



**GOVERNMENT  
OF MALTA**

MINISTRY FOR THE ECONOMY,  
EUROPEAN FUNDS AND LANDS

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIAT  
FOR EUROPEAN FUNDS



**EU funds  
for Malta**  
2014-2020

# SME Internationalisation Grant Scheme Guidance Notes

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## Definitions

**Aid Intensity** means the gross aid amount expressed as a percentage of the eligible costs, before any deducted tax or other charge.

**Date of granting of the aid** means the date when the legal right to receive the aid is conferred to the Beneficiary, being the date of the signing of the Grant Agreement.

**Start of works** means the earlier of either the start of construction works in relation to the investment, or the first legally binding commitment to order the equipment or any other commitment that makes the investment irreversible. Buying land and preparatory works such as obtaining permits and conducting feasibility studies are not considered start of works.

**Operation** means an initial investment project being proposed for part-financing through Call/s under this State aid scheme.

**Economic activity** - means an activity consisting of any one or more of the following:

- any trade, business, profession or vocation and the provision of any personal services;
- the exploitation of tangible or intangible property for the purpose of obtaining income there from on a continuing basis;
- the provision by a club, association or organisation of the facilities or advantages available to its members for a subscription or other consideration;
- the admission of persons to any premises for a consideration.

**External Source** means a source that is autonomous and unrelated to the Beneficiary Undertaking.

**Unrelated to the Beneficiary** - the fact that the buyer does not control the seller, is not sufficient for fulfilling this criteria. The parties have to be unrelated. For that, there should be no influence (decisive or not) on the composition, voting or decisions of the organs of an Undertaking.

**Undertaking** means a **Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME)** as defined in Annex I of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application to Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, as amended.

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1404295693570&uri=CELEX:32014R0651>

The main factors determining whether an enterprise is an SME are:

1. **staff headcount** and
2. either **turnover** or **balance sheet total**.

<b>Company category</b>	<b>Staff headcount</b>	<b>Turnover</b>	<b>or</b>	<b>Balance sheet total</b>
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ € 50 m		≤ € 43 m
Small	< 50	≤ € 10 m		≤ € 10 m

Micro	< 10	≤ € 2 m	≤ € 2 m
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For more details:

[http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition/index_en.htm)

**An Autonomous Enterprise** is any enterprise which is not classified as a partner enterprise or as a linked enterprise as per provisions outlined in Annex I of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty.

**Partner enterprises** are all enterprises which are not classified as linked enterprises and between which there is the following relationship: an enterprise (upstream enterprise) holds, either solely or jointly with one or more linked enterprises 25 % or more of the capital or voting rights of another enterprise (downstream enterprise).

However, an enterprise may be ranked as autonomous, and thus as not having any partner enterprises, even if this 25 % threshold is reached or exceeded by the following investors, provided that those investors are not linked, within the meaning of 'linked enterprise', either individually or jointly to the enterprise in question:

- a) public investment corporations, venture capital companies, individuals or groups of individuals with a regular venture capital investment activity who invest equity capital in unquoted businesses (business angels), provided the total investment of those business angels in the same enterprise is less than EUR 1 250 000;
- b) universities or non-profit research centres;
- c) institutional investors, including regional development funds;
- d) autonomous local authorities with an annual budget of less than EUR 10 million and less than 5 000 inhabitants.

**Linked enterprises** are enterprises which have any of the following relationships with each other:

- a) an enterprise has a majority of the shareholders' or members' voting rights in another enterprise;
- b) an enterprise has the right to appoint or remove a majority of the members of the administrative, management or supervisory body of another enterprise;
- c) an enterprise has the right to exercise a dominant influence over another enterprise pursuant to a contract entered into with that enterprise or to a provision in its memorandum or articles of association;
- d) an enterprise, which is a shareholder in or member of another enterprise, controls alone, pursuant to an agreement with other shareholders in or members of that enterprise, a majority of shareholders' or members' voting rights in that enterprise.

Enterprises having any of the relationships described in a) to d) above through one or more other enterprises, or any one of the investors mentioned under Partner Enterprise, are also considered to be linked.

Enterprises which have one or other of such relationships through a natural person or group of natural persons acting jointly are also considered linked enterprises if they engage in their activity or in part of their activity in the same relevant market or in adjacent markets.

An **'adjacent market'** is considered to be the market for a product or service situated directly upstream or downstream of the relevant market.

**Undertaking in difficulty** as defined in Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty means an Undertaking in respect of which at least one of the following circumstances occurs:

- a) In the case of a limited liability company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years or, for the purposes of eligibility for risk finance aid, an SME within 7 years from its first commercial sale that qualifies for risk finance investments following due diligence by the selected financial intermediary), where more than half of its subscribed share capital has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. This is the case when deduction of accumulated losses from reserves (and all other elements generally considered as part of the own funds of the company) leads to a negative cumulative amount that exceeds half of the subscribed share capital. For the purposes of this provision, 'limited liability company' refers in particular to the types of company mentioned in Annex I of Directive 2013/34/EU (1) and 'share capital' includes, where relevant, any share premium.
- b) In the case of a company where at least some members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years or, for the purposes of eligibility for risk finance aid, an SME within 7 years from its first commercial sale that qualifies for risk finance investments following due diligence by the selected financial intermediary), where more than half of its capital as shown in the company accounts has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. For the purposes of this provision, 'a company where at least some members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company' refers in particular to the types of company mentioned in Annex II of Directive 2013/34/EU.
- c) Where the Undertaking is subject to collective insolvency proceedings or fulfils the criteria under its domestic law for

being placed in collective insolvency proceedings at the request of its creditors.

