



# European Funding Toolkit

## for Social Enterprises & their Support Organisations

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**Euclid Network is the European network of social enterprises and impact-driven leaders. With our members and partners, we deliver events, EU projects, peer exchanges and policy work for social entrepreneurs and impact-driven leaders. Euclid Network currently has over 54 member organisations across 31 countries, operating in 77 countries. They represent over 120,000 social economy organisations and support 25 million individuals annually.**



## Co-funded by the European Union

This guide has been published with the financial support of the European Commission (ESF+ Programme). The information set out in this publication are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Commission.

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**Last revision:** November 2025

### Please use this reference to cite the report:

De Jong, A., Dupain, W., Eikelenboom, P. (2025). "EN Funding Toolkit". Euclid Network.

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# Contents

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Foreword	6
A fundraising guide for social enterprise support organisations	8
Glossary	10
<b>PART 1 - Accessing EU Funding</b>	
An evolving EU policy for the sector	14
The EU's concrete support to social enterprise intermediaries	16
The EU's Social Economy Gateway	20
Find your best fit - a tool to navigate the EU funding maze!	21
Looking Ahead: EU MFF 2028-2034 and opportunities for the Social Economy	28
European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	32
The European Single Market Programme	42
Erasmus+	50
INTERREG - European Territorial Cooperation	60
European Neighbourhood Instrument	68
Horizon Europe	76
InvestEU	84
European Regional Development Fund	90
Citizens, Equality, Rights & Values	96
Global Europe: the Neighbourhood, Development & International Cooperation Instrument	100
Digital Europe (DIGITAL)	106
Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)	112
Creative Europe	116
Just Transition Fund	124
New European Bauhaus	130
Early-stage finance opportunities for social enterprises	134
LIFE Programme: EU Funding for Climate Change and Environmental Protection	140
Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE): Supporting Aspiring Social Entrepreneurs	144
European Investment Bank (EIB) Funding for Social Enterprises	148
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Funding for Social Enterprises	150
Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)	152
Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB)	154
Dedicated Non Financial Support	158
Dedicated Opportunities for Ukrainian Social Enterprises & their Support Organisations	162
Some EU projects' jargon	166

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<b>Part 2 - Getting Non-EU Public Funding</b>	
EEA & Norway Grants	170
World Bank Funding for Social Enterprises	174
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Funding for Social Enterprises	176

<b>Part 3 - Philanthropic &amp; Corporate Fundraising</b>	
Accessing philanthropic & corporate fundraising: A step-by-step guide	180
Example 1 - A hybrid set-up within a business: IKEA Social Entrepreneurship	186
Example 2 - The global CSR department of a multinational: SAP CSR	190
Example 3 - A corporate foundation: The Thomson Reuters Foundation	194

<b>Part 4 - Tips &amp; Tricks: A Roadmap to Fundraising</b>	
Identify your needs & take stock	198
Embed fundraising in all of your work	199
Save your valuable time!	200
Think your application through	200
Reflect & carry on!	201

# Foreword

**The Euclid Network team is proud to present this updated edition of the European Funding Toolkit, a comprehensive guide designed to support social enterprises and their intermediaries in navigating the complex yet rewarding landscape of EU funding.**

As we look ahead to the continuation of the current Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) ending in 2027, we stand at a pivotal moment. With new EU calls on the horizon, focusing on critical themes like the green and digital transitions, social innovation, and inclusive employment, there are abundant opportunities for social enterprises to scale their impact. These calls resonate with the priorities laid out in the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Social Economy Action Plan, further cementing the social economy's role in achieving the EU's broader goals.

The [EU Social Economy Gateway](#), launched as part of the Social Economy Action Plan, provides a vital resource for social enterprises and stakeholders, offering access to a wealth of tools, policy insights, and funding opportunities. This gateway serves as a central hub to navigate the evolving ecosystem and maximise the impact of social economy initiatives across Europe.

The Council's recent recommendation on improving the framework conditions for the social economy is another significant milestone. This recommendation encourages Member States to strengthen their strategies for the social economy, paving the way for enhanced funding streams, supportive ecosystems, and innovative policy approaches.

While this toolkit provides a detailed overview of existing funding streams, Euclid Network remains committed to identifying new funding opportunities and sharing them with our members and partners. Through our communications channels, such as newsletters, social media, and our webinar series Financing Your Social Impact, we ensure timely updates on relevant funding opportunities. Moreover, our EU Funding Helpdesk offers dedicated support to help our members and partners access both EU and non-EU funding.

Looking ahead to the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) starting in 2028, the funding landscape will likely evolve to reflect emerging trends, including a heightened focus on sustainability, digital transformation, and inclusive innovation. Staying informed and prepared will be critical to leveraging these opportunities effectively.

At Euclid Network, we are dedicated to empowering social enterprises and support organisations to navigate the complexities of funding, align their ambitions with available resources, and drive systemic change. Together, we can continue to build a more inclusive, innovative, and sustainable Europe.

On behalf of the Euclid Network Board and Team  
**Neven Marinovic,**  
**President Euclid Network.**



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# A fundraising guide for social enterprise support organisations

**This toolkit has been designed to facilitate the formulation of your fundraising strategy and your funding application processes. It is therefore primarily intended to inform social enterprise support organisations and intermediaries. This guide will also help you advise your beneficiaries in their own fundraising endeavours.**

The toolkit focuses on both public and private funding. While it does not seek to be exhaustive, it will facilitate the identification of potential funding sources for your organisations and get you started!



## Who is this guide for?

This guide has been designed for social enterprise support organisations and intermediaries. It therefore caters, as much as possible, to organisations that identify themselves as supporting the broad social entrepreneurship and social economy ecosystem. These 'intermediaries' can be:

- National federations and networks of social enterprises and social entrepreneurs
- Incubators
- Accelerators
- Research centres
- Universities and dedicated academic departments
- Vocational education and training institutions (VET) and informal training organisations
- Public institutions
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) including civil society organisations (CSOs)

This guide can be used by individuals and teams who occupy roles connected to fundraising and business development or simply by those who wish to share knowledge on the topic with their beneficiaries.

If you are a social enterprise this guide will be relevant to you too as we included a chapter on early-stage finance opportunities and because many of the funding streams mentioned can be used by delivery organisations/social enterprises themselves.

However, you will find even more tailored information in the *Finance your Social Innovation Toolkit* available [here](#).

## How to use this guide?

This guide provides detailed information on the relevant funding and non-financial support programmes made available to social enterprise support organisations by various public institutions and private organisations. You will be able to gather practical advice on how to access funding and non-financial support from these stakeholders and develop your own fundraising framework. You will also be better equipped to define, plan and navigate through all the potential support you and your beneficiaries could access.

**In Part 1**, we guide you through the most relevant European Commission funding streams as an outlook to the new proposed Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028-2034. For each of these programmes, you will understand their objectives, their eligibility criteria, their application processes and the amounts available.

**In Part 2**, we dive into the world of philanthropy and corporate fundraising. With a step-by-step guide to approaching these types of organisations for support, we will help you diversify your revenue streams and build long-term strategic partnerships.

**Finally, Part 3** offers you a roadmap to concretely help you fundraise. It will give you the right tips and tricks at each step of the way to help you make the most informed decisions, anticipate risks and plan ahead. **This toolkit has been designed so that you can either:**

- Access the chapters in a pick-and-mix manner according to your objectives, needs and context
- Read through it in a linear fashion from beginning to end, section-by-section

**We are conscious that your organisations are diverse and that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' fundraising approach. Donors are almost as diverse in their shapes and scopes, so be curious, be bold and fundraise away!**

## Enjoy the read!

### Disclaimer:

Please note that this is a living document. It was updated in November 2025 and is therefore susceptible to require changes and updates. The MFF 2028–2034 outlook presented in this document is based on the European Commission's proposals, available documentation, and current interpretations; further adjustments may be necessary as negotiations evolve and additional official guidance becomes available.

# Glossary - Key terminology and abbreviations

**AMIF:** Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

**CEB:** Council of Europe Development Bank.

**CERV:** Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme.

**Cohesion Policy:** The EU Cohesion Policy seeks to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU. It aims to correct imbalances between countries and regions.

**COSME:** EU's programme for small and medium-sized enterprises (former name - now within the Single Market Programme).

**CSO:** Civil Society Organisation.

**DG Connect:** Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology.

**DG EMPL:** Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion.

**DG GROW:** Directorate-General Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship & SMEs.

**DIGITAL:** Digital Europe programme.

**EACEA:** European Education and Culture Executive Agency.

**EaSI:** EU programme for Employment and Social Innovation.

**ECCP:** European Cluster Collaboration Platform.

**EC:** European Commission.

**EBRD:** European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

**EDIH:** European Digital Innovation Hubs.

**EEA:** The European Economic Association.

**EEN:** Enterprise Europe Network.

**EFSD+:** European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus.

**EISMEA:** European Innovation Council and SME Executive Agency.

**ERC:** European Research Council.

**ERDF:** European Regional Development Fund.

**ESF(+):** European Social Fund Plus.

**ETC:** European Territorial Cooperation.

**EU:** European Union.

**EPSR:** European Pillar of Social Rights: the Pillar of Social Rights is about better delivering on rights for citizens by building on 20 key principles. These key principles represent the beacon towards a stronger social Europe.

**Executive Agency:** A decentralised body of the EU, distinct from the EU institutions. Agencies are there to accomplish specific advisory, management and implementation tasks.

**FEAD:** Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived.

**Funder:** A person or organisation that provides money for a particular purpose.

**GECES:** Constituted to advise the European Commission on policy initiatives related to the social economy and social enterprise. It is a consultative body composed of 40 experts from the private sector, 40 experts from the public sector and observers from organisations such as the OECD and the UN.

**Grantee:** A person or organisation to whom a grant is given.

**IDA:** International Development Association.

**IFC:** International Finance Corporation.

**JRC:** Joint Research Centre.

**JTF:** Just Transition Fund.

**Managing Authority:** A managing authority is a national body/organisation responsible for the efficient management and implementation of an operational programme at national level.

**MFF:** Multiannual Financial Framework.

**NEB:** New European Bauhaus.

**NGOs:** Non-governmental organisations.

**NCPs:** National Contact Points.

**NEET:** Not in education, employment or training.

**NUTS:** Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics.

**SBI:** Social Business Initiative. It was launched in 2011 by the European Commission and established an EU level action plan with concrete measures to establish a favourable environment for social enterprises.

**SEAP:** Social Economy Action Plan.

**SESO:** Social enterprise support organisation.

**SME:** Small and medium sized enterprises.

**UNDP:** United Nations Development Program.

**VET:** Vocational education and training.

**WB:** World Bank.

**YEI:** Youth Employment Initiative.

# Part 1

Accessing EU Funding

# An evolving EU policy for the sector

**The first comprehensive EU-level policy initiative for social entrepreneurship was the 2011 Social Business Initiative (SBI), presented as part of the Responsible Business Package. More than 10 years have passed with many additional actions announced in more recent years.**

The SBI contained an Action Plan to create a favourable ecosystem for social enterprises and focused on three priority areas: funding, visibility and the legal environment. Within these three areas the European Commission (EC) identified 11 priority measures such as: social investment funds; microcredit; a register of social enterprises; labels and certifications; public procurement; and state aid. It was then decided that the SBI's priority areas should be supported by an Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship and Social Economy (also known as GECES), which had a six-year mandate to set the direction for European policy development in this field.

The GECES Expert Group—composed of representatives from the public and private sectors, alongside observers from the OECD and UN—has been in its third mandate (2024–2030). GECES advises the Commission on implementing the Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP), shaping the 'Proximity and Social Economy' transition pathway, informing social entrepreneurship and social finance instruments, and facilitating peer exchanges across the EU. The group continues to drive policy coherence and sector understanding.

GECES now being in its third mandate (2024–2030) strengthens the link between grassroots needs and EU strategic decision-making. Key recent contributions include:

- Special Data Code of Conduct Subgroup — tasked with developing guidelines for data management and sharing in the social economy.
- OECD-EC policy guide on Social Impact Measurement - this guide helps SEs and policymakers design easier, actionable impact measurement systems.
- Updates on the Social Economy Gateway — new topic pages reflecting GECES-endorsed focus areas.

In 2016, the GECES published 13 recommendations for how policy-makers could support the development of social enterprises, which have been reflected in the launch of the European Action Plan for the Social Economy and Social Enterprises in 2021. In parallel that year the recognition of the potential for innovation of social enterprises was reiterated in the European Start-up and Scale-up Initiative. In particular, lack of or poor access to finance was identified as one of the most significant barriers to the creation and growth of social enterprises.

The Expert Group's mandate was renewed in October 2018 with a different structure. This group - known as GECES II and who have a mandate until 2024 - will give feedback to the

EC on existing policies and instruments for the sector. The group will also actively support the development of all future European initiatives in favour of social entrepreneurship and social finance.

**Since 2011, the EC has launched a wide range of initiatives providing financial and non-financial support to European social enterprises.**

Since 2011, the European Commission has launched a series of initiatives to support social enterprises and their support organisations (SESOs), recognising their contribution to employment, inclusion, and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP, 2021–2030) is the EU's central framework for strengthening the sector. It links directly to the Sustainable Development Goals, the European Green Deal, and the EU Industrial Strategy. The SEAP sets out over 60 actions in three areas:

- Creating the right policy and legal frameworks.
- Opening opportunities for growth and market access.
- Boosting recognition, skills, and innovation.

Key priorities include access to funding, green and digital transitions, socially responsible and green public procurement, and awareness-raising.

## Recent developments (2023–2025):

- The Council Recommendation on Developing Social Economy Framework Conditions (Nov 2023) urges Member States to improve access to finance, procurement, taxation, state aid, impact measurement, and data collection.
- The Transition Pathway for the Proximity and Social Economy (2023) provides a collaborative roadmap for green and digital transitions, resilience, and inclusivity.
- Ongoing work under SEAP now feeds into new funding opportunities, such as Social Climate Fund (2026–2032) and the Just Transition Mechanism, ensuring that the social economy is embedded in Europe's broader transformation agendas.

### Tip for applicants:

Aligning project proposals with SEAP, the Transition Pathway, and the Council Recommendation increases coherence with EU priorities and strengthens funding chances.

# The EU's concrete support to social enterprise intermediaries

**The social economy is a major force in Europe: by 2024, more than 4.3 million organisations employ over 19 million people, around 6.3% of the EU workforce. The sector is increasingly diverse, with social enterprises active in inclusion, health, education, circular economy, and digitalisation.**

Recognising this role, the European Commission has expanded support for both social enterprises and their intermediaries (SESOs), strengthening access to finance, capacity building, and ecosystem development through:

- Access to finance via InvestEU Social Investment & Skills Window, EIF guarantees, and ESF+/EaSI legacy instruments.
- Capacity building through ESF+ (Social Innovation+), Erasmus+, and technical assistance programmes.
- Ecosystem development via the Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP, 2021–2030), the Transition Pathway for the Proximity and Social Economy (2022), and the Council Recommendation on Social Economy Framework Conditions (2023).

## Funding & Mechanisms

Social enterprises, SESOs, SMEs, and public authorities can access EU support through grants, loans, guarantees, and procurement contracts. Most EU funds are co-financed (50–90%), with around 80% managed jointly by the Commission and Member States.

### Tip for applicants:

Identifying your national managing authority for ESF+, ERDF, or AMIF is often a good first step.

## The Transition Pathway for the Proximity and Social Economy

Launched in 2022 and updated in 2023–2024, the Transition Pathway sets a roadmap for making the sector greener, more digital, and more socially just (Transition Pathway). Fourteen action areas (seven green, seven digital) guide targeted EU funding and policy development. In 2025, the Commission began monitoring progress and will publish implementation roadmaps by 2026, linking to calls in ESF+, SMP, Horizon Europe, and LIFE.

## Looking Ahead: Watchlists for 2026–2030

### SEAP Mid-Term Review (2025) – Social Economy Gateway

The EU is undertaking a mid-term review of the Social Economy Action Plan ahead of its 2030 horizon ([EU Social Economy Gateway](#)). This will likely shape future policy and funding direction for social enterprises.

### Social Climate Fund – EU Commission Background

Detailed overview of what the Social Climate Fund (2026–2032) aims to achieve—supporting vulnerable groups through the green transition.

[Climate Action European Commission](#)

### CAN Europe Media Advisory on Social Climate Plans

Highlights that Social Climate Plans, required for accessing SCF funding, must be adopted by Member States by June 2025, showing urgency and opportunity ahead.

[CAN Europe](#)

### Bruegel Brief – Social Climate Fund

Analysis on how the SCF redistributes ETS2 auction revenues and guidance for effective national implementation.

[Bruegel](#)

## 2026 EU Budget — Media Statement (June 2025)

Commission's announcement of the 2026 EU budget, which includes significant investment streams (climate, migration, competitiveness). This may hint at future mainstreaming opportunities for the social economy.

[European Commission](#)



## EU Programme matrix

Directorate-General (DG)	Role & Policy Lead	Key Instruments / Programme	Relevance for SEs & SESOs
<b>DG EMPL – Employment, Social Affairs &amp; Inclusion</b>	Leads the Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP, 2021–2030); social inclusion, labour & skills	ESF+, Social Innovation+, EaSI legacy	Core grants & operating support for SESOs and SEs; key driver of inclusion policies
<b>DG GROW – Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship &amp; SMEs</b>	Oversees the Proximity & Social Economy Industrial Ecosystem in EU Industrial Strategy	Single Market Programme (SMP – COSME), cluster support	Anchors social economy in EU industrial and SME policies
<b>DG REGIO – Regional &amp; Urban Policy</b>	Manages cohesion funds and regional development	ERDF, Interreg, Just Transition Mechanism	Enables local/regional SE ecosystem building & infrastructure
<b>DG EAC – Education, Youth, Sport &amp; Culture</b>	Supports education, training, youth entrepreneurship	Erasmus+, Alliances for Innovation	Capacity building, partnerships, youth engagement
<b>DG CLIMA – Climate Action</b>	Leads climate neutrality & just transition	Social Climate Fund (2026–2032)	Ensures SEs are delivery partners for inclusive green transition
<b>DG RTD – Research &amp; Innovation</b>	Funds collaborative R&I, social innovation & circular pilots	Horizon Europe (Clusters 2, 5, 6)	Consortia opportunities for SEs & SESOs in innovation projects
<b>DG ENER / DG ENV – Energy &amp; Environment</b>	Climate neutrality, circular economy, biodiversity	LIFE Programme, Innovation Fund	Funding for green pilots, energy communities, biodiversity projects
<b>DG AGRI – Agriculture &amp; Rural Development</b>	Rural development & CAP	EAFRD (Rural Development)	Supports rural SEs, community farming, short food chains
<b>DG MOVE – Mobility &amp; Transport</b>	Promotes sustainable mobility	Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), Urban Mobility calls	Opportunities for SEs in inclusive transport & mobility pilots
<b>DG NEAR – Neighbourhood &amp; Enlargement</b>	Supports candidate & neighbourhood countries	IPA III, Neighbourhood programmes	SESOs active in EU enlargement countries can join capacity-building & ecosystem projects
<b>DG INTPA – International Partnerships</b>	Oversees EU development cooperation	NDICI–Global Europe, thematic programmes	SEs/SESOs with global scope can access funds for inclusion, climate, partnerships



### Notes for clarity:

#### **DG AGRI, MOVE, NEAR, INTPA**

don't have dedicated social economy lines, but their programmes (rural, mobility, neighbourhood, global partnerships) have **funding windows** where SEs/SESOs can apply as part of **consortia or delivery partners**.

# The EU's Social Economy Gateway



In 2023, the European Commission launched the **Social Economy Gateway** as an online one-stop-shop for the social economy. The gateway focuses on finding information about and for social economy stakeholders, be it about the concept itself, the SEAP, the relevant funding programmes or national social economy ecosystems.

Public officials can use the platform to understand and get inspired by all EU initiatives on social economy. People working in the social economy can use it to easily identify the most relevant EU funding programmes for their organisations, needs, projects, etc. And those who are interested in knowing what is happening in other EU countries can also find that information through the Gateway.

The Gateway was launched as part of a package on Social Economy by the European Commission which included a recommendation to the European Council on Social Economy Framework Conditions.

This proposal set out several areas (including legal, taxation and regulatory frameworks) in which the EU's Member States should take actions to support the development of social economy ecosystems through targeted national strategies.

This recommendation is yet to be adopted by the European Council, however it is anticipated to bring further support for the development of national ecosystems for social entrepreneurship.



The EC provides funding in various forms, including:

## Grants

Given to organisations (and occasionally to individuals). Grants are awarded in many different fields, usually on the basis of project proposals submitted by applicants in response to calls for proposals. Calls are published regularly and seek to fulfil the overall objective of the relevant funding programme.

## Financial instruments

Such as loans, guarantees and equity provided to businesses.

## Cash prizes

For businesses as part of organised competitions, in which businesses often also benefit from free publicity and promotion.

## Purchasing services

Works and goods from the market by inviting businesses to tender for public contracts.

### Disclaimer:

Please note that this guide's intention is to give an overview of some of the European programmes & funds that Euclid Network has identified as relevant for social enterprises, impact-driven leaders and their support structures. It does not seek to be exhaustive and other relevant EU initiatives could be added in the future.



## Find your best fit - a tool to navigate the EU funding maze!

In 2022, EN ran a survey of its members to identify their main areas of interest with regards to future funding applications. Based on their answers, we want to help you navigate the EU funding maze in the most efficient manner.

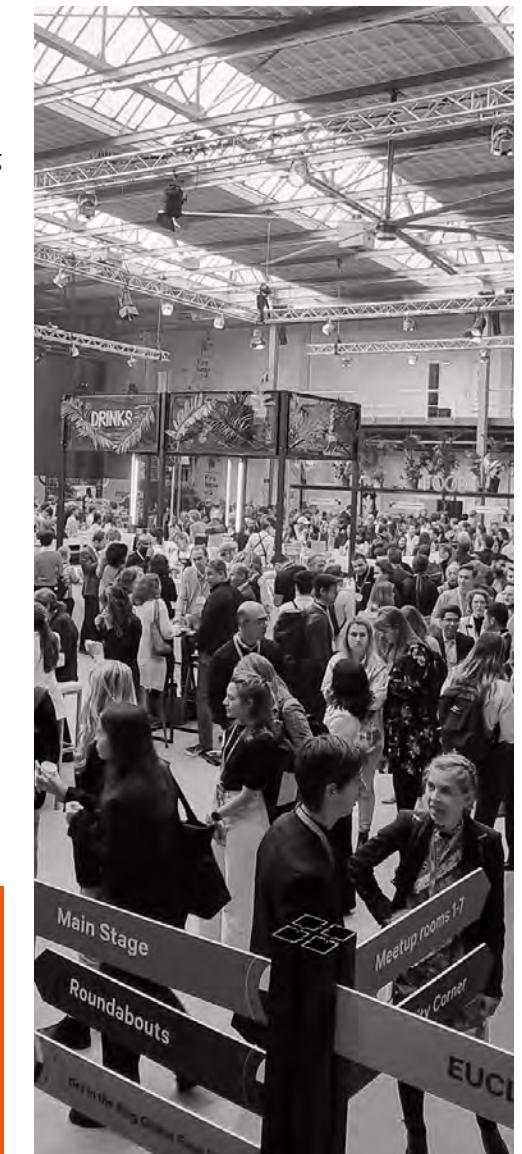
### What is this section?

It is a guide to match your thematic priorities with relevant EU funding streams.

### What is it not?

This is not an exhaustive list of every opportunity. You may identify other themes or funding streams relevant to your work.

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# You are looking to address...

...specific themes of work

## Sustainable Development & Green Transition

**The EU defines sustainable development as a development that** “meets the needs of the present whilst ensuring future generations can meet their own needs. It has three pillars: economic, environmental and social.”

**Where to look first?** [Horizon Europe](#), [ERDF](#), [Interreg](#), [EBRD LIFE](#), [JTF](#), [EEN](#)

## Social Inclusion

With this term, the EU entails the social inclusion of people with disabilities, younger and older workers, low-skilled workers, migrants and ethnic minorities such as the Roma, people who live in deprived areas, and women in the labour market.

**Where to look first?** [ESF+](#), [SMP](#), [CERV](#), [AMIF](#), [Erasmus+](#), [CEB](#)

## Digitalisation

**The EU defines digitalisation as** “the ongoing integration of digital technologies and digitised data across the economy and society.”

**Where to look first?** [Digital Europe](#), [Horizon Europe](#), [Erasmus+](#), [JTF](#)

## Employability & Skills

The EU defines employability as “*a combination of factors (such as job-specific skills and soft skills) which enable individuals to progress towards or enter into employment, stay in employment and progress during their careers.*”

**Where to look first?** [Erasmus+](#), [SMP](#), [ESF+](#), [Global Europe](#), [CEB](#)

## International Cooperation & Development

The EU works with 150 partner countries in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, as well as civil society and international organisations. It provides financial aid, cooperation and conducts research.

**Where to look first?** [Global Europe](#), [AMIF](#), [Horizon Europe](#), [Erasmus+](#), [EEN](#)

## Culture & creative industries

The EU defines the cultural and creative sectors as comprising “*all sectors whose activities are based on cultural values, or other artistic individual or collective creative expressions*”.

**Where to look first?** [Creative Europe](#), [CERV](#), [Horizon Europe](#), [Erasmus+](#)

	ESF+	Horizon Europe	InvestEU	The European Single Market Programme	Erasmus+	Interreg	European Neighbourhood Instrument	European Regional Development Fund	Citizens, Equality, Rights & Values	Global Europe	AMIF	Digital Europe (DIGITAL)	EEA & Norway Grants	Just Transition Fund	Creative Europe	LIFE	New European Bauhaus	EEN
Sustainable Development & Green Transition		●		●	●	●		●						●		●	●	●
Social Inclusion	●				●				●		●		●		●	●		●
Employability & Skills	●			●	●		●		●	●		●	●	●	●			
Digitalisation	●	●			●						●			●			●	●
International Cooperation & Development		●			●					●	●				●			

# You are looking to address...

...challenges specific to social enterprises and their ecosystem

## Access to skills

There is a specific skills gap when it comes to social entrepreneurs and enterprises and therefore a need for dedicated training in formal and non formal education.

