

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

# **Implementing the Disability Employment Package – innovative approaches to improve labour market outcomes for persons with disabilities**

ESF-SI-2025-DEP-01

## **Call Conditions**



Funded by  
the European Union

## ABSTRACT

**Call identifier:** Lithuanian European Social Fund Agency (also referred to as 'the Granting Authority') implementing the European Social Fund Plus Social Innovation Plus Initiative on behalf of the European Commission as an entrusted entity.

**Open Call title:** Implementing the Disability Employment Package – innovative approaches to improve labour market outcomes for persons with disabilities.

**Open Publication date:** Publication date is specified in the Call announcement.

**Deadline:** 30/10/2025 at 17:00 CEST time zone.

**Indicative overall grant budget for the Call:** EUR 10 000 000

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

**Expected duration of a project:** *18-24 months*.

**The size of grant:** The estimated size of a grant is between EUR 500 000 and EUR 1 000 000 per project (but this does not preclude the submission/selection of applications requesting other amounts), constituting no more than 80% of the total project budget. A co-financing of at least 20% must thus come from other sources than the EU budget.

**Official Call websites:**

<https://www.socialinnovationplus.eu>;

<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'). The connection link to the Portal will be specified in the Call announcement.

**For support:** [DEP@socialinnovationplus.eu](mailto:DEP@socialinnovationplus.eu)

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## GLOSSARY

**APPLICANT** – a legal entity (organisation) which submits an application. The applicant assumes the role of **the coordinator**. The coordinator represents the consortium and serves as the central contact point for the Granting Authority.

**ASSOCIATED PARTNERS** – entities that participate in the project, but without the right to charge costs or claim contributions.

**BENEFICIARIES** – the signatories of the Grant Agreement (either directly or through an accession form). They shall collectively contribute to the 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 fulfilling their obligations).

**CO-APPLICANT** – a legal entity that participates in the project, is actively involved in the implementation of the project, and is financially engaged (either by hiring staff or by incurring other costs).

**CONSORTIUM** – an association of two or more entities with the goal of participating in a common project and combining their resources to achieve common project objectives.

**COORDINATOR** – a legal entity that represents the consortium and serves as the central contact point for the Granting Authority.

**DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT PACKAGE (THE PACKAGE)** – a flagship initiative of the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030, which aims at improving labour market outcomes for persons with disabilities by supporting Member States in promoting their social inclusion and economic autonomy through employment.

**ESFA** – Lithuanian European Social Fund Agency, the entrusted entity responsible for the implementation of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) Social Innovation Plus (SI+) Initiative. Under this Call, ESFA may also be referred to as **the Granting Authority**.

**LUMP SUM** – a form of simplified cost options that is determined during the case-by-case assessment of an application based on the submitted Detailed Budget Table and in accordance with the predefined terms of agreement on activities and/or outputs and on their completion.

**PORTAL** – the electronic portal and exchange system managed by ESFA.

**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:

- The entity's mission or activity is in the general interest (public service mission).
- The entity's shares belong to a public body (even if the public ownership constitutes 100% of the share capital).
- The entity receives public financing.
- The 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.

**SOCIAL INNOVATION** – 'an activity that is social both as to its ends and its means and in particular an activity which relates to the development and implementation of new ideas concerning products, services, practices, and models, that simultaneously meets social needs and creates new social relationships or collaborations between public, civil society, or private organisations, thereby benefiting society and boosting its capacity to act' (Article 2.1. (8) of the ESF+ Regulation).

<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. Background

## 1.1. Policy context

Persons with disabilities represent a significant group within the European Union (EU). In 2022, about 27.0% of persons aged 16 and over declared a disability<sup>2</sup>. This represented about 99.9 million people with disabilities aged 16 and over living in private households. In the working-age population, i.e. the 16–64 age group, there were around 39 million persons with a moderate disability and 12 million persons with a severe disability<sup>3</sup>, which amounts to about 20% of the EU working-age population

However, while this group of people comprises a significant portion of the EU population, they have a disadvantaged position in the labour market. Persons with disabilities face more barriers in finding employment and are, therefore, more likely to become long-term unemployed or inactive. When employed, persons with disabilities often work in sheltered employment rather than in the open labour market, or in lower-qualified, lower-paid and less secure jobs with less access to training opportunities, which puts them at a higher risk of in-work poverty. In addition, the COVID-19 crisis has disproportionately affected persons with disabilities, in many cases hindering their labour market participation, for example, due to insufficient accessibility of teleworking solutions.

All of this can be clearly seen in the statistical data. In the EU in 2022, about 54.3% of persons with disabilities aged 20–64 were employed, in comparison with 76.3% of persons without disabilities. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities aged 20–64 was 15.1%, in comparison with 7.6% of people without disabilities in the same age group.

Persons with disabilities also face a higher risk of poverty after social transfers in comparison with people without disabilities. In 2022, about 20.5% of persons with disabilities aged 16 and over faced a risk of poverty, in comparison with 14.5% of persons without disabilities in the same age group. About 35.9% of persons with severe disabilities faced a risk of poverty or social exclusion. Extra costs due to disability also increase the financial burden on persons with disabilities and their families, leading to an increased risk of living in poverty.

Moreover, the situation of women with disabilities is also significantly worse than the situation of men with disabilities. About 51.03% of women with disabilities aged 20–64 were employed, in comparison with 58.1% of men with disabilities in the same age group. About 29.8% of women with disabilities aged 16 and over were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, in comparison with 27.4% of men with disabilities in the same age group<sup>4</sup>.

Understanding that fostering the employment of persons with disabilities is crucial for ensuring their economic autonomy and social inclusion while contributing to a well-functioning and inclusive labour market, the EU is committed to improving the labour market outcomes of persons with disabilities<sup>5</sup>.

Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 has already established, implemented, and upheld the principles of equal treatment in employment, ensuring non-discrimination and safeguarding employees' rights. Article 5 of the Directive obliged employers to provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities to enable them to have access to, participate in, or advance in employment, or to undergo training under the condition that implementing such actions is not imposing a 'disproportionate burden on the employer'<sup>6</sup>.

The right of persons with disabilities to work and be employed on an equal basis with others is also enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which has been ratified by the EU and all of its Member States. Article 27 stipulates that: 'States Parties recognise the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. States

<sup>2</sup> [Statistics | Eurostat](#)

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Grammenos, S., European comparative data on persons with disabilities: Equal opportunities, fair working conditions, social protection and inclusion, Analysis and trends, Data 2022, 2024, [https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/european-comparative-data-persons-disabilities-data-2022\\_en](https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/european-comparative-data-persons-disabilities-data-2022_en)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> European Parliament, Policy Department on Citizen's Rights and Constitutional Affairs, The EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030: Achievements and Perspective, 2024, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/767095/IPOL\\_BRI\(2024\)767095\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/767095/IPOL_BRI(2024)767095_EN.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2000/78/oj/eng>

Parties shall safeguard and promote the realisation of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during the course of employment, by taking appropriate steps, including through legislation<sup>7</sup>.

In addition, in 2017 European Parliament, European Council and the European Commission jointly proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights. Principle 17 of the European Pillar of Social Rights reaffirms the right of persons with disabilities to services that enable them to participate in the labour market and a work environment adapted to their needs<sup>8</sup>. The European Pillar of Social Rights is underpinned by the Action Plan<sup>9</sup>, which, as one of its targets, has the objective of having at least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 in employment by 2030. Given the low employment levels of persons with disabilities, the mentioned objective could be achieved by including this target group in the labour market.

The Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030 was launched by the European Commission (EC) in 2021 and was adopted together with the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. It aims to improve the situation of persons with disabilities in the EU over the ten-year period, making sure that they can fully enjoy their rights, have equal opportunities and access to society and the economy, decide where, how and with whom they live, and that they can move freely in the EU, regardless of their support needs. Closing the employment gap between persons with and without disabilities is one of the objectives of the Strategy, which invited Member States to set national targets for employment and adult learning for persons with disabilities<sup>10</sup>.

One of the Strategy's seven flagship initiatives is the Disability Employment Package (the Package). The Package aims to improve the labour market outcomes of persons with disabilities by providing guidance and good practices for employers, employers' associations, and public authorities, as well as by raising awareness about persons with disabilities and by combating stereotypes. The Package's actions cover all stages of recruitment and employment: strengthening the capacities of employment and integration services; promoting hiring perspectives through affirmative action; ensuring reasonable accommodation; securing health and safety at work; vocational rehabilitation schemes in cases of chronic diseases or accidents; exploring quality jobs in sheltered employment; and pathways to the open labour market<sup>11</sup>.

EU funds also play an important role in realising the rights of persons with disabilities when implementing the Strategy. EU financial instruments under the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021–2027, the NextGeneration EU, the Recovery Plan, or the Technical Support Instrument for Member States are particularly relevant in this context. The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is the most important funding scheme available for Member States to co-finance actions aimed at fighting poverty and exclusion, combating discrimination, and helping the most disadvantaged groups, including persons with disabilities, to gain access to the labour market. In 2022, around 4 million people with disabilities were supported through ESF+<sup>12</sup>.

Taking into account the significant issues remaining with increasing the employment of persons with disabilities and closing the persistent employment gap between persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities, innovative solutions are required to change the current situation.

