

European Social Fund + (ESF+) Social Innovation + (SI+) Initiative

# **Social Innovations for Upskilling of Vulnerable Youth, Especially Young People not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEETs)**

**ESF-SI-2023-SKILLS-01**

## **Call Conditions**



Funded by  
the European Union

## ABSTRACT

**Call identifier:** Lithuanian European Social Fund Agency (hereinafter – ‘the Granting Authority’) as an entrusted entity to implement the ESF+ SI+ Initiative.

**Open Call title:** Social Innovations for the Upskilling of Vulnerable Youth, Especially Young People not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEETs)

**Open Publication date:** 10/11/2023

**Deadline:** 27/03/2024 at 5:00 PM CET time zone

**Indicative overall grant budget for the Call:** 9 660 467,50 EUR

**The form of grant:** a lump sum grant.

**Expected duration of a project:** up to 24 months.

**The estimated size of grant:** between 200 000 EUR and 700 000 EUR per project (but this does not preclude the submission/selection of applications requesting other amounts), constituting not more than 80% of the project’s total budget. A co-financing of at least 20% must thus come from other resources than the EU budget.

**Official Call website:**

<https://www.esf.lt/en;>

<https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/esf-social-innovation>

**For submission:**

All applications must be submitted directly online via the electronic portal and data exchange system eSINNIS ((e) Social Innovation Information System) managed by the Granting Authority (hereinafter – ‘the Portal’).

- Get access to the Portal - <https://forms.office.com/e/00C1MdpgdU>
- Connect to the Portal - <https://esinnis.sharepoint.com/sites/eSINNIS>

For support: [Skills@esf.lt](mailto:Skills@esf.lt)

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## Glossary

**Applicant** – a legal entity which submits an application.

**Associated partners** – legal entities which participate in the project, but without the right to charge costs or claim contributions. These entities will not be parties to the Grant Agreement concluded with the Granting Authority and do not have to be validated.

**Beneficiaries** - the signatories of the Grant Agreement (either directly or through an accession form). They must collectively contribute to a smooth and successful implementation of the project (i.e., implement their part of the project properly, comply with their own obligations under the Grant Agreement, and support the coordinator in its obligations).

**Co-applicants** – legal entities which participate in the project being actively involved in the implementation of the project and engaged financially by hiring staff or incurring other costs.

**Coordinator** – the applicant (after the Grant Agreement is signed – the beneficiary) that is the central contact point for the Granting Authority and represents the Consortium.

**ESFA** – Lithuanian European Social Fund Agency selected as the entrusted entity by the European Commission to implement the ESF+ SI+ Initiative. Under this Call, ESFA is also referred to as the Granting Authority.

**NEETs** - young people aged 15 to 29 who are not in education, employment, or training.

**Lump sum** – a form of simplified cost options that is determined during the case-by-case assessment of the application based on the submitted Detailed Budget Table and on their completion.

**Public body** – any legal entity which is established as a public body by national law.<sup>1</sup> The criteria listed below shall NOT constitute sufficient evidence for an entity to be recognised as a public body:

- Entity's mission or activity is in the general interest (public service mission);
- Entity's shares belong to a public body (even if the public ownership constitutes 100% of the share capital);
- Entity receives public financing;
- Entity is supervised and controlled by the state.

Public bodies may act according to, and be subject to, private law in some or most of their activities, provided that their existence and functioning are governed by public law.

**Vulnerable youth** – young people, who have difficulties accessing work or training for individual or structural reasons (e.g., poverty, social exclusion, disability, long-term unemployment, insufficient school performance or vocational skills, migration background, etc.).

<sup>1</sup> Established as a public body by national law means: 1) incorporated as a public body in the act of creation or recognised as a public body by national law and 2) governed by public law. Both conditions must be fulfilled.

# 1. Introduction – background

## 1.1. Key concepts

This is a Call for EU action grants in the field of upskilling of vulnerable youth under the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) Social Innovation+ (SI+) Initiative**.

Under the ESF+, the SI+ Initiative covers innovations<sup>2</sup> that are social both in terms of their ends and their means. Thus, it is acknowledged that **social innovation**:

- is a collective social process, involving the distinctive participation of civil society actors and building new relationships between public, private, and third sector entities,
- generates social output and impact in terms of improved services, products, models, social relationships, standards, or policies that create greater social impact than current practice and are therefore more effective in achieving the objectives of the ESF+ and the European Pillar of Social Rights ('the Pillar')<sup>3</sup>.

Innovative activities are linked to the development, testing, validation, implementation, and scaling-up of new (combinations of) products, services, models, or practices that meet social needs and resolve societal challenges. Thereby, social innovations aim at changing the social context, empowering civil society actors, and boosting their capacity to act, as well as at developing new policy approaches. The concept of social innovation allows public authorities, private and third sector entities to enter into new relationships and to tailor innovative actions to the specific needs and opportunities or to experiment in a transnational context at the European Union (EU) level.

By supporting transnational cooperation, the Initiative aims to expand the best practices in various fields, including employment, education, skills, and social inclusion across Europe. What is an established good practice in one country or region can serve as a source of innovation elsewhere.

## 1.2. Legal base of the Call

This Call is published under:

- Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013<sup>4</sup>, and notably its articles 5(2), 14(6) and 25 (i);
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy<sup>5</sup>;
- Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union<sup>6</sup>, and notably its articles 181, 182 and 183.

This Call is administered and implemented under the provisions of the Framework Agreement between the European Commission on behalf of the European Union, and ESFA, signed on 7 November 2022.

2 'Innovation' is a concept that includes each of the three following features:

- novelty: an element of change from the current situation;
- adoption: a change that is embraced by its potential users; and
- outcome: value, for example increased efficiency of a process or improvement of the wellbeing of users.

An additional aspect of innovation is that unlike an invention, which is usually considered an individual accomplishment, it results from a process involving the cooperation of numerous actors (European Parliament Briefing „Understanding Innovations“ (February 2016))

3 [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

4 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1057>

5 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1060>

6 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018R1046>

### 1.3. The policy context

In November 2017, the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission proclaimed the **European Pillar of Social Rights ('the Pillar')**, setting out 20 principles and rights to support well-functioning and fair labour markets and welfare systems. The ESF+ finances the implementation of these principles through projects in the area of employment, education and skills, and social inclusion.

The **first principle** of the Pillar states that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market. The **fourth principle** of the Pillar states that 'young people have the right to continued education, apprenticeship, traineeship or a job offer of good standing within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education'.

Every young person, upon leaving the initial education system, should have acquired the necessary skills to succeed in life. However, not everyone has had the opportunity to get the type of education and skills they need, or some may have faced circumstances restricting their possibilities in this regard. This is particularly the case with certain groups of young people not in education, employment, or training ('NEETs'), often in need of support to be able to overcome the difficulties they face. **For all of them, skills are a pathway to employability and prosperity.** With the right skills, people are equipped for good-quality jobs and can fulfil their potential as confident, active citizens. In a fast-changing global economy, skills will largely determine competitiveness and the capacity to drive innovation. They are a pull factor for investment and a catalyst in the virtuous circle of job creation and growth. They are key to social cohesion.

The results of a Flash Eurobarometer on Skills shortages, recruitment, and retention strategies in small and medium size enterprises (SMEs), published on 12 September 2023, confirmed that skilled workers are key to the success of SMEs in Europe.

To make it easier to recruit staff with the required skills, SMEs say they need better collaboration with public employment services (58%), better tools for assessing the skills of applicants (49%), better tools for assessing the company's skills needs (46%), and easier procedures for recognition of foreign qualifications (38%).

**The European Year of Skills<sup>7</sup>** provides a new momentum to deliver on the principles of the Pillar promoting a mindset of reskilling and upskilling and thereby boosting competitiveness of European companies, fostering skills policies and investments to ensure that nobody is left behind in the twin transition and the economic recovery.

Having the right skills empowers individuals to successfully navigate labour market changes and fully engage in society and democracy, so that no one is left behind, as stated in the **European Skills Agenda** of 2020<sup>8</sup>. Building on it, the Porto Declaration<sup>9</sup>, agreed by the EU leaders in May 2021, shows a strong commitment to upskilling and reskilling and to improved employability. It welcomed the ambitious EU headline targets set by the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan of at least 60% of adults participating in training every year and an employment rate of at least 78% by 2030, which requires significant effort to activate more women and young people for the labour market.

