



Horizon Europe

European Innovation Ecosystems Work Programme

HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-03-01

Implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation
valleys

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1.0	17/05/2023	Initial version
1.1	24/07/2023	Questions added

European Innovation Ecosystems Work Programme

HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-03-01

Implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys

Scope

*The present document provides background information and guidance to potential applicants for proposals under the call **HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-03-01: [Implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys](#)**, as announced in the *European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) Work Programme 2023-2024*. It explains some of the key concepts and the main elements of the potential projects which would contribute to the development of the Regional Innovation Valleys, a flagship of the [New European Innovation Agenda](#).*

1. Q: Who can apply in the Regional Innovation Valleys call under EIE WP?

The eligibility condition of the Regional Innovation Valleys call under EIE states that “this action requires the participation, as beneficiaries, of at least five (5) national or regional authorities from at least five (5) different Member States or Associated Countries, of which at least two (2) are representing a 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovator region and at least one (1) is representing a 'strong' or 'innovation leader' innovator region”.

This is an eligibility condition on the minimum composition of the consortium. Therefore, if this criterion is fulfilled, any other relevant legal entities (i.e., any other innovation stakeholders such as clusters, associations, companies, hubs, etc.) that are established in Member States or Associated Countries or other countries eligible to receive funding (in line with the General Annex B to which eligibility conditions of this topic refer) could also be beneficiaries in the action, as long as they can provide the 50% co-funding required.

This is in line with Article 22(1) of the Horizon Europe Regulation that states: “Any legal entity, regardless of its place of establishment and including legal entities from non-associated third countries or international organisations, may participate in actions under the Programme, provided that the conditions laid down in this Regulation have been met together with any conditions laid down in the work programme or call for proposals.” and with Article 23 (1) which sets out the right of any entity coming from a Member State or Associated Country to receive funding.

The 50% co-fund requirement applies to any type of beneficiary participating in the consortium.

2. Q: Where could the applicants find information on whether my region is 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovator or a 'strong' or 'innovation leader'?

In the case of the EIE, the [Regional Innovation Scoreboard](#) is taken as a reference, and in the case of entities representing national authorities, the [European Innovation Scoreboard](#).

The applicants must use as a reference the latest version of the documents mentioned above at the time of the call closure. Associated Countries which are not included in the European Innovation Scoreboard and are ranked below 25 on the latest Global Innovation Index are considered as ‘moderate’ or ‘emerging’ innovators. In cases of Associated Countries not included in any of the previously mentioned references, the participation

rank of the country in the Horizon Europe programme (H2020 country profile) will be taken as a reference and countries ranked below the average will be considered as 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovators.

3. Q: Can entities from Third Countries apply in the Regional Innovation Valleys call under EIE WP?

The action allows for the participation of legal entities from European Union Members States or Horizon Europe Associated Countries as beneficiaries. Legal entities from Horizon Europe non-associated Third Countries could participate as associated partners.

4. Q: Does the Regional Innovation Valleys call under the EIE Work Programme provide the possibility of combining Horizon Europe and Cohesion policy funds for the co-funding of the projects?

Yes, provided it complies with the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR).

This is covered by the new legislation 2021-2027, CPR and Horizon Europe (HE).

The relevant articles are CPR Article 73(2)(4), HE Article 15, also General Block Exception Regulation (GBER) Article 25c.

Applicants are advised to consult the *synergies* [EC notice](#)

5. Q: How can innovation stakeholders, including SMEs/ Research and Technology Organisations (RTOs), participate as a beneficiary in the Regional Innovation Valleys call under EIE?

