

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND PLUS SOCIAL INNOVATION PLUS INITIATIVE (SI+)

Innovative Approaches to Mitigate the Societal Consequences of Russia's War of Aggression Against Ukraine within EU Countries

ESF-SI-2024-UA-01

Call Conditions



Funded by
the European Union

ABSTRACT

Call identifier: Lithuanian European Social Fund Agency implementing the European Social Fund Plus Social Innovation Plus Initiative on behalf of the European Commission as an entrusted entity.

Open Call title: Innovative Approaches to Mitigate the Societal Consequences of Russia's War of Aggression Against Ukraine within EU countries

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

Deadline: 30/05/2024 at 5:00 PM CEST time zone

Indicative overall grant budget for the Call: EUR 22 000 000

The form of grant: a lump sum grant

Expected duration of a project: 12-18 months

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

Official Call site:

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

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

For submission:

Get access to the Portal: <https://forms.office.com/e/nH7ixNDUTJ>

Connect to the Portal: <https://esinnis.sharepoint.com/sites/UACall>

For support:

Ukraine@esf.lt

Table of contents

ABSTRACT / 2

GLOSSARY / 4

1. Background / 5

- 1.1. Contextual background – Europe facing war / 5
- 1.2. Programme/ Legal base / 9
- 1.3. Main Purpose/ Key Focus Areas / 10

2. Objectives – activities – expected outputs / 13

- 2.1. Objectives / 13
- 2.2. Activities and outputs/ 14
- 2.3. Essential elements of the proposal / 15
- 2.4 Social Innovation Match/ 16

3. Available budget and co-financing rate – form of grant -- cost eligibility – cost categories – double funding / 17

- 3.1. Available budget and co-financing rate / 17
- 3.2. Form of grant / 17
- 3.3. Cost eligibility and cost categories / 18
- 3.4. Double funding / 18

4. Timetable – deadlines – project duration / 18

5. Admissibility and documents / 19

6. Eligibility - eligible participants – consortium composition / 19

- 6.1. Eligible participants / 19
- 6.2. Consortium composition / 20

7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion / 21

- 7.1. Financial capacity / 21
- 7.2. Operational capacity / 22
- 7.3. Exclusion Criteria / 22

8. Assessment and award procedures / 24

- 8.1. Assessment procedure / 24
- 8.2. Award procedure / 25
- 8.3. Admissibility and Eligibility Check / 25
- 8.4. Complaints regarding application rejection / 26
- 8.5. Award criteria / 27

9. Other regulations, dissemination and visibility, ownership / 28

- 9.1 Data protection / 28
- 9.2 Record keeping / 28
- 9.3 Horizontal principles (gender and non-discrimination) / 28
- 9.4. Dissemination and visibility / 28
- 9.5. Ownership of results / 29

10. Support / 29

11. Grant Agreement preparation / 29

12. Project implementation requirements / 30

- 12.1. Reporting and payment arrangements / 30
- 12.2. Liability regime for recoveries / 30
- 12.3. Provisions concerning project implementation / 30

13. Amendments of the Call / 31

14. Annexes / 31

GLOSSARY

APPLICANT – the 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 which 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 a smooth and successful implementation of the project (i.e., implement their part of the project properly, comply with their own obligations under the Grant Agreement and support the coordinator in fulfilling their obligations).

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

CONSORTIUM – is an association of two or more entities whose goal is to participate in a common project and combine their resources to achieve common project objectives.

ESFA – Lithuanian European Social Fund Agency, the entrusted entity responsible for implementation of the European Social Fund Plus Social Innovation Plus Initiative on behalf of the European Commission. Under this call ESFA is also referred to as the Granting Authority.

LUMP SUM – a form of simplified cost options that is determined during the case-by-case assessment of the application based on the submitted Detailed Budget Table and 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 law¹. 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.

¹ 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. Background context: Europe facing war

1.1.1. The refugee crisis

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine since February 2022 has triggered one of the most significant humanitarian and displacement emergencies in Europe after the Second World War, which resulted in a mass influx of displaced persons fleeing Ukraine and taking refuge in the European Union (EU).

In response, the Council of the European Union activated the Temporary Protection Directive² (the TPD) providing a possibility for the displaced persons to get immediate access to the labour market, education and vocational training, healthcare, and accommodation in the EU. The activation of the TPD was complemented by the 10-Point Plan³, which synchronised coordination for welcoming of the displaced persons, encouraged Member States to develop national contingency plans, and underlined the importance of transnational cooperation in developing a coherent and coordinated response. Various successive actions and measures were taken to assist Member States, regional and local authorities, and civil society in providing emergency support to people fleeing Ukraine, including the Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE⁴) and Flexible Assistance to Territories (FAST-CARE⁵).

The arrival of people fleeing Ukraine presented some demographic, sociological and state-of-mind peculiarities⁶ for which the receiving countries were not fully prepared. With regard to demographic composition, a relatively high proportion of the displaced persons from Ukraine are considered to be in vulnerable situations. Out of 4 million people who have been granted temporary protection, women (46.6%) and children (34.4%) constitute the largest part⁷. Moreover, 22% of households contain at least one member with a specific need, and 13% of households are comprised of one or more older persons, aged 60 years or older.⁸

The large influx of refugees⁹ has placed considerable pressure on frontline social services, and required additional capacity on top of the existing systems and resources. While the initial priorities focused on satisfying basic human needs, such as shelter, addressing infectious disease concerns, and providing emergency care, they evolved to cater for newly emerging necessities, such as an increased demand for childcare services or psychological support.¹⁰ As Russia's protracted war of aggression continues, further medium-term and long-term solutions are required to guarantee that refugees have access to such key mainstream services as permanent housing, health and care services, social and employment assistance, education, and upskilling/reskilling opportunities. Moreover, high priority shall be given to support for rights and access to key protection services on non-discriminatory basis.¹¹