**Where to look first?** [Erasmus+](#), [SMP](#), [ESF+](#), [Interreg](#), [ENI](#)

## Access to finance

Financial sustainability is often mentioned as one of the main barriers to the creation, development and growth of social enterprises.

**Where to look first?** [ESF+](#), [InvestEU](#), [SMP](#), [ERDF](#)

## Access to markets

The capacity to trade with both the public and the private sectors is still considered a challenge for many social enterprises.

**Where to look first?** [ESF+](#), [SMP](#), [InvestEU](#), [ERDF](#)

## Access to networks

Networks play a crucial role in social enterprise development from fostering peer-learning to creating critical mass for lobbying public institutions.

**Where to look first?** [ESF+](#), [SMP](#), [Interreg](#), [ENI](#), [Global Europe](#)

## Social innovation

For the EU, “social innovations are new ideas that meet social needs, create social relationships and form new collaborations. These innovations can be products, services or models addressing unmet needs more effectively.”

**Where to look first?** [ESF+](#), [SMP](#), [Horizon Europe](#), [Interreg](#), [Global Europe](#)

	ESF+	Horizon Europe	InvestEU	The European Single Market Programme	Erasmus+	Interreg	European Neighbourhood Instrument	European Regional Development Fund	Citizens, Equality, Rights & Values	Global Europe	AMIF	Digital Europe (DIGITAL)	EEA & Norway Grants	Just Transition Fund	Creative Europe	LIFE	New European Bauhaus	EEN
Access to skills	●				●	●	●	●				●	●		●			●
Access to finance	●			●	●			●						●		●		
Access to markets	●			●	●			●							●			●
Access to networks	●			●		●			●	●	●		●		●		●	●

## Good to know

**DG Employment** and **DG GROW** often publish ad-hoc calls for proposals that are very relevant to your organisations and that of your beneficiaries.

For that reason, we encourage you to monitor their websites and the [EU calls database](#).



# Looking Ahead: EU MFF 2028–2034 and opportunities for the Social Economy

The upcoming [EU Multiannual Financial Framework \(MFF\) 2028–2034](#) will reshape the funding landscape across Europe.

While programmes are being streamlined and simplified, important opportunities emerge for the social economy, social enterprises, and their support organisations. At the same time, civil society has raised concerns about reduced long-term structural support and the need for stronger involvement in programme design and governance.

## Key Programmes and Opportunities

### [European Social Fund \(ESF\)](#) & [National/Regional Partnership Plans](#)

- **Opportunities:** Main EU instrument for jobs, skills, inclusion, and poverty reduction. Strong focus on upskilling, lifelong learning, social innovation, social entrepreneurship, housing, and care services.
- **Concerns:** Risks of heavier reliance on performance-based indicators; pressure on Member States to prioritise competitiveness over inclusion.

## Horizon Europe (Research & Innovation)

- **Opportunities:** Supports collaborative research on sustainability, digitalisation, health, social cohesion, and inclusive societies. Potential for SE-led innovation, social impact research, and social procurement pilots.
- **Concerns:** Funding often dominated by large consortia; accessibility for smaller social enterprises and NGOs remains a challenge.

## [European Competitiveness Fund \(ECF\)](#)

- **Opportunities:** Consolidates 14 instruments into one fund; support for SMEs, start-ups and scale-ups, including SEs. Focus on clean tech, digital transition, skills, and access to finance.
- **Concerns:** Shift from grants to financial instruments may disadvantage social economy actors less able to attract private co-investment.

## Erasmus+ (Education, Skills, Youth, Sport)

- **Opportunities:** Expands mobility and lifelong learning, addressing skills shortages, digital and green skills, inclusion, and civic engagement. Stronger links with the “Union of Skills” agenda.
- **Concerns:** Administrative complexity; smaller organisations face barriers to access.



## AgoraEU

### **(Democracy, Rights, Media, Culture)**

- **Opportunities:** Successor to Creative Europe & CERV. Supports civil society, rights, equality, inclusion, democratic participation, media pluralism, and cultural/social innovation.
- **Concerns:** Civil society stresses the need for adequate, stable, and independent funding for grassroots organisations.

## Cohesion & Interreg Funds

- **Opportunities:** Reduce disparities, invest in regions, social infrastructure, housing, innovation ecosystems, and cross-border cooperation. Interreg supports SEs in border regions.
- **Concerns:** Large-scale infrastructure focus could overshadow social priorities unless strong safeguards for inclusion are upheld.

## Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)

- **Opportunities:** Invests in sustainable transport, energy, and digital networks. Opens avenues for social procurement and inclusive infrastructure projects.
- **Concerns:** Heavy focus on big infrastructure projects risks sidelining community-driven, smaller-scale innovation

## Global Europe

- **Opportunities:** External action instrument supporting partnerships worldwide. Opportunities for SEs active internationally in inclusive development, social innovation, and sustainable trade.
- **Concerns:** Priorities may shift towards geopolitical goals, with limited space for grassroots social economy initiatives.

### **Key takeaways for the Social Economy**

The new MFF offers broad opportunities: inclusion, skills, sustainability, digital transition, social innovation, and civic participation.

But funding is shifting towards competitiveness, financial instruments, and performance-based logic.

Continuous and strong stakeholder engagement will be critical to ensure that social economy priorities — inclusion, social entrepreneurship, and social procurement — are embedded in programme design and calls.





# European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)



Grants

**Theme** Employment / Skills / Inclusion

**Budget** €142.7 billion

**Managed by** National Agencies

**The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is the successor to the European Social Fund (ESF). It is the EU's main instrument to build a stronger social Europe and promote the creation of fair and sustainable employment for all EU citizens. The ESF+ total budget is €142.7 billion for 2021-2027.**

## What has changed?

The ESF+ continues to invest in people with a strong focus on helping European society face the challenges of the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impact. Key elements of the new ESF+ are naturally the triple transition to a green, sustainable and digital economy as well as supporting the realisation of the EPSR.

In April 2025 the Commission proposed an amendment to broaden the scope and make it easier to mobilise support for displaced workers. Under the proposed changes,

Member States would gain more flexibility to redirect ESF+ funding towards skills development in strategic sectors, such as defence and clean industries, and to provide additional support to regions bordering Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, which are facing specific challenges linked to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

## You heard about ESF Social Innovation+?

The ESF+ continues to support social innovations with multiple measures. Member States are asked to support social innovation with ESF funding through specific actions in their own national or regional context. Within ESF+, €197 million are dedicated to this new component which include EU-wide, multinational projects to develop, replicate and scale up innovative solutions.

Multiple initiatives have been planned and are detailed in the following text.

**IMPORTANT: The ESF+ integrates the former European Social Fund (ESF) but also:**

- The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)
- The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)
- The EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) – with a dedicated financial budget of €676 million

## What does it support?

The ESF+ focuses on employment, education and skills as well as social inclusion. It seeks to fund local, regional and national employment and social innovation related projects throughout Europe: from small charity initiatives helping people with mental health disorders to find suitable work, to nationwide projects providing vocational training for everyone.

**ESF+ has determined six priority areas for the current programming period:**

- **Reskilling and upskilling** people for the transition to a green and digital economy. A particular focus is put on supporting young people who have been particularly affected by the Covid-19 crisis to obtain qualifications, find a good quality job and engage in education and training.
- **Helping children in need** with targeted actions to combat child poverty and supporting the most vulnerable in society

suffering from job losses and income reductions, including providing food and basic material assistance to the most deprived.

• **Transnational cooperation for promoting social innovation across the EU.** This is a new initiative that includes EU-wide, multinational projects to develop, replicate and scale up innovative solutions. It is also establishing a European Competence Centre for social innovation that will collect, assess, develop, validate and disseminate suitable tools and methods for social innovation. The initiative offers mutual learning, capacity-building and networking for ESF Managing Authorities and other relevant stakeholders.

• **Direct support to social innovation through the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) strand.** It builds on the former EaSI programme 2014-2020, maintaining the focus on evidence-based policy-making and social experimentation, support to job mobility and the non-financial instrument activities related to the former Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis: supporting analytical activities, capacity-building and transnational/ cross-border cooperation to strengthen social protection and social inclusion, fair working conditions, equal access to the labour market, social entrepreneurship and labour mobility.

More information [here](#)



The ESF+ continues to invest in people with a strong focus on helping European society face the challenges of the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and regional disparities across the EU. ESF+ is also here to make the European Pillar of Social Rights a reality on the ground!

### Who can participate?

The ESF+ offers funding to various types of beneficiaries:

- Public administrations
- Workers' and employers' organisations
- NGOs and charities
- SMEs

We note that the ESF+Direct (EaSI) strand funding is also open to any legal entity created under Union law or any international organisation.

### Eligible countries

#### > ESF+ (all in shared management)

##### all EU Member States

#### > ESF+Direct (EaSI) strand:

- EU Member States (and their overseas countries and territories).
- EEA countries, in accordance with the EEA Agreement.
- EU acceding countries, candidate countries and potential candidate countries, in line with the framework agreements concluded with them.
- Third countries having signed an agreement to participate in the strand or a third country listed in the EaSI work programme, if necessary for the achievement of the objectives of an action. However, in the latter case, organisations established in such non-EU countries should in principle bear the cost of their participation.

### How does it work?

The large majority (€142 billion out of €142.7 billion) of the ESF+ budget has been allocated under shared management (in partnership) with the Member States. ESF+ Managing Authorities in each country allocate the money to projects which allows for the funds to be used in the most efficient manner and respond to country and region-specific needs or challenges.

The EaSI strand of ESF+, however, is managed centrally and directly by the EC which is a new feature of the ESF+.

### Who can I contact?

#### The ESF+ funding has shared management with the Member States

Organisations interested in an ESF+ funding for a project should contact the [ESF+ Managing Authority](#) in their country or region or consult their national and regional ESF/ESF+ websites.

#### The ESF+Direct (EaSI) strand is directly managed by the EC

Organisations interested in the EaSI Strand of the ESF+ can respond to the calls for proposals and tenders that are launched by the EC, which are available on the [EC Funding & Tenders Portal](#).

We note that international organisations implement a small part of the programme under indirect management. To find relevant information, have a look at the [annual work programmes](#) which are drafted after consultation with EU Member States and stakeholders.

### Good to know

There is a lot happening with ESF+ and social innovation! Do not miss out!

#### Social Innovation Transnational Cooperation Platform

The platform works as an intermediary platform until the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation is operational, coordinating lessons learned and information sharing between Managing Authorities. Along with social innovation, the platform has been

holding a series of cross-cutting events also developed the following communities of practice:

- Employment, education and skills
- Social inclusion
- Results-based management

Check it all out [here](#).

### National Competence Centres for Social Innovation

Since May 2021, six projects, covering 25 countries and including 148 organisations, have been selected to spend 2 years building national competence centres for social innovation across nearly all Member States. See the list of selected projects [here](#). These centres will help managing authorities to programme and implement social innovation actions, as well as support organisations on the ground with capacity-building and networking measures.

Check out the Centres' objectives, initial factsheets [here](#).

### The European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS) 2022

This is a tool which provides a comparative analysis of innovation performance in EU countries, other European countries, and regional neighbours. It allows countries to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and identify challenges that they need to address.

**Why not use the EIS tool to contextualise and/or problematize your project proposals!**

### ESF+ Update 2025–2026 – Key Points for the Social Economy

The 2025 amendment to the ESF+ Regulation ([Reg. \(EU\) 2025/1913](#)) introduces new flexibility and targeted priorities that are highly relevant for the social economy and its support organisations.

During the mid-term review (2025–26), Managing Authorities may amend their ESF+ programmes—creating opportunities for additional calls and new thematic actions in 2026–2030.



#### Greater Flexibility and Additional Pre-Financing

Programmes that reallocate at least 10% of their budget to the new priorities can receive **extra ESF+ pre-financing in 2026**, easing national cash-flow pressures and enabling more (or earlier) calls. Border regions with Russia, Belarus or Ukraine benefit from even higher advance payments.

#### New Dedicated Priorities with Priority for the Social Economy

Member States may introduce dedicated ESF+ priorities for:

- Civil preparedness, resilience and cybersecurity, and
- Skills for the green transition and industrial decarbonisation.

For these priorities, authorities must give explicit priority to social economy organisations, alongside MSMEs and public employment services. These strands may also receive higher co-financing rates (up to 100%) and exceptional pre-financing.



# Some Inspiration

## A National Competence Centre for Social Innovation

**Countries** Spain, Latvia, France and Sweden.

**Lead** Secretary of State for Social Rights of the Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030, Spain.

**Focus area** Support to social innovators.

**Project name** BuiCaSuS.

**Total budget** €1,060,000.

**ESF+ contribution** €850,000.

**Consortium partners** Unidad Administradora del Fondo Social Europeo (Spain), Ministerio de Derechos Sociales y Agenda 2030 (Spain), Sabiedrības integrācijas fonda (Latvia), Avise (France), Forum for Social Innovation Sweden (Sweden), Inkludera (Sweden), Reach for Change (Sweden).

The aim of the project is to promote the concept of social innovation in order to set up and strengthen National Competence Centres for Social Innovation.

### Edited and available:

- Analytical grid and methodology for country mapping
- Mapping of social innovation ecosystems in Sweden, France, Spain, Latvia

### Forthcoming:

- Mapping of social innovation ecosystems in Latvia (forthcoming)
- Analytical grid and methodology for defining roadmaps for institutional design of National Competence Centres for Social Innovation
- Roadmaps for institutional design of National Competence Centres for Social Innovation in Sweden, France, Spain

*"The new programming cycle of the ESF+ puts more emphasis on social innovation. BuiCaSuS has helped to clarify concepts and is structuring proposals for institutionalising support at member states level."*

— Patricia Bezunartea,  
Directora General de Diversidad Familiar y Servicios Sociales, Government of Spain.

More information  
[here](#)

## Avise: an ESF+ intermediary organisation

In addition to its activities as an engineering agency for the development of the social and solidarity economy, Avise has been an intermediary body for the ESF at national level since 2004. This mission consists of providing financial support, through calls for projects, to initiatives aimed at creating, maintaining and developing jobs in the SSE.

*"For 20 years, Avise has been working to make the European Social Fund (ESF) accessible to SSE structures. As a national ESF intermediate body, Avise mobilises the leverage effect of this funding to enable social innovations to spread across territories, to support the scaling-up of high-impact projects and to improve tools and support for SSE projects, all available on our website [www.avise.org](http://www.avise.org)."*

— Cécile Leclair,  
General Director of Avise.

More information  
[here](#)



# » The Next Generation of ESF+ under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

## What's new?

**The European Commission's proposal for the 2028–2034 MFF updates the ESF+ to better reflect Europe's evolving social and economic priorities. While the fund will continue to focus on employment, skills and inclusion, the new framework introduces several important shifts:**

- Integration into National & Regional Partnership Plans (NRPs):** The ESF+ will be delivered mainly through national and regional "Partnership Plans," ensuring alignment with local realities. Each Member State must dedicate at least 14% of its NRP budget to social spending, covering employment, skills, education, inclusion, housing and care services.
- EU-level "Facility" for cross-border and innovative action:** A new central Facility will complement national programmes by funding transnational projects, social innovation and crisis response—building on the work previously done through the EaSI strand.
- Simplified and results-based funding:** Member States will benefit from streamlined rules and more flexibility, but payments will increasingly depend on the achievement of agreed targets and milestones rather than solely on reported expenditure.

- Expanded policy scope:** New priority areas include long-term care, homelessness, social housing and child wellbeing, alongside continued support for upskilling, reskilling and social innovation.

## Why it matters for EN members and partners

- More national influence:** ESF priorities will largely be set nationally, meaning your Managing Authorities and Monitoring Committees are now the main entry points for advocacy and funding access.
- More space for social economy & innovation:** Social economy, microfinance and social innovation are explicitly referenced as priority areas—creating opportunities for SESOs, intermediaries and networks to co-design or deliver new actions.
- Cross-border opportunities remain:** Through the EU-level Facility, EN and its members can still participate in transnational projects, networks or capacity-building initiatives similar to the current EaSI actions.
- Time to act:** National Partnership Plans are currently being developed—now is the moment to engage ministries, propose pilot measures for the social economy, and ensure your organisation is represented in consultation and monitoring structures.

## Tip for your organisation

1. Identify your **national ESF Managing Authority** and ask about consultation timelines for the next programming period.
2. Align your advocacy with the **Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP)**—the ESF is its financial backbone.
3. Stay alert for **EU-level calls under the new Facility** for cross-border or social-innovation-related projects.
4. Share developments with EN to feed collective input into **DG EMPL and GECES**.
5. Member States begin drafting their **National & Regional Partnership Plans** early 2026. National social economy actors should monitor consultation openings, join stakeholder input.

**Please note:** The 2028–2034 MFF (and related funds including the successor to ESF+) are still subject to negotiation and adoption. The European Commission has published its proposal, but the final regulation must be agreed by the Council (i.e., all Member States) and the European Parliament. National Partnership Plans implementing the fund will also be drafted and consulted.



Therefore, there is still a window of opportunity for social economy actors, networks and intermediaries to provide input, advocate for priorities and influence the programming and delivery of funds."

**National Partnership Plans are currently being developed—now is the moment to engage.**





# The European Single Market Programme



Grants  
Purchasing services  
Financial instruments

**Theme** Innovation / Entrepreneurship / Finance

**Budget** €4.21 billion

**Managed by** European Commission

**The Single Market Programme funds activities that support the good functioning and governance of the EU internal single market. In the current programming period, the programme focuses on Europe's recovery post Covid-19 pandemic. The total budget of the programme for 2021-2027 is €4.21 billion.**

## What has changed with the current MFF?

The Single Market Programme (SMP) brings together several activities that were previously financed to different programmes, namely: COSME; European Statistical Programme (ESP) and Reporting and Auditing. Moreover, it is enhancing consumers' involvement in EU policy making in the field of financial services, Food and Feed, Consumer Programme. Former COSME financial instruments have been transferred to the InvestEU programme.

**For the purpose of this toolkit, we will focus on the SMP's pillar that looks at supporting SMEs.** The SME pillar of the SMP is a continuation of the most impactful actions of the former COSME programme.

## What does it support?

The SME support pillar of the programme provides different types of support to businesses and in particular to SMEs. The general objective is to boost their competitiveness and sustainability. Specific objectives of the programme include:

- Facilitating access to markets
- Promoting entrepreneurship and the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills
- Promoting the modernisation of industry and addressing global and societal challenges

**The Single Market Programme brings together several activities that were previously financed under various programmes.**

**The SMP supports SMEs through five tools:**

- **Enterprise Europe Network**, which provides an integrated package of advice to SMEs on how to innovate, be more sustainable and resilient and access international markets.
- **SME envoy network** to promote SME-friendly regulation and policy-making at EU and national levels.
- **Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs**, which promotes the creation of new businesses and skills development through business mentoring.
- **Joint cluster initiatives**, which comprise a set of new actions involving industrial clusters. These are groups of specialised enterprises, often SMEs, and other related supporting actors in a location that cooperate closely.
- Other actions covering this objective of the SMP and implementing the **EU SME strategy**.

## Who can participate?

The SMP's SME support pillar offers funding to:

- Civil society organisations
- SMEs
- Local, regional, or national authorities
- Educational institutions and stakeholders

## Eligible countries

- EU Member States
- Iceland
- Norway
- Lichtenstein

## Acceding countries, candidate countries and potential candidates:

- Kosovo
- Montenegro
- Serbia
- Turkey
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- North Macedonia
- Ukraine



## How does it work?

In the case of the SME support pillar of the SMP, the EC offers funding through grants and tenders. They are, for the most part, launched and managed by the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA) on behalf of **DG GROW**.

### Grants

EISMEA and **DG GROW** give organisations the opportunity to bid for grants through calls for proposals.

**Frequency of calls for proposals:** ongoing

**Requirements:** consortium-based

**Where to find the calls:** click [here](#)

### Zooming in...

#### Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs programme

This is a cross-border programme promoting the exchange of entrepreneurial and management experience. The exchange entails a newly-established or potential entrepreneur visiting another country to learn from an experienced entrepreneur running a SME. Between 2009 and 2022, more than 10.7k exchanges have been established. Only organisations willing to coordinate exchanges can respond to calls for proposals (if successful, they are called Intermediary Organisations or IOs). Individual entrepreneurs who wish to participate in the programme should do so by applying directly to the Intermediary Organisations or local contact points in their country. Learn more about Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs [here](#).

**Frequency of calls:** every two years.

**Co-financing rate:** up to 90%.

**Consortia requirements:** minimum five partners from four different countries.

**Where to find the calls:** click [here](#).

### Tenders

EISMEA and DG GROW invite organisations to tender for EU public contracts to deliver works, supply or service contracts.

**Frequency of calls for tender:** ongoing.

**Requirements:** depending on the call,

sole applicants or consortia are eligible

**Where to find the calls:** click [here](#).

## Who can I contact?

Calls for proposals and for tenders are published and managed centrally by EISMEA (and DG GROW). Organisations interested in the SME support pillar of the SMP can respond to the calls for proposals and tenders that are launched via the [EC Funding & Tenders Portal](#).

## Good to know

There is also a lot happening within the SMP for social entrepreneurship! Do not miss out!

## SMP Interim Evaluation – Signals for 2026

The 2025 Interim Evaluation of the Single Market Programme (SMP) does not introduce new legal changes for 2026 but identifies

several trends that will shape the final phase of the programme (2026–2027).

[See report here](#).

These shifts mean that SMP calls in 2026 will increasingly favour **results-oriented projects**, clearer reporting, and **initiatives linked to SME competitiveness, digital and green capabilities, standardisation and consumer protection**. Social economy stakeholders should monitor upcoming calls that emphasise measurable outcomes, cross-sectoral cooperation, and support services for SMEs and social enterprises.



## The European Cluster Collaboration Platform & Social Economy Clusters

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform is the European online hub for industry clusters, available [here](#).

The social economy clusters or 'clusters of social and ecological innovation' are groups of social economy enterprises and other related supporting and economic actors that cooperate in a particular location to increase their joint social and ecological impact by enhancing their cooperation, pooling resources and innovation capacity. To find out more about Social Economy clusters, check out the work of the GECES and this [article](#) by Euclid Network.

## The European Social Economy Regions & the Social Economy Missions

Launched in February 2018, the European Social Economy Regions (ESER) initiative was a response of the EC to the growing need of increasing the visibility of the social economy and building networks of stakeholders at regional and local levels. Between 2018 and 2020 EISMEA ran an annual ESER scheme, which was based on a series of awareness-raising events on the social economy being rolled-out in the course of the year in participating regions and cities. The EC was not, however, providing any financial support to regional/local events.

More info [here](#).

Building on this initiative, EISMEA launched in 2020 and in 2021 the 'Social Economy Missions' (SEM) calls for proposals.

The SEMs' objectives are to build resilience and increase the capacity of regional or local public administrations, social economy, SMEs and civil society to overcome difficulties and crises. They seek to develop transnational and inter-regional collaboration, boost peer-learning and share good practices between social economy stakeholders, including enterprises.

**The European Social Innovation Competition (EUSIC) has been running yearly since 2013 and is a flagship European initiative for social innovators.**



### The European Social Innovation Competition

The European Social Innovation Competition (EUSIC) has been running yearly since 2013 and is a flagship European initiative for social innovators.

It seeks to practically support early-stage ideas and facilitate a network of innovators. EUSIC runs across all EU countries as well as Horizon Europe associated countries, with the [European Innovation Council](#) (EIC) in the lead. Each year the competition leads to three awards in the category 'Challenge Prizes' and to one in the 'Impact Prize' category for the best socially innovative projects for a more inclusive, just and sustainable Europe. In 2022 each winner received €50 000.

All semi-finalists and finalists get access to training and visibility. The 2022 theme was: 'The Future of Living, Innovation for Affordable, and Sustainable Housing Districts'.

Under the 2021 EUSIC challenge, the consortium consisting of Nesta Challenges, Euclid Network, GOPA Com. and Ashoka Spain developed a tailored funding toolkit for early-stage innovators available [here](#). This is a useful resource for you to share with your beneficiaries!

More about the competition [here](#) and in the [EIC work programme](#) for 2022.

## Some Inspiration

### Erasmus for social entrepreneurs

**Countries** France, Cyprus, Croatia, Spain, Bulgaria, Greece, Portugal, Germany, The Netherlands.

**Focus areas** Entrepreneurial skills, on-the-job mentoring.

**Project name** Social Entrepreneurs Exchange Development Plus 2 (SEEDplus2).

**Timeline** 2019-2023.

**Budget** €1,915,095,62.

**EC contribution** €1,653,038,86.

This project brought together aspiring and experienced social entrepreneurs to learn from each other (as part of the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs programme).

The programme provided funding for would-be social entrepreneurs to spend 1-6 months in another European country collaborating with and job-shadowing an experienced social entrepreneur. For new entrepreneurs, this was a great opportunity to learn from the best and fine-tune their business case. For host entrepreneurs, the programme offered a unique chance to get a fresh perspective, gain access to international markets and help social enterprise grow in Europe.

More information [here](#).

More information [here](#)



# » The Next Generation of SMP+ under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

**The Single Market and Customs Programme (SMP+) will remain a cornerstone of the EU's economic architecture, ensuring a well-functioning internal market, an efficient customs union, modern taxation systems, and robust anti-fraud measures.**

In the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF 2028–2034), the Commission proposes to merge and streamline several existing programmes — the Single Market, Customs, Fiscalis, and Anti-Fraud programmes — into one consolidated framework, aiming for simpler access, fewer overlaps, and greater flexibility.

## What's new?

- Stronger focus on competitiveness and resilience:** The SMP+ aligns with the EU's Competitiveness Compass and Clean Industrial Deal, supporting SMEs, market surveillance, product safety, and fair competition.
- Customs reform and digitalisation:** A new EU Customs Data Hub will enhance cooperation, transparency, and real-time data exchange across Member States.

- Integrated governance:** Customs, taxation, anti-fraud and statistics will be managed under one umbrella to reduce red tape and strengthen cross-border cooperation.

- Support to the economic security agenda:** The SMP+ will safeguard the Single Market against unfair trade practices, fraud, and unsafe products while enabling Europe's strategic autonomy.