## 1.2. The potential of social innovation

This is a call for European Union (EU) grants related to the transfer or scaling up of social innovations in the field of employment of persons with disabilities under ESF+ SI+ Initiative. The Package shall serve as a reference for the practices. The ESF+ SI+ Initiative aims at promoting transnational cooperation between EU Member States and EaSI participating countries to facilitate the transfer and scaling up of innovative solutions. By supporting transnational

7 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>

8 Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights (2017/C 428/09), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017C1213\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017C1213(01))

9 The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/>

10 Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021–2030, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3e1e2228-7c97-11eb-9ac9-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

11 Disability Employment Package to improve labour market outcomes for persons with disabilities, [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/disability/union-equality-strategy-rights-persons-disabilities-2021-2030/disability-employment-package-improve-labour-market-outcomes-persons-disabilities\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/disability/union-equality-strategy-rights-persons-disabilities-2021-2030/disability-employment-package-improve-labour-market-outcomes-persons-disabilities_en)

12 Exploring open data on ESF participants, <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/stories/s/2014-2020-ESF-and-YEI-participants/49qq-idz4/>

cooperation, the initiative aims to disseminate best practices across Europe in various fields, including employment, education, skills, and social inclusion.

Under the ESF+, the SI+ Initiative covers innovations<sup>13</sup> that are social in terms of both their ends and their means. Thus, it acknowledges 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 and
- generates social output and impact in the form 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.<sup>14</sup>

Innovative activities relate 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 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 specific needs and opportunities or to experiment in a transnational context at EU level.

In line with the above definition, social innovation is marked by the following characteristics:

- **It is built upon a bottom-up/tailored approach.**

Social innovation is triggered by context-specific needs. Rather than relying on standardised models, social innovation encourages the development of solutions that are finely adjusted to the specific needs and resources of a given context. This approach recognises that the complexity of social issues demands a customised response that harnesses the potential of local stakeholders and fosters a sense of ownership over the solutions.

- **It requires the active involvement of civil society.**

Studies on innovation in general often underline the importance of cooperation between public authorities, the private sector, and academia. Social innovation adds civil society as a fourth essential group of stakeholders. As social innovation is people-centred, the involvement of civil society is essential to inform the design and delivery of successful solutions and related policies. In this context, social economy entities play a key role: they have strong local roots and primarily aim to serve the community, thus being well-placed to provide need-driven innovative solutions.<sup>15</sup>

- **It is often based on tested small-scale solutions with potential for upscaling.**

If tested successfully at the small scale, innovative solutions can be scaled up and eventually mainstreamed into public policies or systems. Transferring an innovative solution, even partially, requires extensive adaptation of the model, approach, service, or product to its new context. It is an iterative process, consisting of continuous trials and adjustments with regard to specific local situations, as well as assessment of the long- and short-term impact on the target population.<sup>16</sup>

13 '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).

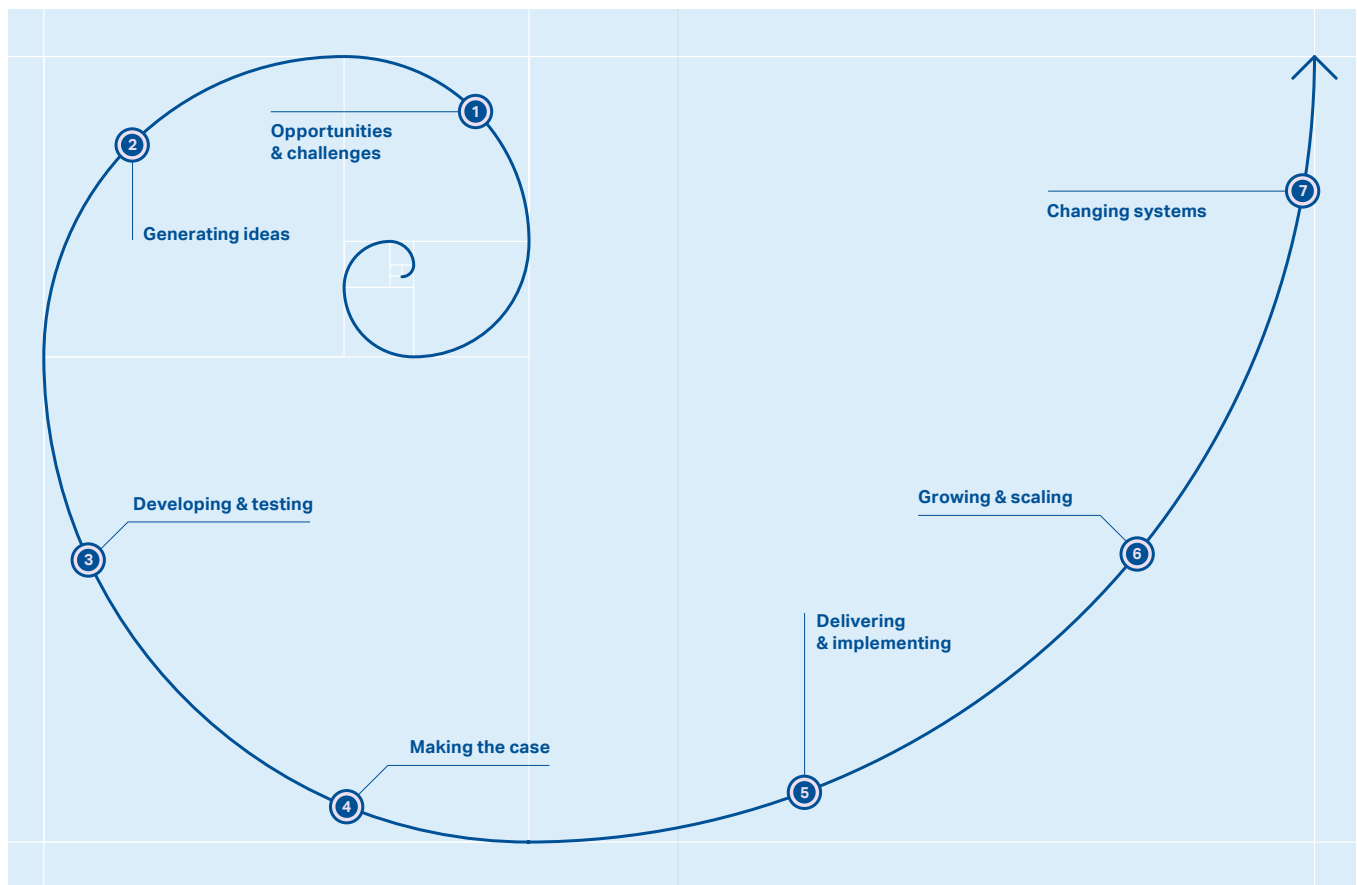
14 [The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/1000000/1/attached/20190619_The%20European%20Pillar%20of%20Social%20Rights%20in%2020%20principles.pdf)

15 COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS. Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy: [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0778](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0778)

16 European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. (2022). Ledan, A. Social experimentation – A practical guide for project promoters. Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: [Social experimentation – Publications Office of the EU](https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/11111111-1111-1111-1111-111111111111).



All in all, social innovation is often referred to as a cyclical process, from early prompts to possible changes in mainstream system policies. Throughout the process, there is continuous learning, assessment of further development, and adaptation. This can be illustrated by a multi-step curve, as shown in the figure below (Figure 1).



**Figure 1 The Innovation Spiral**

Source: [NESTA \(2019\). A Compendium of Innovation Methods.](#)

### 1.3. 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>17</sup>, and in particular Articles 5(2) and 25 (i) thereof;
- Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union<sup>18</sup>, and in particular Articles 184, 185 and 186 thereof.

This Call is financed by the ESF+ under the SI+ Initiative, launched by the European Commission. The SI+ Initiative is implemented under the EaSI strand of the ESF+, under indirect management (Article 25 (i) of the ESF+ Regulation) by ESFA.

The ESF+ is the main European-level instrument for investing in people and supporting the implementation of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights. It targets employment, labour mobility, social inclusion, and skills. ESF+ supports EU Member States in achieving high levels of employment, fair social protection, the eradication of poverty, and a skilled and resilient workforce ready for the transition to a green and digital economy.

<sup>17</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1057>

<sup>18</sup> [Regulation – EU, Euratom – 2024/2509 – EN – EUR-Lex](#)

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.

## 1.4. Disability Employment Package

As mentioned before, The Disability Employment Package<sup>19</sup> is one of the key flagship initiatives of the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030<sup>20</sup>.

The Package's measures span the entire employment process for persons with disabilities (see Figure 2), from recruitment to long-term workplace inclusion. The six topics addressed by the Package are: 1) strengthening the capacities of employment and integration services, 2) promoting hiring perspectives through affirmative action and combating stereotypes, 3) ensuring reasonable accommodation, 4) securing health and safety at work in case of chronic diseases, work accidents or disabilities, 5) ensuring vocational rehabilitation schemes, and 6) exploring quality jobs in sheltered employment and pathways to the open labour market.

