innovation support providers by providing or channelling specialised and customised business support services to stimulate innovation activities, especially in SMEs. They are usually the actors that facilitate strategic partnering across clusters.[33]

Moreover:

Applicants can participate in several Euroclusters under this call for proposals, but **cannot participate in more than one Eurocluster** (applicant consortium) **per Strand**. Each Eurocluster is responsible to verify that their individual consortium partners (applicants) are not participating in proposals to another Eurocluster under the same Strand. If such a case is detected by the funding body, it will lead to the **ineligibility of the organisation concerned** from all proposals in the respective Strand. The respective consortium affected by the exclusion of (a) partner(s) must still fulfil the eligibility criteria as stipulated in section 6 of this Call in order to be considered eligible. This applies also to clusters without legal personality: If the same cluster organisation (even if represented in different consortia by different legal entities) is thus participating in more than one proposal per Strand, it will be considered ineligible in all concerned proposals.

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[32] It must be declared in the *Annex 5 to Part B - Eligibility checklist* that all members of the SMP cluster network are established in the countries participating in the SMP.

[33] Source: Cluster Definitions | European Cluster Collaboration Platform.

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 funding 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[34].

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

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

EU restrictive measures — Special rules apply for certain entities *(e.g. entities subject to [EU restrictive measures](#) under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU)[36] and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#)[37])*. 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).

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

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[34] See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046.](#)
[35] For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).
[36] 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](#).
[37] Commission guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#) on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards (OJEU C 205 of 19.07.2013, pp. 9-11).

Consortium composition

Proposals must be submitted by a consortium (Eurocluster) which complies with the following conditions:

- minimum 3 applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities)

- minimum 3 cluster organisations (as defined above) or cluster networks from at least 3 different EU Member States.

- at least half of the partners in each consortium (Eurocluster) must be cluster organisations or cluster networks registered or having submitted a registration on the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP)[38] by the submission deadline of this Call and have completed the relevant ***Annex 5 to Part B - Eligibility checklist***:

  - For cluster organisations and cluster networks *already registered* in the European Cluster Collaboration Platform: to provide the link to the completed cluster organisation profile for each applicant registered on the Platform (proof to be provided through ***Annex 5 to Part B - Eligibility checklist***); or

  - For cluster organisations and cluster networks *not yet registered* in the European Cluster Collaboration Platform: For each applicant, a declaration on their honour that they represent a cluster organisation or a business network organisation offering or channelling innovative support services to businesses (in compliance with the definition of 'innovation clusters'[39]), and that a cluster profile has been submitted to the ECCP for registration with the respective information included in the descriptive form (proof to be provided in the ***Annex 5 to Part B - Eligibility checklist***).

- the applicant consortium must include at least one partner established in a less advanced region of a EU Member State (as defined and applied in the Cohesion policy regulation 2021-2027[40]: GDP per capita <75%). The name of the less advanced region needs to be indicated in ***Annex 5 to Part B - Eligibility checklist***. The name of this region must be coherent with the region that appears in the legal address (as per provided PIC number) of this partner.

Not concurrent submission

One Eurocluster (applicant consortium) **cannot submit more than one proposal under this call**. If such a case is detected by the funding body, it will lead to the ineligibility of all proposals of that consortium.

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[38] https://www.clustercollaboration.eu.
[39] The term "Innovation clusters" means structures or organised groups of independent parties (such as innovative start-ups, small, medium and large enterprises, as well as research and knowledge dissemination organisations, non-for-profit organisations and other related economic actors) designed to stimulate innovative activity by promoting sharing of facilities and exchange of knowledge and expertise and by contributing effectively to knowledge transfer, networking, information dissemination and collaboration among the undertakings and other organisations in the cluster.
See at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XC0627(01)&from=EN with further information available at
http://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/modernisation/rdi_framework_en.pdf and
http://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/legislation/horizontal.html amending the Community Framework(2006/C323/01).
http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2006:323:0001:0026:en:PDF).
[40] For an overview of the EU less advanced regions per country, please consult the map '*EU regional funding 2021-2027, Investment for jobs and growth goal (ERDF and ESF) eligibility, 2021-2027*' which can be found here: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/maps/#1.

