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ANNEX 2

ANNEX

to the

COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION

on the financing of the Programme for the internal market, competitiveness of enterprises, including small and medium sized enterprises, the area of plants, animals, food and feed and European Statistics and the adoption of the work programme for 2024-2027

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ANNEX II

IMPROVING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF ENTERPRISES, PARTICULARLY SMEs, AND SUPPORTING THEIR ACCESS TO MARKETS

1. INTRODUCTION

The fourth work programme for the SME pillar of the Single Market Programme continues to focus on implementing the SME strategy in the context of industrial ecosystems and the SME components of the updated Industrial Strategy. It puts strong emphasis on supporting SMEs' recovery and the green, circular and digital transition while helping them achieve success in an increasingly competitive and fast moving environment. The work programme sets out actions for all SME pillar objectives: facilitating access to markets, fostering entrepreneurship and the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills, promoting the modernisation of industry and addressing global environmental and societal challenges.

This work programme will also contribute to the implementation of other major policy actions that are of central importance for SME competitiveness and sustainability:

- The European Commission proposal for a Net-Zero Industry Act approved in March 2023 aims to scale up clean technology manufacturing in the EU with a target to provide at least 40% of the EU's annual deployment needs for strategic net-zero technologies¹ by 2030. In addition, the Critical Raw Materials Act aims to diversify and enhance the resilience of EU critical raw material supply chains and support the transition to circularity and sustainability.

Inter alia, this work programme will provide new support for the Raw-Materials Academy and continue support for the new European Solar Academy which will enable further training modules to be provided for educating and training workforce in and for the solar PV manufacturing supply chain in the EU. This responds to the needs of the sector and will provide training and development opportunities for SMEs across the solar value chain.

- The Communication on boosting long-term competitiveness adopted in mid-March 2023, provides a renewed approach and long-term vision on EU competitiveness and productivity. It highlights the European model of growth, based on sustainable competitiveness, economic security, open strategic autonomy and fair competition and identifies nine mutually re-inforcing drivers for future growth, including circularity, digitalisation and skills and energy (fast roll-out of renewables)². Actions in this work programme in areas such as digitalisation, circularity and skills, including the Solar PV and Raw-Materials Academies will contribute towards these goals.
- In mid-March 2023, the Commission adopted its Single market at 30 Communication, taking stock of key achievements and remaining challenges, and outlining focus areas for future action, notably to tackle barriers in the areas that are most relevant for the whole economy (services, capital markets, energy markets, and digital and data markets), and to focus enforcement activities on areas with the highest untapped potential such as business services, retail, construction and tourism.

¹ These include solar, wind, batteries and storage, heat pumps and geothermal energy, electrolysers and fuel cells, biogas / biomethane, carbon capture and storage, and grid technologies.

² The other drivers for growth identified in the Communication include access to private capital and investment; public investment and infrastructure; research and innovation; and education.

SME pillar actions such as EEN, and the training for Solvit and EEN members will contribute to these goals.

In addition, the Commission has adopted an SME Relief package³, as announced in the State of the Union speech of September 2022. This work programme includes a number of actions seeking to address issues and challenges identified in this context.

- The new Agrifood and Retail SMEs - Renewable energy communities action will help SMEs in these sectors to survive the current pressures resulting from the unprecedented increases in energy prices, and also to boost their resilience to future energy market crises.
- Another new action will support training and skills development activities provided by the European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) for digital up/re-skilling of textiles SMEs.

Issues related to the Russian military aggression in Ukraine have also severely affected the competitiveness and resilience of European SMEs and hampered their access to markets. For many SMEs this came on top of damage suffered as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. As a consequence, inflation, high energy costs, and supply chain issues continue to be a major cause for concern. The SME Pillar work programme contains a number of new measures to help SMEs to tackle high energy costs, and supply chain issues and to support Ukrainian businesses, some of which are outlined below:

- In particular, the Clusters-Ukraine action will support Cluster Partnerships for specific sectors or ecosystems comprising partners from both Ukraine and the EU. These partnerships will provide services and a mobility scheme to help Ukrainian cluster managers to enhance their capacities and skills for providing high quality added-value support services for businesses.
- Existing services mentioned in this work programme such as the Enterprise Europe Network have also been adapted to help businesses deal with these unprecedented challenges.

By sharing the same executive agency, the SME pillar seeks to share knowledge and resources in synergy with the European Innovation Council. The work programme is subject to a positive opinion by a committee referred to under Article 21 of Regulation (EU) 2021/690⁴.

On the basis of the objectives given in Article 3(2)(b) of Regulation (EU) 2021/690, this work programme contains the actions to be financed and the budget breakdown for years 2024-25 as follows:

- a) for grants (implemented under direct management) (point 2), including the multiannual instalments for the Enterprise Europe Network, the Joint Cluster Initiative and Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs,
- b) for procurement (implemented under direct management) (point 3),
- c) for actions implemented under indirect management (point 4),
- d) for other actions or expenditure (point 5).

These amounts include appropriations arising from the participation of EEA EFTA States in the programme and are therefore subject to the agreement on their participation.

³ [SME Relief Package \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu) COM(2023)535

⁴ [EUR-Lex - 32021R0690 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/690/oj)

Legal basis

Regulation (EU) 2021/690 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing the Programme for single market, competitiveness of enterprises, including small and medium-sized enterprises, and European statistics and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1287/2013 (the “programme”).

Budget line

03 02 02

Objectives pursued

The **specific objectives** of the Programme laid down in Article 3(2)(b) of Regulation (EU) 2021/690 are to strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs and to achieve additionality at Union level through measures that:

- provide various forms of support to SMEs as well as clusters and other business network organisations, including in the tourism sector, thereby fostering the growth, scale-up and creation of SMEs;
- facilitate access to markets including the internationalisation of SMEs;
- promote entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills;
- promote a favourable business environment for SMEs, support digital transformation and promote new business opportunities for SMEs, including for social economy enterprises and those with innovative business models;
- support the competitiveness of industrial ecosystems and sectors as well as the development of industrial value chains; and
- promote the modernisation of industry, contributing to a green, digital and resilient economy.

Expected results

The progress in implementing the specific objectives of Article 3(2)(b) will be measured with the following indicators, and complimented by the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework C(2023)4993:⁵

- Number of SMEs, clusters and business network organisations, and business support organisations receiving support from the programme, in particular for internationalisation, digitalisation and sustainability.
- Number of companies supported having concluded business partnerships.
- Number of entrepreneurs benefitting from mentoring and mobility schemes, including young, new and female entrepreneurs, as well as other specific target groups.

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming

Many SME pillar actions that include support for climate (or more rarely biodiversity) focus on several objectives, set in the wider context of supporting SME competitiveness and resilience.

⁵ [Single Market programme - legal texts and factsheets \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-room/pages/press-room.aspx?pid=14782)

A key element of the SME pillar contribution to the mainstreaming objectives is the work done by the networks. The Enterprise Europe Network's services for SMEs include advisory and partnership services to support these businesses with their transition to sustainability and circularity. One key part of the service is the EEN sustainability advisors.

The European Solar Academy will provide training to SMEs in the solar PV manufacturing value chain, boosting their critical skills and competencies, resilience and competitiveness. It will contribute to EU climate goals by leading to better availability of competitive domestically produced solar PV components. Other actions that will contribute to these goals include the Raw-Materials Academy and the Agri-food and retail SMEs energy communities.

One action that will contribute directly to the biodiversity goal is the SME fund which includes support towards the costs of IP protection of new plant variety rights.

2. GRANTS

The global budgetary envelope reserved for grants under this work programme for 2024 is EUR 101 187 153.

The actions (2.1, 2.2 and 2.3) were adopted in annex 2 of the 2021 work programme⁶ and are included here for information purposes only. The multiannual instalment for 2024 for these three actions is included in the total budget allocation for 2024.

2.1. Enterprise Europe Network⁷

Budget

Indicative total amount call for proposals (2024 appropriations only): EUR 25 500 000

Table of multiannual commitment budget for this action

Year	2021	2022	2023	2024	TOTAL
Budget EUR	47 000 000	47 000 000	45 000 000	25 500 000	164 500 000

2.2. Joint Cluster Initiatives (EUROCLUSTERS) for Europe's recovery⁸

Budget

Indicative total amount (2024 appropriations only): EUR 3 837 153

Table of multiannual commitment budget for this action

Year	2021	2022	2023	2024	TOTAL
Budget EUR	16 800 000	9 000 000	12 000 000	3 837 153	41 637 153

2.3. Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs

Budget

Indicative total amount (2024 appropriations only): EUR 5 050 000

Table of multiannual commitment budget for this action

Year	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	TOTAL
BUDGET EUR	18 004 751	10 000 000	0	5 050 000	5 000 000	38 054 751

⁶ [Commission Implementing Decision of 6 May 2021 on the financing of the Programme for Single Market, competitiveness of enterprises, including small and medium sized enterprises, and European Statistics and the adoption of the work programme for 2021-2024 | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁷ [Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁸ [Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](#)

2.4. Enterprise Europe Network

Type of applicants targeted by the call for proposals

Typical applicants are organisations with a proven experience to provide business support services to SMEs. Organisations applying for the next EEN call for proposals must be legal entities; they can be fully or partly public or private bodies; corporate bodies must be properly constituted and registered under the law.

Description of the activities to be funded under the call for proposals

The Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) provides business support and advisory services – in particular for SMEs – by offering information, advisory services, feedback and partnering services, innovation, technology and knowledge transfer services. The Network provides services encouraging the participation of SMEs in the opportunities provided by the Single Market Programme (SMP) and Horizon Europe, as well as internationalisation services beyond the Single Market and informs SMEs on access to finance and funding opportunities (InvestEU), including those under the European Structural and Investment Funds.

The EEN activities directly contribute to the implementation of the SME Strategy and play an important role to help SMEs recover from the various crises, such as COVID-19, issues related to the Russian aggression in Ukraine and other supply chain disruptions. The EEN will continue to deliver sustainability and digitalisation advisory services to provide SMEs with the necessary support for the acceleration of the twin transition. At the same time, the EEN is a sounding board and a link between the Commission and the SME community in the implementation of the SME Strategy, the Green Deal Industrial Plan, the updated European industrial strategy and other EU policy priorities, such as the strengthening of the EU's open strategic autonomy and long-term competitiveness.

The Network aims to:

- Help EU SMEs finding international business, technology and research partners in the EU, SMP SME pillar associated countries and third countries, and find alternative solutions for SMEs facing supply chain problems;
- Help SMEs address sustainability challenges and opportunities through the EEN sustainability advisors in place in all EU regions;
- Help SMEs to digitalise by helping them to adapt their processes, use digital technologies to increase their competitiveness and develop new products and services using new digital means; EEN members shall also exploit synergies with the European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH);
- Assist SMEs with assessments and capacity building services to address challenges that SMEs are faced with for sustainability, digitalisation and innovation management;
- Develop and provide a balanced integrated service range to help SMEs to become active in the Single Market and beyond (e.g. regarding EU legislation and programmes, EU funding, intellectual property rights), linking up with regional actors and policies to ensure regional integration of the network's services;
- Improve SMEs awareness on access to finance, in particular InvestEU, and including alternative sources of financing;
- Increase the impact and quality of services;

- Increase the competitiveness of SMEs by internationalisation and innovation support services;
- Provide advisory services to help scale-ups to develop their activities outside their own country;
- Use the SME feedback function to obtain SMEs opinion on EU policy options;
- Strengthen support for SMEs interested in participating in Horizon Europe and other EU funding programmes and corresponding calls for proposals, in particular encourage SMEs to participate in the European Innovation Council (EIC) actions;
- Develop a long-term relationship and provide integrated services to the beneficiaries of the EIC and possibly those who were awarded a Seal of Excellence; further enhance cooperation with Horizon Europe national contact points to help increase participation of SMEs;
- Improve SMEs awareness about other EU initiatives such as the Your Europe portal and the Single Digital Gateway and connected assistance services;
- Ensure visibility, recognition and local awareness about the EEN;
- Improve SMEs resilience including when they are faced with supply chain disruptions and other crises.

The expected results are:

- Increased number of SMEs linked with other entities across Europe and beyond for cross-border business cooperation, technology and knowledge transfer and technology and innovation partnerships;
- Increased number of SMEs aware of sustainability challenges and opportunities and integrating them in their business processes;
- Increased number of SMEs implementing innovation activities and integrating structured innovation management approaches to improve their business processes and develop business opportunities;
- Increased number of SMEs integrating digitalisation to improve their business processes and developing new business opportunities;
- Higher rate of European SMEs exporting within the Single Market and outside the EU;
- Higher rate of European SMEs participating in EU programmes;
- Improvement in European SMEs understanding of EU legislation and of opportunities offered by EU programmes and EU access to finance;
- Increased number of companies reporting a successful outcome on their business in terms of turn-over and jobs created;
- Better visibility of the EEN by promoting success stories;
- Better knowledge/understanding within EU institutions of SMEs opinions, difficulties and expectations.

