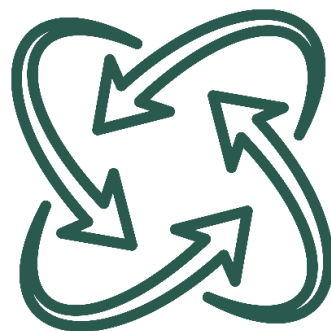# DIGITAL, INNOVATION, AND GREEN TECHNOLOGY PROJECT
(DIGIT PROJECT)

REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
MINISTRY OF SCIENCE, EDUCATION AND YOUTH
Donje Svetice 38, Zagreb 10 000, Croatia

DIGITAL, INNOVATION, AND GREEN TECHNOLOGY PROJECT (DIGIT PROJECT)

IBRD LOAN NO. 9558-HR

PROJECT ID: P180755

GUIDELINES FOR APPLICANTS

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

"ROUTES TO SYNERGIES"

CALL REFERENCE NUMBER: DIGIT.2.2.02

April 2025

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AWU	annual work units
CSF	Croatian Science Foundation
DIGIT	Digital, Innovation, and Green Technology Project
E&S	environmental and social
EC	Evaluation Committee
ERC	European Research Council
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
EU	European Union
EUR	euro (currency)
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
FTE	full-time equivalent
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GOM	Grants Operations Manual
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IP	intellectual property
MSEY	Ministry of Science, Education and Youth
NCP	National Contact Point
NRRP	National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026
OG	Official Gazette
OPCC	Operational Programme Competitiveness and Cohesion 2014-2020
PAD	Project Appraisal Document
PCC	Programme Competitiveness and Cohesion 2021-2027
RDI	research, development and innovation
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
RO	research organization
RCOP	Operational Programme Regional Competitiveness 2007-2013
ToC	Theory of Change
VAT	value added tax

Definitions

In this document, the following terms and expressions should be interpreted as explained hereafter:

- «Applicant» refers to an entity that intends to submit or has submitted a project proposal to the funding program (in this case the Synergies program) under the grant scheme.
- «Application» is a detailed project proposal submitted to this Call with comprehensive descriptions of objectives, timelines, resources, budget, and compliance with environmental, social, and ethical standards, aimed at demonstrating the project's excellence, potential, feasibility, and eligibility for funding.
- «Baseline survey» is a questionnaire completed at the beginning of the application process to collect important baseline information about the applicant, partner, project proposal, and program feedback. This data helps assess the current capabilities of the applicants and partners, sets a reference point for future evaluations, and provides insights for the impact assessment of the Call.
- «Beneficiary» is the signatory to the Grant Agreement, who receives the funding, claims costs, and takes complete responsibility for the proper implementation of the proposed project.
- «Call for proposals» or «Call» is an invitation for project funding issued by the Ministry of Science, Education and Youth (MSEY) and represents a funding opportunity available through the DIGIT Project. Direct financial contribution in the form of a grant is awarded to the beneficiaries through the Call to engage in activities that support the objectives of the DIGIT Project and policies related to digital transformation and green transition.
- «Double funding» means that eligible expenditures have not been and will not be financed from any other public source (including EU funds) in addition to this Call.
- «Horizon Europe» is the research and innovation framework program adopted by the EU for the 2021-2027 period.
- «Partner» refers to an organization that collaborates with the applicant to jointly implement a project.
- «Program» refers to Synergies Program under the DIGIT Project, which is divided into three sub-programs: a) Seal of Excellence (Call for proposals DIGIT.2.2.01), b) Routes to Synergies (Call for proposals DIGIT.2.2.02 – this Call), and c) Bridging Opportunities (Call for proposals DIGIT.2.2.03). One call for proposals will be published under each sub-program.
- «Project» refers to a project carried out by a beneficiary using a grant under one of the grant schemes (in this case, the Synergies Program).
- «Research infrastructure» means facilities, resources and related services that are used by the scientific community to conduct research in their respective fields and covers scientific equipment or set of instruments, knowledge-based resources such as collections, archives or structured scientific information, enabling information and communication technology-based infrastructures such as grid, computing, software and communication, or any other entity of a unique nature essential to conduct research. Such infrastructures may be "single-sited" or "distributed" (an organized network of resources).
- «Research organizations» refer to entities (higher education institutions, research institutes, and other public research organizations) whose goal is to independently conduct fundamental research, industrial research, as well as to disseminate research findings through education, publications, or knowledge transfer.

- «Grant» refers to a financial award provided under a Grant Agreement, in accordance with the criteria and procedures established in the Grants Operations Manual (GOM). It is awarded by MSEY to an eligible beneficiary for project implementation and is financed from the proceeds of the Loan.
- «Grant Agreement» means an agreement to be entered between the MSEY, Croatian Science Foundation (CSF) and a beneficiary, for financing and implementing a project.
- «Grant scheme» means, collectively, the schemes or programs for extending grants to beneficiaries under sub-components 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, and 2.2 of the DIGIT Project following the GOM.

1. About the Synergies program and context of the Call

The Call for Proposals "Routes to Synergies" (hereafter: the Call) is financed under the Digital, Innovation, and Green Technology (DIGIT) Project. The DIGIT Project, a EUR 106 million initiative, aims to drive digital transformation and green transition across the economy, increase funding for applied research and experimental development, and support the Croatian government in strengthening institutional capacity for delivering research and innovation policies. The project is funded through a World Bank loan signed in June 2023 and is scheduled for completion by December 2028.

As part of the DIGIT Project grant schemes, the Synergies Program (hereafter: the Program) provides a strategic framework for addressing the funding and integration challenges that organizations face in securing Horizon Europe funding. The Call aims to prepare consortia for successful participation in Horizon Europe calls for proposals by enhancing their competitiveness through a tailored set of activities. By aligning with European priorities and complementing existing funding mechanisms where applicable, it strengthens Croatia's research and innovation capacity and fosters sustainable economic growth. This strategic investment enhances the country's research profile and competitiveness within Europe, reinforcing its commitment to excellence and innovation.