- 2 Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on Minimum Standards for Giving Temporary Protection in the Event of a Mass Influx of Displaced Persons and on Measures Promoting a Balance of Efforts Between Member States in Receiving such Persons and Bearing the Consequences Thereof. (2001, August 7). Available at: [EUR-Lex - 32001L0055 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)
- 3 10-Point Plan for stronger European coordination on welcoming people fleeing the war from Ukraine. (2022, March 28). Available at: [The 10-Point Plan: For stronger European coordination on welcoming people fleeing the war from Ukraine \(europa.eu\)](#)
- 4 Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL amending Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and Regulation (EU) No 223/2014 as regards Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE). (2022, March 8). Available at: [EUR-Lex - 52022PC0109 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)
- 5 COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS Upgrading Cohesion policy - Flexible Assistance to territories (FAST - CARE) - to address the consequences of Russian aggression. (2022, 29 June). Available at: [EUR-Lex - 52022DC0324 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)
- 6 The survey conducted by UNHCR (2023) revealed that the vast majority of refugees from Ukraine (62%) expressed a desire to return home in the future. They often face a 'waiting dilemma' and are conflicted about integrating into host countries because of their yearning to return home. (For more information: Asscher, L. 2023. Integration of People Fleeing Ukraine in the EU. Available at: [EU Commissioners discuss the progress of the integration of people fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#))
- 7 Eurostat. (2023, August 9). News article. Available at : [30 June 2023: 4.07 million with temporary protection - Products Eurostat News - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#)
- 8 UNHCR. DISPLACEMENT PATTERNS, PROTECTION RISKS AND NEEDS OF REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE - REGIONAL PROTECTION ANALYSIS # 2.19 April 2023. Available at: [Document - DISPLACEMENT PATTERNS, PROTECTION RISKS AND NEEDS OF REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE - REGIONAL PROTECTION ANALYSIS # 2 \(unhcr.org\)](#)
- 9 The term 'refugees' is used in a broad political sense and refers to persons fleeing from Russian military aggression.
- 10 Lee, A. C. K., Khaw, F.-M., Lindman, A. E. S., & Juszczak, G. (2023). Ukraine refugee crisis: Evolving needs and challenges. *Public Health*, 217, 41–45. Available at: [Ukraine refugee crisis: evolving needs and challenges - ScienceDirect](#)
- 11 UNHCR. (2023). Mid-year report on the 2023 Regional Refugee Response Plan for the Ukraine Situation. 2023. Available at: [Document - Ukraine Situation - 2023 RRP Mid-Year Report \(unhcr.org\)](#)

The hard-pressed neighbouring countries, into which most of refugees from Ukraine found refuge, have mobilised efforts at local, national, and regional levels and have exceeded expectations by building infrastructure and providing access to their social services in a timely manner. Much of the successful work on the ground was carried out by local municipal authorities and civil society actors, in particular non-governmental organisations (NGO) and refugee-led organisations. Their practical approach and profound experience in providing protection and assistance to the displaced persons, have positioned them well to provide the ones in need with immediate support. However, the coordination of multiple actors became challenging, and existing networks have been strained from the early days. The lack of sustainable funding, directed specifically at these key actors on the ground is reported to be one of the main obstacles to fully harnessing their potential.¹²

The scale of the refugee crisis necessitates a ‘whole of society’ response, which has led to the active involvement not only of the governmental and non-governmental sectors, but also society at large. While the European public’s reaction to refugee flows from Ukraine has been overwhelmingly positive¹³, the ‘solidarity fatigue’ is becoming apparent in some countries.¹⁴ The wavering support among host communities can be ascribed to a slowing economy, which especially affects low- and medium- income families, and the creeping influence of Russian propaganda. As social cohesion and social stability are being threatened, there is a compelling need for measures directed at advancing social cohesion between refugees and local population.

1.1.2. Global impact of the war in Ukraine on European societies

Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, compounded by other pre-existing economic, geopolitical, and ecological challenges,¹⁵ created a profound impact on EU countries, going beyond the refugee crisis. Many EU countries had a strong dependence on Russian energy supplies prior to the invasion, particularly for natural gas and oil.¹⁶ This dependency, alongside persistent challenges such as the far-reaching macroeconomic impacts of climate change or historically elevated inflation levels, has prompted significant disruptions, escalating food and energy prices. These disruptions have led to one of the most serious cost-of-living crises the region has faced in recent years.

The cost of living and the energy crisis are forcing families to allocate a larger portion of their income to cover basic necessities. Eurostat reports¹⁷ that nearly half of the average household expenditure in the EU is devoted to the three primary expenses that saw the steepest increases: household, transport, and food costs. This trend emphasises the growing financial pressure on families, as they allocate more of their income to cover rising costs, increasing their risk of poverty and financial instability. In addition, the ongoing disruptions not only challenge countries to maintain a stable energy supply, but also compromise food security, affecting access to sufficient and nutritious food of good quality. These challenges highlight the need for EU countries to develop and implement long-term solutions to address the widespread effects of the war.

In addition, the challenges posed by Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine add to the ongoing difficulties caused by COVID-19. Swift policy action, including the role of cohesion policy, has helped mitigate the worst and most immediate effects. Nonetheless, countries are affected to varying degrees by these compounded crises.¹⁵ Supply chains, already disrupted by COVID-19, are being further hampered, leading to scarcity of essential items such as medicine. The combination of these challenges is pushing social services to their limits, emphasising the urgent need for sustainable solutions to adequately support the most vulnerable members of society.

The challenges arising from Russia’s military aggression, combined with the recovery efforts from COVID-19 and other economic, geopolitical, and ecological factors could pose a significant threat to Europe’s social cohesion policy.¹⁸ In response, innovative solutions are required to reduce inequalities, and foster a sense of community and solidarity.

12 European Commission. (2023, June 5). Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion. News article. Available at: [EU Commissioners discuss the progress of the integration of people fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

13 De Coninck, D. (2023). The Refugee Paradox During Wartime in Europe: How Ukrainian and Afghan Refugees are (not) Alike. *International Migration Review*, 57(2), 578-586. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183221116874>

14 Asscher, L. (2023). Integration of People Fleeing Ukraine in the EU. Available at: [EU Commissioners discuss the progress of the integration of people fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

15 International Monetary Fund. 2022. *World Economic Outlook: Countering the Cost-of-Living Crisis*. Washington, DC. October

16 [The impact of the war in Ukraine on euro area energy markets \(europa.eu\)](#)

17 [Housing, food & transport: 61% of households' budgets - Products Eurostat News - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#)

18 [Economic, social and territorial cohesion | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)

1.1.3. The potential of social innovation

Today's societal challenges and newly emerging social needs demand innovative citizen-centred solutions. Consequently, there is an increasing emphasis on **social innovation**, including in the context of EU policies and funds. According to the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) Regulation¹⁹, social innovation is defined as '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).

There are three key dimensions to this definition. Accordingly, social innovation:

- generates new responses to social needs,
- involves cooperation between stakeholders from public, private and civil society sectors,
- has a beneficial impact on civil society and boosts its capacity to act.

When these three dimensions come together, social innovation becomes an approach which not only helps to solve specific societal problems, but also empowers citizens and improves the way our societies and their welfare systems function.

