



Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)

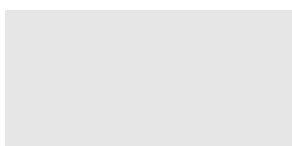
Call for proposals

Joint Cluster Initiatives (EUROCLUSTERS) for Europe's recovery
(SMP-COSME-2024-CLUSTER)

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EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL AND SMEs EXECUTIVE AGENCY (EISMEA)

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EISMEA.I.02 – SMP/SME Pillar, Internal Market and Support to Standardisation

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

0. Introduction	4
1. Background.....	5
2. Objectives — Themes and priorities — Activities that can be funded — Expected impact	7
Objectives	7
(a) Main objective.....	8
(b) Secondary supporting objectives	9
Themes and priorities (scope)	11
Activities that can be funded (scope).....	11
(a) Mandatory activities.....	12
(b) Other eligible activities.....	13
(c) Financial support to third parties (SMEs)	16
(d) Non eligible activities	18
Expected impact and results	19
(a) Key Performance Indicators.....	19
(b) Mandatory reporting requirements and deliverables	20
Overview table: mandatory activities, deliverables and indicators	21
3. Available budget.....	23
4. Timetable and deadlines	23
5. Admissibility and documents	23
6. Eligibility.....	25
Eligible participants (eligible countries).....	25
Consortium composition	26
Non-concurrent submission and non-concurrent participation.....	27
Eligible activities.....	27
Geographic location (target countries).....	28
Duration.....	28
Project budget.....	28
7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion.....	28
Financial capacity	28
Operational capacity	29
Exclusion.....	29

8. Evaluation and award procedure.....	30
9. Award criteria.....	31
10. Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements.....	33
Starting date and project duration	33
Milestones and deliverables.....	33
Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount.....	33
Budget categories and cost eligibility rules.....	34
Reporting and payment arrangements.....	35
Prefinancing guarantees	35
Certificates	36
Liability regime for recoveries	36
Provisions concerning the project implementation.....	36
Other specificities	36
Non-compliance and breach of contract.....	36
11. How to submit an application.....	37
12. Help	37
13. Important	39

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 strand of the Single Market Programme (SMP COSME).

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

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

The call is launched in accordance with the 2024-2027 Work Programme² and will be managed by the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA) (**‘Agency’**).

The call covers the following topic:

- **SMP-COSME-2024-CLUSTERS-01 — Joint Cluster Initiatives (EUROCLUSTERS) for Europe’s recovery**

Euroclusters are cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary, and trans-European strategic initiatives of industry clusters and other economic actors teaming up to support green and digital transition, building social and economic resilience³ and building EU value chains. The term

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 Annex 2 to Commission Implementing Decision C(2024) of 31 July 2024 amending Commission Implementing Decision C(2023) 8926 as regards the implementation of certain action under the Single Market Programme (2024-27 SMP WP).

³ [Euroclusters | European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#)

'Euroclusters' is also defined in the previous 2021 Joint Cluster Initiatives (EUROCLUSTERS) for Europe's recovery call (SMP-COSME-2021-CLUSTER)⁴.

The call is divided into two strands (see Section 2 below).

Each project application under this call must address only one of these two strands.

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

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

- the [Call Document](#) outlines the:
 - background, objectives, scope, activities that can be funded and the expected results (Sections 1 and 2),
 - timetable and available budget (Sections 3 and 4),
 - admissibility and eligibility conditions (including mandatory documents, Sections 5 and 6),
 - criteria for financial and operational capacity and exclusion (Section 7),
 - evaluation and award procedure (Section 8),
 - award criteria (Section 9),
 - legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements (Section 10),
 - how to submit an application (Section 11).
- the [Online Manual](#) outlines the:
 - procedures to register and submit proposals online via the EU Funding & Tenders Portal ('Portal'),
 - recommendations for the preparation of the application.
- the [AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement](#) contains:
 - detailed annotations on all the provisions in the Grant Agreement you will have to sign in order to obtain the grant (*including cost eligibility, payment schedule, accessory obligations, etc*).

You are also encouraged to visit the [EISMEA](#) website to consult the list of projects funded previously.

1. Background

The role of clusters in the industrial policy of the European Union

Europe is embarking on a transition towards climate neutrality and digital leadership. The European industrial strategy aims to ensure that European industry can lead the way as we enter this new age. On 10 March 2020, the Commission laid the foundations for an

⁴ [SMP-COSME-2021-CLUSTER-01 EU Funding & Tenders Portal \(europa.eu\)](#)

industrial strategy that would support the twin transition to a green and digital economy, **make EU industry more competitive globally, and enhance Europe's open strategic autonomy**. On 11 May 2021, the Commission [updated the EU Industrial Strategy](#)⁵ to ensure that its industrial ambition takes full account of the new circumstances following the COVID-19 crisis and helps to drive the transformation to a more sustainable, digital, resilient and globally competitive economy.

The European economy has been exposed to multiple crises, including geopolitical tensions, leading to increased volatilities and supply chain disruptions. To face these challenges, the EU is developing and implementing an Economic Security Strategy which **includes measures to promote the EU's competitiveness, protect the EU's economic security, and strengthen cooperation with a wide range of countries**⁶. Building EU value chains is of critical importance in this regard.

In this context, the EU also brought forward key policies such as the Acts on Chips⁷, Critical Raw Materials Act⁸, and Net Zero Industry Act⁹. These legislations aim at reinforcing European resilience and sovereignty in crucial sectors such as energy, clean technology and digital.

Clusters are key players in the European industrial landscape¹⁰ and connect economic actors along the value chain. They are geographic concentrations of interconnected firms and related economic entities that have reached a sufficient scale to develop specialised expertise, services, resources, suppliers, and skills¹¹. They include business companies of different sizes, but also other essential entities of an industrial ecosystem such as research institutions, science and technology parks, financial service providers, non-profit organisations and related public bodies. Clusters can therefore be utilised to develop and strengthen critical value chains within and beyond their sector.

