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Open Call for Proposals for Financial Support for Social Economy SMEs in Blue Economy Sector

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON BLUEDOTS PROJECT

BLUEDOTS Project aims to build the capacities of Social Economy SMEs acting in the Blue Economy to apply digital-social innovation and principles, fostering a smoother and faster transition of the blue economy toward smart, sustainable, and inclusive models.

- Objective 1 (SO1): Facilitating the digital transition of social economy SMEs to promote access to technology and social tech entrepreneurship while emphasizing sustainable and environmentally friendly practices in the blue sector.
- Objective 2 (SO2): Advocating for the integration of digital technologies and innovations in SME social economy in the blue sector
- Objective 3 (SO3): Enhancing the capacity and competitiveness of social economy SMEs through knowledge transfer and skills development in digital practices.
- Objective 4 (SO4) Cultivating transnational cooperation, sharing best practices in digital social innovation, and promoting sustainable practices through awareness-raising efforts

is available on the project's website www.bluedots-project.eu

2. AIM OF THE CALL

This **Call for for Proposals for Financial Support for social economy SMEs and enabling organisations in the blue sector across Europe that want to digitize their operations** is launched in the framework of the BLUEDOTS project. The **Call** will be open from 22 January 2025 until **21 March 2025** and will select up to 250 Social Economy SMEs in the social Blue economy sector and enabling organisations to take part in the BLUEDOTS project Financial Facility Programme.

The **Bluedots Living Labs** are collaborative spaces designed to foster innovation, sustainability, and digital transformation in the Blue Economy.

These hubs bring together SMEs, entrepreneurs, researchers, policymakers, and community stakeholders to co-create, test, and implement solutions tailored to address the unique challenges of the Blue Economy

Each Living Lab focuses on a specific aspect of the Blue Economy, offering hands-on learning experiences, collaborative opportunities, and practical tools to empower social economy SMEs. Participants work together to develop innovative solutions, blending expertise across sectors. Projects are tested in operational settings, ensuring practicality and scalability. SMEs receive coaching, financial assistance, and mentorship to maximise their impact.

3. FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL ECONOMY SMEs and Enabling Organizations (Financial Facility Programme)

The objective of the financial support is to build capacities of social SMEs and Social Economy Enabling Organisations, acting in the Blue Economy to apply digital-social innovation and principles, fostering a smoother and faster transition of the blue economy toward smart, sustainable, and inclusive models.

Social Economy SMEs and enabling organizations selected under the Call for Proposals in the Financial Facility Programme will receive an amount of max € 800,00 of financial support up to 2 people for each beneficiary to cover their expenses for travel, accommodation and subsistence costs.

The beneficiary will be able to participate in the transnational capacity building face to face event 22th and 23th of May 2025 in Malaga, Andalusia (Spain), a 2 days experiences where the participants will have the opportunity to learn and exchange knowledge with experts, SMEs from other countries and enabling organisations about digitalization in the blue economy operations.

The financial support is provided if the Translational capacity building face to face is organised more than 20 km away from the place of establishment of the selected organisation and if the participant attends the whole activity. For travelling, greener modes of transport should always be favoured, when possible.

In this call for financing, the total amount of funding that will be provided to Social Economy SMEs and enabling organisations is EUR 60.000,00.

4. Typology of financial support

Each selected social SME or Social Economy Enabling Organization will receive a lump sum payment of 800 Euro. The lump sum payment is provided for travel, accommodation and subsistence costs. The financial support is based on the location of the legal headquarters of the applicants, as mentioned in the table below:

Location of legal headquarters of the applicant to the event in Andalusia (Spain)	Amount in EUR
If the legal address of the applicant is located less than 20 km	0 EUR
If the legal address of the applicant is located from 20 km to less than 200 km	400 EUR
If the legal address of the applicant is located from 200 km to less than 1000 km	600 EUR
If the legal address of the applicant is located from 1000 km on	800 EUR

What is a lump sum payment?

A lump sum is a fixed amount of money, which must be dedicated by social SME or Social Economy Enabling Organizations to participate in the BLUEDOTS events.