The action of EIE allows the participation of any relevant innovation stakeholder from [HE eligible countries](#), as beneficiary as long as:

- a. they can commit to contribute to the 50% co-fund rate;
- b. the required condition of at least five (5) national or regional authorities, from at least five (5) different Member States or Associated Countries, of which at least two (2) are representing a 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovator region and at least one (1) is representing a 'strong' or 'innovation leader' innovator region is fulfilled. Once this eligibility criterion is fulfilled, there is no other restriction on the type of partners or their role, and how and by whom the project will be coordinated. However, the partner composition may be evaluated during evaluations in terms of reaching maximum impact and other criteria. Please note that topic also mentions: *“The topic will support [...] programmes of activities (action plans) to enable authorities in charge of public national, regional, or local innovation policies and programmes, with the participation of the private sector and research and innovation actors, to implement joint activities towards innovation development [...]*

Any relevant innovation stakeholder, including SMEs/ RTOs could also be supported as third parties if the awarded consortium prepares joint open calls utilising financial support to third parties (FSTP) to implement interregional innovation projects.

6. Q: Can cities or municipalities apply in the EIE call?

Yes, the call has no restriction, as long as:

- a. the minimum eligibility requirements are met (note that local authorities are not covered in this criterion, only national/regional authorities);
- b. the 50% co-funding remaining budget can be covered.

7. Q: What is the average project size?

The topic does not define any optimal size of the consortia only minimum eligibility criterion. The call conditions do not specify the maximum consortium size. The applicants are only required to comply with the minimum eligibility requirements.

8. Q: How many projects will be funded in the Regional Innovation Valleys call under EIE and what is the relevant funding per project?

The expected number of projects funded under the EIE Work Programme for the 2023-2024 period is 6, each one receiving funding between EUR 8 and 12 million. Each project will have to include the provisions and modalities for the competitive selection and funding of at least 3 interregional innovation projects allocating at least 50% of the total eligible costs to them.

9. Q: What financial support to the parties (FSTP) rule applies to the EIE call?

The EIE call text indicates the following:

- a. The interregional projects have to absorb at least 50% of the action plan's total budget, which equals to the total eligible costs.
- b. The maximum amount of FSTP to be granted to an individual third party is EUR 600.000. This refers to the total participation of the individual third party in **all** interregional innovation projects of a proposal (grant).

The consortium has the full responsibility for the preparation and publication of joint calls, including the call implementation modalities and provisions, in line with the legal requirements for the FSTP implementation, i.e.

- [Financial Regulation - Art 204](#) (2018/1046 - 18 July 2018)
- [General Annexes to the Horizon Europe WP 2023-2024](#) (B. Eligibility)
- [Horizon Europe Model Grand Agreement](#) (Art.6.2.D.1 & Art 9.4)

1. Q: Which are the recipients of the financial support to third parties (FSTP)?

Recipients of financial support to third parties must normally be third parties to the agreement. Beneficiaries are not allowed to provide financial support under the grant agreement to themselves or their affiliated entities.

2. Q: Which are the characteristics of the recipients of financial support to third parties (FSTP)?

Characteristics of recipients of financial support to third parties:

- They do not sign the Grant Agreement (and are therefore not beneficiaries).
- They do not perform action tasks, but the financial support given to them is part of an action task specified in the description of the action.
- They receive financial support from the grant (sub-grant), to be declared as financial support to third parties cost by a beneficiary.

The beneficiary remains responsible towards the granting authority for the proper use of the funding by the recipients. They must moreover ensure that they comply with certain obligations specified in the grant agreement.

3. Q: Which are the thematic areas of the EIE? Can a project be multi-disciplinary with more than one thematic area?

The call is challenge-based and indicates five (5) thematic areas, focusing on reducing reliance on the fossil fuels, increasing global food security, mastering the digital transformation (including cybersecurity), improving healthcare, and achieving circularity.

Applicants are encouraged to prepare proposals focused and targeted to one thematic area, since the proposal will be evaluated on the basis of its coherence, structure and the clearly articulated objectives. However, depending on the challenge to be tackled, proposals may cover more than one thematic area.

4. Could a region participate in more than one proposal?

Yes. Regions as well as other entities could participate in more than one proposal. This could help regions, which are willing to work on addressing challenges in more than one of the five identified areas, to work on different projects.