- d) Where the Undertaking has received rescue aid and has not yet reimbursed the loan or terminated the guarantee, or has received restructuring aid and is still subject to a restructuring plan.
- e) In the case of an Undertaking that is not an SME, where, for the past two years:
  - i. the Undertaking's book debt to equity ratio has been greater than 7,5 and
  - ii. the Undertaking's EBITDA interest coverage ratio has been below 1,0.

**Active Participation** means having a stand to exhibit and promote products and/services at an International Business Promotion Fair.

**Steel sector** means all activities related to the production of one or more of the following products:

(a) pig iron and ferro-alloys: pig iron for steelmaking, foundry and other pig iron, spiegeleisen and high-carbon ferro-manganese, not including other ferro-alloys;

(b) crude and semi-finished products of iron, ordinary steel or special steel: liquid steel whether or not cast into ingots, including ingots for forging semi-finished products: blooms, billets and slabs; sheet bars and tinplate bars; hot-rolled wide coils, with the exception of production of liquid steel for castings from micro, small and medium-sized foundries;

(c) hot finished products of iron, ordinary steel or special steel: rails, sleepers, fishplates, soleplates, joists, heavy sections of 80 mm and over, sheet piling, bars and sections of less than 80 mm and flats of less than 150 mm, wire rod, tube rounds and squares, hot-rolled hoop and strip (including tube strip), hot-rolled sheet (coated or uncoated), plates and sheets of 3 mm thickness and over, universal plates of 150 mm and over, with the exception of wire and wire products, bright bars and iron castings;

(d) cold finished products: tinplate, terneplate, blackplate, galvanised sheets, other coated sheets, cold-rolled sheets, electrical sheets and strip for tinplate, cold-rolled plate, in coil and in strip;

(e) tubes: all seamless steel tubes, welded steel tubes with a diameter of over 406.4 mm.

**Synthetic fibres sector** means:

- (a) extrusion/texturisation of all generic types of fibre and yarn based on polyester, polyamide, acrylic or polypropylene, irrespective of their end-uses; or
- (b) polymerisation (including polycondensation) where it is integrated with extrusion in terms of the machinery used; or
- (c) any ancillary process linked to the contemporaneous installation of extrusion/texturisation capacity by the prospective Beneficiary or by another company in the group to which it belongs and which, in the specific business activity concerned, is normally integrated with such capacity in terms of the machinery used.

**Transport sector** means the transport of passengers by aircraft, maritime transport, road, rail, or by inland waterway or freight transport services for hire or reward; more specifically, the 'transport sector' means the following activities in terms of NACE Rev. 2:

- (a) NACE 49: Land transport and transport via pipelines, excluding NACE 49.32 Taxi operation, 49.42 Removal services, 49.5 Transport via pipeline;
- (b) NACE 50: Water transport;
- (c) NACE 51: Air transport, excluding NACE 51.22 Space transport.

**Coal** means high-grade, medium-grade and low-grade category A and B coal within the meaning of the international codification system for coal established by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and clarified in the Council Decision of 10 December 2010 on State aid to facilitate the closure of uncompetitive coal mines.

**Shipbuilding** means the building in the Union, of 'self-propelled commercial vessel'.

**Self-propelled commercial vessel** means a vessel that, by means of its permanent propulsion and steering, has all the characteristics of self-navigability on the high seas or on inland waterways and belongs to one of the following categories:

- (i) seagoing vessels of not less than 100 gt and inland waterway vessels of equivalent size used for the transportation of passengers and/or goods;
- (ii) seagoing vessels of not less than 100 gt and inland waterway vessels of equivalent size used for the performance of a specialised service (for example, dredgers and ice breakers);
- (iii) tugs of not less than 365 kW;
- (iv) unfinished shells of the vessels referred to in points (i), (ii) and (iii) that are afloat and mobile.

**Marketing of agricultural products** means holding or display with a view to sale, offering for sale, delivery or any other manner of placing on the market, except the first sale by a primary producer to resellers or processors and any activity preparing a product for such first sale; a sale by a primary producer to final consumers shall be considered to be marketing if it takes place in separate premises reserved for that purpose.

**Primary agricultural production** means production of products of the soil and of stock farming, listed in Annex I to the Treaty, without performing any further operation changing the nature of such products.

**Processing of Agricultural products** means any operation on an agricultural product resulting in a product which is also an agricultural product, except on-farm activities necessary for preparing an animal or plant product for the first sale.

**Agricultural product** means the products listed in Annex I to the Treaty, except fishery and aquaculture products listed in Annex I to Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013.

**Fishery and Aquaculture sector** are defined as per provisions of Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the common organisation of the markets in fishery and aquaculture products, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1184/2006 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 104/2000.

## 1. Introduction

This document provides information on the SME Internationalisation Grant Scheme and should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Notes to Applicants
- Guidelines for Implementation

These Guidance Notes together with the Guidelines for Implementation are binding. Failure to comply with the provisions of these documents may result in financial corrections and recovery of funds.

These Guidance Notes may be reviewed, updated and amended from time to time by the Intermediate Body throughout the lifetime of the Measure.

### 1.1 Delegation of Authority

The Measures and Support Division has been designated by the Managing Authority (MA) as an Intermediate Body (IB) responsible for administering European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Grant Schemes through the implementation of Support Measures under the 2014 – 2020 programming period.

