



Greening Agrifood
in Social Economy



Co-funded by
the European Union

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

(„Call for Proposals - Financial Facility Program“)

GRAINS-WP5-2024-002

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1. AIM OF THE CALL

This **Call for Proposals for Financial Support for Social Economy SMEs in Agrifood** is launched in the framework of the GRAINS project. Through the GRAINS Financial Facility Program up to 60 Social Economy SMEs will be selected to support financially the implementation of their greening projects in their agrifood businesses in EU Members States and Ukraine.

The activities for which social economy SMEs may receive financial support are:

- training (upskilling and reskilling),
- consultancy and labelling for greening their operations,
- tailored advisory services to develop local markets,
- other elements necessary for greening their enterprises (eco certifications, eco packaging, digitalisation and technologies, etc.),
- additional path of coaching and mentoring on development of the green transition for social enterprises.

For the implementation of their projects, selected Social Economy SMEs will have to contract verified service providers financed through the grant provided to them by the GRAINS project.

A list of verified service providers have been selected through a specific call (Grains project - Call for Service Providers) to create a pool from which Social Economy SMEs in agrifood can choose the most appropriate provider(s) to support their project implementation.

This **Call for Proposals for Financial Support for Social Economy SMEs in Agrifood** will be open from 29 February 2024 until 30 April 2024 and will select up to 60 Social Economy SMEs in agrifood sector to take part in the GRAINS project Financial Facility Program. The maximum amount to be granted per Social Economy SME in Agrifood by the GRAINS project shall not exceed € 8.175,00.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON GRAINS PROJECT

GRAINS - Greening Agrifood in Social Economy, is a project funded by European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency.

The GRAINS project aims at building the capacity of Social Economy SMEs in agrifood by providing training and workshops on sustainable practices and on how to reduce their environmental footprint, namely:

- Supporting the transition towards sustainable and environmentally friendly practices and production processes;
- Promoting the adoption of sustainable technologies and innovations;
- Building the capacity and competitiveness of social economy SMEs through knowledge transfer and skills development about sustainable practices;

- Fostering transnational cooperation, best practice sharing, and promoting sustainable practices through awareness-raising efforts.

The GRAINS project is implementing several activities such as:

- a capacity building programme focused on business needs and innovation and specific operations of agrifood supply chain,
- a mentorship and coaching programme,
- an advisory support programme to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and expertise from experts and practitioners.
- the Financial Facility Programme provides financial support for small and medium sized enterprises in Social Economy.

The project runs between 1 October 2023 and 30 September 2025.

More information about the GRAINS project is available on the project's [website](#).

3. FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL ECONOMY SMEs IN AGRIFOOD (Financial Facility Programme)

The **Financial Facility Programme** is a monetary support program, and aims to:

- ✓ Improving the capacity of Social Economy SMEs in agrifood to transition to a green business model by improving efficiency.
- ✓ Modernizing the way of working through the use of digitalisation and technology.
- ✓ Encouraging cross-sectoral cooperation and knowledge transfer between social economy SMEs, start-ups, traditional enterprises, consultancies, business support centers, and incubators to increase the adoption of green skills and the development of more sustainable products and services.
- ✓ Promoting sustainable innovation processes by social economy SMEs to increase their competitiveness and creating new market opportunities.
- ✓ Encouraging further investment by social economy SMEs in sustainable alternatives, capacity building, and knowledge transfer.

Social Economy SMEs selected under the Call for Proposals in the Financial Facility Programme will receive an amount of max € 8.175,00 of financial support to implement their projects with the support of one or several service providers choosing the most appropriate provider from the pool of providers created through the specific **Call for Service Providers** in frame of GRAINS project.

The total amount of funding that will be provided to Social Economy SMEs is EUR 490,500.

4. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

In order to be eligible, the applicants must:

- be legal entities;
- be established in one of the eligible countries:
 - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
 - Ukraine
- only small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Social Economy sector operating in the agrifood sector are eligible to apply.

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 start-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."

5. APPLICATION PROCEDURE

The call is open from 29 February 2024. Social Economy SMEs applicants will need to submit their application form through the GRAINS Submission Service to this link: https://clustersubmissionplatform.eu/eurocluster_post/grains-open-call/ before the deadline, scheduled on 30 April 2024 at 12 CET.