Eligible activities

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

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

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

Financial support to third parties is allowed for grants and prizes under the conditions indicated below:

- Euroclusters must publish widely their open calls and adhere to EU standards with respect to transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality. All calls for third parties must be published on:

    • European Cluster Collaboration Platform[41],

    • Enterprise Europe Network[42],

    • Funding and Tenders Portal,

    • Euroclusters' own website,

    • Euroclusters' social media channels, tagging EISMEA, the Commission's Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW) and the European Cluster Collaboration Platform.

– The calls must remain open for at least two months. If call deadlines are changed, this must immediately be published on the call page on the participants' portal and all registered applicants must be informed of the change.

– Without delay, Euroclusters must publish the outcome of the call, including a description of the third party actions, the date of the award, duration, and final recipient legal names and countries.

– The calls must have a clear EU dimension.

– At least 10% of the supported SMEs will come from EU regions different from the countries of individual Euroclusters' partners. Specific attention needs to be paid to EU-13[43] countries in the calls and those EU regions with which the Euroclusters' partners had no previous cooperation and shall focus on engaging actors from regions with different levels of economic development.

– Financial support to third parties will be accepted in projects which support EU SMEs to reach objectives as described in section 2.5 above.

Geographic location (target countries)

Proposals must relate to activities taking place in the eligible EU and non-EU countries for the support from the Single Market Programme, and targeted third countries for the purpose of internationalisation activities.

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[41] Homepage | European Cluster Collaboration Platform.
[42] Enterprise Europe Network (europa.eu).
[43] Member states which joined the European Union in or after 2004.

Duration

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

Project budget

Project budgets (maximum grant amount) are expected to be up to a maximum of EUR 1 400 000 per project, but this does not preclude the submission/selection of proposals requesting other amounts.

The budget of each Eurocluster's proposal should be split in the following way:

- 25% will cover joint activities between cluster organisations and other Eurocluster partners, to finance e.g. design of support measures for SMEs, coordination of actions and joint communication.

- 75% will be directed to SMEs, to finance services in support of their resilience, green and digital transformation, e.g. vouchers for support services, or free access to use testing facilities directly to SMEs.

7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

Financial capacity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- further information

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

- prefinancing paid in instalments

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

or

– propose no prefinancing

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

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

Operational capacity

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

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

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

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

– profiles (qualifications and experience) of the staff responsible for managing and implementing the project

– description of the consortium participants

– applicants' activity reports of last year: not applicable

– list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years).

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

Exclusion

Applicants which are subject to an **EU exclusion decision** or in one of the following **exclusion situations** that bar them from receiving EU funding can NOT participate[44]:

– 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[45] (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)

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

[45] 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.

- 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[46]:

- during the award procedure they misrepresented information required as a condition for participating or failed to supply that information

- they were previously involved in the preparation of the call and this entails a distortion of competition that cannot be remedied otherwise (conflict of interest).

8. Evaluation and award procedure

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

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

The proposals scoring the highest for each of the different Strands will have priority in the final ranking.

If there are no sufficient proposals passing the overall and individual thresholds of the award criteria in any of the Strands, the budget available can be used to support proposals in any other Strand.

For proposals with the same score (within a strand) 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:

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

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 strand 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 strands in order to ensure a balanced spread of the geographical and thematic coverage and while respecting to the maximum possible extent the order of merit based on the evaluation of the award criteria.

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

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

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

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

9. Award criteria

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

– **Relevance:** clarity and consistency of project, objectives and planning; extent to which they match the themes and priorities and objectives of the call; extent to which they to improve the resilience of the European supply and value chains and especially to better integrate SMEs within the industrial ecosystems, in order to improve the SMEs' social and economic resilience, while supporting their green and digital transition; contribution to the EU strategic, policy and legislative context; European/trans-national dimension; extent to which partners are strategically chosen; 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; potential to develop complementarities between consortium partners (30 points)

