



Call for Innovative Projects

1. What is SMARTIES for SMEs?

Background information on SMARTIES for SMEs project: <https://smartiesforsmes.eu/>

SMARTIES for SMEs - Pills of Sustainable, Smart, Regenerative Tourism to Empower SMEs in the EU Mediterranean area is a project co-funded by the COSME Program of the European Union.

Its general objective is **supporting tourism SMEs in the green and digital transition and promoting innovation, resilience, sustainability and quality of their tourism offer.**

The project performs the following activities:

- a qualitative and quantitative research on SMEs needs in post-Covid scenario and best practices to foster the twin transition, reaching 110 key stakeholders and 250 SMEs of 8 countries and 11 areas of the Mediterranean region;
- **technical and financial support scheme to 75 innovative projects** from 5 EU countries of the Mediterranean region, prioritizing sustainable solutions furthering the twin transition;
- a blended programme of capacity building for tourism SMEs in 8 countries and 11 regions, through local workshops and thematic webinars, boosting networking within the tourism ecosystem and with the agrifood ecosystem at Mediterranean level, through dedicated events, communication campaign and publications.

The project started in September 2023 and has a duration of 36 months, involving 8 partners from 6 EU countries (Italy, Greece, Croatia, Slovenia, Portugal and Cyprus).

The total budget of the project amounts to **€ 3 026 789.94**, co-financed at a 90,10% rate by the COSME programme. Out of the total budget, **€ 1 875 000.00** are dedicated to SMEs in the form of direct financial support through the present Call.

2. What is this Call?

Technical and financial support to SMEs: the Call for innovative projects.

The present Call is launched within the technical and financial support scheme provided by SMARTIES for SMEs. It will award up to **75 innovative projects, with a minimum threshold of 9 projects in each of the following countries: Italy, Greece, Slovenia, Portugal and Cyprus** (see also point 3. Who can participate?). In each country a **BSO (Business Support Organization)** is present to support SMEs and their partners **throughout the process:**

Country	Business Support Organization
Italy	Chamber of Commerce Toscana Nord Ovest
Greece	Chamber of Commerce of Xanthi
Portugal	Chamber of Commerce of Madeira
Slovenia	Chamber of Commerce of Maribor

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Contact emails of the 5 Business Support Organizations can be found in Section 5.4.

The support scheme consists of the following:

SMARTIES for SMEs Support Scheme	
Financial support	Each selected project will receive a lump sum of 25 000 €, to be paid through an initial pre-financing payment of 25%, 2 intermediate tranches of 25% and a final payment of 25% of the budget, depending on the activities performed and the results achieved. The funding rate is 100%, therefore participation to the agreed amount is free of charge for successful projects and includes free mentoring and monitoring (Technical support). The payments to the projects follow the lump sum approach, meaning that the estimated budget of the project is formulated based on the outputs, activities and deliverables of the proposed project, and then evaluated to determine its cost effectiveness (see also point 8 - When and how will I receive the funding?).
Technical support	Each selected project will receive free tailored mentoring and support for 15 months starting from March 2025, from experts appointed by the local BSO of their area. These providers will be paid directly by the consortium, meaning that their cost is not to be deducted from the € 25 000 lump sum. Technical support includes: • at least 2 one-to-one mentoring sessions to better develop, implement and promote their innovative business idea, including support to adopt sustainability best practices and obtain internationally recognised certificates and labels; • at least 3 peer-to-peer learning sessions involving the group of projects selected in each country, to share best practices and business strategies, boost future sustainability and foster networking at local level. Additional meetings for monitoring and support in the implementation and reporting of the projects can be arranged depending on needs.
Transnational networking	All selected projects will join a transnational network of tourism innovators to connect with peers, discuss ideas and have access to international best practices, also through the opportunities offered by SMARTIES for SMEs capacity building programme. In each country, BSOs will further select up to 6 projects (30 overall) that will be invited to showcase their innovative projects in: • Pafos (CY) networking event – November 2025; • Rome (IT) networking event – Summer 2026. Travel and accommodation costs to participate in the events are fully covered by SMARTIES for SMEs.