### 1.2 Scope

Business growth depends on the success of enterprises to tap international markets and become less reliant on regional market dependencies, and better positioned to exploit inter-regional market opportunities.

Active Participation at International Business Promotion Fairs provides businesses with the right environment not only to promote and introduce their products/services to new markets, but also to potentially strengthen their international market presence.

This Grant Scheme facilitates the process towards the internationalisation of SMEs through active participation at International Business Promotion Fairs.

### 1.3 Investment Priorities and Specific Objectives

This Measure falls under Priority Axis 3 'Enhancing Malta's competitiveness through investment in SMEs' of Operational Programme 1 2014 – 2020 'Fostering a competitive and sustainable economy to meet our challenges', and addresses the following Investment Priority and Specific Objective:

3a: Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and fostering the creation of new firms, including through business incubators.

SO1: Creation of employment opportunities through the provision of infrastructure, financial incentives as well as support services.

### 1.4 Duration of the measure

The SME Internationalisation Grant Scheme will remain operational until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023, subject to availability of funds.



## 1.5 Budget

The allocated budget for this Measure is set at €1,000,000 with indicative annual thresholds of €250,000.

## 1.6 Open rolling call

The scheme shall be managed on a demand driven bases. Eligible Undertakings may apply whenever a need for assistance is identified by an Undertaking to support its internationalisation efforts through active participation in an International Business Promotion Fair, subject to the thresholds outlined above.

The IB shall issue an open call (rolling-call) for interested eligible Undertakings to submit their applications. Applications will be assessed and evaluated and eligible applications scoring 50% of the selection criteria shall be awarded the grant. Grants shall be awarded on a first-come-first served basis subject to budget availability.

## 1.7 Maximum Grant Value and Aid Intensity

The maximum grant value for the participation by a single Undertaking at an International Business Promotion Fair under this scheme is set at €10,000 part-financing eligible costs up to 50%.

## 1.8 Implementation

Operations should be concluded by 30 June 2023. The IB may consider extensions up to the closing date of the Scheme, upon the express request of the Beneficiary, when justified.

## 1.9 Regulatory Framework

The Operational Programme I “Fostering a competitive and sustainable economy to meet our challenges” for support from the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund under the Investment for growth and jobs goal for Malta approved by Commission Implementing Decision C (2014) 9966 Final dated 15 December 2014.

[https://eufunds.gov.mt/en/Operational%20Programmes/Programming%20Period%202014%20-%202020/Operational%20Programme%201/Documents/Adopted%20OPI\(ff\).pdf](https://eufunds.gov.mt/en/Operational%20Programmes/Programming%20Period%202014%20-%202020/Operational%20Programme%201/Documents/Adopted%20OPI(ff).pdf)

The National ERDF Eligibility Rules and the Partnership Agreement of Malta.

<https://eufunds.gov.mt/en/Information/Pages/Partnership-Agreement.aspx>

Aid may be awarded in accordance with the relevant terms and conditions of the General Block Exemption Regulation (“GBER”) - Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, as amended by Commission Regulation (EU) 2017/1084 of 14 June 2017 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards aid for port and airport infrastructure, notification thresholds for aid for culture and heritage conservation and for aid for sport and multifunctional recreational infrastructures, and regional operating aid schemes for outermost regions and amending Regulation (EU) No 702/2014 as regards the calculation of eligible costs, by Commission Regulation (EU) 2020/972 of 2 July 2020 amending Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 as regards its prolongation and amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards its prolongation and relevant adjustments, and by

Commission Regulation (EU) 2021/1237 of 23 July 2021 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, and as may be subsequently amended.

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1600260910829&uri=CELEX:02014R0651-20200727>

Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006.

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013R1303>

Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund and on specific provisions concerning the Investment for growth and jobs goal and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006.

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013R1301>

## 2 Description

### 2.1 Eligible Actions

This Grant Scheme seeks to support SMEs through the provision of a non-repayable Grant to part-finance up to 50% of eligible costs to actively participate in International Business Promotion Fairs held outside the territory of the Republic of Malta, aimed at the internationalisation of the Undertaking by introducing their products/services to new markets and by potentially strengthening their international market presence. Participation at Business Promotion Fairs held as part of Trade Missions abroad may also be supported under the scheme.

### 2.2 Eligible Cost

- a. Participation Fee
- b. Rental of the exhibition space/stand;
- c. Services related to the construction and setting-up of the stand;
- d. Travel Costs for a maximum of 2 employees/directors representing the Enterprise and managing the Stand/Exhibition Space at the fair based on the travel distance, per participant, being 50% of the applicable ERASMUS + standard allowance for travel distance which is to be determined by using the distance calculator supported by the European Commission, [http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources\\_en#tab-1-4](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources_en#tab-1-4). The travel distance is based on the direct distance from Malta to the final destination, being the place where the Business Promotion Fair is being held. The one-way travel distance must be used to calculate the amount of the grant that will support the round trip.

The current applicable rates are as follows:

Travel Distance	ERASMUS+ Travel Allowance Return Trip per individual (€)
Between 100 and 499 KM	180
Between 500 and 1999 KM	275
Between 2000 and 2999 KM	360
Between 3000 and 3999 KM	530
Between 4000 and 7999 KM	820
8000 KM and over	1100

- e. Per Diem allowance for a maximum of 2 employees/directors representing the Enterprise and managing the Stand/Exhibition Space at the fair, capped to a maximum of 8 nights per participant being 50% of the applicable Official Government Class B per diem for official duty abroad as published by the Ministry for Finance

<http://mfin.gov.mt/en/The-Ministry/Departments-Directorates-Units/fpmd/Pages/Per-Diem-Rates.aspx>. The total per diem allowance entitlement for travel abroad for each participant is calculated on the number of nights spent abroad multiplied by the per diem allowance, irrespective of the time of departure. The earliest night to be taken into consideration for the computation is the night before the first day of the fair with the latest night being the night of the last day of the fair.

