OPEN CALL ANALYSIS

HORIZON BRIDGING 2027: SKILLS FOR INNOVATIVE SMES

Topic HORIZON-BRIDGING-2027-05-01: one lump-sum grant of around €30 million for an Enterprise Europe Network consortium that funds SMEs recruiting researchers from abroad

EUnita strategic translation

This topic does not fund SMEs directly. It would pay one group of Enterprise Europe Network members, as a single lump-sum grant of around €30 million, to build and run a scheme of grants for innovative SMEs. Each SME grant is expected to let a company recruit a PhD-level researcher from abroad for 12 to 24 months. The topic expects the scheme to cover salary or employer cost, relocation and travel; grant amounts are not published. At least 90% of the budget must be passed on to SMEs, with a ceiling of €300,000 each unless the proposal justifies more. Only beneficiaries of call SMP-COSME-2024-EEN can apply. The award criteria add experience in awarding grants to third parties outside the applicants' own jurisdiction and a communication strategy that reaches both SMEs and researchers. If the project is funded, the consortium is expected to open calls for SMEs; none is published.

BRIDGING SKILLS ANALYSIS

Fit assessment | Sources | What it funds | Boundaries | Budget & competition | Funded before | Who should apply | Eligibility | Money | Evaluation | Application & timeline | Risks | Recommendations

Deadline: 3 March 2027, 17:00 Brussels time (18:00 in Romania) | Planned opening: 1 December 2026

Topic budget: €30 million, at most one project | Share for SME grants: at least 90% | Ceiling per SME: €300,000 unless justified | Lump sum, coordination and support action

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Analysis date: 18 November 2026

*This analysis interprets the official call documentation for applicants. It is not legal advice. The official texts are Horizon Europe Work Programme 2026–2027 (part 14 Horizontal Activities and part 15 General Annexes, Commission Decision C(2026) 6687/2 of 29 September 2026), the Funding & Tenders Portal topic record HORIZON-BRIDGING-2027-05-01 and the application forms and model grant agreement listed in the Sources; where this analysis and an official text differ, the official text prevails. Labels used: **Confirmed** (stated in an official source), **EUnita interpretation** (our reading or recommendation), **Derived estimate** (our arithmetic on official figures).*

1. Decision summary: is this call for you?

Confirmed: HORIZON-BRIDGING-2027-05-01, “Skills for innovative SMEs”, is a topic of the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2026–2027 (Bridging actions 2027). It is a coordination and support action that can fund at most one project, with an EU contribution of around €30 million paid as a lump sum. The project must set up a scheme of grants for innovative SMEs that recruit and train highly skilled researchers from abroad. At least 90% of the proposed budget must be paid on to SMEs as financial support to third parties. Only entities that are beneficiaries in the Enterprise Europe Network under call SMP-COSME-2024-EEN can apply. SMEs that are not such beneficiaries do not apply to this topic. If the project is funded, the selected consortium is expected to launch the calls to which SMEs can apply; no such call is published.

On 18 November 2026 the topic is forthcoming. The submission system is planned to open on 1 December 2026, and the deadline is 3 March 2027 at 17:00 Brussels time (18:00 in Romania).

Item	Confirmed position	Source
Topic	HORIZON-BRIDGING-2027-05-01, “Skills for innovative SMEs”, in call HORIZON-BRIDGING-2027-05, “Bridging actions 2027”	Portal data file; WP14 pp. 24, 59
Type of action	Coordination and support action (CSA); lump-sum grant (HORIZON-AG-LS); single-stage submission	Portal data file; WP14 p. 59
Status on 18 November 2026	Forthcoming. “The submission system is planned to be opened on the date stated on the topic header”: 1 December 2026	Portal topic page and data file
Deadline	3 March 2027, 17:00:00 Brussels time. The Director-General may open the call up to one month earlier or later and may delay the deadline by up to two months	Portal topic page; WP14 p. 24, note 26
Budget	EUR 30.00 million for the topic; a maximum of one project; an EU contribution of “around EUR 30.00 million” is estimated, and other amounts are not precluded	WP14 pp. 24, 59
Who can apply	“Only entities that are beneficiaries in the Enterprise Europe Network as a result of the call SMP-COSME-2024-EEN are eligible to apply”	WP14 p. 59; Portal data file
Who benefits later	Innovative SMEs that have an innovation idea and cannot find the skills on the national labour market, through grants of the consortium (financial support to third parties)	WP14 pp. 60–62
Financial support to third parties	At least 90% of the total proposed budget; at most EUR 300,000 per SME over the whole action, higher only if duly justified in the proposal	WP14 p. 60
SME calls	The selected consortium is expected to launch them if the project is funded. No call, date or SME rule is published	WP14 p. 61; not found in the sources read
Granting authority	Not named in the topic text or the Portal data file	WP14 pp. 24, 59–62; Portal data file
Romania	Romanian entities are eligible as entities established in an EU Member State, but only if they are Enterprise Europe Network beneficiaries under SMP-COSME-2024-EEN	WP15 p. 11; WP14 p. 59

Good fit

- ✓ An Enterprise Europe Network member, or a group of members, that has run open calls and paid grants to SMEs
- ✓ A consortium able to reach both SMEs and PhD-level researchers in many Member States and associated countries
- ✓ Partners with experience of researcher recruitment, EURAXESS, visa support and relocation
- ✓ An applicant that can show experience of awarding grants to third parties outside its own country, which the topic adds to the implementation criterion
- ✓ A team that can manage a lump-sum budget of around €30 million in which at least 90% is paid on to SMEs
- ✓ Applicants that can reflect the lessons of the Horizon 2020 SME innovation associate pilot, as the topic asks