Additionally, the Call promotes excellence by strengthening research, development, and innovation (RDI) capacities and enhancing the competitiveness of consortia at both European and international levels. Building these capacities will facilitate successful participation in RDI processes, foster networking opportunities, and support organizations seeking to lead consortia, ultimately increasing their success in Horizon Europe calls for proposals.

Project proposals submitted under this Call should include activities aimed at strengthening the applicant's capacity for successful Horizon Europe participation, with a focus on proposal preparation, capacity building, and the promotion of research infrastructure. Proposal preparation for Horizon Europe calls may involve conducting feasibility studies and preliminary RDI activities to identify promising project ideas, leveraging existing research infrastructure, and developing research topics for future proposals. This process may also include collaboration with external experts to enhance proposal quality, facilitate consortium formation, and ensure compliance with Horizon Europe call requirements. Capacity building activities may focus on strengthening staff skills in areas such as international project management, knowledge transfer, and RDI communication. Promotion of research infrastructure should enhance awareness, accessibility, and utilization of available research facilities, tools, and services. This Call encourages the utilization of research capacity previously funded through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) during past programming periods, including the Operational Programme Regional Competitiveness 2007–2013 (RCOP) and the Operational Programme Competitiveness and Cohesion 2014–2020 (OPCC). In addition, the Call encourages the utilization of research capacities that are developed or are being developed under ongoing projects funded through the ERDF within the Programme Competitiveness and Cohesion 2021–2027 (PCC), as well as through the Recovery and Resilience Facility under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021–2026 (NRRP).

Applicants are invited to read the Call documentation carefully. The documentation provides clarifications and answers to questions regarding the preparation of project proposals.

2. Legal framework and governance

A grant awarded under this Call shall be awarded to the beneficiary in accordance with the conditions set forth in the following documents:

- Project Appraisal Document (PAD) - Digital, Innovation, and Green Technology Project - P180755[1];
- Law on the confirmation of the Loan agreement between the Republic of Croatia and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development for the Digital, Innovation, and Green Technology Project (Official Gazette (OG) 9/23)[2];
- Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF)[3];
- Grants Operations Manual (GOM)[4];
- Grant Agreement[5].

The following national legislation is relevant in the context of this Call:

- Law on Higher Education and Scientific Activity (OG 119/22);
- Criminal Code (OG 125/11, 144/12, 56/15, 61/15, 101/17, 118/18, 126/19, 84/21, 114/22, 114/23, 36/24);
- Criminal Code (OG 110/97, 27/98, 50/00, 129/00, 51/01, 111/03, 190/03, 105/04, 84/05, 71/06, 110/07, 152/08, 57/11, 77/11, 143/12);
- Law on Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing (OG 108/17, 39/19, 151/22)
- Law on Public Procurement (OG 120/16, 114/22);
- Law on Environmental Protection (OG 80/13, 153/13, 78/15, 12/18, 118/18);
- Law on Nature Protection (OG 80/13, 15/18, 14/19, 127/19, 155/23);
- Law on the Implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (OG 42/18).

In addition to the previously established regulations, all delegated and implementing acts adopted pursuant to them shall also apply. The regulations applicable to this Call are those in force at the time of its publication. This implies that the Guidelines for Applicants and annexes, as well as any relationships arising from the Call, are subject to the current legislation, including any laws and regulations that may come into force subsequently, as well as any future amendments. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to verify the applicable laws at the time of submitting their project proposal, as the regulations in force at the time of submission will apply to the Applicant.

The Ministry of Science, Education and Youth (hereafter: MSEY) oversees the entire DIGIT Project and manages each program. The MSEY is responsible for the execution of this Call, while the Croatian Science Foundation (hereafter: CSF) provides implementation support by conducting the selection process of project proposals, preparing and signing grant agreements (with MSEY), including any necessary addendums, and monitoring the implementation of projects.

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[1] Project Appraisal Document (PAD), link
[2] Law on the confirmation of the Loan agreement between the Republic of Croatia and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development for the Digital, Innovation, and Green Technology Project (OG 9/23), link
[3] Environmental and Social Management Framework, link
[4] Grants Operations Manual (GOM), link
[5] Annex A. Template of a Grant Agreement is part of Annex I. Conditions for the preparation and implementation of projects within the DIGIT Project (Section 4.1.) of this Call for proposals

3. Objectives and focus of the Call

The Call promotes upstream synergies by maximizing the value of investments in research infrastructure and capabilities, whether previously developed or currently being developed through ERDF or RRF. This approach ensures that research infrastructure and knowledge serve as a foundation for competitive participation in Horizon Europe, enabling stronger integration and collaboration across research fields and disciplines.

The main objective of the Call is to:

- *Prepare consortia/beneficiaries for a successful participation in Horizon Europe with an array of supporting activities that contribute to their coordination capacities, internationalization, valorization and technology uptake.*

The developed Theory of Change serves as the logical framework of the Call and is illustrated in the diagram below (Figure 1). The main outcomes include:

- *Encouraging participation in Horizon Europe;*
- *Enhancing utilization of research infrastructure.*