5. Q: How extra public and private funding can be leveraged?

For the EIE call, partner regions (beneficiaries) may decide, for example, to:

- ✓ Mobilise **further public funding** by launching open calls targeting additional regions (not only those participating in the proposal);
- ✓ Mobilise **further private funding** by lowering the funding rate to end-beneficiaries of the FSTP (e.g. to 70%)

6. Q: What is the expected TRL level of the innovative projects in the Regional Innovation Valleys call under EIE?

In the case of the EIE, the interregional projects are expected to be similar to Horizon Europe Innovation Actions (IA) namely TRL 6-8 and should focus on the development and/or deployment of technologies and innovations, including breakthrough and disruptive, through cooperation between research and innovation actors from the participating regions.

7. Q: What is the Annual Work Programme (AWP) mentioned under the Regional Innovation Valleys call under EIE?

For Cofund calls, an Annual Work Programme (AWP) document is mandatory together with the application (as annex to Part B) to be uploaded in the Submission System. The 1st work programme is a key part of the proposal; the work programmes for subsequent years are regular deliverables for the implementation of the project.

The AWP provides a detailed description of activities for the initial and each successive twelve-month period of the project, as the action develops in line with the objectives and description of work provided in part B of the proposal. It must include both activities that are planned to be carried out and completed and activities that are simply initiated during the relevant twelve-month period.

Depending on the detail of part B of the proposal, it is not excluded that sections of this annex may overlap with part B.

8. Q: Are there any restrictions on who can be the coordinator of the projects under the Regional Innovation Valleys call HE-EIE-2023-CONNECT-03-01?

No. The role of the coordinator can be assumed by any partner of the consortium that fulfils the relevant eligibility criteria. There is no specific requirement on the eligibility of the coordinator.

9. Q: What is the relevance of the Regional Innovation Valleys call under EIE with the HE-EIE-2021-CONNECT-01-01, HE-EIE-2022-CONNECT-02-01 and HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-01-02 topics?

- HE-EIE-2021-CONNECT-01-01 and HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-01-02 topics (CSA) aimed at funding the preparation of joint action plans, i.e. actions that will allow applicants to explore areas and ways of cooperation, concretise and co-design these action plans.
- The current and the HE-EIE-2022-CONNECT-02-01 topic (COFUND) will finance the implementation of multi-annual joint action plans that are mature and applicants already know what they want to achieve (areas of cooperation, activities, etc.).

10. Will action plans (projects) prepared and financed under HE-EIE-2021-CONNECT-01-01 and HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-01-02 topics automatically get financing for their implementation via HE-EIE-2022-CONNECT-02-01 topic?

No. Getting funds for preparation of joint action plans via “preparatory CSA” topics does not automatically imply getting financing for their implementation via a COFUND topic.

Due to the short time span between the calls, it will not be possible for the applicants of the 2023 preparatory CSA call to submit proposals for the 2023 COFUND call, but only later in future Work Programmes. However, successful projects of 2021 preparatory CSA call can participate in the COFUND call with the necessary call requirements and adjustments of objectives and consortia.

11. Q: What are you expecting behind "deep tech". Some start-ups develop frugal approaches creating new market paradigm (e.g. active mobility). Are they targeted?

Both the EIE and the I3 calls aim to accelerate the development and deployment of innovation, **including** deep tech innovation. This means that the proposals are not restricted only to deep tech innovation but could focus also on other innovation areas.

12. Q: How do you define “deep tech”?

Deep tech is technology that is based on cutting-edge scientific advances and discoveries and is characterised by the need to stay at the technological forefront by constant interaction with new ideas and results from the lab. Deep tech is distinct from ‘high tech’ which tends to refer only to R&D intensity.

13. Q: Do regions have to apply to the call for expression of interest to then apply for the EIE? Is it encouraged or mandatory to be selected for the Regional Innovation Valleys call under EIE?