Participants to the support scheme are expected to:

- be motivated and committed to achieve the expected results of their proposed project and contribute to SMARTIES for SMEs general objective;
- actively participate in the technical support activities as reported above;
- provide at least one person from their staff following the implementation of the project and collaborating with the assigned mentor expert;

- provide all requested information to monitor the project's progress according to the agreed reporting procedures (see point 8).
- guarantee visibility of the EU financing and SMARTIES for SMEs project on all the communication and promotional material related to their project. ¹
- agree that all information provided regarding the project will be made public and shared with the grant awarding authority EISMEA. (see point 10)

3. Who can participate?

3.1 Geographical eligibility



Applicants must be registered organizations (see point 3.2) in the following territories:

- **Italy** – National level
- **Greece** – National level
- **Portugal** – Region of Madeira
- **Slovenia** – National level
- **Cyprus** – National level

¹ Promoting the Action – Visibility of EU Funding – Selected SMEs must promote the SMARTIES for SMES project and its results by undertaking the following activities: • hanging up the poster on receiving financial support from EU funds on the company premises (design & and layout provided by the project coordinator); • publication on the SME website or social media page on receiving financial support from EU funds, if available; • publication of at least one social media post on the received financial support. If the SME does not have a website and/or social media account, then publication of at least one press release on the received financial support.

3.2 Applicants eligibility

Projects can be submitted by:

- single **tourism² SMEs³** ;
- a partnership (with a lead applicant) of **2 to 4 tourism SMEs** of the same country;
- a partnership (with a lead applicant) of **2 to 4 partners** of the same country, with at least **1 tourism SME** and **1 public or private organization** instrumental for the realisation of the project, providing that at least 70% of the financial support is dedicated to the SME/s included in the project.

The same organization (either single or as partnership) can apply to a maximum of 1 proposal. In case of partnership, a **coordinator (lead applicant)** must be designated who will be responsible throughout the application process and implementation phase for submitting the application and communicating with SMARTIES for SMEs team on behalf of the partnership.

4. What is an “innovative project”?

4.1 Thematic areas

The present Call is looking for projects and solutions that **have creativity and high innovative potential, long-term sustainability, and replicability⁴**.

Projects must focus on **at least one** of the following thematic areas:

SMARTIES for SMEs thematic areas	
Green and digital transition	Projects and solutions that support the twin transition of tourism SMEs, enhance their own resilience and the sustainability of the EU tourism ecosystem.
Regenerative tourism	Projects and solutions that develop and promote a tourism offer that respects the authenticity of the local territory and contributes to the wellbeing of local communities.
Synergy between tourism and the agri-food ecosystem	Projects and solutions that develop the synergy between tourism and the agri-food ecosystem, especially promoting the Mediterranean Diet as a model of food sustainability in the tourism sector.

4.2 Eligible activities

Projects are expected to implement **innovative products, processes, services, and/or business models**, and they must consist of a **mix of different activities** that are **instrumental for the realisation of the project and the achievement of expected results**. Such activities may include, but are not limited to:

² For the sake of this call, tourism SMEs may belong to any NACE classes and categories, provided that their activities are relevant to the tourism ecosystem.

³ Applicants must comply with the definition of micro, small or medium-sized enterprise (SME) as per [EU recommendation 2003/3612](#) and the [SME user guide](#) :

⁴ Selected projects are expected to be innovative with regard to the current socio-economic context, replicable, and in line with the policy priorities established at EU level, as identified in the EU Tourism [Transition Pathway](#).

- design and development of innovative tourism offer, products or services;
- design and development of digital solutions applied to the tourism ecosystem;
- services for SMEs to implement their business ideas (different from the Technical support offered by SMARTIES for SMEs), such as advisory services relating to legal requirements, assessment of green and digital maturity level, design of sustainable business models, feasibility studies; external expertise, costs for training courses, coaching, mentoring, etc.);
- product development services (concept idea, prototype, product launch, continuous testing, aiming at excellence and sustainability);
- market studies;
- development and analysis of business plans;
- intellectual property development;
- promotion and communication activities, including participation to fairs, open days, etc;
- training for staff and learning activities, including workshops and study visits, etc.;
- software licenses;
- entry fees/travel to business meetings/trade fairs/trainings; costs for transition processes including EMAS registration and/or EU Ecolabel/other recognised certification schemes, leading on to environmental sustainability (e.g. Green Key, Green Cuisine).

Purchase of equipment is eligible but **must not exceed the 30%** of the project budget and **be justified** by the applicant in the application form (Part B), showing how instrumental it is for the achievement of project's results. The financial support cannot be used for the acquisition of services provided directly by the consortium partners.

Applicants are invited to be **as creative as possible** in developing their own project idea. They can take advantage of and inspiration from:

- the **best practices examples** provided on [SMARTIES for SMEs website](#);
- the **capacity building programme** provided by SMARTIES for SMEs, through live and online workshops (check the project's website for available materials and future events);
- the **information and suggestions** provided by each BSO during Call promotional activities.

4.3 Projects duration

Projects implementation is expected to last 15 months, starting from 1st of March 2025.

5. How can I apply?

5.1 Application procedure

Applicants are requested to apply online through the dedicated page on [SMARTIES for SMEs website](#). Applicants shall register to access the SMARTIES for SMEs call for proposals page and the application package. In case of partnerships, only the lead applicant will need to register and access the application package.