In the context of ESF+, this potential has recently been described as follows:

Social innovation generates social output and impact in form of improved services, products, models, social relationships, standards, or policies that create a greater social impact than current practice. It aims at changing the social context, empowering civil society actors, and developing new evidence-based policy approaches.²⁰ Therefore, social innovation is not merely an immediate response to urgent social needs and pressing challenges. It is a mechanism for achieving systematic change by tackling the underlying causes of social problems.²¹

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 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 service the community, and are therefore well-placed to provide need-driven innovative solutions.²²

- 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, made of continuous trials and adjustments with regard to specific local situations, evaluation of the long- and short-term impact on the target population.²³

¹⁹ 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. Available at: [EUR-Lex - 32021R1057 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁰ 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 \(europa.eu\)](#)

²¹ Bureau of European Policy (BEPA). (2014). Social innovation: a decade of changes. Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: [Social Innovation - A Decade of Changes | ORBIS \(europa.eu\)](#)

²² 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](#)

²³ 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 \(europa.eu\)](#)

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

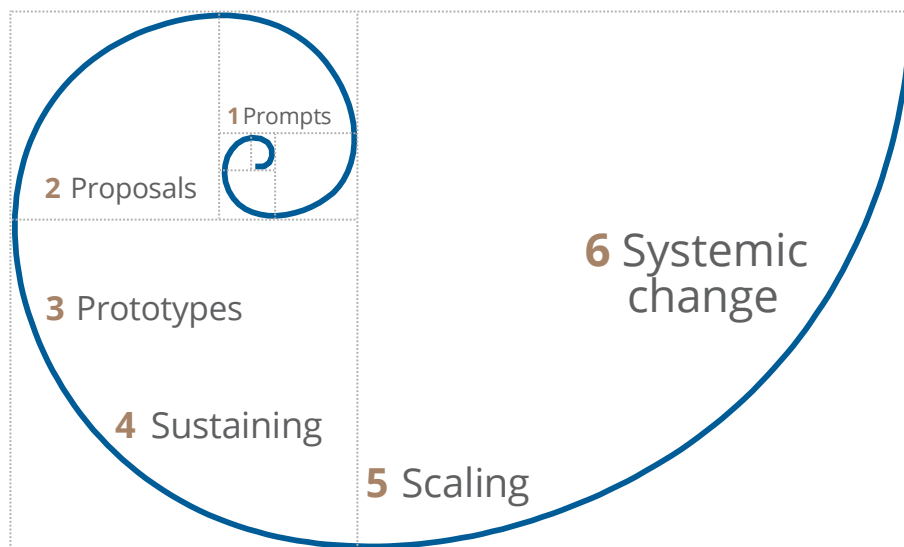


Figure 1. The process of social innovation. Source: Murray, R., et al. (2010). *The Open Book of Social Innovation*. London: Nesta and the Young²⁴

1.1.4. Benefiting from previously tested approaches in the subject fields of this Call

The surge in migrant and refugee arrivals in 2015-2016 forced the receiving countries to experiment with unconventional models of service provision, with the active involvement of non-governmental actors and local communities. Innovative partnerships between government, the private sector, social economy, and civil society, combined with two-way integration strategies for migrants and refugees, encouraged local authorities to develop innovative approaches. The latter proved to have untapped potential to tackle acute needs of forcibly displaced persons, simultaneously enhancing the capacity of communities to act.²⁵

Migrant-related social innovations are more likely to be home-grown and designated to address very specific challenges.²⁶ The experience accumulated during the previous migration crisis is thus profound, yet not fully utilised: it is marked more by scattered small-scale success stories rather than systematic approaches. It is therefore an opportunity to identify innovative models with already measured impact, and to adapt them to the unique characteristics of new contexts.

Furthermore, applicants can draw inspiration from other previous EU initiatives, each offering unique perspectives on how to address the challenges of this Call. For example, the Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) calls, which ran from 2015 to 2019, and aimed at empowering urban areas across Europe to explore innovative solutions in the areas of housing²⁷ and integration of refugees²⁸ and the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) (2014-2020), which provided avenues for innovative projects in the social inclusion domain²⁹. Of particular relevance are the call for social innovation 'Fast track integration into the labour market for third country nationals targeting exclusively asylum seekers, refugees and their family members' (VP/2016/015), and the call for 'Establishing and testing integrated

²⁴ Murray, R., Caulier-Grice, J., & Mulgan, G. (2010). *The open book of social innovation* (Vol. 24). London: Nesta. Available at: [The-Open-Book-of-Social-Innovation.pdf \(youngfoundation.org\)](https://www.youngfoundation.org/publications/the-open-book-of-social-innovation)

²⁵ Patuzzi, L. (2020). Driving Migrant Inclusion through Social Innovation. Lessons for Cities in a Pandemic. Available at: [Driving Migrant Inclusion through Social Innovation: Lessons for Cities in a Pandemic - World | ReliefWeb](https://www.reliefweb.org/publications/driving-migrant-inclusion-through-social-innovation-lessons-for-cities-in-a-pandemic)

²⁶ Millard, J. (2019). Away from Home: How Social Innovations Respond to Migration. Available at: [01_16_Away-from-Home_Millard.pdf \(socialinnovationatlas.net\)](https://www.socialinnovationatlas.net/publications/away-from-home)

²⁷ [Housing | UIA - Urban Innovative Actions \(uia-initiative.eu\)](https://uia-initiative.eu/)

²⁸ [Integration of migrants and refugees | UIA - Urban Innovative Actions \(uia-initiative.eu\)](https://uia-initiative.eu/)

²⁹ Social innovations tested under the EaSI programme (2014-2020). Available at: [Publications catalogue - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/easipublications/publications-catalogue).

interventions aimed at supporting people in (the most) vulnerable situations (VP/2020/003)³⁰. A comprehensive evaluation of all the EaSI-funded social innovation calls in the 2014-2020 programming period can also provide a good basis for drawing significant lessons.³¹

In addition, the initiatives of Interreg Europe, as exemplified by 'A Policy Brief from the Policy Learning Platform on Low carbon economy'³² summarise and explain background issues related to energy communities, while providing good practices and guidance. Finally, innovative approaches have also been used by social economy entities such as associations, foundations and social enterprises. They represent a growing sector responding to the challenges faced by the EU, such as the twin transitions (green and digital). Indeed, they provide consumption and production alternatives that can help foster resilience of societies and sectors such as agriculture or energy. Furthermore, both during the previous refugee crises and at the start of the war of aggression against Ukraine, these entities were among the first to adapt their operations in order to welcome refugees, accompany them in their journey through transit countries, provide or facilitate access to essential social services, and support their social and labour market inclusion. Working with local staff, volunteers and citizens, the social economy can foster dialogue and connections between refugees and residents.³³ For additional sources of inspiration of previous initiatives, please visit the Granting Authority's' website.³⁴

1.2. Programme/ Legal base

The regulatory framework for this Call is set out in:

- 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 (ESF+ Regulation), and notably its articles 5(2), 14(6) and 25 (i);
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy³⁵;
- Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union³⁶, and notably its articles 181, 182 and 183.