Not a fit

- ✗ An SME, start-up or research organisation that is not an Enterprise Europe Network beneficiary under SMP-COSME-2024-EEN: it cannot apply
- ✗ An SME that wants a grant now: no SME call is published
- ✗ An individual researcher looking for a fellowship or a job grant: the money goes to SMEs
- ✗ An applicant that wants to fund its own research and innovation work: a coordination and support action excludes it
- ✗ An applicant that needs a start in 2027: the General Annexes give around eight months from the deadline to signature
- ✗ An organisation that cannot run open calls to EU standards of transparency, equal treatment and conflict-of-interest control

EUnita verdict (interpretation)

EUnita interpretation: a narrow call that can fund at most one project. It suits Enterprise Europe Network members that can form one strong consortium able to run a cross-border grant scheme for SMEs and to recruit researchers across Europe. It does not suit SMEs outside the network, which cannot apply; no SME call is published yet. For network members, the points that matter most in the text are the consortium's record in awarding grants to third parties abroad, a credible plan to reach both SMEs and researchers, and a lump-sum budget that keeps at least 90% for SME grants. This verdict is EUnita's reading of the documents. It is not an evaluation score or a chance of selection.

2. Source verification and document status

Every fact in this document was checked against the official files and pages listed in the Sources section; the list of projects under call SMP-COSME-2024-EEN is from the Portal's project search of 13 November 2026. "WP14" means Work Programme 2026–2027, part 14 "Horizontal Activities"; "WP15" means part 15 "General Annexes"; "AF" is the standard application form for a coordination and support action; "FSTP" is financial support to third parties; "EEN" is the Enterprise Europe Network. Page numbers are those of the PDF.

Document	Version and date	Status in this document
WP14 Horizontal Activities	Commission Decision C(2026) 6687/2 of 29 September 2026; 160 pages	Governing text for the topic: call table p. 24, topic pp. 59–62
WP15 General Annexes	Same Decision; 44 pages	Governing text for admissibility, eligibility, capacity, award criteria, procedure and grant rules
WP1 General Introduction	Same Decision; 14 pages	Context: the Bridging call has 16 actions and an indicative budget of EUR 260 million (p. 6)
Portal topic page and data file	Read on 18 November 2026; published 30 September 2026; status Forthcoming; no update notice; Topic Q&As: none	Status, dates, budget and the conditions text

Document	Version and date	Status in this document
Application form, HE CSA (AF)	Part A version 3.0 of 10 November 2025; Part B version 5.1 of 22 January 2026	An example; the forms in the submission system prevail
Evaluation form, HE CSA	Version 5.0 of 12 November 2025	Criteria, scoring and procedure
Information on financial support to third parties	Template, version 3.0 of 23 January 2023	Content of the annex to Part B
Detailed budget table, HE LS	Version 3.6, for topics opening from 12 December 2025	Budget table to justify the lump sum
Lump Sum Model Grant Agreement	Version 1.0 of 1 November 2024	Model terms; the signed agreement decides
HE Model Grant Agreement (general)	Version 1.2 of 1 June 2026	Listed on the topic page; the topic's agreement type is the lump-sum one
Lump sums: what do I need to know?	Version 3.0, 24 June 2024; 42 pages	Guidance on work-package payments
Decision on lump sum contributions	Version 2.0, dated "xx.xx.2026" in the file	The topic cites the Decision of 7 July 2021
Good practices for FSTP	Version 1.0 of 15 June 2025	Guidance
Horizon Europe Programme Guide	Version 5.1 of 15 September 2025	Guidance
Info day slides, Horizontal Activities	Commission info day of 16 October 2026; slide 54 is this topic, slides 29–35 cover FSTP	Explanatory; the Work Programme and the Portal text prevail
Accompanying study, SME innovation associate pilot	Final report, October 2019; doi 10.2826/645018	Cited in the topic (footnote 52)
WP2 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions	Same Decision; 112 pages	Dates of the Postdoctoral Fellowships 2027
Call SMP-COSME-2024-EEN: Portal data file and project list	Data file read 18 November 2026 (status Closed); project list from the Portal's project search of 13 November 2026	Defines the pool of applicants

Confirmed: each document saved on 13 November 2026 was fetched again on 18 November 2026 and is identical to the saved copy. The Portal data file of the topic is also unchanged: status Forthcoming, planned opening 1 December 2026, deadline 3 March 2027, EUR 30,000,000, one grant.

Where the official documents differ

- **Topic number.** The introduction to the Bridging call in WP14 (p. 57) calls the skills topic HORIZON-BRIDGING-2027-01-01. The call table (p. 24), the topic text (p. 59) and the Portal use HORIZON-BRIDGING-2027-05-01. This document follows the topic text and the Portal.
- **Ceiling per third party.** The standard FSTP annex and the info day slides give EUR 60,000 per third party, "unless explicitly mentioned in the topic". The topic sets EUR 300,000 (WP14 p. 60). The topic text applies, as the annex and the slides themselves provide.
- **Programme label.** The Portal places the topic under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and "Excellent Science"; the Work Programme places it in Horizontal Activities. No rule depends on the label.

3. What the call funds

Confirmed: the topic asks for the “Establishment of an SME support scheme through the Enterprise Europe Network, which delivers transnational skills-matching, recruitment support, and innovation management services to innovative SMEs across Europe” (WP14 p. 60). The money pays for the consortium to design and run the scheme and, above all, to pay out grants to SMEs.

