



# European Lighthouse of AI for Sustainability

## Frequently Asked Questions – Open Call



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# Document History

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## - Basic Info about ELIAS

ELIAS (European Lighthouse of AI for Sustainability) is a consortium of 34 top European institutions from 17 countries. We are committed to advancing fundamental research in AI to answer critical questions about how it can reduce computational costs, model the societal impacts of policy decisions, and affect individuals. Our approach entails a deep integration of academic research with industry-driven applications, forging a synergy that propels the field forward.

Our project builds on and expands the highly successful and internationally recognized network of excellence ELLIS (European Laboratory for Learning and Intelligent Systems). It further develops the pillars defined in ELLIS, i.e., research programs, research units, and Ph.D/Postdoc programs, connecting to an ever increasing network of organisations and ELLIS Fellows and Scholars.

## - Why should you apply?

ELIAS will select 4 SMEs/NGOs/startups that develop novel AI-based services or applications in one of the ELIAS use cases.

Selected companies will enter a 6-month program and receive:

- Up to € 60.000 (lump sum) to develop novel AI-based applications in one of ELIAS focus areas and
- Visibility through ELIAS online channels and events, and dissemination in the ELIAS community.



## - Who can apply?

We are looking for SME, startups and NGO's. Applicants, at the moment of applying, must be officially registered legal entities established in:

- Member States (MS) of the European Union (EU), including their overseas departments
- The Horizon Europe Associated Countries
- The EU Associated Countries participate in Horizon Europe under the same conditions as the EU Member States. A list with all eligible associated Countries can be found here:  
[list-3rd-country-participation\\_horizon-euratom\\_en.pdf](#)
- Legal entities established in any other country or region cannot receive funding in this open Call.

The ELIAS partners, or their affiliates or employees, are NOT considered as eligible applicants and can NOT apply for funding.

## - What are SME and NGO?

An SME will be considered as such if it complies with the European Commission's Recommendation 2003/361/EC. As a summary, the criteria defining an SME are:

- Headcount in Annual Work Unit (AWU) less than 250;
- Annual turnover less or equal to €50 million OR annual balance sheet total less or equal to €43 million.

Note that the figures of partners and linked enterprises should also be considered as stated in the SME user guide. For detailed information check EU recommendation:

[https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-fundamentals/sme-definition\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-fundamentals/sme-definition_en)

NGOs, or non-governmental organisations, are not-for-profit organisations that operate independently from national governments. They often take the form of charities and tend to be particularly active in the fight against poverty, poor healthcare, environmental issues and social exclusion.

NGOs can range from local community-driven initiatives up to international organisations working across the world. Typically funded by donations, they unite people who share a common interest and looking to make a difference or influence change.

## - Can a consortium apply?

No, this call is dedicated only to single-company projects.



## **- Can I apply if the SME is not yet established?**

The SME / organization must be registered as a legal entity at the moment of applying (you should register your company before you submit your application).

## **- What kind of activities are we looking for?**

ELIAS is looking for projects based on AI applications that engage with the network in the categories “Methodology”, “Software/Tools”, “Benchmarks” relevant but not limited to ELIAS’ use cases (see list below) in the scope of AI for sustainability.

## **- What are the use cases?**

Use cases:

- AI for Building Optimization
- AI for Monitoring the Virtual Infrastructure
- Responsible, User-centric Advertising
- Mitigating misinformed migrant perception in EU
- AI for Forecasting of Vegetation State
- Materials Discovery
- Personalized co-piloting systems

## **- My project is outside the use cases. Can I still apply?**

You are encouraged to try to address at least one of the ELIAS use cases. However, even if your project does not fall under any of the use cases listed, it can still be considered for funding. Remember, it should nonetheless have a clear connection to AI/ML and address high-impact societal and economic challenges using machine learning.

## **- What project could be a perfect candidate for the ELIAS Open Call?**

The ideal project is the use case of machine learning by an SME/startup that fits to at least one of the use cases. A successful project can lead to further collaboration between the SME/NGO/startup with the consortium.

## **- Which TRL is expected?**

At a minimum, the projects need to reach TRL 5 and show a validation of technology in an industrial relevant environment of one of the use cases. Applicants will be able and are



encouraged to offer their own contributions in order to reach even higher TRL levels up to 7.

### **- What is TRL?**

TRL - Technology Readiness Levels are indicators of the maturity level of particular technologies. This measurement system provides a common understanding of technology status and addresses the entire innovation chain. There are nine technology readiness levels, TRL 1 is the lowest and TRL 9 the highest. In our project we refer to Annex G of the General Annexes to Work Programme 2016/17 for a full description of TRLs.

### **- Can solutions with TRL lower than expected be funded?**

Applications with lower TRL can be accepted as long as the applicant presents the road map to reach the higher TRL level.

### **- What is an ethics self-assessment?**

The ethics self-assessment is intended to identify the ethical risk related to your project. This process is based on the Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI for self-assessment where you answer ethical questions related to your proposed project and demonstrate the measures you take to deal with possible negative consequences and risks. This allows for an initial clarification of ethical aspects which you may need to pay attention to in designing and implementing your project.

### **- Is the ethics self-assessment compulsory?**

Yes, within the application form you will be asked to write a paragraph on whether the AI system that is being developed, deployed, procured or used, adheres to the requirements of the European Ethics Guidelines on Trustworthy AI.

### **- When is the deadline for submitting a proposal?**

We will evaluate only proposals submitted through the online form within the deadline (May, 31st 2026). Upon receipt of each proposal, you will receive a confirmation of your submission.