This Call is financed by the ESF+ under the Social Innovation Plus (SI+) initiative, launched by the European Commission with a budget of EUR 197 million for the 2021-2027 programming period. The SI+ initiative is implemented under the EaSI strand of the ESF+, under indirect management (Article 25 (i) of the ESF+ Regulation).

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 to achieve high employment levels, fair social protection, the eradication of poverty, and a skilled and resilient workforce ready for the transition to a green and digital economy.

The **ESF+ SI+ initiative** aims at promoting transnational cooperation between the EU Member States to facilitate the transfer and scaling up of innovative solutions. By supporting transnational cooperation, the initiative aims to disseminate best practices in various fields, including employment, education, skills, and social inclusion across Europe.

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.

30 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=629&langId=en> Awarded grants: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=632&langId=en>

31 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8484&furtherPubs=yes>

32 Interreg Europe. (2021). Integrated Low Carbon Strategies. A Policy Brief from the Policy Learning Platform on Low-carbon economy.

33 OECD. (2023). The social and Solidarity Economy as a Partner along the Refugee Journey. Available at: [The social and solidarity economy as a partner along the refugee journey | en | OECD](#)

34 <https://www.esf.lt/en/transnational-calls/1224>

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

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

1.3. Main purpose/ Key focus areas

1.3.1. Using social innovations to transform the refugee situation into opportunity

This Call aims to promote the transfer/upscaling³⁷ of promising innovative approaches that complement institutional measures. Projects implemented under the Call should focus on facilitating the integration of refugee in host countries by employing tailored solutions in the following fields:

a) Employment and skills

Ensuring sustainable labour market inclusion, as well as recognition and improvement of professional skills are key elements of the proper reception and successful integration of newcomers. Foreign-born people bring knowledge and experience, which, if properly employed, can bring considerable added value to the receiving country, the EU and, ultimately, to the native country when people with newly acquired skills decide to return home.

Following the activation of the TPD and on the basis of the landscape recommendations issued by the European Commission,³⁸ the EU Member States have removed numerous administrative barriers and have streamlined procedures to facilitate rapid access to the labour market of displaced persons from Ukraine. Nevertheless, not all the challenges have been fully met, as well as opportunities seized yet:

- Feedback from national authorities suggests that many refugees from Ukraine have found jobs below or not matching their level of qualification and skills.³⁹ Given the high levels of educational attainment of Ukrainian refugees, the risk of over-qualification remains high.⁴⁰
- Ensuring targeted upskilling/reskilling opportunities and professional retraining is crucial for preparing the displaced persons from Ukraine for vacancies that commensurate with their experience more, and at the same time meet the needs of the labour market in host countries.
- Ukrainian refugee communities are predominantly comprised of female-led households, with women under the pressure to reconcile family responsibilities with work, which hinders their sustainable integration into the labour market.
- People fleeing Ukraine have experienced severe psychological and emotional distress. Poor mental or physical health is reported to be inextricably linked to labour market barriers.⁴¹

In view of the arrival of a significant number of displaced persons from Ukraine, the European Network of Public Employment Services (PES Network) has adopted an updated guidelines for PES supporting the labour market integration.⁴² The guidelines have been amended to include good practices that address the labour market inclusion of the displaced persons from Ukraine on temporary protection. The following areas were identified as key priority:

- bundling and dissemination of information (to tackle the lack of coherent, up-to-date, and easily accessible information);
- digital job matching (matching jobseekers with suitable vacancies);
- language (including on-the-job language training, vocational training, and civic education);
- skills and qualifications (swift validation and recognition of skills and qualifications);
- balancing short- and long-term perspectives (dual intent solutions which enable rapid integration while recognising the 'waiting dilemma');

37 As defined in 'Social experimentation – A practical guide for project promoters' (2022), 'transfer' refers to the implementation of social experimentation in other contexts (either territorial or to a different sector); 'upscaling' refers to the implementation on a larger scale, i.e. expanding the scope of small-scale new solutions to an upper level (from local to regional, national, and/or European levels) to reach a higher number of beneficiaries (p. 40).

38 For example: Communication from the Commission on Guidance for access to the labour market, vocational education and training and adult learning of people fleeing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine 2022/C 233/0. Available at: [EUR-Lex - 52022XC0616\(01\) - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

39 Asscher, L. 2023. Integration of People Fleeing Ukraine in the EU. Available at: [L. Asscher_Integration of people fleeing Ukraine in the EU_FINAL.pdf](#)

40 OECD. 2023. What We Know about the Skills and Early Labour Market Outcomes of Refugees from Ukraine. Available at: [What we know about the skills and early labour market outcomes of refugees from Ukraine \(oecd.org\)](#)

41 Klára Fóti, Marta Anzillotti and Michele Consolini. 2023. Promoting Social Cohesion and Convergence. Barriers to Employment of Displaced Ukrainians, Available at: [Barriers to employment of displaced Ukrainians | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions \(europa.eu\)](#)

42 European Network of Public Employment Services. 2023. Labour Market Integration of Displaced People and Refugees. Update of 'Key Considerations'. Available at: [PES Network adopts 7 recommendations to guide employment services assisting refugees and persons displaced from Ukraine - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

- partners and institutions (fostering systematic and effective cooperation between relevant institutions and partners);
- active involvement of employers.

Employment plays an important role in the integration of migrants and has therefore been underlined in the common result indicators of ESF projects. Numerous EU-funded projects aimed at ‘fast-track’ integration of refugees into the labour market were implemented during the former EaSI programme (2014-2020) calls for proposals. Drawing on the lessons learnt, it can be observed that the initiatives which proved to be effective included, inter alia, the following elements:

- an approach based on a multi-stakeholder partnership;
- multi-layered labour integration models/one-stop-shop approach;
- recognition of the importance of the socio-cultural environment for the adaptation to the local environment and long-term employment;
- elimination of exclusion factors and catering for specific needs, including the socio-cultural background of a target group;
- reinforcement of self-employment;
- provision of customised (one-on-one) employment counselling and mentoring.

b) Social inclusion

The social inclusion of refugees goes beyond simply providing access to employment opportunities. It also emphasises the importance of housing, ensuring access to social and care services, providing various support mechanisms and encouraging the commitment of the local population, all of which are essential for a holistic approach to social inclusion.