This action is a multiannual action and the continuation of the previous action in the current SME pillar (**SMP-COSME-2021-EEN-01**)

Implementation

EISMEA

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution - description of how this action contributes to climate and biodiversity mainstreaming in qualitative and quantitative ways

This call will focus on the implementation of actions foreseen in the updated Industrial Strategy and REPowerEU plan and other EU policies, to improve SMEs' social and economic resilience while accelerating their green and digital transition.

Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 25 600 000 (2024 appropriations). Multiannual call to be launched during Q1/Q2 2024 for signature of grant agreements during Q1 2025 at the latest.
- Rate of co-financing: maximum 100% co-financing rate for eligible costs related to additional networking and coordination tasks; max. 60% co-financing rate for all other eligible costs
- Any essential criteria: Applicant organisations have to be established in EU Member States or in countries associated to the SME pillar of the SMP; they must be legal entities, fully or partly public or private bodies; corporate bodies must be properly constituted and registered under the law.
- Approximate number of projects to be funded and amount of grant per project; Approximately 90; country distribution foreseen in an annex to the call for the Enterprise Europe Network, the objective is to have geographical coverage in 27 EU Member States, including the outermost regions, and SME pillar associated countries.
- Indicative duration of the project(s) to be funded: 42 months
- Indicative implementation timetable:

Table of multiannual commitment budget for this action

Year	2024	2025	2026	2027	TOTAL
Amount					182.500.000
EUR	25.600.000	53.500.000	50.000.000	53.400.000	⁹

- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
 - Number of unique SMEs receiving support services (information, partnering, advisory services on EU legislation, access to financing, etc.);
 - Number of achievements (including business/technology/research Partnership Agreements and Advisory Service Outcomes);
 - Number of unique clients supported by the Network through the EEN client journey;
 - Number of clients in feedback-related actions;
 - Client satisfaction on the received services.

⁹ Total call figure to be confirmed prior to WP adoption

2.5. Joint Cluster Initiatives (EUROCLUSTERS) for Europe's recovery

Type of applicants targeted by the call for proposals

Consortia of cluster organisations¹⁰ which team up with other types of organisations covering value chains across industrial ecosystems, with a broad variety of actors from smallest start-ups in social economy to the largest companies in traditional industries, from academia engaged in basic research, to input providers and users to support commercial uptake of research.

They will include a balanced mix of cluster organisations at different development stage i.e. potential, emerging, established or declining, from more developed, transitional and less developed EU regions which operate across borders, inside and outside the EU and will contribute to greener and more digital and resilient EU economy.

Description of the activities to be funded under the call for proposals

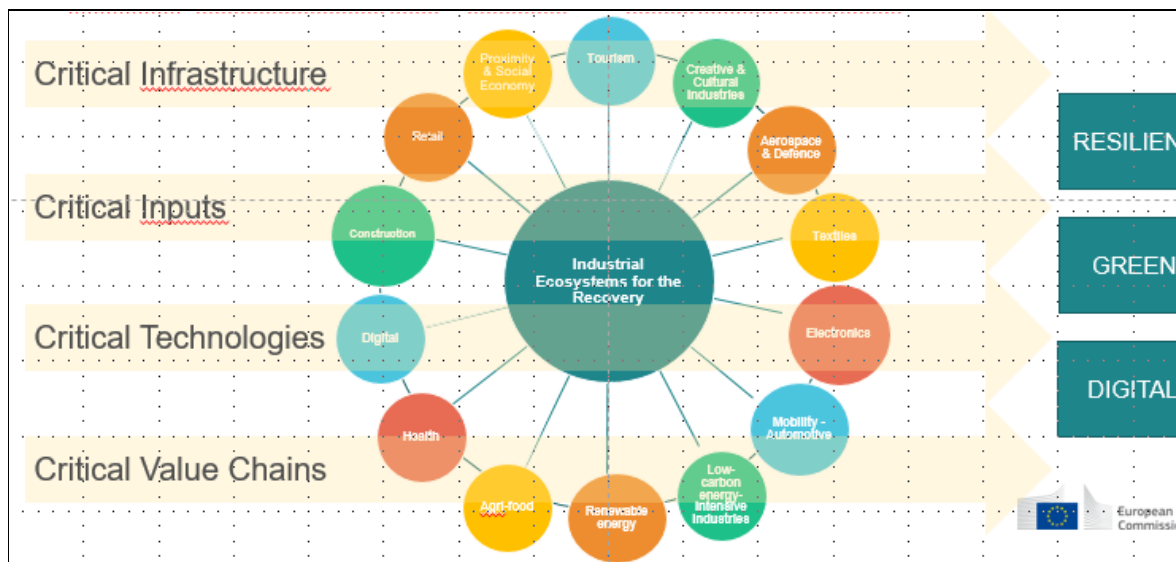
This measure will launch Joint Cluster Initiatives for Europe's recovery (EUROCLUSTERS) as multi-country projects, accessible to both developed and less-developed regions in an organised effort to support implementation of the Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero Age¹¹ as well as REPowerEU Plan¹², in particular to:

- improve the resilience of EU industrial ecosystems by considering the whole supply and value chain across borders, so that supplies do not become bottlenecks;
- build industrial capacity where necessary to ensure that strategic dependencies do not put the green and digital transition at risk;
- foster up- and re-skilling of the workforce whilst attracting talents;
- reconnect and boost access to global supply and value chains.

¹⁰ Cluster organisations are the legal entities that support the strengthening of collaboration, networking and learning in innovation clusters and act as innovation support providers by providing or channeling specialised and customised business support services to stimulate innovation activities, especially in SMEs.

¹¹ COM(2023) 62 final

¹² COM(2022) 230 final



This action will incentivise the creation and development of Joint Cluster Initiatives (EUROCLUSTERS), one of the flagship measures mentioned in article 8 of the Single Market Programme (SMP), building on the successful and inspiring experience of the COSME and the Horizon 2020/INNOSUP-1¹³ cluster projects and the Euroclusters call launched in 2021 which created 30 cross-sectorial, interdisciplinary and trans European Joint Cluster Initiatives (EUROCLUSTERS)¹⁴, to improve the resilience of the European industrial ecosystems, while boosting their green and digital transformation.

The Initiatives will help clusters organisations and their members to strengthen their interlinkages and collaborate to exploit new resilient business opportunities and anticipate and address challenges they face in terms of critical infrastructure, inputs, technologies, skills and value chains.

The actions foreseen in this call for proposals will focus on the implementation of actions foreseen in the Green Deal industrial plan and REPowerEU plan, in order to improve SMEs' social and economic resilience, while supporting their green and digital transition. The resilience of value and supply chains will be a priority, for example, through the diversification of production inputs on different EU territories, pooling of supply or demand, joint investments in critical innovation and production facilities, development of alternative EU technologies and implementation of circularity measures. In addition, clusters and their companies shall explore new ways of rebuilding and reconnecting global supply and value chains in a joint strategy, reshaping their global position to take account of the latest developments affecting their field of business, and taking rational positions on risk exposure.

The Joint Cluster Initiatives (EUROCLUSTERS) will build on the EU cluster capacity to bring together a critical mass of firms and societies in geographical and functional proximities, which are economically and socially interdependent. Potential projects will include actions such as:

- A. partnering between European cluster organisations and key actors along the value chains within their ecosystem, as well as with other ecosystems, to boost

¹³ See: strategic partnerships and EU initiatives at: [European Cluster Partnerships | European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#)

¹⁴ [Euroclusters | European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#)

resilience, and green and digital transformation in their ecosystem(s) in line with relevant transition pathways.¹⁵

- B. building complementarities with the national/regional smart specialisation strategies and with the National Recovery Plans
- C. mapping of critical elements (material, knowledge, skills, technologies and applications) of the supply and value chains
- D. developing a common roadmap (with milestones and KPIs) for and implementing all the following cooperation actions:
 - 1. sharing complementary and tailored infrastructure, suppliers and technologies;
 - 2. development and uptake of advanced technologies by SMEs;
 - 3. implementing circularity measures across the ecosystems;
 - 4. identification and exchange of Best Practices for boosting the resilience, green and digital transformation of SMEs;
 - 5. matching and developing skills and talents;
 - 6. pooling SMEs with common resilience, green or digital transformation challenges, to enable them to identify and implement the most competitive solutions;
 - 7. boosting internationalisation of SMEs by facilitating access and a new strategic positioning in global value chains (e.g. by shaping export consortia, promoting joint EU solutions in global markets) and by building a recognisable brand to attract talents and investments worldwide.
- E. preparing resilience related investment projects, and exploring their financing needs with a view to securing an optimum mix of private and public funding to ensure their success e.g. when available the RRF funds, including business plan and market analysis for long-term investment strategy.
- F. channelling business growth acceleration funding directly to SMEs for boosting their resilience, green and digital transformation.

Implementation

EISMEA

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution

As noted above, this call will focus on the implementation of actions foreseen in the Green Deal Industrial Plan and REPowerEU plan, to improve SMEs' social and economic resilience while supporting their green and digital transition.

Additional information

Total amount of the action: Indicative total amount (2024 appropriations only):
EUR 10 000 000

[Multiannual commitment budget table for this action](#)

¹⁵ [EU Transition Pathways \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

Year	2024	2025	2026	2027	TOTAL
Budget EUR	10.000.000	11.000.000	12.000.000	9.000.000	42.000.000

Rate of co-financing:

The co-financing rate shall be up to 100% of the eligible costs for financial support to third parties, and up to 90% of the eligible costs for the other cost categories.

- A significant amount of the grant will be aimed at supporting directly SMEs , with a view to facilitate their resilience, as well as their green and digital transformation, or to provide free access and support to use testing facilities directly to SMEs of the partners engaged in the Joint Cluster Initiatives.
- Indicative duration of the project(s) to be funded: 36 months
- Indicative timeframe for launching the procedure: Q3-Q4 2024
- *Qualitative and quantitative indicators:*
 - Number of partnerships;
 - Take up of innovation solutions in SMEs;
 - Number of businesses putting in place process innovations leading to improved sustainability;
 - Number of businesses that enhanced their skills for sustainability / circularity;
 - Quality of business support activities such as innovation uptake, re/upskilling and internationalisation and collecting impact data.

2.6. EU-Ukraine Cluster Partnership Programme

Type of applicants targeted by the call for proposals

The type of applicants targeted are European and Ukrainian cluster organisations or business network organisations that manage joint activities, facilitate networking and provide or channel specialised and customised business support services to their members and related actors.

The scheme will indirectly benefit SMEs, by helping support organisations to reinforce their capacities and the quality of their services. These support organisations may include technology centres, research institutes, fab labs, (digital) innovation hubs, creative hubs, resource-efficiency service providers, incubators and accelerators and staff from public authorities at both regional and city/administration levels and innovation agencies.

Description of the activities to be funded by the call for proposals

The action will support Ukrainian business integration in EU value chains and the development of cooperation projects and partnerships between European and Ukrainian clusters and business network organisations. It will foster cluster capacity-building, the professionalisation of support for businesses, especially for SMEs, and strengthen economic ties between European and Ukrainian ecosystems, regions and cities.

In practice, the programme will be implemented by consortia of organisations that are interested in establishing and running a Cluster Partnership (referred to as Partnerships). The Partnerships will be formed through a call for proposals that will bring together cluster organisations and other business network organisations from the EU Member States or other countries participating in the SME pillar of the Single Market Programme (SMP) and from Ukraine, interested in teaming up. Each Partnership will be composed of at least one organisation from Ukraine and also at least two organisations from EU Member States.

The Partnerships may undertake activities such as:

1. Organising twinning, networking and learning activities and projects that aim at cooperation and capacity building. The activities can cover, amongst others, efforts to boost internationalisation, market research, foresight and trends analyses, mapping of joint activities, technology/knowledge transfer, and promote companies' uptake of innovation, digitalisation, and resource-efficient and carbon neutral solutions. This can thus include, for instance workshops, study trips and training and education activities for cluster organisations, business network support organisations, SMEs and public authorities and innovation agencies working with clusters;
2. Supporting the development of a comprehensive cluster strategy for the individual clusters, including activities to strengthen collaboration and partnership development along and across value-chains between the EU and Ukraine;
3. Enhancing cluster managers' capacities and skills towards providing high quality added-value support services for businesses, especially SMEs;
4. Organising and implementing a mobility scheme for staff members from beneficiaries. This shall cover promotion of the scheme, recruitment, matching and follow-up of short-term visits or exchanges for professionals.

This action is based on the understanding that promoting clustering and strengthening cluster organisations are highly effective ways to facilitate economic competitiveness and industrial transition in all countries. Furthermore, support for cooperation between clusters leads inter alia to increased trade, investment and partnering projects between cluster participants. The documented success of previous and existing clusters actions under the COSME and SMP programmes proves these points.

The expectations are that Ukrainian businesses and economy will likewise benefit from the support provided for the further development of Ukrainian clusters and for creating cooperation opportunities between EU and Ukrainian clusters and companies. European clusters and companies are also expected to gain from these actions through new business relations with Ukrainian partners and through the re-building of supply and value chains that were disrupted by the war.

Clusters are an important driver of economic growth and innovation. By clustering together, firms can share ideas and resources, which can lead to the development of new products and services and the creation of new markets. Therefore, it is important to take steps to support their growth and development in Ukraine and their contacts with EU counterparts.