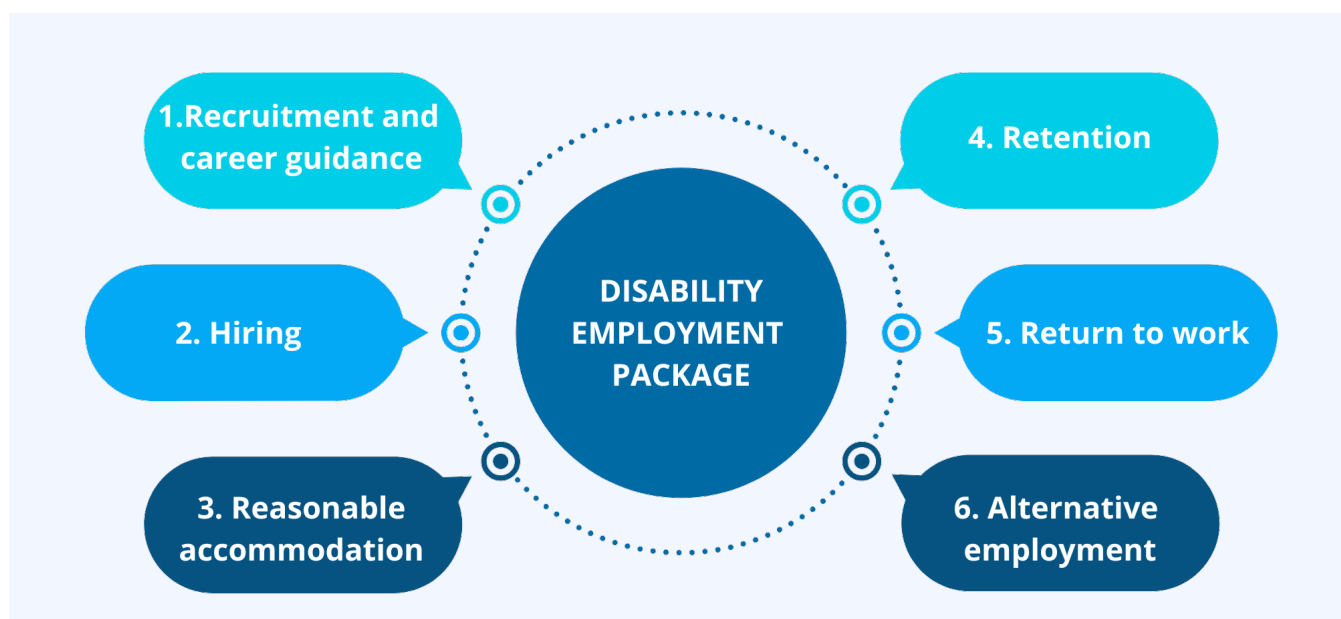


Figure 2. The Disability Employment Package focus areas

### 1.4.1 Strengthening capacities of employment and integration services

Public Employment Services (PES) play a crucial role in facilitating the labour market participation of persons with disabilities. Strengthening PES capacity ensures that employment and integration services are inclusive, effective, and tailored to the needs of this group. To achieve this, PES must be equipped with the right strategies, tools, and partnerships to provide personalised support, targeted job-matching services, and effective labour market policies.

A key focus is on enhancing PES knowledge and operational capabilities to address the barriers persons with disabilities face in the workforce. This includes developing inclusive recruitment policies, improving accessibility of employment services, and fostering collaboration with employers and social partners. Additionally, the implementation of evidence-based practices, vocational training programmes, and employer awareness initiatives can significantly contribute to bridging the employment gap. More specifically, the toolkit presents six areas of action:

1. PES internal measures: training, recruitment policy, performance targets.
2. Services: provision of information, guidance and job placement services, job portals.
3. Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs): supported employment, personalised support, self-employment and entrepreneurship.

<sup>19</sup> [Disability Employment Package](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-30 \(europa.eu\)](#)

4. Reasonable accommodation: guidance for companies, accessibility in PES.
5. Outreach programmes: targeted job fairs, specialised disability advisory services.
6. Engaging in partnerships: models.

Inspiring examples of such actions, along with concrete guidance on strengthening PES services, can be found in the Practitioner Toolkit on Strengthening PES to Improve the Labour Market Outcomes of Persons with Disabilities<sup>21</sup>. This resource provides practical insights into effective employment policies, accessible services, and successful partnerships that support the labour market inclusion of persons with disabilities.

The career guidance policy note is another deliverable under this point. The note has been developed by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop). The guidance presents recent policy developments on accessible lifelong training, development of career management skills, provision of high-quality inclusive support, provision of training to empower the actors, provision of universal coverage, as well as lessons learnt<sup>22</sup>.

#### 1.4.2 Promoting hiring perspectives through affirmative action and combating stereotypes

Ensuring equal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities is essential for fostering an inclusive and diverse labour market. Strengthening hiring perspectives through affirmative action and actively combating stereotypes can help remove barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from accessing and retaining employment. To achieve this, employers, public authorities, and social partners must adopt targeted strategies that promote inclusive recruitment practices, provide necessary workplace adaptations, and raise awareness about the benefits of diversity in the workforce.

A variety of affirmative action measures are currently being implemented across EU Member States to increase the employment of persons with disabilities. These measures fall into several key categories:

- Support services for businesses – providing advisory services, toolkits, and professional guidance to help employers adopt inclusive hiring practices and implement workplace accommodations effectively.
- Subsidies and financial incentives – offering wage subsidies, tax exemptions, and reductions in social security contributions to employers who recruit and retain employees with disabilities.
- Quota systems – establishing employment quotas that require companies to hire a minimum percentage of employees with disabilities, with mechanisms for compliance and incentives for exceeding requirements.
- Awareness-raising initiatives – conducting campaigns and training programmes to challenge stereotypes, showcase the capabilities of persons with disabilities, and promote inclusive workplace cultures.

*Please note that subsidies and financial incentives, such as wage subsidies, are considered forms of regranting and are therefore not eligible under this Call.*

Inspiring examples of such strategies can be found in the Catalogue of Positive Actions to Encourage the Hiring of Persons with Disabilities and Combating Stereotypes<sup>23</sup>, which offers concrete guidance on effective measures and best practices across EU Member States.

#### 1.4.3 Ensuring reasonable accommodation at work

Building an inclusive labour market requires targeted strategies to eliminate barriers preventing persons with disabilities from accessing and retaining employment. Provision of reasonable accommodation is an obligation under the Employment Equality Directive<sup>24</sup>. It plays a crucial role in ensuring that individuals can perform their job effectively while participating on equal terms with others. Employers, public authorities, and social partners must implement structured measures that promote inclusive recruitment, facilitate workplace adaptations, and foster awareness of the benefits of diversity in the workforce.<sup>25</sup>

21 European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Genova, A. and Davern, E., *European network of public employment services – Practitioner toolkit on strengthening PES to improve the labour market outcomes of persons with disabilities*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/034981>

22 [Lifelong guidance for persons with disabilities](#)

23 European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Catalogue of positive actions to encourage the hiring of persons with disabilities and combating stereotypes*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/340493>

24 [Directive – 2000/78 – FN – EUR-Lex](#)

25 *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), Article 27 – Work and Employment. EU Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC) – Obligation to provide reasonable accommodation in employment.*

A variety of reasonable accommodation methods are being applied across EU Member States to improve labour market participation for persons with disabilities. These methods include:

- Providing Assistive Technology – supplying employees with tools such as screen readers, voice recognition software, and ergonomic equipment to enhance workplace accessibility.
- Personal Assistance – offering job coaching, interpreters, or workplace support to help employees navigate job tasks more effectively.
- Adjusting Workspaces (Including Teleworking) – modifying office environments, providing accessible infrastructure, and offering remote work options when needed.
- Flexible Working Hours – adapting schedules, allowing additional breaks, or restructuring shifts to accommodate individual needs.
- Flexible Task Arrangements – reallocating duties or restructuring roles to align job responsibilities with an employee's abilities.

*Please note that while measures such as assistive technology, personal assistance, and workspace adjustments are important for accessibility, costs related to the purchase of furniture, equipment, or infrastructure (including refurbishment or construction work) are ineligible. However, the rental or leasing of equipment may be eligible if it is clearly justified as necessary, cost-effective, and proportionate to the project's implementation needs.*

In addition to workplace adaptations, awareness-raising initiatives play a key role in combating stereotypes and ensuring that employers, colleagues, and the broader public recognise the value of diversity. These initiatives include training programmes, policy toolkits, and guidance materials aimed at fostering an inclusive work culture.

Practical examples of successful implementation are outlined in the Reasonable Accommodation at Work – Guidelines and Good Practices<sup>26</sup>, providing a structured framework for meeting legal obligations while fostering a more inclusive labour market. By integrating reasonable accommodation measures, employers not only ensure compliance with EU regulations but also unlock the benefits of a diverse, engaged, and highperforming workforce, ultimately strengthening their organisation's resilience and innovation capacity.

#### **1.4.4 Retaining persons with disabilities in employment: preventing disabilities associated with chronic diseases**

Retaining persons with disabilities in the workforce requires proactive strategies to prevent the progression of disabilities linked to chronic diseases. Many employees face barriers that impact their ability to work longterm, making early intervention, workplace adaptation, and ongoing support essential.

To achieve this, employers, public authorities, and social partners must implement comprehensive policies that promote workplace inclusion, early intervention, and ongoing support for employees with chronic diseases. Key measures include:

- Workplace health management – regular check-ups, health promotion programmes, and occupational health support to prevent work-related illnesses.
- Flexible work arrangements – phased return-to-work plans, adjusted workloads, and remote working options to accommodate fluctuating health conditions.
- Risk prevention and job adaptation – ergonomic assessments, modified workstations, and tailored job responsibilities to minimise strain.
- Training and awareness – educating employers and staff on chronic disease management and inclusive workplace practices.

Best practices and structured approaches to support retention and prevent disability progression can be found in the Guidelines for Effective Vocational Rehabilitation Schemes, offering insights into sustainable employment strategies.

