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ANNEX 2

**ANNEX**

**to the**

**COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION**

**on the financing of the Programme for the internal market, competitiveness of enterprises, including small and medium-sized enterprises, the area of plants, animals, food and feed and European Statistics and the adoption of the work programmes for 2026-2027**

## ANNEX II

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## ANNEX II

2026 work programme - Improving the competitiveness of enterprises, particularly SMEs, and supporting their access to markets

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The sixth work programme for the SME pillar of the Single Market Programme (SMP) takes account of the recent initiatives of particular relevance for SMEs - the [Single Market Strategy](#), with an online SME ID tool, the voluntary standard to help SMEs demonstrate their sustainability efforts, as well as improve their access to sustainable finance, and an SME check on all regulatory proposals that have a significant impact on SMEs; the adoption of a [recommendation](#) and omnibus proposal on small mid-cap enterprises; and the adoption of the [Start up, scale up strategy](#), to help companies launch and grow.

The work programme continues to focus on implementing the **SME strategy** in the context of industrial ecosystems and the SME components of the updated **Industrial Strategy**. While focusing on the above-mentioned SME priorities of the Single Market Strategy, it continues to implement the **SME Relief Package** of September 2023.

This work programme addresses the main objective of the SMP's SME pillar “**strengthening competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs** and achieving additionality at EU level” and continues to highlight SMEs' green and digital transition, as well as resilience in the context of ongoing challenges: from post-COVID business recovery through modified supply chains and different internationalisation models due to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

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

The **Net-Zero Industry Act** aims to scale up clean technology manufacturing in the EU with a target to provide at least 40% of the EU's annual deployment needs for strategic net-zero technologies<sup>1</sup> by 2030. In addition, the **Critical Raw Materials Act** aims to diversify and enhance the resilience of EU critical raw material supply chains and support the transition to circularity and sustainability, with support proposed on a new stockpiling project.

This work programme will continue to provide support for the **European Wind Academy** to enable roll-out of training modules for training workforce in clean manufacturing supply chain in the EU.

Concrete actions in **tourism and bioeconomy**, with a special focus on biotech applied in the food sector will advance SME transitions towards greener economy and more resilience.

**SME policy** will be supported with work on insolvency support, and data gathering for a stronger evidence base for SMEs, small mid-caps and startups and scaleups. The work programme will continue to fund work on **Better Regulation** supporting the work to reduce administrative burden. The **SAFE survey** provides evidence on SME financing, financial situation and access to markets.

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

Last but not least, this work programme includes a number of multiannual flagship actions seeking to address challenges faced by SMEs and entrepreneurs, and expand business opportunities:

**Enterprise Europe Network:** services for companies on how to innovate and grow internationally (2026 contribution around EUR 40 million)

**Joint Clusters Initiative:** close cooperation between industrial clusters and SMEs (2026 contribution around EUR 12 million)

**Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs:** international mobility scheme for would be entrepreneurs (2026 contribution around EUR 13 million).

By sharing the same executive agency, the SME pillar seeks to share knowledge and resources in synergy with the European Innovation Council. The work programme is subject to a positive opinion by a committee referred to under Article 21 of Regulation (EU) 2021/690<sup>2</sup>.

On the basis of the objectives given in Article 3(2)(b) of Regulation (EU) 2021/690, this work programme contains the actions to be financed and the budget breakdown for 2026 as follows:

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

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

### **Legal basis**

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

### **Budget line**

03 02 02 - improving the competitiveness of enterprises, particularly SMEs, and supporting their access to markets.

### **Objectives pursued**

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

- provide various forms of support to SMEs as well as clusters and other business network organisations, including in the tourism sector, thereby fostering the growth, scale-up and creation of SMEs,
- facilitate access to markets including the internationalisation of SMEs,

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<sup>2</sup> [EUR-Lex - 32021R0690 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

- promote entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills,
- promote a favourable business environment for SMEs, support digital transformation and promote new business opportunities for SMEs, including for social economy enterprises and those with innovative business models,
- support the competitiveness of industrial ecosystems and sectors as well as the development of industrial value chains; and
- promote the modernisation of industry, contributing to a green, digital and resilient economy.

### **Expected results**

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

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

### **Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming**

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

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

The skills academies will provide training to SMEs in the areas such as the solar PV manufacturing value chain, boosting critical skills and competencies, resilience and competitiveness.

The biohubs project in the bioeconomy will promote the use of environmentally friendly (bio)technologies, specifically contributing to a more sustainable and resilient food system that aligns with the EU's broader climate change goals. The action will include scaling-up of food (bio)technologies that could reduce the reliance on feed and livestock in the future, which in turn decreases land use, habitat destruction and the overall environmental impact associated with traditional animal agriculture.

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<sup>3</sup> [Single Market programme - legal texts and factsheets \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic-single-market-programme-legal-texts-and-factsheets-2023-01-11-01.pdf)

## 2. GRANTS

The global budgetary envelope reserved for grants under this work programme for 2026 is EUR 86 250 000.

The actions 2.1 and 2.2 were adopted in annex 2 of the 2024 work programme<sup>4</sup> and action 2.3 was adopted in 2025<sup>5</sup> and these actions are included here for information purposes only. The multiannual instalment for 2026 for these three actions is included in the total budget allocation for 2026.

### 2.1. Enterprise Europe Network<sup>6</sup>

#### Budget

Indicative total amount call for proposals (2026 appropriations only): EUR 40 000 000

Table of multiannual commitment budget for this action

Year	2024	2025	2026	2027	TOTAL
Budget EUR	38 100 000	53 500 000	40 000 000	50 900 000	182 500 000

### 2.2. Joint Cluster Initiatives (EUROCLUSTERS) for Europe's recovery<sup>7</sup>

#### Budget

Indicative total amount (2026 appropriations only): EUR 12 000 000

Table of multiannual commitment budget for this action

Year	2024	2025	2026	2027	TOTAL
Budget EUR	10 000 000	11 000 000	12 000 000	9 000 000	42 000 000

### 2.3. Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs

#### Budget

Indicative total amount (2026 appropriations only): EUR 13 000 000

Table of multiannual commitment budget for this action

Year	2025	2026	2027	TOTAL
BUDGET EUR	12 000 000	13 000 000	5 000 000	30 000 000

<sup>4</sup> [Annex 2 to the Commission Implementing Decision C\(2023\)8926 - Improving the competitiveness of enterprises, particularly SMEs, and supporting their access to markets](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Annex 2 to the Commission Implementing Decision C\(2024\)8194 on the financing of the Programme and the adoption of the work programme for 2025-2027](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](#)

## 2.4. EU Japan Centre for industrial Cooperation

Type of applicants targeted by a direct award

Action grant directly awarded according to Article 195(d) of the Financial Regulation and Article 4 of the Council Decision 92/278/EEC<sup>1</sup>.

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

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

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are crucial engines for growth and job creation; nevertheless, volatility and unpredictability in the current economic context have made it more difficult for SMEs to do business. One of the objectives of the SME pillar of the SMP is to support SMEs' access to other markets. In support of this objective, the EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation (henceforth, the 'Centre') serves as a first point of support for EU SMEs interested in going to Japan. The Centre provides training and information sessions on a variety of industrial topics to even out the knowledge differential that SMEs might have with regards to larger corporations. In light of the EU's recent policy strategies and the EU's interest to boost its economic security, cooperation with close partners like Japan will contribute to efforts towards de-risking supply chains and reducing vulnerabilities linked to critical dependencies in strategic sectors.