Since the granting of a lump sum does not foresee the delivery of detailed financial reporting and timesheets, the following rules and limitations per type of financial support must be respected:

- Only costs generated for the participation in the Living Lab event can be eligible.
- Costs must be determined in accordance with the usual accounting and management principles and practices of the social SME or the Social Economy Enabling Organization and national laws.
- The financial contribution for the eligible costs per financial support scheme will be given to the selected organisations in the form of a lump sum.
- Beneficiaries will be required to complete an evaluation form and description of the trip undertaken.

The lump sum must be contributing to the following costs incurred by the beneficiary:

- Travel costs: transportation (flight, train, mileage or similar) to attend the event.
- Accommodation, meals and other personal allowance to participate: only expenses spent for the days of the event will be eligible.
- The financial support is awarded to the Social SME or Social Economy Enabling Organizations as an organization, not to individual persons. Thus, the financial support can cover the costs of multiple persons travelling from the benefiting organizations.

5. APPLICATION OF THE PROPOSALS

The call documents will be available at the COCETA profile page, project partners' institutional websites and BLUEDOTS Application Service. Information about the call will be published through all the BLUEDOTS communication channels including social media and websites.

In order to be evaluate beneficiaries must fill exclusively the application at this address:

<https://forms.gle/uimAd1pZuK2D5hoh6>

6. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

- In order to be eligible, the applicants must be:
 - A. small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Social Economy sector operating in the blue economy sector are eligible to apply.
 - B. Social Economy Enabling Organisations: sectoral federation or Association representing social economy entities, providing support services to social economy entities or federate social entities

Each applicant must be:

- a legal entity;
- established in one of the eligible countries:
 - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
 - Ukraine
 - Just for SMEs with over than 15 employees: compliance with the national regulation about inclusion of people in situation of disability

DEFINITIONS

Social Economy [SME definition](#) in the *Call for Proposal (SMP-COSME-2022-SEE): Greening social economy SMEs and entrepreneurs in the proximity and social economy ecosystem through transnational co-operation.*

99.9% of the companies in the Proximity & Social Economy (P&SE) ecosystem are SMEs, with a significant part being micro enterprises and starts-ups. This ecosystem employs 22,9 million people and accounts for 6.54% of EU value added (EUR 791 billion). Actors of the proximity and social economy are pooled under this ecosystem given that they often share common characteristics (i.e. local anchorage and short value chains) although the features of these entities vary to a certain extent. In particular, this call will target social economy SMEs and entrepreneurs operating in this ecosystem, and will benefit proximity initiatives such as Local Green Deals but also support the development of sustainable practices (e.g. 15-minutes city, ecofriendly last mile delivery and short food supply chains) at local level.

Social Economy entities definition in the *Social Economy Action Plan (Communication from the Commission ‘Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy’, COM(2021)*

“The social economy covers entities sharing the following main common principles and features: the primacy of people as well as social and/or environmental purpose over profit, the reinvestment of most of the profits and surpluses to carry out activities in the interest of members/users (“collective interest”) or society at large (“general interest”) and democratic and/or participatory governance.

Traditionally, the term social economy refers to four main types of entities providing goods and services to their members or society at large: cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations (including charities), and foundations. They are private entities, independent of public authorities and with specific legal forms. Social enterprises are now generally understood as part of the social economy.

Social enterprises operate by providing goods and services for the market in an entrepreneurial and often innovative fashion, having social and/or environmental objectives as the reason for their commercial activity. Profits are mainly reinvested with a view to achieving their societal objective. Their method of organisation and ownership also follow democratic or participatory principles or focus on social progress. Social enterprises adopt a variety of legal forms depending on the national context

7. DEADLINE AND EVALUATION

The Call is open on the 22 January 2025 12:00 CET and will be open until the **21 March 2025 at 17:00 CET.**

Submitted applications will be evaluated by the BLUEDOTS Selection Committee composed of a member of the Call coordinator (COCETA) and 2 representatives of BLUEDOTS partners with experience in green transition that will oversee all the funding application process. The evaluation will be carried out under appropriate ethical conduct, without conflict of interest and will respect the confidentiality of the information received. All the reviewers will have to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) with the BLUEDOTS Coordinator to ensure the confidentiality of received information.

The BLUEDOTS Selection Committee meets regularly to evaluate all the applications received within the deadline, and will also monitor the use of the subsidies to ensure that the use of funding and the application are on track and meeting their goals.