The measure shall enhance collaboration, networking and learning. It shall improve the quality of specialised and customised business support services provided or channelled to

SMEs by helping cluster organisations and their members to learn from each other, explore and take up new solutions and develop strategic plans for a better cooperation at European and international level. Moreover, it shall address training and business needs along the value chain, that requires SME and cluster managers' skills to adapt to trends, challenges and opportunities that come along with industrial change.

Implementation

EISMEA

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution

The terms of the call will reflect the need to promote the transition of Ukrainian companies to greater sustainability.

Additional information

Total amount of the action: EUR 3 000 000

Rate of co-financing:

- Up to 90% for costs of the cluster partnerships and management costs of the mobility scheme;

Approximate number of projects to be funded and amount of grant per project:

- The maximum amount is EUR 500 000 per grant action.

Indicative implementation timetable:

- Publication of the call for proposals: Q1 2024.
- Award: Q3/Q4 2024.
- Signature of the grant agreements: Q4 2024 – Q1 2025.

Qualitative and quantitative indicators:

- Number of activities undertaken to improve support services by cluster organisations for supporting the growth and competitiveness of their members (e.g. twinning, training, benchmarking, etc.).
- Number of cooperation agreements, joint projects, business agreements, memoranda of understanding and inter-regional partnerships resulting from interactions with other businesses, investors, SME intermediaries, scaling-up support organisations and regional authorities.
- Number of cluster development plans, strategies, implementation roadmaps and new or enhanced mission statements and vision statements for the cluster.
- Number of analyses, mappings, trends and foresight studies, surveys and workshops undertaken.
- Number of staff from clusters, support organisations, public authorities and innovation agencies registered and participating (i.e. relationships achieved) in an exchange scheme, and quality of exchanges measured by feedback questionnaires to participants.

2.7. Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs - junior call

Type of applicants targeted by the call for proposals

Applicants can be public or private entities whose core activity is in the field of business support.

Description of the activities to be funded under the call for proposals

Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs is a mobility scheme that allows potential or newly established entrepreneurs to spend a period of time collaborating with an experienced entrepreneur in another participating country, including in the EU outermost regions. This mobility action aims to support transfer of entrepreneurial skills and ideas with the aim to promote entrepreneurship. It helps the entrepreneurs enrich their experiences as well as learn and network with entrepreneurs in other participating countries.

This measure will expand and strengthen the existing network of Intermediary Organisations (IOs) that act as local contact points in participating countries by bringing in new organisations, with or without previous experience in implementing the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs exchange scheme. The IOs are in charge of recruiting and matching the entrepreneurs and facilitating the mobility actions. They also promote the programme and its benefits at local and national level.

This action aims at providing complimentary projects to the ones financed under the call SMP-COSME-2021-EYE (larger projects) and will pay special attention to supporting entrepreneurs with digital and sustainable business models. Participation of entrepreneurs from underrepresented countries in the programme will also be encouraged through specific quantitative requirements.

This action also aims at offering opportunities to entrepreneurs from SMP participating countries to foster an exchange of business knowledge and expertise in new destinations beyond SMP countries.

Implementation

EISMEA

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution - description of how this action contributes to climate and biodiversity mainstreaming in qualitative and quantitative ways

The action will pay special attention to supporting entrepreneurs with green business models contributing to climate and environmental objectives.

Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 5 000 000
- The co-financing rate reaches up to 100% of the eligible costs for financial support to third parties (i.e. new entrepreneurs) and up to 75% of the eligible costs for other cost categories
- The approximate number of projects to be funded is between 5 and 10
- The expected length of the projects to be funded is 36 months
- Financial assistance to new entrepreneurs (Financial Support to Third Parties) shall take the form of unit cost per month of exchange, for a maximum duration of 6 months
- Indicative timeframe for launching the procedure: Q2 2024

The expected results of the action are (by January 2028):

- Between 2,000 and 2,500 entrepreneurs matched;
- Around 2,000 entrepreneurs registered;
- Between 30 and 50 Intermediary Organisations involved in the implementation of the programme;
- Circa 20 countries covered;
- Rate of successful exchanges above 90% (entrepreneurs' feedback).

2.8. EU-Japan Centre for industrial cooperation

Type of applicants targeted by the direct award

Action grant directly awarded according to Article 195(d) of the Financial Regulation and Article 4 of the Council Decision 92/278/EEC¹⁶.

The Centre is a joint venture established in 1987, funded and managed by both the European Commission (DG GROW) and the Japanese Government (METI). It has its head office in Tokyo and an office in Brussels.

Description of the activities to be funded by the grant awarded without a call for proposals on the basis of Article 195 of the Financial Regulation

The Centre activities will build on over 36 years of experience to propose actions to address SMEs, businesses, and all the other Centre's clients needs in line with its mission. Through this experience of over 3 decades of cooperation with Japan, the Centre has built trust with Japanese players, which is crucial for doing business, mobilising relevant stakeholders and delivering results in this country. Thanks to its unique collaboration with the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), the Centre has a privileged relationship and contacts with METI, also facilitating contacts with other ministries and Japanese public entities. This relationship also helps connect more easily with the Japanese business community.

¹⁶ Council Decision 92/278/EEC of 18 May 1992 confirming the consolidation of the EC-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation (OJ L 144, 26.5.1992, p. 19).

The majority of the existing activities will continue, and the Centre should ensure continuity with all ongoing activities (e.g. Vulcanus, EEN matching services, clusters support missions), although with some adaptations to reflect the changing business and political environment. The Centre's work programme will need to retain some flexibility to meet new and emerging needs of SMEs that exist or may arise. These actions will notably deliver on:

- Activities in line with the EU Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)¹⁷, EU Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA)¹⁸, Connectivity Partnership, the EU-Japan Green Alliance and the EU-Japan Digital Partnership. It will also continue to be in line with the priorities of DG GROW policies notably in terms of (i) Net-zero industrial plan, (ii) industrial ecosystems, (iii) SME internationalisation, and (iv) resilient international and strategic value chains.
- Gateway services for European SMEs: the Centre will continue providing a coherent 'package' integrating various tools, support and services ranging from business intelligence in the form of reports and webinars/seminars to training activities for SMEs and clusters managers and to activities to connect European and Japanese businesses including matchmaking business missions. The Centre provides European SMEs with a unique information and support contact point in Japan (and Brussels), delivering a wide range of services to help EU businesses to access the Japanese market. The complementarity and synergies between the different actions and services provided by the Centre are key factors behind the effectiveness/success of the support it provides to SMEs.
- EU-Japan business cooperation in third countries, where Japan is, beyond its own market, increasingly considered by European businesses as a hub to access third markets, by partnering with Japanese businesses. In parallel, the EU-Japan Connectivity Partnership and the Global Gateway are entering a phase of implementation with the uptake of public supported projects by European and Japanese financial and development organisations in third countries.
- Joint actions with the Member States' Trade Promotions Organisations in a 'Team Europe' mindset for co-organising better business missions with an integrated approach with strong institutional, political and business ties, including with industrial clusters.
- The action may also include provision of financial support to third parties e.g. SMEs, students, researchers.

The Centre's activities will also seek to respond to main business and policy trends, with a focus on the green and digital transition, and in line with emerging Union strategies, such as on economic security. Novelties will take into account the outcomes of the ongoing review of current activities and the accelerated implementation of existing partnership agreements with Japan (like the Green Alliance).

All the activities of the Centre should continue to integrate digital tools to enhance the client's support services such as online and hybrid meetings, online libraries and the use of online business matchmaking platforms. These digital services contribute to reaching out to wider range of potentially interested SMEs and offer more tailored and flexible support.

The Centre is also the National Contact Point in Japan for the EU research and innovation

¹⁷ https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/japan/eu-japan-agreement_en

¹⁸ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/eu-japan-strategic-partnership-agreement.html>

programme “Horizon Europe” to promote research cooperation and support participation from Japanese organisations in this programme.

The following table summarises the Centre’s main existing activities. While the Centre will continue to offer a stable set of trainings, business services, business information and support to dialogue, individual actions are subject to continued internal review to ensure the offer meets existing and emerging demand. Therefore, areas outlined below provide a tentative list of priority areas. The Centre is expected to continue ensuring sound communication through different and innovative formats, such as newsletters, reports, presentations, surveys, etc.

Training and business culture	Japanese business culture and practices	Trainings focused on enabling SMEs to better understand and grasp the cultural and economic elements that define Japan’s business environment and Japanese businesses. Develops state of the art information and practical examples. Currently ‘2-week ‘Get Ready for Japan’ scheme in Tokyo’.
	Market access and cross cultural workshops	Market access workshops in the Union to cover information on how to access the Japanese market for EU companies interested in a particular sector and/or provide insights into the Japanese business culture. Done in cooperation with local members of EEN
	Japanese manufacturing expertise	Training missions to provide in-depth analysis of Japanese manufacturing methodology, aimed at EU managers with knowledge of World Class Manufacturing (WCM) in Japan.
	Industrial internship in Japan	Industrial placements in Japan for engineering or science students with EU or SMP associated country nationality. The internship programme aims to advance participants’ knowledge, enable them to learn Japanese and be well-placed for a future career in Japan.
	Industrial internship in Europe	Industrial placements in the EU for Japanese engineering or science students.
Business services	How to benefit from the EU-Japan EPA	The EPA Helpdesk to support and guide Union SMEs in their search for relevant information.
	Opportunities in Japanese public procurement	The Tax & Public Procurement Helpdesk to provide a wide range of services in the areas of public procurement and tax issues in Japan
	Technology transfer and IP	The EU-Japan Technology Transfer Helpdesk to support Union and Japanese companies and individuals in their steps to search for and acquire technologies.
	Cluster/Regions/Cities Cooperation	The EU-Japan regional cooperation Helpdesk to promote cooperation at the local level of industrial clusters, regions, prefectures and cities through best practices and matchmaking
	EU-Japan business cooperation in third countries	Dedicated helpdesk to support EU-Japan business cooperation in third markets. The helpdesk will consider expanding its coverage of third countries and continue to operate in synergy with the EU Delegation’s work on the Connectivity Partnership.
	Business partnering in/with Japan	The Centre is the contact point in Japan of the Enterprise Europe Network. As such the Centre promotes and disseminate profiles of Japanese companies to the EEN, and put Japanese companies in contact with EU SMEs to facilitate business cooperation. The Centre also supports members of the EEN network to connect with Japanese businesses via the dissemination of their company profile in Japanese to the Japanese business community, the organisation of business missions in Japan, and the organisation of virtual and physical matchmaking sessions.
	Temporary office in Japan	"Step in Japan" will continue to be a support initiative for SMEs in need of logistical support in Tokyo.
Professional business plan	Updated and personalised market entry business plan, building on experience from the “Keys to Japan” offer.	

		<p>Cluster support 3-5 days missions are organised every year in Japan for Union Clusters and SMEs focused on specific sectors (biotech, ICT, nanotech and green technologies). These include market-specific business seminars, one-on-one meetings at a targeted trade fair. The sectors targeted may change depending on the evolving priorities and needs of businesses.</p> <p>Joint actions with the Member States Trade Promotions Organisations for co-organising business missions to Japan following an integrated ‘team Europe’ approach with strong institutional, political and business ties, including with industrial clusters. This action will build on the regular meetings and coordination organised by the Centre with all Member States TPOs in Japan. Services offered by the Centre complement the offer provided by TPOs.</p> <p>SME partnering to also include the dimension of EU-Japan business cooperation in third countries by organising business matchmaking.</p>
Business Information and Dialogue	Intelligence on markets and opportunities in Japan	The Centre will continue to generate information and reports on a wide range of Japanese business sectors, available to European companies only. Topics are to be defined in collaboration with DG GROW and the EU Delegation to Japan .
	EU and Japan policies seminars	The Centre will continue to host seminars and workshops both in Europe and Japan will cover a wide range of issues including climate change, environment, energy, industry, economic security, food safety, etc. in support of disseminating European policies and engaging with a Japanese audience, mainly the business community.
	EU-Japan Business Round Table	The EU-Japan Business Round Table (BRT) fosters communication between the Japanese and European industries, and submits recommendations to the top Japanese and European authorities. It is a unique forum where the business community can engage with EU and Japanese public authorities on issues affecting EU-Japan business which the Centre will continue to support.
The Centre is expected to	Newsletters	The Centre produces several newsletters to ensure dissemination of timely information to all relevant potential interested parties. The Centre has over 15,000 active contacts both in the EU and Japan.
	Social networks	Online presence on relevant social media will continue to play an important role for the communication and dissemination activities of the Centre, including on major social media platforms.

Implementation

EISMEA

Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 7 000 000
- Rate of co-financing: up to 100% of the eligible costs for financial support to third parties and up to 90% of the eligible costs for other cost categories
- Indicative duration: 24 months
- Indicative implementation timetable: Q2/2024 signature of grant agreement
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:

- Number of seminars organised and attendance; Number of enquiries addressed to the Centre and satisfactory replies provided; Number of policy relevant reports generated, in particular designed to support research and policy analysis of EU-Japan economic and industrial issues; Number of participants in Vulcanus and their level of competence;
- Number of EU companies entering Japanese market with the assistance of the centre;
- Number of joint collaborations between EU and Japanese companies facilitated by the Centre;
- Number of enquiries to the EPA helpdesk by European SMEs, and access of European businesses, in particular SMEs, to the Japanese market;
- Number of enquiries to the Japan Tax and Public Procurement helpdesk, Technology Transfer helpdesk, Space.Japan helpdesks, number of seminars organised.