#### **1.4.5 Securing vocational rehabilitation schemes in case of sickness or accidents**

A significant proportion of the working-age population suffers from chronic health problems, and many leave the labour market before their statutory retirement age. They need urgent adjustments to their work to prevent early retirement and disability. Being able to continue working despite health problems is important for enhancing one's

26 Reasonable Accommodation at Work – Guidelines and Good Practices, European Commission (2024).

personal well-being, promoting economic self-sufficiency, and preventing old-age poverty. In addition, keeping or including persons with disabilities in employment has become increasingly important to compensate for the reduction in labour supply resulting from an ageing population.

This can be achieved through vocational rehabilitation which is described as the process of facilitating an individual with additional support needs to overcome barriers, primarily to accessing, maintaining, or returning to employment. The process may also involve support for social inclusion. The process involves various services, which will vary for each individual, and may take place in a group or individual setting. Vocational rehabilitation can be for individuals who are returning to work after a chronic disease, accident, or acquired disability, but it can also be for persons with disabilities that have not yet entered the labour market. It can take place in different settings, including a hospital, in a specialised or mainstream setting, or whilst in employment.

Vocational rehabilitation process includes these key steps and elements:

- Inclusive, supportive education and training, which meets labour market needs.
- Proactive early intervention.
- A well-planned, person-centred, strengths-based, holistic and systematic approach which focuses on empowering individuals to participate in work.
- The development and implementation of individual plans based on co-production and drawing from multidisciplinary teams.
- Effective coordination and communication mechanisms between the actors.
- Career guidance and counselling, including consideration of *placethetrain*, as well as *trainthenplace* models; provide early employment experience and ensure onthejob support.
- Workplace and work adjustments and accommodations that facilitate the individual's work.
- Regular review of the plan and support needed and adapting it, particularly in moments of transition, such as moving to employment.

*Please note that while measures such as assistive technology, personal assistance, and workspace adjustments are important for accessibility, costs related to the purchase of furniture, equipment, or infrastructure (including refurbishment or construction works) are ineligible. However, the rental or leasing of equipment may be eligible if it is clearly justified as necessary, cost-effective, and proportionate to the project's implementation needs.*

Instructions on how to ensure the effective vocational rehabilitation process and examples of good practices implemented in the EU countries can be found in 'Guidelines for Effective Vocational Rehabilitation Schemes'<sup>27</sup>.

#### **1.4.6 Exploring quality jobs in sheltered employment and pathways to the open labour market**

Many persons with disabilities do not work in the open labour market. Some of them work in so-called sheltered employment. Those settings differ across Europe, and not all of them offer quality jobs and working conditions. In this context, the Commission carried out a Study on Alternative Employment Models for Persons with Disabilities: Set-up, Working Conditions and Pathways to the Open Labour Market in Inclusive Enterprises and Sheltered Workshops<sup>28</sup>. The study provides definitions, categorisation and mapping of those settings across the EU. It assesses their impact, including working conditions and job satisfaction, and the transition to the open labour market.

The study examines alternative employment models for persons with disabilities in eight European countries. These models include sheltered workshops and work integration enterprises, which provide employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The study highlights that transition rates from sheltered employment to the open labour market are generally low, often below 1%. The main reasons for this include a lack of effective pathways for transitioning, limited opportunities for skill development and career advancement, and the satisfaction with job security and social support in sheltered employment.

Importantly, the study describes a promising model of employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market: supported employment. The effectiveness of these programmes varies widely across Europe, and practical challenges persist, such as inflexible coaching provisions and eligibility restrictions.

<sup>27</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion. (2024). Jones, L., Maucher M., Talve K. Guidelines for Effective Vocational Rehabilitation Schemes: [3f102797-c8fb-440a-9fa1-4a4bc9286021\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/easip/sites/default/files/2024-06/3f102797-c8fb-440a-9fa1-4a4bc9286021_en)

<sup>28</sup> [Disability Employment Package to improve labour market outcomes for persons with disabilities – European Commission](#)

To address the challenges impeding quality employment of persons with disabilities, the study recommends several strategies, including:

1. Improving educational attainment and skills of persons with disabilities to increase their employability.
2. Creating effective pathways for transitioning from sheltered employment to the open labour market.
3. Raising awareness among families and carers about the benefits of non-segregated employment.
4. Addressing structural disincentives in national welfare benefit systems that deter persons with disabilities from seeking employment.
5. Tackling stigmatisation of disability and promoting inclusive hiring practices.
6. Providing clear information and support to employers to encourage them to hire persons with disabilities.
7. Reviewing quota systems and public procurement policies to promote inclusive employment.
8. Mainstreaming supported employment and related approaches to help persons with disabilities transition to the open labour market.
9. Addressing the lack of adequate funding for supported employment and work integration enterprises.
10. Improving the capacities of Public Employment Services to effectively support persons with disabilities.

Overall, the study emphasises the need for a comprehensive approach to promote the employment of persons with disabilities, including improving educational attainment, creating effective pathways for transitioning, and addressing structural disincentives and stigmatisation. By implementing these strategies, European countries can work towards creating a more inclusive labour market that provides equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. Good practices on promotion of quality employment of persons with disabilities can be found in the 'Study on Alternative Employment Models for Persons with Disabilities: Set-up, Working Conditions and Pathways to the Open Labour Market in Inclusive Enterprises and Sheltered Workshops'<sup>29</sup>.

## 2. Aim of the Call, Activities, and Outcomes

### 2.1. Aim of the Call

This Call will support transnational projects which aim at transferring or scaling up social innovations referenced in the Disability Employment Package.

Applicants are expected to base their proposals on one or more specific practices presented in the Package, with the goal of improving employment opportunities for persons with disabilities – such as recruitment and career guidance, inclusive hiring, reasonable accommodation at work, retention, return to work, or transition from sheltered employment to the open labour market.

### 2.2. Activities

Applicants shall design activities<sup>30</sup> that directly contribute to the aim of the Call. While applicants are encouraged to propose activities best suited to their specific context, at least the following key activities are expected to be covered in each proposal:

1. **Building a shared understanding** of unmet or insufficiently met social and labour market and labour market related needs by strengthening collaboration and capacity building between key stakeholders. For example, implementing initiatives that unite public institutions (e.g., employment and social affairs ministries, local municipalities, public employment services), private enterprises, non-profit organisations, organisations representing persons with

29 European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion. (2025). Gareis K., Gersdorff A., Sturm K. U., Behrend S. Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities: Set-up, working conditions and pathways to the open labour market in inclusive enterprises and sheltered workshops: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1cc9efd9-1b5d-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

30 More guidance on scaling up social innovations are available at:

- European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. (2022). Barnett, Stephen J. Scaling-up social innovation. Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: Social experimentation – Publications Office of the EU ([Scaling-up social innovation – Publications Office of the EU](#)).
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. (2022). Ledan, A. Social experimentation – A practical guide for project promoters. Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: Social experimentation – Publications Office of the EU ([Social experimentation – Publications Office of the EU](#)).



disabilities or service providers for those persons, as well as research bodies to co-design and implement solutions that address employment challenges faced by persons with disabilities. For the purpose of this call, employment is understood as a broad concept consisting of active labour market measures aimed at labour market activation, recruitment, hiring, return to work after sick leave or from vocational rehabilitation, as well as career progression.

2. **Identification and framing of the challenges.** For example, engaging key stakeholders in conducting a comprehensive mapping of barriers in the employment pathway for persons with disabilities across different industries, regions, and work settings.
3. **Identification and adaptation of proven social innovation models that have enhanced employment outcomes for persons with disabilities,** as described in the Package, which should serve as a reference point to put in place specific measures and solutions, to identify effective models, implementing knowledge exchange programmes to facilitate best practice sharing, and selecting promising models for adaptation.
4. **Selecting the appropriate method for scaling a proven social innovation.** For example, determining the most suitable scaling approach based on the context, barriers, and needs of persons with disabilities. This may include open adoption, where a new organisation adopts a social innovation implemented elsewhere; affiliation, where the social innovation owner forms a partnership with an organisation in a new location to meet local demand; branching, where the innovation owner expands operations to a new location to directly implement the model; or any other.
5. **Implementing continuous learning and impact-driven scaling.** For example, integrating regular reflection and evaluation throughout the project to enable timely revisions and improvements, rather than limiting assessment to the end (e.g. stakeholder engagement events, feedback workshops, or learning sessions to review data and assess progress), in order to ensure that innovations remain effective and scalable.
6. **Working towards mainstreaming/consistent adoption.** For example, fostering collaboration among key stakeholders to ensure the sustainable and widespread implementation of proven employment solutions for persons with disabilities into national and local policies, employer practices, and public employment services.
7. **Participation in mutual learning events organised by the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation (established under the ESF+ SI+ Initiative).** It is crucial for mutual learning between beneficiaries and therefore mandatory. It is planned to organise 2-4 mutual learning events during the implementation of the projects (a maximum of two events will take place on site (provisionally in Vilnius, and Brussels), the others online).

