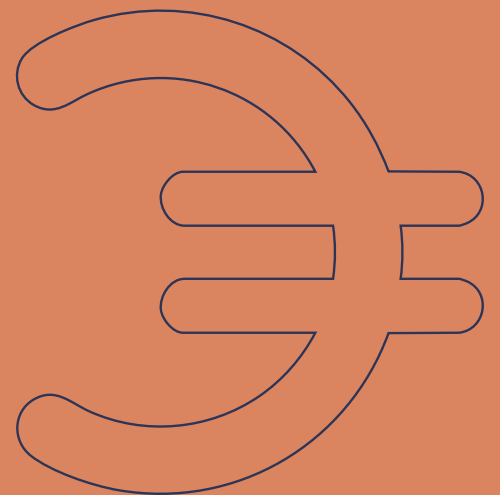


# GUIDE ON EU PROGRAMMES AND FUNDING



This document has been prepared by the Centre for Competitiveness Promotion (CCP) with the financial assistance of the German Government through GIZ GmbH, within the framework of the project "Support to Accession Negotiations in the Economic Chapters of the EU Acquis" (SANECA II). The views and content expressed herein are those of the author and can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the German Government or GIZ.

# Table of Contents

<b>01 Introduction</b>	<b>04</b>
1.1 The Context	4
1.2 The Content and Purpose of the Guide	5
1.3 Overview of EU Programmes	6
1.4 Overview of IPA III Programming	9
1.5 Overview of EU Financing Programmes	11
1.6 Importance of EU Funding for Stakeholders and Target Groups	11
1.7 Responsible institutions for EU Programmes	12
1.8 How to receive information on the EU/IPA Programmes	12
<b>02 Description of EU Programmes</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1 SINGLE MARKET PROGRAMME	14
2.2 HORIZON R 2 - Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness	24
2.2.3 PILLAR III - INNOVATIVE EUROPE	26
2.2.4 COST Programme	27
2.3 DIGITAL EUROPE	33
2.4 CUSTOMS PROGRAMME	53
2.5 FISCALIS PROGRAMME	55
2.6 ERASMUS+	58
2.7 CREATIVE EUROPE	59
2.8 LIFE PROGRAMME	60
<b>03 Description of IPA Programming Framework</b>	<b>69</b>
3.1 IPA III CBC programmes	71
3.2 IPA CBC PROGRAMME BETWEEN IPA AND EU COUNTRIES (INTERREG VI-A)	74
3.3 TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME (INTERREG VI-B)	77
3.4 INTERREGIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME (INTERREG VI-C)	83
3.5 IPA CARE	84
<b>04 EU EXTERNAL ACTION PROGRAMME (RELEX)</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>05 ACCESS TO EU FINANCING PROGRAMMES</b>	<b>87</b>
5.1 INVEST EU PROGRAMME	87
5.2 WESTERN BALKANS INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK (WBIF)	91
<b>06 APPLICATION PROCESS</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>07 RESOURCES AND CONTACTS</b>	<b>99</b>

# Acronyms & Programmes

AIDA	Albanian Investment Development Agency
B2B	Business to business
BAS	Business Acceleration Services
CBC	Cross-border Cooperation
CCS	Cultural and Creative Sectors
COSME	Competitiveness for Small and Medium Size Enterprise
CSA	Coordination and Support Actions
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DG	Directorate General
EACEA	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
EC	European Commission
ECCP	The European Cluster Collaboration Platform
EDIH	The European Digital Innovation Hub
EEN	Enterprise Europe Network
EES	European Electronic Systems
EIB	European Investment Bank
EIB	European Investment Bank
EIC	European Innovation Council
EIE	European Innovation Ecosystems
EIF	European Investment Fund
EISMEA	European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency
EIT	European Institute of Innovation and Technology
ERA	European Research Area
ERC	European Research Council
ERD	European Regional Development Fund
ESA	European Space Agency
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
EUSAIR	Euro
EYE	Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs
FSTP	Financial Support for Third Parties Calls
GEP	Gender Equality Plans
IA	Innovation Action
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
INTERREG	International Regional
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession
KA	Key Action

AIDA	Albanian Investment Development Agency
KIC	Knowledge and Innovation Communities
MECI	Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation
MSCA	Marie-Skłodowska-Curie Actions
NASRI	National Agency for Science Research and Innovation
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PADOR	Potential Applicant Data On-Line Registration
R&I	Research and Innovation
REC	Renewable Energy Community
RI	Research Infrastructure
RIA	Research and Innovation Action
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
SANECA	Support to Accession Negotiations in the Economic Chapters of the Acquis
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	Small and Medium size Enterprise
SO	Specific Objective
TCLF	textile, clothing, leather and footwear
TEN-T	Trans-European Transport Network
TP	Thematic Priority
TRL	Technology Readiness Level
VET	Vocational Education Training
WBIF	Western Balkan Investment Framework
WIDERA	Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area

# 1. INTRODUCTION

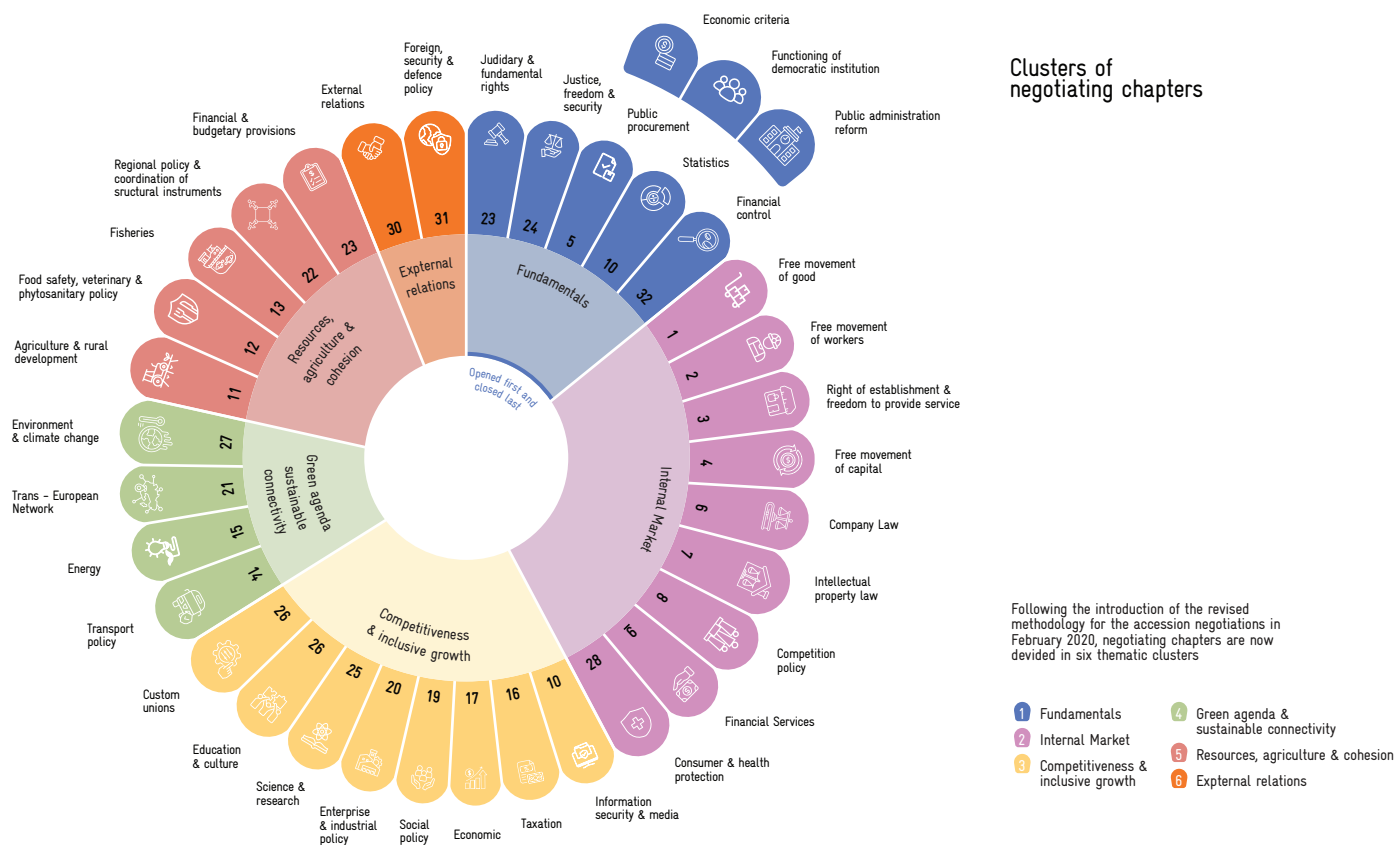
## 1.1 The Context

This guide is prepared within the framework of the implementation of the SANECA Project, funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and implemented by GIZ Albania. The project supports the Albanian Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation in enhancing the capacities of public officials and preparing for EU accession negotiations.

SANECA, which stands for *Support to Accession Negotiations in the Economic Chapters of the Acquis*, assists the Albanian Government in negotiating the Economic Chapters of the EU Acquis, aligning Albanian legislation with EU standards, and navigating the overall negotiation process. This includes **Cluster 2 – Internal Market**, covering the free movement of goods, workers, services, and capital, as well as company law, competition policy, financial services, intellectual property, consumer protection, and public health. Additionally, the project contributes to negotiations related to **Chapter 20: Enterprise and Industrial Policy** (Cluster 3).

Albania is currently in the process of opening negotiations for EU accession, which entails negotiating all 33 chapters of the *Acquis Communautaire*. The country began with a screening process to review its national legislation and assess alignment with EU laws. This process lasted for 14 months, culminating in the official commencement of negotiations on October 15, 2024.

To streamline the negotiations, the EU Commission has organized the 33 chapters into clusters, with each cluster containing several interconnected chapters.



The chapters included in Cluster 2 are crucial for Albania's progress toward joining the EU's Internal Market. Advancing in the accession process necessitates structural changes to Albania's economy and the promotion of a business-friendly environment for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

In this context, the SANECA Project aims to support key stakeholders—including public and private institutions, the private sector, academia, and civil society organisations (CSOs)—to further develop and enhance their competitiveness for integration into the EU market. It is essential that, during the integration process, the Albanian economy gains access to and benefits from EU programmes and funds.

## 1.2 The Content and Purpose of the Guide

The purpose of this guide is to serve as a source of information for stakeholders in Albania—particularly public national and local authorities, institutions, businesses, NGOs, academia and professionals—on how to access funding for their projects from a number of EU funding programmes, and various other funding opportunities where Albania is eligible/potentially eligible to apply.

It seeks to empower Albanian entities by providing significant opportunities to secure funding and access financing that foster innovation and enhance competitiveness within the broader context of the country's EU integration journey.

This guide encourages Albanian stakeholders to align their strategic objectives with EU priorities, thereby enhancing their capacity to comprehend these programmes and increase their chances of successful participation. It underscores the importance of collaboration across diverse sectors, including national and local public institutions, public-private partnerships, SMEs, research institutions, business support organisations, associations, and civil society, to develop competitive, high-quality project proposals. Depending on the nature, scope and priorities of the project for which funding is sought, EU Programmes and funds can be explored for the funding opportunities they may offer.

It covers financing under the EU's 2021–2027 budget (multiannual financial framework) as well as the Next Generation EU temporary instrument set up to stimulate the EU's recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. The guide has listed the EU Programmes, relevant for Albania, including Single Market Programme, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, Customs and Fiscalis, Creative Europe and Erasmus+, as well as a comprehensive information on the IPA III Programming. In addition, the guide includes other financing Programmes, such as InvestEU and Western Balkan Investment Framework in a separated way and accompanied them by short descriptions highlighting the opportunities.

Each section of the Guide outlines programme priorities, eligibility criteria, project types, potential applicants, application procedures, and evaluation standards. Some of them are explained in more details compared to others, keeping in mind the eligibility status of Albania to participate on each specific programme and trying to stay within the Context of the Guide.

The guide presents essential information on EU funding sources, with the ambition to help Albanian potential applicants mapping out their action as precisely as possible, based on this information, highlighting the need to be aware that applying for EU funding requires careful planning in advance and good partnership to create strong consortium. Advices from specialised experts of institutions and/or projects may also be helpful for preparation of a good application.

As multiple calls for funding are published on a regular basis, it is important to check for such opportunities often and to keep an eye on the national and EU sites that provide relevant information, dedicated to EU Programmes and funds. To facilitate research, the Guide has provided hyper-links and footnote to ensure easier access to the sources of funding information.

The guide provides a practical roadmap for navigating EU platforms, including instructions on how to register a company, search for calls for proposals, and identify the essential documents that must be reviewed before applying for EU funding. It also outlines strategies for finding potential partners to develop project ideas and create consortia, ensuring that applicants are well-prepared to undertake the application process.

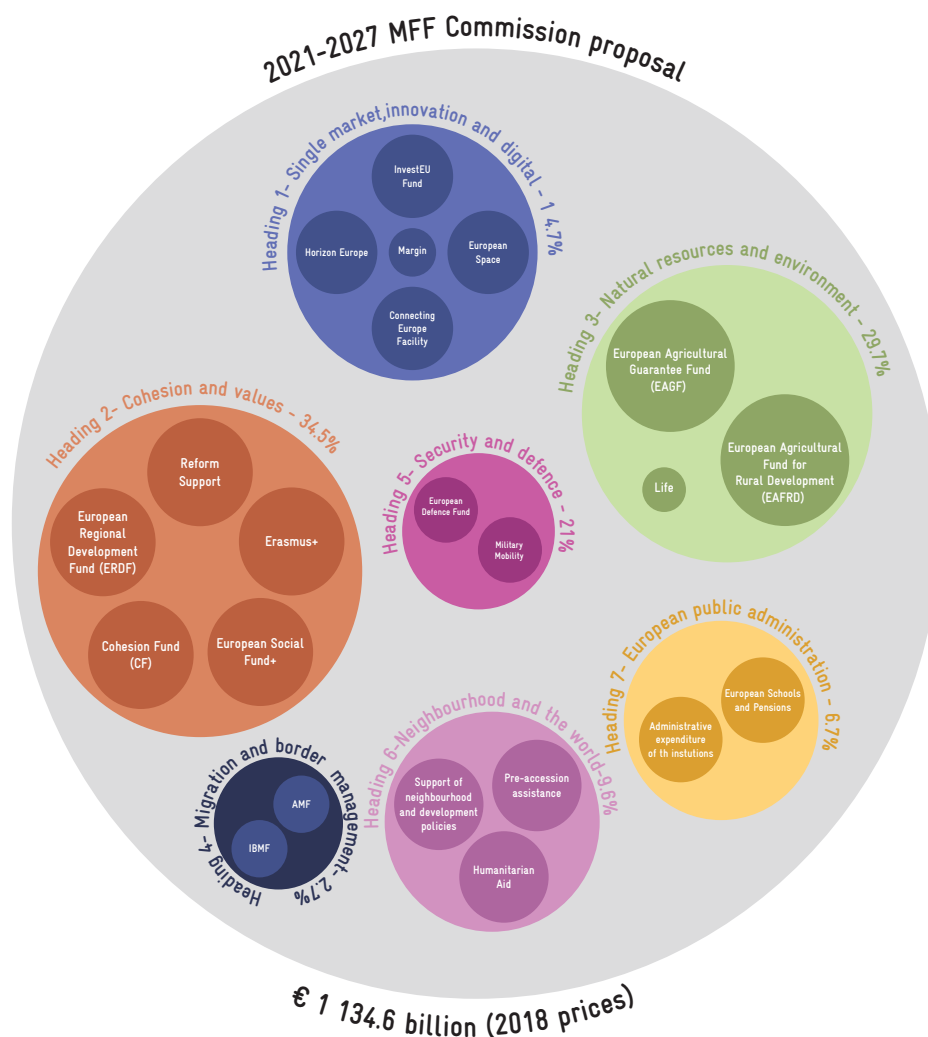
Each section of the guide includes a non-exhaustive list of the key potential beneficiaries, a list of **responsible institutions for EU Programmes** in Albania and other valuable resources that readers can consult for more detailed information on the programmes of their interest.

To address the difficult terminology and complexities associated with some EU programmes, the guide includes **explanation of specific technical terms**, making it easier for readers to understand and navigate the funding environment.

We hope, this guide will give to key potential beneficiaries an introduction to EU funding opportunities, from which they could then in turn apply to secure support for projects aligned with the strategic priorities of their institutions/organisations.

## 1.3 Overview of EU Programmes

EU budget for the period 2021-2027 or the multi-annual financial framework (MFF) has been divided in different programmes, grouped into **seven headings** or expenditure categories of the EU budget. These EU programmes aim to promote the cooperation, primarily among the EU Member States to implement the EU policies and respect EU values. Each programme is dedicated to a specific EU policy area, focused on supporting recovery and provisions for EU's regions, companies, farmers, students and citizens and neighbouring countries.





## The 2021–2027 Multiannual Financial Framework in figures

All EU Member States are eligible to participate in these EU Programmes, whereas EU potential and candidate countries, such as Albania, can join EU Programmes with the status of associated countries. Albania can join and benefit only after a specific Association Agreement with European Commission for each Programme is signed and the respective full amount of Payment (Entry Fees) to the European Commission or the relevant programme body is paid.

There are approximately **40 EU Programmes**, but Albania currently participates in only ten of them as an associated partner, with varying levels of eligibility (full or partial). The indicative list of EU Programmes that Albania is eligible to participate in, includes but is not limited to the following programmes:

1. **Horizon Europe** – Research and innovation framework. Albania is associated member after signing the Agreement and ratifying by the Albanian Parliament in 30th May, 2022 with retroactive effect from 1 January 2021.
2. **Creative Europe** – Support for the cultural and creative sectors. Albania signed the agreement in December 2021 – entry into force 01 January 2021.
3. **Single Market Programme** – Support for SMEs and strengthening the internal market. Albania is participating in SMP only in the strand for 'Competitiveness of SMEs', ratifying in Albanian parliament in December 2023, but entry into force retroactive on 01 January 2021.
4. **Customs** Albania has expressed the interest
5. **Fiscalis** – Cooperation in customs and taxation. Albania is participating in this programme.
6. **Digital Europe Programme** – Digital transformation and technological advancement. Albania is associated country only to "Specific Objectives 1, 2, 4 and 5", after the agreement signed in June 2023 – applies retroactively from 01 January 2023.
7. **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme** – Albania signed the agreement on 27th December 2023 – applicable as from 01 January 2023
8. **Erasmus+** – Education, training, youth, and sports.
9. **European Solidarity Corps** – Volunteering and solidarity activities for young people. (Albania is not associated to the Programme) (Albania is partner country)
10. **Justice Programme**, Albania signed the agreement on 13 March 2024 – applicable as from 01 January 2023)

These programmes aim to enhance Albania's integration into the European framework, enabling cooperation in diverse sectors and fostering alignment with EU standards and practices.

A dedicated section of this Guide offers a detailed explanation of the **Single Market Programme**, providing information about its six pillars, with a particular emphasis on the SME Pillar highlighting the available opportunities for SMEs and support that facilitate the provision of services to businesses and entrepreneurship through market access, promotion of entrepreneurship, opportunities for collaboration with regional clusters, as well as information on specific calls related to sectors such as clusters, tourism, and the social economy.

Regarding the other related pillars, related to the internal market, information is provided on **tools** that can be used for information and services that regulate the market and calls planned for competition policy, standardisation and consumer pillar.

**Horizon Europe Programme** is one of the most important EU programmes in the field of scientific research and innovation. The Guide describes in detail the necessary information across its three pillars, divided into (i) Excellent Science, (ii) Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness and (iii) Innovative Europe. In particular, **Pillar 2** encompasses six thematic clusters and **Pillar 3** dedicated to SMEs with strong innovation potential.

Additionally, it outlines the specific part of Horizon Europe dedicated to **Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area**, as well as the **COST Programme**, which is also financed by Horizon Europe

that helps to connect research initiatives across Europe and beyond with a higher interest from Albanian applicants.

**Digital Europe Programme** is designed to strengthen digital transformation and innovation across various sectors to link the research of digital technologies and their deployment, and to bring the results to the market for the benefit of EU's businesses, citizens and public administration in their digital transformation.

**Customs Programme** supports the development and operation of the central IT systems for customs in the Union, build the capacities and the essential cooperation between customs authorities across the EU. Albanian Custom Authority can benefit from cooperation with the EU Custom system.

**Fiscalis Programme** contributes to addressing some of the EU priorities, linked to the designing EU tax policy actions that contribute to a carbon-neutral continent by 2050, implementing corporate tax reforms, VAT in the Digital Age (VIDA) package, fight against tax fraud, evasion and avoidance, excise fraud and direct taxation. Albanian Tax Authority can benefit from this programme.

**Creative Europe Programme**, which promotes the cultural and creative sectors. It aims to safeguard, develop and promote European cultural and linguistic, diversity and heritage and increase the competitiveness and economic potential of the cultural and creative sectors, in particular the audio-visual sector. Albania has very active participation in this Programme.

**Erasmus+ Programme** aims to support the educational, professional, and personal development of individuals in education, training, youth, and sport, both within and outside of Europe through lifelong learning.

**LIFE Programme**, which focuses on environmental and climate action provides grants linked to the financing of EU environment, including Nature and Biodiversity and Circular economy and quality of life as well as climate action policy including transition to clean energy and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

### **Management of EU programmes**

The Programmes funded by the EU budget can be managed in three different ways:

- Direct management: EU funding is managed directly by the European Commission, through the DGs or EC agencies
- Shared management: the European Commission and national authorities jointly manage the funding
- Indirect management: funding is managed by partner organisations or other authorities inside or outside the EU

The EU enforces regulations to ensure rigorous oversight of fund utilisation, guaranteeing that financial resources are spent in a transparent and accountable way

### **Types of funding and financing available**

The funding and financing types come in the form of:

- Grants – typically, institutions and people apply for grants by submitting ideas for projects following a 'call for proposals'
- Procurements
- Subsidies managed by national or regional authorities
- Loans, guarantees and equity as forms of financial assistance
- Loans to EU Member States and non-EU countries
- Prizes.

## 1.4 Overview of IPA III Programming

There are differences between EU Programmes and IPAIII Programming.

The guide includes comprehensive information on the IPA III Programming, in which Albania participates, covering cross-border cooperation programmes with neighbouring countries, as well as transnational and interregional cooperation programmes. It also highlights the EU grants that Albania benefits under the **External Action Programme**.

**The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance 2021-2027 (IPA III)** is an EU financial and technical assistance instrument dedicated only for the EU candidate countries and potential candidates (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey) in the process of accession to the EU.

It supports in adopting and implementing the political, institutional, legal, administrative, social and economic reforms to comply with Union values and to progressively align to Union rules, standards, policies and practices. IPA III is aligned with the flagship initiatives and priorities of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans (2020).

It is an investment in the future of the EU, making our region safer and more prosperous by supporting the stability and prosperity with a budget of 14,162 billion + 6 billion of the "Reform and Growth Facility".

There are no fixed or indicative national/geographical financial envelopes per country, although a principle of "fair share" allocation and "performance-based principle" is integrated. Each beneficiary country is assessed on its own merits. This means that Albania and respectively their key beneficiaries should be prepared to be able to design projects to absorb the available funds from IPA III.

The key areas of support from IPA III are:

- The rule of law, fundamental rights and democracy;
- Good governance, alignment with EU legislation, good neighbourly relations and strategic communication;
- A green agenda and sustainable connectivity;
- Competitiveness and inclusive growth;
- Territorial and cross-border cooperation.

**The budget of Windows 5, Territorial and cross-border cooperation is divided between different programmes:**

The guide provides a throughout description of **IPA III Programming**, regarding the calls under the **Cross-Border Cooperation Programme with neighbouring countries** North Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro with the priorities of Tourism and Culture heritage, Environment and Employment.

Other INTERREG regional and territorial cooperation programmes are included, such as **CBC Programme with Greece, Adriatic Programme, South Adriatic Programme, Mediterranean programme and Interreg Europe, URBACT and IPA Care**. Also, in this session are included the grants provided to Albania through the **External Action Programme**.

Some of the types of actions (among others funded) by this Programme are:

- Investment in infrastructure;
- Actions in technical assistance;
- Capacity-building;
- Transfer of knowledge.

In Albania, IPA III Programme is managed by the European Commission and the EU delegations in Albania

(direct management), as well as by the national authorities (indirect management). The State Agency for Strategic Programming and Assistance Coordination (SASPAC) is managing and coordination IPA III Funds. The funds are primarily implemented through grants, procurements, budget support, contributions to EU trust funds and to financial instruments and guarantees.

## 1.5 Overview of EU Financing Programmes

The Guide provides information on the Access to Financing available for all types of EU companies of any size and sector. Different financial types in the form of loans, micro-finance and venture capital is supported through financial institutions.

Another chapter of the guide focuses on **InvestEU**, a financing programme managed through EU financial institutions, tailored to support SMEs. These programmes aimed at boosting investment across Europe by leverage both public and private funding to support the EU's top policy objectives, including the green and digital transitions, innovation, social investment, and skills development.

**Invest EU is the key financing instrument that support boosting investment in Europe** in the field of the green, and digital transition, innovation and social investments and skills. An EU budget guarantee of **€26.2 billion is expected to boost more than €372 billions of public and private financing**. The programme consisted of three components. The InvestEU Fund is functioning through the implementing partners that are key financial institutions, which provide services to SMEs through financial intermediaries. The types of financing are **guarantee funds and counter-guarantee funds, which guarantee the financial products of local banks targeting SMEs**.

The guide also provides comprehensive information on the **Western Balkan Investment Framework (WBIF)**, a dedicated financial structure dedicated to Western Balkan countries that fosters collaboration and investment to drive socio-economic development. Four financial instruments of WBIF dedicate equity for SMEs at their early and expansion level and later stage of development, as well as other forms of guarantee funds and lending to financial institutions to further support SMEs. Other instruments aim to support the sustainable energy, mitigate climate change and promote sustainable economic growth.

This platform facilitates the implementation of the **EU's Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans** by employing a variety of financing instruments that blend EU grants with funding from financial institutions. These instruments include equity financing, venture capital, loans, guarantee funds, and micro-finance solutions, all of which aim to strengthen the region's development and integration with the EU.