Policy anchors named in the topic

- Confirmed: the Competitiveness Compass for the EU, which highlights labour and skills shortages, and the ‘Choose Europe for Science’ initiative (WP14 pp. 60–61).
- Confirmed: the Horizon 2020 ‘European SME innovation associate pilot’, run in three consecutive calls under the 2016–2020 work programmes. The topic says the insights of the pilot “should be reflected in any proposal” (WP14 p. 61).
- Confirmed: complementarity with the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions. The scheme offers work opportunities to PhD holders, “including but not limited to those who completed the MSCA fellowship”, who want experience in the private sector. European Universities alliances may offer SMEs further access to training, resources, networks, facilities and infrastructures (WP14 p. 61).
- Confirmed: the Bridging call as a whole prepares the move from Horizon Europe 2021–2027 to Horizon Europe 2028–2034, with a focus on the “innovation to investment journey” (WP14 p. 57; WP1 p. 6).

What the consortium must do

1. Design and run the SME support scheme, “including launching the call, eligibility checks, evaluations, and business support, where necessary”.
2. Promote the scheme to secure quality applications, monitor impact (including on skills development) and disseminate success stories.
3. Support the funded SMEs in recruiting researchers across borders, “including through the EURAXESS network and assistance with visa applications”.
4. Organise networking events and training on industrial innovation and business management, and promote cooperation among the researchers and the funded SMEs.
5. Ensure equal access across EU Member States and Horizon Europe associated countries and a balanced distribution of strategic sectors.

Source for the five tasks: WP14 p. 61. The strategic sectors named are clean and circular technologies, energy, health, biotech, agriculture, bioeconomy, digital technologies, aerospace and civil security (WP14 p. 60).

What the SME grants are expected to cover

Cost item	What the topic says	Source
Researcher’s salary	A competitive salary or total employer’s costs, including full social security under national law, for at least 12 and at most 24 months, including salaries actually paid if the researcher leaves before 12 months	WP14 p. 62
Relocation	May include removal, travel of the researcher and immediate family, visa, translation of certificates, a temporary transition allowance, return relocation, a family and childcare allowance, and other clearly justified relocation costs	WP14 p. 62
Travel and infrastructure	Travel to conferences and workshops, access to and use of technological and research infrastructures, or other activities relevant to the SME’s innovation idea	WP14 p. 62

Confirmed: the topic describes these “essential specificities” as “expected to be built into the SME support scheme”. The topic says the action “is expected to set up a transnational mobility scheme to provide lump sum grants (via FSTP) to innovative SMEs”. The amount and structure of each SME grant are not published.

Who the SMEs and the researchers will be

- Confirmed: the eligible third parties are “SMEs that have an innovation idea and can demonstrate that the relevant skills cannot be found on the national labour market”, for example with data on labour and skills shortages in their national context (WP14 pp. 61–62).
- Confirmed: an SME’s application to an FSTP call should include a description of its innovation idea, a vacancy notice that specifies the knowledge and skills needed, and a recruitment plan that offers equal opportunities to researchers of all genders. Selected SMEs are expected to advertise the vacancy on the EURAXESS portal and other platforms, saying that the grant was awarded (WP14 p. 62).
- Confirmed: the scheme encourages transnational mobility of PhD holders, including MSCA fellows who have finished their fellowships. An MSCA fellow does not need to move again if an SME in the fellow’s country of residence selects them. An SME may hire a researcher of its own country’s nationality if the researcher is currently employed and living abroad. The scheme should be open to researchers from STEM and from social sciences and humanities (WP14 p. 62).

What follows for SMEs

Confirmed: the SMEs that receive grants are third parties, not applicants to this topic. If the project is funded, the selected consortium is expected to launch the calls to which SMEs can apply (WP14 p. 61). The topic and the other documents read give no date for such a call, no definition of SME for it, no list of eligible countries for the SMEs and no number of SME grants. Until a consortium is selected and has published its calls, there is nothing for an SME to apply to.

4. Boundaries: avoid the wrong door

This topic is not a call for SMEs

Confirmed: “Only entities that are beneficiaries in the Enterprise Europe Network as a result of the call SMP-COSME-2024-EEN are eligible to apply” (WP14 p. 59). An SME, a start-up, a university, a research organisation or a public body that is not such a beneficiary cannot apply to this topic. The SMEs named in the topic are third parties that would receive support, not applicants.

What the topic does not fund

- Research and innovation work as such. Confirmed: a coordination and support action “excludes research and innovation (R&I) activities”, apart from the Widening participation component (WP15 p. 14). The topic funds the scheme and its grants.
- Direct payments to researchers. The researcher is employed by an SME; the grant goes to the SME (WP14 p. 62).
- SMEs outside the scheme’s own calls. Confirmed: the third-party grants follow the consortium’s published calls, which must be open for at least two months and published on the Funding & Tenders Portal and on the beneficiaries’ websites. The calls must have a clear European dimension, and a change of deadline must be announced immediately and registered applicants informed (WP15 p. 18).
- Applicants outside the Enterprise Europe Network condition, even if they are eligible under the general rules.

Neighbouring routes named in the documents

Route	What it is	Dates and source
MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships 2027 (HORIZON -MSCA-2027-PF-01-01)	Fellowships for researchers with a PhD, applied for jointly by the researcher and a host in the academic or non-academic sector. A fellowship can add up to six months for a placement in the non-academic sector. The skills topic is described as complementing it	Opening 7 April 2027; deadline 8 September 2027, 17:00 Brussels time (WP2 pp. 29–32)
Other Bridging calls	The same Work Programme part has other Bridging calls with their own topics. HORIZON-BRIDGING-2027-01 and -06 close on 16 February 2027; -02 on 28 January 2027; -03 on 15 June 2027; -04 on 16 February 2027. None of them holds the skills topic	WP14 pp. 18–25
Enterprise Europe Network national contact	The topic page points businesses, with a focus on SMEs, to their EEN national contact for advice, including guidance on EU research funding	Portal topic page, “Get support”
The consortium’s SME calls	Where SMEs would apply if the project is funded. Not published	Not found in the sources read

The sources read do not name another EU call that pays the cost of an SME’s researcher in the way this scheme will.

