



# **Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)**

## Call for proposals

CEF 2 Energy - Cross-border renewable energy projects  
CEF-E-2023-CBRENEW-PREPSTUDIES

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## EUROPEAN CLIMATE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENT EXECUTIVE AGENCY (CINEA)

CINEA.B – Sustainable networks and investments  
**CINEA.B.4 – CEF Energy and Renewable Energy Financing Mechanism**

### CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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## 0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU **action grants** in the field of Energy under the **Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)**.

The regulatory framework for this EU Funding Programme is set out in:

- Regulation 2018/1046 ([EU Financial Regulation](#))
- the basic act (CEF Regulation [2021/1153](#)<sup>1</sup>).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2021-2023 Work Programme<sup>2</sup> and will be managed by the **European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA)** ('Agency').

The call covers the following **topic**:

- **CEF-E-2023-CBRENEW-PREPSTUDIES – CEF2 Energy – Cross-border renewable energy projects**

**NOTE:** The term 'project' used in this application form and other documents is synonymous to the term 'action' used in the CEF Regulation 2021/1153.

We invite you to read the **call documentation** carefully, and in particular this Call Document, [the Model Grant Agreement](#), the [EU Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual](#) and the [EU Grants AGA – Annotated Grant Agreement](#).

These documents provide clarifications and answers to questions you may have when preparing your application:

- the [Call Document](#) outlines the:
  - background, objectives, scope, activities that can be funded and the expected results (sections 1 and 2)
  - timetable and available budget (sections 3 and 4)
  - admissibility and eligibility conditions (including mandatory documents; sections 5 and 6)
  - criteria for financial and operational capacity and exclusion (section 7)
  - evaluation and award procedure (section 8)
  - award criteria (section 9)
  - legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements (section 10)
  - how to submit an application (section 11)
- the [Online Manual](#) outlines the:
  - procedures to register and submit proposals online via the EU Funding & Tenders Portal ('Portal')
  - recommendations for the preparation of the application

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1153 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the Connecting Europe Facility (OJ L 249, 14.7.2021, p. 38).

<sup>2</sup> Commission Implementing Decision C(2021) 5791 final of 6.8.2021 concerning the adoption of the work programme for 2021-2027 and the financing decision for the implementation of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF).

- the AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement contains:
  - detailed annotations on all the provisions in the Grant Agreement you will have to sign in order to obtain the grant (*including cost eligibility, payment schedule, accessory obligations, etc*).

You are also encouraged to visit the CINEA website to consult the list of projects funded previously.

## 1. Background

Regulation (EU) 2021/1153 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF Regulation) supports infrastructure and connectivity in Europe across the three sectors of transport, energy and digital. For the funding period 2021-2027, a new category of eligible projects features in the energy part of the revised CEF programme - **cross-border projects in the field of renewable energy** (hereinafter: CB RES projects) as defined in Article 7 of the CEF Regulation. The support for renewable energy under the revised CEF programme is embedded in the context of the increased ambition as per the Climate Target Plan<sup>3</sup> and of the strategies on offshore renewable energy<sup>4</sup>, on energy system integration<sup>5</sup> and on hydrogen<sup>6</sup>.

Building on the full implementation of the Fit for 55 proposals, under the REPowerEU initiative the EU has agreed on an strategy for a massive speed up and scale-up in renewable energy in power generation, buildings, industry and transport, aiming to increase the headline 2030 target for renewables from 40% to 42.5%, with the ambition to reach 45%.

The CEF funding window (= 15 % earmarking under CEF energy, i.e. 875 mn € in current prices, subject to market uptake) responds to a renewed focus on regional and cross-border cooperation in the deployment of renewable energy in Europe in the Clean Energy Package. The Renewable Energy Directive (EU)<sup>7</sup> states that the Commission shall support Member States' ambition level in the field of renewables through an enabling framework, including the use of Union funds, for the purpose of enhancing regional cooperation between Member States and between Member States and third countries. The new CEF window is part of this enabling framework, alongside [the Union Renewable Development Platform](#) and the [Renewable Energy Financing Mechanism](#).

The Renewable Energy Directive also sets out four types of cooperation mechanisms that can be used for cooperation: statistical transfers (Art. 8), joint projects between Member States (Art. 9), joint projects between Member States and third countries (Art. 11) and joint support schemes (Art. 13). The definition of CB RES projects as per Article 2 (k) of CEF Regulation, builds up on those concepts for its eligibility criteria.

CB RES projects also contribute to the 60% climate-related spending set for the CEF with such projects counting 100% (as per Article 4 and recital 5 of the CEF Regulation) for all renewable generation (provided that for bioenergy the sustainability criteria of the Renewable Energy Directive are met).

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<sup>3</sup> COM/2020/562 final.

<sup>4</sup> COM/2020/741 final

<sup>5</sup> COM/2020/299 final

<sup>6</sup> COM/2020/301 final

<sup>7</sup> Directive (EU) 2018/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources, OJ L 328, 21.12.2018, p. 82–209.