Housing

Housing is an important aspect of social inclusion, particularly for refugees, who often arrive in unfamiliar territory and seek for shelter and security. Many of the Ukrainian refugees relied on personal connections, with a significant number finding shelter with friends, family, or members of the Ukrainian diaspora.⁴³ Half of the respondents reported staying either with local families or with family and friends.⁴⁴

The demographic profile of Ukrainian refugees⁴⁵ includes a substantial proportion of vulnerable groups, for whom traditional housing solutions may not be suitable. There is a pressing need for specialised solutions. The focus could therefore be on advancing the following areas (non-exhaustive list):

- Exploration of alternative housing approaches that overcome the limitations of ownership and for-profit renting, while also tackling energy poverty.
- Transitory or intermediary housing options, such as transitional and community housing, could provide the required flexibility and security.
- ‘Housing First’ strategies that provide permanent housing solutions as a foundation upon which other support services can be built.
- Implementation of co-operative and community-based housing solutions that offer a more culturally congruent and participatory approach.
- Establishing multi-functional reception and neighbourhood centres for refugees to mitigate the risk of social isolation (the ‘ghetto effect’).

Access to social services

Ensuring that refugees have access to essential social and care services is another important dimension of successful social inclusion. The demographic composition of Ukrainian refugees indicates a significant presence of people in need of specialised care. These groups often need more than just medical attention and require social support and community services. The emotional challenges and uncertainty of leaving home country highlight the importance of both mental health services and wider social support systems. Given the diversity of needs, refugees need easy access

⁴³ <https://www.oecd.org/ukraine-hub/policy-responses/housing-support-for-ukrainian-refugees-in-receiving-countries-9c2b4404/>

⁴⁴ EUAA - OECD Survey: Ukrainians broadly satisfied with EU's protection response following the Russian invasion | European Union Agency for Asylum (europa.eu)

⁴⁵ UNHCR. (April 2023). Displacement patterns, protection risks and needs of refugees from Ukraine.

to a wide range of social and care services for their well-being and successful integration. The focus could therefore be on advancing the following areas (non-exhaustive list):

- Administrative simplification, through the introduction or further development of ‘one-stop-shops’ for social services or the introduction of case management instruments.
- Review and adaptation of social service structures at local, regional, national and international levels to ensure they are suitably responsive.
- Facilitation of access to healthcare, including specialised mental health services.
- Enhancement of support for family and childcare, with an emphasis on inclusive education for refugee children.

Support mechanisms

Support mechanisms are a vital component of the assistance provided to Ukrainian refugees. Ensuring immediate access to basic necessities is crucial for Ukrainian refugees. A primary focus should be on facilitating access to essential information, to bridge the gap created by refugees’ limited familiarity with local language, systems, and resources. The focus could therefore be on advancing the following areas (non-exhaustive list):

- Facilitation of access to digital resources as a lack of basic digital literacy can limit access to education, employment, social connections and other useful information.
- Adjustable and adaptive support mechanisms, as material needs can vary significantly between different vulnerable groups. An adjustable support system could offer customised aid packages based on the level of need.

Encouraging the commitment of the local population

The commitment of the local population is pivotal in shaping the resilience and adaptability of communities, especially in times of crisis like the influx of Ukrainian refugees into the EU. Participatory approaches, where local citizens are actively involved in decision-making processes, can significantly influence public opinion and foster a more welcoming environment for newcomers.

To achieve this, the model extends to a multi-stakeholder approach encompassing businesses, administrative bodies, policymakers, as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other civil society actors. This joint approach emphasizes the co-creation of solutions, ensuring a more inclusive and effective response to challenges, and guaranteeing that the interests and goals of all stakeholders are taken into account.

A multi-stakeholder approach has already been successfully employed to tackle challenges related to the integration of refugees.⁴⁶ The focus could therefore be on advancing the following areas (non-exhaustive list):

- Active involvement of both refugees and local communities to alleviate the social and psychological strains induced by a crisis.
- Promotion of cultural and linguistic understanding between refugees and host communities to create an inclusive and mutually respectful environment.
- Engaging diaspora-led initiatives to further enhance support and integration efforts.

1.3.2. Using social innovations to mitigate the effects of the crisis

Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine has also put many people, enterprises, public authorities and regions in EU countries under pressure. This crisis has accelerated fragmentation between social groups and geographic locations. Swift policy actions helped to avert the worst and most immediate consequences. In this context, cohesion policy also played a role, with initiatives such as REPowerEU launched to support the diversification of energy sources, accelerate the production of clean energy and encourage energy saving.⁴⁷ However, not all challenges have been fully addressed and the imperative to strengthen resilience to such events persists. Therefore, this Call aims to promote the transfer and scaling-up of social innovations, notably in the following areas:

a) *Tackling energy poverty*

Energy poverty occurs when energy bills represent a substantial share of consumers’ income, or when they have to

⁴⁶ [Projects | European Social Fund Plus \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴⁷ Böhme, K, Mäder Furtado, M, Toptsidou, M, Zillmer, S, Hans, S, Hrelja, D, Valenza, A & Mori, A.(2022). Research for REGI Committee – The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine on EU cohesion, Part II: Overview and outlook European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels.

reduce their household' energy consumption to extent that negatively impacts their health and well-being. The current energy crisis calls for a rethink of how energy is produced, managed, and distributed across Europe to ensure better access conditions for all. In all EU Member States, there is an opportunity to enhance access to renewable energy facilities and equipment for all citizens, including vulnerable groups.

Particular attention could be paid to the social economy, which provides numerous examples of building resilience in the energy sector.⁴⁸ This includes the creation of energy cooperatives and the promotion of circular and recycling solutions to reduce the EU's reliance on raw materials for the development of renewable energy. The focus could therefore be on advancing the following areas (non-exhaustive list):

- The creation of energy communities and cooperatives.
- Promotion of renewable energy projects.
- Promotion of circular economy practices in energy production and consumption.
- Support for the social economy sector in expanding energy resilience initiatives.

b) Tackling the purchasing power crisis

The challenges of energy poverty are closely linked to the broader issue of purchasing power, particularly in the face of rising inflation. The purchasing power crisis disproportionately affects the poorest populations, and their situation could worsen if immediate action is not taken. The focus could therefore be on advancing the following areas (non-exhaustive list):

- Promotion of urban and community farming initiatives to reduce dependence on imported food and enhance local food security.
- Promotion of sharing economy models in communities.
- Creation of digital platforms that connect small producers directly to consumers.
- Developing and promoting supply chain models that reduce waste, ensure fair compensation for producers, and provide affordable prices for consumers.

c) Experimenting more inclusive social services

The influx of refugees has put considerable pressure on frontline social services, including housing, healthcare, and social support systems. The need to cater for a diverse population with different needs can serve as a catalyst for social innovation. In addition, the demographic composition of the incoming refugee population calls for a more integrated and holistic approach to social services. The focus could therefore be on advancing the following areas (non-exhaustive list):

- The establishment of single-entry points to access a range of social services.
- The use of 'simple language' in administrative documents and public visual communication.
- The creation of multi-disciplinary teams that offer a range of services, from healthcare to psychological support, all under one roof.