- The Centre delivers on the objectives of the SMP SME Pillar through different activities. These include: supporting **the industrial cooperation priorities of European and Japanese authorities**. This is delivered in line with the EU Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), EU Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), Connectivity Partnership, the EU-Japan Green Alliance, the EU-Japan Digital Partnership and the EU -Japan Security and Defence Partnership, and in line with DG GROW's policy priorities in terms of the Clean Industrial Deal, SME internationalisation, and resilient international and strategic value chains.
- **Providing gateway services for European SMEs wishing to enter the Japanese market** through a coherent 'package' integrating various tools, support and services ranging from business intelligence (reports and webinars/seminars) to training activities for SMEs and cluster managers, activities to connect European and Japanese businesses including matchmaking business missions. The Centre provides European SMEs with a unique information and support contact point in Japan (and Brussels), delivering a wide range of services to help EU businesses to access the Japanese market.
- **Facilitate engagement between European and Japanese businesses in a mutually beneficial approach**. This is notably delivered through support for the EU-Japan Business Roundtable, as well as through various activities dedicated to the Europe Enterprise Network or the European Clusters Cooperation Platform.
- **Promote the EU as an investment destination** to Japanese business and investors by acting as a one-stop-shop service providing Japanese corporates, trading houses, investors information about the European regulatory environment, funding schemes and partnership opportunities, as well as promoting opportunities for partnering in European projects open to international partners. This includes support for EU-Japan business cooperation in third countries, where Japan is, beyond its own market, increasingly

considered by European businesses as a hub to access third markets, by partnering with Japanese businesses. This is also achieved through joint actions with Member States' Trade Promotions Organisations in a 'Team Europe' mindset for co-organising better business missions with an integrated approach with strong institutional, political and business ties, including with industrial clusters. Many of the existing activities will be reconducted, although with some adaptations to reflect the changing business and political environment. The Centre's work programme will need to both ensure continuity of actions and services, while retaining some flexibility to meet new and emerging needs of SMEs that exist or may arise.

## Implementation

EISMEA

## Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 7 000 000
- Rate of co-financing: up to 100% of the eligible costs for financial support to third parties and up to 90% of the eligible costs for other cost categories
- Indicative implementation timetable: Q2/2026 signature of grant agreement
- Indicative duration of the project(s) to be funded: 24 months
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
  - 1) Number of SME enquiries and number of contacts of the EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation for information and advice purposes (to the different Helpdesks).
  - 2) Number of persons/SMEs participating in trainings, webinars and workshops.
  - 3) Number of EU companies entering Japanese market with the assistance of the Centre.
  - 4) Number of joint collaborations between European and Japanese companies facilitated by the Centre.
  - 5) Number of updated and new publications focusing on specific segments of the Japanese market.

## 2.5. Promoting trans-European tourism products in third countries

Type of applicants targeted by the call for proposals

An **ad hoc grant** will be awarded to the **European Travel Commission (ETC)**<sup>8</sup> under article 195(f) of the financial regulation. This is due to the activities with specific characteristics that require a particular type of body on account of its technical competence, its high degree of specialisation or its administrative powers.

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

<sup>8</sup> ETC was set up in 1948 by European countries' National Tourism Offices (NTO). These countries have mandated ETC with promoting Europe as a tourist destination in non-European countries. Its membership now comprises 36 NTOs from 35 member countries in Europe (including Ukraine).

This action will enable the continued partnership with the European Travel Commission (ETC) to position Destination Europe as a leader in sustainable, innovative, and inclusive tourism in key long-haul markets.

Set against the backdrop of the new EU Strategy for Tourism, the grant will support efforts to:

- Strengthen Europe's global image as a sustainable, safe, and resilient destination.
- Safeguard and grow the EU's share in an increasingly competitive global tourism market.
- Encourage geographical and seasonal spread of travellers, in line with residents' expectations and community well-being, while promoting local, sustainable experiences.

The action's core focus is to deliver impactful, transnational marketing campaigns through ETC, in close cooperation with national and regional tourism promotion bodies, as well as SMEs. By combining top-down strategic promotion with bottom-up storytelling and destination-driven initiatives, the campaign will showcase thematic, cross-border tourism products that reflect Europe's diversity and values.

Activities will help to increase and redirect travel flows toward less-visited regions and support community-based tourism, enhancing the visibility of sustainable offers and authentic local culture.

#### Implementation

DG MOVE

#### Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 2 000 000
- Rate of co-financing: Up to 75 %
- Indicative implementation: Q1 2027
- Indicative duration of the project(s) to be funded: 12 months
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
  - Number of stakeholders engaged in campaign co-creation, events, and distribution
  - Shift in intention to travel responsibly (percentage change in long-haul travel barometer)
  - Number of new business leads generated through digital and trade activities.

## 2.6. Creation of biohubs for strategic collaboration and SME support

Type of applicants targeted by the call for proposals

Consortium of clusters and business support organisations (BSOs)

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

This call will fund up to 3 projects within the bioeconomy, with a special focus on biotech applied in the food sector, bringing each at least two major biotech clusters together from different countries. They should develop structured collaboration, with the aim of creating virtual hubs of bioclusters, referred to as ‘biohubs’ in this call, with a critical mass enabling them to compete with other global hubs. Projects will have to actively support their SMEs developing innovative products made with bio solutions, especially to scale-up from the laboratory to pilot- and commercial scale, and explore the best options to provide regulatory support to help bring those products to the market.

At least one of the hubs (if more than one is funded) should focus on the agri-food sector, and the use of fermentation technologies (such as biomass fermentation and precision fermentation) which already contribute to food sustainability and security and will increasingly do so. They present opportunities to offer diverse, nutritious and accessible food options with reduced use of land. They also present economic opportunities for rural areas, as biomass fermentation allows for rapid production of protein-rich foods with minimal inputs, adaptable to any location with access to electricity, water, air and feedstock. They also present reshoring opportunities to produce critical feed ingredients, such as vitamins and amino acids. Advanced fermentation technologies also offer potential in other sectors, as highlighted in the [Life Sciences Strategy](#). All hubs (if several are funded) should exploit and optimise advanced fermentation technologies with potential for their sector.

The biohub(s) will have to conduct the 3 following activities:

1. **Strategy development:** As a first step, a strategy will be developed, defining a clear vision and mission, focused on connecting at least two major biotech clusters to boost cross-border innovation collaboration in the EU. It should include both European and international market development strategies, while supporting the maintenance or reshoring of industrial activities essential to safeguarding EU innovation capacity, EU critical production capacities, and EU food security for a project in the agri-food domain. The network will also develop a marketing identity, starting with a name.
2. **Collaboration activities:** A second activity would focus on identifying additional partners for the project across the EU, such as clusters, business organisations, incubators, technical centres, pilot facilities, consultancies, etc., which can contribute positively to the implementation of the strategy. They would be invited to join as active partners, helping to expand and strengthen the network’s activities and reach.
3. **SME support:** Finally, the partners of the network (the original consortium and active partners recruited under activity 2) would support their SMEs (a minimum of 10 SMEs, across the different partners) in scaling up their bio solutions, with a focus on regulatory support and overcoming the challenges of transitioning from lab scale to industrial scale (‘valley of death’). These services would be offered by the partners and their members, such as research institutes, incubators, large companies, pilot facilities or consultancies. This support would help SMEs to transition their proven innovations towards market

readiness and commercialisation. Special preference should be given to SMEs that make use of food-based materials (such as side streams and by-products) as inputs to prevent food waste, creating synergies with the objectives of the SMP Food pillar.

The projects are encouraged to take into account initiatives in the new EU Bioeconomy Strategy<sup>9</sup> and the Horizon Europe work programme 2026-2027<sup>10</sup> in relation to industrial symbiosis, biomass hubs and biomass flows.

## Implementation

EISMEA

## Additional information

Total amount of the action: EUR 3 000 000

Rate of co-financing: Up to 90%

Indicative implementation timetable (launch of the call): Q2 2026

Indicative duration of the project(s) to be funded: 36 months

Qualitative and quantitative indicators: The number of collaboration activities, the scale-up achieved by SMEs in terms of volume increase and/or measurable process improvements (e.g. higher yields, lower costs), and the number of SMEs supported overall.