2.9. EU-SME Centre in China

Type of applicants targeted by the call for proposals

Business support organisations and trade promotion organisations offering services for promoting trade and investment between Europe and China (e.g. bilateral or European Chambers of Commerce, sector specific organisations, business intermediary non-governmental organisations, agencies supporting SMEs in their trade, investment or international activities...).

Description of the activities to be funded under the call for proposals

The EU SME Centre in China serves as a first point of support for EU SMEs interested in internationalising their businesses to China. It provides them with an overview of opportunities and risks in the Chinese market, as well as relevant information on European policies towards China such as de-risking, which help them assess their fitness and readiness to internationalise. It provides links to relevant Trade Promotion Organisations (“TPOs”), Business Support Organisations (“BSOs”) and other EU actions (e.g. IP helpdesk) to make sure the SMEs can have the best support and advice possible when considering their expansion to China. The Centre also provides training and information sessions on a variety of industrial topics, to even out the knowledge differential that SMEs might have in comparison to larger corporations. Finally, the Centre engages in advocacy activities on behalf of EU SMEs, in coordination with the EU Chamber of Commerce in China’s Working Group on SMEs.

The Centre is expected to assist SMEs to understand the Chinese market, so an expected result is increased awareness by SMEs of services that can be provided in this regard not only by the Centre, but also by other actors in China (e.g. BSOs, TPOs). Through the organisation of training programs, the dissemination of learning materials, and the provision of one-on-one professional advice, SMEs are expected to improve their knowledge over the business landscape in China, and to fully grasp the opportunities available to them and the risks along the way.

Implementation

Additional information

Total amount of the action: EUR 2 700 000

Rate of co-financing: maximum co-financing rate of 90 %

Indicative duration of the project to be funded: 36 months

Indicative implementation timetable: implementation starting date : Q3 2024

Qualitative and quantitative indicators:

- Number of SME enquiries and number of contacts of the EU SME Centre in China for information and advice purposes;
- Number of persons/SMEs trained in-person or remotely through webinars and workshops;
- Number of SMEs satisfied with the services provided (e.g. testimonials, post-service customer evaluations, etc.);
- Number of updated and new publications focusing on specific segments of the Chinese market.

2.10. Agrifood and Retail SMEs – renewable energy communities

Type of applicants targeted by the call for proposals

Local business support organisations, collaborating with local authorities, which will create a Renewable Energy Community integrating local Agri-food and Retail SMEs

Description of the activities to be funded under the call for proposals

This action will support the establishment of Renewable Energy Communities by groups of agrifood and retail SMEs, to reduce their exposure to energy costs. The local EEN organisations will lead the creation of the groups, in close collaboration with local authorities. Technical assistance will be provided and will build on the best practices of the Energy Communities Repository, the Rural Energy Community Advisory Hub and the EU Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy.

Energy communities are one of the key elements for achieving the EU's energy transition: by 2050, half of Europe's citizens could be producing up to half of the EU's renewable energy. Recognising the important role of local actors in the energy transition process the EU's Clean Energy Package since 2019 includes provisions to help local communities take ownership of the energy transition through the concept of energy communities.

The Renewable Energy Directive (EU) 2018/2001 defines in its article 22 Renewable energy communities. Participation must be open and voluntary, with participation and effective control by citizens, local authorities & smaller businesses whose primary economic activity is not the energy sector. Energy communities can take any form of a legal entity, for instance, that of an association, a cooperative, a partnership, a non-profit

organisation or a small/medium-sized enterprise. It makes it easier for its citizens, together with other market players, to team up and jointly invest in energy assets. This, in turn, helps contribute to a more decarbonised and flexible energy system, as the energy communities can act as one entity and access all suitable energy markets, on a level-playing field with other market actors ¹⁹.

The primary purpose of a REC is to provide environmental, economic or social community benefits for its shareholders or members or for the local areas where it operates, rather than financial profits. A REC can engage in activities based on renewable energy sources, including generation, energy efficiency, supply, aggregation, mobility, energy sharing, self-consumption, and district heating & cooling.

Implementation

EISMEA

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution:

As this action focuses on the deployment of renewable energy solutions by SMEs in Agrifood and Retail ecosystems, it will contribute at 100% to climate and biodiversity policy objectives.

Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 2 900 000
- Rate of co-financing: Up to 75 %
- Approximate number of projects to be funded: 3-5
- Indicative duration of the project(s): 24 months
- Indicative implementation timetable: publication quarter Q1-Q2/2024
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
 - number of SMEs in the energy communities;
 - total energy needs of those SMEs, and the proportion which will be covered by the renewable energy obtained via the energy communities.

2.11. Support to SMEs in the textiles ecosystem for digital up/reskilling through the European Digital Innovation Hubs

Type of applicants targeted by direct award

The European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs)²⁰ designated by the Member States under the Network of EDIHs. This is due to the activities with specific characteristics that

¹⁹ [Energy communities \(europa.eu\)](https://energycommunities.europa.eu)

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

require particular type of bodies on account of their technical competence, high degree of specialisation or administrative powers.

Description of the activities to be funded by the grant awarded without a call for proposals on the basis of Article 195(f) of the Financial Regulation, as well as of the objectives pursued and the expected results

The overall objective of the grant is to support training and skills development activities carried out by the EDIHs, targeted at SMEs active in the textiles ecosystem. It will address the needs of the local SMEs with respect to their digital up/reskilling.

More specifically, the grant will fund training and skills development activities that are central to successful digital transformation of the SMEs in the textiles ecosystem (in areas such as Artificial Intelligence or Advanced Digital Skills). Environmental issues are also to be taken into account, in particular with regard to the use of innovative digital technologies for sustainability and circularity. The activities will contribute to the digital up/reskilling of the textile, clothing, leather and footwear (TCLF) workforce in the regions where the EDIHs operate, based on an analysis of SMEs' needs. In this regard, a close cooperation with multi-stakeholder local skills partnership established under the EU Pact for Skills for the textiles ecosystem will be ensured. The activities could include promotion of this action, hosting or providing training, boot-camps, traineeships, coaching and mentorship schemes, as well as supporting the implementation of short-term advanced digital skills training courses in cooperation with education providers.

Implementation

DG GROW

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution - description of how this action contributes to climate and biodiversity mainstreaming in qualitative and quantitative ways

The action will contribute to the implementation of actions and commitments agreed in the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles, the EU Pact for Skills in the textiles ecosystem and the upcoming Transition Pathway for the Textiles Ecosystem co-created with the industry. The European Green Deal and the Circular Economy Action Plan for a cleaner and more competitive Europe, the 2021 update of the EU Industrial Strategy and the recently adopted EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles stress the urgency of accelerating the European clothing and textiles sector towards sustainability and circularity. Digitalisation is important and can help companies in the ecosystem to grow and to implement innovative sustainable production and end-of-life processes and technologies. Skills play a key role due to the need for businesses to acquire new skills needed to master new equipment and techniques, and to drive circular innovation in the sector.

Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 600 000
- Rate of co-financing: maximum co-financing up to 90% of the eligible costs

- Indicative duration of the project to be funded: 24 months
- Indicative implementation timetable: Publication of the call: Q1 2024
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
 - Number of training and skills development activities.
 - Number of SMEs which have used the training and skills development activities, by location and type of support received.
 - Participant satisfaction.

2.12. Promoting trans-European tourism products in third countries

Type of applicants targeted by direct award

An ad hoc grant will be awarded to the the European Travel Commission (ETC) under article 195(f) of the financial regulation. This is due to the activities with specific characteristics that require a particular type of body on account of its technical competence, its high degree of specialisation or its administrative powers.

ETC was set up in 1948 by European countries' National Tourism Offices (NTO). These countries have mandated ETC with promoting Europe as a tourist destination in non-European countries. Its membership now comprises 35 NTOs from 34 member countries in Europe.

Description of the activities to be funded by the grant awarded without a call for proposals on the basis of Article 195 of the Financial Regulation, as well as of the objectives pursued and the expected results

The action will allow the overall continuation of the collaboration with the European Travel Commission to promote Destination Europe in third countries (taking over from the grant GA 326/G/GRO/SME/22/12753).

The overall objective of the 2024 grant is to contribute to:

- i. Keep on reinforcing the image of Europe as a safe and secure tourist destination (e.g. despite the context of the war in Ukraine),
- ii. Keep on supporting the recovery of EU tourism across the EU and notably at regional level,
- iii. maintain the share of EU tourism in the world market and better disperse and diversify (in terms of geography and seasons) travellers flows, while taking into account residents' aspirations.

Its specific objective is to contribute to a large transnational marketing campaign, carried out by ETC in cooperation and with contributions from national/regional tourism promotion bodies, via top-down and bottom-up activities allowing a focus on specific topics/projects allowing to highlight transnational products. The action may be done in

particular in the context of supporting the "Joint Promotion Platform for Destination Europe" (JPP) set up by ETC, with EU support²¹.

This large and visible campaign may combine among others, several traditional media and digital campaigns on the web and social media, broad outreach and public relations through cooperation with media, participation in travel trade exhibitions and familiarisation trips. Onsite activities for promoting Destination Europe may also be considered.

In addition, the action will support the production of market intelligence reports pointing at opportunities for the recovery of the European tourism ecosystem and contributing to training EU actors on how to enter new markets or increase their presence in traditional markets.

Implementation

DG GROW

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution - description of how this action contributes to climate and biodiversity mainstreaming in qualitative and quantitative ways

This action should contribute to further promote a more sustainable tourism/ responsible tourism as well as diversified tourism offers (trying to balance the seasonality, push for slow tourism etc.)

Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 2 000 000
- Rate of co-financing: up to 75%
- Approximate number of projects to be funded: 1
- Indicative duration of the project(s) to be funded: 18 Months
- Indicative implementation timetable: implementation start: Q3/2023
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
 - Number of promotion/marketing events;
 - Potential number of travellers targeted by the activities;
 - Number of web pages referencing promotion/marketing materials / Number of portal hits;
 - Media coverage;
 - Increased number of travellers from targeted long-haul markets;
 - Increased awareness of Europe as a unique, safe and secure destination in

²¹ The JPP is designed as a 'marketplace' to develop cooperative marketing programmes initiated at a European level to be jointly funded by public authorities, destinations and private partners

targeted long-haul markets;

- Increased awareness about and visibility of lesser known/emerging destinations and cross-border and transnational thematic tourism offers.

2.13. Partnerships for circular value chains between mainstream businesses and SMEs in social economy

Type of applicants targeted by the call for proposals

Applicants must be legal persons forming a consortium. The following is a list of non-exhaustive types of legal persons that may apply:

- SMEs and economic actors, notably active in the field of social economy;
- Business support organisations and entities with experience in supporting SMEs and start-ups (e.g. clusters, accelerators, incubators, chambers of commerce);
- Training and research centres with experience on social economy;
- Support organisations active at EU and national level such as sectorial member federations and associations or networks representing social economy entities;
- Public authorities at national, regional and local level, or organisations acting on behalf of a public authority, responsible for or active in the fields of social economy, economic affairs, industry, business support or related fields.

Description of the activities to be funded under the call for proposals

In the context of the industrial ecosystem-based approach, the updated Industrial Strategy²² of May 2021 calls for the co-creation of a transition pathway to understand the needs and required actions in each ecosystem in order to deliver on the green and digital transition while reinforcing resilience of the EU. In November 2022, the transition pathway for proximity and social economy ecosystem was launched²³. The 14 action areas (7 for green and 7 for digital) outlined in the transition pathway resulted from a co-creation process with stakeholders launched in December 2021, on the occasion of the adoption of the Social Economy Action Plan²⁴, which sets out the EU vision on social economy for 2030.

This call for proposals aims to deliver on the circular objectives of the Social Economy Action Plan²⁵ and the transition pathway for the proximity and social economy ecosystem²⁶ by allowing the aconsortia established at EU level to:

²² [Updating the 2020 Industrial Strategy \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/e3000420/1/162222main_en.pdf)

²³ [Proximity and social economy transition pathway \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/e3000420/1/162222main_en.pdf)

²⁴ [Social Economy Action Plan - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/e3000420/1/162222main_en.pdf)

²⁵ On the need to “Issue guidance on how to support uptake and partnerships for circular economy between social enterprises and other actors, including mainstream businesses, and raise awareness of social economy in the context of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, Enterprise Europe Network and other networks.

²⁶ Precisely on the two actions under action area 1 “Reinforcing Business to Business collaboration for greener and circular value chains“ (p. 18-19).