Cooperation on the deployment of renewables allows for a more cost-effective upscaling when the locations with the best potential are used, resources are pooled and renewable generation planning and deployment takes place. Cooperation can contribute to further alignment of renewable energy policies, supports the ongoing work in regional energy forums (including the North Seas Energy Cooperation - NSEC, Baltic energy market interconnection plan - BEMIP, Central and South Eastern Europe energy connectivity - CESEC, Pentalateral Forum) and contributes to the strategic uptake of renewable technologies to maintain and expand the Union's technology leadership in the field of renewables.

CB RES projects should contribute to decarbonisation, completing the internal energy market and enhancing the security of supply by promoting the cross-border cooperation between Member States in the field of planning, development and the cost-effective exploitation of renewable energy sources.

The CB RES window for renewable energy within CEF complements other EU funding opportunities for renewable energy.

The window strongly focuses on additional renewable energy generation. Indeed, CB RES projects can have non-RES generation components only to the extent to which they comply with the conditions set out under Article 3 of the Delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/342. Namely, non-RES generation components are eligible *"provided that they form an integral part of the project, effectively enable the integration of and are ancillary to a renewables generation facility"*.

The CEF window for renewable energy will support the development of CB RES projects as well as their implementation by co-financing investments in generation assets based on any of the renewable sources listed in the Renewable Energy Directive. The investments can relate to electricity, heating & cooling and transport sector investments, also when they are integrated in and framing broader investment projects e.g. on renewable hydrogen.

A CB RES project can also combine different renewable energy technologies, and it can contain a component on storage as part of the investment (both on- and off-site) or a component that is needed for the integration of the renewables generation site into the grid/heating system. Such CB RES projects must be framed under a cooperation mechanism in accordance with Articles 8 to 13 of the Renewable Energy Directive and may, but do not necessarily have to, have a physical link to more than one Member State. The cooperation mechanisms can be about an exchange of renewables statistics against a financial transfer (statistical transfer) or relate to an entire support scheme for various projects (joint support scheme) instead of linking to a specific project.

Combining CEF grants with loans, guarantees or equity contributions under InvestEU<sup>8</sup> is possible. The combination of financing from the market, Member States, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, CEF, InvestEU and other Union programmes should support the necessary large-scale deployment of renewables to reach at least 42.5% of final energy consumption in renewable energy in 2030, and putting the EU on track for achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

The CEF window for renewable energy supports:

1. Preparatory studies to develop CB RES projects;
2. Technical studies and works to implement CB RES projects.

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<sup>8</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/523 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 March 2021 establishing the InvestEU Programme and amending Regulation (EU) 2015/1017

## 2. Objectives — Themes and priorities — Activities that can be funded — Expected impact

### *Objectives (expected outcome)*

The **objective of this call** is to support **preparatory studies** as per **Article 7(3)** of the CEF Regulation, e.g. to develop and identify CB RES projects. Such studies can assist project promoters in selecting the best project concept and setting up the cooperation agreement, allowing for projects to be supported prior to having acquired the official status of a CB RES project (CB RES status).

Preparatory studies as per Article 7(3) of the CEF Regulation aim to “develop and identify cross-border projects in the field of renewable energy”. Cross-border renewable energy projects are defined in Article 2 (k) of the CEF Regulation: “cross-border project in the field of renewable energy” means a project selected or eligible to be selected under a cooperation agreement or any other kind of arrangement between two or more Member States or arrangements between one or more Member States and one or more third countries as set out in Articles 8, 9, 11 and 13 of Directive (EU) 2018/2001 in the planning or deployment of renewable energy, in accordance with the criteria set out in Part IV of the Annex to this Regulation. On that basis, **a proposal for preparatory study should demonstrate in its scope the link to planning or deployment of renewable energy**. Without a renewable energy component, a proposal would not meet the main requirement for a preparatory study.

Please note that proposals under this call cannot combine preparatory studies and technical studies and works. For the technical studies and works, separate calls for proposals are launched, and a precondition for eligibility is first to receive the CB RES status.

### *Themes and priorities (scope)*

Preparatory studies in the meaning of Article 7(3) of the CEF Regulation allow for support to both EU Member States but also private project promoters in order to advance cooperation ideas, create momentum amongst involved stakeholders and with this generate a pipeline of CB RES projects. They provide specifically support to the project before acquiring the CB RES status.

The purpose of support for preparatory studies is to overcome the obstacles that have in the past prevented cooperation projects from going ahead, such as uncertainty on the allocation of costs and benefits between involved Member States or the additional complexity of setting up cross-border support.

Applications related to preparatory studies must comply with the CEF Regulation and with the specific conditions set out in this call.

Proposals contributing to the development of the future CB RES project generation delivering in any of the RES technologies as defined in Article 2 of the Renewable Energy Directive (EU) are eligible.

Projects that contribute to the REPowerEU objectives and the initiatives, announced as part of the REPowerEU plan from May 2022, would be particularly relevant for the call. This is valid for projects that are in line with the EU solar strategy and the European Solar Rooftop Initiative and would contribute to the REPowerEU target of over 320 GW of solar photovoltaic newly installed by 2025 and almost 600 GW by 2030. Relevant would also be projects that accelerate renewable hydrogen as a replacement of natural gas, coal and oil in hard-to-decarbonise industries and

transport and contribute to the REPowerEU target of 10 million tonnes of domestic renewable hydrogen production.