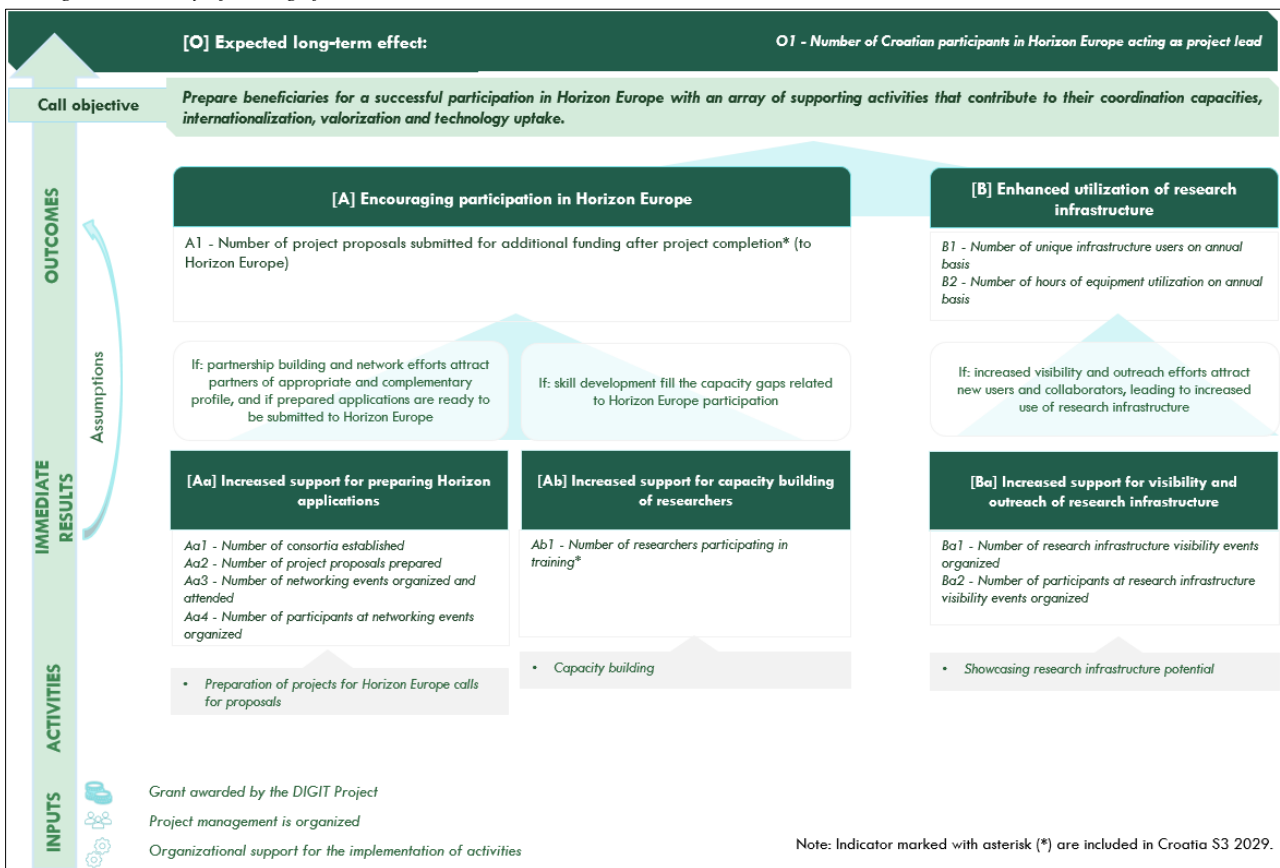*Figure 1. Theory of Change for the Call*

Table 1. Results framework of the Call

Objective of the Call: Prepare beneficiaries for a successful participation in Horizon Europe with an array of supporting activities that contribute to their coordination capacities, internationalization, valorization and technology uptake					
Indicator label	**Level**	**Indicator**	**Measurement unit**	**Deadline for completion**	**Note regarding the selection of indicators**
O1	Impact	**Number of Croatian participants in Horizon Europe acting as project lead**	organization	Three years after project completion	Applicants do not include the indicator in the project proposal. Program managers will monitor the indicator at the program level.
	Description: The indicator measures the number of Croatian participants who apply for Horizon Europe programs as project lead or consortium coordinators. Achievement of this indicator is assessed annually. **Source of verification:** European Commission (Horizon Europe country profiles), MSEY.				

[A] Specific objective: Encouraging participation in Horizon Europe					
Indicator label	**Level**	**Indicator**	**Measurement unit**	**Deadline for completion**	**Note regarding the selection of indicators**
A1	Outcome	**Number of project proposals submitted for additional funding after project completion (to Horizon Europe)**	Project proposal	One year after project completion	Applicants do not include the indicator in the project proposal. Program managers will monitor the indicator at the program level.
	Description: The indicator measures the number of project proposals prepared by supported entities, utilizing activities conducted within the funded project, that have been submitted to Horizon Europe calls for proposals (or its successor programs). **Source of Verification**: Post-implementation period report, including supporting documentation such as confirmation of proposal submission.				
Aa1	Output	**Number of consortia formed**	consortium	Project completion	Applicants need to select the indicator and set a target value for it at the project level. Indicator selection is mandatory.
	Description: The indicator refers to the number of collaborative alliances or partnerships formally created among multiple organizations, institutions, or stakeholders for the purpose of preparing and submitting project proposals to Horizon Europe calls for proposals (or its successor programs). **Source of verification:** signed consortium or partnership agreements.				
Aa2	Output	**Number of project proposals prepared**	project proposal	Project completion	Applicants need to select the indicator and set a target value for it at the project level. Indicator selection is mandatory.
	Description: The indicator refers to the number of project proposals, prepared by the supported entities and based on the activities carried out within the framework of the funded project, with the aim of applying for call for proposals under Horizon Europe (or a successor program).				