- develop sector specific guidance in the form of a toolkit on how to initiate circular economy value chains and strengthen partnerships between social economy entities, mainstream businesses, business support organisations and other relevant actors in specific ecosystems;
- conduct sectoral research identifying potential for business cooperation at product, service or value chain level;
- offer matchmaking services for social economy SMEs in the circular economy fostering enhanced B2B cooperation on circularity (local, regional and transnational);
- support product and service research in social enterprises active in the circular economy;
- design solutions to address potential barriers, opportunities and good practices for multi-stakeholder partnerships in view of establishing and developing buy social markets, circular hubs;
- organisation of networking, match-making and capacity building, events in the framework of relevant EU networks (e.g. the Enterprise Europe Network, and the European circular economy stakeholder platform) to ensure cross-fertilisation and support social economy SMEs to meet potential partners;
- support for the creation of local circularity hubs or clusters promoting circular conduct/practices/practices, and research and innovation in social economy;
- support the uptake of technologies accelerating circularity at all stages of products life cycle.

Projects supported would ensure the sharing and replication of good practices across borders, and sectors when relevant.

Implementation

EISMEA

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution

By strengthening circular economy value chains, developing new circular partnerships and enabling innovation for circular products and services in the proximity and social economy ecosystem, this action will contribute to the transition to a decarbonised economy which generates less waste. This, following the waste hierarchy which calls for waste prevention, re-use and re-cycling of materials, in order of priorities. This action will therefore also contribute to the climate neutrality and biodiversity protection objectives of the EU.

Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 2 000 000
- Rate of co-financing: up to 90%
- Indicative duration of the project(s) to be funded: 24 months
- Approximate number of projects: 2-5
- Indicative implementation timetable:
Launch of the call: Q3 2024

Signature of the agreements: Q1 2025

- *Qualitative and quantitative indicators:*
 - Number of SMEs supported;
 - Geographical coverage of SMEs supported;
 - Diversity of stakeholders involved in the project;
 - Diversity of partners working in different ecosystems/sectors of activity.

2.14. Stepping up organisational and entrepreneurial capacity of SMEs in social economy

Type of applicants targeted by the call for proposals

Applicants must be legal persons forming a consortium. The following is a list of non-exhaustive types of legal persons that may apply:

Business support organisations and entities with experience in supporting SMEs and start-ups in the social economy (e.g. clusters, accelerators, incubators, start-up support, business schools);

Support organisations active at EU level such as sectorial member federations and associations or networks representing social economy²⁷;

Training, research and innovation centres with experience in social economy;

Public authorities at national, regional and local level, or organisations acting on behalf of a public authority, responsible for or active in the fields of social economy, economic affairs, industry, business support or related fields.

Description of the activities to be funded under the call for proposals as well as the objectives pursued and the expected results

In the context of the industrial ecosystem-based approach, the updated Industrial Strategy²⁸ of May 2021 calls for the co-creation of transition pathways to understand the needs and required actions in each ecosystem in order to deliver on the green and digital transition while reinforcing resilience of the EU. In November 2022, the transition pathway for the proximity and social economy ecosystem was launched²⁹. The 14 action areas (7 for green and 7 for digital) outlined in the transition pathway resulted from a co-creation process with stakeholders launched in December 2021, on the occasion of the adoption of the European Action Plan for the social economy³⁰, which sets out the EU vision on social economy for 2030.

This call for proposals aims to deliver on several elements of the transition pathway and the action plan linked to the need to improve the professionalisation and organisational

²⁷ [Social Economy Action Plan - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#). See [Staff Working Document and definitions of organisations](#).

²⁸ [Updating the 2020 Industrial Strategy \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁹ [Proximity and social economy transition pathway \(europa.eu\)](#)

³⁰ [Social Economy Action Plan - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

capacity of SMEs in the social economy as well as social economy ‘enabling organisations’³¹ across several areas:

- organisational and management capacity
- (place-based) innovation capacity
- sectoral research and development of market knowledge
- creation or strengthening (local) value chains
- product and service development
- assessment of social economy business model potential in (local) markets
- start-up and incubation for social entrepreneurs
- strengthening skills (e.g. management, employees, volunteers, target groups)
- networking and linking to mainstream sector organisations

Capacity building schemes should be developed addressing those areas and offering dedicated support, networking and matchmaking opportunities to SMEs in the proximity and social economy ecosystem. Secondly, such schemes should also empower local, regional and national social economy federations and business support organisation to offer the right support to their (sectoral) members and peers.

Activities should support SMEs in the social economy as well as social economy ‘enabling organisations’ in the following areas, including:

- Advisory support
- Training and development
- Networking, matchmaking & facilitation
- Research and innovation support
- Product and service development and ‘go to market’ services
- Mapping of SMEs’ organisational and management capacity, professionalisation and innovation capacity (e.g. green and digital) – allowing capacity building to be tailored to these needs.

Support services, capacity building actions and trainings developed through this call need to undergo a piloting phase allowing adaptation before further scaling.

Where appropriate, projects should make most use of outcomes³² developed in previous EU projects and initiatives to further scale and make accessible to SMEs in the social economy. Where relevant, projects need to align with the objectives of the EU Year on Skills 2023 as well as the Sustainability Competency Framework and the Entrepreneurship Competency Framework (GreenComp and EntreComp).

Projects should have a clear transnational effect and should develop support services with a transferable character. Therefore, projects should address the needs of target groups (SMEs in the social economy as well as social economy ‘enabling organisations’) with different degrees of maturity, allowing learning effects within the consortia.

³¹ Business support organisations, clusters, membership and representative organisations, associations, federations, incubators, accelerators etc.

³² For example pilots focussing on capacity building within the social economy under ERASMUS+, Single Market Programme, ESF+, EaSI, etc.

Implementation

EISMEA

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution - description of how this action contributes to climate and biodiversity mainstreaming in qualitative and quantitative ways

Unlocking the untapped potential of social economy and entrepreneurship and reinforcing capacity can help drive change and innovation towards a climate-neutral and environment-friendly economy.

Additional information

Total amount of the action: EUR 6 000 000

Rate of co-financing: up to 90 %

Approximate number of projects: 5-6

Indicative duration of the projects to be funded: 36 months

Indicative implementation timetable: Launch of the call for proposals: Q3/2024, Signature: Q1-Q2/2025

- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
 - Number of SMEs supported
 - Number of social economy 'enabling organisations' supported, including the support services offered to their members
 - Geographical coverage of SMEs supported
 - Diversity of stakeholders involved in the project
 - Diversity of partners working in different ecosystems/sectors of activity.

3. PROCUREMENT

The global budgetary envelope reserved for procurement contracts in 2024 is EUR 18 696 771.

3.1. SME Policy - SME Performance Review

General description of the contracts envisaged

The purpose of the action is to provide key data related to SMEs and priority policy issues related to the EU SME strategy, including industrial ecosystems, and to support the preparation of the SME Performance Review reports.

This action will consist of 2 elements:

- a Eurobarometer on “SMEs, resource efficiency and green markets” (proposed budget: EUR 550 000):
- a study (procured via a DG GROW Framework contract) on “Harnessing new digital technologies to reduce red tape”. This study will support, among other things the policy discussion with the EU SME envoy network of high-level policy makers from Member States (proposed budget: EUR 330 000).

The final topic of this study may be revised depending on the outcome of a consultation with the SME Envoys network.

There is also a separate project in this work programme (section 5) for the biannual administrative agreement with the JRC (EUR 700 000) that provides the mainstay of DG GROW’s SME data-gathering (to deliver a database with more than 100 indicators and related analysis to allow the monitoring of SME policy at MS and EU levels as per the SME strategy)³³.

Implementation

DG GROW

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution – description of how this action contributes to climate and biodiversity mainstreaming in qualitative and quantitative ways

The Eurobarometer on SMEs, resource efficiency and green markets will provide valuable statistics and analysis that will be used to support our SME policy development work (contribution to new SME policy documents, contribution to measures proposed by other Commission services, and support for design of new funding measures under the SME pillar of the single market programme).

³³ The agreement covers the SPR country fact sheets that were previously implemented via a contract managed by EISMEA (GRO/SME/20/C/011). This contract amounted to 970 000 EUR and ended in April 2022.

Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 880 000
- Indicative implementation timetable (launch of the call): Q3 2024
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
 - Report(s) completed according to the specifications and database(s) provided with the results.

3.2. SME POLICY - Outreach (SME Assembly/SME Envoys, IT tools)

General description of the contracts envisaged

The aim of the action is to assist the Commission (technical assistance) when implementing and monitoring SME Policy at European and national level with the support of contractors.

Different activities will be performed: The organisation of the meetings of the SME Envoys network/Sherpa meetings, the SME Assembly including European Enterprise Promotion Awards (EEPA)/SME week coordinators and expert meetings (Late payment directive and SPR experts included) and any other relevant outreach events/meetings, insofar as these expenses are not covered by the administrative budget.

These meetings and other activities have the following goals:

- to contribute to evaluating and reporting on the uptake of the SBA (Small Business Act, June 2008), the SME strategy (March 2021) and the SME relief package (September 2023);
- to step up efforts to disseminate widely information on SME-policy actions and to promote the exchange of good practices;
- to further develop the SME Performance Review, in order to monitor and assess Member States' performance in implementing SME policy on the basis of a wide range of success indicators.

The maintenance and development of the related IT tools (in particular the SME good practices database to showcase good practices and success stories from EEPA, and other SME Pillar projects (notably EEN), the SME definition tool, and the SME Week tool are all managed by the DG GROW Unit responsible for digital solutions (B3)

The SME good practices database will be modified to enable it to act as the central depository for good practices as well as success stories covering all aspects and internal actors in SME policy (i.e. GROW units for access to finance (C1), Industrial forum, alliances and clusters (D2), and Inter-institutional relations / outreach (D4) and EISMEA [tbc]). This will centralise scattered data collections and render them publicly available to allow citizens and stakeholders to access them. In 2024, it will also be checked whether a merger with the SME Week tool is desirable and technically feasible; this would reduce hosting and maintenance costs. The **Best Practices Database** can be accessed [here](#).

In view of restricted budgets, the above-mentioned simplification project might have to be extended over two years.

The SME Definition tool is a widely used support tool for SMEs. The tool allows

self-assessment to determine whether a company qualifies as a small and medium-sized enterprise. It can be easily found on the DG GROW website by a google search and no registration is needed to use the tool. The intention is to provide the tool in all official EU languages after 2024. This would help in particular smaller SMEs to make better use of it. Link: [SME Definition tool](#)

The SME Week tool allows business organisations, support providers, regional and local authorities and other organisations supporting small businesses throughout Europe to register national, regional and local events organising in the SMP/SME pillar participating countries within the framework of the European SME Week. The Commission provides event organisers with the branding and promotes their events. In 2023 the tool was modernised and technically adapted to the new IT environment chosen by DIGIT.

Link: Information about the SME Week can be found [here](#). The entry form for events is available via this [page](#).

Implementation

DG GROW

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution

The meetings and activities support our work on all types of SME policy measures relevant to SMEs, including measures related to climate.

Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 775 000
- EUR 700 000 for the SME Envoys, European SME week, SME assembly etc
- EUR 75 000 for the IT tools
- Indicative implementation timetable (depending on the action): Q1-Q3/2024
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
 - Timely dissemination of the results
 - Quality and timeliness of the deliverables from the contractor for preparing and supporting meetings
 - Development of the best practice database to allow the integration of success stories and best practices from other sources to create a single depository at the earliest convenience but no later than April 2024
 - Development of the application under the replacement of ColdFusion
 - Updating of the online SME definition tool within the first three months of the year.

3.3. Enterprise Europe Network – animation tasks

General description of the contracts envisaged

This action provides the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) partners with the necessary tools and support to implement their work programmes. This includes IT hosting, maintenance, development of the IT tools and databases, the intranet and community building tools. It also includes budget needed for communication activities, training and governance, organisation of working groups, steering groups, events etc.

Part of this budget will be used to organise the EEN Annual Conference.

Implementation

EISMEA

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution – description of how this action contributes to climate and biodiversity mainstreaming in qualitative and quantitative ways

Not applicable

Additional information

The specific objectives of the Network animation tasks include:

- Governing the EEN, in particular by organising the annual conference, Steering Groups, Working Group meetings or Network stakeholder meetings;
- IT tools and databases, in particular by operating, maintaining, improving and developing new IT tools and databases, ensuring data quality, and maintaining an IT helpdesk;
- Helping the Network to provide its services in an efficient and effective manner and at the highest quality possible;
- Enabling Network partners to provide their services to European SMEs based on the "no wrong door principle" through the Client Journey;
- Network communication, information and support, implementation of the communication plan, prepare and make promotional material and infrastructure available, increase the Network visibility and facilitate networking;
- Dissemination of information on Commission priorities and actions relevant for SMEs throughout the Network;
- Training and capacity building: implementation of the training plan with special attention for new priority areas (training, capacity building and possibly creating assessment tools to help EEN members provide sustainability, digitalisation and innovation services);
- Services to the Network, in particular managing knowledge contents, the forums system, valorising good practices and running thematic and sector groups;
- Assistance to and mentoring of Network partners where quality of activities and services needs to be raised;
- Report on Network achievements and performance indicators on a regular basis, as

defined in the monitoring and reporting guidelines, using an automated (IT developed) reporting system to avoid administrative burden where possible.

The budget for Network animation may also include the budget needed to facilitate the integration of EEN members in Third Countries (travel and subsistence costs for training, working groups, steering groups, annual conference, thematic or sector groups).