As stated above in section "objectives", a **proposal for preparatory study should demonstrate in its scope the link to planning or deployment of renewable energy.**

*Activities that can be funded (scope)*

A study in the meaning of Article 7(3) of the CEF Regulation can be designed as a pre-feasibility study. The funding can also be used to provide technical, economic or legal support in setting up or advancing cross-border cooperation with the objective to select the best project concept. As part of such a preparatory study, it is possible to cover also some wider system-related aspects, e.g. the integration of additional storage investments, or of transport and/or digital related investments for synergetic elements.

A study can be used to start exploring (mainly through desktop studies) the possible sites in the territory of Member States (and third countries if applicable) in order to determine the hosting and off-taking (contributing) countries, as well as other exploratory tasks needed to assess the overall cost and benefits of the project. It should allow identifying and formalising the underpinning cooperation mechanism and can include related communication and stakeholder involvement activities.

A study may also investigate the best form of support, such as auctioning and tendering set-up as well as all aspects for which national grid, market and other rules differ in the participating Member States and would need to be agreed upon for a CB RES project to go ahead.

Examples of activities, which could be part of studies as per Article 7 (3) of the CEF Regulation, include:

- pre-feasibility studies, used to start exploring (mainly through desktop studies) the possible geographical sites ;
- exploratory tasks to assess the overall cost and benefits of the project; first evaluation of overall cost and benefits of the project, including cost of energy generation, system integration, cost of support, greenhouse gas emissions, security of supply, air and other local pollution, innovation;
- analysis of wider system-related aspects e.g. aspects of market and grid integration, grid financing aspects, the integration of additional storage investments, or of transport and/or digital related investments for synergetic elements;
- identification of possible financing sources, assessing Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) potential;
- communication and stakeholder involvement activities;
- cooperation activities between Member States, including the assessment of cost-benefit sharing.

In case the proposal concerns the development of the cooperation activities between Member States, applicants may need to contact the relevant authority of the concerned Member State. Applicants are strongly encouraged to get in touch with the relevant authority as early as possible. Please refer to the CB RES Member States contact points available in the [Programme website](#).

Proposals can be composed of single applicant or based on a consortium. It is not necessary to have participants from all concerned countries in which the project will be implemented. This choice is the remit of applicants, depending on the proposals' objectives, activities and expected impact.



In line with Article 11 of the CEF Regulation, to be eligible, proposals shall either be submitted by one or more Member States or have the agreement of the Member States concerned as expressed through the letter of support.

*Clarification about the letter of support (see section 5):*

The letter of support shall be signed by the ministry of the concerned Member State(s). If the competent authority is at a regional level, the letter of support can be signed by the regional level, as long as the regional authority provides evidence of the agreement of National authorities.

#### Expected impact (expected results)

This call for proposals aims at financing projects contributing to the goals and objectives of the European Green Deal, as well as the Paris Agreement and the 2030 climate and energy targets and the EU's mid-term and long-term objectives in terms of decarbonisation, in accordance with recitals 5 and 30 of the CEF Regulation and in line with the Multi-annual Work Programme.

It is expected that the financial assistance under this call contributes to the further identification and development of the envisaged CB RES projects. Cross-border RES projects are expected to contribute to a cost-effective achievement of renewables target by 2030 in the EU (as referred to in Article 3 of Directive 2018/2001/EC) and to the strategic uptake of renewables technologies and is an integral element of the enabling framework for regional and cross-border cooperation on renewables.

### 3. Available budget

The available call budget is **EUR 1 000 000**.

We reserve the right not to award all available funds depending on the proposals received and the results of the evaluation.

### 4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	19 September 2023
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>09 January 2024 – 17:00:00 CET</u> (Brussels)
Evaluation:	January 2023 – March 2023
Information on evaluation results:	May 2023
GA signature:	August 2023

### 5. Admissibility and documents

Proposals must be submitted before the **call deadline** (see timetable section 4).

Proposals must be submitted **electronically** via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System (accessible via the Topic page in the [Search Funding & Tenders](#) section). Paper submissions are NOT possible.

Proposals (including annexes and supporting documents) must be submitted using the forms provided *inside* the Submission System (⚠ NOT the documents available on the Topic page — they are only for information).

Proposals must be **complete** and contain all the requested information and all required annexes and supporting documents:

- Application Form Part A — contains administrative information about the participants (future coordinator, beneficiaries and affiliated entities) and the summarised budget for the project (*to be filled in directly online*)
- Application Form Part B — contains the technical description of the project (*to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed and then assembled and re-uploaded*)
- **mandatory annexes and supporting documents** (*to be uploaded*):
  - detailed budget table per WP (*template available in the Submission System*)
  - CVs of core project team: not applicable
  - Annual activity reports
  - Timetable/Gantt chart
  - Agreement by the concerned Member States (Letter of support)
  - CBA related calculations, if applicable (not mandatory)

Please note that the amounts entered into the summarised budget table (filled in directly online) must correspond to the amounts calculated in the detailed budget table. In case of discrepancies, the amounts in the online summarised budget table will prevail.