5.2 Application documentation

The application package is composed of:

- **PART A - Project basic information to be filled in online in English:** country, name and type of applicant (single or partnership); project title; project summary (Annex I);
- **PART B – Technical annexes to be uploaded:**
 - Application Form – Annex II A: document to be filled in with the technical details of the project (activities, outputs, expected results, etc.), in English or in national languages;
 - Budget – Annex II B: document to be filled in with division of costs per activities and partners, in English or in national languages;
 - Declaration of Honour – Annex III: to be signed by each partner of the project.

Applicants are **obliged to use the templates** provided as annexes of the present Call for Innovative Projects document, without any alterations. On receipt of each application, applicants will receive an **Acknowledgement of Receipt** via email registered at application stage.

5.3 Call opening and deadline for application

The call for applications will be open from 1st of November 2024 to **24th January 2025 at 12.00 CET** (Brussels Time); thereafter the submission platform will be closed. Only proposals submitted before the deadline will be accepted.

5.4 Further information and contacts

FAQs: Questions may be sent by e-mail no later than 10 days before the deadline for the submission of applications to the following e-mail addresses:

Italy	Chamber of Commerce Toscana Nord Ovest	turismo@tno.camcom.it
Greece	Chamber of Commerce of Xanthi	smarties@ebex.gr
Portugal	Chamber of Commerce of Madeira	dec@acif-ccim.pt
Slovenia	Chamber of Commerce of Maribor	info@ooz-maribor.si
Cyprus	Pafos Tourism Board	info@visitpafos.org.cy

6. How will projects be selected?

6.1 Evaluation procedure

SMARTIES for SMEs' consortium of partners will guarantee a transparent, fair and impartial evaluation process, that aims at awarding excellence, innovation, creativity and sustainability. The process consists of three steps, of which the first two performed at national level and the third one at transnational level.

STEP 1 Check of eligibility

Proposals' eligibility is checked by the BSOs through the verification that:

- applicants (single SMEs or partnerships) meet the eligibility criteria referred in section 3;
- proposals meet the criteria for eligible activities as referred in section 4;
- the application is submitted within the deadline and the documentation provided is complete, as referred in section 5.

Proposals that do not comply will be discarded as non-eligible and will receive a rejection letter.

STEP 2 Technical evaluation

In each country eligible applications will be evaluated by technical evaluators selected by the local BSOs against two sets of criteria:

- **General evaluation criteria (6.2).** They apply to all project proposals across the 5 countries and evaluate their capacity to address the call's requirements and contribute to SMARTIES for SMEs' objective. In order to be admissible for funding, each project must score a minimum of 15 points over 25, and a minimum of 3 points in each of the criteria;
- **Additional award criteria (6.3).** Up to 5 additional points may be assigned if applicants and/or proposals are aligned with the specific priorities identified.

In case two applications reach the same score and only one can be funded, priority will be given to the one with the highest score in the Innovation criterion, and, secondly, in the Impact criterion.

Proposals that do not reach the minimum threshold in the technical evaluation will be discarded as non-successful and will receive a rejection letter. Proposals that reach and/or pass the threshold will be listed as admissible at national level and proceed to the next step.

STEP 3 Ranking and awarding

The transnational consortium of partners will agree on the lists of admissible projects provided by the 5 BSOs, aiming at awarding **15 innovative projects per country** and **with a minimum threshold of 9 projects per country**. In case some countries do not reach 15 admissible projects, the consortium will draw from the reserve lists of the remaining countries, awarding projects with the higher scores. In the event of selection of a lower number of applications and total amount of funding available in a country, the consortium reserves the possibility to re-open the call at a later stage.

The final list of awarded projects and reserve lists will be published on the project website. Applicants will be informed of their proposal's result also by e-mail.

6.2 General evaluation criteria

Criterion	Max. points
C1. Relevance How relevant is the project to the call's thematic areas? Twin transition: e.g. proposals that include digital solutions and training for SMEs; SMEs obtaining sustainable certifications or labels; SMEs reducing their environmental impact, etc. Regenerative tourism: e.g. proposals that integrate regenerative tourism concepts; actively engage local communities; provide positive impact or return for the local area, etc.	5

Synergy with agri-food ecosystem: e.g. proposals that integrate synergies with the local agri-food ecosystem, reduce SMEs food waste, provide food sustainability certifications or processes, etc.	
C2. Innovation How innovative is the project compared to the present state-of-the-art and business-as-usual? What change is expected?	5
C3. Quality of design Is the project's specific objective clearly identified, realistic and achievable? Is the project's structure (activities, expected results, outputs, etc.) clear and consistent with the specific objective? Are expected results verifiable and/or measurable within the project's duration?	5
C4. Operational and financial capacity Do applicants (single SMEs or partnership) demonstrate sufficient operational capacity to carry out the project (expertise and experience)? Are effective management structures and procedures envisioned? Is the project's budget consistent with the activities and responsibilities? Does it demonstrate good value for money?	5
C.5 Impact and sustainability How sustainable is the project's solution in the future? Is medium- and long-term impact expected? How replicable is the project's solution at local, Mediterranean and EU level?	5
Total	25