5. Budget, competition and expected number of grants

Item	Figure	Source
Topic budget	EUR 30.00 million (budget year 2027). It is also the overall indicative budget of call HORIZON-BRIDGING-2027-05	WP14 p. 24; Portal data file
EU contribution per project	“Around EUR 30.00 million”; “this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts”	WP14 pp. 24, 59
Number of projects	“1” (indicative number of projects expected to be funded) in the call table; “The granting authority can fund a maximum of one project” in the topic text	WP14 pp. 24, 59
Budget conditions	Subject to the appropriations in the Union budget for 2026 and 2027. Final budgets may change by up to 20% of the total budget indicated for each part of the Work Programme	WP14 p. 24 note 26; WP15 p. 29
Share for SME grants	At least 90% of the total proposed budget	WP14 p. 60
Ceiling per SME	EUR 300,000 for the entire duration of the action; higher if the objectives would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult and the proposal duly justifies it	WP14 p. 60
Bridging call as a whole	16 actions, indicative budget EUR 260 million	WP1 p. 6
Number of SME grants	Not published	Not found in the sources read

Derived estimate: what the 90% rule means in euros

- Derived estimate: if the full EUR 30 million is requested, at least EUR 27 million is paid on as SME grants (90% of EUR 30 million). At most EUR 3 million remains for everything else, including running the scheme.
- Derived estimate: if every SME grant were EUR 300,000, EUR 27 million would fund 90 grants. Smaller average grants would fund more; grants above the ceiling, which the topic allows if justified, would fund fewer. The topic sets no number of SME grants.
- These figures use the official numbers above and no others. The consortium decides the actual average grant in its calls.

Competition

Confirmed: the topic funds at most one project (the call table gives 1 as the indicative number of projects expected to be funded). The number of applications expected or received is not published. The pool of possible applicants is defined by the condition on the Enterprise Europe Network. The Portal's project search of 13 November 2026 lists 89 projects under call SMP-COSME-2024-EEN, all ongoing, running from 1 July 2025 to 31 December 2028, with 500 beneficiary entries (89 coordinators and 411 participants; 489 distinct organisations) in 40 countries; the list also shows 25 associated partners and 8 third parties, which are not beneficiaries. The Portal data file of that call shows it as closed, with cut-offs on 19 September 2024 and 4 February 2025.

EUnita interpretation: the 89 projects show where the eligible organisations are, not how many will apply. Applications are likely to come from consortia built across several of these projects, because the topic asks for equal access across Member States and associated countries. The documents do not say so.

Confirmed: a figure of about 130 projects a year appears in the 2019 study as a simulation for a scaled-up version of the earlier pilot (129 projects a year). It is not a target of this topic, which funds one project.

6. What has been funded before

EUnita interpretation: the topic asks for the "Establishment of an SME support scheme through the Enterprise Europe Network" and says the action "builds on" the Horizon 2020 'European SME innovation associate pilot', whose accompanying study it cites (WP14 p. 61, footnote 52). The documents read name no earlier round of this scheme. The figures below come from that study (final report, October 2019) and concern the first call of the pilot.

Item	Figure	Source
Calls	Three consecutive calls under the Horizon 2020 work programmes 2016–2020	WP14 p. 61
First call	Open from 11 February to 30 June 2016 on the Participant Portal	Study p. 69
Applications	192 SMEs applied; 2 were not eligible	Study p. 38
Contracts	80 contracts approved. 2 were terminated because no associate was found and 7 were suspended for visa reasons. 71 contracts started in September 2017	Study pp. 7, 69
Placement	An associate was employed by the SME for 12 months	Study pp. 69–70
Eligible applicants	Single SMEs established in Member States or Horizon 2020 associated countries; the researcher had to hold a PhD or equivalent and meet the MSCA mobility rule	Study p. 70

Item	Figure	Source
Average project cost	EUR 102,600	Study p. 9
Geographical spread	The older Member States were overrepresented; Eastern European countries had “less than 10 percent of all applications”	Study p. 38
Scale-up simulation	903 projects over seven years at EUR 92.6 million, which “would fund 129 projects each year”; the baseline assumes that 2.5% of the target SMEs apply and 57.4% of applications succeed	Study pp. 8–9

Lessons the study draws that bear on the new topic

- Confirmed: informal networks were the most effective way to find candidates; 81% of surveyed supported SMEs used them. Only 48% said the compulsory EURAXESS vacancy note had been effective, because it did not attract enough suitable candidates (study p. 46).
- Confirmed: the most cited obstacle in finding a candidate was an inadequate skills match (65% of respondents), followed by visa problems (33%) (study p. 47).
- Confirmed: the topic says the study found the grant “instrumental for most SMEs to recruit an innovation associate” and that most supported SMEs “were able to bring the results of their innovation projects to market” (WP14 p. 61).

Derived estimate: the new ceiling of EUR 300,000 per SME is about 2.9 times the pilot’s average project cost of EUR 102,600. The topic gives its reasons for the higher ceiling: the costs of relocation and of a European competitive salary for an internationally mobile expert at PhD level, and the experience of the Enterprise Europe Network. Results of the second and third pilot calls are not in the sources read.

Confirmed: the applicants’ own earlier funding is the Single Market Programme call SMP-COSME-2024-EEN, whose 89 ongoing projects run from 1 July 2025 to 31 December 2028 (Portal project search of 13 November 2026). That call is not an earlier round of this scheme.

7. Who should apply, and with which ideas

EUnita interpretation: the topic is written for Enterprise Europe Network members that can act together as one delivery body for a Europe-wide scheme. The text points to the capabilities below; each one is tied to a sentence of the topic.