Moreover, as noted in '[The future of European competitiveness](#)' report by Mario Draghi¹², **"networks of universities, start-ups, large companies and venture capitalists (VCs) – which account for a large share of successful commercialisations in high-tech sectors (...) have been critical to the more dynamic industrial structure."** By connecting actors of industrial ecosystems and enhancing the scope and scale for EU companies, innovation clusters not only support competitiveness at European and global level under the twin transition and resilience but also support smart specialisation at regional level. This because clusters have also the capacity to facilitate fast interaction between different stakeholders and find innovative solutions when product availability is scarce. For example, clusters demonstrated the capacity to drive change and make European value chains more resilient during the COVID-19 crisis.

Clusters have a positive impact on economies. The [European Panorama of Clusters](#)¹³ provides evidence that companies within industrial groupings are more innovative than

⁵ [European industrial strategy - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁶ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, "The 2024 Annual Single Market and Competitiveness Report", [COM\(2024\) 77 final](#)

⁷ [Regulation \(EU\) 2023/1781](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 September 2023 establishing a framework of measures for strengthening Europe's semiconductor ecosystem and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/694 (Chips Act)

⁸ [Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1252](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 establishing a framework for ensuring a secure and sustainable supply of critical raw materials and amending Regulations (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1724 and (EU) 2019/1020 (Critical Raw Materials Act)

⁹ [Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1735](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing a framework of measures for strengthening Europe's net-zero technology products manufacturing ecosystem and amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 (Net-Zero Industry Act)

¹⁰ [Cluster policy - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹¹ [Cluster Definitions | European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#)

¹² Mario Draghi (September 2024) [The future of European competitiveness – Part A, A competitiveness strategy for Europe](#), p.26

¹³ [European Cluster Panorama | European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#)

those operating alone, create more and better jobs, conduct more market research, register more international patents and export more than other companies.

Clusters are **key for the EU's competitiveness because they are driving the implementation of our industrial strategy on the ground**. They are bridge-builders, change agents and multipliers. Clusters can help accelerate the green and digital transition and build resilience in line with the updated EU industrial strategy. The Competitiveness Council Conclusions of 24 May 2024 also underlined that, in order to achieve these objectives, it is important to build a pan-European network on the principle of smart specialisation. In this context, the potential of clusters has been recognised¹⁴.

Joint Cluster Initiatives/Euroclusters

Over the last years, the European Commission has put increasing emphasis on developing and strengthening EU industrial value chains that cut across sectors and regions.

In 2021, the European Commission under the Single Market Programme (SMP), established 30 **Joint Cluster Initiatives called 'Euroclusters'**, which are partnerships of cluster organisations that teamed up with other types of organisations¹⁵. A total of 160 organisations have been involved in the initiative, coming from 23 different countries. They successfully contributed to building value chains in areas such as tourism, creative industries, microelectronics, personalised medicines, naval defence etc.

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

Objectives

To continue building on these successful experiences and help in the implementation of the updated industrial strategy, the European Commission and the Agency will launch a new set of around 16 cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary and trans-European **strategic Joint Cluster Initiatives to be called 'Euroclusters'**.

Euroclusters will contribute to the implementation of the European Commission's New Industrial Strategy for Europe¹⁶ as well as to its updated Strategy that was published in May 2021¹⁷ and the SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe¹⁸ adopted in March 2020 by building resilience and accelerating the transition to a green and digital economy. Euroclusters will also support the implementation of the Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero Age¹⁹ and its initiatives (Critical Raw Materials and Net-Zero Industry Acts), and the European Economic Security Strategy²⁰ to ensure the security of the EU value chains. In particular, Euroclusters will:

- strengthen competitiveness by fostering innovation, connecting research and market, and supporting uptake of advanced technologies,
- improve the resilience of the EU industrial ecosystems and build economic security by considering the whole supply and value chain across borders and building industrial capacity where necessary to reduce dependencies,

¹⁴ COMP Council conclusions of 24 May 2024 "A competitive European industry driving our green, digital and resilient future" available here: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10127-2024-INIT/en/pdf>

¹⁵ [Euroclusters | European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#)

¹⁶ [COM\(2020\) 102 final](#)

¹⁷ [COM\(2021\) 350 final](#)

¹⁸ [COM\(2020\) 103 final](#)

¹⁹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero Age, [COM\(2023\) 62 final](#)

²⁰ **Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council on "European Economic Security Strategy"**, [JOIN\(2023\) 20 final](#)

- foster upskilling and reskilling of the workforce and attracting talents,
- reconnect and boost access to global supply and value chains,
- deepen cross-national collaboration to facilitate the creation of European 'Metaclusters'²¹.

The main objective of this call for proposals, for both strands, is to support innovation and adoption of new processes and advanced technologies for strategic autonomy, to build capacity in the most critical areas of the relevant ecosystem(s) and to reinforce transformation into a greener, more digital, and resilient economy.

This call is expected to contribute to the following other supporting objectives:

- to establish networks and strategic partnerships to improve the resilience of the EU industrial ecosystems by developing and strengthening value chains in the EU Single Market;
- to provide training to foster upskilling and reskilling of the workforce and attracting talents;
- to go international to boost access to global supply and value chains.

Euroclusters shall put forward proposals for how to initiate, develop and maintain an EU-level long-term strategic partnership between clusters across different EU Member States and SMP COSME participating countries. Euroclusters must also support SMEs (more details in Sections 2 and 6) and they are expected to demonstrate how they will organise such support in line with the overall Euroclusters long-term strategy.

In their proposals, Euroclusters are expected to concretely explain how they will effectively work together with other support actors and networks such as the European Cluster Collaboration Platform, Enterprise Europe Network, and European Digital Innovation Hubs.

Applications shall address the main objective and are also expected to contribute to one or more of the supporting objectives.

(a) Main objective

Innovation and adoption of new processes and advanced technologies for strategic autonomy, to build capacity in the most critical areas of their ecosystems, and to reinforce transformation into a greener, more digital, and resilient economy.