## What it means for social economy and SMEs

While traditionally focused on market efficiency, the **SMP+ continues to provide opportunities** for social economy actors and SME networks — for instance, through:

- Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)** and **SME Envoy Network**, offering advisory and internationalisation support;
- Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE)**, promoting entrepreneurial exchange and skills development;
- Social Economy Cluster Initiatives** and **Social Economy Missions**, fostering collaboration and innovation across regions;

- European Social Innovation Competition (EUSIC)**, rewarding early-stage innovators tackling societal challenges.

## Opportunities and outlook

Under the new MFF, the SMP+ will:

- Continue funding grants and tenders** (largely via EISMEA) with simplified procedures and ongoing calls;
- Strengthen synergies** with the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF), Horizon Europe, and the National & Regional Partnership Plans;
- Offer new avenues** for innovation, skills development, and sustainability-focused entrepreneurship.

**Please Note:** Programme design and allocations are still being discussed at EU level — meaning...

**...there is room for stakeholder input before Member State approval.**



# Erasmus+



Grants  
Purchasing services

**Theme** Employment/ Skills/ Cross-border cooperation

**Budget** €26.2 billion

**Managed by** National Agencies

**Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. For the period of 2014-2020, it provided studying, training and volunteering opportunities to over 4 million Europeans. For 2021-2027, it offers even more opportunities through a total budget of €26.2 billion. The EC's DG for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture is responsible for running this programme.**

## Annual work programme

Erasmus+ has published its **Annual Work Programme for 2026** and the call for proposal agenda for the entire year.

**For the 2026 Programme guide available in 24 languages** [click here](#)

**For the Call for proposals 2026** [click here](#)

## What has changed?

For 2021-2027, Erasmus+ has adapted to global challenges and to the Covid-19 pandemic by embedding three key priorities:

- **Inclusion & diversity:** Further stress on reaching people with fewer opportunities (due to socio-economic or to geographical constraints). This concerns people of all ages and backgrounds, people with disabilities, early school leavers, unemployed, living in remote areas, victims of exclusion and/or discrimination, etc.
- **Digital:** increased access to digital learning, development of digital skills and hybrid programmes.
- **Green:** Cross-cutting topic towards the ecological transition, building an understanding and competences related to sustainability.

- **For 2026 Work Programme no radical shifts:** a new action on European partnerships for school development — designed to help schools test and implement innovative teaching methods, strengthen basic skills, democratic engagement and shared values.

## What does it support?

The current Erasmus+ programme is made up of three key actions.

- **Key Action 1:** Mobility of Individuals. Providing opportunities for individuals (students and staff) to improve their skills, enhance their employability and gain cultural awareness.
- **Key Action 2:** Cooperation among organisations and institutions. Enabling organisations and institutions to work together and create partnerships in order to improve their provision for learners and share innovative and good practices.
- **Key Action 3:** Support to policy development and cooperation. Any activity helping to support public policy reform and modernise education and training systems.

**As an organisation, Erasmus+ may help you to implement:**

- Networking activities
- Strategic development of your staff's skills
- Organisational capacity-building
- Transnational partnerships
- Exchanges of best practices
- Concrete projects

In this toolkit we focus on Key Action 2, which is probably the most relevant stream of funding for your organisations and your beneficiaries. Keep an eye out for Key Actions 1 and 3 though, as your beneficiaries might want to get involved!

## Key Action 2 - Cooperation among organisations and institutions

Key Action 2 includes various strands of funding such as:

- [Partnerships for Cooperation](#)
- [Partnerships for Excellence](#)
- [Partnerships for Innovation](#)

## Partnerships for Cooperation include:

- [Cooperation Partnerships:](#) Seeking to increase the quality and relevance of the organisation's activities, to develop and reinforce networks of partners, to increase capacity to operate jointly at transnational level, boosting internationalisation of activities, exchanging or developing new practices and methods, sharing and confronting ideas.



- **Small-scale Partnerships (new!):**

Aiming at widening access to the programme to small-scale actors, grass-root organisations, new-comers and individuals who are hard to reach in the fields of school education, adult education, vocational education and training, youth and sport.

- > Lower grant amounts
- > Shorter duration
- > Simpler administrative requirements than Cooperation Partnerships.

**Partnerships for Excellence include:**

- **European Universities:**

Supporting the emergence of bottom-up networks of higher education institutions, which will bring cross-border cooperation to the next level of ambition, through the development of joint long-term strategies for top-quality education, research and innovation based on a common vision and shared values.

- **Centres for Vocational Excellence:**

Supporting the development of transnational platforms for centres of vocational excellence closely integrated in local and regional strategies for growth, innovation and competitiveness, while supporting overall structural changes and economic policies in the European Union.

- **Erasmus+ Teacher Academies:**

Creating European partnerships of teacher education and training providers to set up Erasmus+ Teacher Academies that will develop a European and international outlook in teacher education.

**Partnerships for Innovation include:**

- **Alliances for Innovation:** Fostering strategic cooperation between key players in higher education and vocational education and training, business and research to boost innovation and modernisation of education and training systems. Alliances need to identify and supply the right set of skills, knowledge and competences to match the future labour market demand in sectors and fields that are strategic for Europe's sustainable growth and competitiveness.

- **Forward-looking Projects:** Fostering innovation, creativity and e-participation, as well as social entrepreneurship, in different fields of education, training, youth and sport. It will support forward-looking ideas for improving education and training, youth and sport systems; it will also bring a substantial innovative effect, through new methods and practices, to all types of learning and active participation settings for Europe's social cohesion.

- **Capacity-building projects in the field of youth:** Supporting cooperation and exchange in the field of youth between Programme and Partner Country organisations that cover non-formal learning activities, with a focus on raising the capacity of organisations working with young people outside formal learning while ensuring the active participation of young people.

The Erasmus+ programme offers funding to organisations through calls for tenders and grants.

**Eligible countries**

- EU Member States
- North Macedonia
- Iceland
- Liechtenstein
- Norway
- Turkey
- Republic of Serbia
- **Partner countries**

Eligible countries are divided into two groups: programme countries and partner countries. More information on eligibility [here](#).

**Beware:** The eligibility of individuals and organisations depends on the country in which they are based!

The Erasmus+ programme offers funding to organisations through calls for tenders and grants. While the EC manages Erasmus+, it does not implement the programme directly.

**The Education, Audiovisual, and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)** is responsible for Erasmus+ implementation at European level, while at the national level this is done by national agencies in programme countries and national offices in some partner countries (list available [here](#)).



**How does it work?**

Organisations should submit applications online to the [National Agency](#) in the relevant country, via the [Erasmus+ forms website](#), or to the [EACEA](#).

**Grants**

General and specific calls for proposals are published by the EC, the EACEA, or the National Agency. Every year an [annual work programme](#) is published which outlines the priorities for that year. For 2025 the annual work programme can be found [here](#).

**Frequency of calls:** Ongoing.

**Co-financing rate:**

**Key action 1:** Up to 80%.

**Key actions 2 and 3:** Up to 100%.

**Consortia requirements:** Depending on the call, sole applicants or consortia are eligible.

**Where to find the calls:** Click [here](#).

**Tenders**

The Erasmus+ programme also includes actions implemented via calls for tender, or through works, supply or service contracts.

**Frequency of the calls:** Ongoing.

**Requirement:** Depending on the call, sole applicants or consortia are eligible.

**Where to find the calls:** Click [here](#).

**Who can I contact?**

The Erasmus+ programme is implemented by the [EACEA](#), by national agencies in programme countries, and by national offices in some partner countries (list available [here](#)).

Outside the EU, in partner countries participating in Erasmus+ in the area of higher education, most of the work of the national agencies is carried out by [National Erasmus+ Offices](#).

**Good to know**

Online platforms such as [eTwinning](#), [the EPALE](#), the [School Education Gateway](#) (SEG) and the [European Youth Portal](#) offer virtual collaboration spaces, partner-finding databases, communities of practice and other online services for:

- Teachers
- Trainers
- Youth workers
- Policy-makers and other practitioners
- Pupils
- Young people
- Adult learners in Europe and beyond

**To find potential partners to team up with for Erasmus+ projects, check EPALE, the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe.**

**More information**

Your national agency's website - find out which one is yours [here](#)!

**To find potential partners to team up with for Erasmus+ projects**, check EPALE, the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe. EPALE exists in multiple languages and is a community for teachers, trainers, researchers, academics, policy-makers and anyone else with a professional role in adult learning across Europe. Click [here](#).

Communities of practice are available [here](#).

**Empowerneurship for Newcomers in Europe**

More information [here](#)

**Countries:** Norway, Greece, Italy, Austria, Cyprus.

**Lead beneficiary:** Oslo International Hub (NO).

**Focus area:** Development of competences for adult trainers supporting migrants.

**Timeline:** 2021-2024.

**Total budget:** €312,415.

**EC contribution:** €312,415.

**Consortium partners:** Oslo International Hub (coordinator), Systematically Designed (Norway), Academy of Entrepreneurship (Greece), PRISM (Italy), Glocal Factory (Italy), BEST (Austria), SYNTHESIS (Cyprus).

The aim of the project is to make self-employment a viable option for migrants and displaced people in transition in Europe, and also for those who wish to return to their country of origin, through extending and developing the competencies of educators and other personnel who support adult learners to directly empower and support the up-skilling of persons with a migration background towards becoming the sources of entrepreneurship training for others in their communities.



## Open Business for Community Development (OBCD)

**Countries** Greece, Italy, Spain and Finland.

**Lead** University of Patras (Greece).

**Focus areas** Open business, research, curricula to address skills gaps for social enterprise professionals (higher education and vocational training), social enterprise ecosystems, innovation, incubator pilot.

**Project name** Open Business for Community Development (OBCD).

**Timeline** June 2022-May 2025.

**Budget** €1,843,643.

**EC contribution** €1,474,914.

**Consortium partners** Development Agency of Karditsa (ANKA), Associazione Generale Cooperative Italiane (AGCI), Base3, Helsinki Business College (BCH), Cámara de Comercio Italiana (CCIB), Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (DIAK), Euclid Network (EN), Olympic Training & Consulting (OT), Spanish Representative Platform for People with Physical Disabilities (PREDIF), Silta-Valmennusyhdistys Ry (Silta), University of Patras (UPatras), University of Tor Vergata (UTV), University of Valladolid (UVA).

OBCD seeks to research, identify and address skills gaps among (current and aspiring) social entrepreneurs by creating and testing new curricula (with a particular focus on open business principles) at the levels of vocational and higher education. The project will also establish social enterprise ecosystems involving diverse stakeholder groups, and develop a local incubator pilot to support the growth of social enterprises.

More information [here](#)

## EU3Digital

**Countries** Portugal, Spain, Croatia, UK and the Netherlands.

**Lead** Eslider Portugal.

**Focus area** Digital skills and competences for social enterprises.

**Project name** EU3Digital.

**Timeline** 2020-2023.

**Budget** €288,958.

**EC contribution** €288,958.

**Consortium partners** ABD Associació Benestar i Desenvolupament, DKolektiv, Euclid Network, The Open University, University of Porto.

EU3Digital aims to gather and develop learning resources for third sector organisations and social enterprises to increase individuals' and organisations' digital competences. The EU3Digital outputs serve to support them in advancing their digital strategies, engaging with existing digital support and software, and building capacity.

More information [here](#)

# » The Next Generation of ERASMUS+ under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

**Erasmus+ remains the EU's flagship programme for education, training, youth and sport — enabling millions of Europeans to learn, work, and collaborate across borders. In the new Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034), the programme will be closely aligned with the Union of Skills and the European Competitiveness Fund, linking learning to Europe's green, digital and social transitions.**

With a proposed budget of around €30 billion, Erasmus+ will continue to fund mobility, partnerships, and innovation projects while strengthening cooperation between education, social economy actors and industry.

**A stronger focus on inclusion, digital learning, and sustainability will ensure Erasmus+ remains central to building Europe's talent base and social cohesion in the decade ahead.**

## What It Supports

The programme remains structured around three key actions:

- **Key Action 1:** Learning Mobility of Individuals – supports study, training, and volunteering experiences abroad.
- **Key Action 2:** Cooperation among Organisations and Institutions – funds strategic partnerships and alliances to improve education and training systems.
- **Key Action 3:** Support to Policy Development and Cooperation – encourages innovation in policy reform and stakeholder collaboration.

For most social economy and intermediary organisations, Key Action 2 will remain the most relevant. It covers:

- Cooperation Partnerships and Small-scale Partnerships for local actors and newcomers.
- Alliances for Innovation connecting higher education, VET, business, and civil society to anticipate skill needs.
- Centres for Vocational Excellence and Erasmus+ Teacher Academies supporting excellence, inclusion, and transnational collaboration.

## Opportunities for Social Economy and Skills Development

Erasmus+ supports projects building the skills and competences needed for a fair and sustainable economy. This includes:

- **Developing curricula** for social enterprise and social innovation (e.g. higher education and VET).
- **Fostering entrepreneurship**, leadership, and inclusion through non-formal learning.
- **Promoting youth participation**, volunteering, and intergenerational learning.

Funding opportunities include both grants (via annual calls through National Agencies or EACEA) and service contracts for larger-scale actions.

## Still in Discussion

The post-2027 framework aims to ensure stronger complementarity with the **European Social Fund+**, **Digital Europe**, and **European Competitiveness Fund**, creating a more integrated European skills and talent agenda.

Details on budget allocation and priorities are still subject to final approval by Member States.



# INTERREG

## - European Territorial Cooperation



Grants

**Theme** Cross-border collaboration

**Budget** €4.21 billion

**Managed by** National Agencies

**Interreg forms part of European cohesion policy. The programme facilitates the implementation of joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors from different Member States. The total budget of Interreg 2021-2027 is €7.95 billion.**

The core objective of the programme is to promote a sustainable and harmonious economic, social and territorial development of the EU. Interreg consists in four strands of cooperation:

- Cross-border (Interreg A)
- Transnational (Interreg B)
- Interregional (Interreg C)
- The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) (within Cross-border Cooperation)
- European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) (within Cross-border Cooperation)

### What has changed with the current MFF?

**The Interreg programme has evolved in the following ways:**

- More resources are expected to be spent on climate action and social programmes, including public health
- Increased support for small projects and people-to-people projects: up to 20% within an Interreg programme may be allocated to small project funds
- Pre-financing levels (funds made available to Member States following the approval of the Interreg programmes) are set at 3% for the years 2023 to 2026, resulting in more liquidity for programmes
- The co-financing rate from ERDF of 80% is being set up with higher rates for cooperation at the EU external borders

### What does it support?

**Interreg supports the following types of actions (or "strands"):**

- **Cross-border cooperation** between adjacent regions to promote integrated and harmonious regional development.

**This includes:**

**Interreg A**, which supports cooperation between NUTS III regions from at least two different Member States lying directly on the borders or adjacent to them.

**Interreg IPA CBC**, which supports cross-border cooperation between candidate countries, potential candidate countries and EU Member States to contribute to their accession preparations, with a territorial and cross-border focus.

**The European Neighbourhood**

**Instrument (ENI)**, which with 15 programmes, covers 12 land borders, one sea crossing and three sea basins, stretching from Finland and Russia in the north, to countries like Hungary and Ukraine in the east, and Italy, Northern Africa and the Middle East in the south. (see next chapter).

- **Transnational cooperation** over larger transnational territories or around sea-basins (Interreg B). It involves regions from several countries forming bigger areas where it aims to promote regional development and better cooperation within the Union in tackling common issues.

More information [here](#)



### Who can participate?

Interreg's core target group is any organisation responsible for regional development policy: national, regional, or local public authorities in addition to other relevant bodies responsible for developing and/or implementing regional development policies. This includes job creation and growth programmes in the thematic fields addressed by the programme.

**Interreg's core target group is any organisation responsible for regional development policy.**

The programme also targets other types of organisations provided that their relevance and competence in regional development policy can be demonstrated. These include for instance, (not exhaustive):

- Business support organisations (e.g. development agencies, innovation agencies, chambers of commerce, clusters)
- Environmental organisations (e.g. environmental agencies, energy agencies, NGOs)
- Education and research institutions (e.g. universities, research centres)
- Other organisations of relevance to regional development policies

## Eligible countries

- EU Member States
- Switzerland
- Norway
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Moldova
- Montenegro
- Macedonia
- Serbia
- Albania
- Ukraine

## How does it work?

In this toolkit we focus on two streams of action of INTERREG:

### 1. Transnational cooperation (Interreg B)

This stream involves regions from several countries of the EU forming bigger areas and seeks to promote the best possible cooperation and regional development by a joint approach to tackle common issues. Interreg B supports a wide range of project investment related to innovation, environment, accessibility, telecommunications, urban development etc. The programmes here look at adding the extra European dimension to regional development.

### 2. Interregional cooperation (Interreg C)

The programme supports interregional cooperation projects between regional policy actors. An interregional cooperation project is a project in which partners from at least three different countries work together on a shared regional policy issue by exchanging their experiences and practices in order to integrate the lessons learnt from this cooperation into their policies. It builds on the experience of the participating regions and focuses on the identification, analysis and transfer of good practices and policy experiences among these regions.

- Interregional cooperation projects are partnerships between policy organisations from different countries in Europe, who work together for 3-5 years to exchange experiences on a particular policy issue. Each region involved in the cooperation project produces an action plan, specifying what will be done in the region to ensure that lessons learned are put into action. Project participants are also required to monitor the progress of their action plans.



Calls for project proposals are launched throughout the programming period.

- The Policy Learning Platform is an online space for continuous learning, where any organisation dealing with regional development policies in Europe can find solutions and request expert support to improve the way they manage and implement their public policies on the four Interreg topics listed above (more on this below!).

**Frequency of calls:** Once a year.

**Average total budget of projects:**

€1-2 million.

**Co-financing rate:** 75% to 85%.

**Consortia requirements:** At least three countries represented, at least two EU Member States.

**Where to find the calls:** Click [here](#). (new!)

See fourth call to be published first semester of 2025; [further details here](#).

## Who can I contact?

[Interreg Europe Contact](#) points are based in all EU Member States, Switzerland and Norway.

## Interreg 2026 Outlook

As the 2021–2027 period enters its final implementation phase, 2026 will be a high-intensity year for Interreg programmes. Due to significant delays in cohesion spending and the displacement of projects into the Recovery and Resilience Facility,

Managing Authorities face strong pressure to accelerate commitments and improve absorption. This will translate into more targeted and faster-moving calls, with clear alignment to the revised priorities emerging from the Cohesion Policy [Mid-Term Review](#)—namely competitiveness, green and digital transitions, border stability and territorial resilience.

Interreg programmes are also expected to place greater emphasis on macro-regional strategies, governance, institutional cooperation and capacity-building, reflecting the need to strengthen cross-border coordination and administrative capability. For stakeholders, including social economy organisations and support networks, 2026 offers a window of opportunity: intensified programme activity, clearer thematic direction and simplified procedures designed to ease implementation in the programme's closing years.

### Good to know

#### Policy Learning Platform

The Policy Learning Platform is a service for project partners and for any organisations involved in regional policy around Europe to promote continuous policy learning and capitalise on good regional policy practices. The Platform consists of:

- An international team of experts specialised in the thematic policy fields addressed by the programmes' investment priorities, contracted to organise activities and provide information and support to the regions of Europe for improving the planning and implementation of their policies.

- An interactive web interface designed to facilitate networking, information sharing and knowledge management and exchange. Actors dealing with regional development policies in Europe can find information and analysis on the thematic policy fields addressed by the programme's investment priorities, thematic reports and publications, as well as a database of the relevant practices and results from interregional cooperation projects.

More [here](#).

**Those interested can join the Interreg Europe community to connect with potential project partners.**

Explore all existing Interreg programmes and projects through this [link](#). As for Interreg Europe, you can use the community to search for partners for your project idea, or to find ideas (have a look at the [project idea and partner search page](#)). The recently [approved projects](#) might also offer some inspiration.



## Some Inspiration

### Enter to Transform - Transformational Entrepreneurship Hubs for Recognized Refugee Re-starters

**Countries** The Netherlands, Germany, France, Ireland.

**Lead** University of Twente.

**Consortium partner** Newest Art Organisation, Letterkenny Institute of Technology, Institute for Work and Technology, Westphalian University Gelsenkirchen, GROUPE SOS Pulse, Machbarschaft Borsig11 e.V., The World Makers Foundation, Carlow Institute of Technology, Train of Hope Dortmund e.V., Institut für Kirche und Gesellschaft der Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen, La Ruche Development, Forschungsinstitut für innovative Arbeitsgestaltung und Prävention (FIAP e.V.).

**Focus area** Entrepreneurship & Innovation.

**Timeline** 2020-2023.

**Budget** €2.14 million.

**EC contribution** €1.28 million.

The project offers a social innovation addressing RR re-starters to become ready for business creation. RRs with business experiences in their home country have a huge potential to restart but need specific mentoring to adapt to the NWE economy. The project develops a supportive environment of hubs, which function through mentoring as "door opener" for RR re-starters to enter existing entrepreneurial infrastructure. By door opening the project avoids parallel structures, but introduces RRs to how, through whom and where to get the tools they need to restart.

More information [here](#)

### Interregional cooperation for improved social enterprise business support

**Countries** Spain, Hungary, Romania, Ireland, Italy.

**Lead** Catalan Agency for Business Competitiveness (ACCIO), Spain (Catalonia)

**Focus area** Enhancing social enterprises' competitiveness through improved business support policies.

**Project name** RaiSE.

**Timeline** 2017 - 2021.

**Budget** €1,720,552.

**EC Contribution** €1,462,469.

RaiSE brings together six pro-active regions and one advisory partner to address the common challenge of enhancing competitiveness of social enterprises. Every region has first developed an 'Action Plan' that should: 1) foster improvements in the policy instruments selected; 2) deliver new and enhanced services, such as better training or new funding policies; and 3) lead to better governance, engaging multiple stakeholders in policy development and implementation. In a second part of the project the Action Plans are implemented and monitored.

More information [here](#)

# » The Next Generation of INTERREG under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

Interreg remains one of the EU's flagship instruments for promoting cooperation and cohesion across borders. In the new Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034), it will form part of the European Fund for Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion, aligning more closely with Member States' National and Regional Partnership Plans.

With a proposed budget of around **€9.5 billion**, Interreg will continue to connect regions, cities, and communities to address shared challenges in innovation, sustainability, energy transition, and inclusion.

The next generation of Interreg programmes will simplify procedures, expand participation to neighbouring and candidate countries, and strengthen links with other EU funds such as the **European Competitiveness Fund (ECF)** and the **European Social Fund+ (ESF+)**.

## What's new under Interreg:

- Integrated under National and Regional Partnership Plans: Interreg will operate in coordination with Member States' Partnership Plans, ensuring greater alignment with national cohesion, competitiveness, and climate objectives.
- Simplified delivery model: fewer administrative layers, harmonised rules, and more flexibility to reallocate funds to respond to new challenges.
- Wider participation: inclusion of candidate and neighbouring countries to foster cooperation beyond EU borders.
- Stronger focus on innovation and resilience: projects tackling cross-border economic recovery, energy transition, climate adaptation, and social inclusion.
- Support for small-scale and community projects: simplified access for local and civil society actors, with up to **20% of programme resources available for "people-to-people" cooperation**.

## Opportunities for Social Economy and Regional Development

Interreg increasingly supports cross-border collaboration in the social economy, regional innovation, and inclusive growth.

Relevant project opportunities include:

- Strengthening regional social enterprise ecosystems and business support policies;
- Facilitating cooperation between universities, public authorities, and intermediaries on innovation and sustainability;
- Supporting local and regional actors to address employment, migration and inclusion challenges through joint initiatives





# European Neighbourhood Instrument



Grants

**Theme** Cooperation with neighbouring countries

**Budget** Specific to each of the 15 programmes

**Managed by** National Managing Authorities

**The European Neighbourhood Instrument Cross-Border Cooperation (ENI CBC) is one of the EU's tools to cooperate with its neighbouring countries in order to:**

- Promote economic and social development in regions on both sides of common borders
- Address common challenges in environment, public health, safety and security
- Promote better conditions for ensuring the mobility of persons, goods and capital

## What has changed with the current MFF?

The ENI CBC is the successor of the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (ENPI), which funded 1000 projects between 2004 and 2020.

## What does it support?

CBC partnerships look at identifying common issues and solutions and jointly implementing the actions for the benefit of regions on both sides of a border, and lead to concrete, positive change with regards to the issues.

The instrument covers 12 land borders, one sea crossing and three sea basins, stretching from Finland to Ukraine, from Italy to Northern Africa and the Middle East. Concretely, ENI CBC includes 15 programmes within which calls for proposals are published.



**The programmes are divided as follows:**

1. Black Sea Basin
2. Estonia-Russia\*
3. Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine
4. Italy-Tunisia
5. Karelia
6. Kolarctic
7. Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus\*
8. Latvia-Russia\*
9. Lithuania-Russia\*
10. Mediterranean Sea Basin
11. Poland-Belarus-Ukraine\*
12. Poland-Russia\*
13. Romania-Republic of Moldova
14. Romania-Ukraine
15. South-East Finland-Russia\*

Check out each programme's details [here](#).

## Who can participate?

**Eligible organisations include:**

- Local and Regional authorities
- Federations/Unions/Chambers of Commerce
- State Administrations
- Development NGOs, International NGOs
- Associations
- SMEs
- Universities



More information [here](#)

### How does it work?

Each of the 15 programmes is designed around 4 of the 11 themes identified by the instrument:

1. Business and SME development
2. Support to education, research, technological development and innovation
3. Promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage
4. Promotion of social inclusion and the fight against poverty
5. Support for local and regional good governance
6. Environmental protection, and climate change mitigation and adaptation
7. Improvement of regional accessibility, as well as development of sustainable and climate-proof transport and communication networks and systems
8. Common challenges in the field of safety and security
9. Promotion of and cooperation on sustainable energy and energy security
10. Promotion of border management, border security and mobility
11. Other areas likely to have a substantial cross-border impact

Within these thematic objectives detailed programming is the task of the programme partners themselves, at the local, regional and national level. These partners have to analyse relevant needs to come up with their specific objectives and priorities, based on the local context, and propose these to the European Commission. Within each programme, calls for proposals are then published.