		By the project completion, beneficiaries are required to submit an outline of the project proposal, encompassing all main proposal elements, as specified in a previous edition of the targeted call for proposals (or a similar one). **Source of verification:** Prepared project proposal outline, final implementation report.			
Aa3	Output	**Number of networking events organized and attended**	event	Project completion	Applicants need to include the indicator and set a target value at project level if the project proposal includes organizing or attending networking events.
	Description: The indicator refers to the number of events, such as national and international conferences, meetings, seminars, and workshops, which are organized or attended with project support, for the purpose of preparing an application for Horizon Europe (or a successor program). This includes organizing and attending events aimed at building consortia, preparing project proposals, ensuring alignment with Horizon Europe requirements and guidelines through thorough planning and documentation, among others. **Source of verification:** project implementation reports and supporting documentation (event agenda, list of participants, etc.).				
Aa4	Output	**Number of participants at networking events organized**	participant	Project completion	Applicants need to include the indicator and set a target value at project level if the project proposal includes organizing networking events.
	Description: The indicator measures the number of participants (research organizations, enterprises, others) at events, such as national and international conferences, meetings, seminars, and workshops, that are organized with project support for preparing applications for Horizon Europe (or its successor programs). This includes participation at events aimed at building consortia, preparing project proposals, ensuring alignment with Horizon Europe requirements and guidelines through thorough planning and documentation, among others. When multiple representatives from the same organization attend a single event, they are collectively counted as one participant. Similarly, if representatives from the same entity attend multiple events, each occurrence is counted as one entity. **Source of verification:** project implementation reports and supporting documentation (event agenda, list of participants, etc.).				
Ab1	Output	**Number of researchers participating in training**	researcher	Project completion	Applicants need to include the indicator and set a target value at project level if the project proposal includes participation in trainings.
	Description: The indicator counts the number of researchers participating in trainings, mentorship programs, and other capacity-building activities supported by the project, aiming to prepare participants for successful engagement in Horizon Europe (or its successor programs) calls for proposals. These activities focus on developing non-scientific skills, including project management, international collaboration, knowledge transfer, RDI management, and communication. **Source of verification:** project implementation reports and the final report.				

[B] Specific objective: Enhanced utilization of research infrastructure					
Indicator label	**Level**	**Indicator**	**Measurement unit**	**Deadline for completion**	**Note regarding the selection of indicators**
B1	Outcome	**Number of unique infrastructure users on annual basis**	user	Three years after project completion	Applicants need to include at least one indicator (B1 or B2) and set a target value at project level if the project proposal includes organizing research infrastructure visibility events.
	Description: The indicator measures the annual number of unique users supported by the research infrastructure. Users may include research partners and collaborators, or entities that use the infrastructure under commercial terms. **Source of verification:** report and/or survey in the post-implementation period.				
B2	Outcome	**Number of hours of equipment utilization on annual basis**	hour	Three years after project completion	
	Description: The indicator refers to the number of hours spent on annual basis using the research infrastructure, for conducting collaborative research activities, or provision of commercialization services to enterprises. The indicator measures the total number of hours it is actively used. Users may include research partners and collaborators, or entities that use the infrastructure on commercial terms. **Source of verification:** report and/or survey in the post-implementation period.				
Ba1	Output	**Number of research infrastructure visibility events organized**	event	Project completion	Applicants need to include the indicator and set a target value at project level if the project proposal includes organizing research infrastructure visibility events.
	Description: The indicator measures the number of events, such as open days, tours, demonstrations, or similar activities, organized with project support to showcase the facilities and equipment available. Only events specifically related to enhancing the visibility of the research infrastructure are included in this indicator. **Source of verification:** project implementation reports and supporting documentation (event agenda, list of participants, etc.).				
Ba2	Output	**Number of participants at research infrastructure visibility events organized**	participant	Project completion	Applicants need to include the indicator and set a target value at project level if the project proposal includes organizing research infrastructure visibility events
	Description: This indicator counts the number of participants (e.g., research organizations, enterprises, others) attending events, such as open days, tours, demonstrations, or similar activities organized with project support to showcase available facilities and equipment. Only participation in events specifically related to enhancing research infrastructure visibility is included. If multiple representatives from the same organization attend a single event, they are collectively counted as				

	one participant. Similarly, if representatives from the same entity attend multiple events, each occurrence is counted as one entity. **Source of verification:** project implementation reports and supporting documentation (event agenda, list of participants, etc.).	

By the end of the project, the beneficiary must establish a consortium by signing a consortium agreement with the purpose of applying to a specific Horizon Europe[6] Call for proposals. The project beneficiary must act as the consortium lead, while any project partners (if applicable) must join as consortium members. Additional organizations, including enterprises and organizations from Croatia or abroad, may be included in the consortium, in line with the eligibility requirements for the Horizon Europe program (or its successor program) calls for proposals to which they plan to apply. The consortium must submit a project application to the first available relevant Horizon Europe call for proposals within 12 months after the project's final report under this Call has been approved. **In case the consortium fails to submit a project application in accordance with the conditions set forth in this paragraph, the beneficiary may be liable to return up to 10% of the awarded grant.**

To ensure the sustainability of project funding, any changes to the consortium composition between the initial consortium agreement and the Horizon Europe[7] application must be well justified.

Adjustments should be based on the specific requirements of the targeted Horizon Europe call for proposals while maintaining the continuity and strategic objectives of the project.

4. Evaluation of the Call

By applying to this Call, the applicant and partner (if applicable) consent to the use of the complete application documentation and data collected during the evaluation of project proposals for the purpose of conducting an impact evaluation of the Call, regardless of whether they receive support or not. Access to this data will enable the proper evaluation of the impact of the Call. This consent is given through the signed declarations by the applicant and, if applicable, by the partner (Annex II. and Annex III. of this document).

Before submitting a project proposal, the applicant and partner (if applicable) are required to complete a baseline survey.

Annex V. of this document outlines the indicative content of the baseline survey solely to inform applicants (and partners, if any) about the information required in the baseline survey. The baseline survey must be completed exclusively via the provided link. The applicants (and partners, if any) confirm in the declarations that they have fully completed the survey form.

This survey will collect data on the previous achievements of the applicant (and partner) related to previous experience with Horizon Europe and research and development activities. The responses gathered from the survey will be used to evaluate the impact of the Call.