- f. Costs related to the design and printing of branding material required for the participation at the fair shall be based on the indicated maximum thresholds:

Cost of design and printing of branding material		
Amount	Item	Maximum Eligible Expenditure (excluding VAT) €
1000	A4 folded 3 gate full colour	185
1000	A5 4X4 full colour	135
1000	Business cards full colour	165

- g. Costs for shipment of exhibits.

**All costs must be incurred from external sources to the Beneficiary Undertaking.**

**Expenditure shall only be considered eligible if the cost item is approved in the Grant Agreement, no modifications were made without the approval of the IB, and that the expenditure was undertaken in line with the Guidelines for Implementation issued by the IB together with these Guidance Notes.**

### 2.3 Ineligible Costs

- a) Tax including Value Added Tax and other duties.
- b) Any other direct or indirect ancillary costs.
- c) Insurance costs.
- d) Costs related to participation at conferences, seminars, one-to-one meetings, and training and activities organised in parallel or at the side of the International Business Promotion Fair.
- e) Contingencies and /or losses made by the Applicant.
- f) In kind contributions.
- g) Statutory fines and penalties.
- h) Payments for gifts and donations.
- i) Entertainment (including catering, receptions, etc.)
- j) Depreciation.
- k) Foreign exchange costs and related losses.
- l) Bank charges.
- m) Overheads.
- n) Commissions.

### 3. Eligibility

#### 3.1 Eligible Undertakings

**Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises** engaged in an economic activity, irrespective of their legal form, referred to as the ‘Undertaking’ subject to the exclusions enlisted below.

Undertakings which are not vested with a legal personality acquired through the law applicable to their establishment, need to be registered under the Second Schedule of the Civil Code (CAP 16 of the Laws of Malta).

#### 3.2 Exclusions

- i. Undertakings subject to an outstanding recovery order following a Commission Decision declaring an aid granted by Malta illegal and incompatible with the internal market.
- ii. Undertakings in difficulty are in principle excluded from receiving aid under this scheme. However, in line with the provisions of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty (General Block Exemptions Regulation) as amended by Commission Regulation (EU) 2020/972 of 2 July 2020, such exclusion does not apply to those undertakings that were not in difficulty as on 31 December 2019 but became undertakings in difficulty in the period from 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2021.
- iii. Undertakings that have not honoured their obligations further to a Decision by the competent Court in favour of a recovery order issued by the competent authorities responsible for the administration and management of aid schemes co-funded under the European Regional Development Fund - Cohesion Policy Operational Programme I 2007 – 2013.
- iv. Undertakings that have not honoured their obligations further to a recovery order issued by the competent authorities responsible for the administration of aid schemes co-funded under Cohesion Policy 2014 – 2020.
- v. Exclusions as per provisions in Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty (General Block Exemptions Regulations), as amended.
- vi. Undertakings whose principal activities fall under Section A ‘Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing’ of NACE Rev 2.
- vii. Undertakings active in the sector of processing and marketing of agricultural products, in the following cases:
  - where the amount of the aid is fixed on the basis of the price or quantity of such products purchased from primary producers or put on the market by the undertakings concerned;
  - where the aid is conditional on being partly or entirely passed on to primary producers.

- viii. Actions addressing the processing and marketing of agricultural products in so far as such actions can be considered eligible for funding under the EAFRD.
- ix. Undertaking whose principal activities include the manufacturing, processing and marketing of tobacco and tobacco products.
- x. Public entities: Ministries, Departments, Entities, Authorities, Public Commissions, Public Sector Foundations and similar organisations carrying out a public or regulatory function which does not involve the carrying out of an economic activity, whether or not such organisations are established by law. With the exception of commercial Undertakings carrying out exclusively economic activity in direct competition with third parties and in which Government has a controlling interest.
- xi. Energy Generation, distribution and infrastructure.
- xii. The Steel Sector.
- xiii. The Coal Sector.
- xiv. The Shipbuilding Sector.
- xv. The Transport Sector.
- xvi. The Synthetic Fibres Sector.
- xvii. Undertakings whose principal activities fall under Section K 'Financial and insurance activities' of the NACE Rev. 2.
- xviii. Undertakings whose principal activities fall under Section L 'Real Estate activities' of the NACE Rev. 2.
- xix. Gambling and Betting activities.
- xx. Investment to achieve the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from activities listed in Annex I to Directive 2003/87/EC.
- xxi. Actions resulting in the decommissioning or the construction of nuclear power stations.
- xxii. Actions resulting in investment in airport infrastructure unless related to environmental protection or accompanied by investment necessary to mitigate or reduce its negative environmental impact.
- xxiii. Participation at Business Promotion Fairs held in the Territory of the Republic of Malta.
- xxiv. Undertakings engaged in an illegal economic activity.