Innovation for strategic autonomy

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

Innovation is central to cope with disruptions in supply and to accelerate the uptake of green and digital technologies. Euroclusters shall identify innovation potential in their

²¹ *Metaclusters* are defined as the higher-level organisational structures that connect multiple clusters across different regions or sectors, and can be the most effective way to structure collaboration across countries in the EU. Metaclusters are designed to foster collaboration, knowledge exchange and innovation at a larger scale than individual clusters and address complex challenges that transcend individual clusters by leveraging collective efforts. There is no country in Europe which can specialise in all key technologies so there is no other option but enforcing cross-clustering activities. By collaborating and connecting competences, metaclusters can find solutions to common challenges and become more resilient during shocks (e.g., Covid 19, Russian aggression against Ukraine) and compete with global players. As the value chains are changing fast, and inputs are received from other sectors, multisectoral and interdisciplinary thinking requires cluster cooperation beyond sectoral silos.

value chains. They shall undertake innovation activities, such as any developmental, financial, and commercial activities undertaken by a company that are intended to result in an innovation for the company.

Euroclusters shall 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 company'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 which design or implement projects under the Horizon Europe programme or the national and regional smart specialisation strategies under the Cohesion policy funding.

Adoption of new-to-firm processes and advanced technologies

The aim is to support companies and SMEs in adopting processes and technologies that **improve the value chains' efficiency**, e.g., related to the use of resources, and uptake of green technologies and digital solutions.

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

To succeed in the digital transition, 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 also 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 should 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. This objective is aiming to raise awareness on existing solutions and help accelerate their uptake.

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

(b) Secondary supporting objectives

The secondary objectives of this call for proposals aim at reinforcing the main objective (i.e., the "**Innovation and adoption of new processes and advanced technologies for strategic autonomy**", see above).

1. Establish networks and strategic partnerships to improve the resilience of the EU industrial ecosystems by developing and strengthening value chains in the EU Single Market.
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The specific aim is to strengthen value chains 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: innovation; diversification of production inputs in

different EU Member States; an increase in the customer base of companies within the ecosystem; pooling of supply or demand; mobilisation of joint investments in critical innovation and production facilities; development of alternative EU technologies; implementation of measures to increase environmental circularity; supply of inputs or their substitutes; introduction of new-to-firm technologies, products or services; collaboration to reach international markets. These networks should be designed as strategic, long-term partnerships, extending beyond the duration of the project.

Euroclusters should cooperate effectively with the reinforced action on resilience being carried out by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP)²² and Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)²³ under the updated industrial strategy.

2. Provide training to foster upskilling and reskilling of the workforce and attracting talents.

Partners of Euroclusters can share their experience in analysing, designing and delivering a common strategy and/or on implementing a roadmap on green and digital skills for the clusters. Euroclusters can jointly develop a portfolio of services and implement collaborative actions to build up their training infrastructures, knowledge, and capacities. They could facilitate the upskilling and reskilling of the **cluster members'** workforce, enhance the skills-related services that clusters could provide to their members, engage in regional skills ecosystems and in European and national level initiatives, and cooperate with vocational training organisations.

It would be important that Euroclusters cooperate effectively with other actors and support networks on this objective.

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

The aim is to reach collaboration agreements with entities in third countries leading to market access for EU companies, and to lead international cluster cooperation in fields of strategic interest.

Euroclusters can 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 can **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 should 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 could demonstrate swift adaptability to future developments in international trade and coherence of their priorities with EU strategies, notably as regards trade policy. The Euroclusters can 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.**

²² [Homepage | European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#)

²³ [Enterprise Europe Network | Enterprise Europe Network \(europa.eu\)](#)

In order to achieve this objective, Euroclusters can take advantage of matchmaking events and activities organised by the ECCP - when possible and when in line with the objectives of the SMEs that they are assisting.

Themes and priorities (scope)

Proposals must be focused on a value chain²⁴ within or across one or more of the 14 industrial ecosystems as identified in the European Industrial Strategy²⁵. Furthermore, this call for proposals is divided in two strands: the first strand is specifically related to Net-Zero Industry Act and Critical Raw Materials, the second strand is addressing value chains that are not related to the two mentioned legislations²⁶.

Proposals must be focused on only one of the two strands of this call for proposals:

- Strand 1 focuses on net-zero technologies and critical raw materials: this strand covers value chains within or across industrial ecosystems aiming at ensuring access to a secure and sustainable supply of net-zero technologies²⁷, including by scaling up the manufacturing capacity of net-zero technologies and safeguarding supply chain resilience or/and at starting or expanding the extraction, processing or recycling of strategic raw materials, or the production and scale-up of materials that can substitute strategic raw materials in strategic technologies²⁸;
- Strand 2 covers value chains not covered in Strand 1.

Euroclusters can be active in one or more industrial ecosystems. They must indicate for which of the two strands they apply and which of the 14 industrial ecosystems they represent in the Annex 5 to Part B - Eligibility checklist. This Annex 5 can be **downloaded from EISMEA's page [here](#)** and will need to be uploaded as a mandatory annex to the proposal (please carefully check Section 5 'Admissibility' and Section 6 'Eligibility' of this call for proposals).

Activities that can be funded (scope)

Euroclusters applying to this call for proposals shall deliver on mandatory activities (see below) to address the main objective indicated in Section 2 and, in doing so, they are also expected to contribute to one or more of the supporting objectives.

Moreover, Euroclusters shall design and implement an effective communication plan to promote the **project's** outputs, results, and impact.

Applicants will find below the mandatory activities, as well as a non-exclusive list of eligible activities, under this call for proposals for both strands. Proposals are expected to set out a coherent and well-balanced mix of mandatory activities and other potential activities relevant for each objective being addressed.

²⁴ The term 'value chain' relates to: final products; specific components and specific machinery primarily used to produce the final products; critical raw materials set out in an Annex II to the Critical Raw Materials Act; associated services critical for and specific to the development or manufacturing of those final products; and technologies that fall under the scope of the Net-Zero Industry Act ([STEP Regulation, Regulation \(EU\) 2024/795](#) and [Guidance Note C\(2024\) 3148 final](#)).

²⁵ [European industrial strategy - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#) and [COM\(2021\) 350 final](#).

²⁶ See footnotes 8 and 9 (Critical Raw Materials Act and Net-Zero Industry Act).

²⁷ Annex of [Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1735](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 on establishing a framework of measures for strengthening Europe's net-zero technology manufacturing ecosystem and amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 (Net-Zero Industry Act).

²⁸ Strategic raw materials are listed in Annex I of [Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1252](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 establishing a framework for ensuring a secure and sustainable supply of critical raw materials and amending Regulations (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1724 and (EU) 2019/1020 (Critical Raw Materials Act). 'Strategic technologies' means the key technologies instrumental for the green and digital transitions as well as for defence and aerospace applications as defined in Article 2 of the same Regulation.