As a result of the implemented activities, projects should produce outputs that make innovative practices accessible, adaptable, and replicable for other stakeholders who are able to implement similar practices – such as public authorities, public employment service providers, employers, and other relevant organisations. These outputs should include documented:

- **Procedures\*** – step-by-step instructions on implementing and adapting the practice in different contexts, for example on national level, or by other similar organisations, depending on the project nature.
- **Manuals\*** – comprehensive guides detailing key processes, roles, and methodologies for successful application. The manuals shall be based on the Package guidelines. They could be adapted to specific sectors or specific groups of persons with disabilities.
- **Guidelines\*** – best practices, lessons learned, and recommendations to support further transfer and scaling. The guidelines shall be based on the Package guidelines. They could be adapted to specific sectors, or specific groups of persons with disabilities.
- **And/or other documented and accessible outputs\*** that support the sustainable adoption and scaling of innovative employment practices for persons with disabilities across different contexts, for example on national level, or by similar organisations, depending on the project nature. Documents should help to refute the stereotypes about persons with disabilities and misconceptions about their reduced productivity and cost of support measures.

- \* Those outputs shall not be a mere replication of the Package guidelines. They should be either adapted to specific sectors, groups of beneficiaries, or they should include practical instructions on the implementation of the measures/processes, etc., developed by the Project. They should be reviewed by the project beneficiary, which is a public authority responsible for enacting the policies relevant to the objectives of the Call, with a view to their further implementation.

## 2.3. Outcomes

Applicants should demonstrate in their projects a focus on achieving the desired outcomes, specifically by targeting the following areas (please note that this list is not exhaustive):

**1. The capacities of participating entities built to provide sustainable solutions to increasing employment of persons with disabilities, for instance:**

- Increased collaboration and capacity building among actors (e.g. social partners, employers, public entities, and companies, including public and private) at various levels, fostering effective partnerships and resource sharing.
- Enhanced capacities of stakeholders to implement innovative inclusive approaches tailored to address the specific challenges concerning the employment of persons with disabilities.
- Take-up of the developed outputs of the projects by national, regional, or other stakeholders with a view to scaling up their implementation.
- Commitment of the governments or public authorities to implement project outputs.

**2. Enhanced stakeholder diversity and collaboration in addressing the barriers to employment of persons with disabilities, for instance:**

- Facilitation of collaboration among wider networks, including government organisations, to collectively address the challenges concerning the employment of persons with disabilities.
- Increased awareness and knowledge among society and stakeholders at local/regional/national level of innovative approaches to promote employment of the persons with disabilities.
- Strengthening of the community by empowering persons with disabilities as active citizens with new skills and opportunities.

**3. Increased employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market, for instance:**

- The number of persons with disabilities who participated in the project and were employed in the open labour market has increased, or persons with disabilities who would have left the labour market were retained.
- Transition from sheltered workshops to the open labour market of persons with disabilities.
- Increased use of supported employment models for employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market.
- Refuting the stereotypes about persons with disabilities and misconceptions about their reduced productivity and cost of support measures, amongst the employers and public authorities.

## 2.4. Essential elements of the application

The following elements form the core of a project, i.e., each application shall cover **all the elements**. However, applicants are free to choose how to integrate or combine all these elements in the project framework (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3. Essential elements of the application**



## 1) Conceptual framework

The application should articulate a clear conceptual framework that outlines the cyclical nature of social innovation and details the steps necessary to scale up the proposed innovative model. This includes drawing on existing proven experiences referenced in the Package, specifying planned activities, and projecting anticipated long-term impact. Importantly, it should be underscored that any opportunities created for persons with disabilities **must supplement existing offerings** and services rather than simply redistribute them. The description should be provided in the Application Form: Part B.

## 2) Relevance of social innovation

In the table 'Theory of change' (Section 5, Part A of the Application Form), the applicant has to explain why it is reasonable to further develop (transfer and/or scale up) the chosen innovative approach. The applicant must also specify what positive impact the suggested innovative approach will generate on the target group, the participating entities, and employment system for persons with disabilities. The application should explain the potential impact of the chosen intervention model on addressing the prevalent issue of unemployment of persons with disabilities within the designated transfer/scaling up context. It should demonstrate a clear need for inclusive social innovation and explain how the innovation in question will help to tackle the identified problem(s). The application should clarify how the proposed model will help to fill existing gaps and/or **complement available solutions**, where appropriate. The description should be provided in the Application Form: Part B.

## 3) Transnational partnership

A consortium shall consist of at least three eligible entities representing at least two eligible countries (as detailed in Section 6.1 of the Call Conditions). The application should provide a clear and comprehensive account of how each consortium member will contribute to fulfilling the overarching aim of the Call (see Section 2.1.), while at the same time promoting mutual learning, fostering collaborative efforts, and ensuring the successful execution of the project. The roles assigned to each consortium member should be in line with their demonstrated experience and expertise. The description of the partnership should be provided in the Application Form: Part B – Section 2.

## 4) Diversity of stakeholders

A project is encouraged to apply the Quadruple Helix Model<sup>31</sup> of innovation, which recognises the importance of four major actors in the innovation process: public, private, academic sectors, and civil society. The application should include measures to identify the relevant stakeholders and explain how their effective collaboration and active engagement will be organised. The application should elaborate on how the project will benefit from the expertise, networks, and resources of the actors whose participation is envisaged. This description should be provided in the Application Form: Part B.

## 5) User-centred approach

The project design should prioritise the needs and interests of persons with disabilities, who are the primary target group of this Call. Building on this foundation, it is essential that **only voluntary participation of the persons with disabilities is encouraged**, ensuring that individuals are engaged in a manner that respects their choice. The project must detail how it intends to involve representatives of the target group(s) in the design and development of the intended solution, with a strong focus on creating solutions that are tailor-made to meet their specific needs and circumstances. Additionally, it should delineate how the planned intervention model will support their involvement in the scaling-up process. The description should be provided in the Application Form: Part B.

## 6) Impact measurement and management

An application should demonstrate that the solution proposed in the project is viable in terms of impact (i.e., it works better than other existing solutions). The methodology for collecting, evaluating and presenting evidence of the effectiveness of the proposed innovative approach shall be presented in the application. The methods must

31 Schütz, F., Heidingsfelder, M. L., & Schraudner, M. (2019). Co-shaping the Future in Quadruple Helix Innovation Systems: Uncovering Public Preferences toward Participatory Research and Innovation. *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation*, 5(2), 128–146. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sheji.2019.04.002>

include provisional outcome indicators for monitoring the activities and their impact on the target group and on the participating entities; they must be in line with the 'Theory of change'. The expected impact of the project and the indicators for measuring it shall be provided in the Application Form: Part B – Section 3. Impact evaluation should be proportionate to the scope and size of the project.

## 7) Dissemination and communication

The application should describe the dissemination and communication activities planned to promote the results of the project and maximise their impact at local/regional/national/European level. Dissemination channels and the intended target groups should also be described. The information should be provided in the Application Form: Part B – Section 3.

## 2.5. Social Innovation Match

Coordinators of projects selected under this Call **are required to upload key information about their projects: problem addressed, innovative solution, a short description of ongoing and planned activities, key results and benefits, potential for mainstreaming and their contact details to the Social Innovation Match<sup>32</sup> database (SIM)**. This information will be validated for quality and appropriateness by the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation before publication.

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 on initiatives related to employment, education and training, and social inclusion.

*SIM provides the following opportunities:*

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

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

## 3. Budget available and co-financing rate – Form of grant – Eligibility of costs – Cost categories – Double funding

### 3.1. Budget available and co-financing rate

The indicative Call budget available is EUR **10 000 000**. The Granting Authority reserves the right not to distribute all the funds available under this Call or to increase the budget of the Call (if relevant, by reallocating funding from other calls under the ESF+ SI+ Initiative). The final decision will be made considering the number of applications received and the results of their assessment.

The indicative expected size of the grant is between EUR 500 000 and EUR 1 000 000 per project (but this does not preclude the submission/selection of applications requesting other amounts). The grant awarded may be less 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 sources than the EU budget. Funds from other EU programmes cannot be used as a national co-financing source.

32 [Social Innovation Match | European Social Fund Plus \(europa.eu\)](#)

## 3.2. Form of grant

Grants under this Call shall take the form of lump sums. The amount of the lump sum will be established for **the whole project (overall lump sum)**, per **work package** and per **beneficiary** separately 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).

### 2.1.1. Management of lump sum funding (structure of the application and establishment of lump sums)

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 the applicant, the Granting Authority's assessment of the validity of the amounts requested, and a funding rate of 80%.

All project activities shall be split into work packages. The applicant shall specify the link between the necessary resources and the work packages:

- The applicant shall 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 beneficiary.
- The Detailed Budget Table shall only contain costs that would be eligible as actual costs and shall exclude costs that are ineligible under this Call. The requirements for the eligibility of costs under this Call are presented in Section 3.3 of the Call Conditions.
- Cost estimations shall approximate to actual costs. They should 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 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 (Annex 2 to the Call Conditions).

The overall project description shall be organised in coherent work packages:

- The number of work packages shall be well justified. Among other work packages, the project should include at least three **mandatory work packages: Project Coordination/Management Work Package, Dissemination and Communication Work Package**, and a Work Package **Focusing on Specific Practices Presented in the Package**.
- 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 a work package.
- The objectives, activities, and verifiable deliverables of each work package should be presented in line with the overall project objectives.

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

To facilitate eligibility for the second prefinancing payment, applicants should structure the project proposal so that at least one work package is completed by the end of the first reporting period. Since lump sum payments are conditional upon the completion of work packages, this approach will help ensure that the second prefinancing payment can be made.

