

European Project Design and Management:

Challenges and Opportunities

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CENTER FOR EUROPEAN PROJECTS



In short

Center for European Projects (CEP) of University of Thessaly is an institutional body that provides support to research faculty and academics to enhance their overall impact and effectiveness in the broader EU funding landscape.

Through CEP, University of Thessaly actively participates in a **diverse portfolio** of project initiatives

CEP collaborates **internationally with academic institutions**, engages in various projects, and designs thematic educational programs.

At the moment, CEP runs a diverse and large portfolio of projects including **32 different ongoing projects** from different EU calls.

265

PARTNERS



65+

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH
STAFF MEMBERS



30+

ONGOING
PROJECTS



OUR PROJECT ACTIVITY



Comprehensive funding consultation

- Expert consultation on EU funding opportunities
- Administrative support to transform ideas into successful projects



Comprehensive support

- Extensive experience in EU-funded initiatives



Sustainable & impactful academic and business cooperation

- Active participation in major EU initiatives
- Strengthening research impact through strategic partnerships
- Ensuring sustainable and meaningful cooperation across borders



CENTER FOR EUROPEAN PROJECTS

RESEARCH

Implementation of research projects:
Expertise in research design, project
acquisition, management, and
methodology

NETWORKING

Networking and Partners'
database: Building a competitive
and successful partnership through
a tremendous network of different
organizations across Europe

SERVICE
AREAS

FUNDING

Providing advice on EU funding:
Expert consultation on EU
funding opportunities

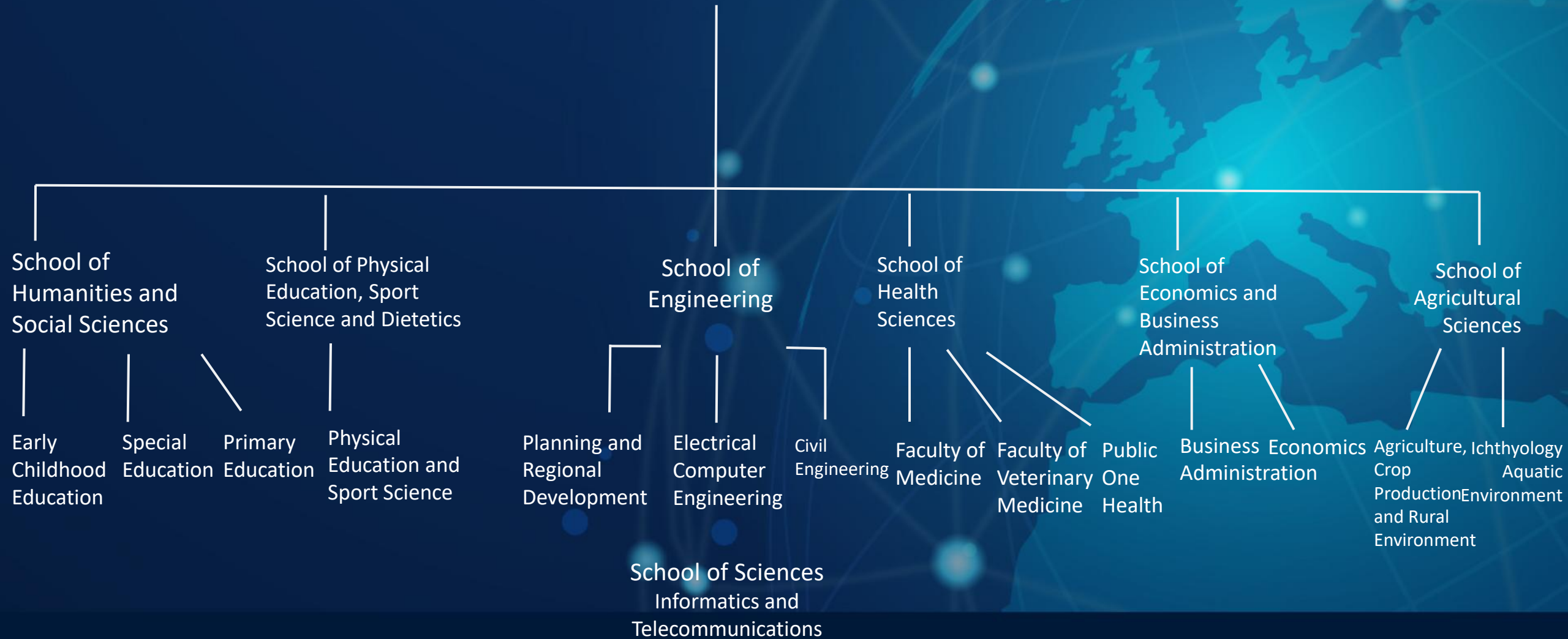
DESIGN EU INITIATIVES

Proposal Development &
Resource Planning: Crafting
competitive proposals and
optimizing resource allocation.