**European Year of Youth 2022** highlighted the urgency to equip the European youth with skills for the future.<sup>10</sup> Skills for the green transition and the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce will be needed in the context of the shift to a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy, as laid out under the European Green Deal<sup>11</sup> setting the path towards EU climate neutrality by 2050. A workforce with the right skills is a precondition for the green transition, forecasted to generate 2.5 million additional jobs in the EU by 2030.<sup>12</sup>

7 Decision (EU) 2023/936 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023 on a European Year of Skills

8 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (COM(2021)274 final)

9 The Porto declaration - Consilium (europa.eu)

10 European Commission, Proposal for a DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on a European Year of Skills 2023, 12 October 2022, COM(2022) 526 final, available at: [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/COM\\_2022\\_526\\_1\\_EN\\_ACT\\_part1\\_v6.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/COM_2022_526_1_EN_ACT_part1_v6.pdf)

11 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - The European Green Deal (COM/2019/640 final)

12 Cedefop, The green employment and skills transformation, p. 22, available at: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/4206>

To boost competitiveness of European companies, in particular SMEs, to realise the full potential of the digital and green transitions in a socially fair, inclusive, and just manner, the European Year of Skills is devoting a **special focus to integrate more people in the labour market, including young people, especially NEETs**. One of the key quantitative objectives of the Pillar is to decrease the rate of young people neither in employment, nor in education or training ('NEETs') aged 15-29 to 9% by 2030.

**NEETs represent a significant proportion of young people in Europe.** In 2022, out of all 15-29 –year-olds, 11.7% (i.e., more than 8.3 million individuals) were neither in employment nor in education or training, still well above the target of 9%. When looking at the NEET rates from an individual country perspective, there are wide variations across the EU Member States. The lowest rates were already below the target of 9.0 % and found in the Netherlands, Sweden, Malta, Luxembourg, Denmark, Portugal, Slovenia, Germany, and Ireland; this was also the case in Iceland and Norway. These countries thus reached the long-term EU-level target for 2030 in 2021 or earlier. At the same time, there were nine Member States that recorded NEET rates above the EU average of 13.1 % in 2021. Among these, the highest rates were recorded in Italy and Romania, where more than 19 % of all young people aged 15–29 were neither in employment nor in education or training<sup>13</sup>.

**NEETs are a heterogeneous group.** For some young people, being a NEET can be a symptom of multiple and engrained disadvantages and may indicate a longer-term disengagement from society and therefore require longer interventions. Some young people are especially vulnerable, for example early leavers from education and training or those with inadequate education or training, who often have limited social protection coverage and/or poor access to financial resources, precarious work conditions, or may face discrimination. Anyone can find themselves in vulnerable life situations, including highly skilled young people or those who already have significant and still-relevant work experience. For them, being a NEET is likely to be a temporary status since they face low barriers to labour market entry and have no inherent vulnerabilities. Thus, any intervention targeted towards NEETs requires an individualised approach: for some NEETs, a lighter approach may be sufficient, whereas other NEETs may need more intensive, lengthy, and comprehensive interventions.

## 2. Objectives – activities – expected outcomes

### 2.1. Objectives – Activities

Funding under this Call will be provided for projects with the aim to foster the development or scaling up of innovative methods/practices **that have proven to be successful in other contexts, in other countries or regions, or within previous experimentations**.

**The objective of the project** is skills development of vulnerable youth and in particular NEETs, by re-engaging them into learning and aiming at their (re-)integration into the labour market. Increasing their employability by addressing skills gaps and helping to develop skills needed in labour markets in the context of green transition are particularly relevant for this Call. The funded projects will increase the opportunities of vulnerable young people in the labour market, as well as strengthen their role as active citizens in society.

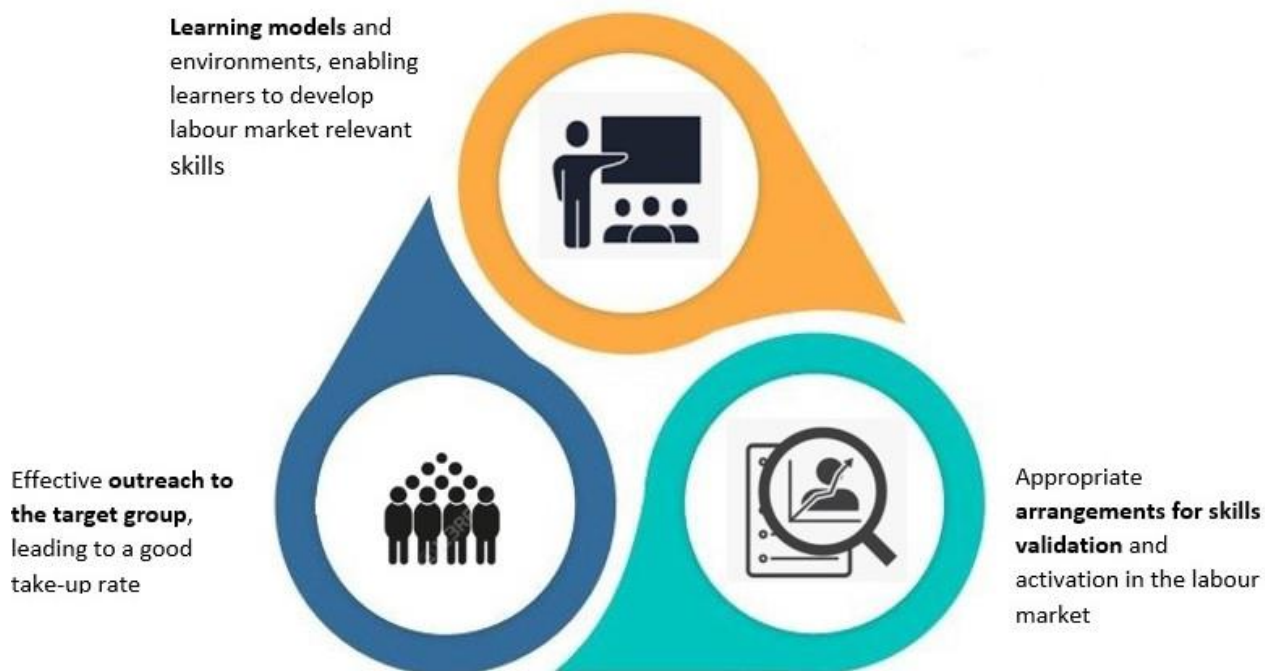
By fostering scaling up of innovative approaches this Call supports the objectives of the European Year of Skills, in particular the third objective<sup>14</sup> thereof.

The present Call offers an opportunity to further develop and properly apply innovative approaches to:

- **effective outreach** to the target group, leading to a good take-up rate,
- **learning models and environments**, enabling learners to develop skills relevant for labour market,
- appropriate arrangements for **skills validation and activation** in the labour market.

<sup>13</sup> Source: Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey, on-line table [edat\_ifse\_20]

<sup>14</sup> "Matching people's aspirations, needs and skills-set, including the skills acquired during mobility, with labour market needs and opportunities, especially those offered by the green and digital transitions, emerging new sectors and core sectors in need of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring that a particular focus is given to integrate more people in the labour market, in particular women and young people, especially those not in employment, education, or training (NEETs), low-skilled persons, older workers, persons with disabilities, people from disadvantaged and diverse backgrounds, people living in remote areas and in the outermost regions, as well as displaced people from Ukraine" (DECISION (EU) 2023/936 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 10 May 2023 on a European Year of Skills)



The project shall include an innovative approach **to at least one** of the 3 domains.

Validation of the knowledge, skills, and competence acquired by the individual is a useful tool for personal development. Validation should make individuals aware of their existing knowledge, skills, and competences, making them visible to others, so that the individual is able to take the next step in their lifelong learning and employment careers.

Previous experience shows that it is useful for the beneficiaries of the projects funded under the same call to exchange knowledge and experience with each other. For this reason, the European Competence Centre of Social Innovation will organise mutual learning events during the implementation of the projects funded under this Call. These events will be facilitated by competent experts and focus on issues relevant for the beneficiaries. Beneficiaries of the funded projects under this Call are expected to participate in this mutual learning scheme.

## 2.2. Target group of the project

Projects submitted under this Call should target vulnerable young people, in particular vulnerable NEETs, who have difficulties accessing work or training for individual or structural reasons (e.g., poverty, social exclusion, disability, long-term unemployment, insufficient school performance or vocational skills, migration background, etc.).

In line with the youth employment thematic concentration (15-29 years), beneficiaries are free to include participants from the age of 15 in the context of the ESF+. Legal entities that actively address inclusion and diversity and involve participants with fewer opportunities are highly encouraged to apply.