## 2.7. SME Innovation Support in Connected and Automated Mobility (CAM)

Type of applicants targeted by the call for proposals

SMEs established in an EU Member State or associated country, developing deployable CAM technologies with a strong potential for replication, market uptake, and alignment with EU industrial ecosystems and policy objectives.

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

The proposed action is the launch and implementation of a targeted Call for Proposals dedicated to SMEs developing Connected and Automated Mobility (CAM) solutions in high-potential areas, with link to the Automotive Action Plan (AAP) flagship action on testbeds for autonomous driving:

- CAM for Smart Ports and Logistics Hubs (including autonomous freight transport)

<sup>9</sup> [Bioeconomy Strategy - Environment - European Commission](#)

<sup>10</sup> End January 2026

The call will fund SME-led projects that include:

- Pre-commercial deployment of CAM technologies (Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) 5-8) in real world operational environments
- Development of hardware, software, AI systems, and interoperability solutions to support driving automation and management of operations
- Integration with infrastructure (V2X, digital twins, EV charging, etc.)

Activities will also include technical assistance, impact monitoring, and dissemination of results.

### **Objectives Pursued**

- Accelerate the market readiness of CAM solutions led by European SMEs
- Retain valuable SMEs developing innovative CAM solutions within the EU (some EU players are already moving to test/deploy in US)
- Boost SME innovation and competitiveness in strategic mobility areas
- Support the green and digital transition of European logistics and freight transport
- Enable collaboration between SMEs, infrastructure operators, and municipalities
- Demonstrate scalable, replicable CAM deployments in the EU
- Contribute to the Commission AAP initiative on testbeds for autonomous driving

### **Expected Results**

- Launch of a well-structured, competitive call targeting CAM-focused SMEs
- Supporting 1-2 projects involving multiple size SME's across Europe
- Feasibility demonstration of the business case related to CAM applications in ports/logistics and freight transport
- Acceleration of solutions reaching TRL 7-8 and commercial readiness
- Creation of long-term partnerships between SMEs and end-users

### Implementation

EISMEA

## Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 5 250 000
- Rate of co-financing: 90%
- Indicative implementation timetable:
  - Call for proposals: Q1/2026
  - Grant Agreement signature: Q4/2026
- Indicative duration of the project(s) to be funded: between 24 and 30 months
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
  - Core indicators:
    - Number of SMEs receiving support from the Programme
    - Number of companies that concluded business partnerships
    - Change in turnover as a result of support/advisory services
    - Change in employment as a result of support/advisory services
  - Ports/Logistics hubs KPIs:
    - % reduction in container turnaround time
    - CO2 emissions saved per pilot site
    - TRL increase per SME
  - Freight transport KPIs:
    - CO2 emissions saved per trip
    - Cost per Kilometre
    - TRL increase per SME

### **2.8. Sustainable growth and building resilience in tourism: Improving the competitiveness of tourism SMEs, encouraging start-ups and female entrepreneurs in tourism**

Type of applicants targeted by the call for proposals

Tourism SMEs or consortia of organisations of, among others, the relevant tourism ecosystem industry stakeholders, innovation hubs, incubators, accelerators, data collecting and managing bodies, as well as competent public authorities and public bodies at local, regional or national level.

Description of the activities to be funded under the call for proposals as well as of the objectives pursued and the expected results<sup>1</sup>

This call for proposals will in particular aim at increasing the competitiveness of tourism SMEs and empowering SMEs in their twin transition efforts in line with the Tourism Transition Pathway (under the Industrial Strategy Update (COM (2021)350 final).

The action will contribute to enhancing competitiveness of the European tourism ecosystem and promoting its twin transition by providing support, including with the intermediary of

consortia of organisations of the relevant tourism industry stakeholders, and building capacities of tourism companies, particularly SMEs and tourism start-ups, for their digital and green transformation. It also aims to boost innovation, resilience, sustainability and quality along the tourism value chain.

The activity may include provision of direct financial support to third parties, e.g. SMEs with innovative projects, including for female tourism entrepreneurs.

***Expected results***

1. enhanced resilience and competitiveness of tourism SMEs through better uptake of sustainability principles, innovation, and digitalisation (i.e. use of new technologies, greening, data) and through increased capacity to track the footprints;
2. new business models in tourism building on digitalisation, new technologies, sustainability, circularity, involvement of local communities and long-term visitors;
3. supporting innovative projects of female tourism entrepreneurs.
4. enhanced cooperation along the tourism value chain;
5. improved transnational and cross-border cooperation, knowledge transfer and peer learning;

This action will build on previous calls for SMEs funded under the COSME and SMP SME pillar and will focus on increasing the sustainable competitiveness of tourism SMEs and start-ups, with a particular emphasis on supporting female tourism entrepreneurs who are underrepresented in the industry.

Implementation

EISMEA / DG MOVE

## Additional information

- Total amount of the action: **EUR 4 000 000**
- Rate of co-financing: Up to 90% **or** up to 100% of the eligible costs for **financial support to third parties (FSTP)** (if FSTP is used) and up to 90% of the eligible costs for all other cost categories, depending on the decisions taken in the call for proposals
- Indicative implementation timetable: launch of call Q2 2026; signature Q1 2027
- Indicative duration of the project(s) to be funded: **24 to 36 months** (maximum 2 consortia)
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
  - Change in turnover as a result of support/advisory services
  - Change in employment as a result of support/advisory services
  - Change in export sales as a result of support /advisory services
  - Number of companies that concluded business partnerships
  - Satisfaction rate regarding support
    - for growth
    - access to markets
    - digital transformation
    - ecosystem support
    - sustainability
  - Measures introduced by supported SMEs
    - Recruitment
    - skills development
    - cooperation agreements
    - digital measures
    - sustainability measures
    - innovation measures
    - Increasing women's participation in startups and entrepreneurship.

### 3. PROCUREMENT

The global budgetary envelope reserved for procurement contracts in 2026 is EUR 31 131 229.

#### 3.1. Enterprise Europe Network animation activities

General description of the contracts envisaged

The aim of the action is to provide the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) partners with the necessary tools and support to implement their work programmes. This includes IT hosting, maintenance, development of the IT tools and databases, the intranet and community building tools. It also includes budget needed for communication activities, training and governance, organisation of working groups, steering groups, events etc. Part of this budget will be used to organize the EEN annual conference.

*Specific objectives:*

- Governing the EEN, in particular by organising the annual conference, Steering Groups, Working Group meetings or Network stakeholder meetings.
- IT tools and databases, in particular by operating, maintaining, improving and developing new IT tools and databases, ensuring data quality, and maintaining an IT helpdesk.
- Helping the Network to provide its services in an efficient and effective manner and at the highest quality possible.
- Enabling Network partners to provide their services to European SMEs based on the "no wrong door principle" through the Client Journey.
- Network communication, information and support, implementation of the communication plan, prepare and make promotional material and infrastructure available, increase the Network visibility and facilitate networking.
- Dissemination of information on Commission priorities and actions relevant for SMEs throughout the Network.
- Training and capacity building: implementation of the training plan with special attention for new priority areas (training, capacity building and possibly creating assessment tools to help EEN members provide sustainability, digitalisation and innovation services);
- Services to the Network, in particular managing knowledge contents, the forums system, valorising practices and running thematic and sector groups.
- Assistance to and mentoring of Network partners where quality of activities and services needs to be raised.
- Report on Network achievements and performance indicators on a regular basis, as defined in the monitoring and reporting guidelines, using an automated (IT developed) reporting system to avoid administrative burden where possible.
- The budget for Network animation may also include the budget needed to facilitate the integration of EEN members in Third Countries (travel and subsistence costs for training, working groups, steering groups, annual conference, thematic or sector groups).
- The budget is also used to organise a conference with 800 participants to allow EEN members to network and exchange knowledge, know-how and useful contacts. The

required budget is needed for all practical aspects of the conference (logistics of physical and virtual meetings, opening session, parallel workshops, closing session, catering etc.).