**All financial instruments have the Technical and Service Assistance Facility that provides supports to SMEs, financial institution and the WB governments.**

## 1.6 Importance of EU Funding for Stakeholders and Target Groups

Each programme and call of proposal declares the eligibility of applicants in the call documents and they are open for all types of organisations and individuals. including:

- Universities, research institutions,
- Private sector, including SMEs, Start-ups and high-tech companies, SMEs with innovative projects
- Civil society organisations,
- Public institutions, agencies and regulatory bodies overseeing market functioning and public sector institutions focused on innovation
- Business support organisations, trade associations and chambers of commerce, tourism organisations
- Local Municipalities and other regional bodies
- Financial institutions

Some Programmes target their fund for public and other entities, with non-profit status, including:

- local municipalities and other regional bodies
- non-profit organisations,

1	SINGLE MARKET PROGRAMME	Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation -MECI
2	CREATIVE EUROPE	
	INVEST EU	
3	DIGITAL EUROPE	Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy – MoIE and
		National Agency of Information System–NAIS
4	HORIZON EUROPE	National Agency for Science Research and Innovation– NASRI
	COST	
	EUREKA	
5	ERASMUS+	Ministry of Education and Sports– MES
		National Erasmus Plus Office in Albania
6	IPA III PROGRAMME	State Agency for Strategic Programming and Assistance Coordination (SASPAC)  NIPAC Office The head director of State Agency for Strategic Programming and Assistance Coordination (SASPAC)

- public enterprises and organisations,
- different types of associations, etc.

The SMEs can be indirect beneficiaries, through subcontracting activities, involved in implementing specific tasks of the awarded projects.

## 1.7 Responsible institutions for EU Programmes

## 1.8 How to receive information on the EU/IPA Programmes

The main open portal to receive information for the EU Programmes is the Tender and Funding portal . The potential applicants can find a short description for each 40 EU programmes listed on this platform. In addition, the information on the open calls for proposals, calls for tenders and working as an expert can be found here through a filter searching.

To prepare in advance for the application, it is important to:

- **search the forthcoming calls**, starting from finding the right eligible calls for proposal, appropriate to your expertise or field of interest and further design and development of the project idea, creation of partnerships, understanding the rules and regulation, etc.
- **consult the dedicated Work Programmes** under interested EU Programme. Within the framework of 2021–2027 period, each EU programme might have annual programme or 2 or 3 work programmes. The others within the same time period can have different work programmes for each of the specific pillar.

Only, the IPAIII cross-border, territorial and regional cooperation programmes cover within one Programme the whole period from 2021–2027.

It is recommended that all Albanian beneficiaries, based on their strategic planning, to identify the programmes of their interest and consult the Work Programme prior to launching the calls of proposals and starting with consultation on the project ideas and find the proper partnership.

It is valuable to attend information days and training on EU Programmes, delivered by respective institutions in charge of specific programme and/or other EU projects or organisations that support with information/training/services to increase the number of the Albanian applicants accessing the EU funds.

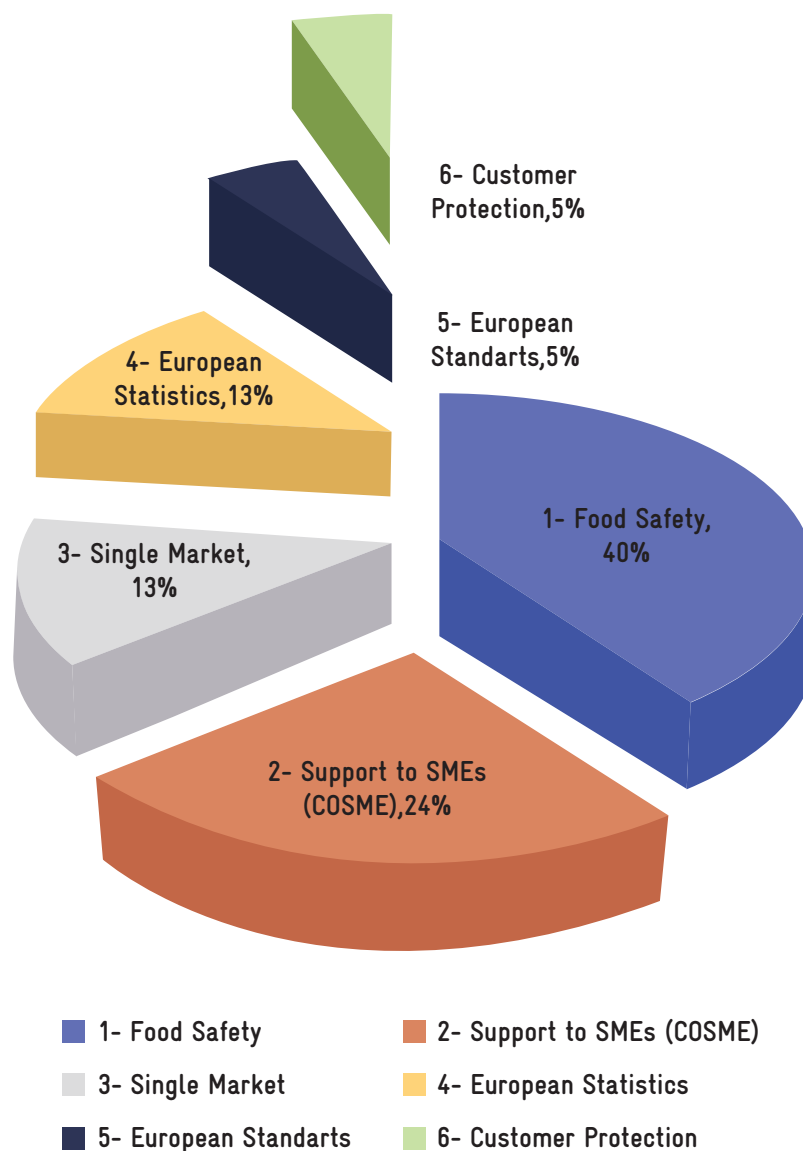
## 2. DESCRIPTION OF EU PROGRAMMES

### 2.1 SINGLE MARKET PROGRAMME

The Single Market Programme (SMP) is a key EU funding instrument designed to improve the functioning of the EU single market. It supports various actions covering areas such as competitiveness, market access, standards and statistics, consumer protection, and the development of SMEs to boost the European economy by removing barriers to the single market and fostering sustainable and inclusive growth.

The Single Market Programme covers 6 pillars/strands, for the **budget of 4.2 billion Euro**, which is divided in different portions:

#### Six Objectives of Single Market Programme



Albania participates in the SMP Programme, but only in the strand 2 '**Competitiveness of SMEs-COSME**' or **SME Pillar**. This means that Albania is eligible to apply only for the calls of proposals open under this Pillar.

## 2.1.1 SME Pillar

SME Pillar-COSME has a budget of €1,04 billion for the period 2021–2027. This programme provides various forms of support to SMEs, clusters and other business network organisations to foster the growth, scale-up and creation of SMEs;

SME Pillar objectives aim to:

- facilitate access to markets including the internationalisation of SMEs;
- 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.

The Work Programme 2025 for the SME pillar continues to focus on implementing the SME strategy in the context of industrial ecosystems and the SME components.

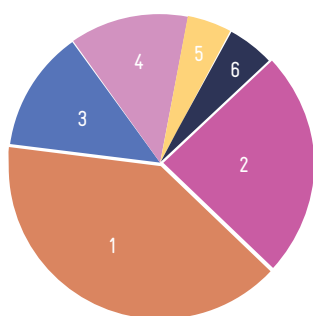
This work programme includes several multi-annual actions, including:

- **Enterprise Europe Network**, which provides services for companies on how to innovate and grow internationally (around EUR 53 million)
- **Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs** that is an international mobility scheme for potential entrepreneurs (around EUR 17 million).
- **Joint Clusters Initiative**, which support establishing close cooperation between industrial clusters and SMEs (around EUR 11 million)
- **Tourism Sector**
- **Social Economy**

More specifically, a short overview of the 5th Work Programme is described below to showcase the types of calls, sectors and different tools to be used to access to these funds. All details can be found on the Funding and Tender portal, as well as on the dedicated EISMEA webpage.

The graph below demonstrates visually the portion of the budget dedicated to each Pillar of Single market programme, and sub-programmes cover under SME Pillar.

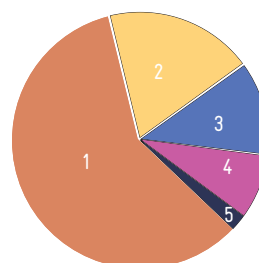
Six Pillars of Single Market Programme



1 – Food safety  
2 – Competitiveness for SMEs, 24%  
3 – Single Market, 13%

4 – European Standards, 13%  
4 – European Standards, 5%  
6 – Customer Protection, 5%

Distribution of budget in 1% for Sub-Programmes in 2025



1-Enterprise Europe Network, 59%  
2-Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, 18%  
3-Join Cluster Initiatives (EUROCLUSTERS), 12%

4-Supporting sustainable competitiveness of tourism SME, 8%  
5-Promoting Trans-European tourism products in third countries, 2%



### 2.1.1.1 Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)

The Enterprise Europe Network is one of the key instruments of the SME pillar that covers 59% (2025) of the grants budget. The EEN uses the full range of its innovation and business advisory services to support SMEs with the transition towards more digitalised, sustainable business models and more climate-friendly products and processes.

EEN is a network of public and private institutions and business support organisations, chambers of commerce, regional development agencies, innovation centres, which provide integrated business services to SMEs. This means that the direct applicants under this call for proposal are only these types of business support organisations/institutions.

Albania has one consortium, consisting of 5 organisations, which represent the local EEN offices in Albania. The consortium is led by AIDA (Albanian Investment Development Agency) as coordinator, and the partners are: the Centre for Competitiveness Promotion, Regional Development Agency of Tirana, Women Economic Chamber of Albania, and Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Durrës. Whereas, the National Agency for Science, Research, and Innovation has the status of an associated partner. This consortium is supported by an EU grant until 2028.

Albanian SMEs can benefit from the services provided by the dedicated group of experts/advisors within EEN-Albania offices and other EEN offices (3000 experts) in 600 regions distributed in more than 60 countries.

The types of services provided by EEN offices include:

- Provision of business information.
- Training and capacity-building activities on a variety of business topics.
- Provision of advisory services to support access to funding and financing, digitalisation, resilience, and change management. These services aim to assist companies in transitioning towards more sustainable business models, including the adoption of cleaner, less waste-producing, and more energy-efficient production processes in SMEs.
- Facilitation of business cooperation between Albanian and EU SMEs through partnering activities, such as participation in business missions, trade fairs, start-up pitching sessions, B2B matchmaking, innovation forums, networking events, etc. This includes leveraging the EEN platform to identify and pursue business opportunities

Innovation



Sustainability



Resilience



EU Single Market



Business Partnering



Digitalisation



Internationalisation



Access to Finance

Albanian SMEs are encouraged to contact local EEN offices to access support services, including information on funding opportunities, business cooperation, and partner search assistance. These services can help with matchmaking and identifying suitable partners within the EU. Further information is available at the following link: Enterprise Europe Network and in the social media [https://www.instagram.com/enterprise\\_europe\\_network\\_al/](https://www.instagram.com/enterprise_europe_network_al/)

### 2.1.1.2 Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE)

**Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE)** is a mobility scheme that supports aspiring and new entrepreneurs through cross-border exchange experiences. The programme is open to public or private entities whose core activities involve business support. Calls for proposals under EYE typically require the formation of a consortium comprising at least five partners from different EU or associated countries.

Successful applicants become local contact points – intermediary organisations responsible for implementing the programme at the national or regional level. Currently, Albania has one intermediary organisation, NOA SH.A, acting as the local contact point. A new call for applications is expected to open in **Q1 2026** to select intermediary organisations for the **2027–2030** implementation period.

The local contact point plays a key role in supporting the participation of young entrepreneurs in the programme. Their responsibilities include assisting with registration in the EYE system, guiding applicants in developing and submitting a viable business plan, evaluating applications, facilitating the matchmaking process with experienced entrepreneurs in EU or participating countries, and supporting the overall mobility experience.

Albanian aspiring and new entrepreneurs (regardless of age) can benefit from this scheme by collaborating for up to six months with a host entrepreneur in another participating country, including the EU's outermost regions. The cost of living during the exchange is partially covered by the European Union.

A schematic steps of exchange programme



Albanian companies can also benefit from this mobility scheme by registering on the platform and hosting new entrepreneurs from other countries in their own businesses. This is a **win-win opportunity** that supports the exchange of entrepreneurial skills and ideas, with the broader aim of promoting entrepreneurship. Through this collaboration, entrepreneurs not only enrich their professional experience but also gain new perspectives, expand their networks, and build lasting connections with peers from other participating countries.

### 2.1.1.3 Calls for EU Cluster actions

The EU has created a **cluster policy aiming to strengthen existing clusters and/or facilitate the emergence of the new ones.**

Some of the calls regarding clusters are listed below:

#### 1. EUROCLUSTERS -Joint Cluster Initiatives for Europe's recovery

**Euroclusters** are cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary, and trans-European initiatives that bring together industry clusters and other economic actors, such as research organisations and companies.

In 2022, **30 Euroclusters** were created with a total budget of **€42 million**, involving **160 partners** from **23 countries**. Among them, **20 Euroclusters** focus on specific industrial ecosystems, while **10 operate** across several ecosystems.

These Euroclusters (consortia) have launched **FSTP (Financial Support for Third Parties)** calls to support specific sectors—such as the furniture and lighting industry, automotive, or polymer recycling—offering opportunities for **training, mentoring, participation in trade fairs, and innovation projects**. Interested applicants should check the relevant link to see if **small-grant opportunities** are still open.

A new call was launched on **15 October 2024**, with another **€42 million budget** to fund **multi-country Eurocluster projects**. These projects are open to both developed and less-developed regions and aim to support a wide range of actors—from early-stage social economy start-ups to large companies in traditional sectors, and from research institutions to end users.

This new call aims to establish **16 new Euroclusters**, with a clear focus on **supporting SMEs**. At least **75% of the total budget** will go directly to SMEs in the form of small sub-grants to fund networking, training, and internationalisation activities. The overall objective is to help SMEs become more **resilient** and to support their **green and digital transformation**, especially in line with the broader goal of fostering **innovation and the adoption of advanced technologies**.

An updated information about the Clusters and open calls can be found on the official website.

Albanian Clusters are eligible to apply under this call by joining in the Consortium with EU Cluster organisations which are already registered or having submitted a request for registration on the ECCP. So far, three (3) Albanian Clusters are registered in ECCP:

- Albanian ICT Association (AITA),
- Wood Industry Cluster of Albania
- AgriNet Albania

#### Definition of Clusters:

The Cluster is a group of companies, service providers and subcontractors, companies operating in similar industries and the related institutions (such as government, business organisations, academic community, financial institutions, etc.) Depending on the type of relationship between companies in the cluster we can distinguish between vertical, horizontal and sector clusters.

Cluster organisations are the legal entities that support the strengthening of collaboration, networking and learning in innovation clusters and act as innovation support providers by providing or channelling specialised and customised business support services to stimulate innovation activities, especially in SMEs. They are usually the actors that facilitate strategic partnering across clusters.

## Innovation cluster

These are structures or organised groups of independent parties (such as innovative start-ups, small, medium and large enterprises, as well as research and knowledge dissemination organisations, non-for-profit organisations and other related economic actors) designed to stimulate innovative activity by promoting sharing of facilities and exchange of knowledge and expertise and by contributing affectively to knowledge transfer, networking, information dissemination and collaboration among the undertakings and other organisations in the cluster.

## ii. European Cluster Partnerships

The European Cluster Partnerships encourage clusters from Europe to intensify collaboration across regions and sectors to work concretely together on initiatives supporting their industrial ecosystems and, in particular, their SMEs.

There are four types of Partnerships focus on:

- **Innovation** to addresses the challenge to develop new cross-sectoral industrial value chains across the EU, by supporting the innovation potential of SMEs.
- **Internationalisation** to facilitate collaboration on internationalisation strategies and helps European SMEs access markets beyond Europe.
- **Excellence** to support the development of cluster management excellence and strengthens strategic cross-regional collaboration between industrial clusters across Europe.
- **Smart specialisation** to facilitate cluster cooperation in thematic areas related to regional smart specialisation strategies.

Under this Partnership Programme the calls will be opened for these types of partnerships

- **EU-Ukraine Cluster Partnership** Programme, where applicants can be European and Ukrainian cluster organisations or business network organisations that manage joint activities, facilitate networking and provide or channel specialised and customised business support services to their members and related actors.
- **EU-Japan Centre for industrial cooperation**
- **EU-SME Centre in China**, which serves as a first point of support for EU SMEs interested in internationalising their businesses to China.

## A facility for Clusters: The European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP)

ECCP is the European on-line Hub for cluster stakeholders (cluster organisations, policymakers and other related stakeholders from the cluster ecosystem) and the reference one-stop-shop for stakeholders in third countries aiming to set up partnerships with European counterparts.

They seek to strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of Europe's economy and industry, particularly SMEs, improving their performance in terms of productivity, innovation, internationalisation and resource efficiency.

**The ECCP acts as a service facility**, including mapping of over 1,500 cluster organisations worldwide , offering the latest news and open calls to a broad community, organise a variety of events (webinars, capacity building seminars, conferences), matchmaking events, an extensive knowledge database, toolkits and publications developed by the ECCP, European Commission, academia and the larger community. The Platform has other features for partner search, internationalisation, understanding trends and policy area.

### 2.1.1.4 Calls for tourism Sector

Tourism sector receives grants under SME Pillar, as well. Each year there is a call of proposal regarding tourism. In the recent Work Programme 2025, the grant targets the following topic:

- Supporting sustainable competitiveness of tourism SMEs

The total budget for this call for proposals is EUR 6.900.000 aims at supporting SMEs strengthening business approaches and becoming more competitive while fostering the green and digital transition, in line with the Tourism Transition Pathway .

The action is expected to contribute to increasing the sustainable competitiveness of the European Tourism ecosystem, namely for the Tourism SMEs, 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. It aims to boost innovation, resilience, sustainability and quality along the tourism value chain. The call is expected to be opened on Q2 2025.

**Tourism Transition Pathway** is a plan jointly created with actors of the tourism ecosystem detailing key actions, targets and conditions to achieve the green and digital transitions and long-term resilience of the sector. The transition pathway calls on the tourism community to implement measures in twenty-seven areas, including: (i) Circularity to reduce energy, waste, water and pollution, and at the same time to better meet the increasing demand for sustainable tourism; (ii) Data sharing practices to allow for new innovative tourism services and improve the sustainable management of destinations; (iii) Skills to ensure the availability of qualified workforce and attractive careers in the ecosystem.

### 2.1.1.5 Calls for business and SMEs in social economy

Social Economy is regularly supported through grants under the SMP. The last opened calls were focus on:

- Stepping up organisational and entrepreneurial capacity of SMEs in social economy
- Partnerships for circular value chains between mainstream businesses and SMEs in social economy

Business support organisations, VET providers, training providers, and other organisations from Albania have been eligible to apply, if could join any consortium created by at least 6 partners from different EU countries. It is recommended to consult the new Work Programmes for the forthcoming calls under the SME Pillar.

## 2.1.2 SME Bundle: Internal Market, Standardisation, Consumers and other Financial Services End-Users

**SME Bundle includes 3 other Pillars of SMP Programme.**

These pillars focus on issues related to the internal market and the objective of creating a borderless economic area. They promote company law, contract and extra-contractual law, and anti-money laundering measures. Additionally, they support standardisation, conformity assessment, accreditation, market surveillance, mutual recognition, and policies aimed at eliminating barriers to the free movement of products within the single market. The pillars also promote the free movement of capital and financial services, including the development of governance tools. Furthermore, they aim to protect consumers, support the interests of businesses and the environment, and uphold competition policy. The Calls of the 5th Work Programme 2025 for the SME Bundle are described below to showcase the types of calls and different tools to use to access to these funds.

*"Albania has not paid the entry fee required to be eligible to apply under the calls opened for these five SMP pillars; however, a brief description is provided for the remaining pillars."*

### **2.1.2.1 Competition policy for a stronger union in the digital age**

The Programme supports:

- Training of non-competition enforcers in the context of the ex-officio enforcement strategy
- Grants to support training of national judges in EU competition law

### **2.1.2.2 Standardisation Pillar**

The grants open under the Standardisation Pillar are mostly focused on EU standardisation Bodies to provide:

- Support to standardisation activities performed by CEN, CENELEC and ETSI, by national standardisation bodies jointly undertaken with the European standardisation organisations and by other bodies in cooperation with the European standardisation organisations.
- Support to organisations representing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and societal stakeholders in standardisation activities.

### **2.1.2.3 Consumers Pillar**

Each year there are calls for proposals for actions that support consumer education, awareness raising and local advice to consumers, etc. Usually, under this call the eligible organisations are public bodies or private non-profit bodies such as NGOs and consumer associations, representing customer interests.

### **2.1.3 Statistics Pillar**

It implements the specific objective of the Single Market Programme to develop, produce, disseminate and communicate European statistics in a timely, impartial and cost-efficient manner, through a strengthened European Statistical System,

### **2.1.4 Food safety Pillar**

This Pillar contributes to a high level of health for humans, animals and plants, food and feed areas, including by preventing, detecting and eradicating animal diseases and plant pests, including by means of emergency measures in the event of large-scale crisis situations and unforeseeable events affecting animal or plant health, supporting the improvement of the welfare of animals, the fight against antimicrobial resistance and the development of sustainable food production and consumption as well as by stimulating the exchange of best practices between stakeholders in those fields.

### **2.1.5 Internal Market Government Pillar**

A set of tools are financed by Single Market Programme to support the internal Market Governance. Some tools are not relevant for Albania, but the open sources such as The Your Europe Portal can be used as a source of information for specific issues linked to each EU Country.



TOOLS	DESCRIPTION OF TOOLS
The Your Europe Portal	It is the most relevant EU information website dedicated to citizens and the businesses, regarding taxations, goods, service, selling in the EU product requirements, finance and funding, human resources dealing with customers, starting or closing a business, etc. Everybody can have access to this Portal
Hub to the single digital gateway- The Once-Only hub	The Once-Only System lets EU public authorities securely exchange official documents and data at the request of citizens and businesses as part of cross-border administrative procedures, e.g., when registering an address or vehicle when moving abroad.
Your Europe Advice	It is an EU advice service for the EU public provided free and personalised for clarification of the European law that applies in specific case and supports how to exercise the EU rights.
SOLVIT	It is a problem-solving network that deals with problems between EU individuals or companies and the authorities in another country, in cases where there is a possible misapplication of EU law.
The Internal Market Information system (IMI)	IMI is an online tool to effective implementation, coordination and communication between the equivalent authorities of every EU country regarding EU' Single Market Law for the rights of people, goods, services and capital to move freely across the borders of the Member states.
The Single Market and Competitiveness Scoreboard	The Scoreboard monitors the countries' performance in implementing the four freedoms: movement of goods, capital, services, and labour/people

#### Eligibility criteria and Selection and award criteria for grants

Each proposal is evaluated on the basis of the selection criteria specified in the respective calls for proposals. Indicatively, these criteria are based on the following:

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION OF EACH CRITERIA
Eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applicant organisations must be established in EU Member States or in third countries participating in the programme.</li> <li>Specific eligibility criteria may be set out in the call for proposals.</li> </ul>
Criteria for financial, Operational and management capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial capacity to complete the proposed project;</li> <li>Stable and sufficient sources of finance to ensure the continuity of the organisation throughout the project and to play a part in financing it;</li> <li>Sufficient technical and management capacity to complete the project;</li> <li>Stable and sufficient sources of finance to ensure the continuity of the organisation throughout the project and to play a part in financing it;</li> <li>Sufficient technical and management capacity to complete the project;</li> <li>Capacity to manage activities corresponding to the size of the project for which a grant is requested;</li> <li>Adequate professional qualifications and experience of the team responsible for the project/operation.</li> </ul>
Criteria for evaluation of the quality of proposals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relevance of the actions proposed in view of the objectives established in the call;</li> <li>Quality (including operational quality) of the proposed actions;</li> <li>Project design and implementation;</li> <li>Project team and cooperation arrangements;</li> <li>Impact.</li> </ul>

## 2.2 HORIZON EUROPE

Albania became an associated partner in the Horizon Europe Programme, after concluding negotiations with the European Commission. The Agreement was officially signed and subsequently ratified by the Albanian Parliament on May 30, 2022, with its provisions retroactively effective from January 1, 2021.

**Horizon Europe** is the European Union's largest research and innovation programme for the period 2021–2027, **with a budget of €€95.5 billion**. This flagship programme aims to advance research and innovation by fostering the creation and dissemination of high-quality knowledge, broadening access to research resources, enhancing economic opportunities, and promoting innovative collaborative frameworks.

Through this Programme, the EU seeks to address pressing challenges faced by its citizens, including workforce development, industrial modernization, infrastructure improvements, and the promotion of inter-regional cooperation. Horizon Europe provides plenty of opportunities to tackle climate change, make Europe fit for the digital age, help achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

The Horizon Europe Programme is open to researchers, organisations, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), corporations, associations, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) across all sectors.

It is easier than ever for SMEs to apply. SMEs may also benefit from an international research centres, academic institutions, centres of excellence, public and private sector, interconnected effort aimed at supporting their innovation and market breakthroughs. Albanian researchers and SMEs can explore the possibilities to apply.

Horizon Europe funding programme has a number of novelties:

- The European Innovation Council (EIC)
- Research & Innovation (R&I) missions
- Open Science policy
- New approach to Partnerships Instrument
- Simpler rules of administrative burden in order to streamline the number of co-funded partnerships with partners like industry, civil society, and funding foundations.

### **The second Horizon Europe strategic plan 2025-2027**

The Horizon Europe strategic plan 2025-2027 steers research and innovation funding 2025-2027, addressing the key global challenges such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, the digital transition and an ageing population.