Each work package may have multiple activities/deliverables. Among other deliverables, the coordinator will have to provide **a mandatory deliverable** – the Final Report 'Lessons Learned and Future Plans', including:

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

In order to promote the transfer and/or scaling up of social innovations across Europe through expanding the best practices, the final reports of the implemented projects will be made public on a website dedicated to the ESF+ SI+ Initiative. A recommended template/guidelines for the Final Report 'Lessons Learned and Future Plans' is provided in Annex 7 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.

### 3.3. Eligibility of costs and cost categories

#### a) Eligible cost categories

The following categories of eligible costs can be covered by the lump sum contributions:

- A. Direct personnel costs:
  - A.1 Employees (or equivalent) person months
- B. Purchase costs:
  - B.1 Travel and subsistence per travel or per day
  - B.2 Other goods and services
- C. Indirect costs<sup>33</sup>

To be eligible, costs must:

- 1. Be attributed to the beneficiary.
- 2. Be related to the duration of the implementation period of the project (except for costs related to the submission of the Final Report of the project).
- 3. Be estimated in eligible cost categories.
- 4. Be linked to and necessary for the implementation of the project, i.e., achieving the objectives of the project.
- 5. Be established in accordance with the usual cost accounting practices of the beneficiary.
- 6. Be identifiable and verifiable.
- 7. Comply with the applicable national and EU legislation, including accounting and public procurement rules.
- 8. Be reasonable and justified and comply with the principles of sound financial management, in particular in terms of economy and efficiency.

Indirect costs shall be defined for each application as a flat rate of 7% of the total eligible direct costs (i.e., the sum of all amounts listed in A and B categories).

The cost eligibility rules are fixed in the Grant Agreement (Article 6 and Annex 2).

#### b) Ineligible costs and contributions

The following costs or 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 payable.
- 5. Currency exchange losses.
- 6. Bank charges levied 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 authorities).
- 9. Costs incurred or contributions made for activities implemented during a suspension of the Grant Agreement.
- 10. In-kind contributions by third parties.

<sup>33</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 corporate management costs and other costs linked to the normal functioning of the entity, such as horizontal and support staff, office and equipment costs (for instance, maintenance, stationery, photocopying, postage, telephone and fax costs, heating, electricity or other forms of energy, water, office furniture, insurance).

11. 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).
12. Costs related to the purchase of land and real estate as well as infrastructure.
13. Costs related to the purchase of furniture, equipment, and vehicles.
14. Costs related to repair, refurbishment, reconstruction, or any construction works.
15. Regranting. This includes any financial support or distribution of funds to third parties such as bursaries, vouchers (e.g. supermarket or transport vouchers), stipends, sub-grants, fixed lump sums to participants.
16. Amortization and depreciation costs<sup>34</sup>.

### 3.4. Double funding

Double funding from the EU budget is strictly prohibited. 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 – Deadlines – Project duration

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Deadline for submission of applications	30 October 2025, 17:00 CEST
Assessment of applications	November 2025 – February 2026
Information on assessment results	March 2026
Grant Agreement signature	June 2026

### Starting date and duration of the projects

The indicative duration of a project should be 18 to 24 months.

The actual starting date of a project could be:

- the first day following the date on which the last of the two parties signs the Grant Agreement; *or*
- the first day of the month following the date on which the last of the two parties signs the Grant Agreement; *or*
- the date agreed by the parties to the Grant Agreement, which cannot be earlier than the signature of the Grant Agreement.

## 5. Admissibility and documents

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

The Portal can be accessed via the Call page. 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** (*the application template is provided as Annex 3 to the Call Conditions*)

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

<sup>34</sup> While depreciation costs are excluded, the rental of equipment may be eligible if justified as cost-effective and necessary for project implementation. Examples may include short-term rental of training or event equipment, IT tools, or workspace – provided these are proportionate and documented according to the project's needs.

The 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 to the Portal under the relevant Call, otherwise the application will be considered incomplete and thus inadmissible.

When applying, the applicant will have to confirm that they have a mandate to act on behalf of all coapplicants. 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 (in particular, eligibility, financial and operational capacity, exclusion criteria, etc.).

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

**It is recommended to complete an application well before the deadline to avoid any last-minute technical problems.** Problems due to last-minute submissions, such as network congestion, will be entirely at the applicant's own risk, and they cannot be used as a basis for a request for an extension of the Call deadline.

Once an application is submitted, the applicant will receive a **confirmation e-mail** (with the date and time of the submission of an application). 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@socialinnovationplus.eu](mailto:IThelp@socialinnovationplus.eu) 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

To be eligible, the applicant acting as the coordinator, co-applicants, and associated partners must:

- Be legal entities (public or private bodies);
- Be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
  - EU Member States.
  - Non-EU countries: listed European Economic Area (EEA) countries and countries associated with the ESF+ (Iceland, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, and Serbia) or countries with which an association agreement is being negotiated and for which the agreement enters into force by the deadline of this Call<sup>35</sup>.

**Applicant, co-applicants and associated partners can be (non-exhaustive list):**

- Ministries of labour and/or social affairs,
- Public employment services (PES), employment agencies, job centres,
- National, regional and local authorities, public authorities, municipalities,
- Vocational education and training entities,
- Local community centres, hubs,
- Non-governmental and non-profit entities (e.g., civil society organisations, associations, foundations, social enterprises, etc.), in particular those representing persons with disabilities.
- Representative bodies linked to the labour market, including chambers of commerce and other trade associations,
- Trade unions.
- Education and research entities,
- Guidance and consultancy service providers linked to employment and/or social inclusion,
- Public and private funders, etc.
- Companies (public and private).

35 List of participating countries in ESF+: [list-3rd-country-participation\\_esf-socpl\\_en.pdf\(europa.eu\)](#)

International organisations can participate in a project as associated partners only.

Natural persons cannot be applicants, co-applicants, or associated partners.

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

EU [restrictive measures](#): Special rules apply to entities from certain countries (e.g., entities subject to EU restrictive measures under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU)<sup>36</sup> and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU), or entities covered by the Commission Guidelines No 2013/C 205/05<sup>37</sup>. Such entities shall not be able to participate in the project in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, associated partners, or subcontractors (if any).

## 6.2. Consortium composition requirements

### a) Applicants, co-applicants (Transnational requirements)

To be considered eligible, the consortium must include **an applicant (the coordinator) and at least two coapplicants**.

The consortium must include at least one public authority, as (co-)applicant or associated partner, which should be:

- a) established in the same country as the applicant or one of the co-applicants,
- b) responsible for implementing the policies relevant to the objectives of the Call, especially, in the areas of employment and disability.

The members of the consortium shall represent **at least two different eligible countries** (see Section 6.1 of the Call Conditions).

Under this Call, an entity may only participate as the coordinator in one consortium.

For practical and legal reasons, it is recommended to set up consortium agreements that allow dealing with exceptional or unforeseen circumstances (even though they are not mandatory under the Grant Agreement). A consortium agreement also gives the possibility to redistribute the grant according to the internal principles and criteria of the consortium (for instance, one beneficiary can reattribute its grant to another beneficiary). The consortium agreement thus allows its members to customise the grant to the needs within the consortium and can also help to protect any member in case of disputes.

### b) Associated partners

Associated partners, as defined in Article 7 of the Grant Agreement, are eligible to participate in a project, but will not be counted among the required minimum number of consortium members. An associated partner may participate in a project but may not declare eligible costs.

### Conditions for rejection

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

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

36 Please note that the EU Official Journal contains the official list, and in case of conflict, its content prevails over that of the EU Sanctions Map <https://www.sanctionsmap.eu>

37 Commission guidelines No 2013/C 205/05 on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards (OJEU C 205 of 19.07.2013, pp. 9-11).



## 7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

An applicant (coordinator) shall 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

Under this Call, only the financial capacity of the coordinator will be assessed.

The coordinator shall have stable, sufficient, and sound financial resources (i.e., having a strong financial capacity) to maintain the project activities and to contribute to their funding, as required.

The financial capacity of **the coordinator** will be assessed prior to the signature of the Grant Agreement<sup>38</sup>, unless otherwise required during the assessment of applications.

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

- Signed Legal Entity Identification form (Public Legal Entity form: in English);
- Copy of the act, law, decree, or decision establishing the legal entity as a public body (or, in the case of absence thereof, any other official legal document that proves this).

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

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

If the financial capacity of the coordinator is subject to doubt, the Granting Authority may additionally require:

- to submit (one or more) prefinancing guarantees;
- to submit an irrevocable and unconditional joint guarantee from other co-applicants or a third party;
- to split the payment of the prefinancing into several instalments;
- to set a ceiling for the prefinancing in the Grant Agreement at EUR 20 000;
- 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.

38 If the application is pre-selected for funding.



If the coordinator is in breach of the 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 (where possible), or termination of the Grant Agreement.

## 7.2. Operational capacity

Under this Call, only the operational capacity of the coordinator will be assessed.

Public bodies<sup>39</sup> are exempted from the operational capacity check. The Granting Authority, if needed, may request additional information to verify the status of the public body.

The coordinator must have sufficient experience in project management/coordination. It is compulsory to meet criteria specified in points **a)** OR **b)**. In concrete terms, this means the following:

a) **The coordinator**<sup>40</sup> (as a legal entity) has managed at least one consortium<sup>41</sup> project (funded by EU or national public funds) which:

1. was managed by the coordinator;
2. involved beneficiaries (an applicant/coordinator and co-applicant) from no fewer than two different countries;
3. lasted at least 12 months;
4. had a total budget of more than EUR 200 000;
5. was implemented and finished within the last five years (1 November 2020 – 29 October 2025<sup>42</sup>).