IMPLEMENTATION & COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT

Guidance at every stage of
project development
Experienced professionals
ensuring smooth implementation

CENTER FOR EUROPEAN PROJECTS



European Calls



HORIZON EUROPE



Erasmus+

Knowledge Alliances

**ERASMUS+
KNOWLEDGE ALLIANCES**



Erasmus+

Strategic Partnerships

**ERASMUS+
STRATEGIC
PARTNERSHIPS**



Erasmus+

Cooperation Partnerships

**ERASMUS+
COOPERATION
PARTNERSHIPS**



Erasmus+

Small-scale partnerships
in Vocational Education and Training

**ERASMUS+
SMALL-SCALE PARTNERSHIPS**



Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion

**EMPLOYMENT,
SOCIAL AFFAIRS & INCLUSION**



**DIGITAL
SERVICES**



**EUROPEAN INNOVATION
COUNCIL AND SMEs EXECUTIVE AGENCY**

INDICATIVE LIST OF PROJECTS



UNIVERSITY OF THESSALY CENTER FOR EUROPEAN PROJECTS

CEP's primary objective is to establish a comprehensive and efficient support system for **research** and **educational** projects at University of Thessaly funded by EU. The Center of European Projects offers expert guidance in project application preparation, methodological support for project implementation, and networking opportunities within the extensive European research, academic and business.

Currently, CEP at the University of Thessaly (UTH) participates in various European project initiatives, including **Horizon Europe**, **Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships**, **DG Employment**, **EASME**, **Interreg**, **Erasmus+ Sports**, **Erasmus+ Virtual Exchanges** and **Knowledge Alliances**, among others, either as coordinator or partner.

*Research is
creating new
knowledge*

-Neil Armstrong-

HORIZON EUROPE

SMART Researchers



ERASMUS+ PARTNERSHIPS FOR INNOVATION – ALLIANCES

ESG4PMChange



ERASMUS+ STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

DRM FRAME



SPM²



KNOWLEDGE ALLIANCES

BeWell



ERASMUS+ SPORTS

IKIGAI 55



ERASMUS+ TEACHERS ACADEMIES

NBS ACADEMY



EASME

EYE

Erasmus for Young
Entrepreneurs

DG EMPLOYMENT

CERP



ERASMUS+ VIRTUAL EXCHANGES

SPORTING UNITY



HORIZON EUROPE



HORIZON EUROPE

SMART Researchers

Strategic Micro-Credentialing and Skills Recognition for a Dynamic Early-Stage Researcher Talent Ecosystem