At proposal submission, you will have to confirm that you have the **mandate to act** for all applicants. Moreover you will have to confirm that the information in the application is correct and complete and that the participants comply with the conditions for receiving EU funding (especially eligibility, financial and operational capacity, exclusion, etc). Before signing the grant, each beneficiary and affiliated entity will have to confirm this again by signing a declaration of honour (DoH). Proposals without full support will be rejected.

Your application must be **readable, accessible and printable**.

Proposals are limited to maximum **120 pages** (Part B). Evaluators will not consider any additional pages.

You may be asked at a later stage for further documents (*for legal entity validation, financial capacity check, bank account validation, etc.*).

- ❗ For more information about the submission process (including IT aspects), consult the [Online Manual](#).

## 6. Eligibility

### Eligible participants (eligible countries)

In order to be eligible, the applicants (beneficiaries and affiliated entities) must:

- be legal entities (public or private bodies)
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
  - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
  - non-EU countries:
    - countries associated to the CEF Programme ([list of participating countries](#))

Beneficiaries and affiliated entities must register in the [Participant Register](#) — before submitting the proposal — and will have to be validated by the Central Validation Service (REA Validation). For the validation, they will be requested to upload documents showing legal status and origin.

Other entities may participate in other consortium roles, such as associated partners, subcontractors, third parties giving in-kind contributions, etc (*see section 13*).

### *Specific cases*

Exceptional funding — Entities from other countries (not listed above) are exceptionally eligible for projects of common interest in the field of transport, energy and digital and for cross-border projects in the field of renewable energy, if the granting authority considers their participation essential for the implementation of the action.

Natural persons — Natural persons are NOT eligible (with the exception of self-employed persons, i.e. sole traders, where the company does not have legal personality separate from that of the natural person).

International organisations — International organisations are eligible. The rules on eligible countries do not apply to them.

Entities without legal personality — Entities which do not have legal personality under their national law may exceptionally participate, provided that their representatives have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf, and offer guarantees for the protection of the EU financial interests equivalent to that offered by legal persons<sup>9</sup>.

EU bodies — EU bodies (with the exception of the European Commission Joint Research Centre) can NOT be part of the consortium.

EU restrictive measures — Special rules apply for certain entities (*e.g. entities subject to [EU restrictive measures](#) under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU)*<sup>10</sup> and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#)<sup>11</sup>). Such entities are not eligible to participate in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any).

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<sup>9</sup> See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

<sup>10</sup> Please note that the EU Official Journal contains the official list and, in case of conflict, its content prevails over that of the [EU Sanctions Map](#).

<sup>11</sup> Commission guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#) on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards (OJEU C 205 of 19.07.2013, pp. 9-11).



For more information, see [Rules for Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment](#).

### Consortium composition

n/a

### Eligible activities

Eligible activities are the ones set out in section 2 above.

Projects should take into account the results of projects supported by other EU funding programmes. The complementarities must be described in the project proposals (Part B of the Application Form).

Projects must comply with EU policy interests and priorities (*such as environment, social, security, industrial and trade policy, etc.*).

Financial support to third parties is not allowed.

### Geographic location (target countries)

Proposals must relate to activities taking place in the eligible countries (*see above*).

## **7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion**

### Financial capacity

Applicants must have **stable and sufficient resources** to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share. Organisations participating in several projects must have sufficient capacity to implement all these projects.

The financial capacity check will be carried out on the basis of the documents you will be requested to upload in the [Participant Register](#) during grant preparation (*e.g. profit and loss account and balance sheet, business plan, audit report produced by an approved external auditor, certifying the accounts for the last closed financial year, etc*). The analysis will be based on neutral financial indicators, but will also take into account other aspects, such as dependency on EU funding and deficit and revenue in previous years.

The check will normally be done for all beneficiaries, except:

- public bodies (entities established as public body under national law, including local, regional or national authorities) or international organisations
- if the individual requested grant amount is not more than EUR 60 000.

The need to demonstrate financial capacity does not apply to Transmission System Operators certified following the procedures laid down in Articles 10 or 11 of Directive 2009/72/EC or Articles 10 or 11 of Directive 2009/73/EC and Joint Undertakings established in the EU which qualify as public bodies.

If needed, it may also be done for affiliated entities.

If we consider that your financial capacity is not satisfactory, we may require:

- further information
- an enhanced financial responsibility regime, i.e. joint and several responsibility for all beneficiaries or joint and several liability of affiliated entities (*see below, section 10*)

- prefinancing paid in instalments
  - (one or more) prefinancing guarantees (*see below, section 10*)
- or
- propose no prefinancing
  - request that you are replaced or, if needed, reject the entire proposal.

 For more information, see [Rules for Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment](#).

### Operational capacity

Applicants must have the **know-how, qualifications** and **resources** to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share (including sufficient experience in projects of comparable size and nature).

This capacity will be assessed together with the 'Quality' award criterion, on the basis of the competence and experience of the applicants and their project teams, including operational resources (human, technical and other) or, exceptionally, the measures proposed to obtain it by the time the task implementation starts.

If the evaluation of the award criterion is positive, the applicants are considered to have sufficient operational capacity.

Applicants will have to show their capacity via the following information:

- description of the consortium participants
- applicants' activity reports of last year

Additional supporting documents may be requested, if needed to confirm the operational capacity of any applicant.