Capability	Why the topic asks for it	Source
Running open calls to EU standards	The consortium is expected to launch the SME calls, check eligibility and run evaluations; calls must meet transparency, equal treatment, conflict-of-interest and confidentiality standards	WP14 p. 61; WP15 p. 18
Awarding grants across borders	The implementation criterion takes into account the ability and experience of the applying entities to award grants to third parties outside their own jurisdiction	WP14 p. 59
Reaching two audiences	The implementation criterion emphasises the communication strategy to reach both innovative SMEs with skills shortages and PhD-level experts	WP14 p. 59
Recruitment support	Support to funded SMEs in transnational recruitment, including through EURAXESS and assistance with visa applications	WP14 p. 61
Training and networking	Events and training on industrial innovation and business management, and cooperation among researchers and SMEs	WP14 p. 61

Capability	Why the topic asks for it	Source
Balanced reach	Equal access across Member States and associated countries; a balanced spread of the strategic sectors	WP14 p. 61

Ideas the scheme design must settle

- EUnita interpretation: how an SME proves a skills shortage on its national labour market, since the topic asks for data on labour and skills shortages in the national context.
- EUnita interpretation: how the scheme finds researchers beyond the EURAXESS vacancy note, given the study's finding that informal networks and academic networks worked better.
- EUnita interpretation: how the grant amount is set for each SME within the EUR 300,000 ceiling, using the cost items of the topic (salary for 12 to 24 months, relocation, travel and infrastructure).
- EUnita interpretation: how the scheme keeps the spread of countries and sectors balanced, and how it reaches Member States that were thin in the pilot (the study names Eastern European countries).
- EUnita interpretation: how researchers who are MSCA fellows are reached and what happens when the SME and the fellow are in the same country, which the topic allows.

Romania

Confirmed: Romania is an EU Member State, so Romanian legal entities are eligible for funding (WP15 p. 11). For this topic they must also be Enterprise Europe Network beneficiaries under SMP-COSME-2024-EEN. The Portal's project search of 13 November 2026 shows four projects with Romanian participants, 33 beneficiary entries in all (32 distinct organisations):

Project (Portal number)	Coordinator and city	Romanian beneficiary entries
RO-BOOST SMEs 3.0 (101212718)	Regional Development Agency of the West Region Romania, Timisoara	5
Eastern Romanian Business Support Network (101213450)	Camera de Comert, Industrie, Navigatie si Agricultura Constanta, Constanta	8
PROSME (101212887)	Agentia pentru Dezvoltare Regionala Sud-Muntenia, Calarasi	12
BISNet Transylvania (101216189)	Agentia pentru Dezvoltare Regionala Centru, Alba Iulia	8

Confirmed: a Romanian SME can apply to this topic only if it is an Enterprise Europe Network beneficiary under SMP-COSME-2024-EEN. If the project is funded, a Romanian SME may be able to apply later to the consortium's calls, if Romania is covered by the consortium's rules, which are not published; the topic expects the consortium to ensure equal access across EU Member States and Horizon Europe Associated Countries (WP14 p. 61).

8. Eligibility checklist

Marks: ✓ stated in the official text; ? not stated or not published; ✗ not possible under the text. The checklist is for an applicant to this topic.

✓	The applicant is a beneficiary in the Enterprise Europe Network as a result of call SMP-COSME-2024-EEN (WP14 p. 59).
?	Whether associated partners, affiliated entities or subcontractors also need to be EEN beneficiaries: the text says only "eligible to apply". Not found in the sources read.

✓	A coordination and support action may be submitted by one or more legal entities established in a Member State or an Associated Country; another third country only in exceptional cases that the topic provides for (WP15 p. 13). The topic sets no minimum number of entities and provides no such exception.
✓	For a coordination and support action, beneficiaries and affiliated entities must be established in a Member State or an Associated Country, unless the topic provides otherwise. This topic provides no exception (WP15 p. 12).
?	Overseas countries and territories. WP15 p. 12 says that for a coordination and support action entities “must be established in a Member State or Associated Country, unless the specific call/topic conditions provide otherwise”. WP15 p. 11 and the Programme Guide (p. 12) list overseas countries and territories linked to Member States as eligible for funding. The topic provides no exception. The sources read do not settle whether an overseas entity can be a beneficiary of this action.
✓	No applicant is subject to EU restrictive measures, or established in Russia, Belarus or non-government-controlled areas of Ukraine (WP15 p. 10). Hungarian public interest trusts cannot take a funded role while the Council measures stand (WP15 pp. 10–11).
?	WP14 p. 58 limits the restriction on entities established in China to research and innovation actions and innovation actions and does not mention coordination and support actions. EUnita interpretation: it does not reach this topic.
✓	Every beneficiary, affiliated entity and associated partner has a PIC in the Participant Register before submission (WP15 pp. 5, 36).
✓	Public bodies, research organisations and higher education establishments (private ones included) from Member States and Associated Countries that take part as beneficiaries or affiliated entities need a gender equality plan at grant signature and during the grant. This does not apply to companies, SMEs or non-governmental organisations (WP15 pp. 17–18).
✓	Financial capacity is normally checked for the coordinator when the requested grant is EUR 500,000 or more, except for public bodies and international organisations (WP15 p. 20). Operational capacity is assessed through the third award criterion; public bodies, Member State organisations and international organisations are exempt from the operational capacity check (WP15 p. 21).
✓	At least 90% of the total proposed budget is allocated to financial support to third parties, and no single SME receives more than EUR 300,000 over the whole action unless the proposal duly justifies it (WP14 p. 60).
✓	The proposal includes the annex “Information on financial support to third parties” (AF p. 48).
✓	The proposal includes a detailed budget table, and the costs in it meet the basic eligibility conditions of EU actual-cost grants; ineligible costs may reduce the grant (WP15 p. 27).
✓	Title, list of participants and sections 1 to 3 together stay within 28 pages (lump-sum coordination and support action); excess pages are made invisible after the deadline (WP15 p. 4; AF p. 31).
✓	The proposal includes a plan for the exploitation and dissemination of results, including communication activities (WP15 p. 4).
✓	The costs of this action are not declared to another EU action: double funding is prohibited (WP15 p. 36).
?	Who counts as an eligible SME in the consortium’s own calls, which countries they may be in, and the grant amounts: not published.
✗	An SME, a researcher or any other organisation that is not an Enterprise Europe Network beneficiary under SMP-COSME-2024-EEN cannot apply to this topic.