**Frequency of the calls:** Varies per programme.

**Co-financing rate:** Up to 90%.

**Consortia requirements:** At least one partner from a Member State and one from an ENI Partner Country or Russia, Turkey, which participates in the Black Sea Basin programme with accession funds, must have at least one partner from each.

**Where to find the calls:** Click [here](#).

### Who can I contact?

- Your local managing authority - check out who they are for each programme by clicking [here](#)
- The [Technical Assistance](#)

### Good to know

You can access databases to find potential project partners [here](#).

An [Online learning platform](#) on Cross-Border Cooperation under the European Neighbourhood Instrument is available!

The programme has a dedicated project to provide technical assistance to all programmes called the '[Technical Support to the Implementation and Management](#)' (TESIM).



## Some Inspiration

### Creating opportunities for youth on both sides of a border & helping refugees

**ENI programme** Romania-Ukraine.

**Countries** Romania, Ukraine.

**Focus area** Youth/Preventing early school drop-out/Cross-border high-schools cooperation.

**Project name** SMART4YOUTH.

**Timeline** 2020-2022.

**Consortium partners** ACDC Romania, Bukovynian Art Center for Revival and Promotion of the Romanian Traditional Culture Development, "Oltea Doamna" Technological High School, Higher Vocational Art School N0 5 Of Chernivtsi.

The project's main objective was to develop and implement specific joint programmes aimed at preventing early school leaving amongst young people at risk, between 14 and 20 years old. The activities include integrative assistance programmes, training, teachers and pupils' exchanges and the development of innovative extracurricular activities. The project seeks to boost collaboration with NGOs and create opportunities for non-formal education. With the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, a volunteer support service was set up in Romania by the SMART4YOUTH project to assist partners in their escape and resettlement.

More information [here](#) & [here](#)

# Some Inspiration

## Making oil-making more profitable and sustainable across the Med

**ENI programme** Mediterranean Sea Basin.

**Countries** Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Greece, Cyprus, Spain, France.

**Focus area** Sustainable and profitable oil making / SME development / Artisan Employment.

**Project name** ARTOLIO.

**Timeline** 2020-2023.

**Budget** €2.9 million.

**EC contribution** €2.6 million.

Agricultural Research Organization, Beit Hakerem Clusters, National Agricultural Research Center, Palestinian Centre for Agriculture Research and Development, American Farm School Post-Secondary Educational and Training Association, Hellenic Agricultural Organization DEMETER/ Institute of Olive Tree, Department of Agriculture – Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment, Center for Advanced Studies in Olive Grove and Olive Oils, University of Corsica, Kellenfol Advertising S.L.

ARTOLIO seeks to establish, in each participating region, a Native Olive Regional Knowledge Center (NOReKC) which will provide up-to-date training on how an artisanal Mediterranean extra-virgin oil (EVOO) should be produced in order to remain competitive, and defines a networking management model for artisanal EVOO through a Pan-Mediterranean Platform comprising all NOReKC. The platform will assist producers across the Mediterranean region in marketing, sales, finance, policy and legislation, at national level and in entering new global markets.

More information  
[here](#)

\*The information contained on the EU's webpages referred to here which concerns cooperation with Russia and Belarus was included before 24 February 2022. The EU has specified that "following the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, the European Commission has suspended the cooperation with Russia and Belarus in the European Neighbourhood Instrument cross-border cooperation programmes."



# » The Next Generation of ENI under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

**The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) will continue to play a central role in fostering cooperation, stability, and sustainable development between the EU and its neighbouring countries.**

In the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034), it will become part of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI) and connect more closely to the National and Regional Partnership Plans under the European Fund for Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion. The restructured framework will support joint initiatives on climate resilience, energy security, digital transition, and social inclusion along the EU's borders, while maintaining strong support for people-to-people cooperation and local cross-border partnerships.

Through simplified management and stronger alignment with Interreg, ESF+, and the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF), the new ENI will help bridge the EU's internal and external policies, promoting stability, prosperity, and shared growth in neighbouring regions.

## Key updates

- **Integration under Global Europe and Cohesion Policy:** stronger links with Interreg and the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) for a unified regional cooperation approach.
- **Simplified governance:** harmonised financial and reporting rules for all external cooperation programmes.
- **Wider thematic scope:** focus on resilience, sustainable energy, border management, digitalisation, and cross-border security.
- **Increased flexibility:** funds can be redirected rapidly to address crises and new cross-border priorities (e.g. humanitarian, energy, or migration).
- **Continued support for local cooperation:** maintaining people-to-people, small-scale, and civil-society-led projects across shared borders.



## Typical thematic priorities include:

- SME and business development
- Education, research, and innovation
- Cultural heritage and creative industries
- Environmental protection and climate adaptation
- Border management, mobility and security cooperation

## Still in Discussion

For 2028–2034,  
ENI will become more  
strategically linked to the  
EU's internal cohesion and  
competitiveness policies.

While the **NDICI-Global Europe** framework will remain the main external cooperation tool, cross-border programmes at the EU's external borders will be **coordinated with Interreg and the Partnership Plans** to ensure continuity, flexibility, and closer cooperation with neighbouring countries.





# Horizon Europe



Grants

**Theme** Innovation / Cross-border cooperation

**Budget** €95.5 billion

**Managed by** European Commission

**Horizon Europe is the successor of Horizon 2020 and is the biggest EU research and innovation programme ever. For 2021-2027, its budget has been increased from €80 billion to €95.5 billion. It aims to ensure that Europe produces world-class science, to remove barriers to innovation and to make it easier for the public and private sectors to innovate together.**

## What has changed with the current MFF?

Although, in many respects, Horizon Europe remains very similar to its predecessor, there are a few new elements to the programme:

- The [European Innovation Council](#) supports innovations with a disruptive nature and potential for scaling and generating breakthroughs that may be too risky for private investors

• [Horizon Europe Missions](#) are sets of measures that aim to contribute to one of the following mission areas: adaptation to Climate Change; Cancer; Restore our oceans and waters; Climate neutral and smart cities; Soil Deal for Europe

• The [Open Science Policy](#), which means mandatory open access to publications and open science principles must be applied throughout the programme

## What does it support?

### Horizon Europe seeks to:

- Tackle climate change
- Contribute to achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals
- Boost the EU's competitiveness and growth

- Facilitate collaboration and strengthen the impact of research and innovation in developing, supporting and implementing EU policies
- Support the creation and better diffusion of excellent knowledge and technologies
- Create jobs, boost economic growth, promote industrial competitiveness and optimise investment impact

Horizon Europe is composed of three main pillars as well as one specific programme (European Defence Fund) and the Euratom programme.

**The most relevant pillars for your organisations and your beneficiaries are the following:**

- **Pillar II:** Global challenges & European industrial competitiveness (€53.5 billion): It covers the themes of 1) Health, Culture, creativity & Inclusive Society; 2) Civil Security for Society; 3) Digital, Industry & Space; 4) Climate, Energy & Mobility; 5) Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture & Environment
- **Pillar III:** Innovative Europe (€3.6 billion): It includes the [European Innovation Council](#), the [European Innovation Ecosystems](#) and the [European Institute of Innovation and Technology](#)



More information [here](#)

### Who can participate?

EU Member States and a large number of Associated countries - find the list [here](#). Make sure you look regularly as it can change!

### How does it work?

Funding opportunities are set out in [work programmes](#), which cover the large majority of support available. **See the launched 2025-2027 Strategic Plan for further orientation**; where the focus is on green transition; digital transition and resilient, competitive, inclusive and democratic Europe [here](#).

#### The main work programme covers:

- Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions and research infrastructures under Pillar I
- All clusters under Pillar II
- European innovation ecosystems under Pillar III
- The part strengthening and widening participation in the European Research Area

#### Other work programmes cover:

- European Research Council (ERC)
- Joint Research Centre (JRC)
- EIC

**Frequency of the calls:** Ongoing.

**Co-financing rate:** 70% to 100%.

**Consortia requirements:** Most funding is allocated to collaborative research projects carried out by consortia of at least three organisations.

**Where to find the calls:** Click [here](#).

### Who can I contact?

The network of [National Contact Points](#) (NCPs) provides guidance, practical information and assistance on participating in Horizon 2020. There are also NCPs in many non-EU and non-associated countries ('third countries').

You can find all opportunities via the [Funding and Tenders portal](#).

### Outlook 2026

The 2025 interim evaluation of Horizon Europe and its accompanying Communication underline that the programme is delivering strong impact and high European added value, but also highlight persistent challenges around complexity, widening participation and synergies with other instruments.

[Link to report here.](#)

In the remaining years, including 2026, implementation is expected to focus on sharpening missions and partnerships, improving take-up by under-represented regions and SMEs, and strengthening links with cohesion policy, InvestEU and national R&I systems.

Calls are likely to put more emphasis on strategic technologies, industrial competitiveness, and the green and digital transitions, while streamlining procedures and indicators where possible.

### Good to know

**With Horizon Europe, the EC sought to simplify some rules**

- Simplified forms of funding (flat rates, unit costs, lump sums, prizes) including ongoing pilots on lump sum project funding
- Simpler rules for personnel costs with rules based on daily rates
- An integrated dissemination and exploitation ecosystem that provides more support and guidance to participants, with the aim to enhance the value creation of the research and innovation investment



# Some Inspiration

## European Partnership on Innovative SMEs

**Countries** Almost all countries of the European continent as well as international members such as Israel, Turkey, Korea, Canada, Singapore, South Africa, Argentina and Chile.

**Lead** Association D'Eureka (Belgium).

**Focus area** SMEs, access to international cooperation.

**Project name** InnovativeSMEs.

**Timeline** 2021-2027.

**Budget** €232,146,760,50.

**EC contribution** €69,644,027,12.

The Innovative SMEs project comprises two main instruments (Eurostars 3 and Innowwide) as well as measures to connect to existing EU programs, initiatives and other European partnerships. As some of the biggest challenges for innovative SMEs accessing international cooperation and entering international markets, as well as developing the ability to receive funding, E\*3 through its coordination of national innovation programs will in addition support the further development of a European Research Area. The Eureka Secretariat will organise two joint transnational calls per year for E\*3 and one call per year for Innowwide. National Innovation Agencies actively support the implementation of E\*3 via national funding and support measures as well as services to applicants and promotion of the program.

More information [here](#)

## Promoting & Supporting Women Entrepreneurship and Leadership

The European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) is a body of the EU and is part of the Horizon Europe programme. EIT is key to supporting various EU policies towards sustainable growth. One of the policies it seeks to enhance is gender equality. The objective is to empower women entrepreneurs and nurture women leaders by increasing the number of girls aged 12 to 18 interested in technology, innovation, digitalisation, entrepreneurship and leadership. In order to make this happen, the EIT is:

- Supporting a cooperation platform that implements women entrepreneurship and leadership activities
- Linking to EIT Alumni and EIT Community activities, such as INNOVEIT
- Disseminating success stories to encourage the empowerment of girls and women across Europe
- Implementing the EIT Woman Award for women innovators

More information [here](#)

# Some Inspiration

## POSITIVE

**Countries** Germany, Lithuania, Italy.

**Lead** Steinbeis Europa Zentrum (Germany).

**Focus area** Connecting social innovation and traditional ecosystems.

**Project name** POSITIVE (Participatory Open Social Innovation Through Interlinking Valuable Ecosystems).

**Timeline** 2023-2024.

**Budget** €499,982,81.

**EC contribution** €499,982,81.

**Consortium partners** Steinbeis Europa Zentrum (DE), Hub Innovazione Trentino (IT), Lithuanian Innovation Centre (LT), Gruenhof e.V. (DE), Trentino Social Tank (IT), Lithuanian Social Business Association (LT).

Social innovation actors take on an important role in finding solutions for societal challenges. However, many social enterprises lack entrepreneurial skills and digitization of their products or services and there is still a lack of support for social entrepreneurs, which is due to the fact that many business support organisations have little understanding of the specific challenges and needs of social entrepreneurs. The social innovation and the technology innovation ecosystems are currently not well interconnected and mostly considered separate ecosystems with different skill sets.

The POSITIVE project will counteract these factors by raising awareness about the benefits of social innovation and providing capacity-building about social innovation and social entrepreneurship to the tech innovation ecosystem, thus creating the basis for better support for social entrepreneurs and a more inclusive innovation ecosystem based on mutual understanding. The project will also provide new opportunities for social entrepreneurs to digitise their products and services and to acquire new business skills through the organisation of an Open Innovation Challenge in three countries (POSITIVE Impact Challenge), which constitutes knowledge transfer from the tech into the social innovation ecosystem, with the specific purpose to support regional SI actors to access alternative means of financing.

The POSITIVE project will also foster the interlinkage of the two ecosystems on a regional and European level through cross-fertilization, knowledge exchange and policy recommendations on how the POSITIVE Impact Challenge model can be replicated. Thus, the POSITIVE project can not only contribute to the strengthening of the social economy on different levels, but also make the tech innovation ecosystem more resilient and equipped to tackle the important societal challenges by including social innovation actors.

More information [here](#)

# » The Next Generation of Horizon Europe under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

## Horizon Europe at a glance (2028–2034)

**Horizon Europe will continue to be the EU's flagship programme for research and innovation, driving scientific excellence, technological leadership, and cross-border collaboration.**

In the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034), it will form part of the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) — creating a seamless pathway from breakthrough research to industrial scale-up. With a proposed budget of around €100 billion, the new framework will focus on clean technologies, digital leadership, health, space, and resilience, while maintaining strong support for social innovation and inclusive research ecosystems.

**Through simplified rules, stronger links with InvestEU, SMP+, and ESF+, and continued open science principles, Horizon Europe will remain central to building a competitive, sustainable, and knowledge-based European economy.**

## Key updates:

- **Integration within the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF):** Horizon Europe will function as a self-standing research and innovation pillar under the ECF's umbrella, ensuring seamless progression from fundamental research to commercialisation and scale-up.
- **Simplified single rulebook:** harmonised rules across all R&I programmes to reduce administrative burden and increase flexibility.
- **Expanded policy windows:** new funding streams focused on clean technologies, digital leadership, biotech, space, and defence innovation.
- **Open science and open innovation:** continued mandatory open access to publications and FAIR data, alongside stronger links between academia, SMEs, and industry.
- **Skills and talent focus:** coordinated with Erasmus+ and the Union of Skills to strengthen Europe's science and innovation workforce.

## Opportunities for Social Innovation and the Social Economy:

Horizon Europe will continue to fund research and innovation projects advancing social innovation, sustainability, and inclusive entrepreneurship.

Relevant opportunities include:

- **Cluster 2 – Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society**, focusing on democratic participation, social resilience, and new economic models.
- **Cluster 5 – Climate, Energy and Mobility**, supporting green transition technologies and sustainable urban development.
- **EIC Pathfinder and Transition calls**, for early-stage innovations with high social impact.
- **EIT and KIC initiatives**, promoting women's entrepreneurship, youth innovation, and education-business collaboration.





# InvestEU



## Financial instruments

**Theme** Sustainable investment / innovation / job creation

**Budget** €372 billion

**Managed by** EIB Group and implementing partners

**The InvestEU Programme builds on the Investment Plan for Europe (or 'Juncker Plan') and brings together the European Fund for Strategic Investments and 13 other EU financial instruments. With over €372 billion in additional investment over the period of 2021-27, the programme aims to give an additional boost to sustainable investment, innovation and job creation in Europe.**

### What has changed with the current MFF?

It is a new programme!

### What does it support?

The InvestEU Programme includes three components, which are:

- 1. The InvestEU Fund:** Mobilising over €372 billion of public and private investment through an EU budget guarantee of €26.2 billion. This guarantee is meant to back the investment of 'implementing partners' such as the European Investment Bank (EIB) Group.
- 2. The InvestEU Advisory Hub:** Providing technical support and assistance to help with the preparation, development, structuring and implementation of investment projects, including capacity-building.
- 3. The InvestEU Portal:** Bringing together investors and project promoters on a single platform, providing an easily-accessible database of investment opportunities.

### Who can participate?

The InvestEU Fund is implemented via the selected financial partners or 'implementing partners,' the main one being EIB Group, which holds the responsibility of implementing 75% of the EU Guarantee. The implementing partners then provide direct and intermediated financing solutions for both private and public project promoters ('final recipients').

The eligible final recipients can be natural or legal persons established in an EU country or in a Third Eligible Country, including:

- Private entities
- Public sector entities and public sector-type entities
- Mixed entities, such as public-private partnership (PPPs) and private companies with a public purpose
- Non-profit organisations



More information [here](#)

**How does it work?**

For the InvestEU Fund: implementing partners in the countries will offer tailor-made financing solutions to project holders. The [InvestEU Advisory Hub](#) is there to support in identifying, preparing and developing investment projects. It is complemented by an online matchmaking tool which is the [InvestEU Portal](#).

**Who can I contact?**

**To benefit from the InvestEU Fund**, SMEs, social and micro enterprises should apply to their local commercial or public banks whose financial products are covered by the EU guarantee in their country or region. The local intermediary will inform them if a particular financing programme is covered by the InvestEU Fund. More info [here](#).

**InvestEU advisory support:** you can easily apply for advisory support through the [InvestEU Central Entry Point](#). You can access the InvestEU Portal [here](#) and add your project, search all projects and/or find the right partners.

**Good to know**

A major component of the InvestEU Programme is the EU's Recovery Plan for Europe in response to the Covid-19 crisis. The Recovery and Resilience Facility is the key instrument at the heart of Next Generation EU to help the EU emerge stronger and more resilient from the current crisis. Check it out [here](#).

**Connecting the disconnected!**

More information [here](#)

**Country** Germany.

**Focus area** Health, Social infrastructure.

**Project name** Großjungig AI.

**Timeline** From July 2020.

**Total cost** €1,000,000.

Großjungig AI is a rental platform powered by artificial intelligence promoting cross-generational co-living through helping seniors living alone to connect to students and young professionals looking for co-living partners.

By promoting cross-generational co-living Großjungig AI is trying to solve two main social problems: loneliness among seniors and the lack of affordable housing in big cities.



# » The Next Generation of InvestEU under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

**InvestEU will remain the EU's main programme for mobilising public and private investment in sustainable, innovative, and inclusive growth. In the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034), it will become the financial arm of the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) — the central EU framework bringing together funding for innovation, industrial policy, and skills.**

With a projected **investment target of around €400 billion**, InvestEU will continue to provide guarantees, loans, equity and advisory support through the **EIB Group** and other implementing partners. It will expand its focus to include **clean technologies, digital transformation, industrial resilience, and social investments**, ensuring that finance reaches SMEs, social enterprises, and regions in transition. Through stronger links with **Horizon Europe, SMP+, and ESF+**, InvestEU will underpin a more competitive, inclusive, and sustainable European economy.

## Key updates:

- **Integration within the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF):** InvestEU will provide the financial arm of the ECF, offering loans, guarantees, and equity support across its four policy windows (Clean Transition, Digital Leadership, Health & Biotech, Defence & Space).

- **Expanded scope:** beyond infrastructure and SMEs, InvestEU will increasingly finance clean technologies, critical raw materials, digital transformation, and industrial innovation.
- **Social Investments and Skills Window:** strengthened to support social economy enterprises, skills development, and inclusive finance, in close coordination with ESF+ and Erasmus+.
- **Simplified framework:** one guarantee mechanism, one governance model, and harmonised rules for all ECF-linked financial instruments.
- **Stronger advisory and technical support:** through the InvestEU Advisory Hub, now fully integrated with the EIB's new Competitiveness Investment Platform.

## Thematic priorities (policy windows):

- Sustainable infrastructure (energy, transport, environment)
- Research, innovation, and digitalisation
- SME and mid-cap access to finance
- Social investment and skills
- Clean and resilient industrial transformation (under ECF)

## Opportunities for the Social Economy and SMEs:

InvestEU remains a critical financing mechanism for the **social economy, social enterprises, and impact-driven organisations**.

Under the **Social Investments and Skills Window**, it will continue to:

- Support social enterprise scale-up, microfinance, and inclusive entrepreneurship.
- Invest in skills development, education, and upskilling aligned with the **Union of Skills agenda**.
- Leverage blended finance models for social innovation and public-private partnerships.

## Access points:

- SMEs and social enterprises apply through **local financial intermediaries** (commercial banks, national promotional banks, or investment funds) offering EU-guaranteed financing.
- Public and private project promoters can seek advisory support through the **InvestEU Advisory Hub** or publish investment projects on the **InvestEU Portal**.
- 

## Still in Discussion

For 2028–2034, InvestEU's model will be scaled up within the **European Competitiveness Fund** to streamline access to EU-backed finance, reduce fragmentation, and enhance impact measurement. It will serve as the EU's **single financial framework** for de-risking investment in clean technologies,

social innovation, and competitiveness — connecting seamlessly with programmes such as **Horizon Europe, SMP+, and ESF+**.





# European Regional Development Fund



Grants

**Theme** Competitiveness / Connectivity / Inclusion / Sustainable development

**Budget** €200 billion

**Managed by** shared by European Commission and national and regional authorities in Member States

**The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) seeks to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU by correcting imbalances between its regions. It is a key element of the EU's Cohesion Policy. The ERDF budget for 2021-2027 is around €200 billion.**

## What has changed with the current MFF?

ERDF has not changed in its shape and specificities. However, for the period of 2021-2027, the focus has been put on enabling "investments in a smarter, greener, more connected and more social Europe."

## What does it support?

ERDF has set out the following priorities:

- Increased competitiveness, through innovation and support to small and medium-sized businesses, as well as digitalisation and digital connectivity
- Green, low-carbon and resilience
- Increased connectivity by enhancing mobility
- Increased social inclusion, supporting effective and inclusive employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare, as well as enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism
- Increased support to locally-led development and sustainable urban development



More information [here](#)

### Who can participate?

The organisations that can apply for ERDF funding include:

- Public bodies
- Some private sector organisations (especially small businesses)
- Universities, associations
- NGOs and voluntary organisations
- Foreign firms with a base in the region covered by the relevant operational programme can also apply, provided they meet European public procurement rules

### How does it work?

The programme is managed in shared responsibility between the EC and national and regional authorities in Member States. The Member States' administrations choose which projects to finance and take responsibility for day-to-day management.

### Who can I contact?

You need to contact your national managing authority - to find out who it is click [here](#).

### ERDF – 2026 Outlook

The Cohesion Policy Mid-Term Review shows slow ERDF implementation across most Member States, meaning 2026 will be a catch-up year with accelerated calls and budget reallocations.

Programmes are expected to prioritise competitiveness, green and digital transition, circular economy, innovation and territorial resilience, while also strengthening administrative capacity and governance in regions facing implementation bottlenecks.

**Macro-regional and territorial strategies will become more prominent in programme design.**

For the social economy, this creates a favourable opening: 2026 ERDF funding will increasingly support community-based transition projects, regional innovation ecosystems, local resilience initiatives, circular and green solutions, digital inclusion, and capacity-building.

Social enterprises and SESOs can position themselves as delivery partners, skills providers, innovation actors and community implementers, particularly in regions seeking inclusive, sustainable development models.

### Good to know

**In need of data? Reports? Or just some inspiration?** Check out the [Cohesion Open Data Portal](#) which gathers studies, analyses, reports, projects and encourages exchange of experience and good practice.

# Some Inspiration

## Stimulating social innovation in Brussels

**Country** Belgium.

**Focus area** Social innovation and collaborative entrepreneurship.

**Project name** Coopcit.

**Timeline** 2015-2023.

**Total investment** €4,644,531.

**EU Investment** €2,091,940.

Coopcit aims to provide Brussels with a social, cooperative and collaborative entrepreneurship centre. It includes five support programmes and a coworking space for social innovation and social entrepreneurship. At the end of 2018, 65 companies had benefited from the support and assistance of Coopcit, 38 new companies were born, 20 jobs had been created, and awareness of the project had been raised amongst 2,437 people.

More information [here](#)

## Improving access to microcredit in France!

**Country** France.

**Focus area** Competitiveness of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.

**Project name** The Adie.

**Timeline** 2014-2020.

**Total investment** €131,102.

**EU Investment** €39,330.

The Adie believes that anyone can become an entrepreneur, even without the right amount of capital or diplomas. In the most isolated region of France, Centre-Val de Loire, the Adie provides microcredit in the hope of supporting the most isolated and least qualified in becoming an entrepreneur. The project has helped social cohesion and the local economy in the region since 75% of the micro-entrepreneurs stayed within their neighbourhood.

More information [here](#)

# » The Next Generation of ERDF under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) will remain a cornerstone of EU Cohesion Policy, supporting economic, social and territorial cohesion across Europe. In the new Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034), ERDF will operate as part of the European Fund for Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion, aligning with national Partnership Plans and the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF).

With a proposed budget of around €230 billion, ERDF will help regions strengthen innovation capacity, accelerate the green and digital transitions, and enhance social inclusion and connectivity.

By integrating investments in regional resilience, industrial transformation, and sustainable urban and rural development, ERDF will ensure that all European regions can adapt and thrive in a changing global economy.

## Key updates:

- **Integration under Partnership Plans:** ensuring coherence between regional, social, and competitiveness investments at national level.
- **New priority on regional resilience:** helping regions adapt to industrial change, energy transition, and demographic challenges.
- **Smarter, greener, more connected regions:** investments aligned with the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) and Clean Industrial Deal.
- **Simplified management and performance tracking:** harmonised rules across cohesion funds with measurable milestones and shared indicators.
- **Urban and local focus:** stronger support for cities, rural and remote areas, and locally led development (LLD) strategies.

## What It Supports

The ERDF continues to finance investments that promote **economic, social, and territorial cohesion** by supporting:

- **Innovation and competitiveness:** research and development, SME support, industrial modernisation, and digitalisation.
- **Green transition:** renewable energy, energy efficiency, circular economy, and climate adaptation.

- **Connectivity:** transport, broadband, and digital infrastructure.
- **Social inclusion:** education, health, skills, social services, and cultural initiatives.
- **Sustainable urban development:** integrated urban strategies and local partnerships for climate-neutral, inclusive cities.

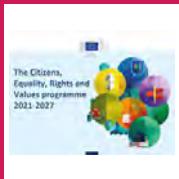
## Opportunities for the Social Economy and Local Actors:

ERDF supports **social enterprises, innovation hubs, and intermediary organisations** working on local development and inclusion.