Within this target group, relevant participants will be, for example:

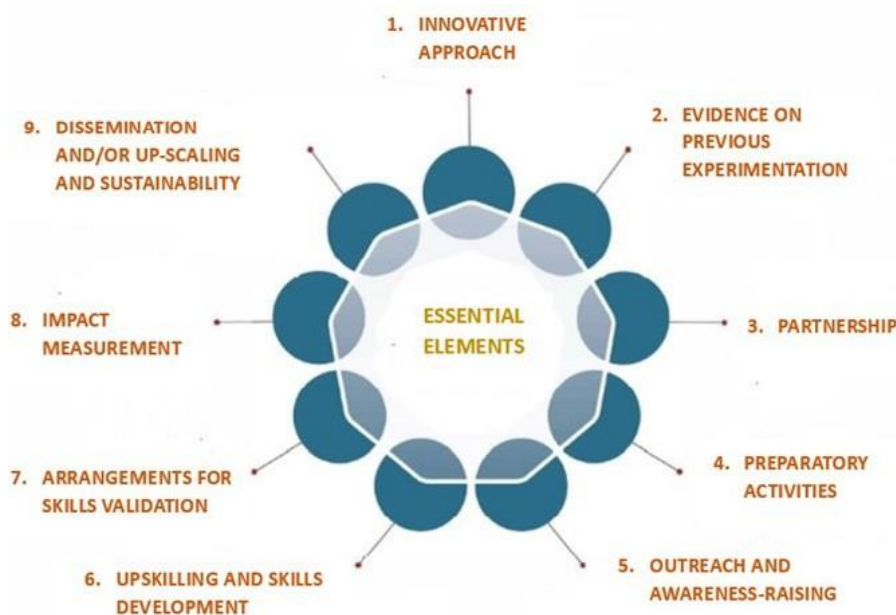
- Early school leavers;
- Low-skilled young people without work experience;
- Economically inactive young people;
- Young persons with disabilities or other health issues;
- Young people from a disadvantaged or minority background;
- Young people facing discrimination.

Considering the very diverse backgrounds of the participants under this Call, an applicant must ensure that proposed measures are adapted to their specific needs, skills, and competencies, including the accessibility arrangements for persons with disabilities and special needs.

## 2.3. Activities

### 2.3.1. Essential elements of the project

The following essential elements shall form the **core** of a project, i.e., each application shall cover the elements listed below. However, an applicant is free to choose how they will integrate all these elements into the project framework and make a combination of them. The applicant can use its own experience and capacity, or, in the case of a shortage of specific competences, they can involve in the project partnership other institutions with the necessary competences, capacities and experience, or they can acquire relevant competencies by learning.



#### 1. Innovative approach

Filling in the table 'Theory of change' (Section 5, Part A of the Application Form) an applicant has to explain why it is reasonable to implement, replicate or further develop the chosen innovative approach. The applicant must also specify what positive impact on the target group, the participating entities, and skills development system the suggested innovative approach will generate. Moreover, the applicant must explain why the innovative approach chosen in the project will impact them and highlight the added value of the project in the specific context in which it is proposed to be scaled up or replicated.

#### 2. Evidence

An applicant shall provide a link to the evidence on previous experimentations of the innovative approach to be scaled up in the project. The application shall include a description of the proposed method with an explanation when and where the method has been applied and what results have been achieved, as well as the web link to the previous experimentation, if available. The information concerning the innovative approach should be presented in Section 1.3 'Complementarity with other actions and innovation — European added value' (Part B of the Application Form).

#### 3. Partnership

Mutual learning, exchange of knowledge, and cooperation between legal entities from **at least two EU Member States shall be the basis for the project**. Additionally, the project shall involve a legal entity which will act as a **potential co-funder of further implementation of the innovative approach to be scaled-up or replicated**. The applicant must explicitly explain how the member entities of the consortium will contribute to mutual learning, joint work, and implementation of the project, what each member brings into the process, and how mutual learning is organised (e.g. peer review or any type of peer support, etc.). The roles of the consortium members reflect their experience and expertise or their needs of knowledge and policy examples. In this regard, it is useful to involve in the consortium a **variety of stakeholders** (NGOs, competent public authorities, training providers, funders, social economy entities etc.). The description of the partnership should be presented in Section 2 (Part A of the Application Form).

#### **4. Preparatory activities**

When planning scaling up of the innovative approach, an applicant must line up the resources and capacities required for smooth implementation of planned activities and analyse their availability. Need for preparatory activities (research, exploration of context, advice on social innovation, building the capacity of project staff, etc.) must be clearly justified, and availability of resources must be ensured. A description of the preparatory activities and their rationale should be provided in Section 4 (Part A of the Application Form).

#### **5. Outreach and awareness-raising**

The applicant must explain how the project will reach out to young people in different settings, inform them of the support available, and build up trust with the young people. This can be facilitated by having a credible plan for outreach and involvement of partners who have better expertise in reaching the identified target group or who have NEETs within their institution. A description of the outreach and awareness-raising activities and their rationale should be provided in Section 4 (Part A of the Application Form).

#### **6. Upskilling and/or skills development**

An application must involve upskilling and/or broader skills development leading to new or improved skills. The applicant must explain why the planned skills development or other types of educational content are best suited to the needs of the target group integrating into the labour market. In addition, the applicant is also invited to develop skills needed in labour market in the context of green transition. These can be professional skills, by all sectors and at all levels or, more broadly, competences to live, work and act in a sustainable manner. A description of the upskilling and/or skills development activities and their rationale should be provided in Section 4 (Part A of the Application Form).

#### **7. Arrangements for skills validation and activation in the labour market**

An applicant must explain the planned approach to ensure that the learning outcomes of the upskilling and/or skills development are validated and activated in the labour market.

The process of validation, to the possible extent, should consider the elements described in the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning<sup>15</sup> that follow the principles outlined in the 2012 Recommendation on validation. In particular, the applicant shall:

- Take into account existing validation services and infrastructure in the country and how these can be utilised in the context of the project;
- Provide a clear mapping of institutional roles and responsibilities of the validation arrangements;
- Provide a reflection of how the individual can use the outcomes of the validation process for additional purposes, e.g., to gain exemptions or credits, access further education and training.

The validation process should be described in in Section 4 (Part A of the Application Form) or attached to the Application Form as a separate annex.

#### **8. Impact measurement**

An applicant must set out ex-ante methods for collecting, assessing, and presenting evidence of the effectiveness of the innovative approach in question. The methods must include provisional output and outcome indicators for monitoring the activities and their impact on the target group, the participating entities and on the skills development system, in line with the 'Theory of change.' The impact measurement should be proportionate to the scope and size of the project. The applicant should disclose how the impact measurement would be used by the applicant organisation for the long-term continuity and sustainability of the innovative approach presented in the project. The expected outcomes, the impact of the project and the indicators for their measurement should be detailed in Section 3 (Part B of the Application Form).

#### **9. Dissemination and/or up-scaling and sustainability**

An applicant must explain how the results of the project will be promoted at the local/regional/national/European levels. Moreover, the applicant must explain how the objectives, activities, and efforts to achieve the desired outcomes will continue beyond the grant period and whether and how the innovative approach could be implemented on a larger scale,

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/3093>

considering, among other options, a possible funding either under the shared management strand of the ESF+ or other funding sources. Information on the sustainability of project results should be detailed in Section 3 (Part B of the Application Form).

### **2.3.2. Activities that can be funded**

Applicants can propose activities that are best suited to pursue the objectives of the Call in their specific context. Applicants must describe how the proposed activities contribute to the expected outcomes as well as to the wider expected impacts of the Call. The expected outcomes should be realistic and defined in measurable terms.

Activities should be designed with the needs of vulnerable young people, in particular vulnerable NEETs in mind. They may require more intensive support to start with learning or training activities or to make the transition to employment. They may have personal situations that need to be addressed before they can consider learning, training and/or career prospects.

Applicants should ensure that the activities described correlate with the proposed budget. The implementation of activities should be carefully documented to ensure transferability and/or upscaling if the project approach proves to be effective.

Activities that can be funded as part of the projects may include but are not limited to:

#### **1. Activities related to mapping and reaching out to the target group:**

- Desk research activities to prepare other activities targeting the final beneficiaries (e.g., research about the target group, their needs, appropriate methodologies, etc.);
- Activities to map the target groups, their needs, and/or the support already available;
- Reaching out to young people, motivating them, and providing them with guidance.

#### **2. Activities related to upskilling and/or skills development:**

- Setting up innovative learning environments, e.g., trusted places in which learners are more at ease than in the usual classrooms, including places learners would know through everyday activities and hobbies (e.g., libraries, museums, gardens, online/virtual environment, etc.);
- Programme design, preferably combining several elements, such as training, work experience, life skills, digital skills, basic skills (skills needed for everyday activities), green skills, etc.;
- Promoting green and digital entrepreneurship;
- Integrated work-based learning elements, such as work tasters, traineeships, apprenticeships, etc.;
- Capacity building activities for educators or other staff of entities involved in the skills development activities, employers, and other relevant stakeholders;
- Involvement of NEETs in co-design and co-delivery of employment programmes through partnerships with local enterprises (co-production).