2. Objectives – activities – expected outputs

2.1. Objectives

This Call will support transnational projects which aim at transferring or scaling up of relevant social innovations. It will focus on two main objectives:

- ï Integration and social inclusion of refugees fleeing Ukraine;
- ï Mitigation of the consequences of the crisis on Member States' societies and their public services.

Transferring and scaling up innovative approaches is a multifaceted process, during which innovative approaches are gradually developed further, conceptualised, validated and adapted to new contexts. It relies upon the collaboration of diverse stakeholders and benefits from mutual learning and exchange of good practices.

⁴⁸ See examples of previous projects in the field: Projects | European Social Fund Plus (europa.eu); <https://www.interreg-central.eu/project-gateway/>; UIA Topics | UIA - Urban Innovative Actions (uia-initiative.eu) etc.

2.2. Activities and outputs

Applicants can propose the activities best suited to pursue the outputs of this Call in their specific context. Applicants should justify how the proposed activities contribute to the expected objectives of the Call - integration and social inclusion of refugees fleeing Ukraine and/or mitigation of the consequences of the crisis on Member States' societies and their public services.

Project activities should:

- be instrumental for achieving the objectives set out in point 2.1;
- be linked to the outputs set out in point 2.2;
- demonstrate a long-term vision and include mechanisms for further transfer/upscaling;
- build the capacity of key stakeholders to implement a new approach/model.

As a result of the activities implemented under the projects awarded under this Call, each consortium is expected to have further developed an already proven or promising innovative approach (-es) that can be used to address the objectives of this Call.

Each consortium is encouraged to consider the outputs presented in this section as part of its project. Please note that the outputs listed below are not exhaustive. They are indicative and may be tailored to meet the specific needs and characteristics of a certain project.

1) Assessment of the existing evidence and building foundation of a new approach/model:

a) *Analysis of the problem and its context.*

- Conducting a comprehensive needs assessment, identifying problems and gaps, and building a shared understanding.
- Identification of circumstances in which a new approach is expected to be scaled up.

b) *Identification of potential innovations and their evidence base.*

- Overview of proven or promising innovations relevant to addressing the identified problems and gaps.
- Identification of an innovative approach/model for further scaling-up, determination of its key elements, and assessment of their relevance.
- Evaluation of the quality of the evidence for a selected innovation and its potential for scalability.

c) *Further development of the selected model.*

- Further testing of the innovation in view of its validation.
- Development, substantiation, and documentation of a consolidated Theory of Change⁴⁹ for a new approach/model.

2) Mapping, engaging and empowering stakeholders:

- Mapping of the key stakeholders and institutional framework.
- Preparation of a stakeholder engagement plan and planning outreach activities to connect with key stakeholders.
- Assessment of the implementation capacity of key stakeholders and the development of a strategy to strengthen their capacity.

3) Piloting and monitoring:

- Development of a roll-out plan, including a blueprint and checklist for implementing the approach/model in new contexts.
- Further piloting (testing, validation) and collecting data on impact.
- Revision and amendment of a plan/guidelines for the transfer/scaling up of the approach/model in line with newly obtained evidence/ data/ lessons learnt.
- Establishment of a monitoring and evaluation framework to track progress and impact.

49 Describing the means by which activities achieve outcomes and use resources.

4) Dissemination and continuity:

- Development of a plan for the sustainability of the innovative approach: resource analysis (e.g., financial, operational), including legislation, necessary to ensure the continuity of the approach/model in new contexts.
- Preparation of a dissemination and advocacy plan.
- Devising a strategy for knowledge exchange and continuous learning among key stakeholders to ensure sustainability and continuous improvement of the new approach/model.

5) Participation in mutual learning events:

Participation in mutual learning events organised by the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation to exchange knowledge and experience in project implementation with other beneficiaries is mandatory. 3-4 mutual learning events are planned during the implementation of the projects: up to 2 events will take place on site (provisionally in Vilnius and Brussels), others online.

2.3. 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 they will integrate all these elements into the project framework or combine them (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Essential elements of the application

Conceptual framework

Project activities should be planned to reflect the cyclic nature of social innovation, focusing on the steps needed to scale up the innovation in question. An application should highlight the existing proven experience on which a project will be based (i.e., what has been achieved prior to the submission of the application). They should explain the steps that are planned to be taken (i.e. the activities which are planned during the implementation of the project, and which will contribute to the outputs of the Call) and the expected impact of the planned intervention (i.e., how the proposed solution will be maintained in the long term to ensure the growing impact). The description should be provided in the Application Form: Part B.

Relevance of social innovation

An application should explain the potential impact of the chosen intervention model on the identified social challenges in the context in which it is planned to be transferred/scaled up. It should demonstrate a clear need for 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.

Transnational partnership

A consortium shall consist of entities representing a minimum of two EU Member States. An application should provide a clear, comprehensive account of how each consortium member will contribute to achieving the identified objectives, while also 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 presented in the Application Form: Part A and Part B.

Diversity of stakeholders

A project should be based on the Quadruple Helix Model⁵⁰ of innovation, which recognises the importance of four major actors in the innovation process - public, private, academic and civil society. The application should include measures to identify 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.

User-centred approach

A project should be designed considering the needs and interests of the social groups it aims to serve (i.e., the ultimate beneficiaries of the innovation). It should be explained how the project intends to engage representatives of the targeted group(s) in the design and development of the intended solution. Additionally, it should delineate how the planned intervention model will support their involvement in the scaling-up process. It is highly recommended to actively engage local communities and ensure that vulnerable groups are not left behind. The description should be provided in the Application Form: Part B.

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 set out ex-ante. This should include provisional output and outcome indicators for monitoring the activities and their impact. The expected impact of the project and the indicators for measuring it shall be provided in the Application Form: Part B. The impact evaluation should be proportionate to the scope and size of the project.

Dissemination and communication

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

2.4. Social Innovation Match

Coordinators of projects selected under this Call **are required to upload key information about their projects, a short description of ongoing and planned activities, and their contact details to the Social Innovation Match⁵¹ 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**.