*Expected results:*

- EEN members are aware of new Commission priorities and ready to provide relevant services to SMEs, for example on sustainability, digitalisation and resilience.
- Reliable and performant IT tools are available to the EEN members to help them implement their activities.
- The visibility of the EEN is increased as a result of the communication activities.
- The annual conference and training activities help EEN staff to increase the skills, knowledge and efficiency.

Implementation

EISMEA

**Additional information**

1. Total amount of the action: **EUR 3 150 000**

implemented using a variety of direct contracts or specific contracts using framework contracts. The exact budget distribution between the different actions will be known at a later stage. An indicative budget of € 1.550.000 will be used for maintenance of IT tools and databases and the rest of the budget for the other activities.

2. Indicative implementation timetable:

Specific contracts under diverse framework contracts (IT, communication, rooms, catering, ...): Q1-Q4 2026

3. Qualitative and quantitative indicators for the action

For the animation contracts:

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

For the annual conference:

- (a) Number of participants onsite and online.
- (b) Number of sessions and workshops organized.
- (c) Satisfaction rate of virtual and physical participants.

**3.2. Developing blueprints of efficient channels and methods to facilitate access of entrepreneurs at risk of insolvency to early warning mentors**

## General description of the contract envisaged

The project is a follow-up action building on the results of two previous projects ended in 2019 and in 2024, respectively, that has been conceived as supporting actions to the implementation of Art. 3 of the 2019 Directive on Preventive Restructuring Frameworks and Insolvency<sup>11</sup>.

- The first project, the Early Warning Europe pilot (EWE), developed a blueprint methodology on how to establish an early warning mechanism for companies in distress, namely on how to detect signs of distress early enough to secure the chance for rescuing the company in distress.
- The second project, the Early Warning Europe Mentor Academy (EWEMA), was focused on identifying new mentors and training them to acquire the necessary skills to support companies in distress. Deliverables of this project are freely and publicly accessible<sup>12</sup> to allow a multiplying effect.
- The proposed project will build on the outcomes of the previous two projects and will focus on leveraging business associations as trusted organisations to offer ‘safe’ channels to facilitate the access of entrepreneurs to mentors, who will assist them out of financial difficulties. This project also aims to provide an alternative support to companies in distress, especially in the EU countries who do not have yet an advisory and mentoring service available to their SMEs in distress. As a consequence, these actions are the needed – and final – complement of the two projects that have been executed in the last 10 years.

### Main actions

- This contract focuses on developing blueprints for establishing the most efficient and trusted channels and methods to facilitate access of entrepreneurs in distress to early warning mentors, in particular those who were trained by the two previous projects (over 1300 mentors), so that the competences of mentors are well used for the benefit of companies in financial difficulties.
- The entrepreneurs facing financial difficulties are in most cases under pressure and are often not sufficiently aware that help is available, if they need it. For this reason, the project foresees the involvement of business organisation (e.g. national/regional small business associations and chamber of commerce) and mentor networks to serve as privileged channels to link entrepreneurs with mentors. They will act as ‘trusted intermediaries’ to ensure the ‘safe’ environment for linking entrepreneurs in distress and early warning mentors.

This project will also address the need for making entrepreneurs at risk of insolvency aware about the availability of early warning mentors, especially in those countries where such awareness is still insufficient. Examples of countries where early warning mechanisms are functioning well (e.g., Denmark, the Netherlands) will be used to showcase benefits of efficient early warning systems that help rescuing still viable companies and preserving jobs

- The project will identify clusters of countries that are showing a certain degree of

<sup>11</sup> Art. 3 of Directive 2019/1023 - Preventive restructuring frameworks, on discharge of debt and disqualifications, and on measures to increase the efficiency of procedures concerning restructuring, insolvency and discharge of debt, and amending Directive (EU) 2017/1132 <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/1023/oj>

<sup>12</sup> One of the key deliverables of the EWEMA project is the “Learning Programme for mentors: Mentoring for Business Success: Helping Companies at Risk of Failure” and can be found at the EU Academy portal: <https://academy.europa.eu/courses/early-warning-mentoring-for-smes>

similarity, e.g. in terms of level of maturity of early warning mechanisms, business cultures, availability of mentors and acuteness of insolvency threat. Then, it will design and develop blueprints of the most efficient methods and channels to reach out to entrepreneurs in difficulties, that will be ready for replication in other countries of similar features. Defining a blueprint will be the task of a contractor.

- The proposal shall build on the outcomes of the two previous projects and include a methodology to engage with as many EU MS as possible, ideally all, as this project relates to certain obligations under the EU law<sup>13</sup>. A strategy for mitigating the risks of a poor involvement of EU MS shall be duly formulated in the proposal.
- Similarly, to maximise the multiplier effect of the outcomes of this project, the proposal shall include a methodology to (i) engage with, (ii) work with, (iii) involve or (iv) make aware as many national SMEs associations as possible and duly propose a mitigation strategy for the related risks.
- The proposal shall also include a methodology to reach out to as many entrepreneurs in distress as possible, directly and/or through business associations. It shall propose a target for this activity. The aim is to provide as many entrepreneurs in distress as possible with the information on how to get access to mentors and what are the conditions and benefits to receive support from early warning mentors.

The final report shall include an indication of how the project outcomes can be implemented at the national level and indicate, for each EU MS, whether there is an expressed interest in performing such action.

## Implementation

EISMEA

## Additional information

Total amount of the action: EUR 500 000

Indicative implementation timetable (launch of the call): Q2/2026,

Indicative duration: 18 months

Qualitative and quantitative indicators:

-number of entrepreneurs involved

-number of mentors involved

-number of business organisations (at different levels) involved

-number of countries covered

- satisfaction rates of entrepreneurs regarding the availability of mentoring services

<sup>13</sup> Art. 3 of Directive 2019/1023

-measures aimed at improving the managerial and financial skills of SME owners.

### 3.3. International Intellectual Property SME Helpdesks

General description of the contracts envisaged

To provide services for the IP SME Helpdesks in China, Latin America, Southeast Asia and India. Via these contracts, the international IP SME Helpdesks offer first-line advice and support to European SMEs (from EU Member States and Participating Countries in the Single Market Programme -SMP-) wishing to operate in or influenced by markets outside of the European Union. These services offer practical business advice from experienced professionals (lawyers, business executives, IP investigators) in person, on-line, and through workshops, e-learning materials, and training. The services cover countries and regions, with focus on high-growth markets and where there are particular IP problems of importance to European SMEs that such service can address or where investors to Europe come from. The services are provided both 'on the ground' to European SMEs already 'in country' and to those 'at home' in Europe, so that the relevant information on IP in the regions can be delivered where it is of most use, to serve European SMEs efficiently and effectively.

The services are offered in co-ordination with and in direct response to requests from European SMEs and their representatives (e.g. sectoral, regional, local associations of SMEs, chambers of commerce). Services are co-ordinated also with relevant EU Member States SME support administrations, with EU and MS trade representations and with EU funded projects supporting SME internationalisation. The Helpdesks offer services that could not be easily provided individually by each Member State and allow to pool expertise to be available to any European SME. Such economies of scale also enable to customise the training or advice to specific sectors or business models. The services also allow avoiding duplication of technical contacts with the relevant countries' administrations to 'signpost' SMEs.