#### **3. Activities related to individual guidance:**

- Guidance and/or counselling, including (personalised) mentoring or tutoring;
- Envisaging pre- and post-placement support (i.e., working with employers before and after the intervention);
- Experts' support for developing young people business idea.

#### **4. Activities related to skills validation and activation in the labour market:**

- Supporting the activation of the participants' skills in the labour market, for instance through traineeships or other activities involving companies, in particular SMEs, specific job fairs, and other forms of communication with employers;
- Activities leading to the validation of the skills acquired, i.e., through appropriate certification;
- Development or further improvement of skills assessment tools and methods.

#### **5. Support to enable participants to participate in project activities:**

- Ensuring care facilities for the children/dependants of young people participating in the training/skills development activities;
- Supporting participants with housing for the duration of the project.

## 6. Participating in mutual learning events

Participating in mutual learning events organised by the European Competence Centre of Social Innovation structured. It is planned to organise 4-5 mutual learning events during the implementation of the projects (maximum 2 events will take place on site (provisionally in Vilnius and Brussels), the others online).

### 2.4. Expected outcomes

As a result of the activities implemented under the projects of this Call the following outcomes are expected (with the special emphasis on NEETs):

- Improved employability and **competitiveness of vulnerable young people (especially NEETs) by equipping them with the right skills;**
- Increased number of young people who have been re-engaged into learning or (re-)integrated in labour market (low skilled persons, persons with disabilities, people from disadvantaged and diverse backgrounds, people living in rural and remote areas and in the outermost regions);
- Enhanced development and/or transition of already existing practices that have proven to be successful in other contexts, in other countries or regions or within previous experimentations;
- Strengthened role of vulnerable young people as active citizens in society;
- Increased awareness and knowledge by society and stakeholders at the local/regional/national and European levels of innovative approaches to foster skills development of young people.

### 2.5. Deliverables

All project activities shall be split into **work packages**<sup>16</sup>. For each work package the link to specific objectives and deliverables must be clearly described. The applicant must describe **at least one deliverable** covered by each work package, considering the scope and specificity of the project activities.

Regarding the project overall, the beneficiary will have to provide as a **mandatory deliverable a Final Report 'Lessons learned and future plans'**, including:

- Outline of the project;
- Analysis and evaluation of the project outcomes and impact;
- Structured feedback of the institutions involved and relevant stakeholders;
- Lessons learned and recommendations for applying the innovative approach in the future;
- Follow-up activities and a long-term sustainability strategy for rolling-out of the innovative approach.

To promote the transfer and/or scaling-up of social innovations across Europe through expanding the best practices, final reports of the implemented projects **will be made public on a website dedicated to the SI+ Initiative**.

A recommended template/guidelines for the Final Report 'Lessons learned and future plans' is provided in Annex 6 to the Call Conditions.

The deliverables of the project will be managed through the Portal and will be specified in Annex 1 of the Grant Agreement.

### 2.6. Social Innovation Match

The Social Innovation Match (hereinafter 'SIM') is a platform developed by the European Commission to promote the transfer and/or scaling-up of social innovations across Europe. It is managed by the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation under the ESF+ SI+ Initiative. The thematic focus of SIM is around initiatives related to employment, education and training and social inclusion.

<sup>16</sup> Work package (WP) means a major sub-division of the proposed project, i.e., every project is divided into defined smaller parts. WP represents a specific block of tasks, and each WP must include activities and deliverables – the output of a particular WP. For more information about work packages please see Section 3.2 of the Call Conditions

SIM offers the following opportunities:

- allows interested stakeholders to search for initiatives developed and tested in other countries,
- helps identify other entities whose work is a source of inspiration,
- facilitates contact between social innovation stakeholders and other entities,
- **helps find potential partners for European calls for transnational projects,**
- allows project promoters to showcase their successful and inspiring social innovation examples.

SIM provides a new possibility for social innovation project promoters to **gain visibility and recognition of their entities across the European Union.**

Please note that the coordinators of projects selected under this call are **required to upload key information on their projects, a short description of ongoing and planned activities, and their contact details on SIM.** This information will be validated against quality and appropriateness by the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation before publication.

For more information on SIM please visit the [SIM user guides](#) page.

## 2.7. Further guidance

It is recommended to use the following information sources while planning project activities:

- [Practical guide: Creating pathways for support for vulnerable young people to enter training and the labour market](#)
- [Activation measures for young people in vulnerable situations – Experience from the ground](#)
- [Effective outreach to NEETs – Experience from the ground](#)
- [Continued Education Offers under the Youth Guarantee – Experience from the ground](#)
- [Employment and entrepreneurship under the Youth Guarantee – Experience from the ground](#)
- [Traineeships under the Youth Guarantee - Experience from the ground](#)
- [Commission Staff Working Document, accompanying the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a Bridge to Jobs - reinforcing the Youth Guarantee](#)
- [Scaling-up social innovation - Seven steps for using ESF+](#)
- [Social Innovation: Inspirational practices supporting people throughout their lives](#)
- [Proposed Approaches to Social Impact Measurement](#)
- [Learning as you scale](#)
- [European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning](#)
- [VET toolkit for empowering NEETs](#)
- [European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning](#)

## 3. Available budget and co-financing rate – form of grant – cost eligibility–cost categories –double funding

### 3.1. Available budget and co-financing rate

The available indicative Call budget is 9 660 467,50 EUR. The Granting Authority reserves the right not to distribute all available funds under this Call or to increase the Call budget (if relevant, by reallocating funding from other calls under the ESF+ SI+ Initiative). The final decision will be made considering the number of received applications and the results of their assessment.

The indicative expected size of the grant is from 200 000 to 700 000 EUR per project (but this does not preclude the submission/selection of applications requesting other amounts).

The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

Under this Call, the EU grant may not exceed 80% of the total eligible costs of the project. A co-financing of at least 20% must thus come from other resources than the EU budget. Funds from other EU programmes cannot be used as national co-financing source.

### 3.2. Form of grant

The grant under this Call shall take the form of a lump sum grant.

The amounts of lump sums will be established for the whole project (the total lump sum) and per each work package individually in accordance with the Rules of the Use of Lump Sum Contributions under the ESF+ SI+ Initiative (for the Rules see supporting documents to the Call Conditions).

Lump sums will be established on the basis of the Detailed Budget Table (see Annex 1 to the Call Conditions for a template) submitted by an applicant, the Granting Authority's assessment of the validity of the requested amounts, and the funding rate of 80%.

Applicants must specify the link between the necessary resources and the work packages:

- Applicants must submit a Detailed Budget Table (Annex 1 to the Call Conditions) providing cost estimations for each cost category per work package and, within a work package, per applicant and co-applicants;
- The Detailed Budget Table must contain only costs that would be eligible for actual costs and must exclude costs that are ineligible under this Call. Requirements for cost eligibility under this Call are presented in Section 3.3 to the Call Conditions;
- The cost estimations must approximate the actual costs. They must be:
  - in line with normal practices,
  - reasonable and not excessive,
  - in line with, and necessary for, the activities proposed.

The payment of a lump sum is linked to the completion of the corresponding work package. A work package can only be declared as completed and the corresponding lump sum paid when all the work has been carried out/all deliverables have been reached in accordance with the Description of the Project in the Grant Agreement (see Annex 2 to the Call Conditions for a Grant Agreement template).

The overall description of the project must be organised in coherent work packages:

- The number of work packages must be well justified;
- A work package must include a description of all activities and deliverables covered by it, broken down by beneficiaries and associated partners who contribute to that work package;
- The objectives, activities and verifiable deliverables (the expected outputs) of each work package should be presented in line with the overall project objectives;
- Each work package can have multiple activities/deliverables.

Work packages with a long duration (e.g., for coordination/management or dissemination) may be split along the reporting periods into several work packages of a shorter duration.

### 3.3. Cost eligibility and cost categories

a) Eligible cost categories under this Call are as follows:

Eligible cost categories for a Detailed Budget Table:

- A. Direct personnel costs:
  - A.1 Employees (or equivalent) person months
- B. Purchase costs
  - B.1 Travel and subsistence per travel or day
  - B.2 Other goods, works and services
- C. Indirect costs<sup>17</sup>

Indirect costs will be defined in an application as a flat rate of 7% of the total eligible direct costs.

<sup>17</sup> Indirect costs are costs that cannot be identified as specific costs directly linked to the performance of the project. Indirect costs are general administrative costs – overhead costs incurred in connection with the eligible direct costs for the project. They can include maintenance, stationery, photocopying, postage, telephone and fax costs, heating, electricity or other forms of energy, water, office furniture, insurance, and any other expenditure necessary for the successful completion of the project.