### 3.3 Additional Provisions

- i. An application may only address participation at a single International Business Promotion Fair.
- ii. Undertakings that have not honoured their obligations, further to a recovery order issued by the competent authorities responsible for the administration and management of aid schemes co-funded under the European Regional Development Fund – Cohesion Policy Operational Programme I 2007 -2013 and in respect of which legal action has been instituted and proceedings are pending or under way before the competent Court, are eligible to apply without prejudice to the assessment and evaluation of their application. However, in the event that the proposed operation is selected the Grant Agreement will only be entered into in if

within 6 months from the date of the notification by the Intermediate Body to the Undertaking that the Operation has been selected such obligations are no longer due either pursuant to a Court Decision or the effective payment of dues.

- iii. The operation has to have an incentive effect and start of works on actions in relation to the activities for which assistance is being requested may only be initiated after the date of the granting of the aid.
- iv. The Undertaking is in compliance with applicable EU and national legislation and administrative requirements, including fulfilment of fiscal obligations, social security contributions.
- v. Applicants must submit evidence as to the capability of private match financing the operation.
- vi. All funding is based on reimbursement of eligible expenditure.
- vii. Support from EU Funds shall be acknowledged during the participation at the fair in line with EU Commission Regulation 821/2014 and in line with the Guidelines for Implementation issued by the Intermediate Body.
- viii. All supplies and services may only be procured from external sources.
- ix. Approved operation beneficiaries shall be based and operational in Malta.
- x. Costs incurred on actions and/or activities that are not strictly in line with the Grant Agreement will not be considered eligible. The Beneficiary must seek in advance approval from the IB should modifications to the approved activities and/or actions be necessary.
- xi. The Undertaking has not been approved or granted any public funding, and will not seek public funding through other National and/or European Union funded initiatives in relation to the activities for which assistance is being requested through this Grant Scheme. This includes schemes under Cohesion Policy and any other European Union instruments or through any other form of Public Funding including schemes administered through National Funds.

## 4.0 Applications

### 4.1 Application Process

The IB shall publicise calls through various media and will collaborate with stakeholders particularly representatives of the target group and other Government Entities to publicise the Grant Scheme to ensure the widest visibility possible.

### 4.2 Submission of Applications

Undertakings must submit an online application as outlined in the call for applications.

Applicants are encouraged to submit their applications well in advance of the targeted participation, thus taking into consideration the time lapse from the submission date and the applicable cut-off date and allowing sufficient time for the administrative processing and assessment of their application.

The application shall include the Undertaking's name and size, a description of the operation, including its start and end dates, the location of the operation and a list of operation costs and the amount of public funding needed for the operation, amongst other requirements.

It is strongly advisable that prior to embarking on the development and submission of the application, prospective applicants read these Guidance Notes together with the Notes to Applicants and the Guidelines for Implementation documents.

### 1.3 Documents to be submitted with the Application

The following documents need to be submitted as part of the application.

1. **Declaration** – a scanned copy of the signed Declaration Form.
  
2. **Business Plan** – a business plan outlining the Undertaking's internationalisation potential, the opportunities being sought and the potential impact for growth of the Undertaking in terms of increased competitiveness, market presence, market share, potential increase in employment and increase in cross regional market co-operation together with a **business case** on how the Undertaking plans to exploit the opportunity of actively participating in the particular business promotion fair. The business plan should as a minimum include the following sections:

Executive Summary
Business History, Background and Objectives
Business Environment
Business Products and/or Services
Present Market
Competition
Management and Organization
Business Resources



Business Project Proposal
Expected Outcome and impacts
Financial Plan/Data
Supporting Information

3. **VAT Compliance Certificate** – a certificate issued not earlier than three months from the date of the application, by the Office of the Commissioner for Revenue (CFR).
4. **Income Tax Compliance Certificate** – a certificate issued not earlier than three months from the date of the application, by the CFR confirming that the Applicant has no liabilities in respect of Income Tax or is otherwise honouring an agreement for settling any outstanding amounts.
5. **Final Settlement and of Social Security Contributions Compliance Certificate** – a certificate issued by the CFR confirming that the Applicant has no liabilities in respect of the Final Settlement System (FSS) and of Social Security Contributions (SSC) or is honouring an agreement for settling any outstanding amounts. The compliance certificate should not be dated earlier than three months from the date of the application.
6. **Audited Financial Statements and/or the Management Accounts** dated within the two financial years prior to the year of submission of the application in relation to the applicant and the linked and partner enterprises. No documents would need to be submitted if a copy of these documents as outlined hereunder is already deposited with the Registry of Companies.

With the respect to the last financial year, the applicant enterprise is to submit a copy of the detailed (not abridged version) of the Audited Financial Statements or the Management Accounts (Profit & Loss Statements/Income Statement and Balance Sheet/Statement of Assets and Liabilities) certified by a Certified Public Accountant. The abridged version may be submitted with respect to the previous year.

In the case of linked and partner enterprises with an obligation to present Audited Accounts/Annual Accounts at the Registry of Companies in terms of the Companies Act (Chapter 386 of the Laws of Malta) no documentation need to be presented subject to the condition that the last Audited Accounts/Annual Accounts declared are not earlier than for the two financial years prior to the year of submission of the application.

In the case of linked and partner enterprises without a legal obligation to prepare financial statements the Management Accounts (Profit & Loss Statements/Income Statement and Balance Sheet/Statement of Assets and Liabilities) certified by a Certified Public Accountant.

In the case of a Start-up established not over 2 years from the date of application not having the above documentation, a Profit & Loss Account/Income Statement, Cash Flow Projections and a Balance Sheet/Statement of Assets and Liabilities certified by a Certified Public Accountant.

In the case of a Sole Trader/self-employed a copy of the Income Tax Return for the last two years certified by a Certified Public Accountant.