The applications must be written in English (applications partially written in another language are not eligible and will be automatically excluded and marked as ineligible).

All the information provided should be complete and valid. After the submission, all the applicants will receive a confirmation email with the registered date and time of the submission.

Only one project submission per applicant is allowed.

Components of the application pack	
ADMINISTRATIVE PART	Applicant administrative data to be completed by filling in the sections online on the GRAINS Submission Service.
GREENING SOCIAL ECONOMY SMEs IN AGRIFOOD PROJECT	To be completed by filling in the technical contents of the proposal (Word template available to download on the GRAINS Submission Service) and uploading it into PDF format. The technical part of the Project includes the following sections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Project Information B. Project Relevance C. Project Implementation D. Project Impact E. Project Budget
DECLARATION OF HONOUR (CONFIRMATION OF THE REQUIREMENT)	To be completed by signing the Declaration of Honour (PDF template available to download on the GRAINS Submission Service) and uploading it into PDF format.

6. DEADLINE AND EVALUATION

The Call is open on the 29 February 2024 12:00 CET and will be open until 30 April 2024 at 12:00 CET.

Submitted applications will be evaluated by the GRAINS Selection Committee composed of representatives of GRAINS 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 GRAINS Coordinator to ensure the confidentiality of received information.

The GRAINS 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 projects are on track and meeting their goals.

The evaluation of grant requests submitted by applicants will be done on two levels, namely:

- **the eligibility check, to verify if conditions set in the call for proposal are met:**

Eligibility requirements	
1	The application is complete, readable and written in English in all its parts. It includes the properly filled and signed Declaration of Honour.
2	The application has been submitted via the GRAINS Application Service within the deadline (scheduled on 30 April 2024 at midnight Brussels time).
3	The application has been submitted by a Social Economy SME (registered at least 6 months from the date of GRAINS application submission).
4	The application has been submitted by a Social Economy SME registered in a EU memberstate or Ukraine.

- **the technical evaluation, to be done according to the following set of 5 award macro-criteria:**

Technical requirements		Score threshold	Score
1	Relevance of the proposal's objectives and greening priorities mentioned to the social economy SMEs that apply to the call Specifications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment of the proposal with the specified objectives and greening priorities outlined in the call. • Evaluation of the direct impact of the proposal on social economy SMEs. 	14	20
2	Applicants technical capacity and experience Specifications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of the technical capabilities and expertise of the applicants, focusing on their past experiences and achievements in similar projects. 	10.5	15
3	Level of innovation in the proposal Specifications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of the degree of creativity and innovation demonstrated in the proposed solution, emphasizing any novel approaches or technologies. • Assessment of the introduction of new and improved methods, processes, or technologies to address the identified challenges. 	14	20
4	Potential impact, feasibility, and sustainability of the proposal in short and long term	21	30

	<p>Specifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of the potential positive impact of the proposal on the target (Greening Social Economy SMEs in agrifood). • Assessment of the feasibility of implementing the proposal, considering resource availability and logistical aspects. • Assessment of the sustainability of the proposed solution in short-term and long-term viability. 		
5	<p>Budget and cost-effectiveness of the proposal</p> <p>Specifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate if the budget aligns with the proposed activities and outcomes. • Assessment of the cost-effectiveness of the proposal, considering the anticipated results and the efficient use of resources. • Assessment of the transparency and clarity of the budget, ensuring that all costs are justified and contribute to the overall success of the project. 	10.5	15
		70	100

The award subsidies will be released as financial contribution to the most eligible and deserving organizations or entities.

The evaluation period shall take max. 40 days, starting from the closing date of the call.

7. RANKING LIST

After individual evaluation, the results will be ranked in a PRELIMINARY LIST. Only proposals with all individual criteria reaching the threshold will be considered eligible and included in the preliminary ranking list.