## b) Ineligible costs and contributions

The following costs and contributions are ineligible under this Call:

1. Costs related to return on capital and dividends paid by the beneficiary;
2. Debt and debt service charges;
3. Provisions for future losses or debts;
4. Interest owed;
5. Currency exchange losses;
6. Bank costs charged by the beneficiary's bank for transfers from the Granting Authority;
7. Excessive or reckless expenditure;
8. Deductible or refundable VAT (including VAT paid by public bodies acting as public authority);
9. Costs incurred or contributions made for the activities implemented during a suspension of the Grant Agreement;
10. In-kind contributions by third parties;
11. Any costs incurred before the project start date and after the project end date;
12. Costs or contributions for personnel of a national (or regional/local) administration, for activities that are part of the administration's normal activities (i.e., not undertaken only because of the grant).

## 3.4. Double funding

There is a strict prohibition of double funding from the EU budget. Any project may receive only ONE grant from the EU budget and under no circumstances shall the same costs be financed twice by the Union budget.

## 4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening	10 November 2023
Deadline for submission of applications	27 March 2024- 5:00 PM CET time zone
Assessment of applications	April 2024 – July 2024
Information on Assessment results	August 2024
Grant Agreement signature	October/November 2024

### Starting date and duration of the projects.

The indicative duration of a project should be 24 months (extensions are exceptionally possible, if duly justified and through an amendment).

The actual starting date of a project could be:

- the first day following the date when the last of two parties signs the Grant Agreement, or
- the first day of the month following the date when the last of two parties signs the Grant Agreement, or
- the date agreed by the parties to the Grant Agreement.

## 5. Admissibility and documents

An application shall be filled in online and together with other supplementary documents submitted electronically via the Portal by the deadline specified in Chapter 4 of this Call. An application submitted not via the Portal or after the deadline, will not be accepted.

### Access the Portal via the Call website.

Submission of an application is a 2-step process:

1. **Creation of a user account.** To use the Portal, an applicant has to create a user account.
2. **Submission of an application** (see Annex 3 to the Call Conditions for application template).

An application, including the annexes to the Call Conditions and other supporting documents, **shall be submitted by filling in the provided forms** unless specified otherwise. An application must be **complete** and contain all the requested information, annexes to the Call Conditions and other supporting documents. The list of required documents is provided as Annex 4 to the Call Conditions.

An application must be **readable** and **accessible**. Please note that the number of characters in the application columns is limited, so please be concise and specific.

Documents must be uploaded on the Portal under the relevant Call, otherwise an application might be considered incomplete and thus inadmissible.

When applying, the applicant will have to confirm that they have a mandate to act for all co-applicants. Moreover, the applicant will have to certify that the information provided in the application is correct and complete and complies with the conditions for receiving the EU funding.

At a later stage, the applicants may be asked for additional documents (validation of a legal entity and bank account, proof of financial capacity, etc.).

It is recommended to complete an application sufficiently in advance of the deadline to avoid any last-minute technical problems. Problems during last-minute submissions, such as network congestion, will be entirely at the applicant's own risk. Call deadlines can NOT be extended.

Once an application is submitted, the applicant will receive a confirmation e-mail (with the date and time of submission).

Not receiving the confirmation e-mail implies that the application was NOT submitted successfully. If the applicant assumes that the failure to apply was caused by the malfunctioning of the Portal, a complaint should be immediately filed via the e-mail address [IThelp@esf.it](mailto:IThelp@esf.it) explaining the circumstances and attaching a copy of an application (and, if possible, screenshots to prove the malfunction of the Portal or the applicant's attempts to submit the application).

## 6. Eligibility - eligible participants – consortium composition

Please note that compliance with the eligibility criteria is mandatory for the entire duration of the project.

### 6.1. Eligible participants

Legal entities established and registered in the Member States, which meet conditions set in Section 6.2, are eligible as applicants or co-applicants and associated partners.

**Applicant, co-applicants and associated partners can be:**

- NGOs/third sector/voluntary/youth non-profit entities,
- local and regional authorities,
- job centres, public employment services (PES), employment agencies,
- schools,
- vocational education and training (VET) providers,
- companies, social partners, representative bodies linked to the labour market, including chambers of commerce and other trade associations,
- agencies responsible for skills validation,
- lifelong-learning research centres and entities,
- associations and representatives of those involved in VET,
- guidance, consultancy, and information service providers linked to lifelong learning.
- public and private funders.

If applicant's or co-applicant's entity is already validated by the Central Validation Service (status 'validated') and has a Participant Identification Code (PIC), which is included in the register of all participants of the EU programmes, the entity's registration certificate does not have to be submitted. If the entity is not validated by the Central Validation Service, documents certifying the entity's legal status and origin shall be submitted as an annex to the application.

Natural persons **cannot be** applicants, co-applicants nor associated partners. International organisations **cannot be** applicants, nor co-applicants, but they **can be** associated partners.

EU restrictive measures — Special rules apply to entities from certain countries (e. g., entities subject to EU restrictive measures under the Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU), or entities covered by the Commission Guidelines No 2013/C 205/0518. Such entities shall not be eligible to participate in the project in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, associated partners or subcontractors (if any).

## 6.2. Consortium composition

Only consortia are eligible.

To be considered eligible, a consortium must include an applicant (coordinator) and **at least one co-applicant from another EU Member State** than the coordinator.

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

Each consortium must involve at least one public or private legal entity as a coordinator, beneficiary or as an associated partner which is a **potential co-funder of further implementation of the innovative approach to be scaled-up or replicated** (ESF+ Managing Authority or Intermediate Body, a foundation, etc.). The application must clearly indicate the role of such institution as a potential co-funder.

Associated partners, as defined in Article 7 of the Grant Agreement (see the Grant Agreement template in Annex 2 to the Call Conditions), are eligible to participate in a project, but they do not count towards the minimum eligibility criteria for consortium composition. An associated partner can participate in a project but may not declare eligible costs. A public body or a private entity (e.g., a foundation) providing co-financing may also participate as an associated partner.

If an applicant is considered ineligible, the application will be rejected.

A co-applicant regarded as ineligible will be removed from the consortium. The related activities and projected costs of the removed co-applicant will be excluded, respectively. The eligibility of the modified consortium will then be re-evaluated without the said co-applicant's activities and costs. If the application is accepted for funding, the Granting Authority will ask the applicant to adapt the work plan and budget correspondingly.

## 7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

An applicant must have the financial and operational capacity to complete the activities for which funding is requested. Only legal entities with the necessary financial and operational capacity may be considered as potential grant recipients.

### 7.1. Financial capacity

An applicant must have stable, sufficient, and solid financial recourses (i.e., having a strong financial capability) to maintain project activities and to contribute to finance it as necessary.

Under this Call, only financial capacity of the applicant, which acts as the coordinator, will be assessed.

The financial capacity of the applicant will be assessed prior to the signature of the Grant Agreement<sup>18</sup>, unless during the assessment of applications is decided otherwise.

18 If the application is pre-selected for funding

The verification of financial capacity shall NOT apply to public bodies. They will be required to submit the following evidence documents to the Granting Authority at the time of Grant Agreement preparation:

- Signed Legal Entity Identification form (Public Legal Entity form: in English);
- Official VAT<sup>19</sup> certificate or — if the legal entity is not registered as a VAT payer — the proof of VAT exemption (issued not earlier than 6 months from submission of application);
- Copy of the act, law, decree, or decision that established the legal entity as a public body (or, in case of absence thereof, any other official legal document that proves this).

Assessment of financial capacity shall be carried out on the basis of the following supporting documents, which will have to be submitted upon request of the Granting Authority prior to the signature of the Grant Agreement or during the assessment of the application:

- a) The applicant which is not a public body and if the grant of the project is > 60 000 EUR must submit:
  - Declaration on honour including declaration on financial capacity to carry out the project;
  - Official annual balance sheets and profit and loss accounts for the last two closed financial years available;
  - Explanatory notes and/or annexes that form part of the aforementioned financial statements (if available);
  - For newly established legal entities: a business plan or any other corresponding document which includes financial projections on total assets and annual total revenue. No statutory audit/self-declaration is needed in such cases.
- b) The applicant which is not a public body and if the grant of the project is >750 000 EUR must submit:
  - The information and supporting documents in point a) hereof;
  - An audit report issued by an approved external auditor certifying the accounts for the last two closed financial years, where such an audit report is available or whenever a statutory audit report is required by the Union or national law.

The financial capacity assessment is based on financial indicators (assets, liabilities, revenue), but other aspects, such as composition of project's costs, coordinator's experience in EU funding, coordination of transnational consortia, etc. in previous years will also be considered to ensure coordinator's credibility.

If the financial capacity of the applicant is perceived as weak the Granting Authority may additionally require:

- to submit (one or more) prefinancing guarantees,
- to submit a joint and several guarantees by a third party,
- to submit an irrevocable and unconditional joint guarantee of other co-applicants,
- to split the payment of the prefinancing into several instalments,
- to set a ceiling for the pre-financing in the Grant Agreement - at 20 000 EUR,
- to establish additional conditions for project monitoring in the Grant Agreement,
- any other measure which, after assessing the specific situation, would ensure that the project will be implemented properly.