Each year, the Commission and the rotating Presidency of the European Union organise a conference with 800 participants to link together EU Institutions with SME support organisations on the ground and to allow EEN members to network and exchange knowledge, know-how and useful contacts. For the year 2024, the aim is to organise a hybrid Annual Conference for the Network with strong presence onsite (up to 800 people) and the possibility to connect the rest of the Network members virtually through a dedicated conferencing platform. The required budget is needed for all practical aspects of the conference (logistics of physical and virtual meetings, opening session, parallel workshops, closing session, networking dinner, catering for the event, etc.).

Budget: EUR 3 150 000

The action is implemented using a variety of direct contracts or specific contracts using framework contracts. The exact budget distribution between the different actions will be known at a later stage.

The direct contracts and specific contracts using framework contracts (such as IT, communication, rooms, catering) will be concluded between Q1-Q4 2024.

Qualitative and quantitative indicators for the action

For the animation contracts:

- Number of Network staff trained (centralised, decentralised and e-learning);
- Number of Network staff having participated in staff exchanges and mentoring activities;
- Number of visits to the public website of the Network and social media followers;
- Efficient management of the Network intranet, IT tools and databases.

For the annual conference:

- Number of participants onsite and online;
- Number of sessions and workshops organised;
- Satisfaction rate of virtual and physical participants.

3.4. EU Capitals of Smart Tourism

General description of the contracts envisaged

In 2018 the European Commission started to implement the ‘**European Capitals of Smart Tourism**’³⁴ initiative, proposed as a preparatory action by the European Parliament. The European Capital of Smart Tourism recognises outstanding achievements in smart tourism in European cities. Smart tourism responds to new challenges and demands in a fast-changing sector, including the evolution of digital tools, products and services; equal opportunity and access for all visitors; sustainable development of the local area; and support to creative industries, local talent and heritage. In the three EU-wide editions of the competition organised so far (European Capital of Smart Tourism 2019, 2020, 2022 – with no edition organised in 2021 due to the pandemic) the cities competing for the title showcased innovating measures they implemented as tourism destinations for: 1) accessibility, 2) sustainability, 3) digitalisation, 4) cultural heritage and creativity. The general aim of this initiative is to promote smart tourism in the EU, to network and strengthen destinations, and to facilitate the exchange of best practices.

The main challenge identified in discussions with destinations is the adoption and sharing of smart and sustainable tourism practices integrated in destinations/cities development policies. Often the role of Destination Management Organisations is limited to the promotion and marketing of a destination with a limited role in shaping a holistic strategy for sustainable and smart development of tourism in the long term.

To support European destinations in smart and sustainable development of tourism, the Commission is fostering the exchange of best practices that are an inspiration for others. The aspects which require destinations’ attention from the tourism management perspective are widely considered: sustainability, accessibility, digitalisation, preservation and valorisation of the cultural heritage and creativity.

The overarching objective of the initiative is to support European destinations by awarding their transformation to smart and sustainable tourism destinations.

- **The European Capital of Smart Tourism** is addressed to bigger tourism destinations, namely cities of more than 100 000 inhabitants having sufficient capacity to showcase innovative smart tourism practices, play a role model and lead a network of cities on smart tourism for a year.
- **A component of the European Capital of Smart Tourism** (formerly the European Destination of Excellence, or EDEN, hereby referred to as Small European Capital of Smart Tourism) is addressed to smaller tourism destinations, namely destinations with a population of 25 000 – 100 000 inhabitants which can showcase their outstanding achievements in sustainability and inspire other tourism destinations in their green transition.

Both components need to be carried out simultaneously.

Implementation

DG GROW

³⁴ www.smarttourismcapital.eu.

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution – description of how this action contributes to climate and biodiversity mainstreaming in qualitative and quantitative ways

One of the 4 criteria against which the winner of the competition is selected, both by independent experts and by a European Jury, is sustainability, ie. innovative and long-term strategies to make tourism offer and structure greener, with a lasting impact not only on visitors, but also on residents. This is also the one and only criterion to select the Small Capital of Smart Tourism.

To assess applications, the contractor identifies a number of independent experts in sustainable tourism, who combine business-oriented, academic, and non-governmental approaches.

Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 2 000 000
- Indicative implementation timetable (launch of the call): Q2 2024, for contract signature in Q4 2024
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
 - Promotional videos, 1 video per winner, 100 views per video on Vimeo & 2K views per video on Facebook; 500-1000 views on youtube EU Growth channel: [The European Capital of Smart Tourism - YouTube](#)
 - Press trips, 1 per year per winner, 7-15 journalists from the international press; Contacts of resulting media coverage of the press trip: 1 clipping per journalist
 - Events, Number of events organised: 10 events per cycle, Number of participants: 20-100 depending on the event; Media coverage: 40 per month, Number of best practices shared: Approximately 40-50 per cycle, Number of destinations engaging in networking and cooperation activities: 7-10 destinations per activity
 - Social media campaigns (Facebook account for Capitals) FB Posts average reach 600/ day, 2 posts (FB & Twitter) for Capitals / week.

3.5. Boosting Competitiveness and Innovation Capacity of SMEs through creative partnerships and the use of new technologies - WORTH partnership project

General description of the contracts envisaged

The WORTH Partnership Project is a flagship action of the SME pillar for creative industries. Following the success and concrete outcomes of the two previous editions (WORTH I 2017-2021, that supported 152 partnerships and WORTH II 2021–2025 that supported 200 partnerships) the new service contract will ensure the continuation of the action through the implementation of the WORTH III edition (tentative duration: 2025-2029).

The Worth Partnership Project is the Europe-wide incubation/acceleration programme

providing direct support to creative SMEs to test and develop new business ideas based on already available tech or green business solutions. It supports transnational business partnerships between SMEs (e.g. manufacturers, artisans, tech-providers) on the one hand and designers and other creative professionals on the other. Building on the successful implementation of WORTH I and II, during the incubation/acceleration process, the business partnerships will develop new design/creativity-driven products, processes or services with high value-added to start a new business pathway or improve their competitive position. In particular, the incubation/acceleration programme will help the business partnerships to: i) define and develop their business idea; ii) define their market positioning; iii) showcase their prototypes or proof of concept during relevant trade shows; iv) define their Intellectual Property Rights strategy; v) define their strategy to find investors. The support to business partnerships will be provided through tailor-made mentoring programmes (coaching and strategic advice tailored to meet the specific needs of each partnership) and through general training courses (e.g. marketing, business planning, IPR protection, pitching, etc.).

Importantly, this action contributes to implementing objectives of the SME pillar of the Single Market Programme and, in particular objective (i) Growth, scale-up and creation of SMEs.

More specifically, the WORTH Partnership Project III will promote:

- The integration of creativity, design and new technologies (including ICT and advanced technologies) in SMEs, leading to innovative, high-added value (and generally more profitable) products, processes and services
- Cooperation across the EUEU, cross-fertilisation and knowledge sharing between SMEs and designers and other creative professionals
- The uptake of green and digital solutions in SMEs operating in creative industries and beyond

The service contract will cover the management and implementation of the WORTH Partnership project III including IT and communication activities.

The project will be implemented via a trans-national platform (operating off- and on-line), which will facilitate the process of:

- Selecting the participants/beneficiaries of the action via open calls for expression of interest,
- Organising and validating business partnerships,
- Ensuring tailor-made support for the business partnerships, including the implementation of the mentoring programme
- Ensuring communication and publicity of the action,

During the implementation of WORTH Partnership project III, events will be organised to raise awareness and promote knowledge sharing on creative entrepreneurship.

Final beneficiaries are: SMEs, designers and/or other creative professionals, technology experts or companies.

Partnerships may receive financial support in the form of a lump sum. The partnerships will be selected via open calls for expression of interest whose scope will be defined according to policy priorities (e.g specific sectors of the Cultural and creative industries

ecosystem, lifestyle industries or other design-intensive industries etc).

The expected result is to support around 200 new transnational partnerships during WORTH III which will be then added to previous partnerships supported, thereby broadening the WORTH community (to around 550 partnerships). They will also be added to the inspiring online gallery showcasing their design-driven products and business ideas³⁵.

Implementation

EISMEA

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution – description of how this action contributes to climate and biodiversity mainstreaming in qualitative and quantitative ways

The Worth partnership project III contributes to promoting sustainable and circular business solutions in design-driven, lifestyle and cultural and creative industries. It contributes to reducing the impact of these industries on climate change and preserving biodiversity, for example, through the use of recycled materials or waste for new designed products. In particular, the business partnerships supported by the action will address specific challenges such as promoting circular economy, finding high added-value solutions, using sustainable/high-performance materials, re-inventing craftsmanship, promoting social inclusion etc.

Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 4 500 000
- Indicative implementation timetable (launch of the call): Q4 2024
The duration of the service contract will be approximately 48 months (2025-2029)
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
 - Number of partnerships created/ supported;
 - Number of new products, services or other solutions presented at relevant fairs and exhibitions;
 - Number of SMEs having benefited from the project;
 - Number of participants in the annual events;
 - Increased visibility for SMEs, designers and creative professionals and their innovative design-driven products and business ideas;
 - Increased competitiveness, innovative capacity and market exposure of SMEs participating in the project.

³⁵ [WORTH II Partnership Projects \(europea.eu\)](https://europea.eu)

3.6. Fit for Future: Engaging SMEs and Stakeholders on policy design and implementation/strengthening of the Better Regulation Agenda

General description of the contracts envisaged

The Commission's policy on better regulation guides the overall burden reduction and simplification efforts under the regulatory fitness and performance ('REFIT') programme. To support the REFIT programme, a REFIT Platform was established in 2015 to support the Commission in those efforts to improve legislation, and remained in operation until the end of 2019.

Tasked by President Von der Leyen to continue the work of the Platform, Vice-President Šefčovič chairs a new high-level group, called the Fit for Future Platform that took over from the REFIT platform. The Fit for Future Platform advises the Commission on how to simplify and reduce burden stemming from existing EU legislation and make the EU legislation fit for future. This platform brings benefits for SMEs in particular by presenting suggestions to reduce red tape, simplify the legislative landscape and enable businesses to make the most of digitalisation. Moreover, the burden reduction dimension of the Better regulation work is beneficial especially for SMEs that are particularly affected by regulatory burdens, including administrative ones.

The role of the SME Envoy Network is to promote the interests of small and medium-sized enterprises in this context by contributing to its annual work programme. This action supports the work of the Platform to provide recommendations to the Commission on how to simplify and modernise legislation. It promotes engagement of stakeholders, particularly SMEs to consultations on have your Say and Have your say simplify.

The type of contracts to be awarded under this action include studies to support the platform's work and other work for burden reduction, technical assistance, IT development, communication services and contracts for event organisation.

Implementation

Secretariat-General (SG)

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution – description of how this action contributes to climate and biodiversity mainstreaming in qualitative and quantitative ways³⁶

The current Commission's climate and biodiversity objectives are very much present in the legislative proposals published on the Have your say portal as well as among the topics in the Fit for Future workplan and generally in better regulation. Stakeholders interested in these dimensions engage in discussion and contribute to the shaping of new legislation.

Additional information

This action falls within the scope of Headline Ambition 3 'an economy that works for people', as well as Headline Ambitions 1 'A European Green Deal' and 2, 'A Europe fit

for Digital Age'. It concerns:

- Carrying out activities of the Fit for Future Platform platform (“Have Your Say: Simplify” platform) including the organisation of technical and Plenary meetings, IT system support, studies on better regulation, etc.. Communication under this action includes informing citizens and stakeholders about key developments and Commission achievements on the Better Regulation Agenda, including the Annual Burden Survey Report, the Regulatory Scrutiny Board Report and results of major events such as Fit for Future Platform meetings or conferences and reports on the Commission’s performance on Better Regulation.
- Communicating on its results and promoting online public consultations and other feedback opportunities via the “Have Your Say” portal on new Commission policy and legal initiatives as well as reviews and evaluations of existing policies and laws. By promoting online public consultations and other feedback opportunities among citizens and stakeholders, the action further contributes to Headline Ambition 6 ‘a new push for democracy’ and corresponds to the outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe, and its call to enhance citizens’ information and participation.

- **Expected results and potential impact of this action on SMEs:**

- Contribution to the simplification of regulatory framework and improvement of regulatory tools for the benefits of SME;
- A further improvement in participation of stakeholders (i.e. mainly citizens and SMEs/business corporate) in consultations via Have your Say and Have our say simplify (namely further increasing the number of unique visitors per year and the overall number of received contributions, as well as the number of unique visitors and contributions from under-represented Member States).