The strategic plan sets out **3 strategic orientations** for research and innovation investment under Horizon Europe for the years 2025-2027:

- Green transition- (At least 35% of Horizon Europe's resources are committed to be spent on climate action and 10% for 2025-2027 on biodiversity action.)
- Digital transition
- A more Resilient, Competitive, Inclusive and Democratic Europe

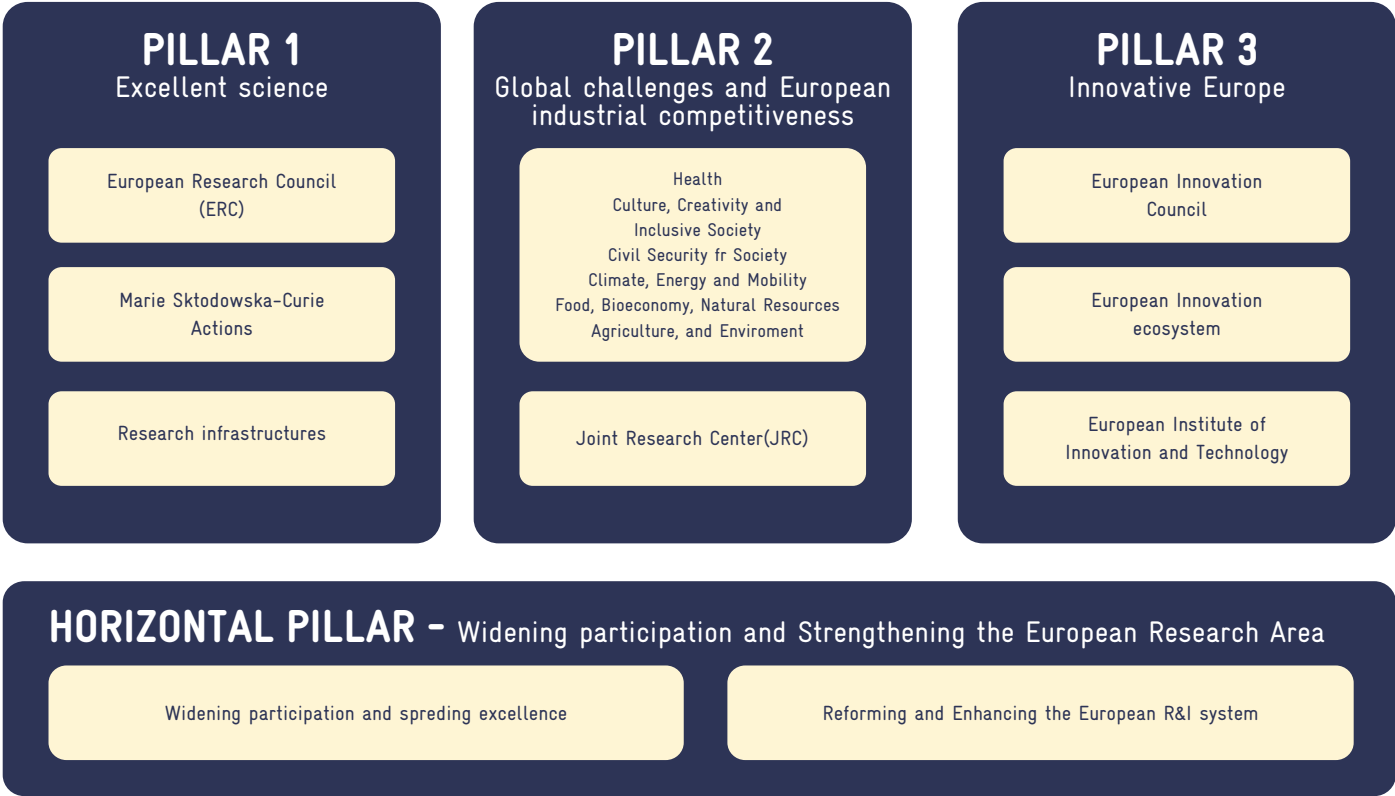
The remaining calls of Horizon Europe will be implemented through the work programmes 2025-2027





**Horizon Europe Architecture**

Due to its complexity, the structure of the Horizon Europe Programme is visually presented below to facilitate understanding for all interested applicants. It is organized by three different pillars, one horizontal pillar, partnership and missions.



## 2.2.1 PILLAR 1- EXCELLENT SCIENCE

This pillar supports researchers through fellowships, exchanges, and funding the projects defined and driven by researchers themselves. Albanian Universities, Research Centres and individual researchers can apply for the calls opened under this Pillar.

PILLAR 1- EXCELLENT SCIENCE		
European Research Council	Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions –(MSCA)	Research Infrastructures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ERC is the premier European funding organisation for excellent frontier research. It funds creative researchers of any nationality and age, to run projects based across Europe. The ERC offers the following grant schemes:</li><li>• Starting Grant (StG): for early-career researchers (2-7 years after PhD).</li><li>• Consolidator Grant (CoG): for mid-career researchers (7-12 years after PhD).</li><li>• Advanced Grant (AdG): for senior, established researchers.</li><li>• Proof of Concept (PoC): to explore innovation potential from ERC-funded projects.</li><li>• Synergy Grant (SyG): for small groups of researchers working together.</li></ul>	MSCA, is a sub-programme under Horizon Europe supporting researchers at all career stages and institutions. It is the reference programme for doctoral education and postdoctoral training. It equips researches with new knowledge and skills through mobility and training, supporting researcher mobility, as well as providing funding for companies to hire researchers.	(RI) offers funding for integrated and inter-connected world class research infrastructures that can be benefited for instance in testing phases of development.

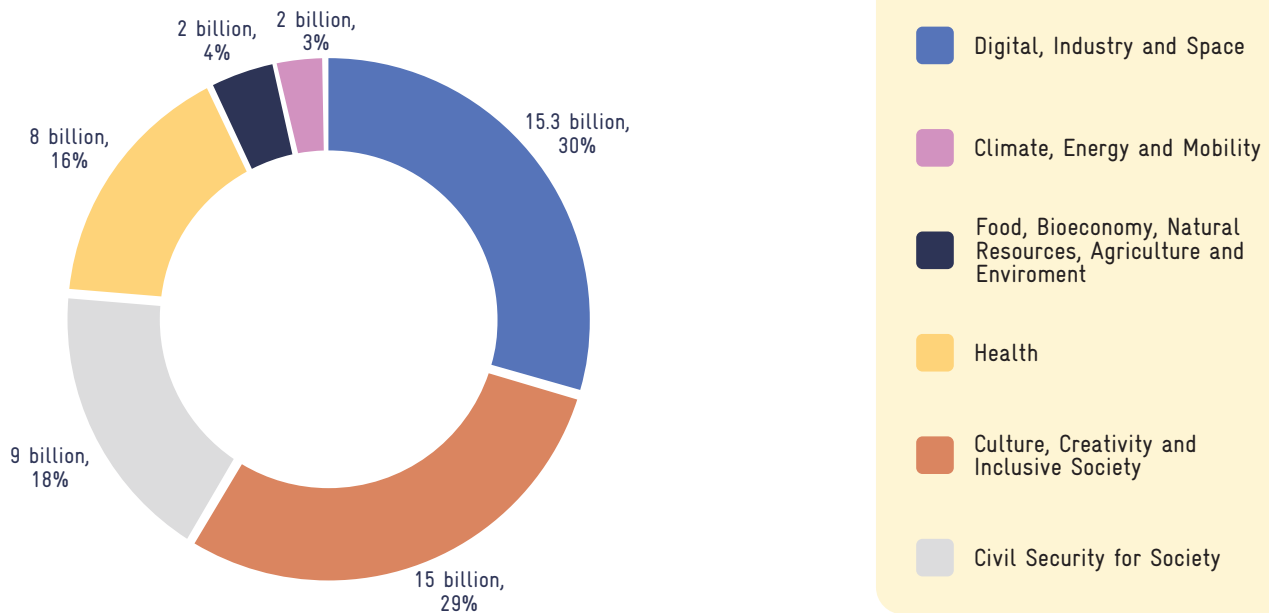
## 2.2.2 PILLAR 2 - Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness

This pillar supports the development of new key technologies and underpins EU policies and Sustainable Development Goal, by solving global challenges around issues that worry us daily, such as health, climate change, clean energy, mobility, security, digital, materials, etc.

It is the most relevant pillar for the industry, supporting cross-European collaborative research and innovation projects, where both industry and academia can be involved.

It consists of **six Clusters** and non-nuclear direct actions of the Joint Research Centre (JRC), with a Budget of **53.5 billion** Euro:

## Structure of PILLAR 2



### Cluster 1: Health

The strategic objectives of Cluster 1, addresses **key health challenges** and recent developments and supports **pandemic preparedness** through investments in medical countermeasures and data-driven health threat prediction to strengthen the European Health Union and comply with new EU health threat regulations.

To tackle the rise in mental health issues, Cluster 1 funds **mental health promotion and treatment initiatives**, notably through the Partnership for Brain Health. It also supports EU responses to **challenges related to an ageing population and the rise in non-communicable diseases**, contributing to the “Healthier Together” initiative and the European Mission on Cancer.

Cluster 1 aims to enhance **health system resilience** in coordination with the European Partnership on Transforming Health and Care Systems. **Digitalization in healthcare** will be furthered through R&I investments, with the European Health Data Space Regulation facilitating data-driven health innovation under strict data protection standards.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need for EU technological independence, especially in health. The updated EU pharmaceutical strategy will support the development of innovative health technologies, and Cluster 1 funds alternatives to **animal testing to improve biomedical research and chemical safety assessments**. To maximize public health impact, Cluster 1 coordinates with other EU programmes and **foster international research cooperation**.

The areas of intervention for this cluster are:

Health throughout the life course

- Environmental and social health determinants
- Non-communicable and rare diseases
- Infectious diseases, including poverty-related and neglected diseases
- Tools, technologies, and digital solutions for health and care, including personalised medicine
- Health care systems

## Cluster 2: Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society

Cluster 2, Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society aims to support democratic governance, cultural heritage, and societal transformation. Leveraging social sciences and humanities, it seeks to understand contemporary societal shifts and provides evidence-based policy options for a fair, inclusive green and digital EU transition.

Cluster 2 aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, addressing issues such as poverty, health, education, gender equality, sustainable cities, and justice.

Proposals are invited under three main focus areas:

TARGET AREAS	DESCRIPTIONS
Democracy and Governance	Research will provide insights and data to strengthen democratic institutions, enhance civic participation, protect fundamental rights, and address new geopolitical challenges.
Cultural Heritage and Creative Industries	This area focuses on improving access to, and preservation of, cultural heritage, fostering sustainable growth in cultural industries, and supporting a digital collaborative space for cultural heritage in Europe.
Social and Economic Transformations	Research will tackle social inequalities, support skills development, and contribute to inclusive economic growth. It will also address the effects of technological advances, migration, and promote fair green and digital transitions.

Horizon Europe ensures collaboration among universities, industries, SMEs, and citizens to bridge regional and generational divides. Cluster 2 projects may receive funding from multiple EU programmes, fostering cross-programme synergy and shared policy objectives.

## Cluster 3: Civil Security for Society

The Cluster 3 Work Programme focuses on strengthening EU security through research and innovation (R&I) in areas like cybersecurity, disaster resilience, and crime prevention. Key objectives include improving crisis prevention and preparedness, bolstering EU resilience to emerging threats, and supporting priorities such as the Security Union Strategy, cybersecurity, and disaster risk reduction.

The programme aims to advance EU priorities, including Promoting the European way of life, the European Green Deal, and a Digital Europe.

Six main **Destinations** guide its initiatives:

DESTINATIONS	DESCRIPTION OF EACH DESTINATION
<b>Protection against crime and terrorism</b>	Developing enhanced capabilities for law enforcement, including cybercrime prevention, to better tackle crime while upholding fundamental rights.
<b>Management of EU external borders</b>	Enhancing security at borders to facilitate legal travel while preventing illicit trade and crime.
<b>Resilient infrastructure</b>	Strengthening physical and digital infrastructure to ensure essential societal functions are maintained.
<b>Increased cybersecurity</b>	Focusing on digital technology development to safeguard data and networks, contributing to a secure on-line environment and technological sovereignty
<b>Disaster-resilient society</b>	Reducing disaster impact through prevention, preparedness, and systemic risk management.
<b>Strengthened security R&amp;I</b>	Supporting cross-cutting research to improve innovation uptake, market readiness, and industrialization of security solutions.

Projects under Cluster 3 involve national authorities, alongside researchers, to ensure practical, needs-driven outcomes. A strong emphasis is placed on ethical standards, societal impact, and public trust, incorporating social sciences and humanities to engage citizens and respect fundamental rights. Cluster 3 supports R&I that aligns with broader EU goals, fostering a secure, open, and resilient EU society.

## Cluster 4: Digital, Industry and Space

The Cluster for Digital, Industry, and Space Work Programme focuses on strengthening Europe's industrial base and strategic autonomy by supporting advancements in digital and industrial technologies, including space.

Key objectives are to reduce reliance on third countries, enhance resilience, and address challenges like sustainability and inclusiveness. The programme aligns with the EU's green and digital transition strategies, aiming to foster leadership in clean, climate-neutral industries and secure, dynamic data economies

Six expected impacts include:

EXPECTED IMPACTS	DESCRIPTION OF EXPECTED IMPACT
<b>Global leadership in green technologies</b>	Developing clean industrial value chains and climate-neutral digital systems.
<b>Strategic autonomy in value chains</b>	Strengthening Europe's supply of critical raw materials and increasing resource efficiency.
<b>Sovereignty in digital tech</b>	Building capacities in critical digital areas and fostering early adoption of new technologies.
<b>Data-driven economy</b>	Advancing data infrastructures to create a secure, integrated data market.
<b>Space autonomy</b>	Ensuring independent access to space for critical EU infrastructure and competitiveness.
<b>Human-centred technology</b>	Focusing on ethical tech development and social innovation, empowering end-users.

The areas of intervention for this cluster are:

- Manufacturing technologies
- Key digital technologies, including quantum technologies
- Emerging enabling technologies
- Advanced materials
- Artificial intelligence and robotics
- Next generation internet
- Advanced computing and Big Data
- Circular industries
- Low-carbon and clean industries
- Space, including Earth observation

Horizon Europe fosters cooperation between universities, SMEs, and communities, creating synergies with EU funds like the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Recovery and Resilience Facility to maximize Impact for supporting projects aligned with EU's industrial, digital, and green priorities and enhancing funding accessibility and innovation potential through multi-sector partnerships.

## Cluster 5: Climate, Energy and Mobility

The Cluster 5 Work Programme aims to accelerate the green and digital transitions, guiding Europe towards climate neutrality by 2050. This programme focuses on transforming key sectors—such as energy and mobility—to achieve greenhouse gas neutrality, enhance resilience, and boost competitiveness.

Key components include:

COMPONENTS	DESCRIPTION OF COMPONENTS
<b>Climate Targets</b>	In compliance with the European Climate Law, the EU aims for a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and full climate neutrality by 2050, bolstered by 'Fit for 55' policies and REPowerEU initiatives to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, especially from Russia.
<b>Research and Innovation (R&amp;I)</b>	Central to these goals, R&I will develop, test, and scale up innovative, market-ready solutions, enhancing Europe's global competitiveness.
<b>Strategic Orientations</b>	The programme contributes to Key Strategic Objectives (KSOs): <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Driving digital and green technologies through human-centred innovation.</li><li>• Restoring ecosystems and ensuring sustainable resource management.</li><li>• Leading in climate-neutral, circular economy practices.</li><li>• Building a resilient, inclusive, and democratic society that supports citizens in the green and digital transitions.</li></ul>

The areas of intervention for this cluster are:

- climate science and solutions
- energy supply
- energy systems and grids
- buildings and industrial facilities in energy transition
- communities and cities
- industrial competitiveness in transport
- clean, safe and accessible transport and mobility
- smart mobility
- energy storage

Cluster 5 is organized into “**Destinations**”, each structured around specific thematic goals, ensuring targeted impacts across multiple strategic objectives.

Each Destination targets specific goals, such as:

- Destination 1 – **fostering climate science**
- Destination 2 – **supporting cross-cutting technologies,**
- Destination 3 – **enhancing sustainable energy supply**
- Destination 4 – **reducing energy demand in buildings and industry,**
- Destinations 5 and 6 – **improving transport performance and mobility systems**

This programme encourages synergies between EU and national funding mechanisms, promoting collaboration across universities, industries, SMEs, and citizen groups to bridge geographic and generational divides. Projects may seek additional funding from other EU sources, to maximize impact.

Key strategies include:

STRATEGIES	DESCRIPTION
Innovation Actions	Pilot projects with a 60% funding rate (except for non-profits) to increase industry involvement.
International Cooperation	Partnerships through Mission Innovation
Social and Gender Aspects	Social sciences and gender considerations are integrated to improve societal acceptance and user safety.

## Cluster 6: Food, Bio-economy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment

Cluster 6 drives **balanced environmental, social, and economic development**, reshaping the **EU's economy and society** to **combat environmental degradation, restore biodiversity, and promote resource efficiency**.

By aligning with **climate goals**, it ensures **food and water security**, supports **green innovation**, and strengthens **economic resilience**, creating a future where growth and sustainability coexist.

Cluster 6's Key Strategic Orientations include **restoring ecosystems, fostering a climate-neutral economy, and promoting resilience and inclusivity**. It aims to achieve these through six expected impacts, organized into "**thematic destinations**", with cross-cutting actions contributing to multiple goals. Key objectives include **preserving natural carbon sinks (e.g., forests, wetlands), reducing greenhouse gases, transforming the food system, and promoting circular and bio-based economies**.

Cluster 6 plays a crucial role in **EU sustainability efforts**, supporting initiatives like the **biodiversity strategy, circular economy action plan, zero pollution strategy, and forest strategies**—all working toward **EU climate neutrality by 2050**.

Additionally, Cluster 6 supports the EU's *Green Deal* objectives by **protecting ecosystems, restoring biodiversity, and enhancing the sustainability of essential sectors like agriculture, forestry, and fisheries**. It prioritizes reducing biodiversity loss and adapting to climate challenges through research and innovation (R&I), aiming for a resilient and inclusive food system aligned with the EU's *Farm to Fork* strategy.

Cluster 6 activities empower farmers and producers with sustainable practices, enhance food safety, and reduce reliance on pesticides and antimicrobials, ultimately ensuring healthy diets and climate-resilient food systems. This aligns with EU policies like the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the **Zero Pollution Action Plan**.

The program **promotes regional development and rural innovation** through initiatives like smart villages and living labs, fostering digital and nature-based innovations for a fair, inclusive transition.

Cluster 6 also supports synergies with EU funding sources, including the European Regional Development Fund and Just Transition Fund, enhancing funding and collaboration opportunities for projects at national and regional levels.

Cluster 6 also **prioritizes international cooperation**, allowing non-EU countries to participate broadly, to address global issues in biodiversity, climate change, and sustainable agriculture. This supports the EU's **Global Gateway Strategy**, encouraging sustainable development and technology transfer worldwide. Moreover, it values the role of social sciences, gender equality, and interdisciplinary approaches, involving the public



and civil society in shaping the EU’s climate roadmap.

The six thematic clusters of Pillar II are each designed to tackle global challenges and EU priorities. To ensure a strategic approach, the **Work Programme**—updated every **two years**—outlines the specific objectives, funding allocations, and research focus areas within these clusters. This framework guides researchers and industry leaders in aligning their proposals with EU ambitions.

Cross-cluster issue: The New European Bauhaus (NEB)

The European Union is moving ahead with its goals to: (i) achieve climate neutrality by 2050; (ii) reduce net greenhouse-gas emissions by 55% by 2030; (iii) shift to a circular economy; and (iv) protect biodiversity.

The **NEB** pays special attention to the built environment, bringing together all types of stakeholders (the general public, universities, research institutes, municipalities, national and regional authorities, architects, artists, communities, and businesses) to promote transformative innovation in support of the Green Deal.

2.2.3 PILLAR III - INNOVATIVE EUROPE

This pillar aims to make Europe a front runner in market-creating innovation. The funding body is the European Innovation Council (EIC), operating as a one-stop shop for **high potential and breakthrough technologies and innovative companies**. 70% of the budget is earmarked for SMEs to support changing innovations throughout the lifecycle from early-stage research to proof of concept, technology transfer, scale up of start-ups and SMEs that may be too risky for private investors.

Structure of Pillar III features three distinctive and complementary instruments:

PILLAR III- INNOVATIVE EUROPE		
European Innovation Council - EIC	European Innovation Ecosystems -EIE	European Institute of Innovation and Technology – EIT
Support to innovations, start-ups, SMEs and research team developing high-risk, high-impact breakthrough innovation, with a particular focus on scaling up and market creating potential.	The European Innovation Ecosystems seeks to develop interconnected, inclusive, and efficient innovation ecosystems	The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) focus on building interconnection and supports inclusive innovation ecosystem by fostering collaboration among business, education, research, public authorities, and civil society.
€10,105 billion	€527 Million	€2.965 billion

2.2.3.1-European Innovation Council

The European Innovation Council work programme 2024 opens funding opportunities worth over €1.2 billion for strategic technologies and scaling up companies. The majority is dedicated to SMEs and start-ups to develop and scale up **“deep tech” innovations** in critical fields such as generative **artificial intelligence (AI)**, **space, critical raw materials, semiconductors and quantum technologies**.

EIC supports high-risk innovations with grants, equity investments, and business acceleration services to foster breakthrough technologies and scale up companies. Its goals are to identify and support innovations that create new markets or address societal challenges too risky for the market alone, and to accelerate

the development and commercialization of advanced technologies in areas like AI, quantum computing, and renewable energy.

Key EIC programs include:

1. **EIC Pathfinder** – for pioneering, high-risk technologies from research.
2. **EIC Transition** – to help move research outcomes toward innovation.
3. **EIC Accelerator** – for scaling high-risk innovations in start-ups and SMEs with blended finance (grants plus EIC Fund equity).
4. **EIC Business Acceleration Services** – offering coaching, mentoring, and investment matching for EIC-backed projects.

The EIC Fund, providing equity investments up to €15 million, supports start-ups and SMEs to bridge financing gaps and attract more investment. Horizon Europe strengthens EIC impact with guidance from leading innovators, strategic Programme Managers, and transition funding to bridge research and application. Additionally, collaborations with the European Research Council (ERC) and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) offer fast-track access for researchers and start-ups to the EIC pipeline.

#### i. EIC Pathfinder

The primary goal of the EIC Pathfinder for advanced research is to establish a scientific foundation for groundbreaking technologies. **It helps during the initial phases of scientific, technological, or deep-tech research and development.** Pathfinder projects are designed to leverage new, innovative directions in science and technology to disrupt existing fields and markets or to create new opportunities by developing cutting-edge technological solutions through:

- EIC Pathfinder Open
- EIC Pathfinder Challenges

The EIC Pathfinder supports early-stage development of future technologies and TRLs from 1 to 4. EIC Pathfinder Open, which supports projects across any scientific, technological, or application domain without specific thematic priorities.

The project with ambitious vision for radically new technology with high impact in economy receive grant for a Research and Innovation Action (RIA), which EU contributions can reach up to €3 million. The success rate for 2024 under these calls:

In addition to funding, successful applicants will receive tailor-made access to a wide range of Business Acceleration Services (BAS) and interactions with EIC Programme Managers. It is a EIC booster grants up to 50,000 Euro

### EIC Pathfinder Challenges

**EIC Pathfinder Challenges** focuses on supporting cohesive portfolios of projects **within defined thematic areas** to achieve specific objectives for each Challenge. The project with new cutting-edge direction in science and technology that disrupt market can apply to receive an EU contribution of €4 million for the Pathfinder Challenges.

The success rate for 2024 under these calls is 7% of the applications received

The thematic areas include **four challenges**:

- Biotechnology for Climate Resilient Crops and Plant-based Bio-manufacturing.

The project should focus on producing more food using biotechnology, by increasing production, but with living proteins.

- Generative Agent to revolutionize Medical Diagnosis and Treatment of Cancer

This call includes technological area and clinical area, addressing only one type of cancer.

- Towards autonomous robot collectives delivering collaborative tasks in dynamic unstructured construction environments

The project should focus on material-robot building system, develop of several robots work together to assemble and should achieve TRL4 demonstration

- Waste to value devices: Circular production of renewable fuels, chemicals and materials

The project should create e.g. products from products that are not recycle

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION OF EACH CRITERIA FOR APPLICATION
<b>Eligible entities</b>	All types of entities: universities, research organisations, SMEs, startups, industrial partners, or individuals.
<b>EU Contribution</b>	Pathfinder Open €3 million
	Pathfinder Challenge €4 million
<b>Funding rate</b>	100%
<b>TRL Level</b>	1-4 ( <b>early-stage</b> development)
<b>Consortium composition</b>	1 single entity falling under SME definition (EU or Associated member), 2 entities from different states; 3 legal entities, at least one legal entity must be based in a Member State and at least two, to be established in different Member States or Associated Countries
<b>Application process</b>	The application process for the EIC Pathfinder consists of the following steps: Step 1: Writing and submitting the proposal with a limit of 20 pages Step 2: Evaluation of the proposal by an EIC Jury Step 3: Signing the Grant Agreement
<b>Submission of Proposals</b>	Funding & Tenders Portal
<b>Evaluation</b>	Excellence (60%), impact (20%) quality & efficiency (20%)
<b>Deadline for submitting proposals</b>	21/05/2025 for the EIC Pathfinder Open
<b>Deadline for submitting proposals</b>	<b>29/10/2025 for the EIC Pathfinder Challenge</b>

## ii. EIC Transition

The EIC Transition is designed to support innovation activities that extend beyond experimental proof of principle in laboratory settings. Its primary goal is to assist in the maturation and validation of novel technologies, facilitating their journey from the lab to relevant application environments.

This programme is aimed at SMEs, start-ups, and organisations that meet specific criteria:

- They have identified EU-funded project results with promising commercial potential, which could serve as the foundation for innovation and the creation of new businesses.
- They envision novel, promising technologies that are ready for the next steps toward maturation and validation, aimed at specific, high-potential commercial applications.
- They have conducted preliminary market research to identify potential markets for their innovations and have explored potential competitors in those markets.
- They are committed to building a motivated and entrepreneurial team that possesses a diverse mix of skills, including researchers, business professionals, and marketers, to develop and drive their ideas toward commercial success.

Through these efforts, the EIC Transition aims to transform innovative concepts into viable business opportunities that contribute to economic growth and societal advancement.

The projects funded through the EIC Transition are eligible to receive Booster grants of a fixed amount not exceeding €50.000 to undertake complementary activities to explore potential pathways to commercialization or for portfolio activities. Additionally, beneficiaries can submit an EIC Accelerator proposal via the Fast Track scheme.

Beneficiaries can also receive extensive support through early stage business support services and can have access to a range of tailor-made Business Acceleration Services (BAS).