EVALUATION IN CASE OF EQUAL SCORING:

In the case of proposals with equal overall scoring, the prevailing one is the proposal that has the higher score in the criterion of:

- Technical requirement 4: Potential impact, feasibility, and sustainability of the proposal in short and long term;
- Technical requirement 1: Relevance of the proposal's objectives and greening priorities mentioned to the social;
- Technical requirement 5: Budget and cost-effectiveness of the proposal following this order.

If the equality persists, the last parameter taken into consideration for the ranking list will be the submission order of the application. The date and time of submission.

In case of equal evaluation scores of applications and insufficient funding to fund all equally rated proposals, a second evaluation round will be carried out to establish a definite ranking among those equally rated proposals.

The FINAL RANKING LIST will result from the decision taken by consensus (minimum $\frac{2}{3}$ of the votes) of the GRAINS Selection Committee during the dedicated decision meetings.

8. COMMUNICATION OF THE FINAL RESULTS

The results of the eligibility and quality evaluation will be communicated to all applicants via email (including the evaluation report summary), both to those who will pass and to those who will fail to pass it.

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

The information on the awarded projects (following the signature of the Sub-grant Agreements between the applicants and the GRAINS Coordinator) will be published on the DIESIS ECCP profile page, GRAINS Application Service and all the GRAINS communication channels including social media and project partners' institutional websites.

9. SUB-GRANT AGREEMENT

Once an Social Economy SME applicant 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 GRAINS 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 implement the supported project under their own responsibility. The signature of the SGA SME applicant must complete the project activities within 8 months maximum.

The co-operation between the SME beneficiary and the selected service provider, shall be drafted according to the national labour laws and shall include the amount requested, the legal name(s) of the service provider(s), and a reference to the GRAINS project, the GRAINS Open Call for Proposals for Financial Support and the Call for Service Providers.

The co-operation contract must be sent to the GRAINS Consortium as a mandatory annex to the Sub-Grant Agreement.

10. TIMELINE

Call opening:	29 February 2024
Deadline for submission:	30 April 2024 midnight (Brussels)
Evaluation:	May 2024
Information on evaluation result:	May 2024
Indicative signature of sub-grant agreement:	June 2024
Indicative start of project implementations:	June 2024 (up to 8 months)

11. MONITORING AND REPORTING

After the implementation of the selected and supported project, the Social Economy SME beneficiary must report the work performance to the GRAINS Consortium to enable the evaluation of the degree of fulfilment of the project work plan. Each Social Economy SME beneficiary must elaborate and submit a FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT to the GRAINS Consortium, via email to the Coordinator and/or national Partner(s) of Reference, within 14 days of the project end date.

The final technical report consists of three parts and the template will be provided by the GRAINS Consortium:

Technical report	
1	Description of the project performance, and the major results including a description of the work done, with final deliverables if envisaged, and deviations from the proposed work plan that may have arisen with the related solutions applied.
2	Description of the incurred expenditures and attaches copies of the corresponding invoices to prove that the costs have been incurred and paid out to the service provider within the project duration.
3	Feedback section about the financial support service offered by the GRAINS Consortium.

12. TYPOLOGY OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT (lump sum)

Successful proposals shall receive the requested financial contribution in the form of a lump sum. The requested lump sum must be dedicated to the implementation of the selected and supported project with the support of the selected services provider(s).

The maximum amount per project must not exceed 8.175,00 EUR (lump sum).

What is the lump sum?

A lump sum is a fixed amount of money, which can be used by Social Economy SMEs beneficiaries for several purposes related to the achievement of the project objectives. Since

the granting of a lump sum does not foresee the delivery of detailed financial reporting and timesheets, the use of the project budget will be controlled considering the technical advancements through the project technical reporting (see Monitoring and Reporting).

The following rules and limitations per type of financial support must be respected:

- Only costs generated during the lifetime of the project can be eligible. The period of costs' eligibility is from the Sub-Grant Agreement signature date until the end of the project (defined in the agreement). Expenditures incurred before the Sub-Grant Agreement signature date and/or after the project closure date are not eligible.
- Costs must be determined in accordance with the usual accounting and management principles and practices of the Social Economy SMEs beneficiaries and national laws.
- At least 80% of the lump sum requested must be dedicated to services delivered by the selected service provider in order to trigger the greening of the SME.
- In the application form the Social Economy SMEs applicant must provide a clear budget division between costs reserved to the services provider and costs regarding the internal staff (of the SME applicant).