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

50 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>

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

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

3.1. Available budget and co-financing rate

The available indicative Call budget is EUR 22 000 000. The Granting Authority reserves the right not to distribute all the fundings available under this Call or to increase the Call budget (if relevant, by reallocating funding from other calls under the ESF+ SI+ initiative). The final decision will be made considering the number of received applications and the results of their assessment.

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

The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

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

3.2. Form of grant

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

The amounts of lump sums will be established for **the whole project (the total lump sum)** and per each **work package**⁵² individually in accordance with the Rules of the Use of Lump Sum Contributions under the ESF+ SI+ Initiative (for the Rules see supporting documents to the Call Conditions).

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

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

- The applicants 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 applicant and co-applicants.
- The Detailed budget table shall contain only costs that would be eligible for actual costs and shall exclude costs that are ineligible under this Call. Requirements for cost eligibility under this Call are presented in Section 3.3 of the Call Conditions.
- The cost estimations shall approximate the 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 as completed and the corresponding lump sum paid when all the work has been carried out/ all deliverables have been reached in accordance with the Description of the Project in the Grant Agreement (Annex 2 to the Call Conditions).

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

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

⁵² Work package (WP) means a major sub-division of the proposed project, i.e., every project is divided into smaller pieces of work. WP represents a specific block of work, each WP needs activities and deliverables – outputs of a particular WP- which show progress of the project.

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

3.3. Cost eligibility and cost categories

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

Eligible cost categories for the Detailed budget table:

- A. Direct personnel costs:
 - A.1 Employees (or equivalent) person months
- B. Purchase costs
 - B.1 Travel and subsistence per travel or day
 - B.2 Other goods, works and services
- C. Indirect costs⁵³

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

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

3.4. Double funding

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

4. Timetable – deadlines – project duration

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Deadline for submission of applications	30 May 2024–5:00 PM CEST time zone
Assessment of applications	June 2024 – September 2024
Information on Assessment results	October 2024
Grant Agreement signature	December 2024

⁵³ Indirect costs are costs that cannot be identified as specific costs directly linked to the performance of the project. Indirect costs are general administrative costs – overhead costs incurred in connection with the eligible direct costs for the project. They can include maintenance, stationery, photocopying, postage, telephone and fax costs, heating, electricity or other forms of energy, water, office furniture, insurance, and any other expenditure necessary for the successful completion of the project.

Starting date and duration of the projects

The indicative duration of the project should be 12-18 months.

The actual starting date of the 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.

5. Admissibility and documents

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

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 needs 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. An application **must be complete** and contain all the requested information, the Annexes to the Call Conditions and supporting documents. A list of the required documents is provided as Annex 4 to the Call Conditions.

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

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

When applying, the applicant will have to confirm that they have a mandate to act for all co-applicants. Moreover, the applicant will have to certify that the information provided in the application is correct and complete and comply with the conditions for receiving the EU funding (especially eligibility, financial and operational capacity, and exclusion, etc.).

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

It is recommended to complete an application sufficiently in advance of 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 form the basis for the request to extend the Call deadlines.

Once an application is submitted, an 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@esf.lt explaining the circumstances and attaching a copy of an application (and, if possible, screenshots to prove the malfunction of the Portal or the applicant's attempts to submit the application).

6. Eligibility - eligible participants – consortium composition

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

6.1. Eligible participants

Legal entities established and registered in the EU Member States are eligible as **applicants** or **co-applicants** and associated partners.

Applicants, co-applicants, and associated partners can be:

- Non-governmental and non-for-profit entities (e.g., civil society organisations, associations, foundations, social enterprises, etc.).
- National, local, and regional authorities.
- Public entities (e.g., agencies, organisations, centres, etc.).
- Research and education institutions.
- Private companies (including consultancy and service providers).

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

International organisations and EU-wide networks can only participate in a project as associated partners.

If the applicant's or co-applicants' entity has already been validated by the Central Validation Service (status 'validated') and has a Participant Identification Code (PIC), which is included in the register containing all participants of the 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 the Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU), or entities covered by the Commission Guidelines No 2013/C 205/0518. Such entities shall not be able to participate in the project in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, associated partners, or subcontractors (if any).

6.2. Consortium composition

Only consortia are eligible.

a. Transnational requirements

To be considered eligible, the consortium must include an applicant (the coordinator) and at least one co-applicant. The members of the consortium shall represent at least two different EU Member States.

For practical and legal reasons, it is recommended to set up consortium agreements that allow to deal with exceptional or unforeseen circumstances (in any case, even if not mandatory under the Grant Agreement). The 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 inside the consortium and can also help to protect any member in case of disputes.

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

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 towards the required minimum number of consortium members. An associated partner may participate in a project but may not declare eligible costs.

c. Affiliated entities

Affiliated entities are not eligible.

d. Conditions for rejection

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

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

7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

An applicant 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

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

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

The financial capacity of the coordinator will be assessed prior to the signature of the Grant Agreement (if the application is pre-selected for funding), unless during the assessment of applications is decided otherwise.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7.2. Operational capacity

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

The coordinator must have sufficient experience in project management/coordination. In concrete terms, this means the following:

- a) the coordinator (as a legal entity) managed at least one consortium project within the past five years; or
- b) the lead project manager, directly involved in the implementation of the project submitted under the Call, managed at least one consortium project within the past five years. Additionally, the lead project manager is expected to have a very good command of English (C1 level or higher). The lead project manager can be:
 - i) currently employed, or
 - ii) planned to be employed by the coordinator (no later than the date of signature of the Grant Agreement).

Please note that only those consortia projects⁵⁴ that:

- 1) had involved partners (an applicant/ coordinator and co-applicant) from no less than two different countries and
- 2) had lasted at least 12 months or had the total budget of more than EUR 200 000 will be taken into consideration for the assessment of operational capacity of the coordinator.

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:

- In the cases referred to in points a) and b) (i) of this Section:
 - A free-form 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;
 - General profiles (qualifications and experience) of the staff responsible for the management of the project (information to be provided under the point 2.3 of Part B of the Application).
 - A list of projects managed by the coordinator and /or the lead project manager within the past five years (please see Annex 5 of the Call Conditions for a template). The information provided should include the subject matter of these projects, their main activities, description of the partners, duration of a project, total and funding amounts and the role of the coordinator.
- In the case referred to in point b) (ii) of this Section:
 - A free form declaration by the coordinator certifying that the lead project manager with the relevant professional competences, appropriate qualifications and a very good command of English (C1 level or higher) will be employed by the coordinator no later than the date of.⁵⁵
 - Explanation/description certifying that the coordinator has previous experience in recruiting staff with the relevant professional competences and appropriate qualifications to manage a project (information to be provided under the point 2.3 of Part B the Application).