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION OF EACH CRITERIA APPLICATION
Eligible entities	All types of entities: universities, research organisations, SMEs, startups, industrial partners,
EU Contribution	€0.5 million - €2.5 million
Funding rate	100%
TRL Level	Start 3-4 and at the end of the project 5-6
Duration	1-3 years

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION OF EACH CRITERIA APPLICATION
Application process	The application process for the EIC Accelerator comprises 3 basic steps. Each step passed successfully gives access to the next step:  Step 1: Writing and submitting the proposal, 22 pages without cover Step 2: Evaluation of the proposal by an EIC Jury Step 3: Face to face interview with the EIC Jury
Submission of Proposals	Funding & Tenders Portal
Deadline for submitting proposals	17/09/2025 at 17:00 Brussels local time

### iii. EIC accelerator

The EIC Accelerator offers support to start-ups and SMEs that have an innovative, game-changing product, service or business model that could create new markets or disrupt existing ones in Europe and even worldwide. Additionally, it supports SMEs that have the ambition and commitment to scale up and are looking for substantial funding, but the risks involved are too high for private investors alone to invest.

70% of the project's budget is funded by EC, with a maximum grant of €2.5 million (+ optional investment component of max €15 million, in the form of equity funding, coaching & mentoring, networking – blended finance option). Grant funding is in the form of Lump Sum contribution–

In order to leverage investments, beneficiaries also have access to a range of tailor-made Business Acceleration Services (BAS) such as access to global partners, access to coaches, mentors, expertise and trainings, as well as access to innovation ecosystem and peers.

The starting **TRL is between 6 and 8** and there are various industry areas, split in Digital technologies, challenges (Health and Green Deal) and the open call for projects that do not apply for any of the previous categories.

*Scale up your ideas with Accelerator funding! This is suited for SMEs, in particular SMEs with female CEOs, start-ups and spinout companies to develop and scale up game-changing innovations.*

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION OF EACH CRITERIA FOR APPLICATION
Eligible entities	Start-ups and SMEs
EU Contribution	maximum grant of €2.5 million + optional investment component of max €15 million
Funding rate	70%
TRL Level	The starting is <b>between 6 and 8</b>
Duration	24 months

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION OF EACH CRITERIA FOR APPLICATION
<b>Application process</b>	<p>The application process for the EIC Accelerator comprises 3 basic steps. Each step passed successfully gives access to the next step:</p> <p>Step 1: Writing and submitting a short proposal  Step 2: Developing and submitting a full proposal  Step 3: Face to face interview with the EIC Jury</p>
<b>Submission of Proposals</b>	Funding & Tenders Portal
<b>Deadline for submitting proposals</b>	12/03/2025 & 01/10/2025

## Women TechEU Initiative

The Women TechEU Initiative provides support to early-stage, women-led deep-tech startups, aiming to reduce the gender gap in the tech industry and promote a diverse European startup ecosystem. By empowering women entrepreneurs, it strengthens the competitiveness of startups addressing key societal challenges and prepares them for future European Innovation Council (EIC) funding opportunities.

Eligibility requires that these startups be established at least six months before applying and have women founders or co-founders in top management roles (such as CEO, CTO, or CSO). The initiative welcomes deep-tech startups from any field, prioritizing gender balance and leadership by women. Startups should not have received substantial prior funding to qualify for financial support under this program.

The programme aims to foster diversity in geographic participation and tech domains, with a strong focus on outreach, especially in underrepresented regions. It will be at least two calls per year and allocate at least 75% of its budget to funding women-led startups, offering up to EUR **75,000 per startup** to support various business development needs.

Grantees will also receive mentoring and coaching through BAS under a separate EIC budget, with access to networking and pitching events. The project is planned for two years, with the option to extend for another year if milestones are met.

The third Women TechEU open call, closed in March 2025, had reached a record of 1038 women-led startup applications from 42 eligible countries, including 26 widening countries. One application was submitted by an Albanian women-led start-up.

The final call is not yet announced, aiming to select 40 beneficiaries to receive €75,000 grant along the personalised business development programme

### Eligibility criteria:

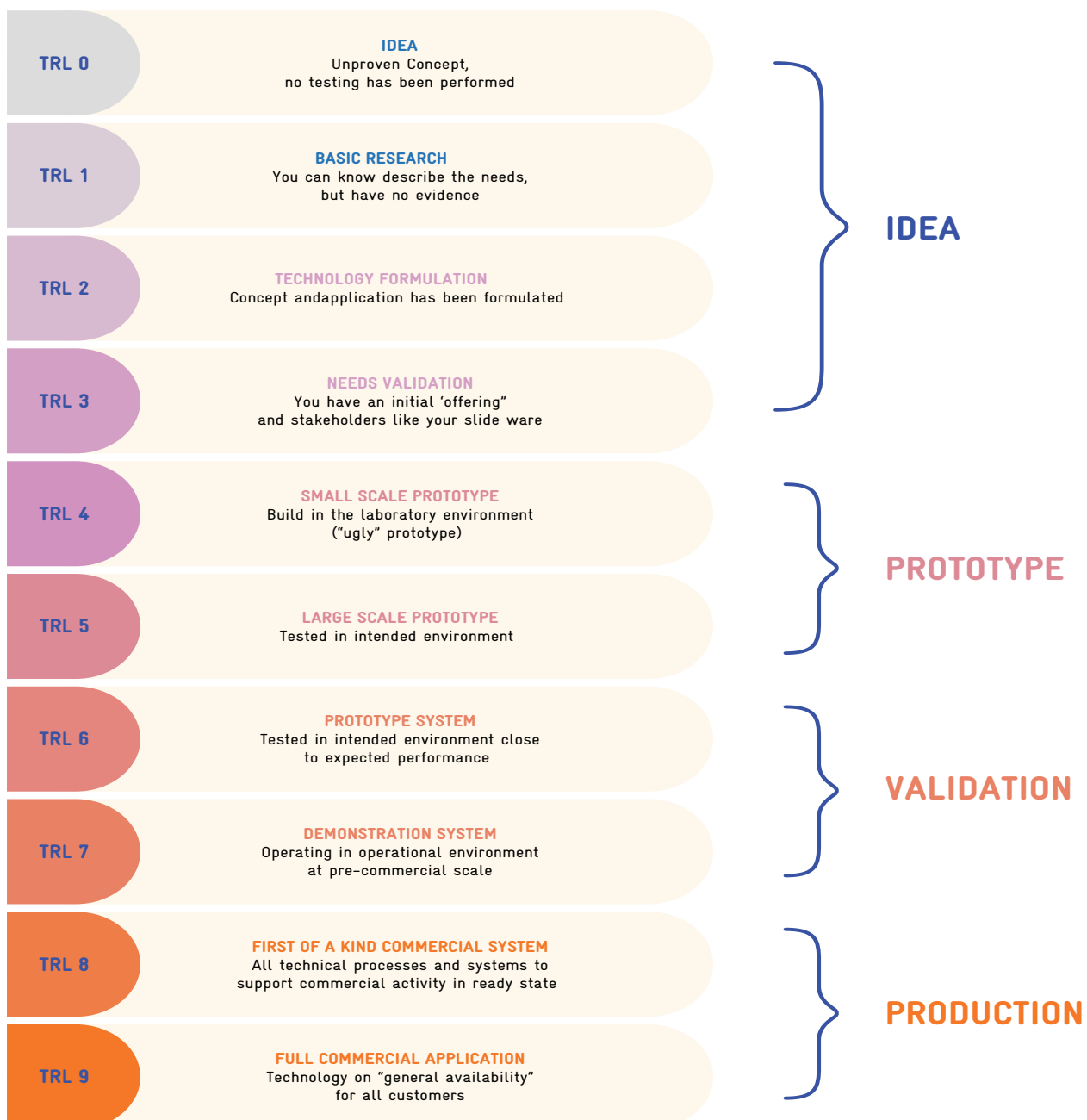
- The company is **women-led**, this entails that a woman is legally recognized as a co/founder of the company and must currently hold a top management position, women need to make up 25% of the company in total, and it is a private company
- The company must be **an early-stage start-up**, this means that the company must be in operation from 6 months to 8 years at the submission of the proposal, it is before reaching high fidelity

minimum **viable product (TRL 3-6)** and has raised limited funding up to €1million in equity

- The company is deep tech, building technology that doesn't exist, is in the edge of science and pioneering.

TRL-Technology Readiness Level (TRL )- serves as a standard framework for evaluating the maturity of innovation and technologies that are submitted for funding, ensuring that projects that receive funding have a high potential for success. TRLs are often specified in the different calls of the programme and are integrated as eligibility requirements for participation. TRL is a reference for different stakeholders (such as engineers, VCs and investors) to determine the current stage of development of an innovation. TRLs scale is made up of nine levels (from 1 to 9) representing different stages of technological development:

## How to measure your technology readiness levels - TRL



Deep Tech: Deep technology is a classification of an institution, an organisation or a start-up company, with the expressed objective of providing advanced and emerging technology solutions to deep societal challenges. They present scientific or engineering challenges requiring lengthy research and development, and large capital investment before successful commercialization.

Their primary risk is technical risk, while market risk is often significantly lower due to the clear potential value of solution to society. The underlying scientific or engineering problems being solved by deep tech companies generate valuable intellectual property and are hard to reproduce. Moreover, the solutions provided by deep technology and applications are critical for solving the complex global challenges that humanity faces, including climate change, sustainable energy or health.

### 2.2.3.2-European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE)

The European Innovation Ecosystems work programme 2025 seeks to develop more interconnected, inclusive, and efficient innovation ecosystems that support company scaling and foster innovation to address significant challenges responsibly, as outlined in the New European Innovation Agenda.

The programme consists of action under two main destinations: CONNECT and INNOVSMES

- **CONNECT- Interconnected Innovation Ecosystems:** This focuses on enhancing connectivity among innovation ecosystems across the EU by leveraging national, regional, and local strengths. It aims to involve various stakeholders to achieve collective goals, particularly in addressing the innovation divide and promoting green, digital, and social transitions.

Calls under Destination -CONNECT	Topics	Type of action	Budget in EUR	No. of projects to be funded
HORIZON-EIE-2025-02-CONNECT-01	Preparatory action for setting up joint programmes among innovation ecosystems actors	CSA	6 million	6
HORIZON-EIE-2025-02-CONNECT-02	Implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys	Co-funded	35 million	5
HORIZON-EIE-2025-03-CONNECT-01	European network of national competence centres for innovation procurement	CSA	4 million	4
HORIZON-EIE-2025-03-CONNECT-02	Expanding Investment Ecosystems	CSA	5 million	5
HORIZON-EIE-2025-03-CONNECT-03	Scaling up deep tech ecosystems	RIA	5 million	1



- **INNOVSMES: Partnership on Innovative SMEs**

This destination supports the European Partnership on Innovative Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), helping them enhance their research and innovation capacities, improve productivity embed in global value chains and access new markets.

Calls under Destination -INNOVSMES	Topics	Type of action	Budget in EUR	No. of projects to be funded
HORIZON-EIE-2025-03-INNOVSMES-01	European Partnership on Innovative SMEs	Co-funded	40 million	1

The work programme aligns with Horizon Europe's strategic objectives and collaborates with other initiatives, such as the European Innovation Council (EIC), the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), and various EU funding and policy frameworks. It emphasizes the importance of sharing best practices and enhancing coordination among national innovation policies through the EIC Forum, which aims to foster conducive conditions for innovation. Overall, the programme promotes a coherent and inclusive EU innovation ecosystem policy.

### 2.2.3.3-European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) supports innovation by fostering collaboration among business, education, research, public authorities, and civil society. It offers training for entrepreneurs, promotes the development of innovative products and services, and provides support for start-ups and scale-ups. The EIT operates through pan-European partnerships, known as **Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs)**.

The EIT Community currently counts nine KICs, each dedicated to tackling a major societal challenge through innovation. From climate change and health to digital transformation and sustainable energy, the EIT KICs bring together leading partners from business, research, and education to tackle Europe's main challenges through innovation.

- EIT Climate-KIC
- EIT Culture & Creativity
- EIT Digital
- EIT Food
- EIT Health
- EIT InnoEnergy
- EIT Manufacturing
- EIT RawMaterials
- EIT Urban Mobility

With local offices across Europe – in every EU Member State and beyond – the EIT Community forms Europe's largest innovation ecosystem, connecting local innovation ecosystems with the resources of its vast Europe-wide network.

To face these global challenges, EIT community of partners offers a wide range of education courses, business creation and acceleration services, and innovation-driven research projects.

From 2021 to 2027, the EIT aims to:

- Strengthen sustainable innovation ecosystems across Europe
- Foster the development of entrepreneurial and innovation skills in a lifelong learning perspective
- Support EU universities in integrating more entrepreneurial education
- Bring new solutions to global societal challenges to the market
- Create synergies and added value within Horizon Europe

The EIT will also work closely with other Horizon Europe programs, particularly the European Innovation Council, to maximize innovation synergies across Europe.

## 2.2.4 WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND STRENGTHENING THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA – WIDERA

The Horizon Europe outlines goals to widen participation in research and innovation (R&I) and strengthen the European Research Area (ERA) to bridge disparities between EU regions and enhance Europe's capacity for sustainable and digital transitions, fostering resilience and strategic autonomy.

**The Work Programme 2025** for “**Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area**” includes two components:

1. Widening participation and spreading excellence;
2. Strengthening the European Research Area (ERA) by reforming and enhancing the European research and innovation system.

HORIZONTAL PILLAR	
Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area	
Project types	
Widening participation and spreading excellence	Reforming and enhancing the European Research and Innovation system
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Teaming, Twinning, ERA Chairs</li><li>» European Cooperation Science and Technology (COST)</li><li>» Boosting National Contact Points (NCPs) activities, pre-proposal checks and advice</li><li>» Brain circulation</li><li>» Excellence initiatives</li><li>» Possibility for entities from widening countries to join already selected collaborative R&amp;I actions</li><li>» Recognition of participation</li><li>» Matchmaking service</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Strengthening the evidence base for the R&amp;I policy</li><li>» Foresight</li><li>» Support for policy makers to the ERA development</li><li>» Support to national R&amp;I policy reform, including Policy Support Facility</li><li>» Attractive researcher careers and links with higher education</li><li>» Open science</li><li>» Gender equality</li><li>» Ethics and integrity</li><li>» Support to international cooperation</li><li>» Scientific input to other policies</li></ul>

**Widening Participation and Spreading Excellence:** This component targets “Widening Countries ,” where R&I systems are less developed, aiming to close gaps between leading and lagging regions in terms of R&I capacity.

According to the Horizon Europe regulation in this programme component, Albania is among the less advanced countries that are eligible for hosting the co-ordinator of widening actions.

It encourages institutional reforms, promotes national investments in R&I, and fosters regional and international collaboration to help under-represented regions enhance research excellence.

By linking R&I advancements with economic and social objectives, the work programme promotes knowledge circulation, interregional collaboration, and skill-building within a shared European ecosystem, facilitating synergies with regional and international investments to enhance the performance of European R&I, as a whole.

Improving access to excellence aims to build stronger, geographically diverse research and innovation (R&I) systems across Europe by enhancing R&I capacities in Widening countries through actions that promote networking, capacity building, and participation in EU-wide research efforts. The strategy includes partnerships with leading institutions to build a pan-European innovation ecosystem, supported by Horizon Europe and Erasmus+, to elevate Widening countries to competitive European and international levels.

The programme’s initiatives, including **Twinning, Teaming**, and university-related schemes, target different stakeholders, from individual researchers to institutions. Teaming focuses on creating or updating centres of excellence in collaboration with top international institutions, which can become local hubs of innovation and **attract talent**. It focuses on capacity building encompasses both scientific and management skills to support institutions in leading EU research projects.

By **fostering innovation and cooperation** between academia, business, and government, these actions are expected to increase R&I capacity, drive structural reforms, boost Horizon Europe participation, and strengthen ties within the European R&I landscape. The programme also prioritizes cross-cutting objectives, including gender equality and open science practices. Expected outcomes include stronger R&I systems, greater international outreach, increased talent retention, and higher success in securing EU funding and leadership roles.

Destination: Improved Access to Excellence		
Expected Calls:	Deadline	Budget per project
<i>Expected Call:</i> HORIZON-WIDRA-2025-01-ACCESS-01: European Excellence Initiative (EEI)	20 November 2025	2-5 million
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-02-ACCESS-01: EIC pre-accelerator - Widening	18 November 2025	300-500,000
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-03-ACCESS-01: Hop-on facility	4 September 2025	200-400,000
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-05-ACCESS01: Implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys in widening countries	15 October 2025	5-8 million

**The Teaming action** aims to establish new or modernize existing centres of excellence in low research and innovation (R&I) performing countries by forming partnerships with leading European scientific institutions. This initiative intends to help these countries become competitive in global R&I, enhancing national and regional R&I capabilities. To maximize impact, projects must secure complementary funding from national, regional, European, or private sources and align with EU objectives like smart specialization strategies and sustainability goals.

Key requirements include developing a strategic vision, a plan for securing long-term funding, and a structure that ensures autonomy in decision-making, management, and recruitment. Proposals are evaluated on their potential to develop R&I excellence, drive socio-economic growth, and stimulate reforms in national R&I systems. Successful proposals must present an investment plan with letters of commitment for complementary funding. The Horizon Europe grant will primarily fund start-up costs, staff recruitment, and initial operational expenses, with a minor research component (up to 10%) allowed to develop methodologies and integrate new scientific staff.

The Teaming projects are expected to achieve measurable impacts, such as establishing international partnerships, increasing research publications, and stimulating institutional or system-level changes. **The project duration can be up to six years**, with indicators provided for measuring its success. Additionally, gender equality and open recruitment policies are emphasized, aligning with European Research Area objectives.

### **Destination: Reforming and Enhancing the EU Research and Innovation System**

**Strengthening the ERA:** This component supports the broader EU R&I landscape by promoting structural reforms, improving researcher mobility, fostering brain circulation, and creating a unified market for knowledge and innovation across the EU. It aims to advance Europe's position in climate neutrality, digitalization, and post-COVID recovery by supporting access to excellence, enhancing talent mobility, transforming research outputs into economic assets, and strengthening partnerships across universities, industry, and small enterprises.

This initiative under Horizon Europe aims to maximize the impact of EU research funding, transitioning from an activity-driven to an impact-driven approach. It promotes the free flow of knowledge and supports the EU's green and digital transitions, post-COVID recovery, and socio-economic resilience.

**Objectives and Strands:** The programme, called Destination 3, focuses on four key areas:

- **Investments and Reforms:** Encouraging strategic investments and reforms to accelerate digital and green transitions and economic recovery.
- **Access to Excellence:** Ensuring balanced research quality and performance across the EU, utilizing Horizon Europe and regional Cohesion Policy strategies.
- **Economic Impact of R&I:** Driving R&I results into practical applications to support competitiveness and societal resilience.
- **Deepening the ERA:** Fostering open science, education, and gender equality, enabling knowledge circulation, and establishing a skilled workforce.

**Expected Impacts:** The program envisions significant enhancements to the EU's R&I system, such as:

- Improved **investment prioritization** and **access to excellence**.
- A stronger link between R&I outcomes and the economy.
- Creation of interconnected knowledge ecosystems, aligning research with societal needs.
- Promoting **open science** practices and citizen engagement.
- Support for attractive careers for researchers, promoting gender equality and inclusivity.
- A modernized, synergistic approach between higher education, research, and business.

Destination: Reforming and enhancing the European research and innovation system		
Expected Calls:	Deadline	Budget per project
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-01: Rolling out the ERA Policy Agenda results	18 September 2025	1,5-2 million
HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-02: Enable sustained coordination and guidance at the European level on institutional non-profit open access publishing		2 million

Ultimately, the program aspires to create a more efficient, open, and trusted European R&I environment that can adapt to future challenges while fostering greater societal engagement and alignment with strategic needs.

## Destination: Attracting and Mobilizing the Best Talents

This initiative supports the European Research Area (ERA) by fostering the free flow of knowledge and strengthening R&I systems in Widening countries. Its goals include developing researchers' skills and facilitating collaboration across the EU. The ERA Chairs programme helps universities and research institutions in these countries attract top talent under experienced researchers (ERA Chair holders) and implement structural changes to achieve long-term excellence.

The programme also promotes brain circulation by encouraging early-career and experienced researchers to work across various sectors and countries, focusing on inter-sectoral mobility and Widening countries to counteract brain drain. Special emphasis is placed on using existing research infrastructures more effectively, improving academia-business linkages, and promoting gender balance.

Expected Impacts:

- Institutional reforms in Widening countries.
- Enhanced use of research infrastructures.
- Attraction of top talent and a reduction in brain drain.
- Greater mobility and connections between academia and industry.
- Enhanced free flow of knowledge across the ERA.
- Improved gender balance and equal opportunities in research roles

Expected Call: ERA Fellowships / HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-TALENTS-01-01	
Type of action:	TMA Postdoctoral Fellowships – European Fellowships
Overall budget:	€ 8 million
Planned opening date:	9th of April 2025
Deadline dates:	10th of September 2025

The target group of this call is hosting organisations located in Widening Countries.

**ERA Fellowships** support excellent researchers through cross-border mobility to Widening Countries within

the EU, open to researchers of any nationality. Applicants must first apply for the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships 2025; if not ranked high enough for funding, their proposals are automatically considered for ERA Fellowships, unless opted out.

Key elements:

- **Eligibility:** The host organisation must be in a Widening Country, and the proposal must meet MSCA criteria.
- **Secondments:** Fellows can include a secondment phase (up to one-third of the fellowship) to add value to the project, with options for both single and multiple shorter periods in any country.
- **Non-Academic Placements:** Up to six months at the end of the fellowship in a non-academic sector in the EU or associated countries to enhance career development and innovation.
- **Training and Development:** Focused on transferable skills, innovation, entrepreneurship, and good scientific practices like Open Science.
- **Career Development Plan:** Jointly developed by the researcher and supervisor to outline research and career goals, training, and outreach activities, and updated as needed during the project.

This fellowship aims to facilitate knowledge transfer, encourage inter-sectoral career moves, and provide comprehensive training and career support to researchers in Widening Countries.

## Other Actions

- **Horizon Impact Award**

The Horizon Impact Award recognizes outstanding EU-funded projects that have achieved significant societal impact by effectively utilizing and disseminating their research results. Annually, the European Commission will select six winners who demonstrate successful pathways from research outcomes to tangible benefits for society.

Key Elements:

- **Purpose:** To celebrate impact projects and inspire beneficiaries of EU research funding to maximize societal value.
- **Awards:** Six monetary prizes of €25,000 each, totalling €150,000 annually.
- **Criteria:**
  - » **Pathway to Societal Benefits:** Applicants must show how their research results were exploited post-project to produce social impact, including sustainability and scale.
  - » **Achieved Impact:** Demonstrated, materialized impact benefiting specific user communities, with support letters as testimony.
- **EU Award for Gender Equality Champions**

The EU Award for Gender Equality Champions celebrates academic and research organisations driving impactful gender equality changes through their Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). This recognition prize aims to build a community of champions that supports institutional transformation toward inclusive gender equality within the European Research Area (ERA).

## Types of Projects and Funds and characteristic elements

Projects under Horizon Europe require active **involvement from researchers, farmers, businesses, government representatives, and civil society** to ensure practical, **widely adopted solutions through co-creation and knowledge sharing**.

Every year, Horizon Europe issues **calls for proposals**, inviting researchers, organizations, and businesses to submit innovative projects. To streamline this process, the **European Commission's Funding and Tender Opportunities portal** serves as a centralized platform, offering:

- **Comprehensive descriptions** of open calls.
- **Detailed research topics** outlining expectations.
- **Downloadable call documents**, including Work Programmes and essential applicant guidelines.

This structured approach ensures that funding opportunities remain **transparent, accessible, and impact-driven**, fostering a **collaborative ecosystem** where science and industry work hand in hand toward **a more sustainable and competitive Europe**.

Some tips on the key elements for a successful project multi-actor proposals:

KEY ELEMENTS	GUIDELINES
Addressing User Needs	Align project objectives with end-user challenges to ensure relevance.
Balanced Consortium	Build a team with diverse expertise (scientific, practical, industry) to strengthen impact.
Leveraging Existing Knowledge	Incorporate best practices and promote knowledge exchange among different actors.
Supporting Engagement	Use effective collaboration methods to foster meaningful participation.
Creating Practical Outputs	Focus on applicable solutions that drive innovation and usability.
Effective Dissemination	Use established dissemination channels, including EIP-AGRI for agricultural projects, to share results ensuring broad accessibility

European grants are typically allocated to collaborative projects spanning from 2 to 5 years duration, which are available to legal entities of all sizes and sectors. Horizon Europe includes **three main types of projects on this regard**:

Below, you can get an overview of the characteristics, requirement and the differences between IAs & RIAs and CSAs



TYPES	INNOVATION ACTIONS (IAs)	RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ACTIONS (RIAs)	COORDINATION AND SUPPORT ACTIONS (CSAs)
Objective:	Produce plans or designs for new or improved products, processes, or services. This includes prototyping, testing, demonstrating, piloting, large-scale product validation, and market replication.	R&D to establish new knowledge or explore the feasibility of a new or improved technology, product, process, service or solution (including basic and applied research, technology development and integration, testing and validation on a small-scale prototype in a laboratory or simulated environment).	To improve cooperation between legal entities from the EU and associated countries to strengthen the ERA including, for example, standardisation, dissemination, awareness-raising, communication and networking activities, policy dialogues, mutual learning or studies. This exclude R&I activities, except for "Widening participation"
Indicative funding rate	with 70% funding (100% for non-profits) + 25% overhead.	100% +25% overhead.	100%
TRL Level	TRL 5-8, Products or technologies are almost ready to be demonstrated in the real environment.	at TRL 1-6 and involves more basic research.	no specific TRL target
Market readiness	these are <b>close-to-market projects</b> aiming for commercialization soon after the project.	In these projects the development is still <b>far from a commercial product</b> or service.	
Size of Funding	<b>€4-15 million grant size</b>	<b>€4-15 million grant size</b>	
Duration	<b>3 years</b>	3-5 years	
No of Pages	full application is 45 pages.	full application 45 pages.	
Projects' type	The projects are collaborative and require the establishment of a consortium		
Consortium Composition	At least one established in a Member State and at least two established either in a different Member state or an Associate Country (inld. Albania. But typically involving 8-to-20 partners per consortium		CSA can be theoretically carried out by a single legal entity, however in practice, these projects are usually also carried out by large consortia as the scope can be quite wide.
Start as a Collaborator/ Partner	To learn the requirements, complexities and expectations of Pillar 2, organisations with experience with the Horizon Europe programme recommend that researchers participate on proposals as <i>collaborators (partners)</i> before attempting to lead an application.		