Furthermore, proposals are expected to demonstrate how the partnerships will work together effectively with other support actors and networks such as ECCP, EEN, and European Digital Innovation Hubs to increase their impact for companies.

(a) Mandatory activities

Main objective: Innovation and adoption of new processes and advanced technologies for strategic autonomy, to build capacity in the most critical areas of their ecosystems, and to reinforce transformation into a greener, more digital, and resilient economy.

Mandatory activity 1:

Support product innovations²⁹ to reduce dependency on critical inputs and technologies **in the Euroclusters' value chains with a view to introducing new-to-firm products or services.**

Mandatory activity 2:

Foster the implementation of business process innovations tied to the adoption of new-to-firm technologies that help SMEs to meet requirements for their successful green and digital transitions, as well as to increase their resilience.

Communicate effectively about the work and results of the Eurocluster.

Mandatory activity 3 on communication:

Euroclusters must demonstrate how they will achieve the highest visibility of their activities and achievements, with particular attention to their industrial ecosystem/s.

Proposals **must include an outline of the Eurocluster's communication strategy**, explaining how the Eurocluster aims to achieve the key communication objectives, by touching at least upon the following elements:

- target audience for communication,
- 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.

Proposals that are selected for funding will have to elaborate on the above in a Communication and Dissemination plan, to be delivered at an early stage of the project implementation.

Each Eurocluster must appoint a communication correspondent.

Euroclusters will make a strategic use of marketing tools³⁰, including social media and active participation (e.g. as speakers) 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.

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ 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.

Euroclusters must use a common brand identity (to be provided by EISMEA to awarded applicants) in order to ensure maximum visibility to the initiative and enhance each **project's visibility and recognition. Euroclusters must develop their individual logos and visual identities** using this common brand identity, while respecting their general obligation to acknowledge the origin and ensure the visibility of EU funding in all communications. The created visual identity must be applied 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 on their respective websites.

Euroclusters must fill in their profile on the European Cluster Collaboration Platform within 15 days following the signature of the Grant Agreement and use **that webpage as the main communication channel for project's activities and results**³¹. Failure to comply with this provision might lead the Agency to suspend or terminate the Grant Agreement.

(b) Other eligible activities

The activities listed below are *not mandatory* but can serve as an inspiration for the applicants in designing their project.

Related to the main objective: Innovation and adoption of new processes and advanced technologies for strategic autonomy, to build capacity in the most critical areas of their ecosystems, and to reinforce transformation into a greener, more digital, and resilient economy.

- carry out an analysis of the potential diversification or substitution of production inputs, technologies or infrastructure on different EU territories;
- scout for input substitutes, alternative technologies, infrastructure providers;
- organise joint investments in critical innovation and production facilities and/or support in 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.
- 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 consist of: developing resilient business models; tapping into sustainable investments; greening business processes; developing environmentally friendly products and services; optimising water and energy

³¹ Please note that the creation of a new project website is not an eligible cost under this call for proposals.

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;

- 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, promoting sustainable practices and fostering a commitment to adaptation;
- identify and exchange best practices on boosting the resilience, as well as the green and digital transformation of SMEs;
- offer green tech services to SME members of clusters;
- offer support based on a clear outline for added value (e.g., step up towards a resource efficiency strategy, demonstrate specific need for resource efficiency and commitment to adaptation);
- support SMEs in their digital transition, e.g., through access to IT specialists who help small businesses identify the most suitable innovative technologies and infrastructures they might need;
- connect clusters and companies to EU Digital Innovation Hubs, the EEN and other relevant support networks;
- develop and increase the uptake of advanced technologies by SME members of clusters;
- develop and implement support measures for digital transformation, digital tools, digital training, and digital expertise;
- promote the use of digital strategic foresight and trend monitoring tools among industry;
- support clusters to upgrade their business services provision in the field of digitalisation;
- work with clusters on the development of 5G connection, broadband connectivity, and other IT infrastructures 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.

Related to the secondary supporting objectives:

1. Establish networks and strategic partnerships to improve the resilience of the EU industrial ecosystems by developing and strengthening value chains in the EU Single Market.

- design and build new collaborations between European cluster organisations and other key actors facilitating value chain interlinkages along and across different industrial ecosystems, with a view of coping with value chains disruptions and input dependencies through innovative solutions;
- establish connections among value chain actors in the form of contracts, agreements, platforms, fora, 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;
- identify dependencies of critical inputs, technologies or infrastructure and/or vulnerable products/services in the industrial ecosystem(s) of the value chain for the proposal in subject.

2. Provide training to foster upskilling and reskilling of the workforce and attracting talents.

- establish joint services for SMEs (e.g., trainings, courses, recruitment support, job facilitation activities, etc.) for up / reskilling the workforce and talent management;
- 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' programmes** in clusters to train SMEs on technology uptake, digitalisation, and sustainable business models;
- develop training programmes for cluster members on digitalisation and digital skills.

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

- establish services that support international trade, investment and partnering opportunities for European SMEs aiming at the signature of cooperation agreements between European entities (intermediaries and/or businesses) and entities in third countries;

- sign business agreements³² and develop joint collaborative agreements³³ between **the partnership's SME members or business members and other relevant partners** from third countries (i.e., countries not participating or not associated to SMP-COSME programme³⁴), leading to increased 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);
- make use of the events organised by the ECCP to create synergies, when possible, and inform ECCP about the **Eurocluster's** internationalisation development plans;
- cooperate with other support networks, e.g., the EEN and Trade Promotion Organisations;
- 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;
- identify the right partners in third countries, notably through tailored fact-finding missions and by joining relevant networks;
- boost internationalisation of SMEs by facilitating access and a new strategic positioning in global value chains, as well as 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 to attract talents and investments worldwide;
- collaborate with local, regional, national and European support providers, for example on matchmaking or any other relevant effort;
- support participation of the targeted SMEs in trade fairs and exploratory events in third countries.

(c) Financial support to third parties (SMEs)

At least 75% of the grant must be directed by the Eurocluster as financial support to

³² 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.

³³ 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 for proposals, 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.