7. Evidence of **Private Match Financing** for the operation (*mandatory*).
8. **Supporting Documentation** including NACE code confirmation<sup>2</sup>. Any other supporting documentation (such as preparatory work and correspondence) that the Applicant deems that would add value to the application.

The IB may request any additional documentation for verification purposes.

In those cases where not all the documentation enlisted under points 3, 4, 5 and 6 is submitted with the application, applicants shall be given the opportunity to rectify the application by submitting the required documentation to be considered for evaluation and selection with the next cut-off date<sup>3</sup>. In the event that applicants fail to rectify an application by the indicated deadline the application shall be considered as an incomplete application and rejected.

#### 4.4 Acknowledgement

Once an application is submitted and confirmed, the system generates a unique reference number for the operation and an acknowledgement e-mail together with the application reference number will be sent to the Applicant.

Applications will be assessed and selected as outlined in Section 6 'Assessment and Selection'. The issuance of the acknowledgement letter does not confer any obligation on the IB to issue the Grant towards the financing of the operation. Actions may only be initiated further to the signing of the Grant Agreement.

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<sup>2</sup> The NACE confirmation shall be in the form of VAT Information Sheet or else communication with the NSO Business Register including the four-digit code in the form of 11.11.

<sup>3</sup> For the last cut-off date, applicants should submit the required documentation by the deadline identified in the rectifications letter

## 5. Compliance with Community Policy

### 5.1 General Principles

It is the responsibility of the Undertaking to ensure compliance with Community Policy, namely:

- Payments of costs under the approved Operation
- State Aid requirements
- Equal Opportunities
- Sustainable development

### 5.2 Payment of costs under the approved Operation

Undertakings should note that Grants awarded for actions under the SME Internationalisation Grant Scheme are public funds. Beneficiary Undertakings should ensure that all cost items to be co-funded through the Grant Scheme are carried out in line with the principles of **sound financial management, good governance, transparency, and equality** together with the provisions of the Guidelines for Implementation issued by the IB together with these Guidance Notes.

### 5.3 State Aid requirements

The terms and conditions of this Grant Scheme are set out in line with Commission Regulation (EU) 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application to Article 107 and 108 of the Treaty, as amended by Commission Regulation (EU) 2017/1084 of 14 June 2017 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards aid for port and airport infrastructure, notification thresholds for aid for culture and heritage conservation and for aid for sport and multifunctional recreational infrastructures, and regional operating aid schemes for outermost regions and amending Regulation (EU) No 702/2014 as regards the calculation of eligible costs, by Commission Regulation (EU) 2020/972 of 2 July 2020 amending Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 as regards its prolongation and amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards its prolongation and relevant adjustments, and by Commission Regulation (EU) 2021/1237 of 23 July 2021 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, and as may be subsequently amended. If an Undertaking receiving aid is found to be in breach of the relevant provisions of this Regulation, action shall be taken to claw back funds (recovery of funds) from the Undertaking in line with the provisions of the pertinent State Aid rules.

**The Undertaking shall ensure compliance with the rules on cumulation of aid in line with Article 8 of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014, as amended.**

**It is the responsibility of the Applicant Undertakings to seek advice and to ensure compliance with State Aid rules and requirements.**

### 5.4 Equal Opportunities and non-discrimination

Beneficiary Undertakings are required to take a pro-active approach to Equal Opportunities and must ensure that at all stages of the implementation of the action/s consideration is given to Equal Opportunities.

Equal Opportunities and non-discrimination are not meant to just address gender discrimination but have a wider scope and include race, ethnicity, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation.

### 5.5 Sustainable Development

Undertakings should include Sustainable Development in the action/s and must ensure that the operation is structured in such a manner that concrete positive actions towards better sustainability and mainstreaming feature throughout. It is important that Environmental matters should also be taken into consideration at all stages of the design, development and implementation of the action and the action should be structured to avoid any related environmental damage.

## 6. Assessment and Selection

The Assessment and Selection of operations shall be undertaken by a Project Selection Committee.

Applications will be assessed against the Gateway (eligibility) and Selection Criteria by the Project Selection Committee.

Applications will proceed to be assessed against the Selection Criteria only if the application meets all the requirements of the Gateway (eligibility) Criteria.

Applications attaining at least 50% of the total score under the Selection Criteria will be granted funding subject to availability of funds.

### 6.1 Gateway Criteria

The Gateway Criteria are the minimum requirements which must be met in order that any application may be considered for assessment and appraisal for selection for funding support. These will be used at the first stage once an application is submitted. This stage will involve an assessment and a Due Diligence process to establish that these minimum requirements are met, namely:

1. **Complete application form:** an Undertaking must present a fully compiled application form together with all the requested supporting documentation, by the indicated deadline.
2. **Eligible Undertaking:** the Undertaking is an eligible Undertaking in line with these Guidance Notes.
3. **Eligible action:** the action for which the Applicant is asking for support is eligible and at least includes an eligible activity.
4. **Match Financing:** the Applicant has submitted evidence as to its capacity to match finance the operation through private sources.

### 6.2 Selection Criteria

Only applications that meet all the requirements of the Gateway (eligibility) Criteria shall proceed for assessment under the Selection Criteria. The Project Selection Committee may at this stage request clarifications from the Applicant. As part of the assessment and appraisal process a score is awarded for each Selection Criteria. Applications scoring at least 50% of the total score under the Selection Criteria shall be approved for funding, on a first-come-first served basis subject to budget availability.

The total maximum score under the Selection Criteria is 120. All the eligible applications will be assessed and evaluated in line with the Selection Criteria outlined hereunder.