If the MSEY decides to conduct an impact evaluation of the Call, surveys will be administered after project completion and in subsequent years, with the purpose of collecting data on the results achieved by the applicants (and partners, if any) in comparison to the baseline situation reported during project submission. By applying to this Call, the applicant (and partner, if any) commit to participating in these additional surveys, should the MSEY decide to conduct them, and consent to the use of collected data for impact evaluation purposes, regardless of whether they receive support or not. This consent is also provided through the signed

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[6] Or any other program which will act as a legal successor of Horizon Europe.
[7] Or any other program which will act as a legal successor of Horizon Europe.

declarations by the applicant and, if applicable, by the partner (Annex II. and Annex III. of this document). The MSEY will ensure that any future surveys do not create an undue administrative burden for respondents, ensuring adherence to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) particularly with regards to purpose limitation and data minimization principles.

5. Eligible applicants

Eligible applicants for this Call are:

- Croatian public higher education institutions and public research institutes, established in accordance with the Law on higher education and scientific activity (OG 119/22), that conduct research activities as defined in their statutes or other relevant acts proving their legal status;
- Other Croatian public research organizations that conduct research activities as defined in their statutes or other relevant acts proving their legal status.

Applicants must prove that, at the time of application, they are not in any of the exclusion situations listed in Annex I. Conditions for the preparation and implementation of projects within the DIGIT Project. The applicant must ensure that they are eligible for the specific Horizon Europe call for proposals they intend to apply for.

One applicant may submit up to two project proposals under this Call.

An applicant may participate as a partner in other projects, provided they meet the eligibility criteria defined in Section 6 of these Guidelines.

6. Eligible partners and partnership formation

Applicants can implement the project independently or in partnership with up to one partner registered in Croatia.

Eligible partners are as follows:

- Private and public higher education institutions and research institutes, established in accordance with the Law on Higher Education and Scientific Activity (OG 119/22), that conduct research activities as defined in their statutes or other relevant acts proving their legal status;
- Other public research organizations that conduct research activities as defined in their statutes or other relevant acts proving their legal status.

The partner must prove that, at the time of application, it is not in any of the exclusion situations listed in Annex I. Conditions for the preparation and implementation of within the DIGIT Project. The partner must also ensure its eligibility for the Horizon Europe program calls for proposals to which it intends to apply. Regardless of the partner's role, the applicant/beneficiary assumes full legal and financial responsibility for project management and implementation.

An entity can participate as a partner up to five times under this Call.

7. Budget of the Call and the intensity of grant support

The budget allocation for this Call is EUR 3 million, with minimum and maximum grant amounts detailed in the table below.

Table 1. Budget of the Call and the intensity of grant support

Min. grant amount (in EUR)	Max. grant amount (in EUR)	Total Call allocation (in EUR)
20,000.00	100,000.00	3,000,000.00

8. Project duration

For this Call, projects must have a duration of up to 12 months, with all activities and payments to be completed by October 31, 2028.

9. Eligibility of projects, activities and costs

This section defines the eligibility requirements for the projects, including the types of eligible projects, activities that can be funded, and the specific costs that qualify for funding under the Call.

9.1. Eligible projects

The general eligibility criteria for projects are the following:

- The project proposal must be in accordance with the objective of the Call and must contribute to the results framework of the Call;
- The project must be implemented independently by the applicant or in a partnership with one partner registered in Croatia as defined in Section 6. of the Guidelines for Applicants;
- The project proposal should build on a previously implemented or ongoing project financed for RDI activities through the ERDF under the RCOP 2007-2013, OPCC 2014-2020 or PCC 2021-2027 programming period, or through the RRF under the NRRP;
- The project proposal utilizes research infrastructure and capacities developed through a previously implemented project funded under RCOP 2007-2013 or OPCC 2014-2020, or those developed or being developed through a project funded under PCC 2021-2027 or NRRP 2021-2026. These include facilities, laboratories, equipment, researcher expertise, technical skills, institutional knowledge, collaborative networks, and validated data and methodologies. The project idea for the Horizon Europe call for proposals must be grounded in these capacities;
- The project is implemented in an acceptable geographical area, on the territory of the Republic of Croatia (with the exception of travel abroad activities);
- A project team is planned in the project proposal;
- The project is not physically or financially completed, nor will it be completed before the signing of the Grant Agreement;
- The project is ready to commence activities, with a duration of up to 12 months, ensuring that all activities and payments are completed by October 31, 2028;
- The project proposal includes eligible activities and costs;
- The project activities are not listed on the International Finance Corporation (IFC) exclusion list of activities, nor are they otherwise excluded by the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) as described in Annex I. Conditions for the preparation and implementation of projects within the DIGIT Project;
- The amount of requested grant is within the prescribed allowable amount of grant funds;

- The project respects the principle of non-cumulativeness, i.e. it does not represent double financing;
- The project is in accordance with Horizontal principles and Ethics as described in Annex I. Conditions for the preparation and implementation of projects within the DIGIT Project;
- The project can be classified as having up to moderate risk for environmental and social impacts, based on the World Bank's environmental and social policies criteria and the ESMF (Section 3.3 Risk Classification Guidelines), as described in Annex I. Conditions for the preparation and implementation of projects within the DIGIT Project.

9.2. Eligible activities

Eligible activities are as follows:

1. **Preparation of projects for Horizon Europe calls for proposals[8]:**

   a. Creating a project consortium:
      - Identifying and mapping potential consortium members;
      - Consulting with Horizon Europe National Contact Points (NCPs) or external experts on partner search and consortium building;
      - Organizing or participating in networking activities aimed at connecting with potential consortium members;
      - Presenting the project idea and research infrastructure, expertise and capacity through organizing and participating in meetings, events, open days, workshops or online tools;
      - Drafting briefing materials, consortium agreement and other documents outlining governance, financial contributions, intellectual property (IP) rights, and responsibilities.
   b. Preliminary RDI activities:
      - Conducting preliminary RDI activities such as feasibility studies to identify promising project ideas, explore, and develop research topics that will be the focus of future application for Horizon Europe calls;
      - Identifying, gathering and assessing preliminary data and existing research, technologies and methodologies to support the project idea.
   c. Preparation and writing of Horizon project proposal(s):
      - Contracting and coordinating with external experts and consultants to support preparation and writing of project proposal(s);
      - Organizing meetings and work sessions for project preparation.