### **- What happens if I do not submit my proposal within the deadline?**

We do not accept applications after the deadline. We strongly encourage you not to postpone your proposal. Failure to meet the submission deadline for any reason, including extenuating circumstances, will result in the rejection of the proposal.

### **- How long does it take to fill in the application?**



It shouldn't take more than 1-2 working days on average. Take into account that specific character limits might be set in each field of the online application form, so we encourage you to keep your proposal focused on the requested information, keeping in mind the ELIAS concept and the requirements gathered in the Application Guideline for this call.

We also recommend you to start the submission process quite in advance before the deadline in order to avoid last-minute problems.

### **- Can a company submit more than 1 application?**

No, you cannot submit more than one application. If more than one proposal is identified, only the last proposal which has been submitted in order of time (most recent counting back from the deadline) will be evaluated.

### **- Will I be able to modify my proposal after submission?**

Yes, you can edit your application after you submit it before the deadline, as many times as you wish.

### **- What are the selection criteria?**

Each proposal will be evaluated by independent evaluators with 3 main awarding criteria, that is: Excellence, Impact and Implementation. Detailed description you will find in the Application Guideline, Section 5.

### **- What type of support is available for preparing the proposal?**

The Application Guideline is the main reference document. It provides detailed information about the requirements of the evaluation and selection process.

### **- How to write a convincing proposal?**

Make sure you do not leave any blank information in your proposal. Be specific and provide precise answers to the questions in the application form.

### **- What happens after the proposal is submitted?**

Immediately after the deadline for applications, the evaluation procedure will start. The evaluation process is transparent, fair and equal to all our participants. A ranking list will be prepared by the Selection Committee and will be published on the ELIAS website.

### **- What is a Reserve List?**

The projects with a close overall score (but just outside the top list) will be put on a Reserve List. In case any project from the top spots in the ranking list is unable to participate, an applicant from the Reserve List may be invited.



Please keep in mind that projects may be placed on the Reserve List also after the publication on the website. In case any of the projects selected for funding fail the formal check, applicants from the Reserve List will be invited to the formal check and Sub-grant agreement stage.

### **- How do you check the SME status?**

Before signing the Sub-grant agreement, we are going to verify your SME status.

More specifically, we will request you to provide the following documentation:

- Status information of the beneficiaries.
- SMEs checklist. In the event they declare being non-autonomous: the balance sheet and profit and loss account (with annexes) for the last period for upstream and downstream organisations.
- Financial information. It includes the headcount (AWU), balance, profit & loss accounts of the latest closed financial year and the relation, upstream and downstream, of any linked or partner company.
- Legal existence. Company Register, Official Journal or similar, showing the name of the organization, the legal address and registration number and, if applicable, a copy of a document proving VAT registration (in case the VAT number does not show on the registration extract or its equivalent). Applicants without a VAT number will have to provide a certificate from their tax authority to confirm their tax ID.
- In cases where either the number of employees or the ownership is not clearly identified: any other supporting documents which demonstrate headcount and ownership such as payroll details, annual reports, national regional, association records, etc.
- Name and position of persons authorized to represent the applicant if not clear from the registration documents.
- Bank identification form.
- Information about participation in other acceleration programmes and another HORIZON EUROPE grant received.

### **- What are the payment conditions and schedule?**

The selected grantees will receive a fixed lump sum of up to €60,000 paid in 1 instalment after the presentation of the results of their project.

### **- How will ELIAS review the SMEs/NGO/startup performance at the end of the support period?**



The grantees' performance at the end of the 6-months support period will be reviewed based on the following inputs:

- Final Report (prepared by the grantees) which includes:
  - Description of the results achieved by the grantees (max. 5 pages),
  - A short summary of the project, which will be published on the ELIAS website,
  - Video demonstrating results of the project (max. 5 minutes),

### **- What is a lump sum?**

The lump sum is a simplified method of settling expenses in projects financed from Horizon Europe funds. It means that you are not required to present strictly defined accounting documents to prove the cost incurred (e.g. invoices), but you are obliged to demonstrate the implementation of the project in line with the milestones set for it. Simply speaking it means that we will assess your progress and quality of your work during Final Review, not your accountancy. The milestones (objectives and results) must be defined in the application form and (if necessary) elaborated before signing the Sub Grant Agreement.

The lump sum does not release you from the obligation to collect documentation to confirm the costs under fiscal regulation.

### **- Where can I find help with my application?**

If you have extra questions regarding our Open Call process you can send us a message to [elias-coordination@unitn.it](mailto:elias-coordination@unitn.it)

In case of any technical issues or problems, please include the following information in your message:

- your username, telephone number and your email address;
- details of the specific problem (error messages you encountered, bugs descriptions, i.e. if a dropdown list isn't working, etc.); and
- screenshots of the problem.

### **- Is any accountability required on the way the funds have been used, e. g. invoices and other financial documents?**

The FSTP beneficiaries will receive a fixed lump sum of up to € 60.000.

The lump sum is a simplified method that means that the FSTP recipient is not required to present accounting documents like invoices, timesheets, etc., to prove that the cost was



actually incurred. However, ELIAS will assess your progress and quality of your work based on the Final Report, not your accountancy. In this sense, we will ask you to demonstrate the implementation of the project in line with the objectives set. In any case, the lump sum methodology does not release you from the obligation to collect documentation to confirm the costs under fiscal regulation.