13. PAYMENT SCHEME

Two possible options are foreseen:

OPTION 1: the Social Economy SMEs beneficiary will provide a guarantee to ensure the amount to be pre-financed payment by the GRAINS Consortium in order to receive the funding and implement its project. Guarantee should cover 60% of the project total budget.

On this case the selected SME will receive a 60% pre-financing after submitting the required guarantee, and will receive final grant transfer (balance 40%) after the completion of the project, within 14 days by the approval of the Final Technical Report.

The guarantee must be presented within 30 days after the signature of the Sub-Grant Agreement by both parties. GRAINS allows different types of Guarantee (Bank/Insurance) depending on the country of the applicant Social Economy SME.

OPTION 2: the Social Economy SMEs beneficiary will NOT provide a guarantee. The reimbursement of the lump sum requested (100%) will be made to the Social Economy SMEs beneficiary within 14 days after approval of the Final Technical Report.

14. GENERAL PAYMENT TERMS

- All payments will be made in Euros (€).
- Expenditures incurred before the Sub-Grant Agreement signature date, or after the project duration period 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.
- Social Economy SMEs Beneficiaries must set up internal agreements regulating their cooperation with services provider(s). GRAINS 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 GRAINS funding scheme.
- Payments will be made to Social Economy SMEs Beneficiaries by DIESIS Network the GRAINS Coordinator.
- Submission of an application does not constitute an entitlement for funding.
- The recipients of the (financial) support from GRAINS (“Beneficiaries”) 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.

15. OBLIGATIONS OF SOCIAL ECONOMY SME BENEFICIARIES

- **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

The Social Economy SMEs beneficiaries must - for a period of five years after the payment of the balance - keep records and other supporting documentation to prove the proper implementation of the action. They must make them available upon request or in the context of checks, reviews, audits or investigations. If there are ongoing checks, reviews, audits, investigations, litigation or other pursuits of claims under the grant agreement (including the extension of funding), the SMEs must keep the records and other supporting documentation until the end of these procedures.

The Social Economy SMEs beneficiaries must keep the original documents. Digital and digitalised documents are considered originals if they are authorised by the applicable national law. Non-original documents may be accepted if they offer a comparable level of assurance.

- **FINANCIAL CAPACITY**

The Social Economy SMEs applicant must have the financial capacity to carry out the actions described in their proposals and to properly manage the financial support granted to them.

Each Social Economy SMEs applicant must BE in alignment with the following situations:

- Is no bankrupt or being wound up, is not having affairs administrated by the courts, has not entered into an arrangement with creditors, has not suspended business activities, is not the subject of proceedings concerning those matters or is not any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations;
- Is in compliance with its obligation relating to the payment of social security contributions and the payment of taxes, in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which it is established;
- Is not subject to a conflict of interest in connection with the grant.

- **DOUBLE FUNDING**

The Social Economy SMEs applicant cannot apply for and/or receive funding outside of GRAINS 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 GRAINS 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.

16. COMPLAINT

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

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

The GRAINS 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 GRAINS 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.

17. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS FOR GRAINS 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: grainsproject@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 GRAINS objectives and work plan. Submitting an application for the GRAINS 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 GRAINS Consortium, the Social Economy SMEs beneficiaries must credit the GRAINS project through proper citation and visibility of the EU emblem and GRAINS logo, including a disclaimer as reported below:
„This project has indirectly received funding from the European Union's Single Market Programme, via the GRAINS Projects (GA N. 101127575)“.

All visibility requirements will be communicated to the Social Economy SMEs beneficiaries after the signing of the Sub-Grant Agreement with the GRAINS Coordinator.

c. GENDER EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

GRAINS 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 Agrifood 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 GRAINS consortium is not responsible for any mistakes or misinterpretations that this text may cause. In the case of inconsistencies, the GRAINS 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: GRAINS'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 on grainsproject@diesis.coop. Contact person: Melinda Kelemen, project manager. Further information on the project, see the project website: <https://www.diesis.coop/grains/>

Brussels, 22.02.2024