Regions do not need to apply in the call for expression of interest in order to qualify as eligible to apply in the EIE calls. They are encouraged to apply in the call for expression of interest in order to benefit from the matchmaking process which will aim to facilitate interconnections among those regions who converge towards the same thematic/technological objectives.

14. Q: Can end-beneficiaries from regions that do not participate as beneficiaries in the proposal (even if they are in the same country with a beneficiary) receive FSTP funding?

As mentioned in the call text, these interregional projects are expected to be similar to HE Innovation Actions (TRL 6-8) and should focus on the development and/or deployment of technologies and innovations, including breakthrough and disruptive, through cooperation between research and innovation actors from the participating regions.

15. Q: Will there be another regional innovation valleys call in the future?

Yes. In line with the New European Innovation Agenda, which indicates that EUR 100 million from the Horizon Europe budget would be committed for the establishment of the regional innovation valleys, there will be more calls in the upcoming Horizon Europe Work Programmes to commit the additional EUR 40 million.

16. Q: Is the action plan total budget the same as the proposal budget and, in case the two budgets are different, what elements are in the proposal budget which are not in the action plan budget?

The scope of the topic states that: “Proposals should allocate at least 50% of the action plan’s total budget to these interregional innovation projects.” The concept of an “action plan” broadly corresponds to a project (and its activities) to be funded by the action. On this basis, the reference to the action plan’s total budget in the scope should be interpreted as the proposal total budget, and, in particular, the total estimated eligible costs.

17. Q: Can European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) participate in the call?

Yes. EIT KICs, as well as any other relevant legal entities that are established in Member States or Associated Countries or other legal entities that are established in Member States or Associated Countries or other Horizon Europe eligible countries can be beneficiaries, as long as they can provide the 50% co-funding required and the minimum eligibility conditions for the composition of the consortium are met.

18. Q: How do you define “regional/national authorities”?

There is no specific definition of national and regional authorities in Horizon Europe, and in general the definition of such authorities depends on the national administrative arrangements. For the purposes of the minimum eligibility requirements under the Regional Innovation Valleys call:

“National authority” means a public authority at the level of government, including those at regional and local levels, as well as Member State organisations within the meaning of Article 2(42) of the Financial Regulation. Based on Article 2(42) of the Financial Regulation: ‘Member State organisation’ means an entity established in a Member State as a public law body, or as a body governed by private law entrusted with a public service

mission and provided with adequate financial guarantees from the Member State.

“Regional authority” is a governing body or administrative entity that operates at a subnational level within a geographic region. For the purposes of assessing whether a regional authority represents a 'moderate', 'emerging', 'strong' or 'innovation leader' region, the [Regional Innovation Scoreboard](#) (RIS) is the reference.

19. Q: Can funding from the Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRF) be used as co-financing?

In principle, yes, the applicants can use the RRF funds to co-fund the Regional Innovation Valleys call.

With respect to the prevention of double funding specifically, the Member State is required to clearly separate estimated costs supported by the RRF, to reflect which part of the measure is expected to be covered by the RRF and which is to be covered by the EIE part of Horizon Europe. The Member States can refer to the guidance note “Double funding under the Recovery and Resilience Facility” of February 2023 or also contact EC-RECOVER@ec.europa.eu if they have any specific questions.

Finally, the above is based on the understanding that the RIVs do not have mandatory national co-financing rates the coverage of which is not allowed by the RRF (page 42 of the [RRF Guidance](#)).

20. Q: Can funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) be used as co-financing?

As rules on cumulative funding may vary from one country to another, if you consider using the “cumulative funding” synergy mechanism to combine ERDF funding and Horizon Europe funding (EIE) please contact the Managing Authority of the respective ERDF programme following the "Notice on Synergies between Horizon Europe and ERDF programmes (2022/C 421/03)".

21. Q: What happens if one consortium member cannot cover 50% of the co-fund?

It is a decision to be agreed between the consortium leader and the Project Advisor managing the project in line with the grant agreement signed. Grant Agreement amendment is possible with a potential new consortium member or task reshuffling.