- Total amount of the action: **EUR 807 000**

Indicative budget allocated to each action:

Action	Amount (EUR)
- Fit for Future Platform	150 000
- Support action for platform	110 000
- IT and Digital working tools	247 000
- Fit for Future communication	300 000

- Indicative implementation timetable (launch of the call):

Use of existing Framework contracts starting from Q1 to Q4

- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:

Fit for Future Platform:

- Timely set up of the Platform including its rules of procedure
- Timely delivery of the annual work programme
- Number of plenary sessions, subgroup and preparatory meetings
- Number of opinions adopted

- Number of events

IT and Digital working tools:

- Timely development of the tools
- Annual Burden Survey
- REFIT Scoreboard
- Number of visits for websites
- Satisfaction survey on the possibilities to contribute to better law making
- Development and maintenance of websites
- Effective use and dissemination of tools

Communication:

- Timely dissemination of communication materials
- Effective dissemination and impact on target public
- Organisation of targeted events, including conferences

3.7. Supporting actions

General description of the contracts envisaged

These actions include:

- Sectoral studies and reports, analytical work, studies analysing cross-sectoral issues and policy areas affecting European competitiveness. Impact assessments and ex-post evaluations will assess policy actions.
- Conferences, workshops and expert meetings that will be organised with participation of various stakeholders (national authorities, consumer organisations, SME representatives, non-governmental organisations, etc.) to discuss challenges for access to the single market, resilience, green and digital transformation of SMEs. This also includes dedicated training to boost the administrative capacity of SOLVIT centres to handle business cases. Particular attention will be devoted to recommendations on how to better address SMEs' needs, how to support socially inclusive business models, how to support re-/upskilling of the workforce and how to further foster European competitiveness. Information actions will be carried out. This includes access to finance communication activities.
- The promotion, technical support and hosting of integrated and user-friendly online systems that provide information on programmes and measures relevant for SMEs whilst ensuring that they do not duplicate existing portals, including support for the Single Digital Gateway.

Implementation

DG GROW, DG DIGIT, EISMEA

Additional information

The studies covering the policy priorities outlined in the Single Market Strategy should lead to an enhanced understanding of European entrepreneurship and competitiveness, and

should enable the Commission to identify the main trends.

Furthermore, studies will combine analytical work of a high academic standard with a policy outlook for the medium term. They will provide the analytical basis for the debate on economic reforms. Other studies will analyse cross-sectoral issues and policy areas affecting European competitiveness.

Impact assessments will focus on the analysis of possible reviews of existing legislation and impacts they might have on competitiveness and, in particular, on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Recommendations for possible new legislative proposals will also be assessed, taking into account their economic and societal added value.

Ex-post evaluations will assess Union policy actions, in particular their overall economic impact, efficiency and effectiveness as well as their impact on reducing obstacles in the market.

Conferences, workshops and expert meetings will be organised with participation of various stakeholders (national authorities, consumer organisations, SME representatives, non-governmental organisations, etc.) to discuss challenges for access to the single market.

Technical support and IT hosting will also be included.

Budget: EUR 6 584 771

4. ACTIONS IMPLEMENTED IN INDIRECT MANAGEMENT

4.1. European Union Chemicals Legislation Finder (EUCLEF)

Implementing entity

The action is implemented by the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) via a Contribution Agreement.

Description

ECHA develops and maintains the EUCLEF database according to the Contribution Agreement concluded with the Commission, represented by DG GROW. Every year, a transfer of funds agreement needs to be signed for the EUCLEF tasks that ECHA needs to complete within 18 months from the transfer of funds (Article 2 of the Contribution Agreement).

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution – description of how this action contributes to climate and biodiversity mainstreaming in qualitative and quantitative ways

Chemicals play a role in almost every renewable energy technology or technology needed for decarbonisation (batteries,...). However, as some of those chemicals are hazardous, the challenge will be to manage their risk effectively and efficiently and/or to substitute them in that technology. Cost-free access to information on chemicals legislation could considerably support this process, and have direct impacts on climate change mitigation and restoration of biodiversity.

Additional information

- Total amount³⁷ of the action: EUR 1 053 400
- One procurement action: (data service provider)
- Indicative implementation timetable (launch of the call):
 - Signature of the Transfer of funds agreement: Q4 2024.
 - The full requested sum (EUR 1 053 400) is provided as pre-financing.
 - The tasks need to be completed within 18 months from the transfer of funds.
 - A final financial report is expected early in 2027 and may lead to the recovery of any unspent part of the 2024 allocation.
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
 - Maintenance and improvement of EUCLEF; potential integration of elements

³⁷ This work programme confirms the availability of funding for EUCLEF from 2024 SME Pillar budget, but does not make any commitment about the possibility to provide SME Pillar funding for this action in future years.

covering on-going policy developments (e.g. originating from the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability).

- Availability of information clearly going beyond currently available cost-free tools.
- Clarity and user-friendliness of the EUCLEF interface and information provided.
- Number of hits on the website.

4.2. European Union Observatory for Nanomaterials (EUON)

Implementing entity

The action is implemented by ECHA via a Contribution agreement with the EC.

Description

ECHA operates the EUON based on a Contribution Agreement concluded with the Commission, represented by DG GROW. Every year, a transfer of funds agreement needs to be signed for the EUON tasks that ECHA needs to complete within 18 months from the transfer of funds (Article 2 of the Contribution Agreement).

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution – description of how this action contributes to climate and biodiversity mainstreaming in qualitative and quantitative ways

Nanotechnology is one of the recognised Key Enabling Technologies (KETs) indicated in the 2020 New Industrial Strategy for Europe (COM(2020)102). Nanotechnology applications will be increasingly essential for the competitiveness of a wide range of EU products in the global market, including those that are needed to fight climate change and loss of biodiversity. In particular, there is large scientific and societal consensus that nanomaterials and nanotechnology play a role in almost every renewable energy technology (e.g. solar, wind, hydrogen).

Additional information

- The European Union Observatory on Nanomaterials provides SMEs, but also other businesses, workers and consumers with relevant information concerning nanomaterials on the EU market, by collecting data from both existing sources and new market studies.
- Nanotechnology is one of the recognised Key Enabling Technologies (KETs) indicated in the 2020 New Industrial Strategy for Europe (COM(2020)102). Nanotechnology applications will be increasingly essential for the competitiveness of a wide range of EU products in the global market, including those that are needed to improve sustainability, fight climate change, enhance and upgrade the hardware that is at the core of our digital infrastructure, and diversify our portfolio of solutions to systemic (lack of critical raw materials, pandemic...) or isolated challenges so as to increase our economy's resilience. Therefore, it is important to improve the quality and transparency of the information on nanomaterials, that is a prerequisite for ensuring confidence in the application of nanotechnology among users, consumers

and the general public. This is a crucial element in order to create an environment favourable to a sustainable development of the nanotechnology field. In turn, the growing use of nanotechnology can unlock potential innovations, thereby contributing to the competitiveness of EU businesses across sectors and ecosystems.

- Publicly available information on nanomaterials on the market can help SMEs and other businesses identify market trends across Europe. This will enhance market access for companies, in particular SMEs, who do not have the capacity to search for and gather and select the most reliable information from the wealth of information that is available about nanomaterials and nanotechnology.
- In addition, the European Union Observatory on Nanomaterials constitutes an industry-friendly alternative (particularly for SMEs) compared to other legislative measures to increase transparency, which could introduce burdensome reporting obligations to industry.
- This action will also put in place synergies with the Consumers Pillar of the SMP (information-sharing and addressing common needs for studies).
- Total amount³⁸ of the action: EUR 619 000
- Indicative implementation timetable (launch of the call);
 - Signature of the Transfer of funds agreement: Q4 2024.
 - The full requested sum (EUR 619 000) will be provided as pre-financing.
 - Tasks need to be completed within 18 months from the transfer of funds. (Payments within 24 months.)
 - A final financial report is expected early in 2027 and may lead to the recovery of any unspent part of the 2024 allocation.
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators³⁹:
 - Maintenance and improvement of the European Union Observatory on Nanomaterials judged on the basis of the annual EUON reports.
 - Publication of information clearly going beyond currently available tools.
 - Clarity and user-friendliness of websites and information for SMEs, workers and consumers.
 - Number of hits on the website.

4.3. SME Fund – Intellectual property voucher for post-COVID-19 recovery and green and digital transition

Implementing entity

The action is implemented by the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) via a contribution agreement and a transfer of funds agreement.

³⁸ This work programme confirms the availability of funding for EUON from 2024 SME Pillar budget, but does not make any commitment about the possibility to provide SME Pillar funding for this action in future years.

³⁹ An indicator on the synergy with the consumers pillar may be added once activities are finalised.

Description

The action aims at improving the capacity of EU-based SMEs to leverage intellectual property as part of their business growth plans, in order to promote innovation in the EU and ensure economic recovery. The action will do this by providing financial relief to SMEs on IP-related costs. The financial relief will ensure that SMEs do not have to renounce managing and protecting their intangible assets when faced with the need to cut costs due to the economic crisis.

EU SMEs are the backbone of innovation. If they are forced to cut costs for managing intangible assets this risks weakening their competitive position. Such forced, but justified, short-term decision-making of SMEs would have a negative medium-term impact on their economic recovery from issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian military aggression in Ukraine.

The action will help SMEs to continue deploying their IP strategies in order to maintain and reinforce their competitiveness by providing them with financial support towards costs related to protection of IP.

The action is a multi-annual action, which started in 2022 and will last until the end of 2024. This is the second generation of the action, because its first generation was implemented in 2021.

The action will target EU-based SMEs primarily, but if the EU and the EUIPO agree in the course of the action, the scope may also be extended to Ukrainian SMEs and/or SMEs from other Associated Countries.

Additional information

During the first generation of the SME Fund, 28,065 services were provided to the benefit of 12 989 SMEs from all 27 Member States. The results of the SME Fund up to now reinforce the case for continued provision in 2024 of SMP SME pillar resources to tackle key challenges that EU SMEs are facing for managing their intellectual property portfolio. This will also reinforce their innovation and growth potential in the medium-term to develop new green and digital technologies.

In order to help SMEs to better manage their intellectual assets (which in turn will boost innovation and scaling-up), the Commission and the EUIPO will provide financial support towards costs relating to IP advice, IP services and the partial reimbursement of costs paid to protect and/or enforce intellectual property (IP) rights in national, EU and international markets. The assistance will be in the form of a reimbursement (this may be in the form of lump sums) of up to EUR 7 000 per SME (for the duration of the action), to be requested in 2024, in particular, to cover expenses related to the following costs:

- Financing or co-financing of costs of IP Scan services (also known as IP pre-diagnostic) or costs of initial assistance given to SMEs for planning the use of the IP voucher in relation to all types of IP rights (trade marks, designs, patents, plant varieties, etc.) (Percentage of co-financing up to 100% to be fixed in the contribution agreement).
- Co-financing of costs of certain IP services in particular in relation to registration, management or enforcement of IP, charged by IP attorneys, IP lawyers, IP consultants, business advisors or European, national or regional IP offices also including prior art search and potentially services outside the EU (Percentage of cofinancing up to 90% of costs. This percentage and the scope of services shall be fixed in the contribution agreement).

- Co-financing of fees charged by IP offices relating to obtaining any IP rights protection in the Union or any of its Member States, also including European and unitary patents managed by the European Patent Office (application/registration fees of any IP right, also including plant variety rights). Percentage of cofinancing up to 90% of fees. This percentage shall be fixed in the contribution agreement.
- Co-financing of fees charged relating to obtaining IP right protection using an international registration system administered by the WIPO or directly to non-EU IP offices (application/registration fees for any IP right). Percentage of cofinancing up to 90% of fees. This percentage shall be fixed in the contribution agreement.

The EUIPO will apply the criteria agreed in advance with the Commission services, based on economic and non-discriminatory conditions, for the selection of eligible countries. This action will target SMEs seeking to further exploit their intangible assets, and that may be considering not investing in IP because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic or because of issues related to the Russian military aggression in Ukraine. It will also prioritise SMEs contributing to the green and digital transition.

This action will be complementary to the support provided by national and Benelux IP offices or by partners who cooperate with them. The action will also rely on the future European IP Information Centre, linked with the Your Europe Portal. In providing support to SMEs, the action, in cooperation with IP offices, will work with various SME intermediaries, including the Enterprise Europe Network, clusters and/or incubators. The action will also cooperate with other IP support providers such as EU IP Helpdesks and, if possible, with patent information centres and the EUIPO Observatory.

This action aims to provide support over a longer term. The applications for vouchers/grants must be submitted before the end of 2024 (the Commission and the EUIPO can agree to extend this time limit by up to 1 year), but the costs can occur from the moment an SME applies for a grant under this action till 2026, provided that the applicant can demonstrate the need for starting the action prior to signature of the grant agreement. The general time-limit for submission of subsequent invoices or proofs of costs can take place until the end of the action (end of 2026).

This action should reach at least 40 000 SMEs.

Budget, indicators

The total amount for the EU contribution in 2024 is up to EUR 2 000 000.

The total amount of the multiannual action is up to EUR 60 100 000 with an EU contribution up to EUR 5 100 000 for the years 2021-2024. EUIPO's contribution of up to EUR 55 000 000 will be provided from its legacy surplus outside its operational budget. The EUIPO may, in agreement with the Commission, add up to EUR 20 000 000 more in the event additional services (compatible with the scope of this action) are included in the course of the action and/or if the scope is also extended to Ukrainian SMEs. This action requires the approval of the EUIPO governing bodies and will be implemented by EUIPO in compliance with its financial rules. The EU contribution will finance exclusively patent and plant variety related costs.