Funding Program: Horizon Europe

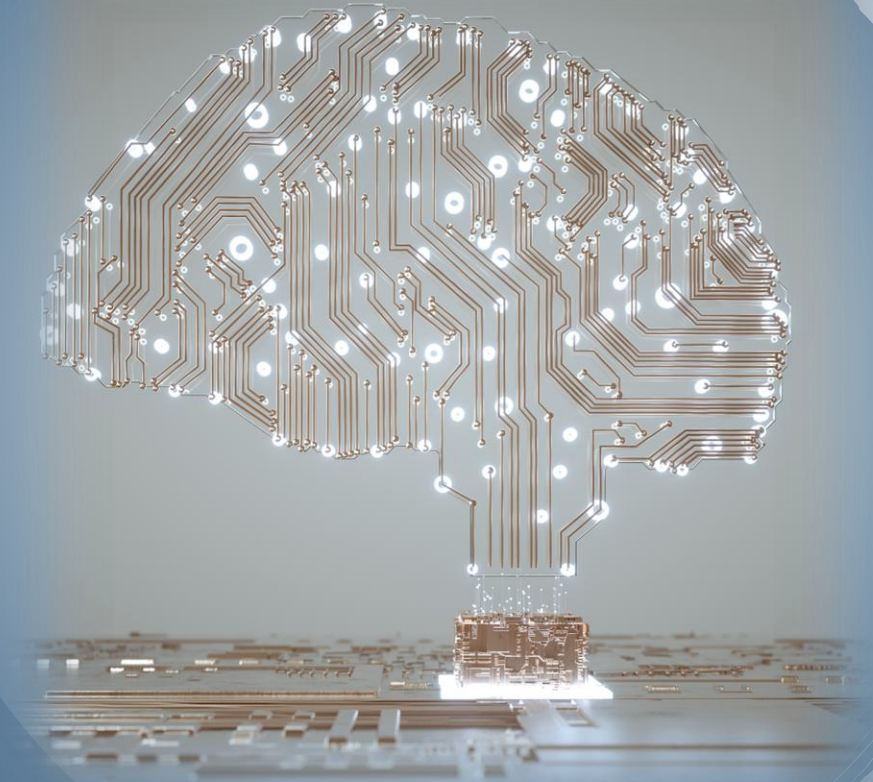
Call: HORIZON-WIDERA-2024-ERA-02

Grant Agreement (GA) No.: 101216967

The project aims to create sustainable talent development ecosystems for early-stage researchers in Widening Countries.

Through the establishment of Career Support Centres that align institutional HR practices with the Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Research Careers and the European Charter for Researchers, SMART Researchers seek to facilitate talent development, career progression, and equip the European labour market with well-skilled researchers, while enabling organisations to enhance their capacity for training, career development, and talent circulation.