³⁴ SMP COSME list of participating countries can be found here: [list-3rd-country-participation_smp_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#).

third parties, the SMEs, via cascade funding by means of open calls fulfilling the conditions described below.

Financial support to third parties can only cover activities directly focused to address the main objective **"Innovation and adoption of new processes and advanced technologies for strategic autonomy, to build capacity in the most critical areas of their ecosystems, and to reinforce transformation into a greener, more digital, and resilient economy"** (see Section 2). Please note that:

- Financial support to third parties requires a direct financial transaction between the beneficiaries of this call, the Eurocluster, **and the "third parties"** (SME beneficiaries of the cascading calls launched by the Eurocluster). Therefore, **support provided "indirectly"**, e.g. via voucher schemes or services, will not count as **"financial support to third parties" in the meaning of this call.**
- The support to third parties cannot be provided through services offered by the consortium directly.
- The financial support that the Eurocluster grant beneficiaries of this call will provide to the third parties must be matched by the third parties/recipients of the financial support with a certain percentage of other private financial sources (in form of debt or own financial resources), thus crowding in private capital into the projects.

Note: Although cluster organisations might be (and often are) **"SMEs"**, in the spirit of this call, **"Euroclusters" will have to target SMEs which are not clusters** or any other intermediary organisations, unless this is proven to be necessary for the implementation of the project.

Proposals must clearly detail:

- the definition of the entities (SMEs) which may receive financial support, **the 'third parties'**,
- the type of proposed support,
- the objectives and results to be obtained,
- the conditions for participation,
- a fixed and exhaustive list of the different types of activities for which a third party 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 (which may not exceed EUR 60 000 for each third party, unless where achieving the objectives of the actions would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult and this is duly justified in the Application form) and the criteria for determining it,
- the reasons why financial support to third parties is needed and how it will be managed,
- a strategy to leverage on EU funding crowding in private capitals,
- a strategy on how to reach SMEs, including through effective collaboration with the EEN and other support networks.

Further conditions regarding the above-listed elements or other elements may be laid down in the calls for proposals that the Euroclusters, as EU grants beneficiaries, must

publish in order to award the financial support to the targeted third parties.

Financial support to third parties is allowed for grants or similar forms of support and prizes under the following conditions:

- Euroclusters must publish widely their open calls and conform to EU standards concerning the respect of transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality. All calls for financial support to third parties must be published at least on each of the following platforms:
 - European Cluster Collaboration Platform³⁵,
 - Enterprise Europe Network³⁶,
 - Funding and Tenders Portal,
 - **Euroclusters' own website (if it exists; if it does not, the calls must be published on the websites of the consortium partners. Please note that costs for the development of a new website are not eligible under this call), and**
 - **Euroclusters' social media channels, tagging** at least 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, an update must immediately be published on the call page on the Funding and Tenders portal, as well as on all the websites and platforms where the call announcement was published, and all registered applicants must be informed of the change;
- Without delay, Euroclusters must publish the outcome of the call, including a short description of each third-party funded action, the date of the award, the duration **of the action, and the final recipients' legal names and countries**³⁷;
- The calls must have a clear EU dimension;
- At least 10% of the supported third parties, the SMEs, shall come from EU regions **different from the countries of individual Euroclusters' partners**;
- In each call, specific attention needs to be paid to EU-13³⁸ countries and to those **EU regions with which the Euroclusters' partners had no previous cooperation**. The calls shall focus on engaging actors from regions with different levels of economic development.

The Eurocluster, as 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.

(d) Non eligible activities

Activities under the main objective of 'Innovation and adoption of new processes and advanced technologies for strategic autonomy' to build capacity in the most critical areas

³⁵ [Homepage | European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#).

³⁶ [Enterprise Europe Network | Enterprise Europe Network \(europa.eu\)](#).

³⁷ It is reminded that no personal data should be published, pursuant to [Regulation \(EU\) 2018/1725](#).

³⁸ Member states which joined the European Union in or after 2004.

of their ecosystems, and to reinforce transformation into a greener, more digital, and resilient economy CANNOT fund the purchase and installation of advanced technologies.

Expected impact and results

(a) Key Performance Indicators

Euroclusters must monitor the results of their activities and elaborate a comprehensive set of indicators, benchmarks and targets to do so.

Indicators and targets included in the proposal must be coherent with the proposed mix of activities and the key focus of each Eurocluster. Nonetheless, all proposals must monitor and report on - as a minimum - the following Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

1. Number of new-to-firm products/services identified and/or introduced on the market³⁹;
2. Number of SMEs supported which undertook business process innovation tied to technological adoption leading to progress with their green transition (including improved climate performance), and / or higher sustainability⁴⁰;
3. Number of SMEs supported which undertook business process innovation tied to technological adoption leading to higher digitalisation⁴¹;
4. Number of SMEs benefiting from third party financial support to participate in projects for enhancing their competitiveness, sustainability and/or digitalisation, and/or for innovating business processes;
5. Number of social media followers (during the project implementation, per social media channel used);
6. Number of social media posts published (during the project implementation, per social media channel used);
7. Number of SMEs directly supported via FSTP coming from regions and countries **different from those of individual Euroclusters' partners**;
8. Number of SMEs, clusters and business network organisations, and business support organisations receiving support from the programme, in particular for internationalisation, digitalisation and sustainability;
9. Number of companies supported having concluded business partnerships;
10. Number of entrepreneurs benefitting from mentoring and mobility schemes, including young, new and female entrepreneurs, as well as other specific target groups;
11. Number of SMEs supported (with direct service support / third party financial support) that enhanced their skills for implementing sustainable business models and practices and/or their digital skills as a result of participating in the project;

³⁹ 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.36.