Public bodies, Member State organisations, Transmission System Operators certified under Directives 2009/72 or 2009/73 and international organisations are exempted from the operational capacity check.

### Exclusion

Applicants which are subject to an **EU exclusion decision** or in one of the following **exclusion situations** that bar them from receiving EU funding can NOT participate<sup>12</sup>:

- bankruptcy, winding up, affairs administered by the courts, arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities or other similar procedures (including procedures for persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)
- in breach of social security or tax obligations (including if done by persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)
- guilty of grave professional misconduct<sup>13</sup> (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)

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<sup>12</sup> See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

<sup>13</sup> Professional misconduct includes: violation of ethical standards of the profession, wrongful conduct with impact on professional credibility, false declarations/misrepresentation of information, participation in a cartel or other agreement distorting competition, violation of IPR, attempting to influence decision-making processes or obtain confidential information from public authorities to gain advantage.

- committed fraud, corruption, links to a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decisionmaking- or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Regulation No [2988/95](#) (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decisionmaking- or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- created under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decisionmaking- or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant).

Applicants will also be refused if it turns out that<sup>14</sup>:

- during the award procedure they misrepresented information required as a condition for participating or failed to supply that information
- they were previously involved in the preparation of the call and this entails a distortion of competition that cannot be remedied otherwise (conflict of interest).

## 8. Evaluation and award procedure

The proposals will have to follow the **standard submission and evaluation procedure** (one-stage submission + one-step evaluation).

An **evaluation committee** will assess all applications. Proposals will first be checked for formal requirements (admissibility, and eligibility, *see sections 5 and 6*). Proposals found admissible and eligible will be evaluated against the operational capacity and award criteria and then ranked according to their scores (*see sections 7 and 9*).


For proposals with the same score a **priority order** will be determined according to the following approach:

1. Score obtained under the 'Priority and urgency' criterion
2. Score obtained under the 'Maturity' criterion
3. Score obtained under the 'Catalytic effect' criterion
4. Score obtained under the 'Impact' criterion
5. Score obtained under the 'Quality' criterion.

All proposals will be informed about the evaluation result (**evaluation result letter**). Successful proposals will be invited for grant preparation; the other ones will be put on a reserve list or rejected.

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<sup>14</sup> See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

 No commitment for funding — Invitation to grant preparation does NOT constitute a formal commitment for funding. We will still need to make various legal checks before grant award: *legal entity validation, financial capacity, exclusion check, etc.*

**Grant preparation** will involve a dialogue in order to fine-tune technical or financial aspects of the project and may require extra information from your side. It may also include adjustments to the proposal to address recommendations of the evaluation committee or other concerns. Compliance will be a pre-condition for signing the grant.

If you believe that the evaluation procedure was flawed, you can submit a **complaint** (following the deadlines and procedures set out in the evaluation result letter). Please note that notifications which have not been opened within 10 days after sending are considered to have been accessed and that deadlines will be counted from opening/access (see also [Funding & Tenders Portal Terms and Conditions](#)). Please also be aware that for complaints submitted electronically, there may be character limitations.

## 9. Award criteria

The **award criteria** for this call are as follows, where appropriate:

- **Priority and urgency:** evaluating correspondence of the proposal with the sectoral policy targets, objectives and priorities, notably its contribution to and alignment with achieving the EU 2030 climate and energy targets in view of reaching the Union’s decarbonisation objectives, completion of the internal market and enhancing the security of supply; measuring its EU added-value and where applicable assessing the possible synergies with other sectors; (5 points)
- **Maturity:** assessing the maturity of the preparatory study project. The criterion will measure, among others: the readiness/ability of the project to start by the proposed start date and to complete by the proposed end date, the status of the contracting procedures and of the necessary permits, and information on the financial viability and availability needed to complement the CEF investment; (5 points)
- **Quality:** evaluating the soundness of the implementation plan proposed, both from the technical and financial point of view, the architecture and design approach the organisational structures put in place (or foreseen) for the implementation, the risk analysis, the control procedures and quality management and, when applicable, the communication strategy of the applicant; (5 points)
- **Impact:** assessing, when applicable, the economic, social and environmental impact, including the climate impact. Moreover, when applicable, the criterion will assess, among others, the innovation aspects of the proposal, as well as its cross-border dimension and the effect of the proposal on the preparation of the project for an application to the list of CB RES project; (5 points)
- **Catalytic effect:** evaluating the financial gap shall assess the catalytic effect of the EU financial assistance and determine whenever possible the actual co-funding rate to be granted. (5 points).

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Priority and urgency	3	5
Maturity	3	5
Quality	3	5
Impact	3	5
Catalytic effect	3	5
<b>Overall (pass) scores</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>25</b>

Maximum points: 25 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 3/5, 3/5, 3/5, 3/5 and 3/5 points.

Overall threshold: 15 points.

Proposals that pass the individual thresholds AND the overall threshold will be considered for funding — within the limits of the available budget (i.e. up to the budget ceiling). Other proposals will be rejected.

## 10. Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements

If you pass evaluation, your project will be invited for grant preparation, where you will be asked to prepare the Grant Agreement together with the EU Project Officer.

This Grant Agreement will set the framework for your grant and its terms and conditions, in particular concerning deliverables, reporting and payments.