- Extent of need for support
- Excellence
- Impact and Sustainability
- Quality and efficiency of implementation

Criteria	Definition	Score
<b>Extent of need for support</b>	<p><b>Size of Undertaking – 5</b> The need for support will be determined on the size and composition of the Undertaking. The smaller the Undertaking the higher the score. Undertakings composed from one single autonomous enterprise will score higher than Undertakings that have a number of linked or partner enterprises.</p> <p><b>Age of Undertaking – 5</b> The need for support will be determined on the age of the Undertaking. The younger the Undertaking the higher the score.</p> <p><b>The extent of internationalisation within the Undertaking – 5</b> The need for support will be assessed on the basis of the extent of internationalisation of the Undertaking, and their presence in international markets. Undertakings with limited international market presence will score higher.</p>	<b>15</b>
<b>Excellence</b>	<p><b>Action is holistic in nature – 10</b> Actions need to be holistic in nature through the integration of the different activities to be undertaken through the operation and any other complimentary activities.</p> <p><b>Action seeks to maximise the internationalisation potential of the Undertaking – 10</b> The application will be assessed in relation to the extent that the action will be exploiting the internationalisation potential of the whole Undertaking and the extent of internationalisation being sought. The state of preparedness of the Undertaking to take up internationalisation initiatives through its business model will also be evaluated.</p> <p><b>Action is ambitious and is addressing an identified gap in the market for the specific sector – 10</b> The application will be evaluated in terms of the extent of identified market gaps it addresses in relation to its specific sector. The assessment will also address the level of the novelty of the concepts and approaches that the action will bring about to its sector by introducing the sector to new or emerging markets. Actions targeting emerging markets will garner a higher score.</p>	<b>30</b>

<p><b>Impact and Sustainability</b></p>	<p><b>Impact in relation to the Applicant’s future growth and sustainable economic viability leading to long term market resilience – 10</b> The application will be evaluated in terms of the operation’s impact vis-à-vis the future potential business growth of the Applicant and the potential to increase the turnover of the enterprise. More over the proposal will be asessed on its potential to increase the degree of networking undertaken by the Applicant, and the potential of the Applicant to reach new markets, increase its market share and global presence.</p> <p><b>Impact on employment – 10</b> The application will be evaluated in relation to the operation’s potential to ensure job retention and potential new employment.</p> <p><b>Impact on improvements in the Undertaking’s business model - 10</b> The application will be evaluated in terms of the operation’s impact on the Undertaking leading it to adopt a stronger and more resilient business model.</p> <p><b>Impact in relation to National Policies and Strategies linked to the Operational Programme – 10</b> The application will be assessed in relation to potential impact on National Policies and Strategies linked to the operational programme.</p> <p><b>Effective integration of the Operational Programme’s horizontal priorities: Environmental Sustainability, Equal Opportunities – 10</b> The application will be assessed in relation to the effective integration of the OP’s horizontal priorities being Environmental Sustainability and Equal Opportunities.</p>	<p><b>50</b></p>
<p><b>Quality and efficiency of implementation</b></p>	<p><b>Level of Management and Control Systems in place – 5</b> The evaluation will be assessing the operation’s quality and efficiency of implementation, the level of Management and Control Systems in place, and the extent of quality standards adopted by the Undertaking.</p> <p><b>Level of private match financing and additional investment addressing complementary actions – 5</b> The proposed action will be assessed against the Undertaking’s level of additional match financing and the potential to inject further investment to address complementary actions.</p> <p><b>Level of capacity and allocation of resources towards the operation – 5</b> The evaluation will be assessing the allocation of resources towards the operation to ensure its successful implementation and sustainability.</p> <p><b>Coherence and Clarity of work plan – 10</b> The evaluation will be assessing the operation’s work plan and strategy. High scores will be given to those actions that show high levels of quality, coherence and clearly identify and address potential risks.</p>	<p><b>25</b></p>

### 6.3 Unsuccessful Applications

Unsuccessful applicants will be informed in writing by the IB.

### 6.4 Appeals

An independent Appeals Board shall be appointed to assess representations submitted by unselected applicants. Applicants whose application was not selected may submit motivated representations within 10 working days from the date of notification by the IB.

The Appeals Board shall review and re-assess the application and shall notify the Applicant of its decision. The decision of the Appeals Board shall be final.

### 6.5 Acceptance Letter

The IB shall issue a funding acceptance letter to selected applicants. The funding acceptance letter shall include any conditions as outlined by the Project Selection Committee. It should be noted that a positive decision at this stage is not a guarantee of funding. All the conditions set-out in the funding acceptance letter would need to be discharged before the Grant Agreement can be signed.

### 6.6 Grant Agreement

The IB shall appoint a contact person from within it, to liaise with the Beneficiary with a view to conclude the Grant Agreement. The Grant Agreement (GA) is the formal agreement between the Intermediate Body and the Applicant. The GA is the legally binding document and sets out the terms of the grant. The IB will work through the terms and any conditions which must be discharged prior to entering into the GA with the Applicant. When the IB is satisfied that any conditions have been discharged, it will issue the GA and it will submit two unsigned copies to the Applicant. The Applicant will, by the indicated timeframe, sign and return both copies for counter-signature by the IB and one copy will be sent back to the Applicant.



## 7. Monitoring and Reporting

This section outlines in brief the reporting requirements and the reimbursement process, and should be read in conjunction with the Guidelines for Implementation issued by the IB together with this document.