If the applicant breaches its obligation to provide the prefinancing guarantee or other corresponding documents, the prefinancing will not be paid.

Such breaches and significant lack of financial capacity may also lead to other measures: rejection of the application, termination of the participation in the project (if possible), or termination of the Grant Agreement.

## 7.2. Operational capacity

Under this Call, only the operational capacity of the applicant, which acts as the coordinator, will be assessed.

The coordinator must have sufficient experience in managing/coordinating projects of comparable size and nature, including a comparable number and diversity of partners.

19 Value Added Tax.

Concretely, this means the following:

**a) project management experience:**

- the coordinator (as a legal entity) has managed (as a consortium coordinator) at least 1 consortium project (funded by EU or national funds) with a value of at least 200 000 EUR with minimum of 2 partners (coordinator and 2 project partners), within the past five years, **or**
- the lead project manager (currently employed or planned to be employed by the coordinator and directly involved in the implementation of the project submitted under the Call) has managed (as a lead manager) at least 1 consortium project with a value of at least 200 000 EUR with minimum of 2 partners within the past five years. Additionally, the lead project manager is expected to have a very good command (C1 level) of English.

Please note that project coordination/management activities are core activities and may not be subcontracted.

**b) proven expertise in working on all three key elements (outreach, learning models, and validation):**

- the coordinator has proven expertise of at least 1 year in working on each of all the three key elements (outreach, learning models, and validation). If the coordinator does not have the required experience, this experience can come in from one or several co-applicants, or from one or several experts (currently employed or planned to be employed by the Coordinator or co-applicant).

The operational capacity of the coordinator to manage the project must be confirmed by the submission of the following supporting documents:

- A list of projects managed by the coordinator and/or the lead project manager within the past five years (please see Annex 5 to the Call Conditions 'List of the previous projects' for the template). The information presented should include the subject matter of these projects, their main activities, involvement of partners and the role of the coordinator).
- A declaration of the coordinator (*free format*) certifying:
  - a very good command (C1 level) of English of the lead project manager,
  - project team's professional competences and appropriate qualifications to carry out the required tasks, and proven project team's expertise in working on each of all three key elements for at least 1 year. The coordinator must certify that the required expertise in working on each of all three elements will be provided either by the coordinator or by one or several co-applicants or experts.
- General profiles (qualifications and experiences) of the staff responsible for managing and implementing the project (information should be presented in Section 2.3 of the Application Form Part B).

If needed, additional supporting documents may be requested to confirm the operational capacity of the coordinator.

If the coordinator is considered not to have the required operational capacity, the entire application will be rejected.

### 7.3. Exclusion Criteria

An applicant and any co-applicant shall be excluded from participating in the Call if any of them is found to be in any of the exclusion situations<sup>20</sup> described below:

1. Bankruptcy, winding up, affairs administered by the courts, arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities or other similar procedures (including procedures for persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts);
2. In breach of social security or tax obligations (including if done by persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts);
3. Guilty of grave professional misconduct<sup>21</sup> (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant);
4. Guilty of fraud, corruption, having links to a criminal entity, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes

<sup>20</sup> See Article 136 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

<sup>21</sup> See Article 136 (1) (c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

(including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)<sup>22</sup>;

5. Has shown significant deficiencies in complying with their main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant);
6. Guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Regulation No [2988/95](#) (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant); or
7. They have created under a different jurisdiction an entity with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant).

An applicant or any co-applicant will also be excluded from participating in the Call if it turns out that<sup>23</sup>:

1. During the award procedure they misrepresented information required as a condition for participating or failed to supply that information.
2. They were previously involved in the preparation of the Call and this entails a distortion of competition that cannot be remedied otherwise (conflict of interest).

In the Grant Agreement preparation phase the applicant and co-applicants will have to submit a declaration confirming that they do not fall under any of the afore-mentioned exclusion criteria. The declaration must be duly signed by their respective legal representatives.

If any questionable data is detected, ESFA will send a notification and will provide the opportunity to present clarification before the final decision of the Project Selection Committee is taken, in compliance with the principle of proportionality.

If an applicant or co-applicants declare one of the situations of exclusion listed above, it shall indicate the measures they have taken to remedy the exclusion situation, thus demonstrating their reliability. These may include technical, organisational, and staff-related measures intended to correct the conduct and prevent further occurrence, compensation of damage, or payment of fines, taxes, or social security contributions. The relevant documentary evidence which illustrates the remedial measures taken must be provided in an annex to the declaration. This does not apply for situations referred in point 4 of exclusion criteria.

Administrative measures may be imposed on an applicant or co-applicants who are guilty of misrepresentation if any of the declarations or information provided as a condition for participating in this procedure prove to be false.

## 8. Assessment and award procedure

### 8.1. Assessment procedure

#### Formal requirements

Applications will first be checked for formal requirements (admissibility and eligibility check, see Section 8.3). Applications not meeting the admissibility and eligibility conditions will be rejected. The final decision on the rejection of applications will be taken by the Project Assessment Committee.

The applications found admissible and eligible will be assessed against the award criteria. In parallel, legal checks (legal entity validation, operational capacity, and exclusion criteria) will be carried out.

22 See Article 136 (1) (d) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

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

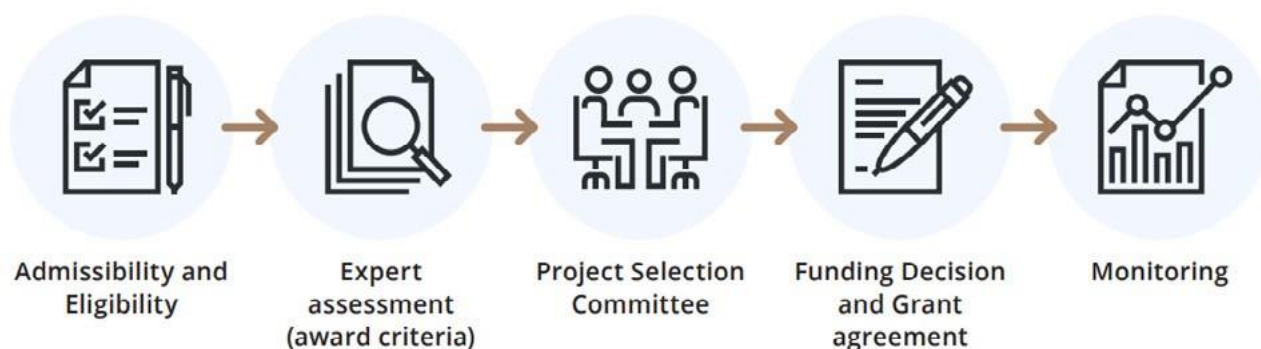


Figure 1. The Process of application assessment

### Appointment of experts and their tasks

Applications will be assessed qualitatively against the award criteria by at least two experts, one of them being an independent external expert (for more information on the award criteria, maximum and threshold points, please see Section 8.5). The Granting Authority has established its own database of external experts. The experts available via the European Commission's Funding and Tender Portal can be engaged as well.

The experts can make suggestions for reducing the budget. The experts shall have no oral or written communication with the applicants.

### Guiding Principles of Assessment

The guiding principles of assessment are the following:

- Transparency: Funding decisions are based on clearly described rules and procedures. Applicants receive adequate feedback on the outcome of the assessment of their applications.
- Fairness and impartiality: All applications are treated equally. They are assessed impartially on their merits, irrespective of their origin, the identity of the submitting entity, the co-applicant(s), or any team member.
- Confidentiality: All applications, annexes and related data, knowledge and documents submitted to the Granting Authority are treated with the strictest confidentiality.
- Efficiency and speed: The assessment process, preparation, and award of grants are dealt with as priority matters.

The Granting Authority will closely liaise with the experts during the assessment process to make sure that rules and procedures are properly understood and dutifully followed. Prior to the assessment of an application, experts will be requested to assess whether there are any grounds for a conflict of interest. Should any possible risk be identified, the application will be reassigned to a different expert.

### Calculation of the final score

The final score for an application will be calculated as the average of the scores awarded by two experts who have assessed the application independently. If the difference between the total scores does not exceed 20 points, one of the experts will prepare a consolidated assessment report.

If the difference between the two overall scores for the same application exceeds 20 points, a third expert will be appointed. The final score will then be determined as the average of the two assessments with the least difference between their overall scores. This requirement shall not apply to cases where both experts have scored an application below the acceptance threshold.