2. **Capacity building:**

   a. Building and strengthening non-scientific skills of project staff, including project management, international collaboration, knowledge transfer, RDI management, and communication;
   b. Participating in training and mentorship programs, workshops and seminars designed to enhance and build expertise in specific areas connected with project's research idea;
   c. Engaging in study visits and short-term secondments at foreign organizations to gain hands-on learning and international experience.

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[8] Or any other program which will act as a legal successor of Horizon Europe.

3. **Showcasing research infrastructure potential:**

    a. Development of marketing and communication materials such as brochures, fact sheets, infrastructure promotional videos, and virtual tours, as well as online tools and content;
    b. Organizing open days, workshops, tours, and demonstration sessions;
    c. Participating in fairs, expos, innovation forums, and similar events to promote existing research infrastructure.

4. **Promotion and visibility:**

    Promoting project results to a wider audience, including academic, industrial, and public stakeholders:
    a. Promoting the project activities, outcomes and impacts;
    b. Developing marketing materials such as brochures, flyers, and posters to promote the project at events, conferences, and online.

5. **Project management:**

    Encompasses all administrative and managerial aspects essential for the successful execution of the project, including planning, coordination, monitoring, and reporting. Effective project management ensures that the project remains on track, stays within budget, and meets its objectives.

9.3. Eligible costs

The project must not represent double funding. All costs[9] must meet the following criteria:

- They are incurred from the date of project proposal submission and no later than October 31, 2028;
- They are directly related to the project and specified in the project's budget plan;
- They are identifiable and verifiable, particularly through their recording in the accounting records of the applicant/partner and their determination in accordance with applicable accounting standards and generally accepted accounting principles;
- They comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation.

Main categories of eligible costs are as follows:

1. **Preparation of projects for Horizon Europe calls for proposals:**

    a. Personnel costs for staff members involved in preparation of projects for Horizon Europe calls for proposals, including RDI activities. These costs correspond to gross salary level 2, encompassing the total employee costs for the organization. This includes all employer contributions and taxes required to ensure the net salary payment to the employee, as well as transport allowances and non-taxable costs;
    b. Travel cost for project staff (transportation, accommodation and daily allowances) for participating in networking and outreach activities, or for presenting project idea; this also includes registration fees;
    c. Organization costs, such as catering and venue expenses, for hosting networking and outreach activities;

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[9] Applicants must provide a detailed budget plan (within Application form) with costs that are fully in compliance with the eligibility criteria. In the project budget, the applicant must select the appropriate cost category for each budget item, choosing from the following: a) Direct costs – personnel; b) Other direct costs; c) Indirect costs.

d. Costs for legal and administrative services related to drafting consortium agreement and other governance documents, including consultancy fees;

e. Equipment and material costs: specialized equipment, tools, and technology directly required for conducting RDI activities (e.g., laboratory equipment, testing devices, software), consumables and raw materials essential for project (up to maximum of 20% of total project costs);

f. Costs related to patent searches, application fees, and IP protection arising from the RDI outcomes, licensing fees for IP rights necessary for carrying out RDI work.

g. Costs of external services for preliminary RDI activities, such as feasibility studies, for identifying promising project ideas;

h. Costs of external services for the preparation of projects for Horizon Europe calls for proposals.

2. **Capacity building:**

   a. Costs of trainings and coaching, such as fees for training programs, workshops and seminars on non-scientific skills, including related travel expenses, accommodation costs and daily allowances;

   b. Costs of study visits and short-term secondments, including related travel expenses, accommodation costs and daily allowances;

   c. Costs of mentorship programs, including fees for mentors and related travel expenses, accommodation costs and daily allowances.

3. **Showcasing research infrastructure potential:**

   a. Costs of marketing and communication materials to promote and showcase research infrastructure, including the design and production of targeted materials and branding of research infrastructure, as well as costs for creating digital presentations and virtual tours.

   b. Organization costs for events;

   c. Costs of participation fees for relevant fairs, expos, innovation forums, and similar events to promote existing research infrastructure, including related travel expenses, accommodation costs, and daily allowances.

4. **Promotion and visibility:**

   a. Costs of marketing materials related (design and production of promotional materials, such as brochures, posters, and flyers, media outreach);

   b. Organization costs for events such as kick-off conference;

   c. Costs of professional services for press releases, media outreach, and PR campaigns to enhance project visibility.

5. **Project management:**

   a. Costs related to project management, including personnel costs for staff members involved in project management (gross salary level 2), which encompasses total employee costs for the organization, including all employer contributions and taxes required to ensure net salary payment to the employee; transport allowances and non-taxable costs are also included. Alternatively, project management costs may cover external administrative project management services, up to a maximum of EUR 5,000.00;

   b. Indirect costs (up to 7% of all eligible costs).

6. **Other eligible costs:**

    a. Non-refundable VAT (must be added per cost item, where applicable).

The following costs are not eligible:

- Costs incurred before the project proposal submission date or after October 31, 2028;
- Purchase, rental, or leasing of land and existing buildings;
- Costs of construction works and following services;
- Cost of work and personal vehicles, as well as the cost of vessels used for commercial purposes;
- Second-hand equipment and instruments;
- Interest on debt, debt service charges and late payment charges;
- Bank charges, costs of guarantees and similar financial expenses;
- Loans to third parties;
- Provisions for losses or potential future liabilities;
- Exchange rate losses;
- Refundable VAT;
- Fines, penalties and costs of litigation, except where litigation is an integral and necessary component for achieving the outcomes of the project; and
- Excessive or reckless expenditure.

10. Methodology for calculating personnel costs

Personnel costs for the project will be calculated using a unit cost per **day-equivalent**, ensuring consistency and transparency in budgeting and reporting. This methodology applies to both existing employees and newly hired staff working on the project.

The maximum number of eligible working days per person per year is 215 days.