This action is the continuation of previous action GRO/SME/22/12712 International Intellectual property SME Helpdesk (China, India, Latin America and South-East Asia) funded under SMP SME Pillar. To facilitate market access and international cooperation it now needs to adapt to the new challenges and policy needs linked to making business easier to foster economic growth and transitioning to more sustainable production practices to enhance EU competitiveness. In addition, the Commission would like to 'professionalise' online communication to build up the international IP SME Helpdesks positioning, increase the reach and better promote the online services such as the enquiry helpdesk. Doing this the international IP SME Helpdesks will put more emphasis on the content (events, trainings, queries, case studies...) and the minimum requirements (KPIs) will be increased.

Implementation

EISMEA

## Additional information

Total amount of the action: **EUR 6 000 000** for 24 months.

- The indicative budget is for
  - Lot 1 International Intellectual Property SME Helpdesk – China:  
EUR 1 400 000
  - Lot 2 International Intellectual Property SME Helpdesk – South-East Asia:  
EUR 1 600 000
  - Lot 3 International Intellectual Property SME Helpdesk – Latin America:  
EUR 1 600 000
  - Lot 4 International Intellectual Property SME Helpdesk – India:  
EUR 1 200 000
  - Lot 5 International Intellectual Property SME Helpdesk – WEBSITE - China, South-East Asia, Latin America, India and Africa:  
EUR 200 000
- Depending on budget availability, this action will be renewed for 24 months.
- Indicative implementation timetable:
  - Publication of the call: Q2/2026
  - Signature of the contract: Q4/2026
- **Qualitative and quantitative indicators:**
  - number of inquiries from EU SMEs answered;
  - number and quality of training and awareness events, including virtual events organised together with a number of SMEs and business support organisation participants;
  - number of visits and hits on the website and SME user satisfaction of the website;
  - number and quality of guides, factsheets, e-learning modules and other publications targeted at SMEs and business support organisations;
  - SME satisfaction and feedback on quality;
  - qualitative case studies that illustrate how IP can help a company internationalise;
  - improved performance of beneficiaries in relation to targeted issue (incl. safer intellectual property strategy developed, new geographical market reached, new products or services developed).

### 3.4. Digital Product Passport (DPP) IT system

General description of the contracts envisaged

This action will build on the work started in 2025 and contributes to the DPP implementation efforts.

Existing framework contracts are used, including from DG COMM and DG DIGIT on acquiring services for:

- Delivering common IT specifications;
- Support activities related to completing the legal framework for implementing the Digital Product Passport (DPP);
- Development the common IT tools, including the DPP Registry;
- IT tools for SMEs developed and maintained by the Commission/or offered as open-source tools to support the creation and compliance validation of DPPs;

- Integration with other Commission systems, including DG TAXUD's system CSW-CERTEX;
- Support the DPP uptake and implementation process for SMEs and other stakeholders, including implementation guidelines, documentation for using the DPP IT systems;
- Support activities related to the DPP standardisation work stream.

The DPP is a key innovation under the 2024 Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR), representing a key tool to store and share relevant data about a product's sustainability, durability and other environmental aspects. The DPP will be available to consumers, businesses and relevant public authorities, helping to make informed decisions and increase demand for sustainable products, promote new circular business models and boost innovation and competitiveness in the EU.

More generally, the DPP, has been recognized as a tool that could allow hosting all product related information including for instance product instructions or conformity documents.

New Commission policy documents and legislative proposals, including the eCommerce Communication, Toys Safety Regulation, Detergents and Surfactants Regulation and Green Claims Directive, mandate the DPP as a key component for hosting and making available in digital format product compliance information.

The Batteries Regulation sets the legal deadline by which the DPP must be operational for certain types of big batteries, the first product category to come on board: 18 February 2027.

In April 2025 the Commission adopted the ESPR Work Programme 2025 – 2030 setting out the list of priority products that will get a DPP under ESPR. Until 2030 products like textiles/apparel (2027), furniture (2028), tyres (2027), mattresses (2029), iron & steel (2026) or aluminium (2027) will get a DPP mandated under ESPR.

The timeline for the development of the IT system will be 2025 – 2027:

The development of the IT infrastructure and IT systems will continue until 2027 when the DPP is due to be rolled out for certain types of big batteries and subsequently for wide range of products like textiles, toys, furniture or tires. The IT systems developed as part of the DPP implementation process will also contain tools for SMEs to facilitate the creation of DPPs as well as the validation of DPPs to ensure they comply with the structure and standards required by the legislation. These tools will be developed and maintained by the Commission or offered as open-source tools.

#### Implementation

DG GROW and DG DIGIT

#### Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 9 100 000
- Indicative implementation timetable: use of Framework Contracts throughout calendar year 2026/2027
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
  - Number of DPPs registered in the DPP Registry by SMEs: more than 10 000 by end of 2028
  - Number of SMEs DPP Service Providers registered in the DPP Registry: more than 10 by end of 2028
  - Number of SMEs using the DPP system:

more than 10 000 by end of 2029.

### 3.5. European Construction Observatory

General description of the contracts envisaged

The European Construction Sector Observatory (ECSO) was set up in 2015. Its primary role is to monitor and analyse the construction sector across all 27 EU countries, providing policymakers and stakeholders with up-to-date information on market conditions and policy developments.

This action is a continuation of an action funded under SMP SME Pillar in 2024. By offering these resources, ECSO aims to enhance the competitiveness of the EU construction sector, promote sustainable development, and support the implementation of the Transition Pathway for Construction. In order to create synergies and maximise the impact of various actions at EU, national and sectorial levels, there is a continuous need for the most recent analytical evidence of market conditions, policy developments and feedback on implementation of construction related policies. This analytical support would not only raise awareness of existing or planned policy measures but also help to understand why and how these measures have been developed, what are the impacts on construction business and job creation, and how the experience gained with these measures could be potentially transferred to various socio-economic contexts. ECSO has served this purpose with the creation of a repository of information related to market trends, industry developments, policy impact and with analytical support.

#### **Key Objectives of ECSO:**

**Monitoring Market Conditions:** ECSO regularly assesses market trends, national and regional strategies, and progress towards the six building blocks outlined in the Transitional Pathway for Construction.

**Encouraging Knowledge Sharing:** It facilitates the exchange of best practices and promotes awareness of policy measures impacting the construction value chain.

**Supporting Policy Development:** ECSO provides analytical support to help define, implement, monitor, and assess policies related to the competitiveness and sustainability of construction enterprises.

#### **Tools and Resources Offered**

**Country Fact Sheets:** Detailed profiles of the construction industry in each EU country, analysing key figures, macro-economic indicators, economic drivers, issues and barriers, innovation, and policy frameworks.

**Policy Fact Sheets:** Analyses of specific policy measures implemented by EU Member States and the UK.

**Analytical Reports and Trend Papers:** In-depth analyses of selected themes and developments that may influence the long-term prospects of the construction sector.

**Data Mapper:** A visual tool providing statistical representations of the construction sector across the EU.

#### Implementation

EISMEA

Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 1 116 505  
The current contract is in place as of 17/12/2024. It was signed for 2 years, with a possibility of a tacit prolongation for another 2 years. This new project will allow for its continuation for 2 additional years, i.e. 2026-2028.
- Indicative implementation timetable (launch of the call): tacit prolongation for 17/12/2026 – 16/12/2028
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:

More than 1 000 unique e-mail addresses on ECSO mailing list. The ECSO webinars and events to be attended by more than 100 stakeholders. An average 200 views per a document produced by ECSO. Good awareness of the construction stakeholders about ECSO and its activities, ECSO activities to be appreciated and valued by stakeholders, expressed via the planned surveys.