The evaluation of the application will be conducted in two phases:

Preliminary eligibility check

The BLUEDOTS Selection Committee will do the preliminary eligibility check of the applicants and will produce a list of eligible applicants in order of submission.

Technical evaluation

- After the preliminary eligibility check , the BLUEDOTS Selection Committee will evaluate proposals that will be ranked according to their final score. The evaluation will be done according to **to the following set of 5 award macro-criteria:**

1. The applicants' capacity and experience (15%)
2. Expected outcomes of the participants in attending living labs (25%)
3. Contribution Potential: Clearly defined ways in which the participant can contribute to the living labs (20%)
4. Innovation and problem-solving activity (10%)
5. Beneficiaries that have their business located in peripheral and lagging areas (15%)
6. Beneficiaries with women or people under 29 years participating in the Living Labs (15%)

Technical evaluation		Score threshold	Maximum Score
1	The applicants' capacity and experience	0	4,5
2	Expected outcomes of the participants in attending living labs	1	7,5
3	Contribution Potential: Clearly defined ways in which the participant can contribute to the living labs	1	6
4	Innovation and problem-solving activity	0	3
5	Beneficiaries that have their business located in peripheral and lagging areas (15%)	0	4,5
6	Beneficiaries with women or people under 29 years participating in the Living Labs (15%)	0	4,5
TOTAL		2	30

Bluedots evaluators will score the criteria on a scale from 0 to 5 (half-point scores may be given):

- Fail 0 The proposal fails to address the criterion or it cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
- Poor 1 The criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
- Fair 2 The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
- Good 3 The proposal addresses the criterion well but there are a certain number of shortcomings.
- Very good 4,5 There is a small number of shortcomings but overall, the proposal addresses the criterion very well.
- Excellent 7,5 The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion with no or minor shortcomings.

The evaluation period shall take max. 20 days, starting from the closing date of the call. **(The closing date of the call is 21 March 2025 17:00 CET)**

RANKING LIST

After individual evaluation, The RANKING LISTS will result from the decision taken by consensus (minimum $\frac{2}{3}$ of the votes) of the BLUEDOTS Selection Committee during the dedicated decision meetings. The results will be ranked in a LIST reporting the funded, the eligible but non funded and rejected applications.

EVALUATION IN CASE OF EQUAL SCORING:

In case of an equal scoring, the lump sum will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis. In such cases, the BLUEDOTS evaluators will prioritise the application that was submitted first, considering the date and time of submission automatically generated by the BLUEDOTS Submission Platform.

The final amount of financial support awarded under the Open Call will depend on the overall quality of the proposals and the available budget. If enough budget will be available under this call, all awarded applicants will receive financial support, in the opposite case the awarded application will receive financial support according to the available resource. In case of waiving of the beneficiary the list of the funded applications will be updated with the next available applicant. The FINAL RANKING LIST will result from the decision taken by consensus (minimum $\frac{2}{3}$ of the votes) of the BLUEDOTS Selection Committee during the dedicated decision meetings.

Approximately 3 weeks after the application deadline all the applicant social SME or Social Economy Enabling Organisation will receive a notification stating the outcome of the evaluation for the submitted request for financial support and the decision on the reception or not for a financial support. The applicants are only allowed to receive the financial support once during the BLUEDOTS project lifetime.

8. COMMUNICATION OF THE FINAL RESULTS

The RANKING LISTS will be published on the COCETA profile page, project partners' institutional websites, BLUEDOTS Application Service and all the BLUEDOTS communication channels including social media, the results of the eligibility and quality evaluation will be communicated to all applicants via email.

The successful applicants will be invited to sign the Sub-grant Agreement with the BLUEDOTS Coordinator.

9. SUB-GRANT AGREEMENT

Once a Social Economy SME or a Enabling organization has been selected for financial support, a specific financial agreement – Sub-Grant Agreement (SGA) will be signed between the awarded Social Economy SME and DIESIS Network the Coordinator of BLUEDOTS within 14 days from the notification.

By signing it, the Social Economy SME Beneficiary accepts the financial support in the form of lump sum, obligations, legal provisions and payment modalities, and agrees to participate to the Living Lab event under their own responsibility.