⁴⁰ Idem

⁴¹ Idem

12. Client satisfaction rate for flagship support services for SMEs.

Furthermore, according to the selected secondary supporting objective(s) that proposals will address, Euroclusters need to report on the following KPI(s) connected to the relevant objective(s):

13. Number of entities collaborating with each other as a result of networking activities performed by the Euroclusters;
14. Number of SMEs taking part in upskilling and reskilling activities of their employees in the scope of the project;
15. Number of collaboration / business agreements signed with entities in third countries;
16. Number of SMEs that participated in internationalisation activities;

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

(b) Mandatory reporting requirements and deliverables

The proposal must provide for all of the following mandatory deliverables:

- Technical progress reports not linked to payments that include depiction of the progress of the implementation of activities, as well as the status of achievement of key performance indicators and lessons learned at that stage of the project⁴².
- Mandatory deliverables linked to the main objective of the call (see Section 2):
 1. New-to-firm products and/or services⁴³ in the industrial ecosystem/s and
 2. Business process innovations⁴⁴ adopted in the industrial ecosystem/s.
- Mandatory deliverable linked to the mandatory activity 3 on communication (see Section 2):
 - Communication and Dissemination Plan.

In addition to the above, the proposal must include also key deliverables stemming from all other relevant (mandatory/non-mandatory) activities.

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

Moreover:

In every technical progress report (regardless of if they are linked to payment or not), Euroclusters must add, as an attachment/annex⁴⁵ to that report:

- an updated list of SMEs financially supported, with detailed information and statistics on the projects benefitting from the financial support to third parties; and
- detailed information on the progress of each of the activities implemented as part of the supporting objectives (if any).

Overview table: mandatory activities, deliverables and indicators

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

The mandatory horizontal indicators, not specific to a single objective of the call for proposals, are also reported for completeness.

Objectives	Mandatory activities	Mandatory deliverables	Mandatory indicators
<p><u>Main objective:</u></p> <p>Innovation and adoption of new processes and advanced technologies for strategic autonomy, to build capacity in the most critical areas of their ecosystems, and to reinforce transformation into a greener, more digital, and resilient economy.</p>	<p>1. Support product innovations to reduce dependency on critical inputs and technologies in the Euroclusters’ value chains with a view to introducing new-to-firm products or services.</p> <p>2. Foster the implementation of business process innovations tied to the adoption of new-to-firm technologies that help SMEs to meet requirements for their successful green and digital transitions, as well as to increase their resilience.</p> <p><i>Note: only the mandatory activities directly focused to address the main objective can be covered by FSTP (see relevant Section of the call text).</i></p>	<p>1. New-to-firm products and/or services in the industrial ecosystem/s.</p> <p>2. Business process innovations adopted in the industrial ecosystem/s.</p>	<p>1. Number of new-to-firm products/services identified and introduced on the market.</p> <p>2. Number of SMEs supported which undertook business process innovation tied to technological adoption leading to progress with their green transition (including improved climate performance), and / or higher sustainability.</p> <p>3. Number of SMEs supported which undertook business process innovation tied to technological adoption leading to higher digitalisation</p> <p>4. Number of SMEs benefiting from third party finance to participate in projects for enhancing their competitiveness, sustainability and/or, digitalisation, and/or for innovating business processes.</p>

Objectives	Mandatory activities	Mandatory deliverables	Mandatory indicators
Communication	3. Communicate effectively about the work and results of the Eurocluster.	3. Communication and Dissemination Plan.	5. Number of social media followers (per social media channel used). 6. Number of social media posts published (per social media channel used). 7. Number of SMEs directly supported coming from regions and countries different from those of individual Euroclusters’ partners.
n.a. (horizontal)	n.a.	n.a.	8. Number of SMEs, clusters and business network organisations, and business support organisations receiving support from the programme, in particular for internationalisation, digitalisation and sustainability. 9. Number of companies supported having concluded business partnerships. 10. Number of entrepreneurs benefitting from mentoring and mobility schemes, including young, new and female entrepreneurs, as well as other specific target groups. 11. Number of SMEs supported (with direct support / third party finance) that enhanced their skills for implementing sustainable business models and practices and/or their digital skills as a result of participating in the project. 12. Client satisfaction rate for flagship support services for SMEs.
<p><u>Secondary supporting objectives:</u></p> <p>1. Establish networks and strategic partnerships to improve the resilience of the EU industrial ecosystems by developing and strengthening value chains in the EU Single Market.</p> <p>2. Provide training to foster upskilling and reskilling of the workforce and attracting talents.</p>	n.a.	n.a.	13. Number of entities collaborating with each other as a result of networking activities performed by the Euroclusters. 14. Number of SMEs taking part in upskilling and reskilling activities of their employees in the scope of the project. 15. Number of collaboration / business agreements signed with entities in third countries.

Objectives	Mandatory activities	Mandatory deliverables	Mandatory indicators
3. Go international to boost access to global supply and value chains.			16. Number of SMEs that participated in internationalisation activities.

3. Available budget

The estimated 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 2025, 2026, and 2027 by the EU budgetary authority.

Around 16 projects are expected to be funded under this call for proposals, with at least 8 projects for Strand 1.

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. If there are no sufficient proposals passing the overall and individual thresholds of the award criteria within one of the two strands, the budget available can be used to support proposals in the other strand.

4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	15 October 2024
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>5 February 2025 – 17:00:00 CET (Brussels)</u>
Evaluation:	March-May 2025
Information on evaluation results:	By the end of June 2025
GA signature:	By the end of September 2025
Expected start of all actions	October 2025

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 (*templates available to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed, assembled and re-uploaded*):
 - Annex 1 to Part B - Detailed budget table/calculator (template available in **the Submission System: file 'Tpl Detailed Budget Table (SMP COSME GFS 90)'**);
 - Annex 2 to Part B - CVs of core project team: not applicable. However, 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, are required in the application form part B and must be duly filled-⁴⁶
 - Annex 3 to Part B - Activity reports of last year: not applicable
 - Annex 4 to Part B - 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.

46

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



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

6. Eligibility

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

Eligible participants (eligible countries)

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

- be legal entities (public or private bodies)
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
 - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
 - non-EU countries:
 - listed EEA countries and countries associated to the Single Market Programme ([list of participating countries](#))
- be or represent a cluster organisation (see definition below), a Single Market Programme (SMP) cluster network⁴⁷, or other types of organisations supporting green and digital transitions and building EU resilience.

Definition of cluster organisations:

For the purpose of this call for proposals, cluster organisations are 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.⁴⁸

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 the consortium with other roles, such as associated partners, subcontractors, third parties giving in-kind contributions, etc. (*see Section 13*).

Specific cases

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

⁴⁷ 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.