### 3.6. European Capital and European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism – Awards

General description of the contracts envisaged

In 2018, the European Commission started to implement the European Capitals of Smart Tourism initiative, proposed as a preparatory action by the European Parliament. The European Capital of Smart Tourism recognizes outstanding achievements in smart tourism in European cities. Smart tourism responds to new challenges and demands in a fast-changing sector, including the evolution of digital tools, products and services; equal opportunity and access for all visitors; sustainable development of the local area; and support to creative industries, local talent and heritage. In 6 EU-wide editions of the competition organised (European Capital of Smart Tourism 2019, 2020, 2022 – with no edition organised in 2021 due to the pandemic – 2023, 2024, 2025), with the seventh edition currently ongoing to select the 2026 winners, the cities competing for the title showcased innovating measures they implemented as tourism destinations in: 1) accessibility, 2) sustainability, 3) digitalisation, 4) cultural heritage and creativity.

The overarching objective of the initiative is to support European destinations by awarding their transformation to smart and sustainable tourism destinations through 2 titles, which are awarded simultaneously. Specifically,

- **European Capital of Smart Tourism** is addressed to bigger tourism destinations, namely cities of more than 100 000 inhabitants having sufficient capacity to showcase innovative smart tourism practices, play a role model and lead a network of cities on smart tourism for a year.
- **European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism** is addressed to smaller tourism destinations, namely destinations having population between 25 000 – 100 000 inhabitants which can showcase their outstanding achievements in sustainability and inspire other tourism destinations in their green transition.

Implementation

Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 2 500 000
- Indicative implementation timetable: Q2 2026, to sign contract in Q4 2026
- Indicative duration of the project(s) to be funded: 36 months
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
 

Promotional videos, 1 video per winner, 100 views per video on Vimeo & 2K views per video on Facebook (plus 500-1000 views on YouTube formerly on [EU Growth channel](#), which will migrate to the T4T Tourism Platform)

Press trips, 1 per year per winner, 7-15 journalists from international press; Contacts of resulting media coverage of the press trip: 1 clipping per journalist

Events, Number of events organised: 10 events per cycle, Number of participants: 20-100 depending on the event; Media coverage: 40 per month, Number of best practices shared: Approximately 40-50 per cycle, Number of destinations engaging in networking and cooperation activities: 7-10 destinations per activity

Social media campaigns (Facebook account for Capitals) FB Posts average reach 600/day, 2 posts (FB & X) for Capitals per week.

**3.7. Better Regulation: Engaging SMEs and Stakeholders on policy design and implementation/strengthening of the Better Regulation Agenda.**

General description of the contracts envisaged

The Commission’s policy on better regulation guides the overall burden reduction and simplification efforts under the *Simplification Agenda*. The work on simplification will proceed, supporting the goal of making business simpler and faster as a means to promote the EU competitiveness, while facilitating the green and digital transition.

Moreover, the burden reduction dimension of the better regulation work is beneficial especially for SMEs that are particularly affected by regulatory burdens, including administrative ones.

Contracts include studies to support this work a technical assistance, IT development, communication services and contracts for event organisation.

The related developments constitute, to a large extent, the continuity of the ongoing better regulation actions ensuring that EU policies and laws achieve their objectives at minimum cost.

Implementation

Secretariat-General

**Additional information**

- a) Total amount of the action: EUR 800 000:
- b) Indicative implementation timetable: use of Framework Contracts starting from Q1

to Q4 2026

- c) Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
- Experts meetings:
    - Timely delivery of the actions
    - Number of events
  - IT and Digital working tools
    - timely development of the tools
    - overview report on simplification, implementation and enforcement
    - Simplification scoreboards/progress follow-up
    - impact on target public (number of impacts, number of visits for websites etc.)
    - timely publication of factual summary reports
    - Satisfaction survey on the possibilities to contribute to better law making
    - Effective use and dissemination of tools
  - Communication:
    - Development and maintenance of web sites.
    - Timely dissemination of communication materials
    - Effective dissemination and impact on target public
    - Organisation of targeted events

### 3.8. Supporting actions

General description of the contracts envisaged

These actions include:

- a) Sectoral studies and reports, analytical work, studies analysing cross-sectoral issues and policy areas affecting European competitiveness. Impact assessments and ex-post evaluations will assess policy actions.
- b) Conferences, workshops and expert meetings that will be organised with participation of various stakeholders (national authorities, consumer organisations, SME representatives, non-governmental organisations, etc.) to discuss challenges for access to the single market, resilience, green and digital transformation of SMEs. This includes the work of the Network for SME Envoys. Particular attention will be devoted to recommendations on how to better address SMEs' needs, how to support socially inclusive business models, how to support re-/upskilling of the workforce and how to further foster European competitiveness. Information actions will be carried out. This includes access to finance communication activities and the SAFE survey<sup>14</sup> on access to finance.
- c) The promotion, technical support and hosting of integrated and user-friendly online systems that provide information on programmes and measures relevant for SMEs whilst ensuring that they do not duplicate existing portals, including support and communication activities on the Single Digital Gateway.

<sup>14</sup> [Survey on the access to finance of enterprises \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/safe-survey)

## **Implementation**

DG GROW, DG MOVE, DG DIGIT, DG ENER, EISMEA

## **Additional information**

The studies covering the policy priorities outlined in the Single Market Strategy should lead to an enhanced understanding of European entrepreneurship and competitiveness and should enable the Commission to identify the main trends.

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

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

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

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

Technical support, IT hosting and data purchases will also be included.

**Budget: EUR 7 964 724**

#### 4. ACTIONS IMPLEMENTED IN INDIRECT MANAGEMENT

The global budgetary envelope reserved for indirect management in 2026 is EUR 18 000 000.

##### 4.1. European Wind Academy

Implementing entity<sup>15</sup>

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

##### Description

This action is the continuation of the 2025 action to launch of the European Wind Academy (C(2024) 8194 final), that the EC is mandated to fund for three years, as one of the Net-Zero Industry Academies under the Net-Zero Industry Act (NZIA). The NZIA provides that the Commission shall support the launch of Net-zero Industry Academies through the provision of seed-funding to ensure the Union's access to a secure and sustainable supply of net-zero technologies, including in the wind power sector. The October 2023 European Commission European Wind Power Action Plan<sup>1</sup> announces the launch of a European Wind Academy under the NZIA. The Action Plan estimates that about 100.000 additional jobs will be needed in the wind sector by 2030.

The launch of the European Wind Academy is designed to support Member State actions to upskill and reskill workers in the wind energy value chain, thus promoting the competitiveness of the sector, the development of the wind value chain and the modernisation of its industry. The Academy will develop learning content and materials to make available to interested education and training providers in the Member States. The aim is to up- and reskill 100.000 learners within three years of the establishment of the Academy, and thereby to contribute to meeting the demand for skilled workers in the wind industry. In its Wind Power Action Plan, the Commission estimates that the up- and re-skilling of workers required for the upscaling of the wind power value chain will require investments of about EUR 850 million.

The European Wind Academy is expected to deliver the following outcomes:

- Develop learning content, in collaboration with stakeholders, industry, social partners, education and training providers and Member States
- Offer the learning programmes, content and materials to education and training providers in the Member States and promote their voluntary use, among others by making available a learning platform to serve as a repository for all learning content developed, by building a network of education and training providers in the Member States and by training and certifying these education and training providers
- Develop learning credentials to facilitate skills transparency, transferability between jobs and learners' mobility, including micro-credentials
- Support collective action on skills development by Academy partners and relevant stakeholders such as the large-scale partnerships under the Pact of Skills

The content and materials are to be developed on the basis of continuous assessments of skills needs of the sector, in particular with regards to vocational technical training. This will allow to identify critical gaps and prioritise the development of learning content in these areas. Following the conclusion of the Contribution Agreement in 2025 with the European Institute

<sup>15</sup> This project is managed by the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

for Innovation and Technology and the related procedures for its launch, including the award to a contractor via grant agreement, the Academy will start training the trainers, as well as designing and/or upgrading learning content in 2026.