- **Quality:**

  - **Project design and implementation:** technical quality; logical links between the identified problems, needs and solutions proposed (logical frame concept); methodology for implementing the project (concept and methodology, management, procedures, timetable, risks and risk management, monitoring and evaluation); feasibility of the project within the proposed time frame; cost effectiveness (sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; best value for money); clarity, level of details and rationale of the proposed support to third parties (30 points)

  - **Project team and cooperation arrangements:** quality of the consortium and project teams; extent to which the role and contribution of each partner is appropriate and in line with its experience and past activities; appropriate and coherent effort distribution; appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams and consortium (30 points)

- **Impact:** ambition, EU added value and expected medium and long-term impact of results on target groups/general public; expected impact on European SMEs benefiting directly from the action; extent to which the project is likely to leverage public funding and attract private funding sources; appropriate, ambitious objectively verifiable and achievable SMART performance indicators to measure its outcomes and expected impact; appropriate, effective and innovative 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
Overall (pass) scores	**70**	**100**

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 call budget. Other proposals will be rejected.

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

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

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

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

Starting date and project duration

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

Project duration: projects should normally last maximum 36 months (extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment).

Milestones and deliverables

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

Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount

The grant parameters *(maximum grant amount, funding rate, total eligible costs, etc.)* will be fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 3 and art 5)*.

Project budget (maximum grant amount): *see section 6 above*. The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

The grant will be a budget-based mixed actual cost grant (actual costs, with unit cost and flat-rate elements). This means that it will reimburse ONLY certain types of costs (eligible costs) and costs that were *actually* incurred for your project (NOT the *budgeted* costs). For unit costs and flat-rates, you can charge the amounts calculated as explained in the Grant Agreement *(see art 6 and Annex 2 and 2a)*.

The costs will be reimbursed at the funding rates fixed in the Grant Agreement (**100%** for the costs for providing financial support to third parties and **90%** for all other costs 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[47]: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost[48]: Yes
- equipment costs: depreciation
- other cost categories:
    - costs for financial support to third parties: allowed for grants and prizes; maximum amount per third party 60 000 EUR, unless a higher amount is required because the objective of the action would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult to achieve and this is duly justified in the Application Form
- indirect cost flat-rate: 7% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, 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

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[47] Commission Decision of 20 October 2020 authorising the use of unit costs for the personnel costs of the owners of small and medium-sized enterprises and beneficiaries that are natural persons not receiving a salary for the work carried out by themselves under an action or work programme (C(2020)7715).

[48] Commission Decision of 12 January 2021 authorising the use of unit costs for travel, accommodation and subsistence costs under an action or work programme under the 2021-2027 multi-annual financial framework (C(2021)35).

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

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

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

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

Certificates

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

Liability regime for recoveries

The liability regime for recoveries will be fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet*

point 4.4 and art 22).

For beneficiaries, it is one of the following:

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

- unconditional joint and several liability — *each beneficiary up to the maximum grant amount for the action*

 or

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

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

Provisions concerning the project implementation

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

- list of background: No

- rights of use on results: Yes

- access rights to ensure continuity and interoperability obligations: 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

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

b) **submit the proposal**

Access the Electronic Submission System via the Topic page in the Search Funding & Tenders section (or, for calls sent by invitation to submit a proposal, through the link provided in the invitation letter).

Submit your proposal in 3 parts, as follows:

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

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

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

The proposal must keep to the **page limits** *(see section 5)*; excess pages will be disregarded.

Documents must be uploaded to the **right category** in the Submission System otherwise the proposal might be considered incomplete and thus inadmissible.

The proposal must be submitted **before the call deadline** (*see section 4*). After this deadline, the system is closed and proposals can no longer be submitted.

Once the proposal is submitted, you will receive a **confirmation e-mail** (with date and time of your application). If you do not receive this confirmation e-mail, it means your proposal has NOT been submitted. If you believe this is due to a fault in the Submission System, you should immediately file a complaint via the IT Helpdesk webform, explaining the circumstances and attaching a copy of the proposal (and, if possible, screenshots to show what happened).

Details on processes and procedures are described in the Online Manual. The Online Manual also contains the links to FAQs and detailed instructions regarding the Portal Electronic Exchange System.