Opportunities include:

- Creating local ecosystems for **social and cooperative entrepreneurship**.
- Revitalising urban and rural areas through **community-led local development (CLLD)**.
- Building skills and jobs linked to **green and digital transformation**.
- Supporting cross-sector cooperation between municipalities, universities, and SMEs.





# Citizens, Equality, Rights & Values



**Theme** Rule of law / Equality / Inclusion / Ending violence

**Budget** €766,300,000

**Managed by** Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme

**The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV) aims to protect and promote European Union rights and values as enshrined in the EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.**

**It contributes to sustaining and further developing open, rights-based, democratic, equal and inclusive societies based on the rule of law.**

## What has changed with the current MFF?

This new programme brings together the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme and the Europe for Citizens Programme.

## What does it support?

The programme has four main objectives which constitute its strands:

- Promoting equality and rights
- Fighting violence (Daphne strand, managed by the Directorate General for Justice and Consumers)
- Citizens' engagement and participation (managed by the EACEA)
- Promoting European values (managed by the EACEA)

## Who can participate?

**Eligible organisations include:**

- SMEs
- Large enterprises
- Government & public authorities including cities
- Civil society organisations
- National Human Rights Institutions

## How does it work?

Particularly interesting for this toolkit's audience are the citizens' engagement and participation and promoting European values strands of funding. These encompass the town-twinning, networks of towns and remembrance actions, as well as the European networks, civil society organisations active at EU level and European think-tanks in the areas of Union Values.

**The CERV programme offers grants, tenders and prizes on an ongoing basis.**

Find all the opportunities on the [Funding and Tenders portal](#). The work programme for 2022-2023 is still to be updated. You can find the most recent work programme at the bottom of [this page](#).

## Who can I contact?

You will need to get in touch with your national contact point for the CERV programme. Have a look [here](#) to find out yours!

## Some Inspiration

### Enabling transnational cooperation and active citizenship

**Country** Austria.

**Focus area** Entrepreneurship, digitality, and transnational collaboration.

**Project name** WSA Europe.

**Timeline** 2021-2022

**EU investment** €335,000.

This project seeks to enable engagement, gender equality, and the implementation of EU values via digital solutions and smart content applications.

The International Center for New Media leverages a network of entrepreneurs, experts and institutional partners through events, awards and networking activities.

One of the awards is the European Young Innovators award, which offers new opportunities for aspiring young Europeans and social entrepreneurs.

More information [here](#)

More information [here](#)

# » The Next Generation of CERV under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

**The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme will remain the EU's central instrument for promoting democracy, equality, and fundamental rights across Europe.**

In the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework, CERV will form part of the **Democracy, Justice and Values Framework**, strengthening synergies with **ESF+**, **Erasmus+**, and **Interreg**. With a proposed budget of around **€2 billion**, the programme will continue to fund actions supporting civic participation, gender equality, non-discrimination, and the rule of law, while enhancing protection against violence and hate. By expanding support for **civil society resilience, youth engagement, and digital citizenship**, CERV will help sustain open, inclusive, and rights-based societies at the heart of the European project.

## Key updates:

- **Integrated democracy and values framework:** closer coordination with the European Democracy Action Plan and Rule of Law Mechanism.
- **Expanded civic engagement strand:** increased funding for citizens' participation, social innovation, and democratic dialogue, including youth engagement and digital citizenship.

- **Stronger link with Cohesion and Competitiveness instruments:** particularly with ESF+ and Erasmus+, to connect civic participation, inclusion, and social innovation.
- **Support for civil society and media freedom:** dedicated funding for independent civil society organisations and cross-border advocacy initiatives.
- **Simplified access for grassroots actors:** lighter application procedures for small and local organisations promoting EU values.

## Opportunities for Civil Society and the Social Economy

CERV provides direct funding for networks, NGOs, and intermediary organisations active in equality, citizenship, and participatory democracy. Typical project opportunities include:

- Building **transnational networks** promoting civic participation and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- Supporting **inclusive and participatory local democracy initiatives**.
- Promoting **gender equality and non-discrimination** through awareness campaigns and capacity building.
- Strengthening **civil society resilience**, especially in countries facing shrinking civic space.





# Global Europe: the Neighbourhood, Development & International Cooperation Instrument

More information [here](#)



**Theme** Governance / Human and economic development /

Global solutions

**Budget** €79.5 billion

**Managed by** European Commission

**International Partnerships are the EU's arm to promote good governance, human and economic development and tackle global issues including poverty, hunger and preserving natural resources. The programme does that with partner countries across the world.** [The Global Europe: Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation](#)

**Instrument** is the principal financial tool of the EU's international cooperation for the period of 2021-2027. The total budget is €79.5 billion.

## What has changed with the current MFF??

Global Europe unifies grants, blending and guarantees, which will allow the EU to strategically promote public and private investment worldwide in support of sustainable development through the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+). Investments will be backed by an up to €53.4 billion External Action Guarantee, which will also cover the pre-accession countries.

## What does it support?

The types of programmes to implement European development assistance and international cooperation are either the:

- **Geographic Pillar:** Fosters dialogue and cooperation with third countries, with a budget of €60.39 billion. This pillar targets a



specific country or region, and will reflect regional and EU policies as well the implementation of the SDGs.

- **Thematic Pillar:** Will complement activities of the first pillar, and funds support to human rights and democracy, civil society, stability and peace, with an envelope of €6.36 billion.

- **Rapid-Response Pillar:** Allows the EU to rapidly and effectively intervene for conflict prevention and to respond to situations of crisis or instability; with an envelope of €3.18 billion it aims to increase resilience and early response.

## External Action Guarantee

To raise additional financial resources and leverage private investment in development actions to boost sustainable development, the **External Action Guarantee (under Pillar 1)** aims to:

- Support micro enterprises and SMEs
- Promote decent job creation
- Strengthen public and private infrastructure
- Foster renewable energy and sustainable agriculture
- Support the digital economy
- Address the health and socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis

The programme's priorities are the following:

- Green alliances and partnerships
- Alliances for science, technology, innovation and digital
- Alliances for sustainable growth and jobs
- Partnerships for migration and mobility
- Partnerships for human development, peace and governance

## Who can participate?

Eligible organisations include any non-profit organisation or company active in the field of development.

There are multiple geographic areas covered by the programme:

- East Africa
- Southern Africa and Indian Ocean
- Central Africa
- Sub-Saharan Africa, Caribbean and Pacific
- Asia
- Central Asia
- Middle East/Gulf
- Pacific
- Latin America
- Caribbean
- Overseas Countries and Territories in the Atlantic, Antarctic, Arctic, Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific region

## How does it work?

Each year, the EC publishes:

- **Action programmes:** with objectives, fields of intervention, expected results, management procedures, and total amounts of allocated funds. Access them [here](#).
- **Work programmes for grants:** specifying the legislation, objectives and schedule of calls for proposals, with indicative amounts of funding and expected results.

The EC provides:

- **Grants:** Calls for proposals to development organisations for projects or for themselves when their operations align with the programme's objectives
- **Tenders:** Calls for tenders for procurement contracts are also available
- **Guarantees and blending:** Used to start up or cover part of the costs of a project, leveraging private investment in development actions

## Who can I contact?

You can access all these opportunities through the [EU Funding and Tender Portal](#).



# » The Next Generation of Global Europe under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

**Global Europe (NDICI) will remain the EU's principal financial instrument for international cooperation, development, and global partnerships.**

In the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework, it will be integrated into the **Global Gateway and Partnerships Framework**, connecting Europe's external investment strategy with its internal objectives on competitiveness, climate action, and resilience. With a proposed budget of around €90 billion, the programme will continue to support **governance, human development, sustainable growth, and peace**, while increasingly focusing on **green and digital connectivity, skills partnerships**, and strategic regional cooperation. Through closer links with **InvestEU, Horizon Europe**, and the **European Competitiveness Fund (ECF)**, Global Europe will help position the EU as a global leader in sustainable investment and equitable partnerships worldwide.

## Key updates:

**Integration with Global Gateway:** the EU's global investment strategy will become the primary operational platform for NDICI, focusing on connectivity, energy, digital, and transport corridors.

**Enhanced coordination with internal instruments:** closer links with Interreg, ENI, InvestEU, and the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) to ensure coherence between internal and external investments.

**Increased emphasis on climate and resilience:** at least 35% of the total envelope will target climate-related actions.

**New focus on partnerships for talent, education, and skills:** expanding cooperation on higher education, mobility, and research with partner countries.

**Streamlined structure:** reduced fragmentation through unified governance, simplified rules, and greater flexibility in crisis response.

## What it Supports

Global Europe continues to finance development and cooperation actions under **three main pillars:**

**1. Geographic Pillar** – supporting cooperation with countries and regions through bilateral and regional programmes (Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Pacific, Neighbourhood, and Overseas Territories).

**Focus:** inclusive growth, governance, sustainable infrastructure, migration partnerships, and trade integration.

**2. Thematic Pillar** – promoting **human rights and democracy**, civil society, peace and stability, and global challenges such as health, digitalisation, and environment.

**3. Rapid Response Pillar** – enabling quick EU action for conflict prevention, crisis management, and early recovery efforts.

**4. In addition, the External Action Guarantee (EAG) under the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+).**

## Opportunities for Civil Society and the Social Economy

- Strengthen social economy ecosystems and sustainable value chains in partner countries.
- Support youth and women's entrepreneurship through blended finance.
- Promote decent work, skills development, and sustainable agriculture.
- Build green and digital partnerships that align with EU global priorities.





# Digital Europe (DIGITAL)



Grants  
Purchasing services  
Cash Prizes

**Theme** Digitalisation

**Budget** €7.5 billion

**Managed by** DG CONNECT

**The Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL) is a new EU funding programme focused on bringing digital technology to businesses, citizens and public administrations. DIGITAL aims to accelerate the economic recovery and shape the digital transformation of Europe's society and economy, bringing benefits to everyone, but in particular to small and medium- sized enterprises. The total budget of the programme for 2021-2027 is €7.5 billion.**

## What has changed with the current MFF?

DIGITAL is a new EU funding programme.

## What does it support?

Digital technology and infrastructure have a critical role in our private lives and business environments. We rely on them to communicate, work, advance science and answer current environmental problems. At the same time, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted not only how much we rely on our technology to be available to us, but also how important it is for Europe not to be dependent on systems and solutions coming from other regions of the world. Paving the way for achieving this goal is the DIGITAL programme.

**DIGITAL will provide strategic funding in five key capacity areas:**

- Supercomputing
- Artificial intelligence
- Cybersecurity
- Advanced digital skills
- Ensuring a wide use of digital technologies across the economy and society, including through European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs)

DIGITAL will not address these challenges in isolation, but rather complement the funding available through other EU programmes, such as the Horizon Europe programme for Research and Innovation, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Structural funds, to name a few.

## Who can participate?

Member States and Associated countries. For more information take a look at the work programme [here](#).

## How does it work?

DIGITAL will offer funding through grants and tenders, the majority of which are launched and managed by DG Connect.

For the first two years, DIGITAL will be implemented through four work programmes:

1. For all actions excluding those implemented by the other three work programmes as indicated below - [DIGITAL Europe Work Programme 2021-2022](#)
2. For the European Digital Innovation Hubs - [DIGITAL Europe - EDIH Work Programme 2021-2023](#)
3. For Cybersecurity actions - [DIGITAL Europe - Cybersecurity Work Programme 2021-2022](#)
4. For High Performance Computing actions – the work programme will be prepared by the EuroHPC Joint Undertaking [here](#) and [here](#)

## Grants

DG CONNECT gives organisations the opportunity to bid for grants through calls for proposals.

**Frequency of calls for proposals:** Ongoing.

**Requirements:** Consortium-based.

**To find suitable partners:** Click [here](#).

**Where to find the calls:** Click [here](#).

## Tenders

DG CONNECT invites organisations to tender for EU public contracts to deliver works, supply or service contracts.



**Frequency of calls for tender:** Ongoing.

**Requirements:** Depending on the call, sole applicants or consortia are eligible.

**Where to find the calls:** Click [here](#).

By providing access to technical expertise and experimentation as well as the possibility to “test before investing”, EDIHs help companies improve business/production processes, products or services using digital technologies.

### Who can I contact?

Calls for proposals and for tenders will be published and managed centrally by DG CONNECT. Organisations interested in DIGITAL can respond to the calls for proposals and tenders that are launched via the [EC Funding & Tenders Portal](#).

For National contact points (NCPs), please view the [NCP site here](#). At this moment of print - the adoption of the Digital Europe 2025 – 2027 Work Programme has not been published yet.

### Good to know

SESOs can benefit from the EDIHs!

EDIHs will function as one-stop shops that help companies dynamically respond to digital challenges and become more competitive.

By providing access to technical expertise and experimentation as well as the possibility to “test before investing”, EDIHs help companies improve business/production processes, products, or services using digital technologies.

They also provide innovation services, such as financing advice, training and skills development, that are needed for a successful digital transformation. Environmental issues are also taken into account, in particular with regard to energy consumption and low carbon emissions.

Find the EDIH near you [here](#)!

# THE RIOT, OK



# » The Next Generation of Digital Europe under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

**The Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL) will remain the EU's key investment tool for deploying digital technologies and strengthening Europe's technological sovereignty.**

In the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework, it will become a **core pillar of the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF)**, directly supporting Europe's twin digital and green transitions. With a proposed budget of around €10 billion, DIGITAL will focus on **artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, high-performance computing, advanced digital skills, and digital innovation hubs (EDIHs)**. By connecting technology deployment with industrial policy and skills development, DIGITAL will help businesses, public administrations, and citizens benefit from Europe's digital transformation — ensuring a more innovative, inclusive, and competitive digital future.

## Key updates:

- **Integration under the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF):** DIGITAL will become one of the ECF's key implementation pillars, supporting the Digital Leadership and Clean Transition windows.
- **Expanded focus:** beyond core technology capacity, it will fund projects on **AI deployment, cybersecurity, semiconductors,**

quantum computing, and data infrastructure.

- **Digital inclusion:** reinforced link with **ESF+** and **Erasmus+** to promote advanced digital skills and access for SMEs, public authorities, and civil society.
- **European Digital Infrastructure Consortia (EDICs):** strengthened role to accelerate cross-border data spaces and digital public services.
- **Simplified delivery model:** unified calls and joint work programmes with Horizon Europe and ECF partners to reduce administrative fragmentation.

## What it Supports

DIGITAL provides strategic investment in **five key capacity areas** to ensure Europe's competitiveness and technological sovereignty:

1. **High-Performance Computing (HPC):** development of exascale and quantum computing capabilities through the EuroHPC Joint Undertaking.
2. **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** deployment of trustworthy AI solutions and access to high-quality data for innovation and public services.

**3. Cybersecurity:** reinforcing Europe's cyber resilience through the European Cybersecurity Competence Centre and national competence networks.

**4. Advanced Digital Skills:** training programmes and digital skills academies, closely coordinated with the Union of Skills initiative.

**5. Digital Transformation of Business and Public Services:** scaling up the network of **European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs)** to help SMEs and the public sector "test before investing" in digital technologies.

## Opportunities for Social Economy, SMEs, and Regions

DIGITAL offers direct opportunities for **social enterprises, SMEs, public bodies, and intermediary organisations** to engage in Europe's digital transformation.

Key areas of relevance include:

- Using **EDIHs** as one-stop shops for innovation support, digital training, and sustainable business transformation.
- Developing **AI and data-driven tools** to enhance impact measurement and service delivery in the social economy.



- Supporting **regional digital ecosystems** and cross-border collaborations.
- Participating in **capacity-building projects** on cybersecurity, open data, and digital governance.





# Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)



Grants  
Purchasing services

**Theme** Migration / Asylum

**Budget** €9.88 billion

**Managed by** European Commission and Member States

**The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) aims to further boost national capacities and improve procedures for migration management. It also aims at enhancing solidarity and responsibility sharing between EU Member States, in particular through emergency assistance and the relocation mechanism.**

**The fund has a total budget of €9.9 billion for 2021-2027.**

## What has changed with the current MFF?

The EC significantly increased the budget of the renewed AMIF, from €3.137 billion for 2014-2020 to €9.9 billion for 2021-2027. Through the political agreement reached between the European Parliament and Council, the fund will specifically support solidarity and responsibility-sharing, in particular towards the most affected EU countries.

Additionally, funds will be allocated to local and regional authorities that implement measures that support people's integration into their community. Moreover, EU Member States can now obtain, amongst others, €10.000 for each person welcomed through resettlement, including family members, and € 6.000 for every person they welcome for humanitarian admission.



## What does it support?

**The AMIF Funding contributes to the achievement of four specific objectives:**

- **Asylum:** Strengthening and developing the [Common European Asylum System](#), as well as its external dimensions
- **Legal migration and integration:** Supporting legal migration to EU Member States in line with economic and social needs, as well as contributing to the integration of non-EU nationals
- **Return:** Enhancing fair and effective return strategies that contribute to combating irregular migration, with an emphasis on a sustainable, effective and dignifying return process
- **Solidarity:** Making sure that EU Member States which are most affected by migration and asylum flows can count on solidarity from other EU Member States

To find out which actions are funded under AMIF, click [here](#).



### Who can participate?

#### Eligible organisations include:

- State and Federal authorities
- Local public bodies
- Non-governmental organisations
- Humanitarian organisations
- Private and public law companies
- Education and research organisations

#### Eligible countries include:

- All EU countries except Denmark
- [Associated countries](#)

### How does it work?

The largest share of the budget (63.5%) is channelled through shared management by the EC and the Member States. The remaining share is directly managed under the [thematic facility](#) by the EC's DG Migration and Home Affairs, dedicated to allocating funds to emerging or unforeseen needs.

AMIF offers funding to organisations through calls for tender and grants.

### Grants

General and specific calls for proposals are published by the EC and National Authorities. Every year an Annual Work Programme is published which outlines the priorities and objectives for that year. The Annual Work Programme of the EC can be found [here](#).

### Tenders

AMIF also includes actions implemented via calls for tender, or through work, supply or service contracts.

**Frequency of the calls:** On-going.

**Requirement:** Depending on the call, sole applicants or consortia are eligible.

**Where to find the calls:** Click [here](#).

### Good to know

Based on the operational lessons learnt in the past few years, the "Toolkit on the use of EU funds for the integration of people with a migrant background" identifies areas where people with a migration background are considered to face the most pressing and acute challenges.

You can access the toolkit [here](#).





# Creative Europe



Grants  
Purchasing services

**Theme** Culture, Creativity, Media, Heritage

**Budget** €2.44 billion

**Managed by** European Commission

**The Creative Europe programme is the EU's flagship programme to support the culture and audiovisual sectors. It provides financial support to cultural and creative organisations as well as to cinemas and films. It seeks to strengthen cultural diversity and meet the needs and challenges of the cultural and creative sectors, in particular in the post-Covid 19 pandemic context. The total budget of the programme for 2021-2027 is €2.44 billion.**

## What has changed with the current MFF?

The current Creative Europe Programme focuses on the recovery of these sectors that took a major hit during the Covid-19 pandemic. The programme also puts a stress on inclusivity, digitalisation and sustainability. For 2025 the focus will be on green and digital

transitions and strengthening social and economic resilience, see more information here. With a budget for 2025 of over 338 million euro the annual work programme details can be found [here](#).

## What does it support?

The programme seeks to support projects that:

- Safeguard, develop and promote European cultural and linguistic diversity and heritage
- Increase the competitiveness and economic potential of the cultural and creative sectors, in particular the audiovisual sector

**The programme is divided into three strands:** the CULTURE strand, the MEDIA strand and the CROSS-SECTORAL strand.

**1. The CULTURE Strand supports various cultural and creative sectors including architecture, cultural heritage, design, literature and publishing, music, performing arts.**

The CULTURE strand encourages cooperation and exchanges among cultural organisations and artists within Europe and beyond to:

- Foster artistic creation and innovation
- Support the promotion and the distribution of European content across Europe and beyond
- Help artists find creation and performance opportunities across borders
- Stimulate the digital and environmental transition of the sectors

Under this strand, funding is available under six areas:

- > [European cooperation projects](#)
- > [European platforms](#)
- > [European networks](#)
- > [Circulation of European literary works](#)
- > [Culture Moves Europe](#) (mobility for artists & professionals)
- > [Pan-European Cultural Entities](#)

**Funding opportunities cover:**

- **Horizontal actions:** cooperation projects, networks, platforms, mobility for artists and cultural professionals, and policy development

**• Sectoral support:** support for music, publishing, cultural heritage and architecture as well as other sectors

**• Special actions:** EU cultural prizes, European Capitals of Culture, European Heritage Label, support for young high-quality artists, and broad citizens' service outreach

**2. The MEDIA Strand supports the film and audiovisual industries in areas of development, distribution and promotion of European works.**

It encourages digitalisation, cooperation across the value chain, new talents and knowledge-sharing, innovation, wide engagement with audiences, especially youth.

**This strand is divided into four clusters:**

> **The Content Cluster** is about creation and production of high-quality content. It focuses on cross-border cooperation amongst producers and content developers, and stimulates innovation within content, business models and technology use.

> **The Business Cluster** is about business innovation, scalability and talents across the European audiovisual industry's value chain. Actions here focus on learning and knowledge sharing including mentoring, digital and greening skills, on business exchanges and transnational distribution of content.

More information  
[here](#)



> The **Audience Cluster** is about audience growth on multiple platforms, supporting the digital transition of the sector and engaging with younger audiences including with educational tools.

> The **Policy Support Cluster** seeks to establish regulatory dialogue, data sharing, intelligence on trends and stakeholder outreach.

### 3. CROSS-SECTORAL Strand supports collaboration between different cultural and creative sectors.

With the aims of supporting transnational policy cooperation, promoting visibility and transferability of the programme's results, promoting innovation in all areas as well as technological adaptation.

#### This strand entails:

- **Transnational policy cooperation** promoting knowledge of the programme and supporting the transferability of results.
- **Creative Innovation Labs** which allow for design and testing of innovative digital solutions and facilitate the creation of close-to-markets tools, models and methods.
- **New support to the news media sector** which promotes media literacy, pluralism and media freedom, as well as activities to help the sector adjust to the structural and technological changes it faces.

#### Who can participate?

The Creative Europe Programme offers funding to all types of cultural and creative organisations (including non-profits, SMEs, education & training organisations, etc.). There are many sub-programmes to Creative Europe, and therefore different eligibility groups. **We feature some examples here below (list non-exhaustive):**

##### • For the CULTURE strand:

Under 'European Cooperation projects' and 'European Networks': Organisations. Not individuals.  
Under 'Culture Moves Europe': individuals.  
Under 'Pan-European Cultural Entities': organisations supporting European young and highly talented musicians in the field of orchestras.

##### • For the MEDIA strand:

Under the business cluster: training organisations, distributors and sales agents, tech companies, video on demand services, aggregators, exhibitors, film markets, etc.  
Under the audience cluster: cinema operators, festival organisers, video on demand networks and operators theatrical distributors, sales agents, heritage institutions, etc.  
More details [here](#).

##### • For the CROSS-SECTORAL strand:

Organisations in general. The wider European news media sector, including small media.

#### Eligible countries:

EU Member States	North Macedonia
Iceland	Serbia
Norway	Turkey
Liechtenstein	Armenia
Albania	Georgia
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Tunisia
Kosovo	Ukraine
Montenegro	

Look out for updates to the list of eligible countries [here](#).

#### How does it work?

In the Creative Europe programme, the EC offers funding through grants. They are, for a large majority, launched and managed by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

We note that the CULTURE strand entails three types of projects:

##### • Small scale projects

(minimum 3 organisations from 3 different countries) - €200,000, co-funding rate: 80%

##### • Medium scale projects

(minimum 5 organisations from 5 different countries) - €1 million, co-funding rate: 70%

##### • Large-scale projects

(minimum 10 organisations from 10 different countries) - €2 million, co-funding rate: 60%



## Grants

The EACEA gives organisations the opportunity to bid for grants through calls for proposals.

**Frequency of calls for proposals:** Ongoing.

**Co-financing rate:** Up to 80%.

**Consortia requirements:** varies per strand and substrand.

**Where to find the calls:** Click [here](#).



## Who can I contact?

For questions you may have about the programme and help you may need to cooperate with organisations in other countries, [Creative Europe Desks](#) are in place in every participating country.

## Good to know

[CultureEU Funding Guide](#): an interactive user-friendly tool to assess which funding suits your organisation/needs best.

[Creative Unite Platform](#): a platform for and by the cultural and creative sectors, set up with the help of the EC and the EP Pilot project "FLIP Finance, Learning, Innovation and Patenting for CCIs". It is hosted by the European Creative Hubs Network.

The platform offers a common space for all cultural and creative sectors in Europe and beyond to share their initiatives and actions in response to the COVID-19 crisis and beyond.



# » The Next Generation of Creative Europe under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

**From 2028 onwards, the current Creative Europe programme is expected to evolve into AgoraEU — a new umbrella programme bringing together culture, media, and values under one framework.**

Building on the achievements of Creative Europe (2021–2027), AgoraEU will strengthen support for Europe's **cultural and creative sectors**, alongside the **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV)** programme, creating a more integrated approach to democracy, culture, and media. With a proposed **doubling of the budget for culture and media**, the new programme will continue to fund artistic cooperation, mobility, and media innovation, while promoting **pluralism, inclusion, and freedom of expression**. AgoraEU will align with the **European Competitiveness Fund (ECF)** and **Union of Skills**, recognising culture and creativity as vital to Europe's democratic resilience, social cohesion, and global competitiveness.

## Key updates:

- **Merger into AgoraEU:** unites Creative Europe (Culture, Media, Cross-sectoral) and CERV under one integrated programme supporting culture, creativity, media freedom, civic engagement, and European values.

- **Significant budget increase:** proposed doubling of the combined allocation for culture and media compared to 2021–2027.
- **New focus on democracy and civic participation:** cross-cutting actions linking artistic and media innovation to citizen engagement and democratic dialogue.
- **Stronger digital and green transformation:** continuation of Creative Innovation Labs, support for green production models, and sustainability in cultural mobility.
- **Cross-sectoral governance:** DG EAC (culture and education), DG CONNECT (media and digital), and DG JUST (democracy and values) will jointly steer implementation through EACEA.