10. TIMELINE

Call opening:	22 January 2025
Deadline for submission:	21 March 2025 17:00 CET
Evaluation :	Up 04 April 2025
Information on evaluation result:	April 2025
Indicative signature of sub-grant agreement:	April 2025
Date of the event in Malaga	22th and 23th of May 2025

11. Contracting with BLUEDOTS consortium

Once evaluations are completed, successful applicants will be notified and invited to confirm their participation in the events and to sign a mono beneficiary sub-grant agreement (sGA) with the coordinator of the BLUEDOTS project. This sub-grant agreement needs to be signed by the applicant and returned to the BLUEDOTS project coordinator at no later than the planned event start date.

Unsuccessful applicants will also receive notifications with suggestions for other available opportunities. After acceptance, your organization must participate in at least two on-line peer-to-peer activities and in a transnational or national capacity building during the project. The grants will be paid for travel, accommodation and subsistence costs.

12. General payments terms

In order to be funded all the expenses must respect the following rules:

- All payments will be made in Euros (€).
- Expenditures incurred before the Sub-Grant Agreement signature date, are ineligible for remuneration.
- Costs incurred for the implementation of the project must be used for the sole and close purpose of achieving the objectives of the project and its expected results, in a transparent manner consistent with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- BLUEDOTS will not be responsible for paying any costs applied for and incurred by the beneficiaries in case of non-compliance with the terms and conditions of the BLUEDOTS funding scheme.
- Payments will be made to social SME or Social Economy Enabling Organization by the BLUEDOTS partners defined in the Sub-Grant Agreement.
- Submission of an application does not constitute an entitlement for funding.
- The recipients of the financial support from BLUEDOTS must ensure that the European Commission, EISMEA, the European Anti-fraud Office (OLAF) and the Court of Auditors (ECA) can

exercise their powers of control, on documents, information, even stored on electronic media, or the final beneficiaries' premises.

13. Implementation and follow-up on the financial support

Once the applicant participates in the Living Lab event, the applicant social SME or Social Economy Enabling Organization is entitled to the payment of the financial support. After the events conclude, the funds will be transferred to the applicant's bank account as provided in their application.

In order to be paid the beneficiary doesn't have to produce any supporting documents but must keep the original, supporting documents up to 5 years (e.g. boarding passes, travel tickets, hotel invoices). Digital and digitalized documents are considered originals if they are authorized by the national law. Non-original documents may be accepted if they offer a comparable level of assurance. Beneficiaries will be required to complete an evaluation form and description of the trip undertaken.

In the follow-up of the financial support the social SME or the Social Economy Enabling organization commits to providing feedback on the service that the BLUEDOTS project has delivered with the financial support. The social SME or Social Economy Enabling Organization agrees to be recontacted by the consortium for dissemination and communication activities, for example such as to provide a success story, video, or testimonial etc.).

● **DOUBLE FUNDING**

The Social Economy SMEs applicant cannot apply for and/or receive funding outside of BLUEDOTS for a similar project that could lead to potential double funding of the same action.

The above-mentioned statements regarding financial capacity and double-funding must be confirmed by the Social Economy SMEs applicant in the Declaration of Honour, to be submitted along with the Application Form as a mandatory annex.

Selected Social Economy SMEs should be able to provide some basic information about their financial standing upon request from the BLUEDOTS Consortium. The following documents could be asked after the selection procedure:

- Copy of the profit and loss account
- Balance sheet for the last two years for which accounts have been closed. Failing that, appropriate
- statements from banks shall be submitted.

In the case of Social Economy SMEs (or start-ups) without a financial history or track record, an audit of their current fiscal period (certified by an external auditor) or a self-declaration, including a Business Plan for the ongoing financial year could be required.

● **NON-COMPLIANCE**

if the selected Social Economy SMEs breaches any of the obligations outlined in the Sub-Grant Agreement related to the execution of the specified action, there may be potential consequences:

- Grant reduction: based on the specific terms and conditions of the Sub-Grant Agreement the grant provided may be reduced proportionally to the severity or nature of the non-compliance.
- Termination of the Sub-Grant Agreement: In extreme cases of non-compliance, the grant agreement may be terminated altogether. This would mean the recipient loses access to any remaining funds and may be required to return the funds already received.
- Legal Actions: In severe cases, non-compliance may lead to legal actions being taken against the recipient. Legal proceedings could be initiated to recover funds, enforce compliance, or address any contractual breaches.