- Indicative implementation timetable:
 - Signature of the Contribution Agreement with EUIPO: Q1/2024
 - Transfer of funds: Q1/2024
 - Evaluation of impact: as of 2025
 - End of action: 2026

- Qualitative and quantitative indicators for the action
 - Number of requests/SMEs funded.
 - SME demographics (size, country, industrial sector)
 - Number of IP rights, fees and services by types and geographical scope applied by SMEs
 - Rate of deficiencies per type
 - Change of IP protection/management practices by SMEs (self-reported)
 - Satisfaction of SMEs, and, if possible, of other stakeholders, with the action
 - Change of economic performance potentially related to this action

Multiannual call – 2021-2024

Budget line	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total commitment appropriations (EUR) 2021-2024
030202					
Action 4.3	1 000 000	0	2 100 000	2 000 000	5 100 000

Only EU SMEs may benefit from this action, but if the Commission and the EUIPO agree in the course of the action, it may be extended to Ukrainian SMEs and/or SMEs from other Associated Countries.

No follow-up action is envisaged. Trainings and awareness-raising campaigns are organised regularly by the EUIPO, outside of the budget of the action.

The results of the action will serve as useful input for future EU policies designing the fee structure and fee levels for the registration of different IP rights at EU level.

The EUIPO will regularly (monthly) provide data per service type on the number of SMEs that benefited from the action and the amount committed and awarded to these SMEs. Further more detailed reports will be provided regularly which will also include data on the SME demographics, their size, country and industry sector and the average amount granted per service type.

A report on the expenditure incurred in the implementation of the action will also be provided by the EUIPO to the Commission. Where applicable, a summary of final audit reports or controls carried out will also be provided by the EUIPO. A control opinion by the EUIPO will also accompany these documents.

Change of IP protection/management practices by SMEs will be measured by self-reporting and through satisfaction-surveys prepared by the EUIPO.

4.4. European Raw Materials Academy

Implementing entity

The action is implemented by the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) via a delegation agreement and executed by a contractor.

Description

The European Raw Materials Academy is one of the European Net-Zero Industry Academies established under the Net-Zero Industry Act. This Act includes a legal obligation on the Commission to support the establishment of European Net-Zero Industry Academies through the provision of seed-funding. Though not adopted yet by the co-legislator, the Commission proposal is legally binding upon the Commission. This work programme confirms the allocation of 2024 SME pillar funding for this action.

The European Raw Materials Academy would aim to re-skill and up-skill a workforce required for the raw materials value chain in the EU. More specifically, it would:

- develop learning programmes, content and learning and training materials for voluntary use by Member States and education and training providers on their territories;
- enable and promote the use of the learning programmes, content and materials by education and training providers in the Member States;
- develop and deploy qualifications and credentials, including, where appropriate, micro-credentials, to facilitate the transparency of skills and qualifications acquired and enhance the transferability between jobs and the cross-border mobility of the workforce, and to promote matching with relevant jobs through existing EU tools.

The Academy would aim to train professionals mostly in SMEs operating along the raw materials value chain in Europe to substantially meet the skills gap foreseen in the raw materials sector by 2030⁴⁰. It would aim to address critical needs of the sector, responding to the needs and objectives outlined in the Net-Zero Industry Act, the Critical Raw Materials Act and the European Raw Materials Alliance. The primary focus of the programme would be SMEs. Reduced costs are foreseen for SME employees to participate in education and training programmes of the Academy which charges a fee per course participant. That fee would be reduced as one result of this action.

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution – description of how this action contributes to climate and biodiversity mainstreaming in qualitative and quantitative ways

Europe's green transition, including renewable energy generation and storage, will not be possible without a vastly increased use of metals, minerals and advanced materials. The Green Deal Industrial Plan states that the manufacturing of EU net-zero technologies is only possible if access to relevant critical raw materials is ensured and announces the establishment of Industry Academies to roll out up-skilling and re-skilling programmes in strategic industries for the green transition, including raw materials. This is why the Net-Zero Industry Act provides for the establishment of the European Raw Materials Academy.

Based on Industry data, growth patterns of the renewable energy sectors, including solar, wind, and hydrogen, and the e-mobility industry will create nearly 4 million new jobs in Europe. Furthermore, the circular economy needs will entail another increase of 700,000 jobs bringing the total number of jobs needed for the renewable and e-mobility sectors in Europe to close to 5 million by 2030. Due to the crucial dependence of these industries on raw materials, 25% of the jobs required could be linked to the extraction, refining, manufacturing operations of raw materials, as well as recycling of end of life products. This would mean 1.2 million new jobs

⁴⁰ The Raw Materials Academy will be modelled on the Battery Academy and the Cybersecurity Academy.

would be needed in the raw and advanced materials sector in Europe for the renewable and e-mobility sectors.

Additional information

- Total amount⁴¹ of the action: EUR 3 000 000
- Indicative duration of the project to be funded: 24 months
- Indicative implementation timetable; implementation starting date: Q2 2024
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
 - o Number of SME staff completing training (including number of staff and geographical distribution);
 - o Number of training programmes established (including the qualification of training topics with a focus on interdisciplinary training);
 - o Increase in staff in participating companies (qualitative impact indicator).

4.5. European Solar Academy

Implementing entity

The action is implemented by the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) via a delegation agreement and executed by a contractor.

Description

The establishment of a large scale training and skills pilot for the “European Solar Academy” is proposed:

- The European Solar Academy would aim to provide direct support to SMEs by educating and training the workforce in and for the solar PV manufacturing supply chain in the EU. The Academy will operate under the umbrella of the new EU Solar PV Industry Alliance.
- The Academy would aim to train workforce primarily in SMEs and large businesses operating in the area of solar PV manufacturing in Europe. It will address critical needs of the sector, responding to the needs and objectives outlined in the Solar Strategy and the EU Solar PV Industry Alliance’s terms of reference.
- The Academy would develop and implement a comprehensive training programme providing training and development opportunities across the solar value chain, focused on manufacturing and ancillary supply side activities.
- The primary focus of this action would be SMEs. According to some estimates, a 20 GW increase in manufacturing capacity across the solar value chain in Europe would

⁴¹ The possibility of providing SME Pillar funding in future financial periods will be assessed during the preparations for future SME pillar work programmes.

create up to 400 000 new jobs across the EU.

- Large businesses would be entitled to participate but with a reduced funding rate (if for the purposes of staff training) and always in cooperation with SMEs relevant for the value chain component. Otherwise, they could also participate as training providers.

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution – description of how this action contributes to climate and biodiversity mainstreaming in qualitative and quantitative ways

This project will contribute to the availability of a skilled workforce required for the manufacturing of solar PV technologies that are needed to produce renewable energy without which the EU climate targets cannot be met. As set out in the Net-Zero Industry Act, the upscaling of the European production of net-zero technologies such as solar PV is inter alia dependent on the availability of a skilled workforce, which this project would make a significant contribution to. The target of scaling up of manufacturing capacities of solar PV will focus on sustainable and circular technology designs, including, but not limited to, the proposed ecodesign measure for solar PVs. In that context, climate indicators will focus on such aspects as raw material content, recyclability, carbon footprint and potentially human rights issues in the supply chain. None of this will be possible without a skilled workforce.

Additional information

SMEs are a vital part of the solar PV value chain. A healthy and competitive solar PV value chain in Europe will require numerous SMEs to scale up their manufacturing capacities and to engage with large industry leaders. Skills, especially in the area of sustainable and circular design and next generation solar PV technologies are a critical factor of success. Lack of qualified workforce has been identified as a major barrier to scale up this sector in Europe, and boosting skills is one of the priority areas of the SME pillar.

Participating SMEs will have an opportunity to directly train their staff on critical skills and competencies needed for solar PV manufacturing. The focus will be on interdisciplinarity and skills needs for manufacturing competitive products in this supply chain. In addition, SMEs will be able to engage with larger industry leaders in Europe in order to better adapt their outputs to the overall solar value chain. This will result in more resilient, competitive and agile SMEs in the solar value chain.

- Total amount of the action: EUR 5 000 000
- Indicative duration of the project to be funded: approximately 36 months
- *Qualitative and quantitative indicators:*
 - Number of SMEs trained (including number of staff and geographical distribution);
 - Number of training programs established (including the qualification of training topics with a focus on interdisciplinary trainings);
 - Increase in staff in participating companies (qualitative impact indicator).

5. OTHER ACTIONS OR EXPENDITURE

5.1. SME Performance Review– Administrative arrangement

General description of the contracts envisaged

The administrative arrangement with JRC aims to provide scientific and other support for the assessment of the performance of the EU countries and potentially also some non-EU countries in implementing the SME Policy areas and for drafting and finalising the SME Performance Review (SPR) reports and country sheets. This would also include a set of indicators to assess SME Policy and any other data/analysis/inputs to be used as a basis for the SPR reports and country sheets. This data and analysis provides essential evidence and support for SME Policy work. The current agreement “COIN/GROW V” will come to an end in September 2024. The arrangement funded by the 2024 budget will run from September 2024 to September 2025.

Implementation

DG GROW

Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming contribution

The cooperation will contribute to the better availability of data on, among other things, the environmental performance and sustainability related actions of EU SMEs.

Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 700 000
- Indicative implementation timetable; Q2/Q3 2024
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:

Indicators/data/analysis/inputs provided in time to publish as planned the SME Performance Review reports and country sheets.

Quality of the data and analysis provided.

5.2. Remunerated experts; reimbursement of experts

Amount

EUR 700 000

Description

Remunerated experts: to provide expertise in the evaluation of larger calls for proposals, and for which no separate budget is included.

Reimbursement of experts: support to the conferences and expert meetings (including European Business Organisation meetings; meetings and conferences, and dialogue with

stakeholders).

6. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Please note that the following multiannual calls have been launched under the 2021 Work Programme. This section is for information only.

The budget included in the 2024 work programme is as follows:

TITLE	Date of publication	Indicative 2024 amount (EUR)
Enterprise Europe Network	11/05/2021	25 600 000
Joint Cluster Initiative	30/09/2021	3 837 153
Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs	16/03/2022	5 050 000

The above breakdown is indicative; therefore budget transfer between priorities, under the same budget line, is allowed (provided it is announced in the call for proposals)

List of Projects

Action	Title	Budget	Sub-total
Grants			
2.1	Enterprise Europe Network	25.500.000	
2.2	Joint Cluster Initiatives	3.837.153	
2.3	Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs	5.050.000	
2.4	Enterprise Europe Network (new call)	25.600.000	
2.5	Joint Cluster Initiatives (new call)	10.000.000	
2.6	EU-Ukraine Cluster Partnership	3.000.000	
2.7	Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs - Junior Call	5.000.000	
2.8	EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation	7.000.000	
2.9	EU SME centre in China	2.700.000	
2.10	Agrifood and Retail SMEs – renewable energy communities	2.900.000	
2.11	Support to SMEs in the textiles ecosystem for digital up/reskilling through the European Digital Innovation Hubs	600.000	
2.12	Promoting trans-European tourism products in third countries	2.000.000	
2.13	Partnerships for circular value chains between mainstream businesses and SMEs in social economy	2.000.000	
2.14	Stepping up organisational and entrepreneurial capacity of SMEs in social economy	6.000.000	101.187.153
Procurement			
3.1	SME policy - SME Performance Review	880.000	
3.2	SME Outreach	775.000	
3.3	Enterprise Europe Network - animation	3.150.000	
3.4	EU capitals of smart tourism	2.000.000	
3.5	WORTH partnership project	4.500.000	
3.6	Fit For Future	807.000	
3.7	Supporting actions	6.584.771	18.696.771
Indirect management			
4.1	European Chemicals Legislation Finder	1.053.400	
4.2	European Union Observatory for Nanomaterials	619.000	
4.3	SME fund - Intellectual property voucher	2.000.000	
4.4	European Raw Materials Academy	3.000.000	
4.5	European Solar Academy	5.000.000	11.672.400
Other actions			
5.1	SME Performance Review - analytical support	700.000	
5.2	Remunerated experts; reimbursement of experts	700.000	1.400.000
TOTAL		132.956.324	

Eligibility criteria and Selection and award criteria for grants

Eligibility criteria

Applicant organisations must be established:

- in EU Member States;
- or in third countries participating in the programme under Article 5 of Regulation (EU) 2021/690.

Specific eligibility criteria may be set out in the call for proposals or invitation.

Selection and award criteria

As regards all grants envisaged in this work programme, each proposal will be evaluated on the basis of the selection criteria specified in the respective calls for proposals. Indicatively, these criteria are based on the following:

- Financial capacity to complete the proposed operation;
- Stable and sufficient sources of finance to ensure the continuity of the organisation throughout the project and to play a part in financing it;
- Operational (technical and management) capacity to complete the operation;
- Capacity to manage activities corresponding to the size of the project for which a grant is requested;
- Adequate professional qualifications and experience of the team responsible for the project/operation.

An evaluation of the quality of proposals, including the proposed budget, will be based on the following award criteria:

- Relevance of the actions proposed in view of the objectives established in the call;
- Quality (including operational quality) of the proposed actions;
- Project design and implementation;
- Project team and cooperation arrangements;
- Impact.