ALLIANCES FOR INNOVATION



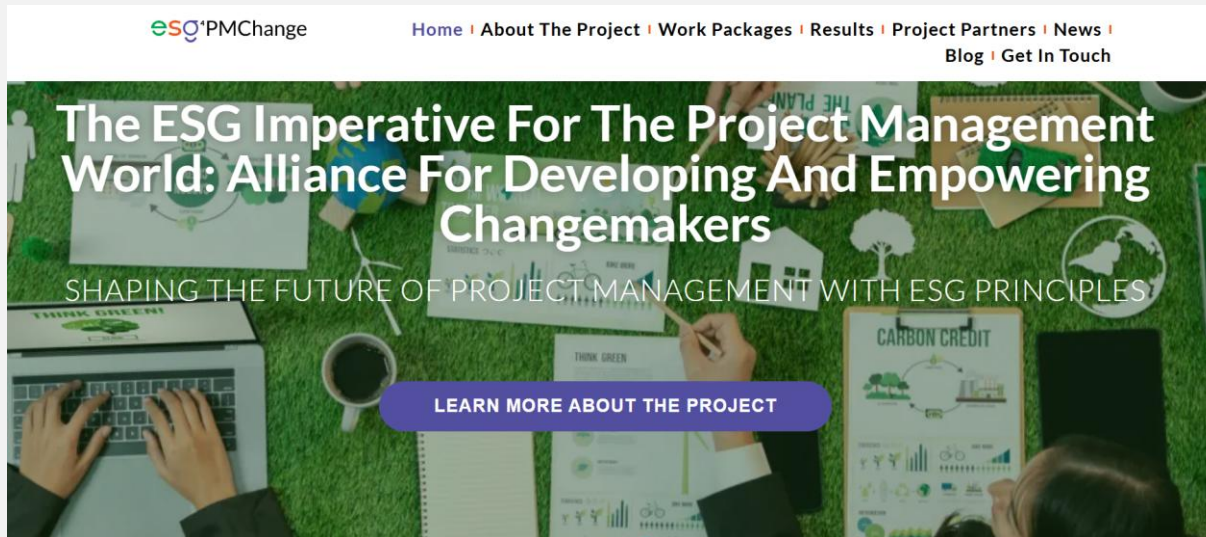
Joining Forces for a Sustainable Future



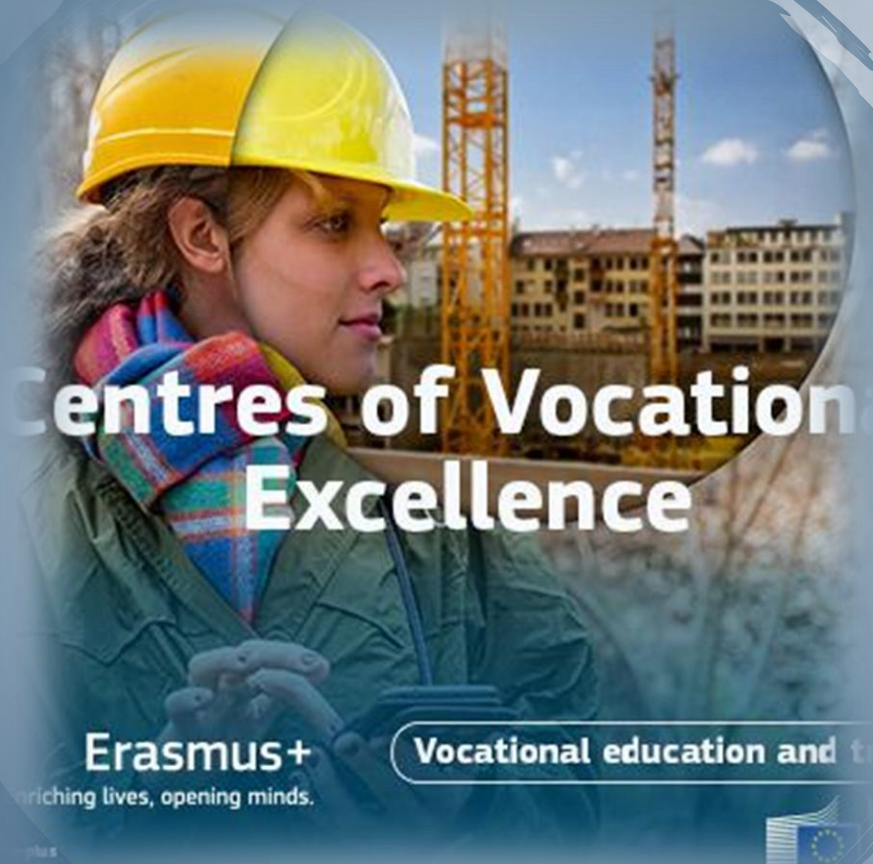
The project is an ambitious initiative designed to bridge the gap between sustainability and project management.

By integrating Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles into project management education, the project empowers future professionals to drive impactful, responsible, and future-proof projects.

Through cutting-edge training, digital learning resources, and real-world applications, ESG4PMChange aligns with global sustainability goals, industry needs, and EU policies such as the Green Deal and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



CENTER FOR VOCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

A woman wearing a yellow hard hat and a green jacket with a colorful scarf is looking towards a construction site. In the background, there are cranes and buildings under construction.

**Centres of Vocational
Excellence**

Erasmus+
enriching lives, opening minds.

Vocational education and training



EU-DRIVE- European Upskilling in Disaster Resilience and Innovation in Vocational Excellence



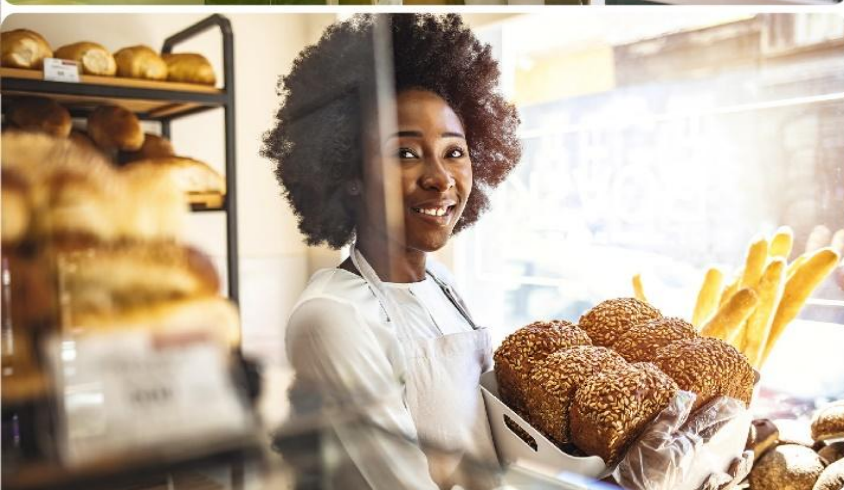
EU-DRIVE brings together 15 partners from Mediterranean countries to address the urgent demand for vocational skills in Disaster Risk Management (DRM), civil protection, and climate resilience. The project unites VET providers, research centres, universities, and public policy actors to co-create innovative, inclusive, and labour market-relevant training solutions.