## What It Supports

AgoraEU will preserve and expand the three key dimensions of Creative Europe, while integrating civic participation and democratic engagement strands:

- **Culture Strand** – fostering cross-border cooperation, cultural innovation, and artistic mobility through initiatives such as European Cooperation Projects, European Networks, Culture Moves Europe, and European Capitals of Culture.

- **Media Strand** – supporting the audiovisual and media industries, from content creation to audience engagement, with reinforced actions for media pluralism, digitalisation, and youth engagement.
- **Democracy and Values Strand (new)** – funding for civil society, think-tanks, and networks promoting democratic participation, media literacy, and freedom of expression.
- **Cross-sectoral Strand** – promoting innovation across creative and civic sectors through Creative Innovation Labs, policy exchange, and technology adaptation.

## Opportunities for Cultural and Social Economy Actors

AgoraEU will continue to support **cultural organisations, creative entrepreneurs, social innovators, media actors, and civil society networks**.

Priority areas include:

- Strengthening cultural and creative ecosystems, including social enterprises active in culture and media.
- Supporting democratic innovation and civic participation through creative and digital tools.



## Still in Discussion

The AgoraEU proposal (July 2025) is currently under negotiation between the European Commission, Parliament, and Member States as part of the new **MFF 2028–2034**.

Final structure, strands, and allocations are expected in 2026, but the merger of Creative Europe and CERV into **AgoraEU** is a key feature of the proposed EU budget, marking a shift towards a single, integrated framework for culture, media, democracy, and values.





# Just Transition Fund



**Theme** Green transition

**Budget** €19.2 billion

**Managed by** National Managing Authorities

**Part of the Cohesion Policy, and first pillar of the Just Transition Mechanism under the European Green Deal, the Just Transition Fund (JTF) supports the European territories most affected by the transition towards climate neutrality to avoid regional inequalities growing. It is part of the European Cohesion Policy. Its total budget is €19.2 billion, and it is expected to mobilise around EUR €25.4 billion in investments with national co-financing and voluntary transfers from other funds.**

## What does it support?

The aim of the JTF is to alleviate the socio-economic costs triggered by the transition towards climate-neutrality, supporting the economic diversification and reconversion of the most-affected territories and helping people to adapt in a changing labour market.

### Support can be provided to:

- Productive investments in SMEs
- The creation of new firms
- Environmental rehabilitation
- Investments in clean energy
- Upskilling and reskilling of workers
- Job-search assistance
- Active inclusion of jobseekers programmes
- The transformation of existing carbon-intensive installations, when these investments lead to substantial emission cuts and job protection



## Who can participate?

The JTF, through the MS, offers funding to::

- SMEs
- Large enterprises and Emission Trading System activities

**Economic diversification:** enterprises and economic stakeholders such as support for productive investment in SMEs (including micro-enterprises and start-ups). It can also invest in the creation of new firms, including through business incubators and consulting services. Due importance should be given to sectors with a strong job creation potential, to mitigate negative repercussions on employment, particularly in sectors with growth potential, such as the raw materials value chain.

**Employment:** the JTF can support the upskilling and reskilling (including training) of workers and job seekers in sectors with a local employment potential (either existing or to be created). It can also support job-search assistance (guidance and counselling, assessment and validation of prior learning) for jobseekers and support their active inclusion in the labour market. The assistance to jobseekers can also benefit dismissed workers who have lost their job in sectors in the TJTP territories even if they are not residing in that territory.

Other activities include research and innovation, investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy, smart and sustainable local mobility, digitalisation, soil regeneration, circular economy and social infrastructure for the purposes of child- and elderly-care facilities and in training centres, including local social services.

**Technical assistance can also be supported by the JTF.** This includes actions necessary for the effective administration and use of the JTF, including for the capacity-building of partners, as well as to provide financing for functions such as preparation, training, management, monitoring, evaluation, visibility and communication.

### Eligible countries include:

- The JTF will concentrate on a limited number of NUTS3 regions or parts of those regions

### How does it work?

The JTF budget has been allocated under shared management (in partnership) with the Member States. Member States prepare, together with the relevant local and regional authorities of the territories concerned, one or more territorial just transition plans. Managing Authorities in each country allocate the money to projects.

### Grants

The JTF provides grants to the territories most negatively impacted by the transition to a climate-neutral economy.

### Who can I contact?

Your Managing Authority is your port of entry to know about budget, calls for proposals and all relevant details.

### Good to know

The [Just Transition Platform](#) (JTP) was set up to support all stakeholders in accessing the available support. Events are organised on a regular basis to share knowledge and good practices, to support capacity-building and the bilateral and multilateral exchange of views across all affected sectors and to provide advice on just transition to authorities and stakeholders involved in JTF-related activities. It also includes a dedicated webpage and contact form.

**The Just Transition Scheme under the InvestEU Programme:** support economically viable investments by private and public-sectors aligned with just transition objectives and can be implemented under any financial product under the four policy windows of InvestEU.



### Social Enterprise Just Transition Fund

**Country** Scotland.

**Lead** Social Investment Scotland

**Focus area** Social Entrepreneurship, transition to net zero, creating jobs in low-carbon industries.

**EC Contribution** over 1 million €.

More information [here](#)

Through the JTF, Social Investment Scotland has set-up a fund aligned to the Scottish Government's Just Transition outcomes. With that, they aim to finance social enterprises and communities to transition to net zero, create jobs in low-carbon industries and contribute to the region's future prosperity.

The Social Enterprise Just Transition Fund will be a blended product with a grant element of up to 50% of the overall funding request, the remainder will be loan.

Additionally, they have set-up master-classes and offer support regarding market-building activities.

## » The Next Generation of JTF under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

### The future of the Just Transition Fund (JTF) under the 2028–2034 MFF

The future of the **Just Transition Fund (JTF)** is currently the subject of ongoing negotiations as part of the European Commission's proposals for the **2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**. While the JTF remains one of the most visible instruments of the **Just Transition Mechanism (JTM)** and the **European Green Deal**, early indications suggest that the programme may not continue as a **stand-alone fund** in its current form, signalling a **potential integration of the JTF into broader national and regional funding frameworks**, such as the **National and Regional Partnership Plans**, which would bring together all territorial investments under a single programming and reporting structure.

This possible integration would not mean the end of the EU's just transition objectives. On the contrary, the **core mission of the JTF – ensuring that no region or worker is left behind in the shift towards climate neutrality** – will remain central to the EU's **policy agenda**. What is expected to change is the **delivery mechanism**: rather than a dedicated, ring-fenced fund, future support for just transition priorities could be channelled through a **larger “competitive-ness and transition envelope”** under the **European Competitiveness Fund (ECF)** and implemented via Member States' partnership plans.





# New European Bauhaus



**Theme** Sustainable and inclusive living | Green Deal

**Budget** Varies each year - €85 million in 2021 – 2022)\*

**Managed by** European Commission

**A creative and interdisciplinary initiative that connects people in different cities, regions, and countries working on similar goals. The New European Bauhaus (NEB) is all about living spaces and experiences; it seeks to facilitate and steer the transformation of our societies along three inseparable values:**

- Sustainability, from climate goals, to circularity, zero pollution, and biodiversity
- Aesthetics, quality of experience and style, beyond functionality
- Inclusion, from valorising diversity, to securing accessibility and affordability

## What does it support?

New European Bauhaus revolves around four thematic axes that guide its implementation on the ground:

- Reconnecting with nature
- Regaining a sense of belonging
- Prioritising the places and people that need it the most
- Shaping a circular industrial ecosystem and supporting life-cycle thinking

## Who can participate?

This initiative is different from all other EU funding instruments. Through its various sub-initiatives, citizens, experts, businesses, and institutions can contribute and participate.

## Eligible countries:

- EU Member States
- Non Member States, depending on the initiative, e.g, [NEB actions for Ukraine - capacity-building programme](#)

Check out for updates on all initiatives [here](#).

## How does it work?

The delivery of the NEB crystallises in several EU financing instruments dedicating calls to support pilot projects such as Horizon Europe, ERDF, Erasmus+, etc. To know more about these funding opportunities for 2023-2024, have a look [here](#).

## Grants & Prizes

The NEB is mainly financed through various EU funding schemes providing dedicated and contributing grants. See [here](#).

The NEB prizes celebrate projects and young people's concepts and innovative approaches to architecture, design, and urban planning that are aligned with the goals of the NEB initiative. The prizes are awarded within the NEB's four core axes.

More about the prizes [here](#).

## Who can I contact?

NEB dedicated and supporting calls for proposals are published by various European funding instruments (see above). You will need to refer to these to identify whom to contact.

However, the NEB also has [dedicated National Contact Points](#) (NCP).

## Good to know

The [NED Dashboard](#) is an interactive map where you can access all relevant information about the NEB projects and key actors.

Read about the inspiring projects [here](#).



\*Many other EU programmes will integrate the New European Bauhaus as an element of context or priority without a predefined dedicated budget.

More information [here](#)

# » The Next Generation of NEB under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

## The future of the New European Bauhaus (NEB) under the 2028–2034 MFF

The New European Bauhaus (NEB) will remain one of the EU's most visible cross-sectoral initiatives connecting the **European Green Deal** with people's daily lives — inspiring a more sustainable, inclusive, and beautiful built environment across Europe. However, its **institutional structure and funding model are set to evolve significantly** in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2028–2034.

According to the European Commission's proposal (COM(2025) 558 final – "A Stronger Europe for the Future") and the draft Horizon Europe Regulation (COM(2025) 543 final), the NEB will no longer operate purely as a voluntary coordination initiative. Instead, it will become a **formal "NEB Facility"** — a permanent, multiannual funding and policy mechanism embedded within **Horizon Europe's "Society" pillar** and linked to the **European Competitiveness Fund (ECF)**.

This change reflects the EU's broader shift towards **fewer, more integrated funding instruments**, aiming to connect research, innovation, cohesion, and social policy through shared objectives.

The NEB will thus function as a horizontal priority or facility rather than as a stand-alone programme. The NEB Facility will pool resources and priorities from multiple programmes — **Horizon Europe, ERDF, ESF+, InvestEU, Creative Europe/AgoraEU, and the European Competitiveness Fund** — focusing on local transformation projects that combine sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusion. Calls will continue to carry the NEB label, but will increasingly appear under these wider programmes' annual work programmes.

The New European Bauhaus (NEB) will remain one of the EU's most visible cross-sectoral initiatives connecting the European Green Deal with people's daily lives



# Early-stage and project finance opportunities for social enterprises and/or intermediaries

**In this chapter, we guide you through different incubators, accelerators, prizes and funding programmes at EU level that social entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs in your networks can access to bring their mission and vision to life, grow and learn new skills as well as expand their own networks.**

## What are incubators and accelerators?

Incubators and accelerators are places for your beneficiaries to get out there, bring their idea to life, launch it and give it the boost it needs to succeed in the market. Sometimes this comes in the form of financial opportunities but they mainly do so through non-financial support.

### Incubators

An incubator is a place where your beneficiaries can receive support, with a variety of activities, ranging from defining their solution or idea to the very first steps of boosting it. Incubator support oftentimes includes mentorship, funding opportunities, business modelling, skilling pathways, and training and advice on calls for proposals. An incubator is thus an ideal place for your beneficiaries to start developing their business ideas and plans.

### Accelerators

An accelerator helps existing businesses and social enterprises that need a further push into the market. Therefore, an accelerator is more focused on the growth and scaling of a social enterprise and its market penetration. In contrast to an incubator, an accelerator helps social enterprises which already have a business model and activities in place.

**To support your beneficiaries in navigating through the different early-stage finance opportunities, the following section spotlights the most relevant incubators, accelerators and EU funding opportunities.**

Please keep in mind that the following list does not intend to be exhaustive, but is intended to give an introductory and broad overview of the possibilities at the EU level.

### European Innovation Council

The [European Innovation Council](#) (EIC) seeks to identify, develop, and scale up breakthrough technologies and game-changing innovations of SMEs, start-ups, spin-offs and researchers. But the EIC's support goes far beyond financial support, and offers non-financial support to all awarded projects under the EIC programmes, which consist of coaching, mentoring, partner opportunities and much more. To find out more about the Business Acceleration Services of the EIC, click [here](#).

**To learn more about all upcoming funding opportunities, click [here](#).**



# Some Inspiration

## EIC Transition

**Themes** Innovation, mature and novel technology, business case development.

**Grants** Up to €2.5 million.

**Non-financial support** Tailor-made business acceleration services.

**Target audience** Single applicants (SMEs, spin-offs, start ups, research organisations, universities) or small consortia (max 5 partners) may apply.

**Call for applications** To find out more about the application process, see [here](#).

The EIC Transition programme funds the maturation and validation of novel technology in the lab and in the relevant application environments and the development of a business case and model towards commercialization. Projects that are part of the EIC Transition address both the development of technology and the market/business aspect. Therefore, technologies will be able to prove the intended applicability and a business model to develop the technology for the market.

**The EIC Transition programme offers two types of funding:**

1. EIC Transition Open: funding awarded through open calls without predefined thematic priorities
2. Strategic EIC Transition Challenges: funding awarded through open calls with a thematic focus, e.g. energy efficiency

To find out more about upcoming opportunities, click [here](#).

More information [here](#)

## EIC Accelerator

**Themes** Develop and scale up breakthrough innovations.

**Grants** Up to €2.5 million.

**Investment** Up to €15 million.

**Non-financial support** Coaching, mentoring, access to investors and corporates and many other opportunities as part of the EIC community.

**Target audience** SMEs, startups, spin-off companies.

**Call for applications** On a rolling basis through the [EIC Platform](#).

The EIC Accelerator program supports SMEs, in particular startups and spin-off companies, to develop and scale up game-changing innovations. Hence, the EIC Accelerator program is a key way in which the EU supports social entrepreneurs and enables them to attract the full investment amounts needed for scale up in a shorter time frame. Learn more about application requirements [here](#).

## European Social Innovation Competition (EUSIC)

**Theme** The Competition focuses every year on a different societal issue.

**Prizes** €50,000 (three winners will be awarded).

**Non-financial support** Coaching, training and networking activities.

**Target audience** Early-stage social innovators and entrepreneurs.

**Call for applications** Once a year, to stay up to date click [here](#).

Launched in memory of social innovation pioneer Diogo Vasconcelos, EUSIC is an annual competition run by the EC, with support from the EIC across all EU Member States and Horizon Europe-associated countries. Each year prizes are awarded to the best socially innovative projects designed to change the world for the better and address the competition's theme.

**In 2022, there were two categories applicants could apply to:**

1. The Challenge Prize, which is looking for projects with a particular focus on breakthrough, market-creating and deep-tech innovations
2. The European Social Innovation Impact Prize 2022, which aims at recognising the efforts made by the semi-finalists of EUSIC 2021

Besides financial support, the 30 shortlisted social innovators have the possibility to benefit from non-financial support, provided through coaching, training and networking activities.

More information [here](#)

## EU Prize for Women Innovators

**Themes** Celebrating innovative women entrepreneurs.

**Prizes** There are two prize categories:

- > The Women Innovators category, awarding three prizes of €100,000.
- > The Rising Innovators (under the age of 35) category, awarding three prizes of €50,000.

**Target audience** Women entrepreneurs.

**Call for applications** Once a year - to stay up to date click [here](#).

The goal of the EU Prize for Women Innovators is to create role models for women and girls everywhere and raise awareness of the need for women entrepreneurs. Therefore, this prize is a great podium for women who have founded an innovative social enterprise or company and want to show their achievements to further launch their projects.

All women who are established in one of the EU Member States or Horizon Europe Associated Country, with an innovative enterprise registered at least 2 years before the application, can apply.

More information  
[here](#)

## EIC Pathfinder

**Themes** Research, development, emerging breakthrough technology.

**Grants** Up to €3 million or €4 million.

**Non-financial support** Tailor-made business acceleration services.

**Target audience:** Researchers, start-ups, high-tech SMEs, industrial stakeholders.

**Call for applications** The EIC Pathfinder programme consists of a combination of both open and challenge-driven funding. See the [EIC Pathfinder](#) for updates.

This programme opens up funding opportunities in the field of science and/or technology based on breakthrough high-risk/high-reward research. Bold ideas which potentially offer radically new technologies are backed through the EIC Pathfinder program with €350 million available. To find an extensive description of the EIC Pathfinder, see the following [document](#).

More information  
[here](#)





# LIFE Programme: EU Funding for Climate Change and Environmental Protection



Grants

**Theme** Environment / Climate Action / Energy Transition /

Circular Economy

**Budget** €5.43 billion

**Managed by** European Commission (DG Environment and DG Climate Action) and the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA)

**The LIFE Programme** is the EU's funding programme for tackling climate change and protecting the environment.

The LIFE programme supports green innovations and cleantech solutions across Europe through action grants, awards and operating grants. To find out more about the LIFE Programme see the following [link](#).

## What does LIFE support?

The LIFE Programme funds projects that address environmental and climate priorities through four thematic sub-programmes:

**1. Nature and Biodiversity** – conserving and restoring Europe's ecosystems and natural habitats, protecting endangered species, and implementing the Natura 2000 network.

**2. Circular Economy and Quality of Life** – supporting projects on waste prevention, resource efficiency, pollution control, air and water quality, and sustainable urban development.

**3. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation** – reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting climate resilience, and developing innovative adaptation strategies.

**4. Clean Energy Transition** – encouraging the uptake of renewable energy, energy efficiency, and local clean energy solutions by supporting regional and local initiatives.

LIFE funds **pilot and demonstration projects, capacity-building actions, technical assistance, and awareness-raising initiatives**.

Projects often aim to replicate or scale up proven approaches in other EU regions.



## Some Inspiration

### LIFE Programme: Close-to-Market-Projects

More information [here](#)

**Theme** Access to markets, climate change mitigation and adaptation, circular economy and quality of life.

**Co-financing** Between 60% and 95%, depending on the project call.

**Non-financial support** Coaching, business development, networking.

**Target audience** SMEs and start ups close to market.

**Call for applications** On a rolling basis - to stay up to date click [here](#).

The close-to-market opportunity under the LIFE programme, which aims to support SMEs and start ups to bring their innovative solutions to the market through co-financing and non-financial support such as business development and coaching, is particularly interesting to social entrepreneurs who want to bring their product to the market.

For more information, click [here](#).

# » The Next Generation of EU LIFE under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

## LIFE Programme at a glance (2028–2034)

The LIFE Programme will continue as the EU's flagship fund for environmental protection, climate action, and clean energy transition, building on more than 30 years of experience supporting innovative green solutions across Europe.

In the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework, LIFE will operate with a proposed budget of around €7 billion and play a stronger role as the deployment arm of the Green Deal Industrial Plan.

By working closely with Horizon Europe, the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF), and InvestEU, LIFE will bridge the gap between research, innovation, and large-scale market deployment of clean technologies.

**The programme will continue to fund projects on biodiversity, circular economy, climate resilience, and clean energy, helping public authorities, businesses, and social enterprises deliver tangible results for a greener and more sustainable Europe.**

### Good to know

- LIFE is the only EU programme exclusively dedicated to the environment and climate action.
- It complements other EU funds such as Horizon Europe, Interreg, and InvestEU, often serving as a bridge between research and large-scale deployment.
- The programme also finances operating grants for environmental NGOs and networks active at the EU level.
- LIFE projects frequently attract co-funding from private investors and national authorities, multiplying their impact.

### Key updates:

- Alignment with the European Green Deal Industrial Plan: LIFE will focus on accelerating the market uptake of green technologies, nature-based solutions, and circular business models.
- Integration of climate resilience and biodiversity restoration goals: new sub-programmes will emphasise adaptation, ecosystem services, and soil health.
- Closer synergy with Horizon Europe: LIFE will act as a “deployment bridge”, supporting pilot and demonstration projects that scale up research results to market-ready solutions.
- Digital transition for sustainability: new priorities for data-driven environmental management, green AI, and digital monitoring tools.



# Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE): Supporting Aspiring Social Entrepreneurs



Grant

**Theme** Entrepreneurship / Knowledge Sharing / Skills Development

**Budget** €80,000,000 (2021-2027)

**Managed by** European Commission

**To support young and aspiring social entrepreneurs in gaining new knowledge and skills on how to run their social enterprise.**

Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs offers new and aspiring entrepreneurs the chance to learn from experienced entrepreneurs in different countries. We have discussed EYE in depth in the chapter on The European Single Market Programme.

There are also other EU programmes that can be beneficial to the (early-stage) social entrepreneurs in your networks - see details in previous chapters:

- European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)
- Erasmus+
- InvestEU
- DIGITAL
- Single Market Programme

## Some Inspiration

### Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE) Exchange Programs

More information [here](#)

**Theme** Mutual learning.

**Funding** All expenses for exchange are covered.

**Length of stay** 1 to 6 months.

**Target audience** New and experienced social entrepreneurs.

**Call for applications** On a rolling basis - to stay up to date click [here](#).

To support young and aspiring social entrepreneurs in gaining new knowledge and skills on how to run their social enterprise, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs offers new and aspiring entrepreneurs the chance to learn from experienced entrepreneurs in different countries. On the other hand, experienced social entrepreneurs can benefit from a new fresh perspective offered by young social entrepreneurs and receive the opportunity to cooperate with foreign partners and/or learn about new markets.

The programme is run by a network of local contact points, present in the different participating countries. Find out more [here](#).

### Winner 2022: EU Prize for Women Innovators Rising Innovator category

Ailbhe and Isabel Keane, two sisters from Ireland, are the founders of Izzy Wheels. Their company has created fashionable wheel covers for wheelchairs. Through the wheelchair covers, Izzy has been able to express her personality together with many others who have bought the wheelchair covers. Besides gaining a platform through the EU, Izzy wheels has been able to work together with for example Marvel and Disney.

### Winner 2021 Challenge: Skills for tomorrow - Shaping a green and digital future

To adapt and thrive in a world that is continuously changing by digital and environmental challenges, last year, EUSIC incentivised social innovators to come up with innovative ideas in the "2021 challenge: Skills for tomorrow - Shaping a green and digital future". One of the winners of 2021 is Snowball Effect, a social enterprise supporting aspiring social entrepreneurs in their initiation, by building upon existing solutions to scale them up. So far, Snowball Effect has reached over 1000 people with their vision of scaling existing solutions and trained over 145 aspiring social entrepreneurs.

### Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs

In 2019, Artjola Puja from Albania joined the EYE programme to launch her business in the digital health industry. She successfully developed a portable medical device, which enables patients to routinely monitor their blood coagulation function and share this medical data with hospitals and clinics for a quick medical evaluation. With the help of the EYE program, Artjola Puja was able to go from a business plan to building a high-fidelity prototype. She stayed 6 months with her host in Munich to work in a professional environment on her idea. This helped her gain valuable experience in the European market regulations for medical devices.

# » The Next Generation of EYE under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)



## **The future of Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE) under the 2028–2034 MFF.**

The Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE) scheme — currently implemented under the Single Market Programme (SMP) — is expected to continue playing a key role in supporting aspiring and established entrepreneurs across Europe in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF 2028–2034).



However, its governance and funding framework are likely to evolve, as the European Commission moves towards more streamlined and integrated financial instruments for competitiveness and SME support. According to the Commission's proposal for the next MFF (COM(2025) 558 final – *A Stronger Europe for the Future*), the new European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) will merge and modernise several current instruments, including the Single Market Programme (SMP), COSME, and parts of the InvestEU SME Window.

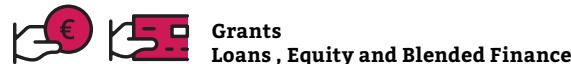
Entrepreneurship mobility and mentoring initiatives such as EYE are specifically referenced in the ECF framework as activities to be continued under the Competitiveness and Skills window. In the current SMP Work Programme 2025,

**EYE already operates in close coordination with the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), InvestEU's SME Window, and the Joint Cluster Initiatives, which together form the EU's entrepreneurship and SME support ecosystem**





# European Investment Bank (EIB) Funding for Social Enterprises



**Theme** Social Inclusion / Environmental Sustainability / Green Transition

**Budget** Varies by program

**Managed by** European Investment Bank (EIB)

**The European Investment Bank (EIB) plays a critical role in providing financial support to social enterprises in the EU and neighbouring states. Through its Impact Financing Envelope (IFE) and InvestEU programmes, the EIB offers funding for projects aligned with green transition, inclusive finance, and social innovation. The EIB supports social enterprises through its Social Inclusive Finance Technical Assistance (SIFTA)**

## Key Areas of Focus

- Climate Action and Environmental Sustainability:** EIB provides funding for social enterprises working on renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure, and circular economy solutions
- Social Impact Finance:** The EIB supports projects that promote social inclusion, education, healthcare, and financial inclusion in EU neighbouring countries
- Blended Finance:** The EIB uses a mix of public and private funding to support high-impact social enterprises

## Eligibility

- Social enterprises, cooperatives, and impact-driven organisations in EU Member States and EU neighbouring countries
- Priority is given to projects focusing on sustainability, social inclusion, and digitalisation

- Organisations must demonstrate financial viability, measurable social impact, and scalability

## Funding Types

- Grants:** Available through specific programmes like InvestEU for capacity-building or pilot projects
- Loans:** Direct loans for large-scale projects with a social or environmental impact
- Equity and Blended Finance:** The EIB co-invests with private investors in social enterprises through its Impact Financing Envelope

## How to Apply

- Social enterprises should submit funding proposals through the EIB's application portal, demonstrating alignment with EIB's priority areas
- Projects must include detailed financial projections, sustainability plans, and social impact metrics
- Contact Points:** EIB country offices and representatives in EU neighbouring regions offer support in preparing funding applications

## Some Inspiration

### Affordable, Green Housing for Low-Income Families with EIB Financing in Poland

**Country** Poland.

**Lead** GreenHomes.

**Focus area** Sustainable Housing.

**Contribution** €5 million.

A social enterprise called GreenHomes in Poland sought to address the housing crisis by constructing affordable, eco-friendly homes for low-income families. GreenHomes accessed financing from the European Investment Bank (EIB) through its Impact Financing Envelope (IFE).