## 8.2. Award procedure

### Selection of projects for funding

The selection of projects will be made and the final decision for funding will be taken by a selection panel – the Project Selection Committee (hereinafter – 'PSC'). The results of the assessment will be presented at the PSC meeting. PSC will rank the applications with the passing scores and will set the order of priority for the applications with equal scores. In cases where applications received the same scores, their order of priority shall be determined by the scores for the following award criteria, in descending order of importance: 'Relevance', 'Quality' and 'Impact'.

Applications that pass the individual thresholds per criterion and the overall threshold will be considered for funding – within the limits of the available budget. Other applications might be put on the reserve list or will be rejected.

### **Communication of the selection results**

Each applicant will be informed about the assessment results. All applicants whose applications have been selected for funding will be invited for the preparation of the Grant Agreement. Each rejected applicant will receive an Assessment Summary Report including reasons for its rejection and information on the possibility of submitting a complaint. (For more information, please see Section 8.4).

If the application is deemed to have been rejected due to flaws in the selection procedures (rather than the quality of the application), a complaint may be submitted following the deadlines and procedures set out in the Assessment Summary Report.

### **Grant Agreement**

Grant Agreement preparation will involve a dialogue to fine-tune the technical and financial aspects of the project and may require extra information from the applicant. It may also include adjustments to the application to address recommendations of the experts, and PSC, as well as any other concerns. Compliance with the requested amendments will be a pre-condition for signing the Grant Agreement.

## **8.3. Admissibility and eligibility check**

Once submission of applications is closed, the admissibility and eligibility check of applications will be carried out by the Granting Authority. Admissibility and eligibility check will ensure that only high-quality applications, which are in line with requirements set out in the Call, are further assessed (award criteria assessment) and qualify for funding. In this stage, compliance with the admissibility conditions and eligibility criteria is checked. Failure to comply with one of the admissibility and eligibility requirements may lead to the rejection of the application.

#### **To be considered admissible, an application must be:**

- submitted by the Call deadline,
- submitted electronically via the Portal. Paper submissions are NOT possible,
- readable and accessible,
- complete and must contain all the requested information, annexes, and supporting documents. Only the information requested in the application and the documents specified in Annex 4 to the Call Conditions will be taken into consideration during the assessment.

Applicants are encouraged to submit application in English to facilitate the treatment of the applications and to speed up the assessment process. However, applications submitted in any of the official languages of the EU will be accepted.<sup>24</sup> In this case, an application should be accompanied by an executive summary in English. It should be noted that the assessment of applications against the award criteria will be carried out on the basis of the English version of an application. The quality of the translation will not be guaranteed, and the translation of the application may not fully reveal the content of the text in the original language, therefore, it is left at applicant's own risk. Moreover, the Grant Agreement, as well as the project management, formal reporting, key deliverables, and all communication with the Granting Authority must be in English.

If any of the admissibility requirements are not met, the application will be deemed inadmissible, no eligibility check will be commenced, and the application will be rejected.

#### **To be considered eligible, an application must:**

1. Involve only applicants and associated partners defined as eligible under the Call Conditions (see Section 6.1 of the Call Conditions);
2. Be submitted by a consortium meeting the requirements set out in the Call Conditions (see Section 6.2 of the Call Conditions);

<sup>24</sup> If you need the Call documentation in another official EU language, please submit a request within 10 days after Call publication (for the contact information, see Section 7).

3. Not involve legal entities subject to EU restrictive measures (see Section 6.1 of the Call Conditions);
4. Not exceed the maximum project duration indicated in the Call Conditions (see Section 4 of the Call Conditions);
5. Pledge a contribution to the project with own funds or funds from other sources at least to the percentage level of the project costs specified in the Call Conditions (see Section 3.1 of the Call Conditions).
6. Be submitted by the applicant (coordinator) which meets operational capacity criteria (see Section 7.2 of the Call Conditions);
7. Target vulnerable young people, as specified in Section 2.2 of the Call Conditions;
8. Not propose a project that has already been funded (in its entirety or any separate part thereof) from the EU budget or will receive such funding in the foreseeable future.

If any of the eligibility requirements is not met, the application will be deemed ineligible, no further assessment will be undertaken, and the application will be rejected.

Results of admissibility and eligibility assessment will be documented, and, in case of the negative assessment, the applicant will receive an explanation for the rejection.

## 8.4. Complaints about application rejection

If the application is deemed to have been rejected due to flaws in selection procedures (rather than the quality of the application), a complaint may be submitted. Only the coordinator of the consortium can submit a complaint.

Complaints will be subject to the following conditions:

1. Complaints must be limited to procedural aspects, and not focused on the merits of corresponding applications. A complaint must relate to the assessment procedure, admissibility, or eligibility checks and demonstrate a procedural irregularity, factual error, manifest error of assessment, or abuse of powers (e. g., lack of coherence between the scores and comments, lack of conclusions or inadequate reasoning of (i.e., within) conclusions, the existence of a conflict of interest, breach of the limits of discretion, etc.). Disagreements with the result or reasoning of the application's assessment will not be considered.
2. Only one request for reviewing the procedural aspects per application will be considered. The request cannot refer to the assessment of applications submitted by other applicants.
3. Review requests will not automatically lead to re-assessment of an application. Re-assessment will only be carried out if the complaint demonstrates that the procedural irregularity, factual error, manifest error of assessment, or abuse of powers has affected the decision regarding the funding of the application. Thus, for example, a complaint relating to one of the assessment criteria will not lead to a re-assessment if, even by adding the maximum points under this criterion, the final score will nevertheless remain below the threshold for funding.
4. Re-assessment will be carried out on the basis of initially provided information, i.e., no additional information will be accepted. Depending on the case, re-assessment can be partial (limited to the criterion affected by the error) or full (when the whole assessment has been recognized as flawed). Re-assessment may be assigned to the same assessment panel or a new one, depending on the Granting Authority's internal procedures.

All received complaints will be handled with the due observance of the requirements of confidentiality.

All complaints shall be submitted to the Granting Authority in English, by writing e-mail to the following address: [complaints@esf.lt](mailto:complaints@esf.lt).

An applicant is required to provide as much relevant detail to the complaint as possible, including any supporting documents and/or correspondence, if applicable.

Having received a complaint, the Granting Authority will examine it and provide a response.

Complaints must be filed within 20 days upon the receipt of a notification about the rejection of an application from the Granting Authority. Complaints received after the deadline will not be taken into consideration. The Granting Authority will respond no later than within 30 days after receiving the complaint. If a complaint is complex, the time allocated for the Granting Authority's response may be extended. If this is the case, the complainant will be informed about the progress of the investigation, the reasons for the delay, and a new deadline.

The complaints' procedure presented herein, and its timeframes must not hinder the start-up or ongoing implementation of other projects proposed for financing/financed under the Call. In case a complaint is confirmed, the application will be referred for reviewing and reassessment.

If the response provided by the Granting Authority is deemed insufficient by the complainant, the disputes concerning the complaint will be settled in accordance with the procedure established by the laws of the Republic of Lithuania in the Vilnius City District Court or the Vilnius Regional Court, depending on the nature of the claims.

## 8.5. Award criteria

Applications that are declared eligible and admissible will be subject to an assessment against the award criteria.

### The award criteria for this Call are as follows:

#### Relevance (Max 40 points, threshold 25 points):

The extent to which:

- The project contributes to the objectives and expected outcomes of the Call, as they are described in Section 2 of the Call Conditions;
- The project's necessity is based on a need analysis;
- The innovative approach to the main domains described in Section 2.1 of the Call Conditions is based on credible evidence;
- The application includes the appropriate measures for the adoption to specific needs, skills, and competencies of a target group, including the accessibility arrangements for persons with disabilities and special needs (if applicable);
- Project activities contribute to the development of skills and competences relevant for the green transition;
- Project activities are complementary to other initiatives already carried out by the participating entities and demonstrate a European added value.

#### Quality - project design, implementation, and project team (Max 40 points, threshold 20 points):

The extent to which:

- The project is clear and consistent;
- The project demonstrates logical links between the identified needs, problems and proposed solutions;
- Project activities and deliverables contribute to the objectives and outcomes of the project;
- The methodology for implementing the project (*arrangement of work, composition of essential elements (listed in Section 2.3 of the Call Conditions), skills validation process (specified in Section 2.3 of the Call Conditions), monitoring, quality control, timetable, risks & risk management*) is clear, complete and effective;
- The project is feasible within the proposed time frame and budget;
- The project is cost-effective and allocates appropriate resources to each activity;
- The project incorporates measures to ensure gender and non-discrimination mainstreaming;
- The composition of the consortium has a clear rationale. The project demonstrates a balanced distribution of tasks, responsibilities, resources, and management tools within the consortium.

#### Impact (Max 20 points, threshold 10 points):

- Expected long-term impact of the results on target groups and participants;
- Expected long-term impact of the project results on the skills development system at local, regional, national level or in other EU countries;
- Appropriate dissemination plan for ensuring sustainability and long-term impact after the EU funding ends.