TYPES	INNOVATION ACTIONS (IAs)	RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ACTIONS (RIAs)	COORDINATION AND SUPPORT ACTIONS (CSAs)
<b>Start early</b>	Given the complexity of establishing a consortium spanning multiple institutions in different countries, organisations with experience with the Horizon Europe program have advised that development of a competitive Pillar 2 application requires a minimum of six (6) months and up to one year.		
<b>Ensure gender plan</b>	The European Commission is committed to promoting gender equality in research and innovation; therefore, Horizon Europe projects prefer gender-balanced consortia. It is recommended that you integrate these principles when developing a consortium.		

## EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIPS

Pillar II encompasses European Partnerships, which serve as key instruments for fostering greater cooperation and collaboration in pursuit of strategic goals. A substantial portion of the Pillar II budget is allocated through calls designed within partnership structures.

European Partnerships **unite the European Commission with private and/or public partners** to tackle some of Europe's most urgent challenges through coordinated research and innovation efforts. This strategic alignment and resource pooling make them a vital tool for implementing Horizon Europe, playing a crucial role in advancing the EU's political priorities, including the green and digital transitions.

There **three types of European Partnerships** divided across 6 clusters:

<b>Co-programmed partnerships</b>	Co-Programmed Partnership are built on the joint programming of research and innovation activities, as well as the mobilisation of additional initiatives by partners, all aligned with the partnership's objectives. They operate under a Memorandum of Understanding, which the European Commission signs with industry associations. The EU's financial contribution is executed through Horizon Europe work programme calls, while the matching contributions from partners are managed under their own responsibility.
<b>Co-funded partnerships</b>	Co-funded partnerships fund joint programmes of research and innovation activities between research and innovation funders. They are implemented through Horizon Europe Grant Agreements signed by the Commission and a consortium of partners, generally composed of research and innovation funders and other public authorities. Partners generally implement joint transnational calls as well as additional activities, with either 30% or 50% co-funding from Horizon Europe.
<b>Institutionalised European Partnerships</b>	<p>Joint Undertakings (JUs) based on Article 187 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU): long-term collaborations with private (sometimes also public) partners requiring a high degree of integration</p> <p>Article 185 initiatives, based on Article 185 TFEU: long-term collaborations with public partners requiring a high degree of integration Both Article 185 and 187 partnerships require the adoption of specific legislation and are implemented by dedicated structures created for that purpose.</p> <p>Between 2021 and 2024, 49 partnerships were established. Under the second strategic plan, an additional nine new partnerships have been launched:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brain Health (co-funded)</li> <li>Forests and Forestry for a Sustainable Future (co-funded)</li> </ul>

- Innovative Materials for EU (co-programmed)
- Raw Materials for the Green and Digital Transition (co-funded)
- Resilient Cultural Heritage (co-funded)
- Social Transformations and Resilience (co-funded)
- Solar Photovoltaics (co-programmed)
- Textiles of the Future (co-programmed)
- Virtual Worlds (co-programmed)

## The portfolio of 59 European Partnerships, as a result of the selection of new Partnership under Second Strategic Plan 2025-2027

PILLAR II  
Global challenges & European industrial competitiveness

PILLAR III  
Innovative Europe

CLUSTER 1: Health	CLUSTER 2: Culture, creativity, inclusive societies	CLUSTER 4: Digital, industry and space	CLUSTER 5: Climate, energy and mobility	CLUSTER 6: Food, bioeconomy, natural resources, agriculture and environment	European Innovation Ecosystems
Innovative Health Initiative	Resilient Cultural Heritage*	Chips (formerly KDT)	Clean Hydrogen	Circular Bio-based Europe	Innovative SMEs
Global Health Partnership	Social Transformations and Resilience*	Smart Networks & Services	Clean Aviation	R&I in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA, Art. 185)**	
Transformation of Health and Care Systems		High Performance Computing	Single European Sky ATM Research 3	Biodiversa+	EIT
Chemicals Risk Assessment		European Metrology (Art. 185)	Europe's Rail	Climate Neutral, Sustainable & Productive Blue Economy	InnoEnergy
ERA for Health		AI-Data-Robotics	Connected, Cooperative and Automated Mobility (CCAM)	Water4All	Climate
Rare Diseases*		Photonics	Batt4EU	Animal Health and Welfare	Digital
One-Health Anti Microbial Resistance*		Made in Europe	Zero-emission waterborne transport	Accelerating Farming Systems Transitions	Food
Personalised Medicine		Clean Steel – Low-Carbon Steelmaking	Zero-emission road transport	Agriculture of Data*	Health
Pandemic Preparedness*		Processes4Planet	Built4People	Safe and Sustainable Food System*	Raw Materials
Brain Health*		Globally Competitive Space Systems*	Solar Photovoltaics*	Forests and Forestry for a sustainable Future*	Manufacturing
		Innovative Materials for EU (I AM for EU)*	Clean Energy Transition		Urban Mobility
		Virtual Worlds*	Driving Urban Transitions		Cultural and Creativity*
		Textiles of the Future*			Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystem*
		Raw Materials for the Green and Digital Transition*			Cross-Pillars I and II
					European Open Science Cloud

■ Institutionalised Partnerships (ART. 185/7)

■ Institutionalised Partnerships / EIT KICs

■ Co-programmed

■ Co-funded

■ Proposed new candidate European Partnerships under the Horizon Europe strategic plan 2025-2027

\* Partnership not yet Launched  
\* Direct continuation of a H2020 partnership

Under the partnerships there are also Key Digital Technologies (KDT – underpinning all digital systems, including all electronic and photonic components, and the software, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things) and Circular Bio-based Europe (CBE – the successor of BBI JU) that differ significantly from RIA and IA applications.

Key Digital Technologies of electronic products and systems are Semiconductor components – chips that capture, store, process, transmit and act on data.






18 Member States agreed to bolster Europe's electronics, photonics and embedded systems value chain. This includes a particular effort to reinforce the processor and semiconductor ecosystem and to expand industrial presence across the supply chain

## HORIZON EUROPE'S FIVE MISSIONS<sup>23</sup>

EU Missions are **flagship initiatives** within **Horizon Europe**, focused on **addressing urgent societal challenges** through coordinated **research and innovation efforts**. They bring together **policymakers, stakeholders, and the public** to create **impact-driven solutions**.

While missions are not an integral part of any specific pillar, during the first three years of the programme, they were funded by up to 10% of Pillar II's annual budget. As a research and innovation instrument, their primary goal is to develop solutions for major societal challenges.

In 2021, five EU Missions were launched. Between 2025 and 2027, further efforts will be made to ensure a successful transition from their initial phase to full deployment, with the following objectives set to be achieved by 2030 :

Symbols	EU Missions	Objectives to be achieved by 2030
	<b>Restore our Oceans and Waters</b>	To study, protect and restore biodiversity and to eliminate pollution.
	<b>Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities</b>	To deliver 100 climate-neutral and smart cities
	<b>A Soil Deal for Europe</b>	100 living laboratories to lead the transition towards healthy soils
	<b>Adaption to Climate Change</b>	To support at least 150 European regions and communities to become climate resilient
	<b>Cancer</b>	To improve the lives of more than 3 million people.

## 2.2.4 COST Programme

COST (The European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is a funding organisation for research and innovation networks called COST Actions, which receive funding by Horizon Europe Programme.

Albania is the full member of the COST Programme. In total, there are 41 countries as full members that govern COST via their representatives in the COST Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) – the General Assembly of the COST Association.

The **National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation** represents Albania in COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology). Albania's participation in the programme has significantly increased since 2018. Statistics from 2023 indicate that Albania has been highly active, securing a total of **€518,370** in funding and holding **leadership positions in 19 COST Actions**.

COST Actions follow **a bottom-up approach**, allowing research initiatives to connect across Europe and beyond. They can focus on **any topic**, facilitating collaboration between diverse stakeholders. Participants include **researchers and innovators from universities, public and private institutions, industry, SMEs, and other relevant organisations**. Participation is open to individuals at **any stage of their career**.

**COST Actions** must be proposed by **a Network of Proposers** consisting of researchers and innovators from at least **seven COST Member countries**, with at least half of them coming from **Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC)**—a category under which **Albania is classified**.

Each successful project runs for **four years**, with estimated funding of **€125,000 in the first year** and an average of **€150,000 per year** for the remaining three years. Unlike other EU-funded projects, **COST Programme does not cover research expenses**—instead, it funds networking activities such as:

- Events
- Short-term Scientific Missions
- Training Schools
- Communication activities
- Virtual networking tools

By supporting networking, **COST serves as a stepping stone for further research and innovation funding, including Horizon Europe**.

### Application Process for COST Actions

Each year, COST Programme **launches an Open Call**, offering a **high success rate of 37%**. Researchers and innovators looking to submit a proposal must refer to the **SESA<sup>26</sup> guidelines** and the **Open Call Announcement** found on the Documents and Guidelines page. Proposals can be submitted through the **e-COST platform** within the designated deadline.

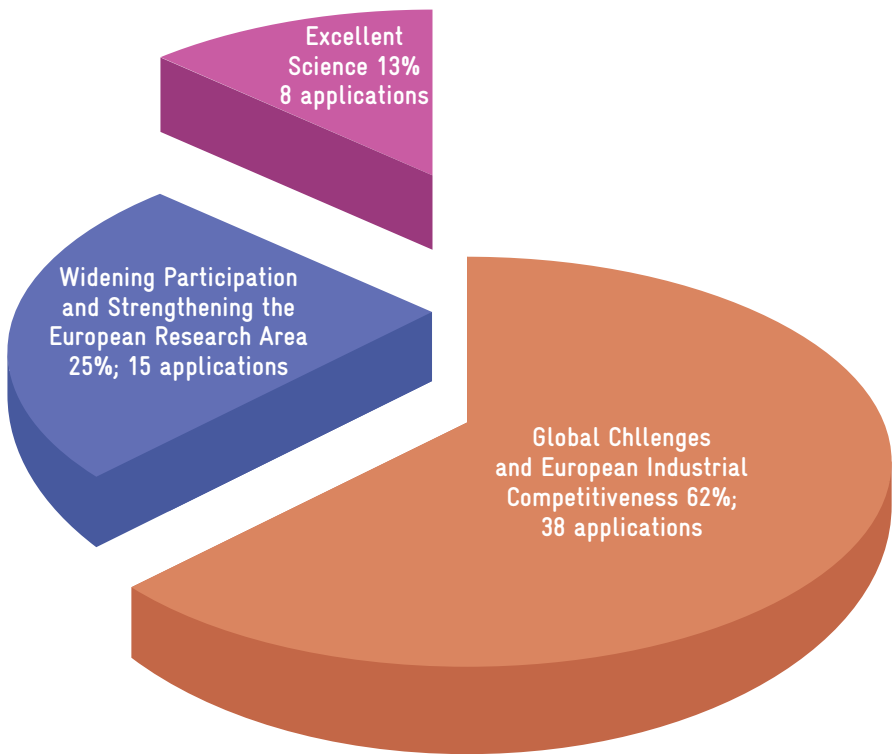
Additionally, researchers interested in **joining an existing COST Action** rather than submitting their own can visit the COST Actions page and **contact the Main Proposer** via email to express their interest.

### COST Innovators Grant (CIG)

COST also offers **COST Innovators Grant (CIG)** to accelerate **breakthrough innovations** by bridging the gap between **scientific research** and **marketable applications or societal solutions**.

Eligible **COST Actions** that are reaching the **end of their initial four-year funding period** are invited to apply for **CIG funding** through the **COST Association**. CIG projects last 12 months and grant recipients benefit from the same networking opportunities as regular COST Actions.

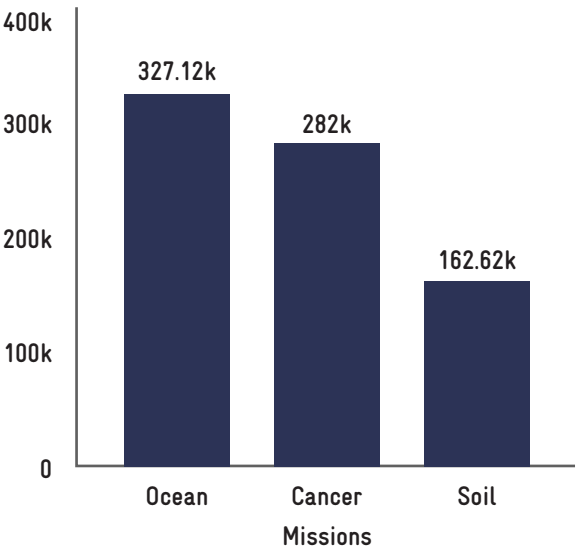
# Participation of Albania in Horizon Europe



## Key Figures of Albanian participation in Horizon Europe

Net EU Contribution in Euro	7.03M
Participation	53
Application	436
Success Rate	11,24%
SME Participation	4
SME Net EU Contribution in Euro	537,4K

## EU Contribution (EUR) across Missions



## 2.3 DIGITAL EUROPE

The **Digital Europe Programme** is designed to bridge the gap between **digital technology research and its deployment**, ensuring that the results reach the **market** for the benefit of **EU businesses, citizens, and public administrations** during their digital transformation.

So far, the Programme has supported the creation of a **network of European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs)**. **Eight Albanian consortia** applied for the establishment of **EDIHs**, co-funded by the EU. Out of these, two consortia were selected as winners and will operate as EU-funded EDIHs, **while six others received the Seal of Excellence**.

These **Hubs** will collaborate closely with the **local ecosystem of Albanian SMEs and small mid-caps**, offering a **wide range of specialized digital transformation services** tailored to industry needs. They will help companies **leverage digital opportunities, adopt advanced digital technologies**, and support public administrations and industries in deploying **blockchain solutions**, fostering trust in the digital transformation process.

With a budget of **€7.9 billion**, the **Digital Europe Programme** provides **strategic funding** for projects in **five crucial areas**. **Albanian SMEs, Universities, Research Centres, NGOs, and public institutions** are eligible to apply for funding under this programme.

A short description for each area is described below:

No.	Areas	Billion in €	Description of each area for open calls
1-	High Performance Computing	2.2	The <b>Programme</b> aims to strengthen the EU's <b>supercomputing and data processing capacities</b> , making them more <b>accessible</b> and expanding their use across <b>public interest sectors</b> such as <b>health, environment, security, and industry—including SMEs</b> .
2-	Cloud, Data and Artificial intelligence	2.1	To support <b>existing AI testing and experimentation facilities</b> in areas such as <b>health and mobility</b> within <b>EU Member States</b> , fostering <b>cooperation</b> between these facilities.
3-	Cybersecurity		Not eligible for Albania
4-	Advanced Digital Skills	0,58	To support the design and delivery of <b>specialised education and traineeships</b> , equipping future experts in <b>critical fields</b> such as <b>data and AI, cybersecurity, quantum computing, and high-performance computing (HPC)</b> . The programme also promotes <b>workforce upskilling</b> through <b>short-term trainings</b> , ensuring participants stay <b>updated on the latest advancements</b> in these key areas.
5-	Accelerating the Best Use of Technologies	1.1	The initiative is <b>open to a broader range of opportunities</b> spanning multiple fields with <b>high impact in public interest sectors</b> , including health, the Green Deal, smart communities, and the cultural sector.

With the **Chips Act** entering into force in **September 2023**, the **Digital Europe Programme** has expanded to include a **new capacity area focused on semiconductors**, reinforcing Europe's position in this critical sector.

**DIGITAL** is implemented through **multi-annual work programmes**. For the 2023–2024 period, there are **two independent work programmes**, each detailing:

- Funding opportunities
- Objectives under the five key areas
- Budget breakdown
- Management approach (direct vs. indirect)
- Implementation areas and specific topics
- Tentative timelines for call announcements

To ensure **effective preparation** for upcoming calls under specific objectives, **a prior consultation with the relevant work programmes** is strongly recommended. When a **Call is launched**, applicants can refer to the **Call document**, which provides details on:

- Objectives
- Budget allocations
- Eligibility criteria
- Award criteria (Relevance, Implementation, and Impact)

This structured approach enables applicants to **strategically** plan and submit strong proposals for funding under the Digital Europe Programme.

Some information on different types of grants for the potential applicants preparing the proposals under the Digital Europe programme are mentioned below:

### **Funding Mechanisms under the Digital Europe Programme**

#### **Simple Grants:**

- Designed primarily for personnel costs to implement action tasks.
- Activities involving third parties (subcontracting, financial support, purchases) **should be limited**.
- **Funding rate:** 50% of total eligible costs for all beneficiaries.
- Applicants **must have in-house expertise** to execute project activities.

#### **SME Support Actions:**

- Focused on **building and deploying digital capacities** for SMEs.
- If an SME is part of a consortium and must invest to access digital capacities:
  - » **Funding rate:** 50% of total eligible costs.
  - » **Exception:** SMEs receive a higher funding rate of 75%.

#### **Coordination and Support Actions (CSA):**

- Small grants promoting **cooperation** and **coordination** among various actors.
- Supports activities such as **standardization, dissemination, awareness-raising, networking, policy dialogues, mutual learning, and studies**.
- **Funding rate:** 100% of eligible costs.

### Grants for Financial Support to Third Parties:

- Provides financial support to external organisations.
- **Funding rate:** 100% of eligible costs for the consortium.
- **Third-party co-financing:** 50% of total eligible costs.

### Lump Sum Grants:

- Reimburses a **fixed lump sum** for the consortium and entire project.
- Amount is determined **ex-ante**, at grant signature.
- Covers **direct and indirect eligible costs**—no need to report actual expenditures.
- If an action is not properly implemented, only part of the lump sum will be paid.
- **Funding rate:** 50% of total eligible costs.

## 2.4 CUSTOMS PROGRAMME

The Customs Programme (2021–2027) has a **€950 million budget** aimed at establishing a **comprehensive legal framework**, advancing a **modern digital customs environment**, and enhancing **cooperation and human competency development** among customs authorities.

As a strategic tool, the programme supports the **implementation of customs policy and legislation** at both the **EU and Member State levels**. Its primary objective is to strengthen the **customs union**, ensuring seamless collaboration among **customs authorities** while facilitating the development and operation of **central IT systems** across the Union.

Additionally, the programme assists customs administrations in **managing growing trade volumes** and adapting to **emerging trends and technologies**, such as **e-commerce and blockchain-based solutions**.

### Work Programme (2023–2025): Direct Awards for Customs Authorities

For the **2023–2025 period**, funding is allocated through **direct awards**, meaning there are **no open calls for proposals**. This approach is designed to directly support **customs authorities in participating countries, including Albania**.

Applicants can submit proposals, which will be evaluated based on **award criteria** covering the following areas:

- Legal and operational framework development
- Advancing digital customs infrastructure
- Capacity-building initiatives for customs personnel
- Cross-border cooperation and harmonization efforts
- Integration of innovative technologies for customs processes

By providing direct funding to customs authorities, the programme ensures **efficient resource allocation** while strengthening the EU's customs union and fostering international collaboration.

The programme **funds up to 100% for the activities** such as

- seminars, workshops,
- events,
- expert teams, costs of hosting experts,
- subcontracting,
- travel, accommodation and daily allowance,
- depreciation and overheads.



## 2.5 FISCALIS PROGRAMME

Albania has joined the **Fiscalis Programme**, an EU initiative aimed at enhancing the **functioning of the internal market's taxation systems**. The programme enables **participating countries, tax authorities, and officials** to collaborate in **combating tax fraud, tax evasion, and aggressive tax planning**.

Beyond enforcement, **Fiscalis also protects the financial interests of Member States and honest taxpayers**, ensuring **efficient tax collection and compliance**. It facilitates the **implementation of EU taxation laws** by:

- Enhancing exchange of information
- Supporting administrative cooperation
- Reducing the administrative burden on tax authorities
- Lowering compliance costs for taxpayers

### Key Benefits and Functions

Fiscalis empowers **national tax administrations** by fostering the **creation and exchange of tax-related information and expertise**. The programme supports Member States in:

- Developing and maintaining Trans-European IT systems for taxation.
- Establishing networks to connect officials across the EU.
- Strengthening cooperation in the fight against tax fraud, evasion, and avoidance.
- Improving efficiency in tax collection through digital solutions and collaboration.

By leveraging **Fiscalis**, Albania benefits from advanced **tax policy coordination** and **modernized digital tools**, reinforcing its role in **European taxation governance**.

For the period **2021-2027**, the programme has a budget of **€269 million**.

Eligible activities under this programme include:

- Development and operation of **European electronic taxation systems (EES)**.
- Collaboration between **administrations, experts, the EU Commission, and other partners** through seminars, workshops, networks, and study visits.
- **EU-wide training and competency building** via eLearning, eBooks, nano-learning courses, and educational videos.
- **Research and communication activities** to support tax policy implementation.
- **Innovation initiatives**, including proof-of-concepts, pilot projects, and prototypes.

Grants under the **Fiscalis Programme** are awarded **without a call for proposals** to eligible entities, which include **EU national tax authorities** and **tax authorities from third countries associated with the programme, including Albania**. These grants are designated for specific topics relevant to the **Albanian Tax Authority**, ensuring effective participation and alignment with national priorities.

## 2.6 ERASMUS+

Erasmus+ is the EU Programme in the fields of education, training, youth and sport for the 2021–2027 period. The program's overarching goal is to support the educational, professional, and personal development of individuals in education, training, youth, and sport both within and outside of Europe through lifelong learning, in order to promote sustainable growth, high-quality jobs, social cohesion, innovation, and a stronger sense of European identity and active citizenship.

The Programme has the following **specific objectives**:

- To promote **learning mobility of individuals and groups**, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion and equity, excellence, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of education and training.
- To promote **non-formal and informal learning mobility** and active participation among young people, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of youth.
- To promote **learning mobility of sport staff**, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of sport organisations and sport policies.

### Programme's Priorities

#### Priority 1: 'Inclusion and Diversity'

More specifically, the Programme aims to promote equal opportunities, access, inclusion, diversity, and fairness in all its actions. It places mechanisms and resources at the disposal of organisations and participants with fewer opportunities. National Agencies play a crucial role in supporting projects that are inclusive and diverse.

Eleven (11) SALTO<sup>28</sup> Resource Centres, EACEA, and EU Delegations are key players in promoting and rolling out inclusion and diversity measures.

The three regional SALTOs fosters strategic and innovative cooperation between stakeholders from EU Member States and third countries associated to the Programme and third countries not associated to the Programme in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, aiming to:

- Further raise the quantity, quality and impact of projects and partnerships;
- Support youth work and youth policy development in third countries not associated to the Programme in the Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership and Russia and in the South-Mediterranean, respectively.

SALTO South East Europe is based in Ljubljana, Slovenia and is responsible for **Albania**, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia (European Solidarity Corps only).

The Programme aims to increase accessibility and outreach to people with fewer opportunities by providing mechanisms and resources to support their participation and address potential barriers.

#### Priority 2: 'Digital Transformation'

The **Erasmus+ Programme** supports citizens in acquiring **digital skills and competencies** essential for various aspects of life, including **living, learning, working, exercising rights, and accessing online services**. The programme promotes the **adoption of digital technologies** and **digital transformation strategies** to enhance learning opportunities.

To engage a **larger target audience**, Erasmus+ leverages:

- Information and communication technology (ICT) tools
- Physical mobility programmes
- Virtual learning initiatives

By integrating **innovative digital solutions**, the programme ensures **inclusive, accessible, and future-ready education** across diverse sectors.

### Priority 3: 'Environment and fight against climate change'

The EU prioritizes **environmental sustainability** through the **European Green Deal**, emphasizing the role of **schools, training institutions, and universities** in educating and engaging communities on climate change. Erasmus+ serves as a **key instrument** for fostering **knowledge, skills, and attitudes** essential for climate action and sustainable development. It enhances **mobility opportunities** in **green-focused sectors**, improving **competence development** and **career prospects**, while promoting **innovative and sustainable practices**.

Platforms like the **European School Education Platform** and **EPALE** facilitate the exchange of best practices and policies for environmental sustainability, ensuring continuous learning and collaboration.

### Priority 4: 'Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement'

Erasmus+ prioritises projects that **promote democratic life and civic engagement** through both **formal and non-formal learning activities**. The **Youth Participation Strategy** complements **EU Youth Policy** and is supported by the **Youth Participation Toolkit**, which provides **knowledge, recommendations, tools, and guidance** to enhance youth involvement.

Participants in Erasmus+ projects must be **established in an EU Member State or an associated third country**. However, **specific actions** in higher education, vocational training, youth, and sport are open to participants from **third countries not associated with the Programme**, including **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro**, supported by **SALTO South East Europe**.

Albanian **SMEs and organisations** can participate, especially in **education, training, youth, and sport-related projects**. Erasmus+, while traditionally known for **student exchanges**, has evolved to support **skills training, workforce innovation, and partnerships**, making it increasingly relevant for SMEs.

Erasmus+ is structured into **three Key Actions (KA)**, with descriptions provided below for **KA1 and KA2**.

## 5.1.1. Key Action 1

### 5.1.1.1. Learning Mobility of Individuals

#### Virtual exchanges in higher education and youth

The only **KA1 project** relevant to **Albanian SMEs** is **virtual exchanges** in **higher education and youth**, fostering **intercultural dialogue and soft skills development** through **online interactions**. While not a substitute for physical mobility, these exchanges provide **valuable international learning experiences** and can serve as a foundation for future physical exchanges outside this action.

Virtual exchanges occur in **small, facilitator-led groups** and can be integrated into **youth projects** or **higher education courses**, involving participants from either **one or both sectors**.

Projects include **organisations and participants** from **EU Member States, associated third countries, and eligible non-associated countries**. Applicants must be **legal entities** (public or private) active in **higher education or youth**, established in **eligible countries**.

## 5.1.2. Key Action 2

### 5.1.2.1. Cooperation Partnerships

#### Description

Cooperation Partnerships support the development of innovative practices and joint initiatives promoting co-operation and peer learning. Cooperation Partnerships are anchored to the priorities and policy frameworks of each Erasmus+ sector, promoting cross-sectoral and horizontal cooperation in thematic areas. They are managed by National Agencies or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). The objectives include increasing quality, building capacity, addressing common needs, and enabling transformation and change at individual, organisational, or sectoral levels. A Cooperation Partnership is a transnational project and must involve minimum three organisations from three different EU Member States or third countries associated to the Programme.