**With a €5 million EIB loan, GreenHomes was able to:**

- Construct 200 affordable housing units using sustainable materials and energy-efficient designs
- Lower utility costs for low-income families by 30% through energy-saving technologies such as solar panels and insulation systems
- Provide green jobs to local workers, focusing on sustainable construction practices





# European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Funding for Social Enterprises



**Theme** Social Inclusion / Green Transition / Sustainable Development

**Budget** Varies by program

**Managed by** EBRD

**The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) provides funding and technical assistance to social enterprises in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEMED) region. The EBRD's support focuses on fostering sustainable development, social inclusion, and green transition in emerging markets.**

## Key Areas of Focus

- Green Economy and Climate Resilience:** The EBRD offers funding for projects that promote renewable energy, energy efficiency, and sustainable agriculture
- Inclusive Development:** Social enterprises that create jobs, especially for women and youth, and improve access to finance for underserved populations are a key focus
- Small Business Support:** The EBRD's **Small Business Initiative (SBI)** provides financial and advisory support to social enterprises, helping them grow and scale

## Eligibility

- Social enterprises, NGOs, and SMEs with a strong impact focus, operating in **Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and North Africa**
- Priority is given to projects that address **climate change, financial inclusion, and social innovation**



More information  
[here](#) and  
[here](#)

## Some Inspiration

### Supporting Ethical Fashion and Social Inclusion in Ukraine

**Country** Ukraine.

**Lead** Komilfo.

**Focus area** Ethical Fashion and Business Resilience During Conflict.

**Contribution** Supported by the EU4Business Initiative.

Komilfo, a lounge and sleepwear manufacturer based in Mykolaiv, Ukraine, has shown resilience and innovation during wartime. The company received critical support from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Union (EU), enabling it to overcome challenges posed by the Russian invasion and scale its operations.

**With a combination of EBRD loans, EU grants, and advisory services, Komilfo was able to:**

- Implement a computer-aided design system to digitize and automate its pattern development, improving efficiency and reducing production time
- Expand production capacity to include private label collections and exclusive designs for international brands
- Maintain and grow its workforce by hiring professionals displaced by the conflict in Eastern Ukraine

## Impact:

- Komilfo scaled up production and automated key processes, allowing remote work during wartime conditions
- The company expanded its international reach, exporting products to markets including Germany, Canada, the United States, Italy, the Netherlands, and Israel
- Komilfo continued to win "Brand of the Year" awards in Ukraine, reflecting consumer trust and satisfaction





# Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)



**Theme** Sustainable Development / Good Governance

**Budget** €79.5 billion (2021-2027)

**Managed by** European Commission's DG INTPA

**The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) is the EU's primary external funding tool, supporting social enterprises in EU neighbouring countries and developing regions. It aims to promote sustainable development, good governance, and inclusive economic growth.**

## Key Areas of Focus

- Green Transition and Energy:** NDICI funds projects that address climate change, renewable energy, and sustainable infrastructure in EU neighbouring states
- Social Entrepreneurship:** Social enterprises that focus on job creation, youth empowerment, and financial inclusion are supported through NDICI's capacity-building and grant programmes
- Human Development:** Funding is available for projects improving healthcare, education, and social protection

## Eligibility

- Social enterprises, NGOs, and local governments in **EU neighbouring countries** (Eastern Europe, North Africa, Middle East, and the Western Balkans)
- Projects must demonstrate alignment with **EU development goals** in areas such as

green transition, economic inclusion, and governance

- Applicants must have a track record of measurable social impact and financial sustainability

## Funding Types

- Grants:** NDICI offers grants for capacity-building, pilot projects, and infrastructure development
- Loans and Guarantees:** The NDICI facilitates blended finance opportunities, combining public funding with private investment
- Technical Assistance:** NDICI provides advisory services to help social enterprises build capacity and scale their operations

## How to Apply

- Social enterprises should submit proposals via the **EU Funding & Tenders Portal** under the NDICI programme
- Proposals must align with **EU external action priorities**, and include clear impact metrics, financial sustainability plans, and a scalability strategy
- Contact Points:** Reach out to **EU delegations** in the respective neighbouring countries for support with funding applications

## Some Inspiration

### Scaling Renewable Energy for Rural Communities with NDICI Support in Moldova

**Country** Moldova.

**Lead** EcoMoldova.

**Focus area** Sustainable Development.

**Contribution** €600,000.

In Moldova, EcoMoldova aimed to provide renewable energy solutions to remote, off-grid communities. They received a €600,000 grant from the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) to expand their operations and bring solar energy to underserved rural areas.

**With NDICI funding, EcoMoldova was able to:**

- Install solar panels in 50 villages, providing clean energy to over 5,000 households and reducing reliance on fossil fuels
- Create local jobs by training and employing 100 technicians to maintain the solar systems
- Lower energy costs for households by 40%, while reducing the carbon footprint of rural communities

This project not only promoted environmental sustainability but also contributed to economic resilience in rural Moldova. The NDICI funding allowed EcoMoldova to become a regional leader in green energy solutions.

# Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB)



**Theme** Social Cohesion and Inclusion

**Budget** €500,000000 unlocked through InvestEU Guarantee

**Managed by CEB**

**The Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) is a multilateral development bank with a unique mission to promote social cohesion throughout Europe. The CEB finances investment in social sectors, including education, health and affordable housing, with a focus on the needs of vulnerable people. Supported by the InvestEU Guarantee, CEB provides direct financing (loans) for projects that enhance social inclusion.**

Under the InvestEU, CEB will help unlock €500 million of investments in support of the InvestEU Social Investment and Skills Window (SISW): Financing projects in skills, education, training, social housing, schools, universities, hospitals, social innovation, healthcare, long-term care and accessibility, microfinance, social enterprise, integration of migrants, refugees and vulnerable people.

## Key Areas of Focus

- Social, affordable and student housing
- Education, employment and skills
- Healthcare, long-term care and social care

## Eligibility

- Aside from local and regional authorities, also credit unions, social enterprises, associations (SESOs), foundations and social infrastructure operators are eligible). Borrowers must be based in an EU member state (except for Austria, which is not a member of the CEB)
- The fund will support other cross-cutting themes like climate action, gender equality and digitalisation
- Applicants must have a track record of measurable social impact and financial sustainability

## Funding Types

- **Loans:** CEB provides direct financing (loans) for projects that enhance social inclusion
- **Technical Assistance:** Via the InvestEU Advisory Hub - technical support (grants) can be allocated to projects that meet the criteria

## How to Apply

- Social enterprises should submit proposals via the **CEB Portal** [here](#)
- Proposals must align with **CEB priorities**, and include description of the project and alignment with the policy objectives of the CEB, project financial aspects (financing plan a.o.) and summary of your profile (legal and financial)
- **Contact Points:** Reach out to the CEB directly [here](#)



# Some Inspiration

## Empowering migrants in professional welfare and economic rights - EMPOWER!

**Country** Italy.

**Lead** Associazione Microlab.

**Focus area** Social Cohesion.

In Italy, the Associazione Microlab is leading a multi-stakeholder partnership composed of local authorities, civil society and private organisations, to address migrant inclusion in the Piedmont region of Italy.

Microlab is an Italian association with 20 years of experience in promoting social inclusion through entrepreneurship, job orientation and financial education for potential entrepreneurs from vulnerable communities.

### CEB funding, enabled Microlab to:

- Create new sources of information on migrants' financial inclusion in Piedmont, reaching 500,000 individuals
- Over 70 local and regional stakeholders and target groups improved their awareness of migrants' financial inclusion
- Reached 1160 non-EU citizens to reinforce their financial literacy and improve employability conditions

Furthermore, for those who are interested in becoming entrepreneurs, the project will provide tutorship and training on starting up a business in Italy, tailored advice for developing a business plan, and will provide the opportunity of obtaining micro-credits. were displaced by the conflict in Eastern Ukraine.



# Dedicated Non Financial Support

## Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)

**The Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) operates globally, providing comprehensive support to SMEs in areas such as growth, sustainability, digitalization, and innovation.**

Covering over 70 countries and comprising more than 600 business associations, the EEN facilitates connections through approximately 700 annual business events and B2B meetings, fostering international collaborations.

Each country has its own EEN consortium, which includes public and private organizations like government agencies, chambers of commerce, and universities. These consortia help SMEs enhance their competitiveness and international reach, aligning with the EU's goals of sustainable and inclusive development.

New Programme/Mandate 2025-2028: The European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA) has opened a call for proposals to establish EEN consortia from July 2025 to December 2028. The initiative focuses on business support through organisations like chambers of commerce and research institutions, with a budget of €182.5 million.

### Key Services and Activities for Social Enterprises

#### 1. Tailored Capacity Building and Trade Support:

As intermediaries, EEN members can work with national partners (see National Contact Point, NCP) to organize or co-host events tailored to support social enterprises. These events focus on trade facilitation, capacity building, and knowledge sharing.

**Workshops, Trainings, and Matchmaking Opportunities:** Social enterprises are actively encouraged to participate in activities hosted by EEN member organizations.

**These include:**

- Workshops on innovation and technology adoption
- Training sessions on international trade and market expansion
- Matchmaking events to connect enterprises with partners, investors, and collaborators

#### 2. Collaborative Events with Intermediaries:

National EEN partners, such as trade promotion offices and chambers of commerce, often co-host events that bring together social enterprises and key ecosystem stakeholders. These events help bridge gaps in market access, funding, and innovation.

The EEN also includes **Sector Groups**, such as the **Proximity & Social Economy Group**, which focus on proximity-based, sustainable business models. These groups assist social enterprises in accessing funding, fostering cross-border partnerships, and scaling their operations sustainably.

For more information and to locate your **National Contact Point (NCP)**, visit the [EEN website](#).

## The Next Generation of EEN under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

### Looking ahead to the 2028–2034 MFF for EEN

As part of the next Multiannual Financial Framework, the **EEN is expected to transition under the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF)** — the successor to the current Single Market Programme.

According to the Commission's MFF proposal (COM(2025) 558 final – A Stronger Europe for the Future), the ECF will integrate multiple competitiveness and SME instruments (including **EEN**, **EYE**, and **InvestEU's SME Window**) to create a single ecosystem supporting SMEs throughout their growth cycle.

While the detailed structure of EEN's post-2028 implementation remains under discussion, the Commission has confirmed its intention to:

- **Maintain the network model** based on national and regional intermediaries;
- **Align EEN services with the EU Green Deal Industrial Plan**, especially in supporting SMEs' decarbonisation and energy efficiency;
- Expand partnerships to support **dual transformation** (green + digital) and participation in global value chains;
- **Simplify administration** through longer partnership cycles and unified reporting templates across EEN, EYE, and cluster initiatives.



# European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP)

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) is the EU's hub for industry clusters, serving as a one-stop-shop for collaboration between European and non-European stakeholders. Social economy clusters, a key focus of the platform, are supported to enhance resilience, innovation, and sustainability.

The ECCP facilitates matchmaking and provides tools to restore value chains, build partnerships, and enhance cluster cooperation across regions and countries.

## Relevant Matchmaking Tools

- **EEN Supply Chain Resilience Platform:** Enables SMEs to connect with new partners and restore disrupted value chains.
- **Solidarity Lanes Business Matchmaking Platform:** Focuses on connecting businesses to address critical logistics, exports, and partnerships in challenging operational environments.

For more information, [visit the ECCP website](#).



# Dedicated Opportunities for Ukrainian Social Enterprises & their Support Organisations

**Following Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine, the European Commission launched a series of actions to support the country. These actions aim to integrate Ukraine in the Single Market and promote business cooperation between EU Member States and Ukraine. Within those initiatives, several are relevant to social enterprises; they are listed in the below section.**

## Dedicated funding streams and opportunities for Ukrainian entrepreneurs

**Erasmus for young entrepreneurs (EYE) for Ukraine.** With the ReadyForEU call launched in February 2023. With this dedicated call, substantial funds have been dedicated to specifically allow new Ukrainian entrepreneurs to gain business experience in other European countries. The goal is to recruit up to 430 new Ukrainian entrepreneurs and match them with host entrepreneurs.

**Interestingly the new entrepreneurs do not have to be based in Ukraine to be eligible, they can be Ukrainian citizens displaced in other Member States and conduct their exchange within that same country.**

More information can be seen [here](#).

**1. Support to integrate into the Single Market.** A budget of €4.5 million has been dedicated to provide financial support to Ukrainian SMEs affected by the war, in the form of vouchers to access services and participate in trade fairs in the EU. The call is now closed but its details are available [here](#). We should soon know more about the consortium that will lead this initiative.

**2. Protecting your IP.** Ukrainian SMEs have the opportunity to apply for funding through the [2023 Ideas Powered for Business SME Fund](#) to secure their intellectual property.

**3. Supporting Ukraine through culture.** The EC is supporting Ukrainian artists, cultural and creative professionals and organisations through different instruments. The 2023 Creative Europe annual work programme includes a special action of €5 million to support Ukrainian artists and cultural organisations to create and showcase their art and works. The aim of this is to help in the welcoming of Ukrainian displaced people, children in particular, while preparing the post war recovery of the cultural and creative sector in the medium term. More about this [here](#).

## Dedicated Initiatives (non financial)

### 1. The Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) supports Ukraine

#### What is EEN?

EEN is a global network covering 70 countries. The Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) operates across Europe and beyond, structuring its efforts to enhance SME growth and sustainability at both the national and regional levels. Each country typically has its own EEN consortium, which comprises public and private sector organisations, such as government agencies (like RVO in the Netherlands or Enterprise Ireland), chambers of commerce, innovation centres, universities, and industry associations. These consortia provide tailored support to SMEs, focusing on innovation, internationalisation, and technology transfer, while promoting sustainable and inclusive economic development in line with the EU's broader policy goals.

Sector Groups within the EEN, including the Sector Group Proximity & Social Economy, play a crucial role in guiding specific industry areas. This group focuses on promoting social economy enterprises (SEEs) by offering customised services and support aimed at fostering proximity-based, sustainable business models. The group acts as a bridge to help SEEs connect with partners, access



## Dedicated Opportunities for Ukrainian Social Enterprises & their Support Organisations

funding, and grow through innovation and cross-regional collaboration. With a focus on social enterprises and sustainability, the group helps raise the visibility of SEEs within the EEN and promotes cross-border support structures.

### EEN offers a wide range of services:

- Search for business partners and buyers of their products
- Place and track commercial offers
- Promote their innovative technologies to the EU markets
- Search and attract modern innovative technologies from abroad
- Search for investors and partners in the EU to create joint enterprises
- Fund intermediaries in the social enterprise ecosystem of their events, if aligned with bullets above

More about EEN [here](#) and to find your national contact point (NCP) go [here](#).

### What is EEN Ukraine?

Ukraine joined the EEN in July 2017. For this purpose it created the consortium of the EEN-Ukraine, which included scientific organisations, representatives of business and government agencies. The EEN-Ukraine helps Ukrainian SMEs to innovate and partner with EU SMEs. As part of this, EEN Ukraine has recently mapped Ukrainian clients and their innovation needs to achieve the twin transition and improve their competitiveness, as well as raised awareness about doing business and investing in Ukraine. More about EEN-Ukraine [here](#).

### 2. European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) supports Ukraine

#### What is the ECCP?

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform is the European online hub for industry clusters available [here](#), entails Social economy clusters (see Chapter on SMP). ECCP is the reference one-stop-shop for stakeholders in non-EU countries aiming to set up partnerships with European counterparts.

#### What is the Ukrainian Cluster Alliance?

Established on March 24, 2022, the Alliance aims to support cooperation between Ukrainian and European clusters, in order to restore disrupted value chains and for them to become more resilient at regional, national and international levels. It unites 60 cluster organisations with more than 2,000 enterprises and science-research organisations and offers a matchmaking tool. The Alliance website is available [here](#).

#### What is the EU Clusters Support for Ukraine Forum?

This Forum was established by the ECCP to multiply the ability of the European industry to contribute to humanitarian aid for Ukraine and to support refugees in the MS. On this Forum, anyone can share information, register offers of assistance, propose collaborations and request assistance in order to facilitate procurement and delivery of urgent humanitarian requirements.

These include food, hygiene products, medicines; as well as personal equipment to ensure survivability in war and refugee conditions, including shelters, clothing, bedding and accommodation. More about this [here](#).

### 3. Relevant matchmaking tools

#### The EEN Supply Chain Resilience Platform

As part of the EEN's support to SMEs to become more resilient, the platform enables SMEs to connect with new partners and help restore disrupted value chains.

See [here](#).

#### EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes – Business Matchmaking Platform

The EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes Business Matchmaking Platform brings EU and Ukrainian businesses together to quickly find pragmatic solutions to the export of agricultural produce, food products, and raw materials from Ukraine, aiming to facilitate logistics operations and to find new partners. See [here](#).



# Some EU projects' jargon

**Co-financing/co-funding:** The EC rarely funds 100% of a project. Rather, it co-funds a portion of the project, which varies according to the calls.

**Deliverable:** Concrete output of a project: it can be a report, an event, a website, a publication, etc.

**DoA or DoW:** Description of the Action/Work – the key reference document of a project, the description of all activities, milestones, deliverables and corresponding responsibilities.

**Final report:** Final overall report on a project. Includes both a narrative report (concrete progress and outcomes of the project) and a financial report (or financial statement/financial claim).

**FPA:** Framework Partnership Agreement - Implementation strategy, longer than a simple project (usually between four and six years).

**Grant:** Direct financial contributions in support of projects or organisations which further the interests of the EU and/or contribute to the implementation of an EU programme or policy. (You receive a grant after having responded to a call for *proposals*).

**Interim report or Periodic report:** Project report to be delivered half-way through a project (can be narrative only, or couples with a financial report).

**Maximum EU Grant:** This is what the EC has agreed to contribute to financially for a given project (if fully accomplished/full performance or equivalent).

**Milestone:** Key step within the project – often appears in the DoW (used to evaluate the progress of a project).

**NUTS Classification:** NUTS or Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics. It is a hierarchical system for dividing up the territories of the EU (and the UK) for the purpose of collecting, developing and harmonising European regional statistics as well as to run socio-economic analyses of the regions. Current nomenclature: NUTS 1: major socio-economic regions / NUTS 2: basic regions for the application of regional policies / NUTS 3: small regions for specific diagnoses.

**Operational Programme:** Exists for Erasmus+ and Cohesion Funds. Sets the overall rules, guidelines and orientations of all the streams of funding within a given programme.

## Person Months (Person Days, Person Hours):

Metric for the time (effort) that personnel of an organisation devotes to a project.

**Programmation (seven years):** EU funding streams are implemented through a Multiannual Financial Framework of seven years (currently 2021-2027).

**Project officer (PO):** The designated EC staff member in charge of overseeing project's implementation and reporting.

**SGA:** Specific Grant Agreement: description of the action (=project) (usually between 18 and 36 months).

**Tender:** Public contracts to buy goods and services - studies, technical assistance and training; consultancy, conference and publicity services; books and IT equipment etc. (You are awarded a tender after having responded to a call for tender).

**The Action:** Synonym for 'the project'.

**WorkStream (WS) / Work Package (WP) / Intellectual Output (IO):** DoAs (DoWs) are divided into WS/WP/IO which are chunks of the project comprising sets of activities.

**Work Package leader:** Project partner that coordinates the work of others on the WP/WS/IP.



## Part 2

Getting Non-EU Public Funding

# EEA & Norway Grants



Grants  
Purchasing services

**Theme** Innovation / Inclusion / Fundamental Rights /  
Regional cooperation

**Budget** €1.5 billion (data for 2014-2021)

**Managed by** European Economic Association & Norway Grants

**The European Economic Association (EEA)<sup>1</sup> and Norway Grants are financial mechanisms funded by Liechtenstein, Iceland and Norway. The objectives of these grants are to: 1) contribute to reducing inequalities across Europe; and 2) sustain and strengthen the bilateral relations between the three donor countries and fifteen beneficiary countries, all located in Europe.**

EEA & Norway grants do not compete with EU funds but seek to complement them and enhance their common policy objectives of regional cohesion, sustainable development and economic and social equality.

<sup>1</sup> The EEA Agreement brings Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and the EU together in a single market – often referred to as the Internal Market.

## What does it support?

The EEA & Norway grants fund a wide range of topics through programmes and dedicated funds:

- Innovation, research, education and competitiveness
- Social inclusion, youth employment and poverty reduction
- Environment, energy, climate change & low carbon economy
- Culture, civil society, good governance and fundamental rights & freedoms
- Justice & home affairs
- Regional cooperation

## Who can participate?

To receive funds directly from the EEA & Norway grants, as “project promoter”, your organisation has to be based in one of the following countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech

Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

If your organisation is based in Norway, Liechtenstein or Iceland you cannot receive project grants directly, but you can become a “donor project partner” if you cooperate in a project with one of the beneficiary countries. A dedicated guide for entities based in the three donor countries is available [here](#).

## Additionally, we note that:

- The [Fund for Youth Employment](#) accepts projects with partners from Ireland, Italy and Spain
- The fund for [Regional Cooperation](#) accepts projects from Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine

## How does it work?

The EEA & Norway Grants do not fund the same topics in all their beneficiary countries; they adapt them according to the local needs and priorities defined in coordination with each state. Therefore a series of programmes addressing specific issues and predefined objectives are available for each Beneficiary State. Your project idea needs to fit in those in order to be eligible for funding.



More  
information  
[here](#)

According to your country, organisation and project the eligibility criteria will vary. In general, it is encouraged to establish partnerships with organisations in the three donor countries and include them in the design of projects.

The funds are co-managed by the EEA & Norway Grants Financial Mechanism Office based in Brussels and Fund Operators on the ground within each beneficiary country.

## IMPORTANT

Unlike the usual programmes funded by the EEA & Norway grants within each beneficiary country, the Fund for Youth Employment and the Fund for Regional Cooperation have a primarily transnational focus. The partnerships built involved partners in multiple countries.

- The Fund for Youth Employment seeks to reduce youth unemployment through transnational projects
- The Fund for Regional Cooperation supports projects tackling common challenges through regional cross-border/ transnational collaborations

**Who can I contact?**

Details on the specific support for each country are available [here](#), where you can also access open calls for proposals and upcoming events. Additionally, each country manages a national website for the EEA & Norway Grants.

Funding calls are regularly published online [here](#) - the EEA & Norway Grants do not accept spontaneous applications.

**How to find a donor partner:**

Donor Programme Partners are there to help find partners in the donor countries. The list of Donor Programme Partners is available [here](#). Please note that for the Active Citizens Fund, relevant to some of you, the [Norwegian Helsinki Committee](#) and the [Icelandic Human Rights Centre](#) can also assist you.

More about partnership opportunities [here](#).

**What's next?**

All the programmes under the EEA & Norway Grants 2014–2021 will run until 30 April, 2024. The EEA & Norway grants have not yet published their upcoming funding programme that should start in 2022.

**The EEA & Norway grants regularly publish invitations to bid to become a national Fund Operator within their beneficiary countries**

**Good to know**

- EEA & Norway Grants are extremely competitive funding streams - success rates are low!
- You can apply to become a Fund Operator: the EEA & Norway grants regularly publish invitations to bid to become a national Fund Operator within their beneficiary countries. You will then be responsible for programme design, implementation and compliance with country-specific areas through project support and monitoring. You will also need to ensure that the programme builds capacity and sustainability of the organisations supported on the ground and promote multilateral collaborations.
- In some programmes, projects can include partners from third countries. However, their participation cannot be financed through the EEA and Norway Grants.

# Some Inspiration

**International Project: WOMEN4IT**

**Beneficiary partner countries** Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania and Spain.

**Expert partners** The European Centre for Women and Technology (Norway) and DIGITALEUROPE (Belgium).

**Focus** Digital competences of young women at risk of labour exclusion/women employability.

**Timeline** Sept 2018 - August 2021.

**EEA contribution** €2,714,304 grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway - Fund for Youth Employment.

The project's main objective is to increase women's employability and decrease their risk of social and labour exclusion. It does this through awareness-raising campaigns on digital skills, employment opportunities in ICT and the gender gap. The project also wants to foster partnerships with employers and develop training and guidance on "digital jobs" destined for women. A large part of the project is dedicated to dissemination and exchange of good practices between a variety of stakeholders.

The project is developing an online employability profiling tool and a learning platform for job seekers - with the objective of assessing 1,000 young girls and women. The objective is to benefit 700 young women directly through non-formal education opportunities. It also wishes to introduce innovative solutions to 350 employers, and reach 10 000 young people through awareness activities.

More information [here](#)

**Local Project: Pata-Cluj**

**Country** Romania.

**Focus** Social inclusion of Roma people in Pata-Cluj region.

**Timeline** 2015-2017.

**Initial total budget** €4,095,865.

**EEA contribution** €3,457,555.

The project used social innovation for the desegregation and social inclusion of families living in the Pata Rât area in Romania. The project tested methodologies that would later serve as a basis for public policy interventions on social inclusion. The project sought to improve the housing situation of 35 families, who were moved out from the marginalised communities into social apartments in integrated areas of the city. Additionally, 41 young people from Pata Rât were enrolled in professional qualification courses within the 'YouthBuild programme,' thereby enabling them to access additional opportunities in the labour market. The situation of 169 families was improved in terms of school participation, access to child protection services and social benefits.