⁴⁸ Source: [Cluster Definitions | European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#).

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 persons⁴⁹.

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'**⁵⁰. ⚠ Please note that if the action will be implemented by the members, they should also participate (either as beneficiaries or as affiliated entities, otherwise their costs will NOT be eligible).

Countries currently negotiating association agreements — Beneficiaries from countries with ongoing negotiations for participation in the programme (*see list of participating countries above*) may participate in the call and can sign grants if the negotiations are concluded before grant signature and if the association covers the call (i.e. is retroactive and covers both the part of the programme and the year when the call was launched).

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)*⁵¹). Such entities are not eligible to participate in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any).

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

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

[Consortium composition](#)

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

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

⁴⁹ See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

⁵⁰ For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

⁵¹ 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](#).

- 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 ECCP⁵² by the submission deadline of this call for proposals; in this sense, it is requested that all applicants fill in *Annex 5 to Part B - Eligibility checklist* by providing:
 - For cluster organisations and cluster networks *already registered* in the European Cluster Collaboration Platform: the link to the completed cluster organisation profile for each applicant registered on the Platform must be provided; 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'⁵³), together with a proof that a cluster profile has been submitted to the ECCP for registration, with the respective information included in the descriptive form.
- the applicant consortium must include at least one partner established in a less advanced region of an EU Member State (as defined and applied in the Cohesion policy regulation 2021-2027⁵⁴: 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.

Non-concurrent submission and non-concurrent participation

It is recalled that individual applicants (beneficiaries and affiliated entities) cannot participate in more than one Eurocluster proposal under this call for proposals. Each Eurocluster is responsible to verify that their individual consortium partners (applicants and affiliated entities) are NOT participating in proposals of another Eurocluster. This applies also to clusters without legal personality: if the same cluster organisation (even if represented in different consortia by different legal entities) participates in more than one proposal, all concerned proposals will be considered ineligible under this call.

Similarly, one Eurocluster (consortium of applicants and affiliated entities) cannot submit more than one proposal under this call for proposals.

If any such case is detected by the funding body, it will lead to the ineligibility of all concerned proposals submitted by the concerned consortia under this call.

Eligible activities

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

⁵² <https://www.clustercollaboration.eu>.

⁵³ 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 affectively to knowledge transfer, networking, information dissemination and collaboration among the undertakings and other organisations in the cluster. See at: [Communication from the Commission — Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation \(europa.eu\)](#) with further information available at: [Modernisation - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#) and [Horizontal Rules - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵⁴ 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: [Inforegio - Maps \(europa.eu\)](#).

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*).

Geographic location (target countries)

Proposals must relate to activities taking place in the eligible EU and non-EU countries associated to the Single Market Programme (*see above*), and targeted third countries for the purpose of internationalisation activities.

Duration

Projects should normally range between 30 and 36 months.

Extensions beyond 36 months are possible, only if duly justified and through an amendment.

Project budget

The maximum grant amount is expected to be around EUR 2 625 000 per project.

The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

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

- Up to 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, networking, training and internationalisation activities/services, as well as joint communication.
- At least 75% will be directed to SMEs in the form of financial support to third parties (FSTP), to directly finance services to support their resilience, green and digital transformation only related to the main objective ("Innovation and adoption of new processes and advanced technologies") of this call for proposals.

7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

Financial capacity

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

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

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

- public bodies (entities established as public body under national law, including local, regional or national authorities) or international organisations
- if the individual requested grant amount is not more than EUR 60 000.

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

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

- further information
- an enhanced financial responsibility regime, i.e. joint and several responsibility for all beneficiaries or joint and several liability of affiliated entities (*see below, Section 10*)
- prefinancing paid in instalments
- (one or more) prefinancing guarantees (*see below, Section 10*)

or

- propose no prefinancing
- request that you are replaced or, if needed, reject the entire proposal.



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

Operational capacity

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

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

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 participate⁵⁵:

⁵⁵ See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

- 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 misconduct⁵⁶ (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 grant⁷)
- 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 EU Regulation [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 rejected if it turns out that⁵⁷:

- 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.

⁵⁶ 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.

⁵⁷ See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

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:

- 1) Projects focusing on an industrial ecosystem 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 then 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 two 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 will be considered to have been accessed and that deadlines will be counted from opening/access (see also [Funding & Tenders Portal Terms and Conditions](#)). Please also be aware that for complaints submitted electronically, there may be character limitations.

9. Award criteria

The award criteria for this call are as follows:

1. **Relevance:** clarity and consistency of project, objectives and planning; extent to which they match the themes and priorities and objectives of the call; extent to which they aim to improve the resilience of the European supply and value chains, 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 (in particular to the Net-Zero Industry Act and/or Critical Raw Materials Act for proposals applying to Strand 1 of this call);

European/trans-national dimension; potential to develop mutual cross-border cooperation (30 points).

2. Quality:

- **Project design and implementation:** logical links between the identified problems, needs and solutions proposed (logical frame concept) intended to result in an innovation⁵⁸ for the SMEs financed with financial support to third parties; methodology for implementing the project (concept and methodology, project management, work plan, timetable, risks and risk management, quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation); methods of crowding in private capital in financial support to third parties financed projects; foster the establishment of strategic collaboration between tech-savvy companies and traditional businesses; feasibility of the project within the proposed time frame; cooperate effectively with local and other actors which design or implement projects under the Horizon Europe programme or the national and regional smart specialisation strategies under the Cohesion policy funding; cost effectiveness (sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; best value for money); clarity, innovativeness and rationale of the proposed support to third parties (30 points).
- **Project team and cooperation arrangements:** quality of the consortium and project teams **to deliver on the project’s objectives**; extent to which the role and contribution of each partner is appropriate and in line with its experience and past activities with a view of reaching the main objective and its supporting ones; appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams, consortium and third parties (30 points).

3. **Impact:** credibility, ambition, and expected medium and long-term impact of results on target groups/general public; expected impact on European SMEs benefiting directly from the action to result in a new or improved product or business process (or combination thereof) that differs significantly from the SMEs’ previous products or business processes and that has been introduced on the market or brought into use by the company; appropriate, objectively verifiable and achievable performance indicators to measure project outcomes and expected impact; appropriate dissemination strategy for ensuring visibility and long-term impact; sustainability of results after EU funding ends (10 points).