#### Funding Rules

The proposed funding model consists of a menu of 3 single lump sums, corresponding to the total grant amount for the project: **120 000 EUR, 250 000 EUR and 400 000 EUR**. Applicants will choose between the 3 pre-defined amounts according to the activities they want to undertake and the results they want to achieve.

#### Requirements

The project description should include a detailed methodology, task distribution, financial arrangements, timeline, monitoring system, quality assurance mechanism, and evaluation strategy. The project shall make a distinction between project management and work packages for implementation, with a maximum of five work packages, including the project management work package. The assessment should follow proportionality, with higher amounts indicating more accurate and comprehensive methodology. Subcontracting of services is allowed as long as it doesn't cover core activities directly affecting the project's objectives, and tasks must be clearly identified and described in the application.

#### Payment of the Grant

The grant payment requires all activities to meet the application's quality criteria. If some activities aren't completed or assessed, the grant amount may be reduced at the final report stage. The assessment is based on detailed descriptions, project objectives, results, and partner organisation self-assessment.

For **Cooperation Partnerships**, the calls relevant to Albanian SMEs and organisations, include:

**KA220-VET: Cooperation Partnerships in Vocational Education and Training.** This call supports partnerships aimed at improving innovation in VET, including digital transformation, environmental sustainability and skills development. The aim of the funding is to provide grants for collaborative projects between SMEs, educational institutions and other stakeholders to create innovative tools and training methods. It is an annual call which focuses on tech, green economy, digital skills and can include partnerships in fields like green energy and youth employment.

**KA220-SCH: Cooperation Partnership in School Education.** This call aims to improve school education systems through innovative practices, teacher and staff development, and enhanced collaboration between schools and external organisations. SMEs -including the Albanian ones- can contribute to projects related to entrepreneurship education, digital literacy, environmental sustainability, and fostering connections between schools and local businesses.

**KA220-YOU: Cooperation Partnerships in Youth.** This call focuses on supporting youth organisations, enhancing youth participation, and developing skills for employment, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Albanian SMEs can provide input on employability skills, offer training or internships, and participate in mentoring or skill-building programs.

**KA220-ADU: Cooperation Partnerships in Adult Education.** This call aims to foster lifelong learning and improve adult education, particularly for disadvantaged adults or those needing reskilling. SMEs can participate to help design and deliver vocational and soft skill training, particularly in areas where adult learners seek upskilling (e.g., digital skills, language learning).

**Important Note!** Albanian SMEs and organisations must collaborate with at least one organisation from an Erasmus+ Programme Country, as projects must be coordinated by organisations from Programme Countries.

### 5.1.2.2. Capacity Building

#### ◇ Capacity Building in Higher Education

The **CBHE action** fosters **international cooperation** through **multilateral partnerships** among organisations in the **higher education sector**. From these projects must directly **benefit third countries not associated with the Programme**, enhancing their **higher education institutions and systems**.

Aligned with the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and the **Paris Agreement**, CBHE supports **higher education modernization**, socio-economic **recovery, growth, and prosperity**, and addresses **globalization, human development decline, fragility, and inequalities**.

**Eligibility:** Applicants must be **private or legal entities**, including:

- Higher education institutions (HEIs) or HEI organisations
- Institutions active in the labour market, education, training, or youth sectors

These entities must be established in an **EU Member State, an associated third country, or a non-associated third country** from an **eligible region**, including **Region 1 (Albania)**, along with Regions **2, 3, 5a, 6, 7a, 8a, 9, 10, and 11**.

#### ◇ Capacity Building in the field of Vocational Education and Training

Capacity building projects foster **international cooperation** through **multilateral partnerships** between organisations in the **VET sector** from **EU Member States, associated third countries, and non-associated third countries (including Albania)**.

These projects aim to enhance the **relevance, accessibility, and responsiveness of VET institutions and systems in third countries not associated with the Programme**, driving **sustainable socio-economic development**.

#### **Key Participation Rules:**

- Organisations from third countries not associated with the Programme (e.g., Albania) cannot serve as project coordinators.
- Albanian entities can participate, but must collaborate with a coordinating organisation from an eligible EU or associated country.

This setup ensures strong **institutional cooperation and capacity-building**, aligning VET with global development goals.

## Capacity Building in the field of Youth

Capacity-building in youth projects is all about bringing organisations together, fostering international partnerships, and creating impactful learning experiences. Through Erasmus+, youth organisations in the EU and associated countries collaborate with those from third countries, helping young people grow, connect, and contribute to their communities.

For third countries not associated with the Programme, this initiative focuses on Region 1 (Western Balkans, including Albania), Region 2 (Eastern Partnership), and Region 3 (Southern Mediterranean). These projects aim to boost cooperation in youth work and non-formal learning, driving socio-economic development and well-being for both organisations and individuals.

To be eligible, applicants must be public or private companies, including small, medium, and large enterprises, as well as social enterprises. While they can actively contribute, they cannot act as project coordinators.

By bridging communities across regions, Erasmus+ ensures that young people and organisations can exchange knowledge, build networks, and create lasting impact in the field of youth development.

### ◇ Capacity building in the field of Sport

Capacity-building projects in sport foster **international cooperation** through **multilateral partnerships**, bringing together organisations from **EU Member States, associated countries, and third countries not associated with the Programme in Region 1 (Western Balkans, including Albania) and Region 2 (Neighbourhood East)**.

These projects use **sport as a tool** to promote **core values, personal and social development, and community cohesion** in third countries not associated with Erasmus+.

### ◇ Eligibility & Partnership Structure

- Projects must be **transnational**, involving at least **four organisations from a minimum of three countries**.
- Partnerships must include:
  - » At least one organisation from two different EU Member States or associated countries.
  - » At least two organisations from one eligible third country (Region 1 or Region 2). **Region 1** and **Region 2** cannot participate in the same proposal, meaning cross-region partnerships between them are not eligible.

This structured approach ensures meaningful **international collaboration**, expanding opportunities for **youth, organisations, and sports initiatives** in eligible regions.

## 2.7 CREATIVE EUROPE

The Creative Europe programme 2021–2027 has a budget of € 2.44 billion, higher compared to the previous programme. Albania is fully member on this programme. A dedicated Creative Europe Desk Albania is at the Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation of Albania that provide the up-to-date information about the open call of proposal and organise information days for the potential applicants.

**Creative Europe Desk Albania** serves to bridge the cooperation between the creators and European opportunities, having information, training and activities for those who wish to participate in cross-border cultural projects. The main objectives of the programme are to (i) safeguard, develop and promote European cultural and linguistic diversity and heritage; and (ii) increase the competitiveness and economic potential of the cultural and creative sectors, in particular the audio-visual sector.

The novelties of the programme contribute to the recovery of these sectors, reinforcing their efforts to become more inclusive, more digital and environmentally more sustainable.

The Creative Europe programme is divided in **3 strands**.

Culture Strand

Media Strand

Cross-sector Strand

### 5.2.1 The Culture strand

The Creative Europe programme supports a wide range of cultural and creative sectors including among others:

- architecture
- cultural heritage
- design
- literature and publishing
- music
- performing arts

The Culture strand encourages cooperation and exchanges among cultural organisations and artists within Europe and beyond. Creative Europe aims to foster (i) Artistic creation and innovation; (ii) Support the promotion and the distribution of European content across Europe and beyond; (iii) help artists find creation and performance opportunities across borders; and (iv) stimulate the digital and environmental transition of the European Culture and Creative Sectors

#### ◇ Types of Project opportunities supported by Culture strands

- **European Cooperation Projects**, involving organisations in the cultural and creative sectors from different countries taking part in the programme. It covers the EU and beyond. Creative Europe aims to improve access to European cultural and creative works and to promote innovation and creativity.

Funding is available for 3 types of projects

- small scale cooperation projects (minimum 3 partners from 3 different eligible countries)
- medium scale cooperation projects (minimum 5 partners from 5 different eligible countries)
- large scale cooperation projects (minimum 10 partners from 10 different eligible countries)



Projects can cover one or more cultural and creative sectors and can be interdisciplinary. The maximum duration for all projects is 48 months. Organisations active in the cultural and creative sectors can apply.

- **European Network**

The Europe Union co-finances **37 pan-European Networks of culture and creative organisations**, under the Creative Europe programme (2021-2027). These networks support cultural organisations and professionals who contribute to strengthening the competitiveness and diversity of the European cultural and creative sectors.

- ◇ **European Platform for the promotion of emerging artists**

The platforms are essential instrument for developing the careers of emerging talents and improving their working conditions. The platforms provide tailor-made responses to the needs and challenges of emerging talent, offering them targeted professional opportunities in terms of mobility, training, incubation and development, as well as remuneration. 16 European Platforms are co-financing for the period 2021-2023. These platforms implement projects to increase the visibility and circulation of emerging European artists and their work, to develop both their careers and their talent.

- ◇ **Culture Moves Europe**

Culture Moves Europe provides **mobility grants** for around 7,000 artists, cultural professionals and host organisation in all 40 creative Europe countries (2022 to 2025). It covers the sectors of architecture, cultural heritage, design and fashion design, literature, music, performing arts and visual arts.

## **5.2.2 Media Strand**

Supports and promotes Europe's film and audiovisual sector. The priorities of this sub-programme are structured in 4 clusters: (i) Content Cluster, (ii) Business Cluster, Audience Cluster and Policy Support Cluster

The business cluster promotes business innovation, scalability and talents across the European audiovisual industry's value chain. Each year it is supported the training of over 2 400 professionals and the promotion and distribution of over 300 audiovisual works.

## **5.2.3 Cross-sectoral strand**

The purpose is reinforcing collaboration between different cultural and creative sectors (CCS) in order to help them address the common challenges they face and find innovative solutions.

The funding calls under this Programme can be found also under the Culture and Creativity page of European Commission, divided by years and topics.



## 2.8 LIFE PROGRAMME

LIFE Programme for 2021–2027 has a budget of EUR 5.432 billion is a EU financing instrument for environment and climate action. The programme is divided into two sub-programmes, structured

- ◊ **LIFE-Environment** (representing 75% of the overall financial envelope)
  - » Nature and Biodiversity
  - » Circular economy and quality of life
- ◊ **LIFE-Climate Action** (representing 25% of the envelope).
  - » Transition to clean energy
  - » Climate change mitigation and adaptation

Proposals can be submitted by public or private organisations legally registered in the European Union or countries associated to the LIFE Programme. Albania does not participate in the LIFE Programme and is not on ongoing negotiations to participate in the LIFE Programme.

For detailed information, LIFE publishes two Multi-Annual Work Programmes (MAWP) for the 2021–2024 and 2025–2027 timeframes. Specifically, each year LIFE publishes Calls for Proposals for different types of projects.

### Priorities

- Boosting and integrating the implementation of the EU's policy objectives for halting and reversing loss of wildlife habitats and species across all sectors, as well as the Biodiversity Strategy objectives for 2030
- Supporting the **transition to a circular economy** and protecting and improving the quality of EU's natural resources, including air, soil and water among others
- Supporting **implementation of the 2030 energy and climate policy framework**, the EU's climate neutrality objective by 2050, and the new EU strategy on adaptation to climate change
- Building capacity, **stimulating investments** and supporting implementation of policies focused on energy efficiency and small-scale renewable.

### Actions financed

- Information and communication, including awareness-raising campaigns, and corporate communication regarding the political priorities of the Union, as well as regarding the implementation and transposition status of environmental, climate or relevant energy legislation of the Union
- Studies, surveys, modelling and scenario building
- Preparation, implementation, monitoring, checking and evaluation of legislation, policies and programmes, as well as assessment and analysis of projects not funded by the LIFE Programme
- Workshops, conferences and meetings
- Networking, and best-practice platforms
- Other activities, such as awarding prizes

# 3. DESCRIPTION OF IPA PROGRAMMING FRAMEWORK

The IPA III Programming Framework<sup>32</sup> is the **overarching strategic document** for the programming of IPA III funds for the duration of the 2021–2027. It reflects the specific objectives of the IPA III Regulation<sup>33</sup> and focuses on the priorities of the EU's enlargement process.

The EU assistance is programmed according to five thematic Windows, which mirror the clusters of the negotiating chapters. The thematic windows are:

- ◊ **Window 1: Rule of law, fundamental rights and democracy (15.13 % of the budget)**  
It aims to strengthen the rule of law, democracy, the respect of human rights and international law, civil society and security as well as to improve migration management including border management.
- ◊ **Window 2: Good governance, EU Acquis alignment, good neighbourly relations and strategic communication (16.59% of the budget)**  
It promotes good governance and the compliance with Union's values and their alignment with the Union's rules, standards and practices in the relevant areas. EU assistance fosters peace and stability across the region
- ◊ **Window 3: Green agenda and sustainable connectivity (42.25% of the budget)**  
It promotes the green agenda by reinforcing environmental protection, contributing to mitigation, increasing resilience to climate change, accelerating the shift towards a low-carbon and circular economy and develop the digital economy and society. This approach is applied on land, sea (blue economy) to boost resilience and preventing the emergence and spread of future health crises.
- ◊ **Window 4: Competitiveness and inclusive growth (22.31% of the budget)**  
It aims to strengthen economic and social development, including through education, competitiveness, research and innovation, social inclusion, industrial and employment policies, with a specific focus on private sector development as well as agriculture, rural and industrial development. Gender equality, reduction of inequalities and enhancing of social cohesion need to be taken into account, for example by greening enterprises for job creation, with focus on women and youth.
- ◊ **Window 5: Territorial and cross-border cooperation (3.51% of the budget)**  
The strategic objectives of the cross-border cooperation programmes are: Promotion of reconciliation and confidence building and good neighbourly relations. In addition, a number of cross-cutting themes, such as climate change, environmental protection, civil society, gender equality and rights-based approach, are main-streamed and therefore implemented under the five windows.

Sustainable development of Albania and integration with the European Union derives from the **Cross-Cutting Priorities across all windows**: Themes like **climate change, environmental protection, gender equality, civil society engagement**, and the **rights-based approach** are integrated into all five windows.

## Strategic Framework and Reforms in Albania

EU support aligns with Albania's national planning documents (three-year strategic documents that are updated annually):

- National Plan for European Integration (NPEI)
- Economic Reform Programme (ERP)
- The new National Strategy for Development and Integration will be the overarching policy document covering the 10-year period 2021 – 2030.

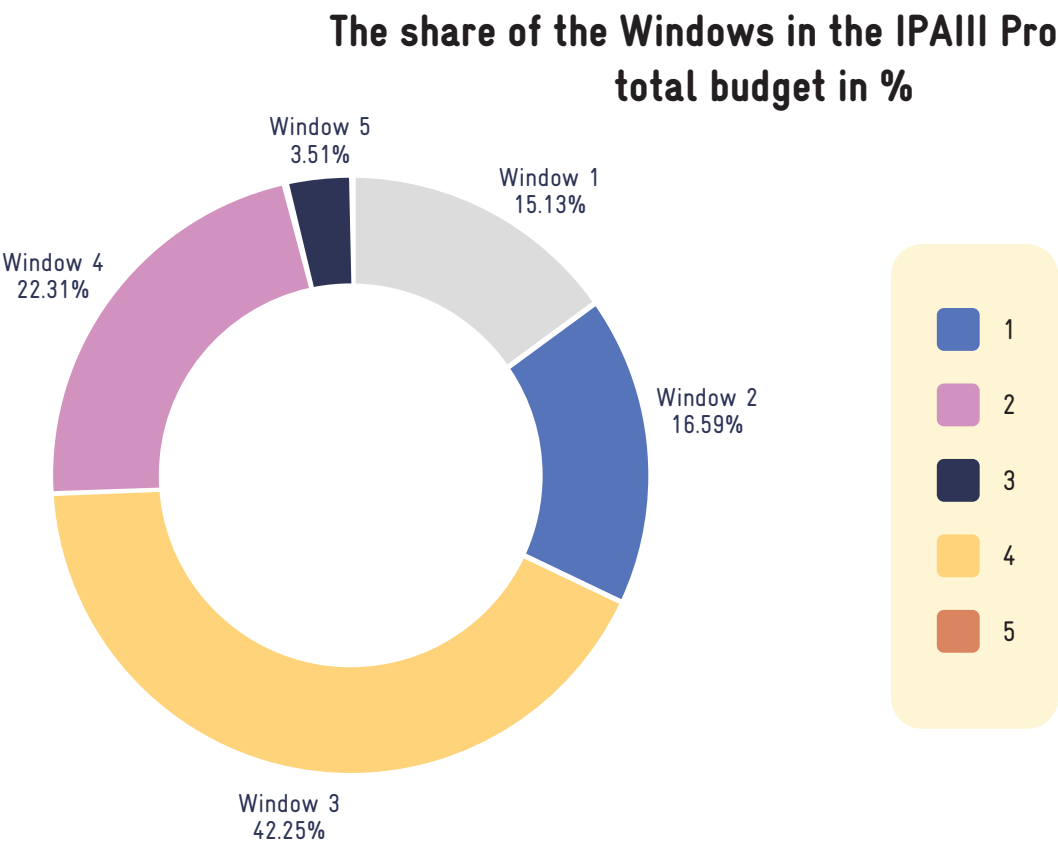
These documents outline the country's priorities for EU integration and sustainable development.

Albania’s National Reform and Growth Agenda for the period 2024–2027, will be supported by the EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans.

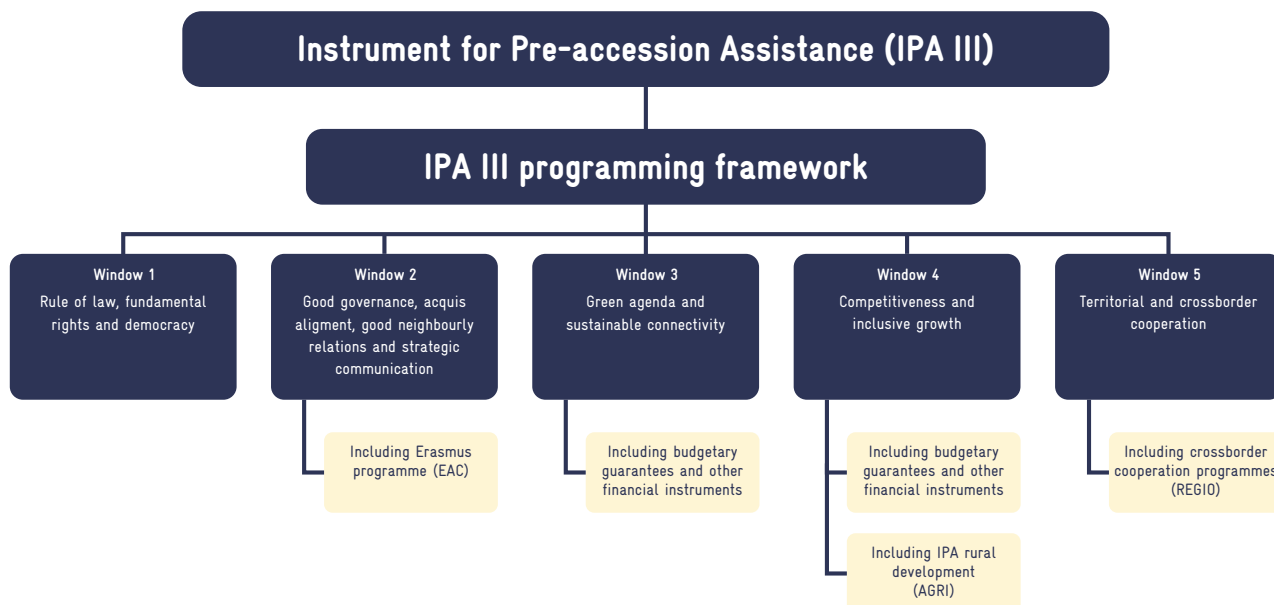
In March 2025, Albania receives the pre-financing, to the amount of EUR 64.5 million to support the implementation of the Reform Agenda, under the Reform and Growth Facility, EUR 30 million in concessional loans for the state budget, as support for the implementation of the reforms under the country’s Reform Agenda. The remaining pre-financing of EUR 34.5 million, in grants and concessional loans, will be injected directly to the WBIF (Western Balkans Investment Framework) for infrastructure investments in Albania.

**The EU Assistance programmed under Window 4 and Window 5 will contribute to Cluster 3, Chapter 20, Enterprise and Industrial Policy of Acquis Communautaire**

The Budget break down in five Windows



Structure of IPA III Programme



The programming of IPA III ensures a stronger performance-based approach while at the same time guaranteeing the principle of fair share. There is also a stronger focus on relevance and maturity at the Commission selection stage, with the aim of ensuring stronger linkage with the reform agenda, accelerating implementation and reducing backlog.

Albania participates in **eight Territorial Cooperation Programmes** for the period 2021– 2027.

3,51 % of the financial envelope of IPA III Programme is allocated to Window 5 (Territorial and cross-border cooperation) between the beneficiaries in the Western Balkan Countries, in line with their needs and priorities.

Type of financial assistance by IPA III are **procurement, grant, and prize award**, accessible to international and regional organisations, as well as to all other individuals who are citizens of, and to legal entities that are duly established in:

- Member states
- Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey,
- contracting parties to the Agreement on the European Economic Area and
- countries for which reciprocal access to external assistance is established by the Commission.

### 3.1 IPA III CBC programmes

#### How CBC Programmes Work?

**Call for proposals** is the primary mechanism for funding under CBC programmes. To achieve greater local impact, these calls should concentrate on specific themes, project sizes, and/or target recipients. Prior to the launch of the calls, information campaigns are delivered to ensure local visibility and to promote a genuine bottom-up approach. The calls for proposals encourage the active participation of local authorities and facilitate authentic bottom-up engagement and partnerships among the public and private sectors, thereby fostering an environment that supports sustainable socio-economic development and/or reconciliation.

To qualify for funding under the IPA III, all project proposals submitted by the beneficiary countries during the programming phase must satisfy the **criteria of strategic relevance and technical maturity**.

For larger initiatives, the Programmes open calls for '**strategic projects**', particularly when these initiatives demonstrate a distinct cross-border impact. These can take up to 30–35% of the total CBC programme budget. Strategic projects can cover everything from setting up joint information systems to infrastructure development.

Also, all the CBC programmes allocate up to 10% of their budget **for technical assistance**. This funding is used to build the skills and capacities of municipal staff who are directly involved in project implementation—ensuring the teams on the ground are well-prepared to deliver meaningful results.

### 3.1.1 IPA CBC Programmes (MK-AL, ME-AL and AL-KS)

#### Albania and Cross-Border Cooperation

Albania is part of the cross-border cooperation programmes with the neighbouring countries (North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo). The eligible Programme area doesn't cover the whole territory of the Albania but only the territories of land-borders decided in the IPA III CBC Programmes 2021-2027.

It is managed and implemented either in direct management of EU Commission or in indirect management by a lead IPA III beneficiary.

The CBC programmes are aligned with broader EU priorities and directly contribute and create synergies with the priorities of the Economic and Investment Plan and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.

The EU co-financing rate is not higher than 85 % of the eligible expenditure of a cross-border cooperation programme, making it much easier for local communities to bring their ideas to life with strong financial support.

There are **three IPA CBC** programmes that involve Albania:

- North Macedonia – Albania (MK-AL)
- Montenegro – Albania (ME-AL)
- Albania – Kosovo (AL-KS)

**Three IPA CBC Programmes** have selected their thematic clusters/priority areas jointly by the regions participating in the programme. Two key thematic priorities agreed upon for all upcoming calls for proposals are:

- TP2: Environment
- TP5: Tourism and Natural/Cultural Heritage

These focus areas offer excellent opportunities for local governments to develop impactful projects that protect the environment and promote regional tourism and heritage, while strengthening ties with neighbours.

THEMATIC CLUSTERS	THEMATIC PRIORITIES (for three IPA CBC PROGRAMMES)
Greener and Improved resource efficiency	TP2 protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management through joint actions for environmental protection; reduction of plastic pollution, promoting sustainable use of natural resources, coordinated maritime spatial planning, resource efficiency and circular economy, renewable energy sources and the shift towards a safe and sustainable low-carbon, green economy; improving waste and water management, promoting investment to address specific risks, ensuring disaster resilience and disaster
Improved business environment and competitiveness	TP5 encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage;

The budget is allocated in three years 2022, 2024 and 2026, meaning that three calls of proposals will be opened during the period.

	Programmes	Programme Area		Total Budget	Total EU contribution
1	IPA CBC North Macedonia-Albania	Pelagonia, Polog Southwest	Dibër Elbasan Korça	€13,790,000	€11,900,000
2	IPA CBC Montenegro-Albania	Andrijevisa, Berane, Plav, Petnjica, Rožaje, Podgorica, Cetinje, Danilovgrad, Budva, Ulcinj, Bar, Gusinje, Tuzi, Kolašin	Shkodra and Lezha Regions, Municipality of Tropoja	€13,790,000	€11,900,000
3	IPA CBC Albania-Kosovo <sup>34</sup>	Kukes and Lezha and 6 municipalities	South Economic Region Prizren, Dragash/Dragaš, Rahovec/Orahovac, Suhareka/Suva Reka, Malisheva/Mališevo, and Mamusha/Mamuša Shkodra and Lezha Regions, Municipality West Economic Region composed of 6 municipalities: Peja/Pec, Deçan/Decani, Gjakova/Đakovica, Istog/Istok, Klina and Junik	€9,734,117	€8,400,000

All three IPA III CBC Programmes have mainstreamed also a Technical Assistance Priority (TP7) that cover 10% of the Programmes' budget aiming at increasing the capacities of regional and local authorities on project identification, application and implementation.

Target Group of these programmes, which can directly apply under the calls for proposals are

- Local and regional authorities' staff
- Associations of Local Governments
- CSOs, e.g. Youth and Woman Organisations
- Regional Development Agencies
- Education and training organisations
- Central authorities (Regional Departments from the LM and Agencies operating in the eligible area)
- Entities responsible for tourism and culture heritage
- Youth and students
- Business operators in fields such as tourism and agriculture (farmers)
- Public utility companies

## 3.2 IPA CBC PROGRAMME BETWEEN IPA AND EU COUNTRIES (INTERREG VI-A)

Albania is eligible for Interreg – IPA CBC programme, which is cross-border cooperation initiative involving one or more IPA III beneficiaries alongside one or more EU Member States which can team up for shared development projects.