10.1. Calculation of the daily rate

The daily rate for personnel costs is calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Daily rate} = \frac{\text{Total staff costs of the organization in the last closed full financial year x 1.2}}{\text{Annual work units in the last closed full finacial year}} \div 215$$

where:

- Total staff costs: The total employer cost for all staff members employed by the applicant or partner in the last closed financial year, increased by 20% to account for projected staff expenditure growth in the coming years. This includes gross salary level 2, which encompasses the total employee costs for the organization, including all employer contributions and taxes required to ensure net salary payment to the employee, as well as transport allowances and non-taxable costs, as reflected in the organization's annual financial statements.
- Annual work units (AWU) represent the total number of full-time equivalent (FTE) employees working at the organization during the last closed financial year. One AWU corresponds to a full-time employee working the entire year, while part-time employees and those employed for only part of the year are counted as fractions of an AWU.
- 215 days: The standard maximum number of eligible working days per full-time employee per year. One working day corresponds to 8 working hours.

The calculation of the daily rate is subject to cost eligibility verification and budget review, during which applicants will be required to provide supporting documentation used as the basis for the calculation.

10.2. Budgeting and cost allocation

Personnel costs in the project budget must be allocated collectively for all individuals working on a specific activity and per applicant and partner, rather than per individual employee. Each personnel cost item in the budget must specify the total number of daily rates required, without detailing the number of working days for each individual staff member, in cases where multiple individuals are working on the same activity. The engagement of each person in the project activity must be specified and described in the Application Form.

Personnel costs will be reported based on timesheets, which record the hours worked on the project and are converted into working days. Timesheets must be maintained for each employee working on the project and must be signed monthly by both the employee and the project manager. The total number of reported working days per person cannot exceed 215 days per year.

11. Instructions for the submission of project proposals

Project proposals must be written in English and submitted via the application portal eDIGIT available on the website http://digit.mzom.hr/. Please follow these instructions carefully to ensure your project proposal is properly submitted and considered:

1. **Access the application portal eDIGIT**: Applicants, either the authorized representative or the project manager, must create a user account on the application portal eDIGIT, if not already registered. This account will be used throughout the application process.
2. **Complete the baseline survey**: Applicants (and partners, if applicable) must complete the baseline survey which can be accessed at the following link:
   - https://croatiasurvey.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0VZGvmme8b5epeK.
   The completion of the survey is mandatory before submitting the application. Please note that it is not necessary to upload a .pdf version of the completed surveys, but you may keep one for your own records.
3. **Complete the Application form**: Log in to the eDIGIT and accurately fill out the Application form. The content of the Application form is listed in the Annex IV. of this document.
4. **Upload required documents and information**: Log in to the eDIGIT and upload the required documents as listed in the table below.

Table 2. Submission of supporting documents

Document	Mandatory (yes/no)	Notes and document format
Declaration by the Applicant	Yes	Completed, signed, and stamped Annex II. (.pdf format) (English).
Declaration by the Partner	Yes (if applicable)	Completed, signed, and stamped Annex III. for partner (if applicable) (.pdf format, (English).
Statute or other relevant act proving the legal status of the applicant/partner	Yes, if the latest version is not publicly available on the applicant's/partner's website	The statute (or an equivalent document) must be provided for the applicant and partner (if applicable) if it is not publicly available. The statute or equivalent document must be submitted as a signed and scanned document (.pdf or .zip format (if multiple documents are required)) (Croatian).

CVs of project team members	Yes	The Call does not prescribe a specific template for CVs. Submit a CV for each project team members (.zip format) (English).
Grant Agreement of the ERDF or RRF project	Yes	Submit a Grant Agreement, signed, and stamped, confirming that the applicant was an official beneficiary of ERDF funding (RCOP/OPCC/PCC) or RRF funding (NRRP) (.pdf format) (Croatian). The Grant Agreement must relate to a successfully implemented project or to a project that is currently under implementation and has not been terminated, and which serves as the foundation for the project proposal submitted under this Call.
Approved final report of the ERDF or RRF project	Yes (if applicable)	The approved final report refers to the official final project report submitted by the beneficiary and approved by the managing authority of the ERDF-funded or RRF-funded project (for RDI activities). This report confirms the successful implementation and completion of the previously funded project, which serves as the foundation for the project proposal under this Call (.pdf format) (Croatian). The document must be submitted only if the referenced project has already been implemented.

5. **Review and finalize submission**: Carefully review the entire application and ensure all required fields and documents are completed and attached. Incomplete proposals may be disqualified from the evaluation process.
6. **Submit the application**: Once all required information and documents are prepared, submit the application including documents via the application portal eDIGIT. Ensure the submission is completed before the specified deadline. The project proposal can be submitted by a person authorized to represent the applicant or by the project manager, who must be an employee of the applicant.
7. **Confirmation of submission**: After successfully submitting, the applicant will receive a submission confirmation. This confirmation should be retained as proof of submission.

Important notes:

- **Submission deadline**: Project proposals submitted after the deadline will not be accepted. It is advisable to complete the submission process well in advance of the deadline.
- **Electronic submission only**: All submissions must be made through the application portal eDIGIT. E-mail or paper submissions are not accepted.
- **Completeness and accuracy**: The information provided in the project proposal application must be complete and accurate. The MSEY or CSF may request additional information if needed.

Before adopting an Award decision on funding and signing the Grant Agreement, applicants (only those projects that meet the minimum required score and for which funds are available) need to prepare and submit documents as listed in the table below.