### 7.1 Reporting

A Final Implementation Report is to be submitted following the completion of the assisted operation. Moreover the beneficiary should draw up a report outlining the outcome further to the participation in the International Business Promotion Fair, the envisaged impact on the beneficiary and any follow-up action that the beneficiary shall be undertaking.

The IB shall carry out on-the-spot checks during and after the operation implementation timeframe.

Further information regarding the implementation of the operation is available in the Guidelines for Implementation.

### 7.2 Reimbursement

The Beneficiary Undertaking must submit a claim for reimbursement together with the Final Implementation Report, an updated Compliance Certificate/s issued by the Commissioner for Revenue (CfR) covering Income Tax, VAT and Final Settlement of Social Security Contributions compliance issued not earlier than the date of completion of the supported action. A Financial Identification Form<sup>4</sup> is to be submitted with the claim.

The reimbursement request will only be processed when the IB is satisfied that the claimed cost items were implemented, in line with the GA and pertinent regulations, rules and guidelines, following rigorous monitoring and checks.

The claim for reimbursement will include the following documentation which must be signed and certified by a **Certified Public Accountant** as specified in the Guidelines for Implementation:

- A copy of the invoice and respective delivery note issued by the supplier/service provider;
- A copy of the respective receipt<sup>5</sup> issued by the supplier/service provider;
- A copy of the bank statement confirming the transaction of payments to the service provider for the claimed cost (defrayment from bank account identified in the Financial Identification Form);

Furthermore, the claim will also be supported by a statement which must be signed and certified by a **Certified Auditor**, specifying that:

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<sup>4</sup> For more details refer to the Guidelines for Implementation issued by the IB

<sup>5</sup> Where a tax invoice is not provided.

- i. The costs claimed were actually incurred by the Undertaking and were not reimbursed or may be recoverable through other sources;
- ii. The expenditure satisfies the conditions that are outlined in the Grant Agreement;
- iii. The expenditure was incurred during the approved operation period;
- iv. A separate accounting system or a separate accounting code has been maintained for all operation transactions and that all operation transactions are accurately and properly recorded;
- v. The Beneficiary has ensured that any rules governing accumulation of aid have been respected; and
- vi. Aid has been calculated at the applicable intensity level as approved by the Intermediate Body.

Beneficiaries are to consult the Guidelines for Implementation which provides further detailed information in this regard.

**It is the beneficiary's responsibility to ensure that reimbursement requests, including all the required supporting documentation, are submitted to the Intermediate Body by not later than 30 September 2023, or on a later date as confirmed by the IB.**

### 7.3 Retention of Documentation

The Beneficiary has the obligation to retain all related documents for control and audit purposes, for 10 years following the completion of the operation. The Beneficiary must also co-operate with the IB and other monitoring and audit bodies entrusted with such functions with respect to the granting of aid under this scheme, for the duration of 10 years in light of audits and other controls.

Further information related to the retention of documentation is available in the Guidelines for Implementation.

## 8. Publicity

Beneficiary Undertakings are responsible for ensuring proper visibility of interventions assisted through this Grant Scheme, part-financed by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund under Operational Programme I 2014 – 2020.

All communication and publicity measures must acknowledge support from the European Union and the respective Fund in line with Article 2.2 of Annex XII of Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013, and Articles 3-5 of Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No. 821/2014.

Visibility measures should be proportionate and reflect the scale of assistance and the nature of the operation.

Beneficiaries are to seek the guidance of the IB prior to embarking on publicity and visibility actions. Failure to fully comply with the visibility and publicity requirements will result in financial corrections and loss of funds. The beneficiary is responsible to keep evidence of compliance such as copies of printed documentation, photographic evidence of participation at fairs, and of commemorative plaques and posters affixed throughout the implementation of the operation.

Further information related to publicity is available in the Guidelines for Implementation.

## 9. Data Protection

Data and information collected and held by the IB in relation to the financed action will be transferred to the MA and may also be transferred to official third parties in order to fulfil the IB's functions, in line with Community obligations according to law and in line with the provisions of Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation) and any amendments thereof.

Information and any data provided by the potential beneficiaries and beneficiary will be used for the sole purpose for which they are intended, that is, (i) verification procedures; and (ii) evaluation and monitoring purposes in line with Regulation (EU) 1303/2013. The data will not be used for any other means or for any other purpose that is incompatible with that for which the data is being collected.

In applying for assistance under this scheme, applicants will be giving authorisation to the IB to make enquiries and to carry out the necessary checks with the competent Authorities and Organisations to verify any information submitted in relation to the application.

Beneficiary Undertakings should ensure that they disclose factual and accurate data to the IB. The Beneficiary Undertaking has the right to access all the data relating to the grant issued in its name and may request the rectification of any incorrect data.

## 10. Contact Details

For more information regarding the Business Enhance ERDF Grant Schemes, kindly contact the Measures and Support Division.

Address: Measures and Support Division  
The Oaks Business Centre, Block B  
Farsons Street  
Hamrun HMR1325

Telephone Number: 25552635

Email: [msd.eufunds@gov.mt](mailto:msd.eufunds@gov.mt)

Website: [www.businessenhance.gov.mt](http://www.businessenhance.gov.mt) or  
[www.eufunds.gov.mt](http://www.eufunds.gov.mt)

# BUSINESS ENHANCE



Operational Programme I - European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020  
"Fostering a competitive and sustainable economy to meet our challenges"  
Aid Scheme part-financed by the European Regional Development Fund  
Co-financing rate: 80% European Union; 20% National Funds