14. COMPLAINT

For any complaints regarding the Call results, please contact BLUEDOTS Consortium at this mail address: bluedotsproject@diesis.coop within 3 days after the announcement of the Open Call results communicating the following information:

- BLUEDOTS Application Service username and application name;
- Applicant contact name and details;
- The object of your complaint;
- Information and evidence of the alleged breach.

The BLUEDOTS Selection Committee will examine the complaint based on the information brought forward by the applicant, will assess the case and decide whether the complaint is justified or not and will inform the applicant on the decision taken.

If the complaint is considered justified, the BLUEDOTS Selection Committee will re-evaluate the project application and the related assessment part, subject to the complaint providing an updated assessment. The final decision on the complaint will be communicated to the applicant in writing within 20 working days from the date of submitting the complaint. This decision will be final, binding to all parties and not subject to any further complaint proceedings within the programme if the complaint is based on the same grounds.

15. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS FOR BLUEDOTS PROJECTS WINNERS

a. DATA MANAGEMENT

Personal data and information are provided in the application form for the immediate purpose of allowing a full and successful evaluation of applicants and for providing additional innovation support to Social Economy SMEs. This includes:

- Name and contact details of the applicant (telephone number, postal address, address, internet website)
- Name and details of the contact person (e-mail, telephone number)
- VAT Registration Number of the company
- Financial information of the company (number of employees, annual turnover or balance).

In case a Project is awarded, the following additional information of all awardees is required:

- Bank account reference (IBAN and BIC codes)
- Information about the grant recipient's representative (name and surname, position, telephone number, email address, signature).

Data concerning the service provider is delivered in the application form and the Final Technical Report to permit the evaluation of the action. Data concerning business digital transformation projects is delivered in the application form and the Final Technical Report to permit the evaluation of the action.

The persons whose personal data is processed have the right to access and correct their own personal data. For this purpose, they must send any queries about the processing of their personal data to the following email address: bluedotsproject@diesis.coop Data will be processed in compliance with applicable EU and national laws on data protection.

The General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679/EU) guarantees that the processing of data is carried out in compliance with the fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as the dignity of the data subject with particular reference to confidentiality, personal identity and the right to data protection. By applying, the applicant agrees to the storage and use of their personal data for the execution of the BLUEDOTS objectives and work plan. Submitting an application for the BLUEDOTS Call implies full, complete and unreserved acceptance of these regulations.

b. FUNDING VISIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

For dissemination and use of results generated through the financial support from the BLUEDOTS Consortium, the Social Economy SMEs beneficiaries must credit the BLUEDOTS project through proper citation and visibility of the EU emblem and BLUEDOTS logo, including a disclaimer as reported below:

„This project has indirectly received funding from the European Union's Single Market Programme, via the BLUEDOTS Projects (GA N. GAP-101167884_1)“.

All visibility requirements will be communicated to the Social Economy SMEs beneficiaries after the signing of the Sub-Grant Agreement with the COCETA, Call financial support coordinator.

c. GENDER EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

BLUEDOTS seeks gender balance. Therefore, applicants are invited to take all measures to promote equal opportunities between men and women in the implementation of the project. They must aim for a gender balance at all levels of personnel assigned to the action, including supervisory and managerial levels to the extent possible.

d. DISCLAIMER

Purpose: This text is explaining the Open Call for Proposal for Subsidy Support for Social Economy SMEs in Blu Economy for information purposes only. No rights can be claimed based on this document. This document does not reflect the views of the European Union and/or the European Innovation Council and

SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA). Neither the European Union nor the other EC bodies can be held responsible for them.

Mistakes or inconsistencies: The BLUEDOTS consortium is not responsible for any mistakes or misinterpretations that this text may cause. In the case of inconsistencies, the BLUEDOTS Consortium will determine the steps to be taken, in cooperation with the applicant concerned.

Consequential damages: In no event shall either party be liable to the other or any of its affiliates for any consequential, incidental, indirect, special, punitive or exemplary damages (including, without limitation, lost profits, business or goodwill) suffered or incurred by such other party or its affiliates in connection with this financing scheme, even if advised of the possibility of such damages.

Direct Damages: BLUEDOTS's liability for direct damages will be limited to the amount of the financial contribution awarded to the applicant pending of payment

Should you have any questions, please contact us pedro@coceta.coop Further information on the project, see the project website: www.bluedots-project.eu

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