Table 3. Submission of supporting documents before adopting an Award decision on funding and signing the Grant Agreement

Document	Mandatory (yes/no)	Notes and document format
Partnership Agreement	Yes (if applicable)	Signed, and stamped Partnership Agreement (.pdf format) concluded between the applicant and partner (if applicable). The minimum content requirements for the Partnership Agreement are detailed in Annex VI. (English)
Environmental and Social Screening Questionnaire (ESSQ)	Yes	Completed Environmental and Social Screening Questionnaire (ESSQ) (Annex VII. of the Guidelines for Applicants), prepared by the applicant (.doc, or .docx format). If the ESSQ results indicate the need for specific Environmental and Social (E&S) instruments, the applicant will be responsible for preparing the required documentation (such as the ESCOP, ESMP Checklist or ESMP) before the Award decision is made (English)
Documentation related to salary calculation	Yes	Acceptable documents: • Annual financial statement of the applicant and partner (if applicable) for the last closed financial year, with clear indication of the salary expenditure amounts used for the calculation of the daily rate (.pdf format) (English/Croatian); • If the annual financial statement, or annual consolidated financial statement (as applicable) does not include the number of employees at organization expressed in FTE for the last closed financial year, the applicant/partners must provide an official document or a signed declaration confirming this information (.pdf format) (English/Croatian).

12. Timetable and deadlines

This Call is a permanently open Call, meaning project proposals can be submitted continuously from May 15, 2025 (start date) at 09:00:00, until either December 31, 2026, or until all available funds are allocated [10], whichever occurs first. The indicative timetable and deadlines are outlined in the following table.

Table 5. Indicative timetable and deadlines

Indicative timetable and deadlines	
Call opening	May 15, 2025 – 09:00:00
Call closing	December 31, 2026 – 16:00:00 or until all the available funds are allocated
Project proposal evaluation results	Max. 60 days after project proposal submission

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[10] In case that all available funds are allocated before the Call deadline, the MSEY will inform all potential applicants through the DIGIT Project website.

13. Grant award process

For this Call, funding will be provided to projects that meet the administrative, eligibility, and quality criteria and achieve the minimum required score. Projects that meet these criteria can receive funding as long as the Call remains open or until all available funds are allocated. The process from submission to Grant Agreement signing is illustrated in the following chart.

The process from submission to Grant Agreement signing is shown in the following chart.

Figure 2. Grant award process

Submit the Application	→	Assessment process (administrative, eligibility and quality)	→	Selection of projects meeting minimum score	→	Eligibility of costs and budget cleaning	→	Award decision	→	Grant Agreement sigining

The stages of the grant award process for this Call are detailed in Section 2 of Annex I.

After submitting project proposals and before an Award decision on funding is made, applicants (upon request by the CSF) must prepare and submit the following:

- Environmental and social screening questionnaire (ESSQ) (Annex VI. of the Guidelines for Applicants). Only low and moderate risk activities can be eligible for financing/awarded.

If the ESSQ results indicate the need for specific Environmental and social (E&S) instruments, the applicant will be responsible for preparing the required documentation (such as the Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP), ESMP Checklist, Environmental and Social Code of Practice (ESCOP) before the Award decision on funding is made. Failure to submit any of the required documents will result in the application being automatically rejected, and an Award decision on funding will not be adopted.

14. Other information

Any questions must be submitted through the eDIGIT application portal, where potential applicants and partners will be able to select the relevant Call (DIGIT.2.2.02) to submit their inquiries. The MSEY will respond to these questions through a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section, which will be published on the DIGIT Project website.

15. Data protection

The protection of personal data is ensured in accordance with the provisions of the Law on the Implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (OG 42/18).

Personal data collected includes details of the applicant or authorized representative (name, surname, OIB, email, phone number). Throughout the grant award process, personal information remains confidential. Additionally, data related to stakeholders involved in project implementation (such as name, surname, OIB, and salary) may be collected. These data are processed exclusively for project preparation, evaluation, implementation, and auditing purposes.

Personal data may be shared:

- Within bodies responsible for implementing and monitoring the DIGIT Project;
- With individuals authorized by these bodies to perform specific services.

Access to personal data is limited to those with a legitimate need.

Applicants and beneficiaries have the following rights regarding the protection of personal data:

- The right to access their personal data, including confirmation of whether data are being processed, access to the data, and a copy of the processed information;
- The right to rectify inaccurate data and supplement incomplete data;
- The right to request the erasure of personal data if they are no longer needed for their original purpose, have been unlawfully processed, or after the data retention period has expired;
- The right to restrict the processing of personal data;
- The right to object to the processing of personal data;
- The right to file a complaint with the Croatian Personal Data Protection Agency.

Personal data will be stored as long as there is a purpose for it, and, at most, five years after the closure of the DIGIT Project.

Contact: Data Protection Officer: SzZOP@mzom.hr, Donje Svetice 38, 10000 Zagreb, tel: +385 1 4594 294.

16. Grievance Redress Mechanism

The MSEY and CSF are responsible for the establishment of the Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) for receiving and facilitating the resolution of complaints and concerns raised by applicants, beneficiaries, and any individuals, groups, or communities who feel affected or interested, or feel that they may be affected or interested in the activities of the projects under the DIGIT Project.

The GRM is also intended to prevent and mitigate the risk of corruption, limit the risk of conflict between the beneficiary, contracted subjects (services or goods), and the community, mitigate environmental and social risks and impacts, and allow stakeholders to provide practical suggestions and opinions to ensure that the program remains accountable and transparent to the beneficiaries. The GRM is prepared to capture complaints and refer them to the relevant sectors to obtain solutions within reasonable time frames.

Contacts:

- Contact details of the MSEY GRM – a) e-mail address: grmdigit@mzom.hr; or b) postal address: Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i mladih, Uprava za znanost i tehnologiju, Sektor za programe i projekte Europske Unije, Donje Svetice 38, 10000 Zagreb;
- Contact details of the CSF GRM – e-mail address: grmdigit@hrzz.hr.

17. List of annexes

1) Conditions for the preparation and implementation of projects within the DIGIT Project (Annex I.)
2) Declaration by the Applicant (Annex II.)
3) Declaration by the Partner (Annex III.)
4) Application form (Annex IV.)
5) Indicative content of the baseline survey (Annex V.)
6) Minimum content requirements for the Partnership agreement (Annex VI.)
7) Environmental and social screening questionnaire (Annex VII.)