Only projects meeting all the five requirements above will be taken into consideration for the assessment of operational capacity of the coordinator.

b) **The lead project manager**, directly involved in the management of the project submitted under the Call, has managed at least one consortium project (funded by EU or national public funds) which:

1. was managed by the lead project manager;
2. involved beneficiaries (an applicant/coordinator and co-applicant) from no fewer than two different countries;
3. lasted at least 12 months;
4. had a total budget of more than EUR 200 000;
5. was implemented and finished within the last five years (1 November 2020 – 29 October 2025<sup>43</sup>).

Only projects meeting all the five requirements above will be taken into consideration for the assessment of operational capacity of the coordinator.

Additionally, the lead project manager is expected to have a very good command of English (C1 level or higher).

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

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

1. A list of projects managed by **the coordinator or the lead project manager** within the last five years (see **Annex 5** of the Call Conditions for a template **to justify requirements a) or b)**).
2. **Evidence, proving that at least one project from those indicated in Annex 5 meets all the five operational capacity criteria**<sup>44</sup>. The documentation must clearly demonstrate that the project indicated:
  - 1.1. was coordinated/managed by the lead applicant/coordinator or the lead project manager;

<sup>39</sup> Definition of a public body can be found in the Glossary. Documents proving that the entity is a public body are presented in Section 7.1.

<sup>40</sup> As defined in the Glossary of the Call Conditions

<sup>41</sup> As defined in the Glossary of the Call Conditions

<sup>42</sup> The project must be completed before the submission of an application under this Call.

<sup>43</sup> The project must be completed before the submission of an application under this Call.

<sup>44</sup> Evidence could include funding decisions, grant agreements, and other documents containing all the required information. To facilitate assessment, if needed, the documents should be provided with the translation into English. If a link to a website is provided, it should be an official website of the funding instrument/programme, containing all the required information.

- 1.2. involved partners/beneficiaries (a lead applicant/coordinator and co-applicant) from no fewer than two different countries;
  - 1.3. lasted at least 12 months;
  - 1.4. had a total budget of more than EUR 200 000;
  - 1.5. was implemented and finished within the last five years (1 November 2020 – 29 October 2025<sup>45</sup>).
3. A declaration by the coordinator certifying the professional competences, appropriate qualifications, and a very good command of English (C1 level or higher) of the coordinator's project team to carry out the required tasks (Annex 8).

If it is considered that the coordinator, which is not a Public Body, does not have the required operational capacity (including cases where Annex 5 or evidence, proving that at least one project from those indicated in the Annex 5 meets all five operational capacity criteria, are not submitted with the application), 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>46</sup> described below:

1. Bankruptcy, winding up, affairs administered by the courts, arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities, or other similar procedures (including procedures involving persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts);
2. In breach of social security or tax obligations (including those of persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts);
3. Guilty of grave professional misconduct<sup>47</sup> (including where committed by persons with power of representation and 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 (including the financing of terrorism), child labour, or human trafficking (including where committed by persons with power of representation and decision-making or control, beneficial owners, or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)<sup>48</sup>;
5. Having a history of significant deficiencies in complying with their main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including where committed by persons with power of representation and 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 where committed by persons with power of representation and decision-making or control, beneficial owners, or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant); or
7. They have created an entity in another jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin, or have created another entity with this purpose (including where committed by persons with power of representation and 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 participation in the Call if it is found that<sup>49</sup>:

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

The applicant and co-applicants will have to submit a declaration confirming that they do not fall under any of the above exclusion criteria. The declaration shall be duly signed by their respective legal representatives.

<sup>45</sup> The project must be completed before the submission of an application under this Call.

<sup>46</sup> See Article 136 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#)

<sup>47</sup> See Article 136 (1) (c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#)

<sup>48</sup> See Article 136 (1) (d) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#)

<sup>49</sup> See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#)

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

Where an applicant or co-applicants declare one of the above situations of exclusion, they 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 damages, or payment of fines, taxes, or social security contributions. 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 to in point 4 of the 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 participation in this procedure prove to be false.

## 8. Assessment and award procedures

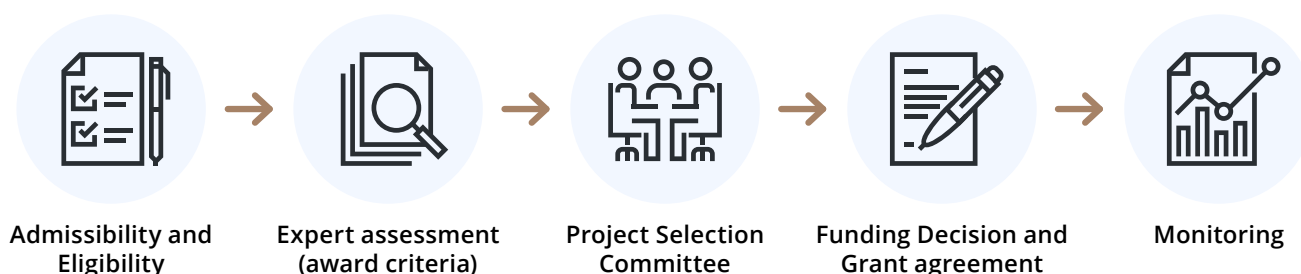
### 8.1. Assessment procedure

#### Formal requirements

Applications will first be checked for formal requirements (see Section 8.3 of the Call Conditions, 'Admissibility and eligibility check'). Applications that do not meet these admissibility and eligibility conditions **will be rejected**. The final decision on the rejection of applications will be taken by the Project Assessment Committee.

Applications submitted by means other than through the Portal, or after the deadline, are not accepted (they are not assessed at the admissibility stage, etc.).

Applications that are deemed 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.



**Figure 4. Process of application assessment**

#### Appointment of experts and their tasks

Applications will be qualitatively assessed against the award criteria by at least two experts, at least one of whom will be an independent external expert (see Section 8.5 of the Call Conditions for more information on the award criteria, maximum, and threshold points).

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 applicant, co-applicant(s), or any team member.

- Confidentiality: All applications, associated 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 a matter of priority.

The Granting Authority will liaise closely with the experts during the assessment process to ensure 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 observed, 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 points awarded by two experts who have assessed the application independently. If the difference between their final scores does not exceed 20 points, one of the experts will prepare a consolidated assessment report.

If the difference between the two final 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 lowest difference between their overall scores. A third expert shall not be appointed in cases where the final score (the average of two experts) is below the acceptance threshold.

## **8.2. Award procedure**

### **Selection of projects for funding**

The selection of projects will be made, and the recommendations for funding will be taken by a selection panel – the Project Selection Committee (PSC). The results of the applications' assessment will be presented at the PSC meeting. The PSC will rank the applications with the passing scores and will set the order of priority for 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 may be put on the reserve list or will not be funded. The final decision on the funding of projects and the final amount of the grant is taken by order of the Director of the Granting Authority.

### **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 the rejection of their application and information on the possibility of submitting a complaint (for more information, please see Section 8.4 of the Call Conditions).

If the application is deemed to have been rejected due to flaws in the selection procedure (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**

The preparation of the Grant Agreement will involve a dialogue to fine-tune the technical and financial aspects of the project and may require additional 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 precondition for signing the Grant Agreement.

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

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

**To be considered admissible, an application shall be:**

- Readable and accessible;
- Complete and must contain all the information, annexes, and supporting documents requested.

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.

The application will be considered inadmissible and will be rejected if the following annexes are not submitted with the application at the time of its submission:

- Annex 1: Detailed Budget Table.
- Annex 5: List of the Previous Projects or Annex 9: Public Legal Entity Form (whichever is required depending on the legal status of the coordinator).
- Annex 8: Declaration of the Professional Competencies.

Applicants are encouraged to submit their application in English to facilitate the processing of applications and speed up the assessment process. However, applications submitted in any of the official languages of the EU will be accepted.<sup>50</sup> In this case, an application should be accompanied by an executive summary in English. It should be noted that the assessment of applications will be carried out on the basis of the English version of the application. The quality of the translation will not be guaranteed, and the translation of the application may not fully reflect the content of the text in the original language and is therefore at the 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 shall be in English.

If any of the admissibility requirements is 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 shall:**

1. Involve only applicants, co-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 that meets the requirements set out in the Call Conditions (see [Section 6.2](#) of the Call Conditions);
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 from their 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), who meets the operational capacity criteria (see [Section 7.2](#) of the Call Conditions);
7. 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;
8. Meet the other requirements set out in the Call Conditions.

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.

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

## **8.4. Complaints regarding application rejection or other acts or omissions of the Granting Authority**

If the application is deemed to have been rejected or dealt with otherwise 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.

<sup>50</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)

Complaints will be subject to the following conditions:

1. Complaints must be limited to procedural aspects and must not focus on the merits of the corresponding applications. A complaint must relate to the assessment procedure, admissibility, or eligibility checks and must 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, existence of a conflict of interest, breach of the limits of discretion, etc.). Disagreements with the result or reasoning of the assessment of the application will not be considered.
2. Only one request for review of the procedural aspects per application will be considered. The request cannot refer to the assessment of applications submitted by other applicants.
3. Requests for review will not automatically lead to re-assessment of an application. A 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. For example, a complaint relating to one of the assessment criteria will not lead to a re-assessment if, even after adding the maximum points under that criterion, the final score would nevertheless remain below the threshold for funding.
4. Re-assessment will be carried out on the basis of information initially provided, i.e., no additional information will be accepted. Depending on the case, re-assessment may be partial (limited to the criterion affected by the error) or full (where the entire assessment of the application has been recognised as flawed). Re-assessment may be assigned to the same assessment panel or a new one, depending on the internal procedures of the Granting Authority.