#### **Additional information**

- Total amount of the action: EUR 3 000 000
- Indicative implementation timetable:
  - Q2 2025 – Q4 2025 conclusion of launch procedures (contribution agreement and grant agreement)
  - Q1 2026 – Q3 2027 – design and implementation of the first training material and train the trainers
  - Q4 2027 – Q2 2028 final trainings delivered under the pilot and design of follow up actions
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
  - Number of training programmes developed
  - Number of workers trained
  - Number of SMEs whose workers are trained

#### **4.2. EIB investment survey (ecosystems and supply chains)**

Implementing entity:

EIB – European Investment Bank

The action is implemented by the EIB via a contribution agreement.

Description

This contribution to the EIB to finance the extension of its reputed EIBIS investment survey to include an additional module covering DG GROW’s classification of industrial ecosystems and the setting up of a new standalone supply chains survey.

The action will deliver impact data in the form of statistics on bottlenecks and on resilience strategies followed by firms.

The action also includes a report analysing and presenting the main results and outreach activities to disseminate and present the results to stakeholders.

## Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 200 000
- Indicative implementation timetable: Field work/survey conducted in 2025, data delivered beginning 2026, report analysing the data in June 2026, outreach activities Q3/Q4 2026
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
  - Number of firms responding to the survey
  - Number of countries covered by the survey
  - Stakeholders participating in the outreach activities

### 4.3. Scaling up and beyond – better evidence for startup scaleup policies

Implementing entity:

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

The action is implemented by the OECD via a contribution agreement.

Description

This action aims to further develop a framework to collect new evidence and improve understanding about enterprise (and in particular SME) scale-up trends, drivers and barriers. Identification of effective policy approaches to unleash SME scale-up potential will also form part of the action.

The project is an extension of an earlier successful pilot phase which was completed end of 2024. The new phase will apply the concept to at least 10 to 12 more countries (EU and participating countries) and also widen the scope of the data to be compiled per firm. In addition, the project will carry out additional work related to the policy analysis, including related to industrial ecosystems, digitalisation and sustainability.

In addition to the recently adopted EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy (Choose Europe to start and scale – (COM(2025) 270 final dated 28 May 2025, [EU startup and scaleup strategy](#)), the OECD cooperation project will support the startup/scaleups policy by providing updated data on scaleup firms. It will build on the previous 2 cooperation phases with the OECD by, among other things, enlarging the number of MS and participating countries for which scaleup data would be collected from currently 15 to maximum 30 and a distinction between different kind of scalers.

A cooperation with DG RTD which is in the lead of the startup/scaleup strategy is being considered involving possible co-delegated budget from RTD.

## Additional information

- Total amount of the action: EUR 800 000
- Indicative implementation timetable:  
Launch and signature in Q1 2026, implementation Q2 2026 – Q2 2028
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
  - At least two thematic studies and dedicated (ideally 30) country fact sheets published in due time. 27 EU MS covered plus certain participating countries. Information on SMEs and in particular on scaling-up firms, taking into account the ecosystem approach, to be provided.
  - The work would build on the two previous successful phases of the project and enlarged to cover all Member States to serve as a potential basis for a startup/scaleup monitoring tool for the new startup & scaleup strategy.
  - Number and share of scaleups by country
  - Employment creation by scaleups in the countries and on the EU level
  - Value-added/turnover in countries and on the EU level

### 4.4. Critical Raw Materials stockpiling: a joint stockpiling initiative

#### Implementing entity

The action is implemented by an entity that is able to fulfil the functions and tasks described below, namely to directly or indirectly purchase stockpiles of critical raw materials for the purpose of securing the CRM supply for EU industry.

#### Description

A joint critical raw materials (CRM) stockpiling initiative in Europe is designed to strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating within key strategic sectors such as clean energy, digital technologies, defence and aerospace.

In the last years an increasing number of export controls on raw materials from China (gallium, germanium, graphite, rare earths, etc.) has affected European companies, notably SMEs, by restricting the availability of essential inputs needed for manufacturing of products for strategic sectors in Europe.

Complemented with other measures on security of supply, a stockpiling mechanism is key to reduce supply risks and secure more stable and sustainable access to CRMs for the European industry.

The CRM stockpiling initiative will be established through a multi-step process involving:

- the identification of priority materials (quantities and qualities) and sectors based on strategic importance, supply risk, and industrial needs.

- setting the governance (direct or indirect management) for stockpile creation, management, and access. The definition of governance structures, funding models, and sourcing criteria.
- the identification of available logistics, storage and industrial production capacities to safely and adequately store materials, supported by inventory management.
- The establishment of operational procedures to monitor stock levels, manage releases during supply disruptions, and coordinate replenishment.

The exact dimension of the instrument(s) to be supported by the SME pillar of the SMP will be defined after further analysis of the different following options:

- 1) Direct procurement by the Commission of stocks, and/or on behalf of Member States.
- 2) Provision of direct grant to relevant Member State authorities for them to purchase, store and release the stocks.

The different options may include parallel contributions by the interested Member States in order to achieve the sufficient financial firepower to cover CRM stockpiles for a pre-defined period of time.

Additional options could be also envisaged to operationalise this instrument.

Rooted in the objectives of the Clean Industrial Deal and the Critical Raw Materials Act, this initiative aims to enhance access to a secure, sustainable and timely supply of critical raw materials, thereby reducing Europe's strategic dependencies and enhancing strategic autonomy and competitiveness.

Expected results include improved supply security and reduced-price volatility for SMEs, preservation of jobs and industrial capacity in critical sectors, accelerated deployment of low carbon technologies, and strengthened contribution of SMEs to Europe's sustainable and competitive value chains.

#### Additional information

- a) Total amount of the action: EUR 14 000 000
- b) Participation in the Critical Raw Materials stockpiling initiative is restricted to EU Member States for the purpose of accessing stockpiled materials, directly supporting their SMEs and given the sensitivity of the initiative as those materials can be also used for security and defence purposes.
- c) Indicative implementation timetable:
  - Q1/2026 – launch of the task preparation
  - Q2/2026:(if needed) launch of the call with a view to select the appropriate partner (depending on the options chosen)
  - Q3/2026: implementation of the mechanism
- d) Duration: 12 months
- e) Qualitative and quantitative indicators:
  - Number of SMEs receiving support
  - Baseline SME consumption patterns for targeted raw materials

- Days of supply available for SMEs based on average consumption rates

*Within two years of execution*

- SMEs served, volume and value (compared to market) of materials delivered
- Production delays decrease and savings vs. pre-initiative conditions during a shortage
- SME feedback on continuity of operations
- SME feedback on continuity of operations

## 5. OTHER ACTIONS OR EXPENDITURE

### 5.1. Supporting the EU Tourism Dashboard – JRC

General description of the agreement envisaged

The administrative arrangement with the Joint Research Centre- JRC aims at ensuring a smooth continuity of the EU Tourism Dashboard, its online presence, the update of the indicator and descriptor values and continuing relevance of the Dashboard for the EU tourism policy. These objectives are supported via consultation of key stakeholders such as the EU Member States via the TAC and the T4T expert group, as well as research activities carried out by the JRC in cooperation with DG MOVE, ensuring the optimisation of the role and policy relevance of the Dashboard. The scope and main objectives of the EU Tourism Dashboard, as a key tool to follow up on the green and digital transition and socioeconomic aspects of tourist destinations in Europe, remain unaltered.

The EU Tourism Dashboard is an online knowledge platform developed by the JRC currently including 30+ indicators and descriptors characterising tourist destinations in the EU, and, where possible, Iceland, Switzerland and Norway.