The Model Grant Agreement that will be used (and all other relevant templates and guidance documents) can be found on [Portal Reference Documents](#).

### Starting date and project duration

The project starting date and duration will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 1*). Normally the starting date will be after grant signature. Retroactive application can be granted exceptionally for duly justified reasons but never earlier than the proposal submission date.

Project duration: up to 24 months (extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment).

### Milestones and deliverables

The milestones and deliverables for each project will be managed through the Portal Grant Management System and will be reflected in Annex 1 of the Grant Agreement.

### Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount

The grant parameters (*maximum grant amount, funding rate, total eligible costs, etc*) will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 3 and art 5*).




Project budget (maximum grant amount): projects of any budget are admitted. However it is recommended for the budget to be in the range of 100 000 – 350 000 EUR. The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

The grant will be a budget-based mixed actual cost grant (actual costs, with unit cost and flat-rate elements). This means that it will reimburse ONLY certain types of costs (eligible costs) and costs that were *actually* incurred for your project (NOT the *budgeted* costs). For unit costs and flat-rates, you can charge the amounts calculated as explained in the Grant Agreement (*see art 6 and Annex 2 and 2a*).

The costs will be reimbursed at the funding rate fixed in the Grant Agreement (maximum **50%**).

Grants may NOT produce a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). For-profit organisations must declare their revenues and, if there is a profit, we will deduct it from the final grant amount (*see art 22.3*).

Moreover, please be aware that the final grant amount may be reduced in case of non-compliance with the Grant Agreement (*e.g. improper implementation, breach of obligations, etc*).

 Please be aware that project management costs (including related tasks, such as consortium-internal progress meetings, project reporting etc) should not exceed 10% of total costs for the project. Costs exceeding this limit will be rejected during grant preparation.

*Budget categories for this call:*




- A. Personnel costs
  - A.1 Employees, A.2 Natural persons under direct contract, A.3 Seconded persons
  - A.4 SME owners and natural person beneficiaries
- B. Subcontracting costs
- C. Purchase costs
  - C.1 Travel and subsistence
  - C.2 Equipment
  - C.3 Other goods, works and services
- D. Other cost categories
  - D.1 Financial support to third parties
- E. Indirect costs

*Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:*

- personnel costs:
  - average personnel costs (unit cost according to usual cost accounting practices): Yes
  - SME owner/natural person unit cost<sup>15</sup> : Yes
- subcontracting costs:

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<sup>15</sup> Commission [Decision](#) of 20 October 2020 authorising the use of unit costs for the personnel costs of the owners of small and medium-sized enterprises and beneficiaries that are natural persons not receiving a salary for the work carried out by themselves under an action or work programme (C(2020)7715).

- country restrictions for subcontracting costs: Yes, subcontracted work must be performed in the eligible countries or target countries
- travel and subsistence unit cost<sup>16</sup>: No (only actual costs)
- equipment costs: full cost
- other cost categories:
  - costs for financial support to third parties: not allowed
- indirect cost flat-rate: 0% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteers costs and exempted specific cost categories, if any)
- VAT: VAT is NOT eligible
- other:
  - in-kind contributions for free are allowed, but cost-neutral, i.e. they cannot be declared as cost
  - project websites: communication costs for presenting the project on the participants' websites or social media accounts are eligible; costs for separate project websites are not eligible
  - eligible cost country restrictions: Yes, only costs for activities carried out in eligible countries or target countries are eligible
-  Please be aware that in case of significant changes to the circumstances that have an impact on the project budget, you may be asked to request an amendment to reduce the maximum grant amount. If you do not comply with this request, we may have to terminate the grant and reduce it from our side (*see art 32*).
-  Similarly, you may be asked to request an amendment to reduce the maximum grant amount, if your project encounters major delays during the project implementation. If you do not comply with this request, we may have to terminate the grant (*see art 32*).

### Reporting and payment arrangements

The reporting and payment arrangements are fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4 and art 21 and 22*).

After grant signature, you will normally receive a **prefinancing** to start working on the project. The amount will be established based on the grant type or estimated project duration at the time of grant signature and will vary between 25% and 50%. The prefinancing will be paid 30 days from entry into force/financial guarantee (if required — whichever is the latest).

There will be no interim payments. There will be one **final payments** (with detailed cost reporting).


In addition, you will be expected to submit one or more progress reports not linked to payments.

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<sup>16</sup> Commission [Decision](#) of 12 January 2021 authorising the use of unit costs for travel, accommodation and subsistence costs under an action or work programme under the 2021-2027 multi-annual financial framework (C(2021)35).

**Payment of the balance:** At the end of the project, we will calculate your final grant amount. If the total of earlier payments is higher than the final grant amount, we will ask you (your coordinator) to pay back the difference (recovery).

All payments will be made to the coordinator.

 Please be aware that payments will be automatically lowered if one of your consortium members has outstanding debts towards the EU (granting authority or other EU bodies). Such debts will be offset by us — in line with the conditions set out in the Grant Agreement (see *art 22*).

Please also note that you are responsible for keeping records on all the work done and the costs declared.

### Prefinancing guarantees

If a prefinancing guarantee is required, it will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4*). The amount will be set during grant preparation and it will normally be equal or lower than the prefinancing for your grant.