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

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

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 of the receipt of the decision from the Granting Authority. Complaints received after the deadline will not be taken into consideration. The Granting Authority will respond no later than 30 days after receipt of the complaint. If a complaint is complex, the time allocated for the Granting Authority to respond 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 funding/funded under the Call. In case a complaint is confirmed, the application will be referred for review and reassessment.

If the response provided by the Granting Authority is deemed insufficient by the complainant, disputes concerning the complaint shall 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:

1. **Relevance** (Max 40 points, threshold 25 points):
  - The extent to which the project contributes to the aim and activities of the Call (as they are described in Chapter 2 of the Call Conditions), and fosters transnational cooperation aimed at transfer and upscaling of social innovation;
  - The extent to which the project draws from the Package as a guiding framework and demonstrates a strong rationale for the selection of particular innovative practice(s) to be adapted to a specific new regional, national, or local context.

- The extent to which the project addresses the needs or gaps in employment of persons with disabilities not previously addressed, or not addressed through formal frameworks.
  - The extent to which the project describes synergies with other existing local/regional/national offerings and services, avoiding duplication with existing support for persons with disabilities.
2. **Quality – project design, implementation, and team** (max 40 points, threshold 20 points):
- **Project design and implementation** (max 20, threshold 10 points):
    - Clarity and consistency of the project;
    - Logical links between identified problems, needs, and proposed solutions;
    - Methodology for implementing the project (organisation of work, monitoring, timetable, communication and dissemination, involvement of relevant stakeholders and active involvement of public authorities, risks and risk management);
    - A balanced distribution of tasks, responsibilities, resources, and management tools of the consortium;
    - A clear and justified rationale for the composition of the consortium.
  - **The cost-effectiveness of the project** (max 20, threshold 10 points):
    - Feasibility of the project within the proposed time frame and budget;
    - Cost-effectiveness (sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; best value for money).
3. **Impact** (max 20 points, threshold 10 points):
- The extent to which the application includes a sound and detailed impact evaluation methodology that is appropriate for its purpose and capable of providing evidence and identifying the expected outcomes<sup>51</sup>;
  - The extent to which the planned intervention demonstrates a long-term vision, i.e., it is sustainable beyond the project and enables the adaptation, replication, and sustainable scaling of the innovative practices for employment of persons with disabilities, beyond the direct beneficiaries of the project; This should be demonstrated through clearly described outputs (procedure, measure, or guideline) and their implementation plan<sup>52</sup>.
  - The effectiveness of dissemination to maximise the uptake of the project results at local/regional/national/European levels. The potential to reach a wider population than the one directly involved in the planned activity is an essential criterion.
  - The extent to which the project demonstrates a commitment to long-term sustainability by actively involving relevant public authorities (e.g. ministries, PES, municipalities, employers' organisations, trade unions, etc.) in the future implementation and uptake of the project outputs/outcomes.

Scale for assessing the award criteria of the application:

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 criterion or sub criterion. The reasons for this will be explained in the Consolidated Assessment Report.

<sup>51</sup> See Chapter 3 of Social Experimentation – Publications Office of the EU

<sup>52</sup> See Chapter 4 of Social Experimentation – Publications Office of the EU



## 9. Other regulations – Dissemination and visibility – Ownership

### 9.1 Data protection

The submission of an application under this 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>53</sup> It will be processed exclusively for the purposes of the assessment of the application, the subsequent management of the grant, and, if needed, programme monitoring, evaluation, and communication.

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

### 9.2 Record keeping

The beneficiaries shall 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, beneficiaries are not required to keep specific records of actual costs incurred but must keep adequate records and supporting documents to prove proper implementation of the work.

The beneficiaries shall keep the original documents. Digital and digitised documents are considered as originals if they are permitted by the applicable national law. The Granting Authority may accept non-original documents if they provide a comparable level of assurance.

For more details, see Article 19 of the Grant Agreement.

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

Projects under this Call shall ensure gender equality, equal opportunities, and non-discrimination on the grounds of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation throughout the project cycle, i.e., preparation, implementation, monitoring, and reporting.

Projects shall take appropriate measures to prevent any discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation, in line with the aims, objectives, and priorities of the Call. Accessibility for people with disabilities should also be duly reflected.

These principles aim to ensure that project's target group, irrespective of their gender, limited abilities, or any other characteristics, are equally engaged in project activities. See also 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 on any supplies or major results funded by the grant;
2. **Present the project** (including a project summary, the contact details of the coordinator, the list of beneficiaries (if any), European flag and the funding statement, and project results) on the beneficiaries' **website** or **social media account**.

The emblem and the funding statement are available in the Grant Agreement and on the Europa<sup>54</sup> website or can be downloaded from the European Commission's website.<sup>55</sup>

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

### 9.5. Ownership of results

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

<sup>53</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj>

<sup>54</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>55</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/logos\\_downloadcenter](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/logos_downloadcenter)



'Results' shall be understood as any tangible or intangible effect of a project, such as data, know-how, or information in any form or nature, whether or not they can be protected, as well as any rights attached to them, 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 or after the implementation of the project.

For more details, 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.socialinnovationplus.eu/>) and the European Commission's (<https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/esf-social-innovation>) websites regularly, as the Granting Authority will use them to publish Frequently Asked Questions and Call updates, if necessary.

### For submission support:

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

Non-IT related questions should be sent to the following e-mail address: [DEP@socialinnovationplus.eu](mailto:DEP@socialinnovationplus.eu).

Questions related to the submission of an application shall:

- be sent **at the latest seven days before the submission deadline** (see Section 4 of the Call Conditions);
- clearly indicate the reference to the Call and the topic to which the question relates.

Call-specific questions shall be sent **no later than 10 days before the submission deadline**.

## 11. Grant Agreement preparation

If an application is assessed positively, the Grant Agreement preparation process will be initiated. During this process, the applicant will be asked to update the submitted application taking into account the comments provided by the experts (provided in the Summary Assessment Report), which may include budgetary corrections. The applicant will also be asked to submit the requested documents to the Granting Authority for a financial capacity assessment.

The Grant Agreement preparation and application update procedure shall not last longer than two months. If the applicant fails to make the necessary corrections/provide requested documentation within two months of being informed of them, the Granting Authority will make decisions based on the latest available information/documentation and the application will no longer be corrected and the deadline for submitting documents will not be extended.

This Grant Agreement sets out the framework for the grant and its terms and conditions, in particular with regard to deliverables, reporting, and payments.

The template for the Grant Agreement can be found in Annex 2 to the Call Conditions.

## 12. Project implementation requirements

### 12.1. Reporting and payment arrangements

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 shall submit a periodic report (prepared using the template available in the Portal Reporting Tool). Specific reporting periods will be defined in the Data Sheet of the Grant Agreement (point 4.2).

Payments will be made in euros to the bank account indicated by the coordinator in the Data Sheet of the Grant Agreement (point 4.2).

According to the maximum possible duration of the project (18-24 months), two prefinancing instalments and the final payment are planned:

- The first (initial) prefinancing payment of 50% of the grant;
- The second prefinancing payment of 30% of the grant. Where the spending of the previous prefinancing is less than 70%, the amount of the next prefinancing payment will be reduced by the difference between the 70% threshold and the amount used;
- The final payment (payment of the balance).

*Please note that a financial risk assessment will be carried out during the financial capacity assessment. In the case of acceptable risks, the frequency and the amounts of the foreseen prefinancing may be adjusted.*

There will be no interim payments. The specific frequency, amount, and requirements of prefinancing 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, there is limited joint and several liability with individual ceilings – for each beneficiary – that cannot exceed their maximum share of the grant.

Beneficiaries shall 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 becomes apparent that the Granting Authority has overpaid and needs to recover the amounts unduly paid.

For more details, see Chapter 4: Section 1 and Chapter 4: Section 3 – Article 22 of the Grant Agreement.

## 12.3. Provisions concerning project implementation

In certain cases, for objective reasons which could not be foreseen by the beneficiary at the time of the submission and assessment of the application, the deadline for the implementation of the project activities may be extended, by a maximum of six months in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 36 of the Grant Agreement.

For details of the amendment provisions, see Articles 5 and 36 of the Grant Agreement.

If the beneficiaries are in breach of any of the obligations under the Grant Agreement, the Granting Authority will take the measures provided in Chapter 5 of the Grant Agreement.

For more details on the consequences of non-compliance, see Chapter 5 of the Grant Agreement.

### No-profit rule

No-profit rule – Grants may NOT produce a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs)<sup>56</sup> for the beneficiaries. For more details, see point 4.2 of the Data Sheet and Article 21.3.3 of the Grant Agreement.

## 13. Amendments of the Call

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.

<sup>56</sup> See Article 192 EU Financial Regulation 2018/1046

## 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: Declaration of Honour for Beneficiaries, template.
7. Annex 7: Lessons Learned and Future Plans, template.
8. Annex 8: Declaration of the Professional Competences, template.
9. Annex 9: Public Legal Entity Form