9. How the money works

Confirmed: eligible costs take the form of a lump sum, as defined in the Decision of 7 July 2021 on lump sum contributions under Horizon Europe (WP14 p. 59). The estimated budget is described in a detailed budget table. The table “will be used as a basis for justifying and/or fixing the lump sum amount”, and its costs must comply with the basic eligibility conditions for EU actual-cost grants (WP15 p. 27). One lump sum share is fixed for each work package. Payments “do not depend on a successful outcome, but on the completion of activities” (lump-sum guidance p. 3).

Element	Rule	Source
Form of grant	Lump sum, coordination and support action	WP14 p. 59
Funding rate	Maximum 100% for a coordination and support action. For lump-sum grants the rate is applied in the method that fixes the amounts and is not shown in the grant agreement	WP15 pp. 31–32
Financial support to third parties	Provided as grants; EUR 60,000 threshold of Article 207 of the Financial Regulation does not apply; at least 90% of the budget; EUR 300,000 per SME for the whole action unless justified	WP14 p. 60
Cost categories	Budget categories of the actual-cost rules: personnel, subcontracting, purchase costs and the costs of providing financial support to third parties. Indirect costs are a 25% flat rate of eligible direct costs, excluding subcontracting, financial support to third parties and unit costs or lump sums that include indirect costs	WP15 p. 32
Pre-financing	Normally 160% of the average EU funding per reporting period; exceptionally less or none. 5% to 8% of the maximum grant amount is deducted and paid into the mutual insurance mechanism	WP15 p. 33
Interim and final payments	One or several interim payments after periodic reports, then a final payment after the final report. In the model agreement the data sheet sets an interim payment ceiling (if any) of 90% of the maximum grant amount; the payment times and amounts are fixed in the signed grant agreement	WP15 p. 33; Lump Sum MGA pp. 12–13
Reporting	The coordinator declares each work package completed or not completed in the periodic report. An incomplete work package can be completed and paid in a later period	Lump-sum guidance p. 18
Liability	Individual financial responsibility: each beneficiary is liable for its own debt	WP15 p. 33
Duration	Not stated in the topic. The grant agreement fixes the start date and duration. The topic's reason for the EUR 300,000 ceiling mentions an "expected duration of 1-2 years"; the text does not say whether this is the duration of the action or of the support to each SME	WP15 p. 30; WP14 p. 60

How the SME grants must flow

- Confirmed: the SME recipients do not sign the grant agreement. The consortium remains responsible to the granting authority and must extend to the recipients the rules on conflict of interest, confidentiality and security, ethics, visibility, specific rules, information and record-keeping, and the audit rights of the Court of Auditors and OLAF (info day slide 33; Lump Sum MGA Article 9.4).
- Confirmed: unless the topic provides otherwise, the consortium gives the support directly to the recipients, without further intermediaries. The support must not be presented as directly provided by the EU. The recipients, the amounts awarded and the amounts paid are reported in the Continuous Reporting Module (info day slide 35).
- Confirmed: the consortium submits a draft call and the project officer needs to approve it; a published call can still be edited and published again (info day slide 34).
- Confirmed: calls for third parties stay open for at least two months, are published on the Funding & Tenders Portal and on the beneficiaries' websites, and the outcome is published without delay. The calls must have a clear European dimension, and a change of deadline must be announced immediately and registered applicants informed (WP15 p. 18).

Confirmed: a proposal for a lump-sum grant that asks for financial support to third parties where the topic does not allow it has the amount deducted; here the topic requires it (info day slide 30).

10. Evaluation

Confirmed: the three award criteria for a coordination and support action are set in General Annex D (WP15 p. 24) and repeated in the evaluation form. Each is scored from 0 to 5. The threshold is 3 for each criterion and 10 for the sum of the three scores (WP15 p. 26). There is no weighting for this type of action; the weight of 1.5 on Impact applies to innovation actions only.

Criterion	Aspects to be taken into account	Source
1. Excellence	Clarity and pertinence of the project's objectives; quality of the proposed coordination and/or support measures, including soundness of methodology	WP15 p. 24
2. Impact	Credibility of the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts specified in the work programme; suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities	WP15 p. 24
3. Quality and efficiency of the implementation	Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks, and appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages and the resources overall; capacity and role of each participant, and the extent to which the consortium as a whole brings together the necessary expertise	WP15 p. 24

Additions in the topic

- Confirmed: "The quality and efficiency of implementation criterion shall take into account the ability and experience of the applying entities to award grants to third parties outside their own jurisdiction."
- Confirmed: "The implementation criterion shall include and emphasise the communication strategy proposed to reach out to both innovative SMEs with skills shortages and PhD-level experts."
- Confirmed: "The granting authority can fund a maximum of one project." (all three: WP14 p. 59)