Through the enlargement policy, the EU has outlined the priorities and areas for strengthened collaboration, focusing on the unique challenges encountered by the Western Balkans. These priorities are in line with the EU key priorities, including the reduction of regional inequalities, enhanced territorial development, the transition to climate-neutral and resilient areas, the promotion of sustainable local economies, and the establishment of sustainable digital and physical connectivity.

This initiative is overseen by DG REGIO and executed under shared management, with a singular Managing Authority situated in one of the participating Member States.

Funding from IPA III is combined with the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under a matching principle of +5%. This means that each programme receives an equal amount of funding from both ERDF and IPA III, along with an additional 5% from IPA III.

INTERREG-VIA includes two Programmes for Albania to participate.

### 3.2.1 IPA CBC Greece- Albania

The **2021–2027 Interreg VI-A IPA Greece–Albania** Programme is designed to support border regions in Greece and Albania as they work together toward building more sustainable and inclusive economies. By encouraging cross-border collaboration, the programme helps reduce regional differences and strengthens how communities work together across borders. The goal is to promote shared regional growth, boost local development, and help these areas overcome the challenges of being on the periphery.

Total Budget (including technical assistance)	EUR 33 312 503.00
Total EU contribution	EUR 26 650 000.00

The eligible cross-border area of the Interreg VI-A IPA Greece Albania spreads from the Ionian Sea until the Prespa lakes and includes:

PROGRAMME AREA	
GREECE	ALBANIA
Regional units of (NUTS 3 units): Grevena, Kozani Kastoria Florina Arta, Preveza (Thesprotia) (Ioannina) (Zakynthos) (Kerkyra) (Kefallinia, Ithaki) (Lefkada)	the regions of (NUTS 3 units): (Berat) (Gjirokastër) (Korçë) (Vlorë) (Fier)

## Thematic priorities (clusters)

According to the joint development needs of the cross-border area the three policy objectives of the Cohesion Policy that the Strategy involves are:

<b>Policy Objective 2</b>	A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility	Priority Axis 1: Supporting transition to greener and more resilient cross-border regions
<b>Policy Objective 3</b>	A more Connected Europe, by enhancing mobility, with strategic transport and digital networks	Priority Axis 2: Improving accessibility in the cross-border area
<b>Policy Objective 4</b>	A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights	Priority Axis 3: Fostering sustainable cross-border economic and social development

### 3.2.2 IPA South Adriatic

The Interreg IPA South Adriatic 2021–2027 programme aims to build a smarter, greener, better-connected, more inclusive, and well-governed South Adriatic region. To achieve this, it encourages strong collaboration between national and regional authorities, as well as non-profit organisations, by supporting joint projects focused on smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth.

With a total budget of **€81,258,768.19** (including 17.51% co-financing), the programme is led by the **Puglia Region** in Italy, in partnership with the **Molise Region**, and involves the entire territories of **Albania and Montenegro**.

The programme has 5 Priority axes divided in eight (8) specific objectives.

Priority Axes	Specific Objectives	Example Actions
<b>SMART</b>	1.1 Enhancing growth and <b>competitiveness of SMEs</b> through joint cross-border actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• green tourism, cultural / creative SMEs (e.g. joint artistic productions), health-care (e-health), agro-food, blue economy</li><li>• R&amp;D actions, start-ups, S3 strategies, business advice</li><li>• border-crossing procedures, trademarks, patents, cyber-security, fight against counterfeiting, adoption of EU rules for SMEs, digitalisation</li></ul>



Priority Axes	Specific Objectives	Example Actions
GREEN	<b>2.1 RISK</b> –Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience with joint cross-border actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• natural risks (floods, droughts, landslide, earthquakes, wildfires, coastal erosion, human/ animal/vegetal pandemics, etc.), + artificial risks (oil spills, maritime disasters, etc.)</li> <li>• measures targeting specific groups e.g. touristic, cultural industries, etc. or risks at border-crossings, adoption of EU rules on risk management</li> <li>• digitalisation in risk management e.g. for monitoring &amp; planning coastal / maritime environment</li> </ul>
	<b>2.2 BIODIVERSITY</b> – Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution with joint cross-border actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• protection of natural habitats, reducing pollution, promotion of recycling waste &amp; sewage water, while preserving biodiversity</li> <li>• management of natural / cultural heritage for green tourism,</li> <li>• water resources / landscapes, incl. actions for adopting ICZM &amp; Maritime Spatial Planning</li> <li>• adoption of EU rules incl. green deal / digitalisation</li> </ul>
	<b>2.3 ENERGY</b> –Promoting energy efficiency with joint cross-border actions EUSAIR: in Pillar 2, especially in relation to a more efficient and green energy network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• awareness-raising on CO2 emissions</li> <li>• energy efficiency measures targeting specific sectors (e.g. culture/tourism, construction, public buildings, etc.)</li> <li>• security of cross-border energy networks</li> <li>• digital tools / processes for energy efficiency</li> <li>• integrated energy efficiency plans within RES strategies/adoption of EU rules on energy</li> </ul>
CONNECTED	<b>3.1. INTERMODALITY</b> – Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and inter-modal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility, through joint cross-border actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• maritime, air, rail / road sustainable transports, soft mobility, multimodal transport links, e.g. targeted to tourism,</li> <li>• ports security/ security at border-crossing &amp; customs, adopting EU rules on transports / digitalisation</li> <li>• accessibility of peripheral, areas / urban-coastal areas</li> <li>• top-down projects of strategic importance</li> </ul>

Priority Axes	Specific Objectives	Example Actions
<b>SOCIAL</b>	<b>4.1 SKILLS</b> – Improving access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through cross-border actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• professional trainings or capacity building e.g. in tourist, cultural / creative sectors,</li> <li>• professional / entrepreneurial / digital skills</li> <li>• inclusion of vulnerable social groups (incl. unemployed, migrants, NEETs, etc.)</li> <li>• efficiency of cross-border labour markets, recognition of professional qualification / adoption of EU rules on welfare, labour, qualification</li> </ul>
	<b>4.2 INCLUSIVE TOURISM</b> – Enhancing the role of culture and tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation, through cross-border actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• making tourism / culture more social and more economically resilient, primarily targeting vulnerable social groups / local communities</li> <li>• management of cultural / natural assets sustainable, more diversified, valorised, e.g. through cultural routes</li> <li>• digitalisation, capacity building, services &amp; new opportunities for vulnerable groups, adoption of EU rules</li> </ul>
<b>GOVERNANCE</b>	<b>5.1 ADMINISTRATIVE EFFICIENCY</b> – Enhance efficient public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens and institutions, in particular, with a view to solving legal and other obstacles in border regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• institutional capacity e.g. to manage / promote cultural, natural heritage, creative industries,</li> <li>• increasing mutual trust, improved management of border-crossing points, adoption of EU rules, or enhancing e-government &amp; statistic data collection/ accessibility</li> <li>• Identification / mitigation of administrative / legal obstacles or mainstreaming</li> </ul>

### Type of partners, eligible to apply under this Programme:

- Public bodies (incl. International organisations)
- Bodies governed by public law
- Non-profit organisations

## 3.3 TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME (INTERREG VI-B)

### 3.3.1 Interreg IPA Adrion

Albania qualifies to participate in the **IPA ADRION** programme that invests in regional innovation systems, cultural and natural heritage protection, environmental resilience, sustainable transport and capacity building.

Bringing together **ten (10) partner countries** from both EU and non-EU areas of the Adriatic-Ionian region, the programme fosters European integration and drives forward regional policy development, benefiting more than 70 million people. This unique mix of countries creates a vibrant and collaborative environment, encouraging strong cross-border partnerships and shared growth. A key focus of the programme is to support the EU enlargement process by strengthening cooperation among all participating countries.

## The Programme area includes four (4) EU Member States

- **Croatia** – regions: Panonska Hrvatska; Jadranska Hrvatska; Grad Zagreb; Sjeverna Hrvatska.
- **Greece** – regions: Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki; Kentriki Makedonia; Dytiki Makedonia; Thessalia; Ipeiros; Ionia Nisia; Dytiki Ellada; Sterea Ellada; Peloponnisos; Attiki; Voreio Aigaio; Notio Aigaio; Kriti.
- **Italy**, regions: Abruzzo, Basilicata, Calabria, Emilia–Romagna, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Lombardia, Marche, Molise, Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano, Provincia Autonoma di Trento, Puglia, Sicilia, Umbria, Veneto;
- **Slovenia** – regions: Vzhodna Slovenija; Zahodna Slovenija.

**Five (5) non-EU Partner States** (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) and **One (1) third country (San Marino).**

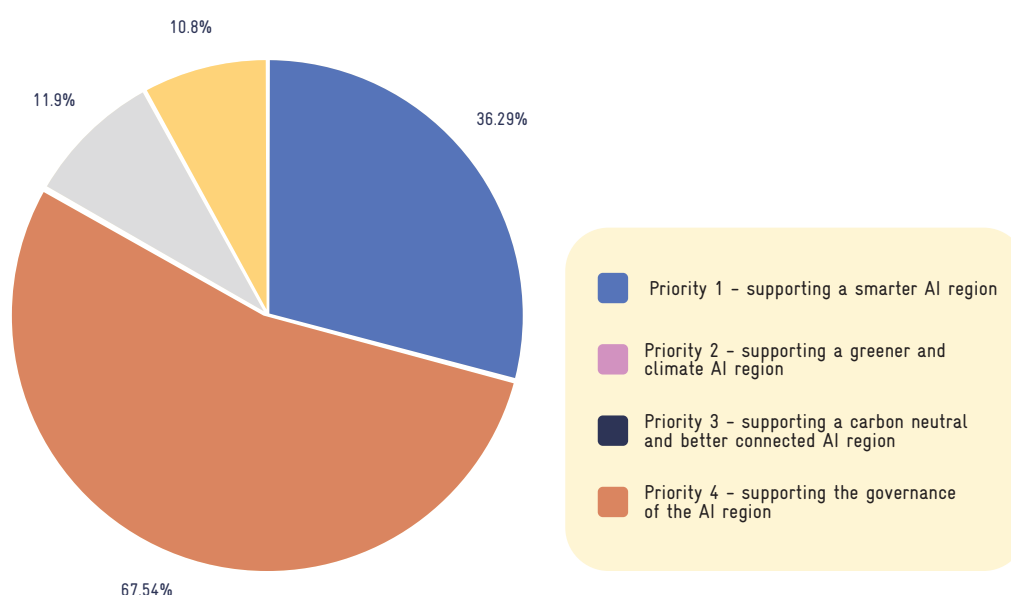
Total Budget	160.8 MEUR
Total EU budget	136,688 MEUR
National contribution	24.2 MEUR
EU co-financing rate	85%

## Thematic priorities (clusters)

POLICY OBJ.-PO	DESCRIPTIONS	PRIORITY AXES	SPEC. OBJECTIVES	
PO 1	A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity	Priority 1. Supporting a smarter Adriatic Ionian region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen innovation capacities</li> <li>• Supporting skills development</li> </ul>	36
PO 2	A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility	Priority 2. Supporting a greener and climate resilient Adriatic-Ionian region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing resilience to climate change, natural and man-made disaster</li> <li>• Supporting circular economy</li> <li>• Supporting environmental preservation and protection</li> <li>• Supporting sustainable multimodal urban mobility</li> </ul>	67

POLICY OBJ.-PO	DESCRIPTIONS	PRIORITY AXES	SPEC. OBJECTIVES	
PO 3	A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility	Priority 3. Supporting a carbon neutral and better-connected Adriatic-Ionian region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthening a carbon neutral smart mobility</li> </ul>	11
PO 6	Interreg: A better Cooperation Governance	Priority 4. Supporting the Governance of the Adriatic-Ionian region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting the governance of the Adriatic Ionian region</li> </ul>	10

### Interreg funds allocation per Priority Axes



The programme is marked by a strong sustainable approach, where green policy plays a major role with dedicated resources for future funded projects up to 54% of the total allocated resources.

IPA III plays a significant role in facilitating the involvement of its beneficiaries in transnational and interregional cooperation programmes funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which are overseen by DG REGIO.

These programmes are executed under a shared management framework, adhering to the implementation rules established in the European Territorial Cooperation goal (Interreg) Regulation, and do not require submission for the opinion of the IPA III Committee.

### 3.3.2 Interreg Euro-Med

The Interreg Euro-MED Programme facilitates cross-border cooperation in the Mediterranean region, including Albania, by offering financial support for initiatives that are designed and overseen by public authorities, academic institutions, private entities, and civil society organisations.

#### Programme area

The Interreg Euro-MED Programme encompasses 69 regions, which include 65 regions (NUTS 2) from 10 **EU member states**: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain, along

with **4 IPA candidate nations**: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, in total unites stakeholders from 14 nations along the northern Mediterranean coast.

This eligible geographic area accounts for approximately 25% of the European Union's total area and serves a population exceeding 140 million individuals across all partner countries.

With a total budget of around **€294 million for the 2021–2027 period**, the programme focuses on making the **region smarter, greener, and improving cooperation** among its many stakeholders.

NO.	PRIORITIES	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES
P1	A Smarter Mediterranean	1.1: Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies
P2	A Greener Mediterranean	2.4: Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system-based approaches 2.6: Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy 2.7: Enhancing protection and conservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure including in urban areas and reducing all forms of pollution
P3	Mediterranean Governance	6.6: Actions to support better cooperation governance

The Interreg Euro-MED Programme funds projects that offer solutions aligned with four key missions, all aimed at creating a more sustainable and resilient Mediterranean region .

### 1- Strengthening an innovative sustainable economy

This mission supports projects that boost innovation across Mediterranean regions. Enhancing innovation capabilities within Mediterranean regions is essential for fortifying and solidifying a knowledge-based society. The projects associated with this mission will bolster the abilities of both public and private entities to develop and manage Regional Innovation Strategies, thereby enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs and facilitating the shift towards a circular and sustainable economy.

### 2- Protecting, restoring and valorising the natural environment and heritage

Initiatives aligned with this mission will advocate for measures aimed at mitigating and adapting to climate change, while also promoting the sustainable management of natural resources and the restoration of degraded ecosystems.

### 3- Promoting green living areas

Initiatives will address this challenge by promoting the creation of more environmentally friendly living spaces, while also striving to reduce their effects on both the Mediterranean ecosystem and the global climate, with particular emphasis on air quality, energy consumption, and transportation.

### 4- Enhancing sustainable tourism

Initiatives will focus on the advancement of sustainable tourism as a comprehensive concern: encouraging tourism that aligns with the principles of a circular economy, taking into account the sustainability of eco-system services through innovative technologies, and advocating for the safeguarding of natural resources and cultural heritage.

The application process for Strategic Territorial Thematic projects, within the Interreg Euro-MED programme, takes place in two phases: pre-application and full application, where only the projects selected in the first phase can proceed to the second phase.

Applications are accepted only during the call period through the "JEMS system".

For more, visit: <https://jems.interreg-euro-med.eu/>

## Funding and Co-Financing

The Interreg Euro-MED Programme offers grants that cover **80%** of a project's eligible budget. The remaining 20% must be co-financed by the project partners, using either:

- **Public funds** (national, regional, or local), or
- **Private funds** (partners' own contributions or external private sources)

**Note:** The programme works on a **reimbursement basis**, so no pre-financing is provided, therefore partners must ensure they have sufficient cash flow to advance funds

Reimbursement methods include: **Real costs** and **Simplified Cost Options (SCOs)** – like predefined unit costs, lump sums, or flat rates

Each participating state has either a **centralised or decentralised** control system for expenditure verification. Albania has the centralised control system and the financial report are subject of expenditure verification by the First Level Controller (FLC) of SASPAC.

### Types of projects:

The Programme supports 2 types of projects:

- ◇ **Thematic projects** that contribute to the Smarter and Greener priorities;
- ◇ **Governance projects** that fit the Governance priority.

### Thematic Projects

Thematic projects are divided into 4 categories:

- ◇ **Study projects** perform analyses to better address a thematic issue and open the door to the development of new instruments, policies, strategies, and action plans.
- ◇ **Test projects** experiment common instruments, policies, strategies and action plans already developed to validate concrete solutions to be transferred.
- ◇ **Transfer projects** optimise and share validated common instruments, policies, strategies and actions plans to have the stakeholders adopt them.
- ◇ **Strategic territorial** projects conduct studies, test solutions and transfer results addressing the strategic topics of a specific typology of territories.

Each project implementing actions to fulfil the selected specific objective contributes to one of the 4 Programme missions that tackle challenges of greater importance.

## 3.4 INTERREGIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME (INTERREG VI-C)







### 3.4.1 Interreg Europe

**Interreg Europe** is an EU-funded programme that promotes interregional cooperation to help reduce disparities in development, growth, and quality of life across Europe's regions

With a budget of **€394 million**, the programme creates opportunities for regions to work together, exchange good practices, and find shared solutions to regional development challenges. It brings together **36 countries**, including the EU27, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, and Ukraine.

## Thematic priorities / Topics covered:

The programme contributes to all EU priorities and strives for better regional governance through capacity building.

Priorities	Specific objectives
	Research & innovation capacities; Digitisation SME competitiveness; S3, industry and entrepreneurship Digital connectivity; Greener Europe
	Energy efficiency; Renewable energy; Smart energy systems Climate change; Water management; Circular economy Nature & biodiversity; Zero-carbon urban mobility; More connected Europe
	Sustainable TEN-T Sustainable mobility
	Education; Social inclusion; Integration of third-country nationals Health care; Culture and sustainable tourism Europe closer to citizens
	Integrated urban development Integrated non-urban development Better regional governance
	Integrated urban development Integrated non-urban development Better regional governance

It is important to highlight that some of the Municipalities of Albania and NGOs from Albania have been the winner in the last call.

### Who can benefit

- ◇ Public authorities
  - » national, regional, local public authorities
  - » other relevant bodies responsible for developing and/ or implementing regional development policies
  - » authorities responsible for developing and/ or implementing the Investment for jobs and growth programmes
- ◇ Organisations relevant for regional development policies
  - » Business support organisations (development agencies, innovation agencies, chambers of commerce, clusters, etc.)
  - » Environmental organisations (environmental agencies, energy agencies, NGOs, etc.)
  - » Education and research institutions (universities, research centres, etc.)

### 3.4.2 URBACT

**URBACT IV 2021-2027** helps cities to develop an integrated set of actions for sustainable positive changes for cities, integrating the cross-cutting EU priorities of digital, green and gender-equal policy-making into its activities.

For this period, URBACT IV is co-financed by:

- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF): €79.77 million
- IPA III: €5 million
- NDICI (Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument)

The programme includes:

- All EU 27 Member States, Norway, and Switzerland
- IPA countries: Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina
- NDICI countries: Ukraine and Moldova

During the implementation of the programme the managing authority will promote the strategic use of public procurement to support policy objectives (including professionalism efforts to address capacity gaps).

Beneficiaries are encouraged to:

- Use quality-based and life-cycle cost criteria
- Integrate green, social, and innovative considerations into their procurement processes
- Build professional capacity to manage procurement effectively

### 3.5 IPA CARE

IPA CARE is an EU funded capacity development Programme for Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Kosovo\*, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Türkiye.

The overall objective of the IPA CARE Programme is to contribute to resilience in Partner countries, in particular to earthquakes and health emergencies. More specifically, it has three main objectives:

- ◇ To increase the institutional and legal framework and capacities of the IPA III relevant beneficiaries on disaster risk reduction related to earthquakes and health emergencies in particular
- ◇ To increase prevention, preparedness and response capability of the IPA relevant beneficiaries at regional, cross-border and local levels in relation in particular to earthquakes and health emergencies.
- ◇ To increase IPA III beneficiaries' participation in and cooperation with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) including regional cross-border cooperation.

The IPA CARE Programme runs from March 2023 to February 2029 and has a budget of 12,8 million EUR, of which 36% will be devoted to equipment.



## 4. EU EXTERNAL ACTION PROGRAMME (RELEX)

The EU provides different combined funding in the form of grants, public contracts to support projects and organisations, furthering their objectives of the third countries, including Albania.

The calls of proposals on EU –funded project for Albania can be found at the DG INTPA Publications website (formerly EuropeAid) and in e-Calls PROSPECT , if the organisation is already registered in e-Calls PADOR. But recently, can be search in the EU Funding & Tender Portal.

In general, grants of External Action are managed by DG Near, but the EU delegation in Albania is communicated on behalf of DG Near.

Those applicants intending to apply for a grant and twinning should register in PADOR (Potential Applicant Data On-line Registration).

The application process under this call of proposal followed two steps, the application with a concept note and the pre-selected applicants apply for full application phase. In specific cases, both stages are opened at the same time schedule.

The calls can be divided in one or in different Lots and there is a specific budget allocated for each Lot.

Any EU contribution in any EU grant requested under the calls for proposals must fall within the following percentages of total eligible costs of the action:

- Minimum percentage: 60 % of the total eligible costs of the action.
- Maximum percentage: 95 % of the total eligible costs of the action

To be eligible for a grant, the lead applicant must:

1. be a legal person
2. be non-profit-making
3. be a non-governmental organisation
4. be established in Albania or in a Member State of the European Union or in another IPA III beneficiary

Applicants can be directly responsible for the preparation and management of the action not acting as an intermediary. Usually these calls require application submitted by consortium of minimum 1 applicant and 1 co-applicant.

The global objectives of the calls for proposals provided under the Programme of External Action are to strengthen the role and capacity of civil society to promote and defend a more participatory and democratic society and support the public institutions in advancing in delivering the policies and provision of services. The aim is to reduce poverty, to ensure sustainable economic, social and environmental development and to promote democracy, the rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights

In Albania, these grants have been focused to support civil society organisations in the field of Environment, Culture and Food Safety and Consumer Protection, as well as in the fields of Good Governance, Rule of Law and Environment

Regarding the public institutions, the support is given to strength the overall capacity and effectiveness, strengthening partnerships to advance social services provision and inclusive employment and skills and support to enhance the organisation and governance.

Also, through EU grants, support is given to the local Municipalities and CSOs to enhance the socio-economic development of their regions and social inclusion.

Under the External Action some calls are managed by the indirect grant management meaning that the EU has concluded a financing agreement with Albania which fills the role of the contracting authority, while EU perform prior authorisation controls of the main steps of the procedure.

## 5. ACCESS TO EU FINANCING PROGRAMMES

The EU offers a variety of **financing options** through **local financial institutions**, including **loans, micro-finance, and venture capital**, accessible to **businesses of all sizes and sectors**. Every year, more than **200,000 businesses** receive EU-backed financial support.

### How Financing Works

- **Local financial institutions** determine the **financing terms** (amount, duration, interest rates, and fees).
- **EU support** enables these institutions to offer additional funding to businesses.
- **Banks, venture capitalists, and angel investors** make funding decisions.

### Applicant Rights & Feedback

- **Unsuccessful applicants** have the right to request **feedback** from credit institutions on their financing decisions.
- This feedback helps businesses understand their **financial position** and improve their **future financing chances**.

## 5.1 INVEST EU PROGRAMME

The **InvestEU Programme** is the EU's flagship financing initiative designed to **boost investment** by leveraging **public and private funds** to support **sustainable recovery and strategic priorities** such as **green and digital transition, innovation, social investment, and skills development**. Running from **2021 to 2027**, it aims to mobilize **€372 billion** through an **EU budget guarantee of €26.2 billion**.

Unlike traditional EU funding programmes, **InvestEU operates on a market-driven basis**, meaning there are **no national envelopes**—funding is allocated based on **market demand**. Member States can allocate resources from **shared management funds** and the **Recovery and Resilience Facility** to enhance investment impact.

*Albanian has not benefitted from this Programme, mostly dedicated to EU member states*

Businesses can apply for funding across **six major sectors** under InvestEU:

No.	Sectors	Specific objectives
1	Energy Sector	Supports renewable energy, energy efficiency, storage technologies, and the development of clean fuels.
2	Sustainability	Funds transport, digital infrastructure, and smart urban projects, including those under the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T)
3	Environment	Focuses on water supply, waste management, biodiversity conservation, decarbonization of industries, and climate resilience.
4	Research, Innovation, and Digitalization	Promotes cutting-edge R&D, digital transformation, corporate innovation, and Horizon Europe-linked projects.
5	SME Support	Enhances access to finance for startups, small businesses, and mid-cap enterprises, especially those facing financial constraints.
6	Social Investment and Skills	Strengthens education, healthcare, social housing, gender equality initiatives, and social enterprise funding.

InvestEU facilitates **access to finance**, **reduces investment risks**, and **supports high-impact projects** that drive **Europe's competitiveness and sustainability goals**. By integrating **EU-backed funding with market-driven solutions**, it ensures that businesses across all sectors can access **long-term growth opportunities**.

The InvestEU Programme consists of three components:

- 1-The InvestEU Fund<sup>43</sup>,
- 2-The InvestEU Advisory Hub
- 2-The InvestEU Porta<sup>44</sup>

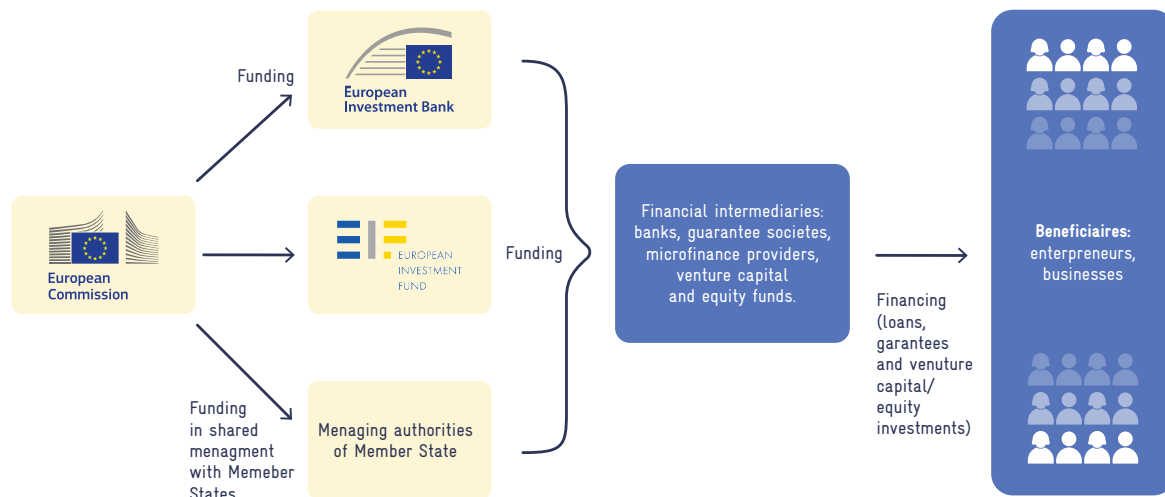
The InvestEU Fund is an instrument that targets economically viable projects in areas where there are market failures or investment gaps. This instrument seeks to attract commercial financing only support projects where financing could not be obtained at all or not at the required terms without InvestEU Fund support. It will also target higher risk projects in specific areas, strategic investment with interest on the green and digital transitions, as well as social investment and skills.