EU-DRIVE will establish five Regional DRM Skills Hubs and a transnational Alliance to foster sustained cooperation between VET institutions, emergency services, local authorities, and civil society. A modular curricula will be delivered in simulation-based training, and implement work-based learning (WBL) in real operational settings.

EU-DRIVE aims to enhance the skills pipeline into the DRM sector, especially in the public workforce, while supporting systemic innovation in VET.



Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs



«Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs?»



European Project Design & Management

*A Complex Procedure:
Challenges and Obstacles*

Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. Why should we submit a European project?
- 2. What funding sources are available?
- 3. Where can I find the required information?
- 4. Is the organization eligible?
- 5. What is needed to start the process?
- 6. How do I submit a proposal?
- 7. What is the difference between the various calls for proposals?





A complex process

A structured process, but it is very important to identify:

Process coordinator !!!

This is not always the prospective project manager, but in any case, it is the proposal writer

Planning of all activities

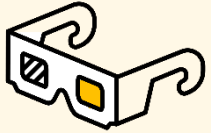
Alignment and coordination of all involved parties are required

Commitment to submitting the proposal

Composure is required, as well as a strong desire to successfully complete the proposal submission process

Stages of Planning and Implementation of a European Project

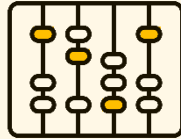
A. PREPARATION / PLANNING



Proper organization and preparation are essential, as they will largely ensure the successful completion of the other stages

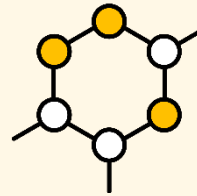
Planning

B. PROPOSAL DESIGN & SUBMISSION



A key part of the process that will essentially be evaluated and will secure funding

C. IMPLEMENTATION



Consistent and proper implementation in accordance with the plan ensures the desired results

Implementation

D. EVALUATION



It essentially determines the key outcome of implementation and, by extension, the final stage of funding

Development

Performance

Introduction: European Funding Framework

- ❑ The planning and implementation of a project within a European framework take place through a structured and phased process.
- ❑ This process begins with the strategic coordination of partners **within a multisectoral partnership** (e.g., public bodies, research institutions, NGOs, businesses) and culminates in an action plan aimed at achieving specific objectives.
- ❑ These objectives are defined at the outset, implemented through organized interventions, evaluated periodically, and adjusted based on results and feedback.



STAGE 1: Planning and Preparation

- During the initial planning stage, an inventory is taken of available resources, key challenges, long-term priorities, and, most importantly, potential funding sources (Funding Calls).
- The organization's capacity and expertise are assessed in order to identify the call that best fits its needs and will increase the chances of success.
- **IMPORTANT:** the time available until the final submission of the proposal.



STAGE 1: Planning and Preparation

What should I look for after searching for the Call for Proposals:

2025 Erasmus+ call for funding now open

The call for proposals comes with a budget of nearly €5 billion to support mobility and cooperation opportunities for learners, educators, and organisations.



- ❑ A thorough understanding of the general and specific objectives of a call [objectives & priorities]
- ❑ Understanding the eligible activities [funding activities]
- ❑ Which organizations are eligible for this specific call (lead partner and partners) [eligibility]
- ❑ What is the budget range for the proposal (low–high) [Budget]
- ❑ How many years (program duration vs. project duration) [duration]

Formulating an Initial Idea – Concept Note

A prerequisite for seeking out partners is the development of an initial concept, which will be sent out to identify suitable partners.

A clear and concise formulation of an initial proposal, in order to create a draft document that can be used to find partners.

Typically, the concept note includes:

- 1. A general description of the idea (in summary)*
- 2. A reference to objectives and priorities*
- 3. The actions / proposed work packages*
- 4. Total budget*



Centres of Vocational Excellence

ERASMUS-EDU-2025-PEX-COVE

Opening date: 05 December 2024

Call for proposals

Topic description

Open For Submission

Programme: Erasmus+ (ERASMUS+)

Scope: CENTRES OF VOCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Implementing vocational excellence approaches features prominently in the overall EU policy agenda for skills and for Vocational Education and Training (VET). The European Skills Agenda, the European Education Area, the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET [<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32020H1202%2801%29>], as well as the Osnabrück Declaration [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/osnabrueck_declaration_eu2020.pdf], all include very clear references to Vocational Excellence as a driving force for reforms in the VET sector.