Procedure

- Confirmed: proposals are checked for admissibility and eligibility, then evaluated for operational capacity and the award criteria by a committee of independent external experts and ranked by quality score. Exceptionally, where the topic says so, representatives of EU institutions may form the committee of a coordination and support action. This topic does not say so (WP15 p. 28).
- Confirmed: for lump-sum proposals, the evaluation summary report comments on the detailed budget table only for proposals invited to grant preparation or placed on the reserve list, and for proposals rejected in part because of significant overestimation or underestimation of costs (WP15 p. 28).
- Confirmed: proposals that pass the individual and the overall threshold are considered for funding within the call budget. Proposals with the same score are ranked by the method in Annex F: first those that cover aspects of the call not covered by higher-ranked proposals, then the Excellence score, then the Impact score, then the gender balance among the researchers with a leading role named in the proposal, then geographical diversity, then other factors related to the objectives of the call (WP15 p. 28). The topic sets no special arrangement.
- Confirmed: an invitation to grant preparation "does NOT constitute a formal commitment to funding"; legal entity validation, a financial capacity check and an exclusion check follow (WP15 p. 29).
- Confirmed: an evaluation review can cover procedural aspects only; the request is limited to 7,000 characters and must be submitted within 30 days after the results are accessed (results not opened within 10 days of sending count as accessed) (WP15 p. 30).

- Confirmed: the General Annexes award a Seal of Excellence only “if indicated in the specific call/topic conditions” (WP15 p. 29). The topic text does not mention one.

EUnita interpretation: what the text points evaluators towards

EUnita interpretation: with a single grant and a minimum score of 3 on each criterion, the two additions in the topic are the clearest signals of what a strong proposal shows: documented experience of awarding grants to third parties in other countries, and a communication strategy that reaches both SMEs and researchers. The info day slides add that an insufficient FSTP annex “may contribute to down-scoring” (slide 30). This is a reading of the text, not a score.

11. Application package and timeline

Package

Item	Rule	Source
Platform	The Funding & Tenders Portal electronic submission system, through the topic page. Paper submission is not possible. Use the forms inside the submission system, not the templates on the topic page, which are for information	WP15 pp. 3–4, 27
Language	Any official EU language; English strongly advised. A request for the call documents in another EU language must be made within 10 days after publication of the call	WP15 pp. 36–37
Part A	Filled in online: administrative information about the applicants, the summarised budget and call-specific questions	WP15 p. 27
Part B	Downloaded, completed and uploaded as a PDF. Section 1 Excellence, section 2 Impact (including the plan for dissemination and exploitation), section 3 Quality and efficiency of the implementation (work plan and capacity of participants)	AF pp. 31–52
Page limit	Title, list of participants and sections 1 to 3 together: 28 pages for a lump-sum coordination and support action (25 pages is the standard limit)	WP15 p. 4; AF p. 31
Annexes	“Information on financial support to third parties”, uploaded as a separate annex to Part B; the detailed budget table (Excel): fill in the .xlsm template and upload it as .xlsx or .xls, because the submission system does not accept .xlsm	Lump-sums guidance pp. 26, 40; WP15 p. 27; AF p. 48 (FSTP annex)
Deliverables	A data management plan as a deliverable by month 6, and the plan for dissemination and exploitation, including communication activities, as a deliverable within 6 months after signature	AF pp. 35–37
Consortium agreement	A written consortium agreement is required unless the call provides otherwise	WP15 p. 36

Confirmed: the FSTP annex must set out the maximum amount per third party, the criteria for calculating the exact amount, a clear and closed list of the activities that qualify, the persons or categories of persons that may receive support, and the criteria for giving support (FSTP template; info day slide 29).

Dates

Date	Event	Source
30 September 2026	Topic published on the Portal	Portal data file

Date	Event	Source
16 October 2026	Commission info day on the Nature and Bridging calls (held; slides online)	Info day slides; Commission list of info days
1 December 2026	Planned opening of the submission system. The Director-General may open the call up to one month earlier or later	Portal topic page; WP14 p. 24 note 26
3 March 2027, 17:00 Brussels time (18:00 in Romania)	Deadline, single stage. The Director-General may delay it by up to two months. Deadlines cannot be extended at the request of applicants	Portal topic page; WP14 p. 24; WP15 p. 36
Around 5 months after the deadline	Information on the outcome of the evaluation (General Annex F, unless the topic says otherwise). Derived estimate: around August 2027 if the deadline stays	WP15 p. 30
Around 8 months after the deadline	Indicative date for signing the grant agreement. Derived estimate: around November 2027	WP15 p. 30
After signature	Calls for SMEs, which the selected consortium is expected to launch. No date published	Not found in the sources read

Time zone

Confirmed: all deadlines are at 17:00:00 Brussels local time (WP14 p. 24 note 26). Derived estimate: on 3 March 2027, Brussels is on Central European Time (UTC+1) and Romania is on Eastern European Time (UTC+2), so the deadline is 18:00 in Romania.

Confirmed: other calls in the same Bridging family close on other dates, for example 16 February 2027 for HORIZON-BRIDGING-2027-01. The deadline of this topic is 3 March 2027.

12. Risks and red flags

Risk	Why it matters	Basis
One project only	The topic funds at most one project, so at most one consortium receives a grant. Every other eligible consortium receives nothing from this topic	WP14 pp. 24, 59
Narrow and partly open eligibility	Only EEN beneficiaries under SMP-COSME-2024-EEN can apply. The text does not say whether associated partners, affiliated entities or subcontractors must be EEN beneficiaries too. A consortium built on an assumption here could be found ineligible. WP15 p. 37 says that all applicants must fulfil the call conditions; if one does not, it must be replaced or the whole application is rejected. Whether this reaches associated partners, affiliated entities and subcontractors is not stated	WP14 p. 59; WP15 pp. 5, 37; not found in the sources read
Pass-through delivery	At least 90% of the budget has to reach SMEs through open calls that meet EU standards, with the project officer approving the draft call. Slow or weak calls put the work packages at risk	WP14 p. 60; WP15 p. 18; info day slide 34
Lump-sum payment logic	Payment follows completed work packages, not results. Ineligible costs in the budget table can reduce the grant, even after the project ends	Lump-sum guidance pp. 3, 18; WP15 p. 27