The guarantee should be in euro and issued by an approved bank/financial institution established in an EU Member State. If you are established in a non-EU country and would like to provide a guarantee from a bank/financial institution in your country, please contact us (this may be exceptionally accepted, if it offers equivalent security).

Amounts blocked in bank accounts will NOT be accepted as financial guarantees.

Prefinancing guarantees are formally NOT linked to individual consortium members, which means that you are free to organise how to provide the guarantee amount (*by one or several beneficiaries, for the overall amount or several guarantees for partial amounts, by the beneficiary concerned or by another beneficiary, etc*). It is however important that the requested amount is covered and that the guarantee(s) are sent to us in time to make the prefinancing (scanned copy via Portal AND original by post).

If agreed with us, the bank guarantee may be replaced by a guarantee from a third party.

The guarantee will be released at the end of the grant, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the Grant Agreement.

### Certificates

Depending on the type of action, size of grant amount and type of beneficiaries, you may be requested to submit different certificates. The types, schedules and thresholds for each certificate are fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4 and art 24*).

### Liability regime for recoveries

The liability regime for recoveries will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet point 4.4 and art 22*).

For beneficiaries, it is one of the following:

- limited joint and several liability with individual ceilings — *each beneficiary up to their maximum grant amount*
- unconditional joint and several liability — *each beneficiary up to the maximum grant amount for the action*

or

- individual financial responsibility — *each beneficiary only for their own debts.*

In addition, the granting authority may require joint and several liability of affiliated entities (with their beneficiary).

#### Provisions concerning the project implementation

Security rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 13 and Annex 5)*

IPR rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 16 and Annex 5):*

- rights of use on results: Yes

Communication, dissemination and visibility of funding: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 17 and Annex 5):*

- communication and dissemination plan: No
- additional communication and dissemination activities: Yes
- special logos: No

Specific rules for carrying out the action: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 18 and Annex 5):*

- Member State information: Yes
- specific rules for digital infrastructure projects: No
- specific rules for ATM common projects: No
- durability: Yes
- specific rules for blending operations: No

#### Other specificities

n/a

#### Non-compliance and breach of contract

The Grant Agreement (chapter 5) provides for the measures we may take in case of breach of contract (and other non-compliance issues).



For more information, see [AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement](#).

## **11. How to submit an application**

All proposals must be submitted directly online via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System. Paper applications are NOT accepted.

Submission is a **2-step process**:

### **a) create a user account and register your organisation**

To use the Submission System (the only way to apply), all participants need to [create an EU Login user account](#).

Once you have an EULogin account, you can [register your organisation](#) in the Participant Register. When your registration is finalised, you will receive a 9-digit participant identification code (PIC).

## b) **submit the proposal**

Access the Electronic Submission System via the Topic page in the [Search Funding & Tenders](#) section (or, for calls sent by invitation to submit a proposal, through the link provided in the invitation letter).

Submit your proposal in 3 parts, as follows:

- Part A includes administrative information about the applicant organisations (future coordinator, beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners) and the summarised budget for the proposal. Fill it in directly online
- Part B (description of the action) covers the technical content of the proposal. Download the mandatory word template from the Submission System, fill it in and upload it as a PDF file
- Annexes (*see section 5*). Upload them as PDF file (single or multiple depending on the slots). Excel upload is sometimes possible, depending on the file type.

The proposal must keep to the **page limits** (*see section 5*); excess pages will be disregarded.

Documents must be uploaded to the **right category** in the Submission System otherwise the proposal might be considered incomplete and thus inadmissible.

The proposal must be submitted **before the call deadline** (*see section 4*). After this deadline, the system is closed and proposals can no longer be submitted.

Once the proposal is submitted, you will receive a **confirmation e-mail** (with date and time of your application). If you do not receive this confirmation e-mail, it means your proposal has NOT been submitted. If you believe this is due to a fault in the Submission System, you should immediately file a complaint via the [IT Helpdesk webform](#), explaining the circumstances and attaching a copy of the proposal (and, if possible, screenshots to show what happened).

Details on processes and procedures are described in the [Online Manual](#). The Online Manual also contains the links to FAQs and detailed instructions regarding the Portal Electronic Exchange System.

## **12. Help**

As far as possible, ***please try to find the answers you need yourself***, in this and the other documentation (we have limited resources for handling direct enquiries):

- [Online Manual](#)
- FAQs on the Topic page (for call-specific questions in open calls; not applicable for actions by invitation)
- [Portal FAQ](#) (for general questions)
- call information on the [CINEA website](#).

Please also consult the Topic page regularly, since we will use it to publish call updates.

*Contact*

For individual questions on the Portal Submission System, please contact the [IT Helpdesk](#).

Non-IT related questions should be sent to the following email address [CINEA-CEF-ENERGY-CALLS@ec.europa.eu](mailto:CINEA-CEF-ENERGY-CALLS@ec.europa.eu). Questions received after 21 December 2023 will not be answered.

Please indicate clearly the reference of the call and topic to which your question relates (*see cover page*).

