



Horizon Europe & European Regional Development Fund

European Innovation Ecosystems Work Programme

HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-03-01

Implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys

&

Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument

Version 1.0

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HISTORY OF CHANGES		
Version	Publication date	Changes
1.0	17/05/2023	Initial version

Frequently Asked Questions

Differences and similarities between the European Innovation Ecosystems & the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument calls

Scope

The present document provides background information and guidance to potential applicants for proposals under the call of **HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-03-01: [Implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys](#)**, under the European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) Work Programme 2023-2024 and the two strand 1 and strand 2a calls, published in 2023 under the [Interregional Innovation Investments \(I3\) Instrument](#). It explains some of the main similarities and differences between the calls, which will contribute to the development of the Regional Innovation Valleys, a flagship action of the [New European Innovation Agenda](#). See also separate FAQs on EIE and I3 Instrument calls under the [Funding and Tenders Portal](#).

1. Q: Who can apply in the EIE and who in the I3 calls?

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

Other type of beneficiaries can be included as long as the above condition is fulfilled, for example, SMEs, Technology Centres, business associations etc. It is noticed that the 50% co-fund requirement applies to any type of beneficiary participating in the consortium.

I3 Instrument calls are targeted at consortia of innovation actors from the quadruple helix ecosystem (e.g. SMEs, public administrations, research centres and academia, clusters, innovation intermediaries and the civil society including end-users).

For Strand 1, the consortium should include at least five independent legal entities established in five different regions in at least three different eligible countries. In addition, at least two legal entities should come from a less developed region.

For Strand 2a, the consortium should include at least three independent legal entities established in three different regions in at least two eligible countries. The consortium should represent at least one more developed region and must have a strong involvement of less developed regions and focus on their needs.

2. Q: What is the funding rate of the EIE and the I3 instrument?

The EIE action has a 50% funding rate of the total eligible costs.

For the I3 Instrument's strand 1 and strand 2a calls, the funding rate for financial support to third parties provided by beneficiaries is up to 100% of the eligible costs. For other eligible costs, the co-financing rate is up to 70%.

3. Q: What is the expected duration of the project?

In the case of the EIE, the applicants are encouraged to consider a project duration of three to five (3-5) years.

In the case of the I3 Instrument, indicative duration of projects for strand 1 and strand 2a calls is 18 - 36 months.

4. Q: Is the financial support to third parties (FSTP) part mandatory under the calls?

For EIE: Operationally, FSTP is an integral part of the call. The call indicates that the action plan of the proposal should include the provisions and modalities for the competitive selection and funding (joint open calls implemented via financial support to third parties - FSTP) of at least three interregional innovation projects in the selected thematic/technological area, including deep tech, linked to key EU priorities. Also, proposals should allocate at least 50% of the total budget to these interregional projects (FSTP).

For the **I3 Instrument** the financial support to third parties is not mandatory but only optional. A project implemented under the I3 Instrument can be composed of a portfolio of sub-projects, which could be portfolios of interregional investment activities. This can take the form of distributing funds by the consortium coordinator to the consortium members or providing financial support to third parties.

5. Q: What is the percentage (%) of funding of the end-beneficiaries in the frame of the Financial Support to third parties (FSTP) in EIE and I3 call?

The EIE call text indicates the following:

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

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

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

For the I3 Instrument, the funding rate for financial support to third parties provided by beneficiaries is up to 100% of the eligible costs.

6. Q: Should the applicants act as sole-applicants or in consortium (multi-beneficiaries)?

Concerning both I3 Instrument and EIE calls, applicants have to apply as a consortium in line with the call eligibility criteria.

7. Q: What is the average project size and the maximum amount of funding envisaged in the EIE and I3 calls? How many projects will be funded?

The expected number of projects out of **the EIE call** for the 2023-2024 period is 6 projects, each one receiving an average funding from EUR 8 to 12 million. Each project will have to conduct at least 3 interregional projects allocating at least 50% of the total eligible costs to them.

For both **I3 Instrument's** strand 1 and strand 2a calls, project budgets (maximum grant amount) are expected to range between EUR 2 and EUR 10 million per project, but this does not preclude the submission/selection of proposals requesting other amounts, if duly justified in the application.

For strand 1 and strand 2a, the estimated total available call budget for 2023 is EUR 31 million for each of the two calls. We reserve the right not to award all available funds or to redistribute them between the call priorities, depending on the proposals received and the results of the evaluation.

8. Q: Are Third Countries eligible for EIE or I3?

The action of EIE allows the participation of legal entities from European Union Members States or Horizon Europe Associated Countries as beneficiaries. Legal entities from Horizon Europe non-associated Third Countries could participate as associated partners. See: [List of Participating Countries to Horizon Europe](#)

No third countries associated with the I3 Instrument. Applicants belonging to third countries are thus not eligible for this instrument.

9. Q: On which basis are regions categorised in EIE and I3?

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

The applicants must use as a reference the latest version of the documents mentioned above at the time of the call closure. Associated Countries which are not included in the European Innovation Scoreboard and are ranked below 25 on the latest Global Innovation Index are considered as 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovators. In cases of Associated Countries not included in any of the previously mentioned references, the participation rank of the country in the Horizon Europe programme (H2020 country profile) will be taken as a reference and countries ranked below the average will be considered as 'moderate' or 'emerging' innovators.

In the case of the I3 Instrument that falls under cohesion policy, regions are categorised as 'less developed regions', 'transition regions' and 'more developed regions'. This categorisation can be found within Article 108 of the [Common Provisions Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1060](#).

10. Q: What is the expected TRL level of the innovative projects under the two calls?

In both I3 Instrument and EIE cases, the TRL level of interregional projects is expected to be high and close to market, similar to Horizon Europe Innovation Actions (IA), namely TRL 6-8 for EIE and TRL 6-9 for I3 Instrument's strand 1 and 2 a calls. It should focus on the development and/or deployment of technologies and innovations, including breakthrough and disruptive, through cooperation between research and innovation actors from the participating regions.

11. Q: Could you please clarify what is meant by "interregional"?

For both calls under the EIE and the I3 Instrument, applicants from more than one region and more than one MS have to apply in consortia in line with the call eligibility criteria. The aim is to ensure the participation of consortia members from different member states

12. Q: Could we apply and receive funding from both EIE and I3 calls?

Yes, this is feasible, as long as the activities to be funded are different and there is no double funding of the same cost item.

13. Q: Can an applicant submit/participate in several proposals? or just one?

There is no restriction on the number of proposals an applicant can submit/participate, as long as the projects have different objectives and activities and there is no double funding of the same cost item.

14. Q: Is the endorsement letter (I3) or letter of intent (EIE), required as part of the application (proposal) only for the coordinator's region (consortium leader) or for each region/country participating?

In the case of EIE, the coordinator is invited to provide duly signed and dated letter of intent (LoI) for the engagement/commitment of all the beneficiaries in providing the remaining 50% of the EC funding for the project implementation. The consortium is only required to submit one letter of intent, since the eligibility condition states: "The consortium must provide a letter of intent at the moment of submission of the proposal

indicating the source of the required 50% of complementary funding (e.g. national and/or regional funding, European funding, or private investments).”

For the I3 Instrument’s strand 1 and 2a calls, the project coordinator must submit the support letter from the competent regional or national institution, or the body responsible for the management of the smart specialisation strategy (S3) before the call deadline.

Members of the consortium can submit the support letter from their S3 authority provided that the corresponding region agrees to be identified as “Regional Innovation Valley”.