12. Help

As far as possible, ***please try to find the answers you need yourself***, in this and the other documentation (we have limited resources for handling direct enquiries):

–   Online Manual

–   FAQs on the Topic page (for call-specific questions in open calls; not applicable for actions by invitation)

–   Portal FAQ (for general questions).

Please also consult the Topic page regularly, since we will use it to publish call updates. (For invitations, we will contact you directly in case of a call update).

Contact

For individual questions on the Portal Submission System, please contact the [IT Helpdesk](#).

Non-IT related questions should be sent to the following email address at the latest 1 week before the submission deadline: EISMEA-SMP-COSME-ENQUIRIES@ec.europa.eu.

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

13. Important

⚠️ **IMPORTANT**

- **Don't wait until the end —** Complete your application sufficiently in advance of the deadline to avoid any last minute **technical problems**. Problems due to last minute submissions *(e.g. congestion, etc.)* will be entirely at your risk. Call deadlines can NOT be extended.

- **Consult** the Portal Topic page regularly. We will use it to publish updates and additional information on the call (call and topic updates).

- **Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Exchange System —** By submitting the application, all participants **accept** to use the electronic exchange system in accordance with the Portal Terms & Conditions.

- **Registration —** Before submitting the application, all beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners must be registered in the Participant Register. The participant identification code (PIC) (one per participant) is mandatory for the Application Form.

- **Consortium roles —** When setting up your consortium, you should think of organisations that help you reach objectives and solve problems.

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

- **Coordinator —** In multi-beneficiary grants, the beneficiaries participate as consortium (group of beneficiaries). They will have to choose a coordinator, who will take care of the project management and coordination and will represent the consortium towards the granting authority. In mono-beneficiary grants, the single beneficiary will automatically be coordinator.

- **Affiliated entities** — Applicants may participate with affiliated entities (i.e. entities linked to a beneficiary which participate in the action with similar rights and obligations as the beneficiaries, but do not sign the grant and therefore do not become beneficiaries themselves). They will get a part of the grant money and must therefore comply with all the call conditions and be validated (just like beneficiaries); but they do not count towards the minimum eligibility criteria for consortium composition (if any).

- **Associated partners** — Applicants may participate with associated partners (i.e. partner organisations which participate in the action but without the right to get grant money). They participate without funding and therefore do not need to be validated.

- **Consortium agreement** — For practical and legal reasons it is recommended to set up internal arrangements that allow you to deal with exceptional or unforeseen circumstances (in all cases, even if not mandatory under the Grant Agreement). The consortium agreement also gives you the possibility to redistribute the grant money according to your own consortium-internal principles and parameters (for instance, one beneficiary can reattribute its grant money to another beneficiary). The consortium agreement thus allows you to customise the EU grant to the needs inside your consortium and can also help to protect you in case of disputes.

- **Balanced project budget —** Grant applications must ensure a balanced project budget and sufficient other resources to implement the project successfully *(e.g. own contributions, income generated by the action, financial contributions from third parties, etc)*. You may be requested to lower your estimated costs, if they are ineligible (including excessive).

- **No-profit rule —** Grants may NOT give a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). This will be checked by us at the end of the project.

- **No double funding —** There is a strict prohibition of double funding from the EU budget (except under EU Synergies acions). Outside such Synergies actions, any given action may receive only ONE grant from the EU budget and cost items may under NO circumstances declared to two different EU actions.

- **Completed/ongoing projects —** Proposals for projects that have already been completed will be rejected; proposals for projects that have already started will be assessed on a case-by-case basis (in this case, no costs can be reimbursed for activities that took place before the project starting date/proposal submission).

- **Combination with EU operating grants —** Combination with EU operating grants is possible, if the project remains outside the operating grant work programme and you make sure that cost items are clearly separated in your accounting and NOT declared twice *(see AGA — Annotated Model Grant Agreement, art 6.2.E)*.

- **Multiple proposals —**

  Each project application under the call must address only one of the 15 strands (refer to section 2). Euroclusters consortia cannot submit more than one proposal under this call. The individual partners of the Euroclusters can apply in different Strands. However, individual partners may not participate in several proposals under the same Strand.

- **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](#).