6.3 Additional award criteria

Criterion	Max. points
Applicant already possessing sustainability certifications	1
Project proposals including female or young (under 40) SMEs. For non-individual companies, the criterion should apply to 51% of partners.	1
Project proposals that promote inclusivity, accessibility and non-discrimination	1
Project proposals that contribute to local job creation	1
Projects aiming at tourism seasonality mitigation and/or new tourism products especially in rural/isolated areas	1

7. If I win, when will I start?

Signing of Sub-Grant Agreement

Awarded projects will be **invited to sign a contract (Sub-Grant Agreement – SGA) with their local BSO**, (see Model SGA – Annex IV) detailing the legal requirements of the awarded sub-grant. In case of partnership, the lead partner will assume the responsibility of signing the contract for the whole consortium. By signing the SGA, the beneficiaries accept the sub-grant and agree to implement the project under their own responsibility and in accordance with the contract, with all the obligations and terms and conditions it sets out.

	Indicative timeline
Call deadline	24 th January 2025 12.00 (CET)
Evaluation period	24 th January – 21 st February 2025
Information to applicants and signature of SGAs	21 st February 2025– 1 st March 2025

Once the contract is signed, each project will be **assigned to a local expert**, who will follow and support them throughout the implementation period. Each project will be invited to at least two one-to-one sessions with the expert and at least three peer-to-peer sessions together with the other

projects selected in their countries. Additional sessions and technical support meetings can be scheduled with single projects or with groups according to needs.

8. When and how will I receive the funding?

Monitoring, reporting and payments

SMARTIES for SMEs financial support is provided through a **lump sum**, a form of **simplified costs reporting** that focuses on the activities, outputs and expected results of the project instead of documenting expenses. Therefore, during the implementation phase, projects are requested to **give evidence of the realization, effectiveness and quality** of their activities and outputs, and to demonstrate the achievement of the expected results, according to what they planned in their project proposal (Application Form).

Reporting is performed by filling in Progress Reports (see Annex VII) and presenting them to the local BSO. If the planned results are delivered, the payments will be done. If results are not satisfactory, projects will be invited to review and improve on their performances. In case the projects do not deliver in a significant way what agreed in the signed contract, the funding will be cancelled, according to the conditions set out in the SGA.

The following monitoring and reporting process is expected:

Indicative timeline	
Project start	1 st March 2025 (date of signature of SGA)
Kick-off check	30 th April 2025 – The expert assigned to the project will check that its kick-off activities have been implemented, that a management structure is in place and that planning of activities is adequate. A first pre-payment of 25% of the grant is delivered.
1 st progress report	31 st August 2025 – Projects will submit a first progress report giving evidence of activities, outputs and results achieved so far. If the report is approved by the BSO, a second payment of 25% of the grant is delivered.
2 nd progress report	28 th February 2026 – Projects will submit a second progress report giving evidence of activities, outputs and results achieved so far. If the report is approved by the BSO, a third payment of 25% of the grant is delivered.
Final report	31 st May 2026 – Projects will submit a final report giving evidence of activities, outputs and results achieved by the end of the project. If the report is approved by the BSO, the final payment of the remaining grant (25%) is delivered.

9. Record keeping

Beneficiaries of awarded projects are required to keep record of documents proving the implementation of their activities and achievements of results up to 5 years after the end of the project. Although providing evidence on the expenditures (e.g. invoices, receipts, etc) is not required, it is recommendable to keep and file also the expenses documentation for eventual sample audits by national authorities.

10. Processing of personal data

To process and evaluate applications, SMARTIES for SMEs partners will need to collect personal and organisational data of the SMEs and other participating organizations. Such data will be processed in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data. The names of participating organizations will be published on the SMARTIES for SMEs website and other publication materials for general communication. Information and data will also be shared with the grant awarding body (European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency - EISMEA), who may also publish general information accordingly.

ANNEXES to the Call for Innovative Projects

Application package To be provided during the application phase	Annex I – Project Basic Information (online) Annex II A – Application Form Annex II B – Budget Annex III – Declaration of Honour
Implementation package To be signed and used during projects implementation phase	Annex IV – Model of Sub-Grant Agreement Annex V – Bank Account Information Form Annex VI – Model of Progress Report

Applicants are obliged to use the templates provided as annexes of the present Call document, without any alterations.