Scale for assessing the application award criteria:

Max. number of points for a criterion	Range of scores			
	Very good	Good	Fair	Weak
40	34-40	28-33	20-27	0-19
20	17-20	14-16	10-13	0-9

Maximum of total award criteria points: 100 points.

Overall threshold: 60 points.

Please note that an application will be rejected if it scores below the overall minimum threshold (60 points) or if it does not pass the minimum score threshold set for each award criteria. The reasoning for that will be explained in the Assessment Summary Report.

## 9. Other regulations, dissemination and visibility, ownership

### 9.1. Data protection

The submission of an application under the Call involves the collection, use and processing of personal data. This data will be processed in accordance with the applicable laws on data protection, including Regulation 2016/679<sup>25</sup>. It will be processed solely for the purpose of assessing the application, subsequent management of the grant and, if needed, program monitoring, evaluation, and communication.

For more details, see Article 14 of the Grant Agreement.

### 9.2. Record keeping

The beneficiaries must keep records and store other supporting documents to prove the proper implementation of the project in line with the accepted standards in the respective field (if any). For lump sum contributions the beneficiaries are not obliged to keep specific records on the actual costs incurred but must keep adequate records and supporting documents to prove proper implementation of the work.

The beneficiaries must keep the original documents. Digital and digitalised documents are considered originals if they are authorised by the applicable national law. The Granting Authority may accept non-original documents if they offer a comparable level of assurance.

More detailed information is provided in Article 19 of the Grant Agreement (see the Grant Agreement template in Annex 2 to the Call Conditions).

### 9.3. Horizontal principles (gender and non-discrimination)

The projects under this Call must ensure gender equality, equal opportunities, and non-discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation throughout all the project cycle – the preparation, implementation, monitoring, and reporting stages.

The projects must take appropriate measures to prevent any discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation, in accordance with the aims, objectives, and priorities of the Call. Accessibility for people with disabilities should also be properly considered.

These principles aim to ensure that project participants, irrespective of their gender, limited abilities, or any other characteristics, are equally engaged in project activities. Please also see Article 17 of the Grant Agreement.

### 9.4. Dissemination and visibility

The beneficiaries must:

1. **display the EU flag (emblem) and the funding statement** 'Co-funded by the European Union' in all communication and dissemination activities related to the project and any supplies or major results funded by the grant,
2. **present the project** (including a project summary, the coordinator's contact details, the list of beneficiaries (if any), the European flag and the funding statement, project results, etc.) on the beneficiary's **website** or **social media account**,

The emblem and the funding statement are available in the Grant Agreement and on the Europa<sup>26</sup> website or can be downloaded from the European Commission's website<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj>

<sup>26</sup> [https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/symbols/european-flag\\_en](https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/symbols/european-flag_en)

<sup>27</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/logos\\_downloadcenter](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/logos_downloadcenter)

Please note that the Granting Authority and the European Commission reserve the right to make the project results public. Please also see Article 16 of the Grant Agreement.

## 9.5. Ownership of results

The results of the project belong to the beneficiaries that generated them. The Granting Authority does not obtain ownership of the results produced during the implementation of the project.

'Results' are understood as any tangible or intangible effect of a project, such as data, know-how or information of any form or nature, regardless of whether it can be protected or not, as well as any rights attached to it, including intellectual property rights.

The Granting Authority and the European Commission may use (free of charge) any non-sensitive information related to the project activities, as well as materials and documents received from the beneficiaries, for policy, information, communication, dissemination, evaluation, and publicity purposes – during implementation of the project or afterwards.

For more details, please see Article 15 of the Grant Agreement. The rules governing intellectual property rights are also described in the same Article.

## 10. Support

Many answers can be found in the Call Conditions and other related documentation mentioned above.

Please also visit the Granting Authority's (<https://www.esf.it/en/>) and the European Commission's (<https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/esf-social-innovation>) websites regularly, since they will be used to publish Frequently Asked Questions and Call Conditions updates, if necessary.

### For submission support:

For individual questions concerning the Portal, please contact the IT Helpdesk: [IThelp@esf.it](mailto:IThelp@esf.it)

Non-IT related questions should be sent to the following email address: [Skills@esf.it](mailto:Skills@esf.it)

Questions related to the submission of an application must:

- Be sent **at the latest 7 days before the submission deadline** (see Chapter 4 of the Call Conditions);
- Clearly indicate the reference of the Call and the topic to which the question relates.

Call-specific questions must be sent **at the latest 10 days before the submission deadline**.

## 11. Grant Agreement preparation

If the assessment of an application is positive, the Grant Agreement preparation procedure will be initiated, during which the applicant will be asked to update the submitted application considering experts' comments (provided in the Summary Assessment Report), as well as to submit the requested documents to the Granting Authority for financial capacity assessment.

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

The Grant Agreement template may be found as Annex 2 to the Call Conditions.

## 12. Project implementation requirements

### 12.1. Reporting and payment arrangements

The beneficiaries will have to report regularly to the Granting Authority on the progress of the project (e.g., deliverables, critical risks, etc.), by using the Portal Reporting Tool and in accordance with the timing and conditions stated in the Grant Agreement. For payment requests, the coordinator will provide a report (prepared using the template available in the Portal Reporting Tool). According to the maximum possible duration of the project (24 months) the first periodic

report will be submitted 30 days after the end of reporting period (up to 12th month). Specific reporting periods will be defined in the Data Sheet of the Grant Agreement (Point 4.2).

Payments will be made in Euro to the bank account indicated by the coordinator (Grant Agreement, Data Sheet, Point 4.2).

The payment of the grant usually consists of prefinancing instalments and the final payment (the balance). The aim of the prefinancing is to provide a cash flow to the beneficiary. Please note that a risk assessment of the project will be carried out prior to signing the Grant Agreement. In case of acceptable risks, the frequency, and the amounts of the foreseen prefinancing may be adjusted, and an additional prefinancing may be provided.

According to the maximum possible duration of the project (24 months), two prefinancing instalments (plus an additional prefinancing, if any) and the final payment are planned:

- The first (initial) prefinancing payment of 50% of the grant after signature of the Grant Agreement;
- The second prefinancing payment of 30% of the grant after approval of the first periodic report.

Where the spending of the previous prefinancing will be less than 70%, the amount of next prefinancing payment will be reduced by the difference between the 70% ceiling and the amount used.

- the final payment (payment of the balance).

There will be no interim payments. The specific prefinancing frequency, amount and requirements will be defined in the Grant Agreement. For more details, see Point 4 of the Data Sheet and Articles 21 and 22 of the Grant Agreement.

## 12.2. Liability regime for recoveries

The liability regime for recoveries will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (Point 4.3 of the Data Sheet and Article 22 of the Grant Agreement). For beneficiaries, it is limited joint and several liability with individual ceilings – for each beneficiary that cannot exceed their maximum share of the grant.

The beneficiaries must be liable to the Granting Authority for the total value of the grant paid out, including the amounts transferred by the coordinator to its beneficiaries. In the event of a recovery order for full or partial reimbursement of the grant to the Granting Authority, the coordinator shall be responsible for the reimbursement of the grant.

Recoveries will be made, if – during the Grant Agreement termination, the final payment or afterwards – it turns out that the Granting Authority has paid too much and needs to recover the amounts undue.

For more details see Section 1 of Chapter 4 and Article 22 of the Grant Agreement,

## 12.3. Provisions concerning project implementation

For details about the amendment provisions, see Articles 5 and 39 of the Grant Agreement.

If the beneficiaries breach any of obligations under the Grant Agreement, the Granting Authority will take measures provided in Chapter 5 of the Grant Agreement. For more details about the consequences of non-compliance, please see Chapter 5 of the Grant Agreement.

### No-profit principle

The grant may not have the purpose or effect of producing a profit<sup>28</sup> for the beneficiaries.

Profit is defined as a surplus of the receipts (the Union grant, and the revenue generated by the project) over the eligible costs incurred by the beneficiary, when the request is made for payment of the balance. If there is a profit, it will be deducted from the final grant amount.

For more details see Point 4.2 of the Data Sheet and Article 21.3.3 of the Grant Agreement.

28 See Article 192 EU Financial Regulation 2018/1046

## 13. Amendments of the Call Conditions

Any amendment to the Call Conditions, including their annexes, will be set out in writing, and will be published in the same place as the Call Conditions.

## 14. Annexes

1. Annex 1 Detailed Budget Table;
2. Annex 2 Grant Agreement, template;
3. Annex 3 Application Form, template;
4. Annex 4 List of Required Documents;
5. Annex 5 List of the Previous Projects, template;
6. Annex 6 Final Report 'Lessons learned and future plans', template.