The indicators are organised under the following 4 policy pillars:

- a. Green pillar (linking to the green transition)
- b. Digital pillar (linking to the digital transition)
- c. Socio-economic pillar (linking to socio-economic resilience)
- d. Basic descriptors (tourism demand, supply and flows, with several of them having also policy relevance for green transition and socio-economic resilience).

Implementation<sup>2</sup>

DG MOVE

Additional information

Total amount of the action: EUR 1 000 000

Indicative implementation timetable: From January 2026 to December 2028.

Administrative arrangement to be signed in January 2026

Qualitative and quantitative indicators: Website traffic and stakeholder consultation give information about the success of the Dashboard and its most relevant indicators.

### 5.2. SME Policy - SME Performance Review (SPR) - Administrative arrangement with the Joint Research Centre - JRC

General description of the agreement envisaged

The administrative arrangement with the JRC aims to provide scientific and other support in the assessment of the performance of the EU countries and certain non-EU countries in implementing the SME Policy areas and in drafting and finalising the SME Performance Review (SPR) annual reports and annual country sheets.

This also includes a set of indicators to assess the SME Policy and any other data/analysis/inputs to be used as a basis for the SPR reports and country sheets. This data and analysis provides essential evidence and support for the SME Policy work.

The purpose of this action is to provide data and analysis related to SMEs. It supports the work on the SME Relief package as well as wider implementation of SME policy. Further to this, the SME indicators and Country fiches obtained through this process constitute a main data point to support SME related Country Specific Recommendations in the Semester and also feed into the Single Market Scoreboard.

This project represents the extension of the long-running and successful cooperation between DG GROW and the JRC in the area of data on EU SMEs. The 2026 action will ensure that the European Commission, and DG GROW specifically, provides an up-to-date comprehensive and updated database of SMEs, taking account of current issues and challenges faced by businesses.

The project is unique in that it draws together all available data sources (Eurostat, World bank, OECD, etc.) on EU SMEs covering all relevant policy areas. It then goes on from there to analyse more than a hundred indicators and thousands of data bases in a complex and continuously updated statistical process developed jointly over the years in a close collaboration between DG GROW and the JRC.

The project provides the mainstay of DG GROW's SME data gathering and analysis directly derived from the provisions laid down in the 2020 EU SME strategy. It ensures the availability and analysis of more than 100 statistical indicators plus the current and forecasts of Eurostat-based indicators.

The collaboration with the JRC yields timely updates on all of the data as a starting point. This data is then further processed and analysed to calculate meta-indicators for distinct policy areas in tune with the provision from the 2020 SME strategy to monitor SME policy development.

Not only is this data then used in the annual SME country fact sheets and the annual report but it also helps to inform the specific studies, the Eurobarometers as well as other exercises in- and outside DG GROW (such as the annual single market report, the European semester report, impact assessments, etc.). In short, the three elements of the SPR are designed to complement each other so as to ensure a maximum of data on analysis for SME policy-making.

This exercise relies on the JRC's extensive expertise with modelling, composite indicators and forecasting. The JRC's role includes thorough statistical validation of all composite indicators produced, estimation of missing data points, as well as current- and forecasts of key SME variables, elaborated through statistical database programmes such as Stata.

In past exercises, these figures have been widely quoted, including by the European Parliament, Member States and press articles, and therefore need to conform to the highest quality standard, which the JRC ensures through rigorous validation processes and cross-referencing results with other available data sources.

## Implementation

DG GROW

## Additional information

Total amount of the action: EUR 750 000

Indicative implementation timetable: launch Q2, signature AA Q3 2026, duration 24 months

Qualitative and quantitative indicators:

- Drafting of the annual SME Performance Reports 2027 and 2028 (including analysis of SME performance and contribution to the overall economy by industrial ecosystems, Member States and size classes and the forecasting of core SME indicators)
- Executive summaries for policymakers for 2027 and 2028
- Series of SME country fact sheets for 2027 and 2028
- Updating of the SME database
  - Now and forecasting of keys SME indicators for 2027 and 2028 resp. 2028 and 2029 (based on the Eurostat time series)
  - Calculation and updating of a series of SME performance indicators by Member States, size classes and industries/industrial ecosystems
  - Updating of the SBA /SME indicator set of some 100 SME policy environment indicators and the related calculation of composite indicators per 10 specific policy domains (access to finance, etc)

Data Collection for SMEs' Twin Transition monitor (to provide timely data and analysis of the progress of SMEs as regards the green and digital transition); includes a dedicated indicator calculation, database and reporting.

### 5.3. Remunerated experts; reimbursement of experts

#### Amount

EUR 530 000

#### Description

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

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

## 6. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

### 6.1. Multiannual calls

**Please note that the following multiannual calls have been launched under the 2024 Work Programme (EEN, Euroclusters) and under the 2025 Work Programme (Erasmus for young entrepreneurs). This section is for information only.**

The budget included in the 2026 work programme is as follows:

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Date of publication</b>	<b>Indicative 2026 amount (EUR)</b>
Enterprise Europe Network - EEN	25/04/2024	40 000 000
Joint Cluster Initiative - EUROCLUSTERS	15/10/2024 04/08/2025	12 000 000
Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs - EYE	Q1/2026	13 000 000

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

## 6.2. List of projects

Action	Title	Budget	Sub-total
<b>Grants</b>			
2.1	Enterprise Europe Network	40 000 000	
2.2	Joint Cluster Initiatives	12 000 000	
2.3	Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs	13 000 000	
2.4	EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation	7 000 000	
2.5	Promoting trans-European tourism products in third countries; ad hoc grant	2 000 000	
2.6	Creation of biohubs for strategic collaboration and SME scale-up support	3 000 000	
2.7	SME Innovation Support in Connected and Automated Mobility (CAM)	5 250 000	
2.8	Sustainable growth and building resilience in tourism: Improving the competitiveness of tourism SMEs, encouraging start-ups and female entrepreneurs in tourism	4 000 000	
			<b>86 250 000</b>
<b>Procurement</b>			
3.1	Enterprise Europe Network – animation activities	3 150 000	
3.2	Insolvency prevention	500 000	
3.3	International IP SME Helpdesks	6 000 000	
3.4	Digital Product Passport - DPP	9 100 000	
3.5	European Construction Sector Observatory	1 116 505	
3.6	European Capital of Smart Tourism and Green Pioneer awards	2 500 000	
3.7	Better Regulation Platform	800 000	
3.8	Supporting actions	7 964 724	
			<b>31 131 229</b>
<b>Indirect management</b>			
4.1	European Wind Academy	3 000 000	
4.2	EIB investment survey (ecosystems and supply chains)	200 000	
4.3	SME Policy – SME Performance Review (OECD – Better evidence for startup scaleup policies)	800 000	
4.4	Critical Raw Material Stockpiling	14 000 000	
			<b>18 000 000</b>
<b>Other actions</b>			
5.1	EU tourism dashboard (JRC AA)	1 000 000	

5.2	SME Policy– SME Performance Review (JRC AA)	750 000	
5.3	Remunerated experts; reimbursement of experts	530 000	
			<b>2 280 000</b>
		<b>TOTAL EUR 137 661 229</b>	

### **6.3. Eligibility criteria and Selection and award criteria for grants**

#### **Eligibility criteria**

Applicant organisations must be established:

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

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

#### **Selection and award criteria**

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

Financial capacity to complete the proposed operation;

Stable and sufficient sources of finance to ensure the continuity of the organisation throughout the project and to play a part in financing it;

Operational (technical and management) capacity to complete the operation;

Capacity to manage activities corresponding to the size of the project for which a grant is requested;

Adequate professional qualifications and experience of the team responsible for the project/operation.

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

Relevance of the actions proposed in view of the objectives established in the call;

Quality (including operational quality) of the proposed actions;

Project design and implementation;

Project team and cooperation arrangements;

Impact.