Risk	Why it matters	Basis
Dates can move	Opening may shift by up to a month either way and the deadline may be delayed by up to two months. Results are expected around five months after the deadline and signature around eight months after it	WP14 p. 24 note 26; WP15 p. 30
SME side not defined	The rules, dates, SME definition and eligible countries of the SME calls are not published; budget amounts are subject to appropriations	WP14 pp. 24, 61; not found in the sources read
Recruitment friction	The 2019 study found that the EURAXESS vacancy note alone did not attract enough suitable candidates, and that skills mismatch and visa problems were common obstacles	Study pp. 46–47
Geographical balance	The scheme must give equal access across Member States and associated countries. In the pilot, Eastern European countries sent less than 10% of the applications	WP14 p. 61; study p. 38
Time zone	Brussels time, 17:00; 18:00 in Romania	WP14 p. 24 note 26

Red flags

- A proposal whose partners are not Enterprise Europe Network beneficiaries under SMP-COSME-2024-EEN.
- A budget table that leaves less than 90% for SME grants or sets a per-SME amount above EUR 300,000 without a justification in the proposal.
- A thin FSTP annex: the info day slides say it may contribute to down-scoring.
- A proposal that treats SMEs as applicants to this topic.
- A plan that relies on the EURAXESS vacancy note alone to find researchers.

13. EUnita recommendations

For an Enterprise Europe Network member preparing a proposal

1. EUnita interpretation: settle the consortium first. Every applying entity should be a beneficiary under SMP-COSME-2024-EEN. Treat the role of any other entity as open until the topic text or the submission system settles it.
2. EUnita interpretation: build the case on evidence of awarding grants to third parties across borders. This is the only criterion addition that concerns the applicants' own record.
3. EUnita interpretation: write the communication strategy for two audiences and show how researchers are reached beyond the EURAXESS vacancy note, using the lessons of the 2019 study that the topic asks to be reflected.
4. EUnita interpretation: complete the FSTP annex in full: the amount per SME and how it is calculated, the closed list of qualifying activities (salary for 12 to 24 months, relocation, travel and infrastructure), who can receive support, and the criteria for giving it.
5. EUnita interpretation: build the lump-sum budget table by work package, keep at least 90% for SME grants, and make every cost eligible under the actual-cost rules.
6. EUnita interpretation: plan for equal access across countries and a balanced spread of the strategic sectors from the start, and say how the scheme will reach the Member States that were thin in the pilot.
7. EUnita interpretation: keep room in the plan for the opening and the deadline to move, as the Work Programme allows.

For an SME that wants to benefit later

- EUnita interpretation: there is nothing to submit yet. The consortium's calls are not published and carry no date in the documents read.
- EUnita interpretation: the topic says an SME's application should include a description of its innovation idea, a vacancy notice that specifies the knowledge and skills needed, and a recruitment plan with equal opportunities for researchers of all genders. An SME can prepare these items in advance; the consortium's final requirements are not published.
- EUnita interpretation: an SME can gather data on its labour and skills shortage in its national context, since the topic asks it to show that the skills cannot be found on the national labour market.
- EUnita interpretation: the Portal topic page points SMEs to their Enterprise Europe Network national contact for advice on EU research funding.

Unresolved points

- The granting authority for this topic is not named in the documents read.
- Whether the Enterprise Europe Network condition also covers associated partners, affiliated entities and subcontractors.
- Whether the "expected duration of 1-2 years" in the topic's reason for the EUR 300,000 ceiling is the duration of the action or of the support to each SME.
- Whether an entity from an overseas country or territory linked to a Member State can be a beneficiary of this coordination and support action.
- The duration of the action, the number of SME grants, the amount, rate and structure of each SME grant, the definition of SME and the eligible countries for the SMEs.
- The dates, platform and evaluation process of the consortium's calls for SMEs.
- Whether the lump sum is fixed in the topic or proposed in the application: the topic gives an estimate of around EUR 30 million and does not preclude other amounts.
- The number of applications expected or received, and any success rate.
- The results of the second and third calls of the Horizon 2020 pilot.
- Dates after the deadline other than the general figures of around five and around eight months in the General Annexes.

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- Work Programme 2026–2027, part 14 Horizontal Activities (Decision C(2026) 6687/2 of 29 Sep 2026): https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2026-2027/wp-14-horizontal-activities_horizon-2026-2027_en.pdf (downloaded 13 Nov 2026, re-checked 18 Nov 2026)
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- Standard evaluation form, HE CSA (v5.0): https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/temp-form/ef/ef_he-csa_en.pdf (downloaded 13 Nov 2026, re-checked 18 Nov 2026)

- Information on financial support to third parties (template v3.0): https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/temp-form/af/information-on-financial-support-to-third-parties_he_en.docx (downloaded 13 Nov 2026, re-checked 18 Nov 2026)
- Detailed budget table, HE LS (v3.6): https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/temp-form/af/detailed-budget-table_he-ls-euratom_en.xlsm (downloaded 13 Nov 2026, re-checked 18 Nov 2026)
- Lump Sum Model Grant Agreement (V1.0, 1 Nov 2024): https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/agr-contr/ls-mga_en.pdf (downloaded 13 Nov 2026, re-checked 18 Nov 2026)
- HE Model Grant Agreement (V1.2, 1 Jun 2026): https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/agr-contr/general-mga_horizon-euratom_en.pdf (downloaded 18 Nov 2026)
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Checked 18 November 2026. Official updates prevail.