The **Implementing Partners** of InvestEU Fund are 17 Banks, including

- ◇ European Investment Bank (EIB), as the main implementing partner
- ◇ The European Investment Fund (EIF) ,
- ◇ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)
- ◇ And other EU national Banks

**Implementing Partners** offer financial services directly and through **financial intermediaries** across Europe, supporting **public and private companies**, including **SMEs, small mid-caps, larger enterprises, and individuals**.

To become **financial intermediaries**, organizations must **apply during an open call** and undergo a **standard selection process**, which includes **due diligence**. This ensures **credibility, financial stability, and compliance** with EU funding standards.



European Commission

Eligible financial intermediaries are public or private entities, including but not limited to:

- For **guarantees**: credit or financial institutions, alternative lenders, leasing companies;
- For **counter-guarantees**: (counter-) guarantee schemes, (counter-) guarantee institutions or other entities, credit or financial institutions

The financial intermediaries that sign agreements with Implementing Partners can implement the Guarantee Funds available under InvestEU.

The eligible final recipients from the guarantee funds can be natural or legal persons established in an EU country or in a Third Eligible Country (including Albania), including:

- Private entities such as project companies, large corporates, mid-cap companies, including small mid-cap companies, and SMEs;
- Public sector entities;
- Public-private partnership (PPPs) and private companies with a public purpose;
- Non-for-profit organisations.

The above entities should apply for their projects to their **local commercial or public banks whose financial products are covered by the EU guarantee in their country or region**. The local intermediary will inform them if a particular financing programme is covered by the InvestEU Fund.

The selected projects to be eligible of the use of EU guarantee for financing and investment operation should be in compliance with the InvestEU Regulation and the Investment Guidelines.

The project must:

- Address market failures or investment gaps and be economically viable
- Need EU backing in order to get off the ground
- Achieve a multiplier effect and where possible crowd-in private investment
- Help meet EU policy objectives

Although, Albania is not an EU member state, Albanian SMEs can potentially access InvestEU indirectly through financial intermediaries (such as commercial banks or venture capital funds) that collaborate with the European Investment Bank (EIB) or other participating financial institutions that invest in projects, benefiting from the EU budget guarantees.

From the statistics data, so far, none of the financial intermediaries from Albania have signed any agreement with Implementing Partners of InvestEU Fund,

### **InvestEU Advisory HUB<sup>46</sup>**

The InvestEU Advisory Hub is the central entry point to provide advisory support and technical assistance to project developers and private and public entities. It helps applicants (Private, public project promoters, financial and other intermediaries) with the preparation, development, structuring and implementation of investment projects of the InvestEU Fund.

To apply for the advisory support, the above entities should click to the InvestEU Central EntryPoint and follow the steps by answering a set of questions helping them to identify the advisory needs to address and the potential advisory partner. The applicants should provide some details (e.g. location, area of activity sector, type of advisory support needed, maturity of the proposal and beneficiary contact details). To formally apply for advisory support, the applicant will need to register and log in via EU Login.

At the end of the application process, the applicant may be invited to select one or several advisory partner(s) that could serve their advisory needs based on the replies provided throughout the questionnaire.

The types of advisory support available are:

- **Project Advisory** (project identification, preparation and development, planning and implementation of investment project and financial structuring, etc)
- **Capacity Building** (strengthening capacity and investment readiness of organisations; environmental and/or social sustainability structuring and impact assessments; procurement and compatibility with State aid rules.

- **Market development** (Market development activities; Communication and awareness raising).

### The InvestEU Portal<sup>48</sup>

The InvestEU Portal brings together investors and project promoters on a single EU-wide database of investment opportunities available within the EU, Norway and Iceland.

The database contains a list of pre-checked quality projects thus, qualified investors have the opportunity to easily screen various projects before deciding on which ones to invest in.

The InvestEU Portal allows project promoters to reach investors that they may not be able to reach otherwise. Both, the project promoter and the investors have to be registered on the Portal.

## 5.2 WESTERN BALKANS INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK (WBIF)

**WBIF** – is a joint initiative of the EU, financial institutions, bilateral donors and beneficiaries, aimed at enhancing harmonisation and cooperation in **investments for the socio-economic development contributing to the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries**. The WBIF plays a fundamental role in implementing the **€30 billion Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans focuses on supporting start-ups and micro-, small and medium-sized businesses to invest towards innovation and green growth**. The WBIF is also an integral part of the new Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, channelling half of the financial assistance made available through the Reform and Growth Facility.

### WBIF Instruments

- WB EDIF- Western Balkans Enterprise Development and Innovation Facility
- REEP – Regional Energy Efficiency Programme
- EFSE – European Fund for Southeast Europe
- GGF – Green for Growth Fund

### 5.2.1 Western Balkans Enterprise Development and Innovation Facility (WB EDIF)

**WB EDIF<sup>49</sup>** is a joint initiative of the EU, International Financial Institutions (IFIs), bilateral partners and the public institutions of the Western Balkans economies (**EIB, EIF, EBRD, World Bank, OECD, KfW, DEG, OeEB and the Italian Republic**)

It seeks to improve access to finance for small business owners and improve the economic and regulatory environment in which local SMEs operate in Albania and other WB countries This includes

- **Policy reforms** in accordance with EU acquis and best international practices;
- **Provision of equity finance** for early stage and mature SMEs;
- **Provision of debt finance** to local financial intermediaries through guarantees and incentives;
- **Dedicated advisory services** to improve sales, productivity, employment and financial literacy, and enhance the emergence and growth of innovative and high-potential SMEs

WB EDIF **does not support entrepreneurs directly but provides funding to local financial intermediaries** via debt and equity products as well as support services – e.g. venture capital funds, guarantee schemes including mutual guarantee organisations, micro-finance institutions and any other financial institutions, providing finance to SMEs established in the Western Balkan countries.

WB EDIF - 4 Pillars				
EC, Beneficiaries, International Financial Institutions, Bilateral				
1. SME Equity Financing		2. SME Loan Guarantee	3. SME Lending	4. Support Services Facility
Enterprise Innovation Fund (ENIF)	Enterprise Expansion Fund (ENEF)	EIF	EU grant to EBRD-	Technical assistance Support Services Providers
innovative SMEs in their early and expansion stage	SMEs in later stage of their expansion	Financial institutions SMEs	Lending to local commercial bank Co-lending to SME	To governments

Source: European Investment Fund

## 5.2.2 Regional Energy Efficiency Programme -REEP/REEP+<sup>50</sup>

The **Regional Energy Efficiency Programme** aims to support WB beneficiaries achieve their sustainable energy objectives, to create a sustainable market, promote renewable energy and energy efficiency and stimulate investments

Partners of REEP are the Energy Community, the EBRD, European Commission and KfW Banking Group. The investments from the EBRD and KfW Banking Group are combined with grants from the WBIF.

The REEP provides both, financing and technical assistance. Funding helps **individuals, businesses, and municipalities** invest in **energy efficiency and renewables**, through the financial instruments:

- **WeBGEFF**: Loans for homes and small-scale renewables.
- **WeBSEDF**: Funds industrial efficiency and renewable projects.

The benefits are:

- Loans (€1–6million) for energy projects.
- Free consultancy for project setup (WBIF grant).
- Cashback incentives for CO<sub>2</sub> reduction.

Other supports are given through Direct Finance of Public Buildings & Policy Dialogue Support, especially

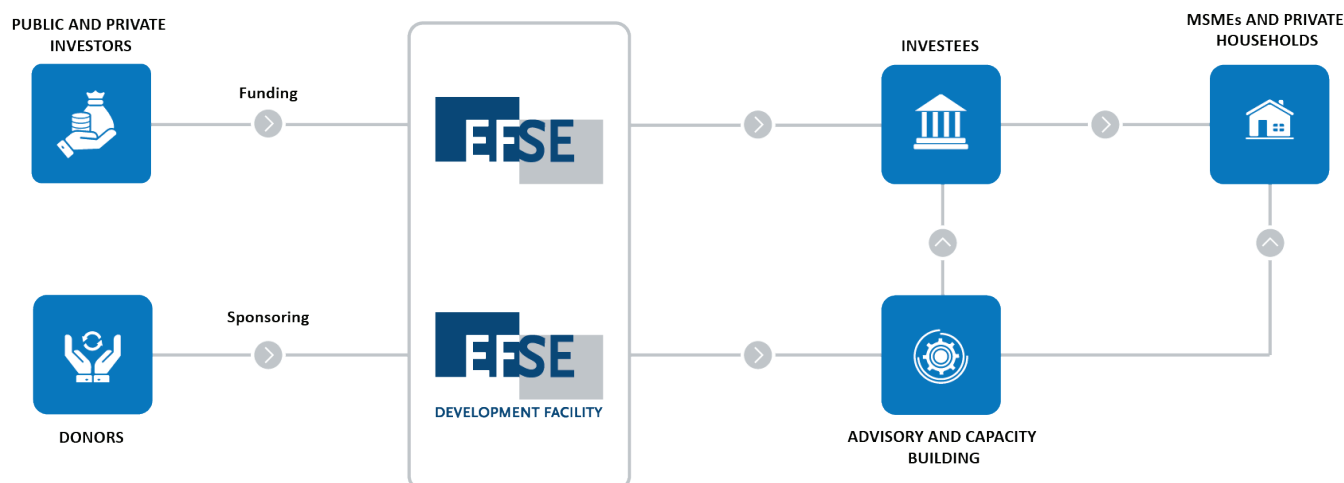
- Funding for schools, hospitals, and government buildings.
- Regulatory alignment with EU energy standards.
- Technical help for energy projects.

These initiatives support **clean energy, efficiency, and sustainability** in communities and businesses. One of the supported project was on energy-efficient rehabilitation of up to 19 dormitories at the Student City 1 in Tirana.

### 5.2.3. European Fund for Southeast Europe - EFSE

The European Fund for Southeast Europe (EFSE) invests in carefully selected local financial intermediaries, including commercial banks, microfinance institutions, and non-bank financial institutions such as leasing companies.

EFSE builds their capacities, facilitates knowledge-sharing and provides on-the-ground training and mentorship through its Entrepreneurship Academy. In addition, the EFSE Development Facility provides advisory and capacity building, training, and other non-financial support to institutions and individuals.



### 5.2.4 Green for Growth Fund - GGF

The **Green for Growth Fund (GGF)** operates in **19 markets**, including **Albania**, Turkey, the European Eastern Neighbourhood, and the Middle East & North Africa, supporting **climate action and sustainable economic growth**.

How It Works

- **Blended finance model:** Combines public and **private capital** to expand investments in underserved regions.
- **Funding for businesses and households** through **local financial institutions** or **direct project investments**.
- **Technical Assistance Facility** ensures **high-quality implementation**, promoting **energy efficiency and renewables**.

GGF targets at least a **20% reduction in energy use and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions**, along with benefits in **water, waste, and material efficiency**. This initiative complements **existing EU-backed programs**, driving **green development and economic resilience**.

How to Apply for a WBIF Grant?

The WBIF provides **grants for energy, environment, social, transport, digital and private sector projects and programmes through annual or biannual calls for proposals**.

Private sector development grants may also be allocated to specific initiatives that complement infrastructure projects and help achieve the WBIF's strategic orientations and investment priorities.

Only Albanian projects submitted and/or endorsed by the **National IPA Coordinators (NIPAC)** of Albania are **eligible for consideration from WBIF**.

The **WBIF** contributed **€333.4 million in grants** to these investments, of which **€330.7 million was EU IPA funding** and **€2.7 million was Bilateral Donor funding (2020-2024)**



666 SMEs supported in Albania and €60.1m was financing amount for SMEs

Some of the Investment benefitted from Albania still in active status:

1. Albania – North Macedonia Power Interconnection (I): Grid Section in Albania
2. Montenegro – Albania – Greece Rail Interconnection (Rehabilitation of Section Durrës – Tirana, New Railway to Rinas Branch)
3. Rehabilitation of Fierza Hydropower Plant in Albania
4. Tirana Bypass in Albania
5. Vau i Dejës Floating Solar Photovoltaic Power Plant
6. Belshi Solar Photovoltaic Power Plant
7. Vorë – Hani i Hotit R2 Railway Line in Albania
8. Establishment of Smart Labs – Network of ICT Laboratories for the Pre-university Education System
9. Belshi Solar Photovoltaic Power Plant
10. Safe and Sustainable Transport Programme (SSTP)
11. Corridor VIII: Durrës – Rrogozhinë Railway Section in Albania
12. Corridor Vc: Kvanj Tunnel – Buna Motorway Subsection

Below is an overview of the **Active WBIF Programmes for the Private Sector**, including blending financing and guarantees, along with the financial institutions responsible for implementation

FINANCING PROGRAMMES	START DATE	FINANCIAL INSTITUTION	SECTOR
SME Go Green Programme in the Western Balkans	Dec- 2022	EBRD	Sustainable agriculture Green transition
Green Finance for Inclusion	Jan- 2023	CPD (Cassa Depositi e Prestiti)	Sustainable agriculture Financial inclusion
Go Digital in the Western Balkans	Dec- 2023	EBRD	Green transition Digital Transition and Innovation
Eco-Industrial Parks in the Western Balkans – Proof of Concept	Jun- 2023	IFC	Trade and value chain integration Green transition
Pilot Programme on Inclusive and Socially Responsible Procurement	Dec-2022	EBRD	Financial inclusion
Structural Reform Facility – Competitiveness Policy Priorities for Western Balkans	Dec- 2023	EBRD	Financial inclusion
European Fund for Southeast Europe (EFSE)	Jun-2008	KFW	Sustainable agriculture Green transition
Green for Growth Fund (GGF)	Dec-2009	KFW	Financial inclusion Green transition



FINANCING PROGRAMMES	START DATE	FINANCIAL INSTITUTION	SECTOR
Enterprise Expansion Fund (ENEF) II	Dec- 2023	EBRD	Financing and financial diversification
Western Balkans Regional SME Competitiveness Support Programme	Dec- 2017	EBRD	Trade and value chain integration Green transition
Advice for Small Businesses	Dec- 2019	EBRD	Multi-thematic
WB EDIF Guarantee 4 SME Resilience	Jun-2022	European Investment Fund	Financing and financial diversification Financial inclusion
Growth for All	Aug-2024	EBRD	Financial inclusion
HI-BAR	Mar- 2024	EBRD	Crowding-in private capital Green transition
Supporting Market-Oriented Green Transformation in the Eastern Neighbourhood and Western Balkans	Jun- 2024	KFW	Crowding-in private capital Green transition
Western Balkans Climate Programme	Dec- 2024	IFC	Financing and financial diversification Green transition
Innovation and Green Transformation Facility	Dec- 2024	European Investment Bank	Digital transition and innovation Green transition
Supporting Entrepreneurs and MSMEs to Safeguard Employment	Sept-2024	KFW	Financial inclusion
EDFI Carbon Sinks	Oct- 2024	EDFI	Crowding-in private capital Green transition

## 5.2.5 Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans (2024-2027)

Adopted on 8 November 2023, the Growth Plan aims to accelerate the Western Balkans' **socio-economic convergence** with the EU, paving the way for **future EU membership**.

The **Reform and Growth Facility**, launched on **25 May 2024**, provides **€6 billion** in funding, complementing **IPA III assistance**, to support **EU-related reforms and economic growth** in the region.

On **23 October 2024**, Albania's **Reform Agenda** for Albania was approved, covering:

- Rule of law and governance
- Digital and green transition
- Human capital development
- Business environment

Investment & Fund Disbursement will be in the blended financing through:

- **WBIF Grants & Loans (€3B)**: Infrastructure investments linked to reform agendas.
- **Direct Loans (€3B)**: Disbursed to **Western Balkans'** budgets for key reforms.

Payments will be made **twice a year**, following reform progress. The first Financial Allocation, the EU approved **€64.5M** for Albania:

- €30M for reforms
- €34.5M through the Balkan Investment Fund for infrastructure

The Commission will **sign agreements** with Albania, ensuring **fraud prevention, transparency, and financial integrity** in fund utilisation.

## 6 APPLICATION PROCESS

### 6.1 Steps-by step how to apply for EU calls

All applications concerning the calls under the **EU Programmes** must be submitted electronically via the Funding & Tenders Portal and should use the forms provided inside the system.

To submit an application, beneficiaries must follow the steps outlined below:

Steps	Details
Step 1: Create an account & PIC number	<div></div> <p>To start, you'll need to create an <b>EU Login account</b>, which serves as the primary access point for all European Commission services. Begin by visiting the Funding and Tenders Portal and selecting the EU Login option at the top right. If you don't already have an account, follow the link to create one. You'll be prompted to enter your personal details, such as your email address and name. After submitting this information, check your email for a confirmation link and follow the instructions to activate your EU Login account.</p> <p>Next, you'll need to register your organisation, if it's not already registered. After logging in, navigate to the Participant Register section, where you'll find the option to register. Here, you'll provide detailed information about your organisation, including its legal status, address, and other relevant details. Upon completing this step, the system will assign your organisation a unique 9-digit Participant Identification Code (PIC). This code is crucial, as it identifies your organisation in any EU funding application. Before starting this registration process, it's a good idea to search the portal's database to see if your organisation already has a PIC to avoid duplications. Check if your organisation is already registered, or register it</p>
Step 1: Find the most suitable Call	<p>After registration of your organisation, you can now explore funding opportunities. On the portal's homepage, select <b>Find Calls for Proposals</b> to browse the open calls under the EU Programme of your interest. To narrow down your search, use the available filters, such as the programme (e.g., Horizon Europe), topics, or deadlines, to find relevant opportunities. Once you find a call that aligns with your project goals, click on it to access detailed information, including guidelines and requirements.</p>

Steps	Details
Step 2: Find partners (optional)	<p>The <b>Partner Search</b> option on the Funding and Tenders Portal is a valuable tool for organisations looking to collaborate on project proposals under EU-funded programmes. This feature helps applicants identify and connect with potential partners who can bring complementary skills, expertise, or resources to their projects, especially for collaborative calls that require multi-partner consortia.</p> <p>To use the Partner Search, first, navigate to the Funding and Tenders Portal. On the homepage, you'll find the Partner Search tool under the "Funding" section or in the relevant call details page. This tool allows you to search by specific criteria, such as keywords related to your project's focus area, expertise needed, or program type. You can also look for organisations that have experience with similar projects or even narrow down by country or region.</p> <p>The search results will display a list of organisations and individual profiles, along with details about their expertise, past projects, and areas of interest. Many profiles also include a brief description of the organisation and contact information, making it easy to reach out directly to initiate a discussion. Additionally, some organisations list specific calls or topics they are interested in, which can help you find partners who are actively seeking collaboration on the same call.</p> <p>Alternatively, if your organisation is looking to attract partners, you can create a profile or post a partnership request. This profile can highlight your organisation's capabilities, the types of projects you're interested in, and any specific expertise you offer. This visibility increases the chances that other organisations looking for partners might approach you.</p>
Step 3: Writing your Proposal	<p>Whether a one-stage or two-stage proposal, the structure contains two distinct Parts: <b>Part A - the section generated by the IT system, and Part B - the Technical Description</b> (usually accompanied by a Consent Form).</p> <p>Part A is based on the information entered by the participants through the submission system at any time before the final submission.</p> <p>Part B includes three sections each corresponding to an evaluation criterion. The template for this part is available for download since the beginning of the submission process and is part of the specific call or topic.</p> <p>The electronic submission system is an online wizard that guides you step-by-step through preparing your proposal. In brief, the procedure involves the following activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Logging in the Portal</li> <li>2. Select the call, the topic, and the type of action in the portal</li> <li>3. Create a draft proposal: Title, acronym, summary, main organisation and contact details</li> <li>4. Manage your parties and contact details: add your partner organisations and contact details</li> <li>5. Edit and complete web forms of Part A and upload the proposal's Part B</li> <li>6. Submit the proposal!</li> </ol>

Steps	Details
Step 4: Where to find more help	<p>Use the tools within the Funding &amp; Tenders Portal to get more information and guidance on preparing and submitting your proposal. Open the "Guidance and Documents" section and browse through the different options offering detailed information on every aspect of the submission process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Guidance &amp; Manuals</b> gives an overview of the different sections you can reach through this section</li> <li>• <b>Reference Documents</b> provides a list with the documents of the programmes managed on the EU Funding &amp; Tenders portal</li> <li>• <b>How to Participate</b> provides a detailed explanation on the submission procedure including guidance on finding partners.</li> <li>• <b>FAQ</b> section includes the most frequently asked questions that provide clarifications on several grey areas.</li> <li>• <b>Helpdesk &amp; Support</b> section offers different tools for additional help such as an IT Helpdesk, phone numbers for direct contact with the EU, a research enquiry service, and the National Contact Points (NCPs) for the Horizon Europe.</li> <li>• <b>Videos</b> that provide guidance on accessing the Funding &amp; Tenders Portal.</li> </ul>

## 6.2 Tips for a Successful Application

### ♦ Pay attention to the text and page limits

In both types of proposals (short and full proposal) there is a specific page limit indicated in the downloadable template. Additionally, there are explanations on which pages from the template can be removed and do not count in the page limit.

For short proposals, the page limit is usually at 12 pages (for Part B) while for full proposals, the page limit is usually at 50 pages (for Part B). Different page limits might apply depending on the call and they will be indicated in the specific call document.

### ♦ Pay attention to the Annexes of Part B

Annexes of Part B can be traced at the end of the Part B Template Document. They often include additional material that can enrich the proposal and get the message through. There are mandatory annexes as well as optional annexes. Usually, the Annexes usually (but not always) include:

- Pitch deck – a ppt presentation of the proposal will be used in case you are invited for a face-to-face interview (for short and full proposal)
- Video up to three minutes explaining the project idea and the capacity of the beneficiaries (for short and full proposal)
- Lump Sum including a detailed budget breakdown (only for full proposal)
- Financial plan and equity needed using a specific template (only for full proposal)
- Data management plan (DMP) providing information about open access to data (only for full proposal)
- CVs of key personnel (only for full proposal)
- Letters of intent (only for full proposal)
- Ownership control declaration (only for full proposal)

## 7. RESOURCES AND CONTACTS

### 7.1 Table of Albania's Participation Status in EU Programmes

EU PROGRAMMES	ALBANIA'S PARTICIPATION STATUS	ENTRY AGREEMENT SIGNED	RELEVANT INSTITUTION/S
Horizon Europe	Associated country (Full member)	May 30, 2022 (Retroactive: Jan 1, 2021)	National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation
Creative Europe	Associated country (Full Member)	Dec 2021 (Retroactive: Jan 1, 2021)	Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation
Single Market Programme	Associated country, eligible partially under (SME Competitiveness Pillar)	Dec 2023 (Retroactive: Jan 1, 2021)	Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation
Digital Europe	Associated country (eligible for specific objectives 1, 2, 4, 5)	June 2023 (Retroactive: Jan 1, 2023)	Ministry of Infrastructure & Energy, National Agency for Information Society
Erasmus+	Non-associated third country with access to the international dimension of Erasmus+	N/A	Ministry of Education & Sports
Fiscalis Programme	Participant	N/A	Albanian Tax Authority
Customs Programme	Participants	N/A	Albanian Customs Authority
Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme	Partner Country (not associated to the Programme)	27th December 2023 (Retroactive: Jan 1, 2023)	Ministry of Education & Sports
European Solidarity Corps	Partner Country (not associated to the Programme)	N/A	Ministry of Education & Sports
Justice Programme	Associated country	13 March 2024 (Retroactive: Jan 1, 2023)	Albanian Customs Authority

## 7.2 Contact Information for Relevant Agencies and Support Services

European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH);

COSME data

ECCP, <https://www.clustercollaboration.eu>.

<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-innovation-hubs>

Europe Direct – European information network, [https://europa.eu/european-union/contact\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en).

EURES – European cooperation network of employment services, <https://ec.europa.eu/eures>.

<https://europa.eu/youreurope>.

SOLVIT – EU-wide problem-solving network, <https://ec.europa.eu/solvit>.

EBN, <http://www.ebn.eu>.

Eureka | Home ([eurekanetwork.org](http://eurekanetwork.org))

National Contact Points (NCPs) for the EU Research and Innovation framework programme, such as the (networks of) Horizon Europe National Contact Points;

European Institute of Technology – KICs (Knowledge and Innovation Communities);

Smart Specialisation Thematic Platforms;

The European IP Helpdesk and the international IP Helpdesks;

Joint Cluster Initiatives (Euroclusters);

European Business Angels Network (EBAN);

Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE)

TPE – Trade Promotion Europe and the European Business Organisation Worldwide Network (EBOWN)

European Business Organisation Worldwide Network – European Business Organisation Worldwide Network (eboworldwide)

The Centre for Competitiveness Promotion (CCP) is a non-profit organisation established in 2011, dedicated to advancing economic development through support for SMEs, entrepreneurship and inclusive growth. The Centre is particularly recognised for its expertise in European Union programmes, which constitute a core area of its work.

CCP has extensive and long-standing experience in the preparation, management, and implementation of EU-funded projects. It has successfully participated in and coordinated initiatives under a wide range of EU programmes, including COSME, the Single Market Programme, IPA Cross-border Cooperation, INTERREG, and ERASMUS+, among others. This experience reflects also its deep understanding of EU funding mechanisms and policy priorities.

In addition to project implementation, the Centre provides capacity-building support through targeted training on EU programme participation and proposal development, serving non-profit organisations, local public authorities, and private sector actors. Its work is further complemented by services in business development, market research, policy analysis, and stakeholder engagement.

For more information, please contact CCP at [info@ccp.al](mailto:info@ccp.al)

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# GUIDE ON EU PROGRAMMES AND FUNDING