If necessary, additional supporting documents may be requested to confirm the operational capacity of the coordinator. If it is considered that the coordinator does not to have the required operational capacity, the whole 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 situations⁵⁶ described below:

⁵⁴ Funded from EU or national funds.

⁵⁵ Please note that if this condition is not fulfilled prior to the signature of the Grant Agreement, the Grant Agreement won't be signed and an application will be rejected.

⁵⁶ See Article 136 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

1. Bankruptcy, winding up, affairs administered by the courts, arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities or other similar procedures (including procedures for persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts);
2. In breach of social security or tax obligations (including if done by persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts);
3. Guilty of grave professional misconduct⁵⁷ (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant);
4. Guilty of fraud, corruption, having links to a criminal entity, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant);⁵⁸
5. Has shown significant deficiencies in complying with their main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant);
6. Guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Regulation No 2988/95 (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant); or
7. They have created under a different jurisdiction an entity with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant).

An applicant or any co-applicant will also be excluded from participating in the Call if it turns out that:⁵⁹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. Assessment and award procedures

8.1. Assessment procedure

Formal requirements

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

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



Figure 3. Process of application assessment

Appointment of experts and their tasks

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

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

Guiding principles of assessment

The guiding principles of assessment are the following:

- Transparency: Funding decisions are based on clearly described rules and procedures. Applicants receive adequate feedback on the outcome of the assessment of their applications.
- Fairness and impartiality: All applications are treated equally. They are assessed impartially on their merits, irrespective of their origin, the identity of the submitting entity, the 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 priority matters.

The Granting Authority will closely liaise with the experts during the assessment process to make sure that rules and procedures are properly understood and dutifully followed. Prior to the assessment of an application, experts will be requested to assess if 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 an application independently. If the difference between the total number of their points does not exceed 20 points, one of the experts will prepare a consolidated assessment report.

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

8.2. Award procedure

Selection of projects for funding

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

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

Communication of the selection results

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

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

Grant Agreement

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

8.3. Admissibility and eligibility check

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

To be considered admissible, an application shall be:

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

Applicants are encouraged to submit application in English to facilitate the treatment of applications and to speed up the assessment process. However, applications submitted in any of the official languages of the EU will be accepted.⁶⁰ 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 an application. The quality of the

⁶⁰ 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 10).

translation will not be guaranteed, and the translation of the application may not fully reveal the content of the text in the original language, therefore, it is left at applicant's own risk. Moreover, the Grant Agreement, as well as the project management, formal reporting, key deliverables, and all communication with the Granting Authority 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 meeting 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 with own funds or funds from other sources at least to the percentage level of the project costs specified in the Call Conditions (see Section 3.1 of the Call Conditions);
6. Be submitted by the applicant (coordinator) which meets 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.

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

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

8.4. Complaints regarding application rejection

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

Complaints will be subject to the following conditions:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8.5. Award criteria

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

The award criteria for this Call are as follows:

1. Relevance (Max 40 points, threshold 25 points):

- the extent to which the project contributes to the objectives and outputs of the Call (as they are described in Chapter 2 of the Call Conditions), including the key focus areas of the Call (as they are described in Section 1.3 of the Call Conditions), and fostering transnational cooperation aimed at transfer and upscaling of social innovation;
- the extent to which the project demonstrates that it contributes to / complements the results of past activities in the field of social innovation (on national and EU level).

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, 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;
- the extent to which the planned intervention demonstrates a long-term vision, i.e. it is sustainable beyond the project and aims to generate a lasting impact on the target group(s);
- the effectiveness of dissemination to maximise the uptake of the project results at local/ regional/ national/ European levels.

4. 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. The reasons for this will be explained in the Consolidated Assessment Report.

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 2016/679⁶¹. It will be processed exclusively for the purposes of the assessment of the application, the subsequent management of the grant and, if needed, program monitoring, evaluation, and communication.

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

9.2 Record keeping

The Beneficiaries 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 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, please 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 taken into account.

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

9.4. Dissemination and visibility

The beneficiaries must:

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

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

The emblem and the funding statement are available in the Grant Agreement and on the Europa⁶² website or can be downloaded from the European Commission's website.⁶³

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

9.5. Ownership of results

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

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

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

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

10. Support

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

Please also visit the Granting Authority's (<https://www.esf.it/en/>) and the European Commission's (<https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/esf-social-innovation>) websites regularly, since 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@esf.it.

Non-IT related questions should be sent to the following email address: Ukraine@esf.it.

Questions related to submission of an application shall:

- be sent **at the latest 7 days by the submission deadline** (see Chapter 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 **at the latest 10 days by the submission deadline**.

11. Grant Agreement preparation

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

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

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

62 https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/symbols/european-flag_en

63 https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/logos_downloadcenter

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 Euro to the bank account indicated by the coordinator in the Data Sheet of the Grant Agreement (point 4.2)

The payment of the grant usually consists of prefinancing payment (-s) and a final payment (payment of the balance). The aim of the prefinancing is to ensure a sufficient cash flow to the beneficiary:

- i For projects lasting up to 12-months, a prefinancing payment of 70% of the grant and the final payment are foreseen.
- ii For projects lasting between 12 and 18 months, two prefinancing payments and the final payment are foreseen:
 - i The first (initial) prefinancing payment of 50% of the grant after the signature of the Grant Agreement;
 - ii The second prefinancing payment of 30% of the grant after the approval of the first periodic report.

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.

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

- iii The final payment (payment of the balance).

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, it is limited joint and several liability with individual ceilings – for each beneficiary that cannot exceed their maximum share of the grant.

The 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 turns out that the Granting Authority has paid too much and needs to recover the undue amounts.

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 the application, the deadline for the implementation of the project activities may be extended, by a maximum of 6 months in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 36 of the Grant Agreement.

For details about 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, please see Chapter 5 of the Grant Agreement.

No-profit principle

The grant may not have the purpose or effect of producing a profit⁶⁴ for the beneficiaries.

Profit is defined as a surplus of the receipts (the Union grant, and the revenue generated by the project) over the eligible costs incurred by the beneficiary, when the request is made for payment of the balance. If there is a profit, it will be deducted from the final grant amount. For more details see Point 4.2 of the Data Sheet and Article 21.3.3 of the Grant Agreement.

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.

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.

64 See Article 192 EU Financial Regulation 2018/1046

Activating innovations for social change

M. Katkaus g. 44, LT-09217, Vilnius, Lithuania
+370 5 264 9340 | info@esf.lt | www.esf.lt/en



**Funded by
the European Union**