More information [here](#)

# World Bank Funding for Social Enterprises



**Theme** Poverty Alleviation / Social Inclusion / Sustainable Development

**Budget** Varies by program and region (e.g., IFC, IDA funding mechanisms)

**Managed by** World Bank Group through IFC and IDA

**The World Bank provides various funding mechanisms for social enterprises in emerging markets, focusing on poverty alleviation, social inclusion, and sustainable development. Social enterprises can access World Bank funding primarily through its International Finance Corporation (IFC) and International Development Association (IDA) arms, which provide investment and advisory services to organisations addressing development challenges.**

## Key Areas of Focus:

- Inclusive Business Models:** Projects that create jobs, offer essential goods and services to underserved populations, or promote sustainable economic growth

- Sustainable Infrastructure and Climate Resilience:** Funding for projects that promote renewable energy, climate adaptation, and green infrastructure in emerging markets
- Social Finance and Impact Investing:** The World Bank's focus on leveraging private investment through **blended finance** mechanisms enables social enterprises to co-finance innovative projects

## Eligibility

- Social enterprises, NGOs, cooperatives, and businesses with a focus on inclusive and sustainable development
- Organisations must demonstrate their impact on social inclusion, climate resilience, or economic growth in low- and middle-income countries
- Special emphasis is placed on projects operating in EU neighbouring countries such as the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, and Middle East

## Funding Types

- Grants:** For small-scale pilot projects or research initiatives
- Loans:** Concessional loans through IDA for eligible countries
- Blended Finance:** IFC provides risk mitigation, equity, and loan financing in collaboration with private investors

## How to Apply

- Social enterprises should identify relevant funding opportunities through the World Bank Projects and Operations Portal and submit proposals responding to specific calls
- Applications must demonstrate a clear link to sustainable development goals (SDGs), impact metrics, and financial sustainability
- Contact Points: IFC representatives in regional offices can offer advisory services and support in preparing for funding applications

## Some Inspiration

### Empowering Women in Agriculture through the IFC Blended Finance Programme

**Country** Macedonia

**Lead** AgriWomen

**Focus area** Agriculture

In North Macedonia, a social enterprise called AgriWomen—focused on empowering women farmers in rural areas—secured funding through the International Finance Corporation (IFC), part of the World Bank Group. The enterprise aimed to train women in sustainable farming practices and provide access to market opportunities. AgriWomen accessed a combination of grants and concessional loans under the IFC's Blended Finance Programme, which focuses on supporting inclusive business models in agriculture.

### With this funding, the enterprise was able to:

- Implement sustainable farming techniques and train over 500 women farmers
- Build a digital platform to connect small-scale women farmers with local and international markets
- Increase the income of women participants by 35% over two years



# United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Funding for Social Enterprises



**Theme** Social Inclusion / Gender Equality / Climate Resilience / Youth Empowerment

**Budget** Varies by program and region

**Managed by** UNDP

**The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supports social enterprises through funding, capacity-building, and innovation initiatives aimed at accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UNDP prioritises projects that foster social inclusion, gender equality, climate resilience, and youth empowerment.**

## Key Areas of Focus

- SDG Impact Investment:** Financing social enterprises that address SDG-related challenges, particularly those targeting poverty reduction, gender equality, and climate action
- Inclusive Markets** Development (IMD): A programme to support social enterprises in creating inclusive business models that generate both social and financial returns
- UNDP Accelerator Labs:** Innovation hubs that fund and mentor social enterprises working on breakthrough solutions to local development challenges

## Eligibility

- Social enterprises, cooperatives, NGOs, and startups with a strong social impact focus

- Organisations that demonstrate alignment with SDGs and address pressing challenges in low-income or emerging markets, including **Eastern Europe, North Africa**, and the **Middle East**
- Projects that foster **gender equality, climate resilience, and digital innovation** are highly encouraged

## Funding Types

- Grants:** Direct financial support for innovation projects and SDG-aligned business models
- Technical Assistance:** UNDP offers advisory services, capacity-building, and mentorship through its Accelerator Labs
- SDG Impact Fund:** Blended finance solutions that combine grants and private capital for social enterprises

## How to Apply

- Social enterprises can apply for **UNDP SDG Impact Fund** calls, which are announced on UNDP's **Funding Opportunities Portal**
- Proposals should clearly demonstrate how the project aligns with the SDGs, target beneficiaries, and scalability potential
- Contact Points:** Reach out to regional **UNDP country offices** for guidance on specific local funding opportunities



## Part 3

Philanthropic & Corporate  
Fundraising

# Accessing philanthropic & corporate fundraising: A step-by-step guide

Generosity can take many shapes and forms, each country having its own cultural practices and legal frameworks. While if public sector grants are often perceived as the main source of financial support for social enterprise support organisations, philanthropic and corporate funding is also a significant leverage.



## Among the world's 200 largest corporations: Who's out there?

Foundations and corporates are organisations with their own financial resources; they define themselves how and where to deploy them. They are independently governed and can use their private resources for the public good.

### Foundations

There is no Europe-wide agreed definition of what a foundation is. Various countries will have their own understanding of the word.

The main types of foundations are:

- **Trustee-based foundations:** institutional set-up
- **Family foundations:** set up by wealthy individual(s)
- **Corporate foundations:** philanthropic arms of corporations with income depending on the profit of the companies
- **Community foundations/Charitable trusts:** set up as a charity whose income is given for charitable causes



### Corporate Businesses

Many companies have philanthropic and social impact purposes, regardless of their size: multinational corporations, large companies or SMEs can be your ally in your projects.

They can support you through:

- Their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes
- A philanthropic arm ('corporate foundation')
- A hybrid set-up: Headquarters and national/local branches (directly)

## Good to know

Any company is a potential donor - even if they do not do philanthropy yet! When considering a corporate foundation, do not forget that the same company might also provide support via their CSR programmes.

Bear in mind that multinationals have various entities: the relevant level for your project could therefore be the international entity, the branch/franchise/ headquarters in the country where you are based or another specific entity that explicitly works and dedicates funds to your project's subject matter. Therefore, make sure you do thorough research and identify all the organisations that may support your activities. Monitor their activities and interact with them in various settings.



## What can I get?

### You need funds...

Be clear about the amounts you need and what you need it for (a project? organisational expenses?) Avoid reaching "blindly" for the biggest amount possible but rather identify your financial objective in the short, medium and long-term and be sure it is in proportion with your mission.

### ...but maybe you need other things too!

Are you/your team members/beneficiaries in need of specific skills or additional human resources? Do you need furniture? A room and catering for a meeting? Sponsorship for a large event? It may seem small compared to your financial needs, but it is also a good way to approach potential funders, build a trust-based relationship and then ask for more.

**The patronage of a foundation or company can take different forms. While it is often financial, it can also rely on the donor's other resources.**

### Financial



**Grants can be allocated to your organisation for different purposes:**

- Restricted funding will support a specific pre-agreed project or purpose
- Unrestricted funding will allow you to finance your organisational expenses and contribute towards your broader mission
- Unrestricted funding is getting rarer as donors like to co-create projects and increasingly expect in-depth reporting on money spent

### Skills-based



**The donor provides the receiving organisation with pro-bono support in the shape of human resources and/or expertise. This can take many forms:**

- Employee volunteering hours
- Dedicated expert staff on a specific project (e.g. project management, accounting)
- Specific training for your organisation's employees, volunteers or beneficiaries (e.g. reshaping a revenue-generation strategy, designing a volunteer retention plan)

### In kind



**The donor gives or makes available their goods and/or facilities to the beneficiary, such as:**

- Products and equipment (e.g. office supplies, furniture)
- Technology (e.g. access to a pricey software)
- A conference room and catering for an event
- Working space and facilities

## How does it work?

Each funding entity has its own ways.

Most of them have an organisational committee (or equivalent) which sets their long term objectives and support criteria. Some have annual or bi-annual committees, with deadlines to submit applications. Others have recurrent or random open calls fitting their areas of support. Some function on a spontaneous application basis while a few rely on their own network to identify needs on the ground and strategically select their future beneficiaries themselves.

Therefore, on your road to fundraise for your organisation you may:

- **Respond to open calls that are regular** and core to the organisation's purpose and support activities. In that specific case you should establish a list of your prospects fitting this category and keep a calendar with their annual or bi-annual deadlines.
- **Respond to open calls that are published punctually** (or to respond to emergencies). In that case, map your prospects fitting this category, subscribe to their newsletter and follow them on social media. Be sure to keep up to date with their latest calls.
- **Write spontaneous applications.** Many entities are open to being proposed activities on an ad hoc basis. To do so, keep a standardised document to present your organisation and the project ready to be sent to your prospects. Sometimes, it is worth considering sending it to different individuals/departments within the same organisation.

## Good to know

The best practice in reaching out to potential donors is often to mix a qualitative and quantitative approach by:

- Soliciting a high number of prospects via a standardised mailing campaign
- Participating in events and workshops to meet potential supporters
- Identifying key people in your network that could be your direct interlocutors or your 'go-betweens'

## 5 questions to ask yourself

1. What are the strategic priorities of the donor? Can I get any intel on current organisational dynamics?
2. What types of initiatives have my prospect donor(s) already supported and how?
3. How and by whom are projects/organisations similar to mine otherwise supported?
4. Where and how could we fit our project and organisational goals within their mission and vision?
5. Is there an opportunity to fundraise collaboratively (with other organisations) so as to reach critical mass and increase our chances to get support?



# Example 1

## A hybrid set-up within a business: IKEA Social Entrepreneurship

**IKEA Social Entrepreneurship** fills a gap between IKEA philanthropic activities and IKEA business. It is a hybrid organisation that sits within IKEA (business) with the aim to maximise social impact by accelerating the social entrepreneurship movement both inside and outside the IKEA value chain. This means looking into how products and services from social entrepreneurs can be included in the IKEA offer and co-creating development programmes that accelerate the movement of social entrepreneurship in general.

IKEA Social Entrepreneurship uses a variety of tools to support social entrepreneurs to scale their impact, including co-worker knowledge sharing, supporting capacity-building (e.g. through accelerator programs), access to markets and offering financial tools and support.

IKEA Social Entrepreneurship partners with social enterprise intermediaries such as Acumen, Ashoka, NESsT and Yunus Social Business to design and implement impactful projects and programmes involving social enterprises across the world.

**Strategic focus:** Inclusion, equality and livelihood.

**Target groups:** Social enterprise intermediaries, social entrepreneurs and social businesses.

**Areas of support:** Operational support; Business management skills; Social entrepreneurship competences; Product design and sales; Strategic Development.

**What is implemented:**

- **Acceleration:** Accelerator programmes for social entrepreneurs
- **Access to markets:** Design and production of items and services
- **Expertise and capacity-building:** Strategic and operational support to social enterprises by IKEA employees.
- **Financial support:** Grants, loans and equity investments

**Headquarters:** Netherlands.

**Current countries of operation:**

Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Chile, Sweden, The Netherlands, Romania, Jordan, India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia.

More information on IKEA Social Entrepreneurship [here](#), and on the Handbook for SE [here](#).



More information [here](#)

**How do partnerships with SESOs come about?**

IKEA Social Entrepreneurship identifies needs and opportunities within specific ecosystems and proactively reaches out and selects preferred partners to develop a business relationship or potential support projects and programmes with. In most cases therefore they do not accept unsolicited proposals. There are opportunities for entrepreneurs to apply to accelerator programmes developed with IKEA Social Entrepreneurship partners; latest calls and other opportunities are published on their [website](#), social media and through their partners.

**Their top 3 tips for you:**

1. Be clear about the social challenges you address, how you are improving the life of your target groups and the value you can create for the corporate partner
2. Ensure that the purpose, goals and scope of the partnership are clear from the beginning – a good tip is to formulate a common theory of change for the partnership
3. Avoid becoming too reliant on a partnership with a large corporation - make sure to have other collaborations and/or clients

### Good to know

IKEA is a very large multinational. As a social enterprise support organisation, **you can also look into:**

**The IKEA Foundation:** An independent charitable foundation that oversees IKEA's global philanthropy. The Foundation resides in the Netherlands and their funds come from the Stichting INGKA Foundation.

**Thematic areas:** renewable energy, employment and entrepreneurship, agricultural livelihoods, refugee livelihoods.

### Your local IKEA sustainability manager:

All IKEA stores are encouraged to develop a local sustainability and circular economy plan. Reaching out to a local IKEA could therefore offer an interesting pathway to local collaborations for your beneficiaries and, if successful, potential scaling opportunities to include more IKEA stores and markets.

### Types of support

- Financial
- Skills-based
- Training
- Human resources
- Access to markets



## Some Inspiration

### Circular by 2030:

In 2018, IKEA announced its plans to manufacture and market all of its products according to circular principles by 2030. IKEA will only use renewable or recycled materials across its entire product portfolio by that time.

More information [here](#)

### The Dela Accelerator Programme with Ashoka

Ashoka and IKEA Social Entrepreneurship co-created the 'Dela' accelerator which focuses on scaling established social enterprises that work with systems change in the areas of livelihoods, equality and inclusion. The focus is on sharing knowledge, perspectives and networks to support social entrepreneurs that work with and for underprivileged populations.

The programme matches IKEA co-workers with social entrepreneurs to support them with their business challenges, while allowing IKEA co-workers to learn from the social entrepreneurs.

More information [here](#)

## Example 2

### The global CSR department of a multinational: SAP CSR

**SAP runs one of the longest standing global corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes, encompassing a strong social entrepreneurship and non-profit support strategy globally. Their core focus is to power equitable access to economic opportunity, education and employment, and a green economy, in many cases through strong and impactful strategic partnerships with SESOs and intermediaries. Focus is on three strategic program pillars: accelerating social business, building future skills, and collaborating for sustainability.**

SAP partners with social enterprise intermediaries such as the Social Enterprise World Forum, Acumen, Social Traders Australia, Social Enterprise UK, Yunus Social Business, Agora Partnerships, Euclid Network, Movingworlds and many more to design and implement impactful projects and programmes involving social enterprises across the world.

**Strategic focus:** Equitable access to economic opportunity and inclusive education and employment.

**Sectors supported:** All sectors, specifically those enhancing digital inclusion and industry transformation.

**Target groups:** Social enterprise intermediaries and social entrepreneurs.

**Areas of support:** Youth entrepreneurship; business management skills; capacity-building; scaling; digital skills; social entrepreneurship competences; strategic development; partnerships and networking.

**Budget:** €24 million.

**Headquarters:** Germany.

**What is implemented:**

- **Intrapreneurship & youth entrepreneurship programmes:** To inspire new ventures initiated by SAP employees and support young entrepreneurs with their ideation and business models
- **Access to markets:** 5 & 5 by '25 initiative, [see inspiration box](#)
- **Expertise and capacity-building:** Strategic and operational support to social enterprises by SAP employees; access to market and scaling programmes: connecting social enterprises with markets and technologies, including through social procurement (BuySocial)
- **Financial support:** Grants

**Current countries of operation:** Global.

**More information:**

More information on SAP CSR [here](#)

SAP Leading with Purpose [here](#)

5 & 5 by '25 [here](#)

and press release [here](#).

More information [here](#)



### How do partnerships with SESOs come about?

Most partnerships with SAP are initiated through connections and networking efforts on the side of SAP and of the SE intermediaries themselves. SAP favours long-lasting partnerships encompassing financial and non-financial support. As a flexible organisation, they are able to test and pilot initiatives that, when successful, can be deployed at wider levels.

### Their top 3 tips for you:

1. Understand what we are doing in the social enterprise space and why there is an added-value for SAP to be involved in that sector
2. Check that you are aligned with our vision, goals and values and clearly demonstrate that shared vision
3. Have big dreams but propose something tangible and doable in the first instance. This could lead to bigger projects!

### Types of support:

- Financial
- Skills-based
- Training
- Human resources
- Access to markets
- Networking
- Restricted and unrestricted funding



# Some Inspiration

### 5&5 by 2025 Social Procurement Initiative

5&5 by 2025 Social Procurement Initiative: SAP launched in 2020 the global [5 & 5 by '25 Initiative](#), a corporate initiative targeting five percent of SAP's addressable spend with social enterprises and diverse businesses by 2025 (US\$60 million annually).

In setting this target, SAP aims to inspire organisations around the world to buy more goods and services from purposeful suppliers, making a positive collective impact. With global procurement spending estimated by the World Bank in 2019 to be at least US\$ 14 trillion, by directing even just a fraction of this to social enterprises and diverse businesses organisations have the power to tackle some of the world's most pressing social and environmental problems.

Together with customers, (social enterprise intermediary) partners, diverse suppliers and social enterprises, SAP has set out to expand social procurement where infrastructure exists and intends to support and establish the infrastructure and build capacity where it does not yet exist.

5 & 5 is part of SAP One Billion Lives, a programme for which the ambition is to positively impact one billion lives by integrating social enterprises into the global economy through procurement practices.

More information [here](#)

## Example 3

### A corporate foundation: Thomson Reuters Foundation

The **Thomson Reuters Foundation** is the corporate foundation of Thomson Reuters, the global news and information services company. It works to advance media freedom, foster more inclusive economies and promote human rights. The Thomson Reuters Foundation combines the power of journalism and the law to drive systemic change through news, media development, free legal assistance, training and convening initiatives.

TrustLaw is the Thomson Reuters Foundation's global pro-bono legal service. It connects high-impact NGOs and social enterprises working to create social and environmental change with leading law firms and corporate legal teams to provide them with free legal assistance.

TrustLaw is the biggest pro-bono network in the world. Since 2009, they have helped more than 5,000 organisations ranging from small local charities, to social enterprises, to large non-profit organisations, saving the sector over \$205 million in legal fees.

TrustLaw has a network of Referral Partners, comprising funders, umbrella organisations and thought leaders, such as the Impact Hub, UnLtd and Ashoka. Through these partnerships, TrustLaw supports their grantees, fellows, members and award winners with free legal assistance.

**Sectors supported:** TrustLaw supports all sectors and topics, as long as the social enterprise fits the service's criteria:

- The social enterprise has been registered for at least one year
- It has a clear social impact and re-invests the majority of their profits into their social mission, or plans to do so
- The organisation can demonstrate sufficient impact and financial sustainability

**Target groups:** Social enterprise intermediaries and social entrepreneurs.

#### Areas of support:

Through TrustLaw, they provide:

- Free legal assistance on corporate matters or legal research
- Training and events
- Legal training
- Capacity-building and training
- Legal support to policy or advocacy activities

**Budget:** The Thomson Reuters Foundation does not provide financial support.

**Headquarters:** USA and UK, with regional teams in Spain, Argentina, Kenya, India and The Philippines.

#### What is implemented:

• **Pro bono facilitation:** Matching law firms and social entrepreneurs looking for specific skills or legal advice through their global pro-bono service, TrustLaw

• **Training for legal professionals:** Guiding legal experts on how to support social entrepreneurs through TrustLaw

• **Training, capacity-building & networking events:** Legal and impact investing training and legal health check workshops for civil society

• **Research:** Legal research to drive policy change or on social enterprise in general

**Countries:** TrustLaw has a global reach and is active in 180+ countries.

**More information:** on the Thomson Reuters Foundation can be found [here](#), and on TrustLaw [here](#).

#### How do partnerships with SESOs come about?

Eligible NGOs and social enterprises can apply to become a member of TrustLaw through the [TrustLaw website](#).

If SESOs fit the criteria, they may receive pro-bono legal advice through the TrustLaw service. They may also refer other partners and social enterprises in need of legal advice.

More information [here](#)

#### Their top 3 tips for you:

1. Identifying the legal priorities for your organisation can be difficult. Drawing on TrustLaw's 10 years of experience supporting NGOs and social enterprises, we have created a [Legal Health Check](#) tool to help you spot issues on which legal advice might be needed.
2. TrustLaw has facilitated the publication of 50+ reports and guides helping social impact organisations navigate regulatory frameworks and advocate for change in the law. You can find some [here](#).
3. You do not need to be a lawyer or have extensive legal knowledge to work with TrustLaw. Once you become a member, our team will help you scope your legal needs and draft the projects you post to our legal network, thus making it as simple as possible to receive the right legal assistance.

## Part 4

Tips & Tricks:  
A Roadmap to Fundraising

# Identify your needs & take stock

## Define your fundraising strategy based on the mission and needs of your organisation

If raising public funds (including EU funds) and/or philanthropic/corporate funds fit into your fundraising strategy, make sure that the projects you commit to are relevant to your organisational interests, cause, membership or beneficiaries in the first place.

The projects should always be fitting with your strategic priorities for a given period. Do not favour potential financial resources over your mission. A good way to start is with a SWOT and a risk analysis of your own organisation.

### PLAN AHEAD!!!

Most of the time you will find that submitting your funding-application takes more time than expected. Writing project proposals and collecting all necessary documents is time-consuming. The follow-up is often overlooked and also requires a lot of time and energy.

**Bear in mind that proposal writing often takes place a year before the project is implemented.**

This allocated time, and therefore costs, have to be embedded into your fundraising strategy within fundraising costs.

### Be clear on your available human resources

EU projects in particular can be highly time-consuming and require staff dedicated to the project for management, drafting and reviewing reports and articles, dissemination, financial management and so on.

Due to the pressure on resources, make sure to discuss thoroughly within your organisation, with potential partners, and where possible, with funders, before committing to an EU-funded opportunity.

### Make sure your own resources are sufficient to guarantee the pre-financing of the projects

All or part of the money is sometimes only provided at the end of the project. EU funds for instance are not always paid out regularly or as expected. When writing your application, pay particular attention to eligible and non-eligible costs.



# Embed fundraising in all of your work

## Define your main selling points & shout about them! Identify your main strengths by asking yourself the following questions:

- Who do we reach? How many partners? Who can we bring in?
- What impact do we have?
- What are we good at? What skills do we have?

Make it all very clear and visible - why not have it on your website and social media for example?

### Maintain a propositions log

Fundraising is part of business development and it needs to be done in a strategic and continuous manner. Do not wait for specific opportunities to be published (calls for proposals/expressions of interest) to start working on ideas within your organisation or with a group of partners. Make it a habit to maintain a potential project log or proposition log.

### Keep the conversation going

If you are eager to develop something with a group of organisations then be proactive and connect with other likely candidates. Ask to meet regularly and shape your ideas together. The right funding opportunity will come and you will have saved a lot of time. Create communities of practice, working groups and join forces.

### Gradually build up your network

Build strong relationships with other support organisations and international networks in your sector and with organisations across Europe/the world that are relevant to your

work. By collaborating on occasional activities (e.g. events, volunteering, field visits) on a regular basis and not only on specific projects, you will develop trusting relationships and a good understanding of each other. This helps to raise your visibility. Use your networking skills to build relations across a wide range of organisations, including academia & research centres, local and regional authorities,

EU policy-makers, businesses, etc. As your activities develop, your credibility and capability to shape and lead projects grows, putting you in an even better position to lead a consortium or partner with others and thus advancing your cause.

### Anticipate Calls for Proposals

Some EU funding programmes publish long-term work programmes that anticipate the themes of upcoming calls for proposals over one to two years. This is the case of the Horizon Europe programme for example. This allows an organisation to really anticipate project proposals.

### KEEP YOUR RADAR ON!!!

Identify the relevant international and EU calls databases and set up alerts based on your preferences. Some examples include [EuCalls.net](http://EuCalls.net) or [kaila.eu](http://kaila.eu).

Further, identify a list of relevant organisations to follow. Sign up for their newsletters, set Google Alerts, follow them on social media, attend their events and workshops. This way you are sure to keep an eye out for relevant calls for proposals, activities and consultations regularly to update each other on project ideas. Often reaching critical mass by joining together various actors will ensure you better outcomes than going for it alone.

# Save your valuable time!

## Dare to take the initiative

Dare to take a leading role in the design and implementation of a project – do not underestimate the knowledge and skills you can bring. Being close to a particular social or environmental issue, you have good knowledge about the needs and gaps in your area of work. However, do make sure that you are partnering with the right (number of) partners, that you have got the geographic representation requested and that all partners are eligible legal entities.

## Good to know:

Each EU call for proposals will lay out its eligibility criteria. They can vary significantly from one call to another. For instance, some calls will require each partner organisation to have been established for at least three years, some will only apply this rule to the lead coordinator.

More generally, carefully read the eligibility criteria of a call for proposal as your proposal could be rejected solely for ineligibility reasons. This applies to the type of organisations that can apply, the type of signature that is needed on a document or else the mail posting stamp's time.

## Summarise your current financial situation, including all your sources of income

Some funders (the EC especially) will want to see proof of financial capacity, other private funders may want to be exclusive, others will ask for other donors and some may look at their “co-financing partners” to know with which other organisation they may be associated with through your project.

# Think your application through

## Do not over-promise!

Applying for funding for a project is exhilarating and one can have a tendency to over-promise in terms of activities, outputs, results, impact indicators. If this might impress your evaluators and may give you a win, it might turn out to be unattainable in practice. Remember: if you promise the moon, you will be asked for it! Not delivering on your expected results can put a strain on your relationship with your funder and partners during the timeframe of the project and could jeopardise your credibility for future applications. Evaluators will always favour realistic, researched, well defined and well explained work-plans.

## Define your European added value

Chances are that if you are applying for an EU grant, your evaluators will have to understand its European added value. Ask yourself the following question: why should this project be implemented transnationally and with EU money? In other words: why is the impact likely to be higher if the project is implemented thanks to an international collaboration as opposed to each organisation asking for funding at national level. Explicitly including that the exchange or transfer of good practice are at the centre of your project is an example.

## Not delivering on your expected results can put a strain on your relationships

with your funder and partners during the timeframe of the project.

## Clearly identify your expected impact

Identifying the impact you want to have with your project or initiative - as small-scale as it may be - is crucial and should happen at ideation phase. Define your expected impact (the one you know your project will have), your desired impact (the broader change that the project could contribute to). Illustrate your expected impact with some clear and concrete KPIs. Do not forget to say how you will measure your performance - include an evaluation strategy or impact assessment methodology.

## Keep it tight & short but tell a story!

Keep it tight, concise and consistent. Think numbers, bullet points, tables, visuals. Tell the reader/evaluator a coherent, well evidenced story.

## Reflect & carry on!

### Work on feedback!

It is very tempting to resubmit a ready-made project proposal especially if it got a good score but was rejected for lack of funding.

### But first ask yourself the following questions:

1. Should I resubmit the proposal towards the same call? Is there one that is more aligned? Look around as there might be another funding stream that fits your purpose!
2. Have I taken into account the feedback I received on my first application? Evaluators will have indicated the strengths and weaknesses of your proposal, so reshape your proposal according to this. Do not forget to have a look at the evaluation criteria and scoring system again - you might see that you overlooked an area.

3. Is there any way I can make this proposal stronger? Even if you like it, take a critical look at the proposal, ask colleagues who were not involved in its development to read it and comment.

Sometimes, answering those questions might create more work than intended such as replacing a partner or rethinking an impact evaluation methodology, but it is worth it.

## Manage expectations

Be mindful that the success rates of applying to some funding streams are very low; you will need to manage expectations. But at times, if you feel you have been losing time on an unsuccessful application, bear in mind that your work is not useless.

It is always a good exercise to step back, reflect on your work and ambitions and put it down on paper. And besides, chances are you will reuse parts of your application sooner rather than later.

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