**IMPORTANT**

- **Don't wait until the end** — Complete your application sufficiently in advance of the deadline to avoid any last minute **technical problems**. Problems due to last minute submissions (*e.g. congestion, etc.*) will be entirely at your risk. Call deadlines can NOT be extended.
- **Consult** the Portal Topic page regularly. We will use it to publish updates and additional information on the call (call and topic updates).
- **Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Exchange System** — By submitting the application, all participants **accept** to use the electronic exchange system in accordance with the [Portal Terms & Conditions](#).
- **Registration** — Before submitting the application, all beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners must be registered in the [Participant Register](#). The participant identification code (PIC) (one per participant) is mandatory for the Application Form.
- **Consortium roles** — When setting up your consortium, you should think of organisations that help you reach objectives and solve problems.

The roles should be attributed according to the level of participation in the project. Main participants should participate as **beneficiaries** or **affiliated entities**; other entities can participate as associated partners, subcontractors, third parties giving in-kind contributions. **Associated partners** and third parties giving in-kind contributions should bear their own costs (they will not become formal recipients of EU funding).

- **Coordinator** — In multi-beneficiary grants, the beneficiaries participate as consortium (group of beneficiaries). They will have to choose a coordinator, who will take care of the project management and coordination and will represent the consortium towards the granting authority. In mono-beneficiary grants, the single beneficiary will automatically be coordinator.
- **Affiliated entities** — Applicants may participate with affiliated entities (i.e. entities linked to a beneficiary which participate in the action with similar rights and obligations as the beneficiaries, but do not sign the grant and therefore do not become beneficiaries themselves). They will get a part of the grant money and must therefore comply with all the call conditions and be validated (just like beneficiaries); but they do not count towards the minimum eligibility criteria for consortium composition (if any).
- **Associated partners** — Applicants may participate with associated partners (i.e. partner organisations which participate in the action but without the right to get grant money). They participate without funding and therefore do not need to be validated.
- **Consortium agreement** — For practical and legal reasons it is recommended to set up internal arrangements that allow you to deal with exceptional or unforeseen circumstances (in all cases, even if not mandatory under the Grant Agreement). The consortium agreement also gives you the possibility to redistribute the grant money according to your own consortium-internal principles and parameters (for instance, one beneficiary can reattribute its grant money to another beneficiary). The consortium agreement thus allows you to customise the EU grant to the needs inside your consortium and can also help to protect you in case of disputes.

- **Balanced project budget** — Grant applications must ensure a balanced project budget and sufficient other resources to implement the project successfully (e.g. *own contributions, income generated by the action, financial contributions from third parties, etc.*). You may be requested to lower your estimated costs, if they are ineligible (including excessive).
- **No-profit rule** — Grants may NOT give a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). This will be checked by us at the end of the project.
- **No double funding** — There is a strict prohibition of double funding from the EU budget (except under EU Synergies actions). Outside such Synergies actions, any given action may receive only ONE grant from the EU budget and cost items may under NO circumstances declared to two different EU actions.
- **Completed/ongoing projects** — Proposals for projects that have already been completed will be rejected; proposals for projects that have already started will be assessed on a case-by-case basis (in this case, no costs can be reimbursed for activities that took place before the project starting date/proposal submission).
- **Combination with EU operating grants** — Combination with EU operating grants is possible, if the project remains outside the operating grant work programme and you make sure that cost items are clearly separated in your accounting and NOT declared twice (see [AGA — Annotated Model Grant Agreement, art 6.2.E](#)).
- **Multiple proposals** — Applicants may submit more than one proposal for *different* projects under the same call (and be awarded a funding for them).  
Organisations may participate in several proposals.  
BUT: if there are several proposals for *very similar* projects, only one application will be accepted and evaluated; the applicants will be asked to withdraw one of them (or it will be rejected).
- **Resubmission** — Proposals may be changed and re-submitted until the deadline for submission.
- **Rejection** — By submitting the application, all applicants accept the call conditions set out in this this Call Document (and the documents it refers to). Proposals that do not comply with all the call conditions will be **rejected**. This applies also to applicants: All applicants need to fulfil the criteria; if any one of them doesn't, they must be replaced or the entire proposal will be rejected.
- **Cancellation** — There may be circumstances which may require the cancellation of the call. In this case, you will be informed via a call or topic update. Please note that cancellations are without entitlement to compensation.
- **Language** — You can submit your proposal in any official EU language (project abstract/summary should however always be in English). For reasons of efficiency, we strongly advise you to use English for the entire application. If you need the call documentation in another official EU language, please submit a request within 10 days after call publication (for the contact information, see *section 12*).



- **Transparency** — In accordance with Article 38 of the [EU Financial Regulation](#), information about EU grants awarded is published each year on the [Europa website](#).

This includes:

- beneficiary names
- beneficiary addresses
- the purpose for which the grant was awarded
- the maximum amount awarded.

The publication can exceptionally be waived (on reasoned and duly substantiated request), if there is a risk that the disclosure could jeopardise your rights and freedoms under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights or harm your commercial interests.

- **Data protection** — The submission of a proposal under this call involves the collection, use and processing of personal data. This data will be processed in accordance with the applicable legal framework. It will be processed solely for the purpose of evaluating your proposal, subsequent management of your grant and, if needed, programme monitoring, evaluation and communication. Details are explained in the [Funding & Tenders Portal Privacy Statement](#).