⁵⁸ As defined in *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>): “An innovation is a new or improved product or process (or combination thereof) that differs significantly from the unit’s previous products or processes and that has been made available to potential users (product) or brought into use by the unit (process)”



Maximum points: 100 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 16/30, 16/30, 16/30 and 6/10 points.

Overall threshold: 70 points.

Proposals that pass the individual thresholds AND the overall threshold will be considered for funding — within the limits of the available budget (i.e. up to the budget ceiling). Other proposals will be rejected.

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

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

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

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

Starting date and project duration

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

Project duration: *see Section 6 above*.

Milestones and deliverables

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

See mandatory deliverables under Section 2 above.

Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount

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

Project budget (maximum grant amount): *see Section 6 above*.

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

The costs will be reimbursed at the funding rates fixed in the Grant Agreement (100% for the costs for providing financial support to third parties and 90% for all other cost categories).

Grants may NOT produce a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). For-profit organisations must declare their revenues and, if there is a profit, we will deduct it from the final grant amount (*see art 22.3*).

Moreover, please be aware that the final grant amount may be reduced in case of non-compliance with the Grant Agreement (*e.g. improper implementation, breach of obligations, etc*).

Budget categories and cost eligibility rules

The budget categories and cost eligibility rules are fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 3, art 6 and Annex 2*).

Budget categories for this call:

- A. Personnel costs
 - A.1 Employees, A.2 Natural persons under direct contract, A.3 Seconded persons
 - A.4 SME owners and natural person beneficiaries
- B. Subcontracting costs
- C. Purchase costs
 - C.1 Travel and subsistence
 - C.2 Equipment
 - C.3 Other goods, works and services
- D. Other cost categories
 - D.1 Financial support to third parties
- E. Indirect costs

Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:

- personnel costs:
 - SME owner/natural person unit cost⁵⁹: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost⁶⁰: Yes
- equipment costs: depreciation
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties: allowed for grants or similar and prizes; maximum amount per third party EUR 60 000, unless a higher amount is required because the objective of the action would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult to achieve and this is duly justified in the Application Form
- indirect cost flat-rate: 7% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteers costs and exempted specific cost categories, if any)
- VAT: non-deductible VAT is eligible (but please note that since 2013 VAT paid by beneficiaries that are public bodies acting as public authority is NOT eligible)

⁵⁹ Commission [Decision](#) of 20 October 2020 authorising the use of unit costs for the personnel costs of the owners of small and medium-sized enterprises and beneficiaries that are natural persons not receiving a salary for the work carried out by themselves under an action or work programme (C(2020)7115) as amended by Commission Decision C(2024)5328 of 30 July 2024.

⁶⁰ Commission [Decision](#) of 12 January 2021 authorising the use of unit costs for travel, accommodation and subsistence costs under an action or work programme under the 2021-2027 multi-annual financial framework (C(2021)35) as last amended by Commission Decision C(2024) 5405 of 31 July 2024.

- other:
 - in-kind contributions for free are allowed, but cost-neutral, i.e. they cannot be declared as cost
 - kick-off meeting: costs for kick-off meeting organised by the granting authority are eligible (travel costs for maximum 2 persons, return ticket to Brussels and accommodation for one night) only if the meeting takes place after the project starting date set out in the Grant Agreement; the starting date can be changed through an amendment, if needed
 - project websites: communication costs for presenting the project on the participants' **websites or social media accounts** are eligible; costs for *separate* project websites are not eligible
 - other ineligible costs: No.

Reporting and payment arrangements

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

After grant signature, you will normally receive a prefinancing to start working on the project (float of normally 50% of the maximum grant amount; exceptionally less or no prefinancing). The prefinancing will be paid 30 days from entry into force/10 days before starting date/financial guarantee (if required) — whichever is the latest.

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

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

All payments will be made to the coordinator.



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

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

Prefinancing guarantees

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

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

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

Prefinancing guarantees are normally requested from the coordinator, for the consortium. They must be provided during grant preparation, in time to make the prefinancing (scanned copy via Portal AND original by post).

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

The guarantee will be released at the end of the grant, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the Grant Agreement (*art 23*).

Certificates

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

Liability regime for recoveries

The liability regime for recoveries will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet point 4.4 and art 22*).

For beneficiaries, it is one of the following:

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

or

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

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

Provisions concerning the project implementation

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

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

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

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

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

- specific rules for PPI Grants for Procurement: No
- specific rules for blending operations: No

Other specificities

n/a

Non-compliance and breach of contract

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



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

11. How to submit an application

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

Submission is a 2-step process:

a) create a user account and register your organisation

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

Once you have an EU Login account, you can [register your organisation](#) in the Participant Register. When your registration is finalised, you will receive a 9-digit participant identification code (PIC).

b) submit the proposal

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

Submit your proposal in three 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](#)
- Topic Q&A 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.

Contact

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

Non-IT related questions should be sent at the latest **5** working days before the call submission deadline to the following email address: 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).
- **Completed/ongoing projects** — Proposals for projects that have already been completed will be rejected; proposals for projects that have already started will be assessed on a case-by-case basis (in this case, no costs can be reimbursed for activities that took place before the project starting date/proposal submission).
- **No-profit rule** — Grants may NOT give a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). This will be checked by us at the end of the project.
- **No cumulation of funding/no double funding** — It is strictly prohibited to cumulate **funding from the EU budget (except under 'EU Synergies actions')**. Outside such Synergies actions, any given action may receive only ONE grant from the EU budget and cost items may under NO circumstances be declared under two EU grants. If you would like to nonetheless benefit from different EU funding opportunities, projects must be designed as different actions, clearly delineated and separated for each grant (without overlaps).
- **Combination with EU operating grants** — Combination with EU operating grants is possible, if the project remains outside the operating grant work programme and you make sure that cost items are clearly separated in your accounting and NOT declared twice (see [AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement, art 6.2.E](#)).
- **Multiple proposals** — Euroclusters consortia cannot submit more than one proposal under this call for proposal. Each project application must address only one of the two strands under this call for proposals. The individual consortium partners (applicants and affiliates entities) cannot participate in more than one Eurocluster proposal (see section 6).
- **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](#).