The initiative on Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) aims to respond to this policy priority supporting reforms in the VET sector, ensuring high quality skills and competences that lead to quality employment and career-long opportunities, meeting the needs of an innovative, inclusive and sustainable economy(See brochure on *VET skills for today and for the future*). The CoVE initiative also supports the implementation of the European Green Deal, the Communication on attracting Skills and Talent and the new Industrial and SME Strategies, as skills are key to their success, as well as the Communication on skills and talent mobility adopted in 2023²⁴⁷ ,the Action Plan on labour and skills shortages, and the [Council Recommendation 'Europe on the Move'](#).

CoVEs operate in a given local context, creating skills ecosystems for innovation, regional development and social inclusion while working with CoVEs in other countries through international collaborative networks. They establish a bottom-up approach to vocational excellence involving a wide range of local stakeholders enabling VET institutions to rapidly adapt skills provision to evolving economic and social needs.

They provide opportunities for initial training of young people as well as the continuing education of adults, including in the context of the green and digital transitions. They act as catalysts for creating knowledge and innovation hubs, as well as supporting entrepreneurial initiatives.

The networks aim for "upward convergence" of VET excellence. They will be open for all VET institutions, including those using similar approaches, aimed at exploring the full potential of VET institutions to play a role in the development of the economy and society.

This initiative introduces a European dimension to vocational excellence by supporting the development of international collaborative networks of Centres of Vocational Excellence.

The concept of vocational excellence proposed here is characterised by a holistic, integrated approach to skills development, innovation and social inclusion, which is based on the following principles:

- Is an integrated part of **skills ecosystems** [Skill ecosystems are defined as regional ecosystems that bring together business settings and associated business models, institutions and actors in a given local context to create a powerful tool to support industrial innovation. See [European Cluster Collaboration Framework](#)].

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTION

This action supports the gradual establishment and development of international collaborative networks of Centres of Vocational Excellence.

The Centres of Vocational Excellence aim at achieving the following objectives:

- to ensure high quality skills through flexible and learner-centred VET provisions that lead to quality employment and career-long opportunities, swiftly responding to the needs of an innovative, inclusive and sustainable economy as well as to societal needs;
- to support and act as drivers for local and regional development, innovation and social inclusion in the context of the green and digital transitions;
- to contribute to upward convergence on VET excellence, to increase the quality of VET at system level in more and more countries;
- to ensure that outputs and results are taken into use and have impact beyond the project partner organisations and beyond the project period. Centres of Vocational Excellence operate at two levels:
 1. At **national level**, involving a wide range of local stakeholders creating skills ecosystems for local innovation, regional development, and social inclusion, while working with CoVEs in other countries through international collaborative networks.
 2. At **international level**, bringing together CoVEs that share a common interest in:
 - **specific sectors** [See for example the agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI) works to foster competitive and sustainable farming and forestry] or industrial ecosystems [See [14 industrial ecosystems](#) as described in Commission Communication on Updating the 2020 New Industrial Strategy, as well as the SWD(2021) 351, Annual Single Market Report 2021];
 - **innovative approaches to tackle economic and societal challenges** (e.g. climate change, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, sustainable development goals [See [Berlin Declaration on Education for SDG](#)], integration of migrants and disadvantaged groups, upskilling people with low qualification levels, etc.), or
 - **innovative approaches to increase the outreach, quality and effectiveness of existing CoVEs.**

The networks will bring together existing CoVEs, or develop the Vocational Excellence model by linking partners from various countries, that intend to develop Vocational Excellence in their local context through international cooperation. They could contribute e.g. to the delivery phase of the [New European Bauhaus initiative](#) by collaborating with the communities involved in the local transformations fostered by the initiative.

CoVEs achieve their objectives by bringing together and working closely with a set of local/regional partners such as initial and continuing VET providers, higher education institutions including universities of applied sciences and polytechnics, research institutions, science parks, innovation agencies, companies, other employers, chambers and their associations, social partners, social enterprises, sectoral skills councils, professional/sector associations, national and regional authorities and development agencies, employment services, qualifications authorities, social inclusion and reintegration organisations, etc.

This call will thus support projects bringing together local or regional partners from various countries developing a set of activities under three clusters; 1) Teaching and learning, 2) Cooperation and partnerships, and 3) Governance and Funding.

CoVEs are required to apply EU wide instruments and tools [Such as the EQF, EQAVET, Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships, Council Recommendation on key competences, etc.] whenever relevant.



Forming a Partnership

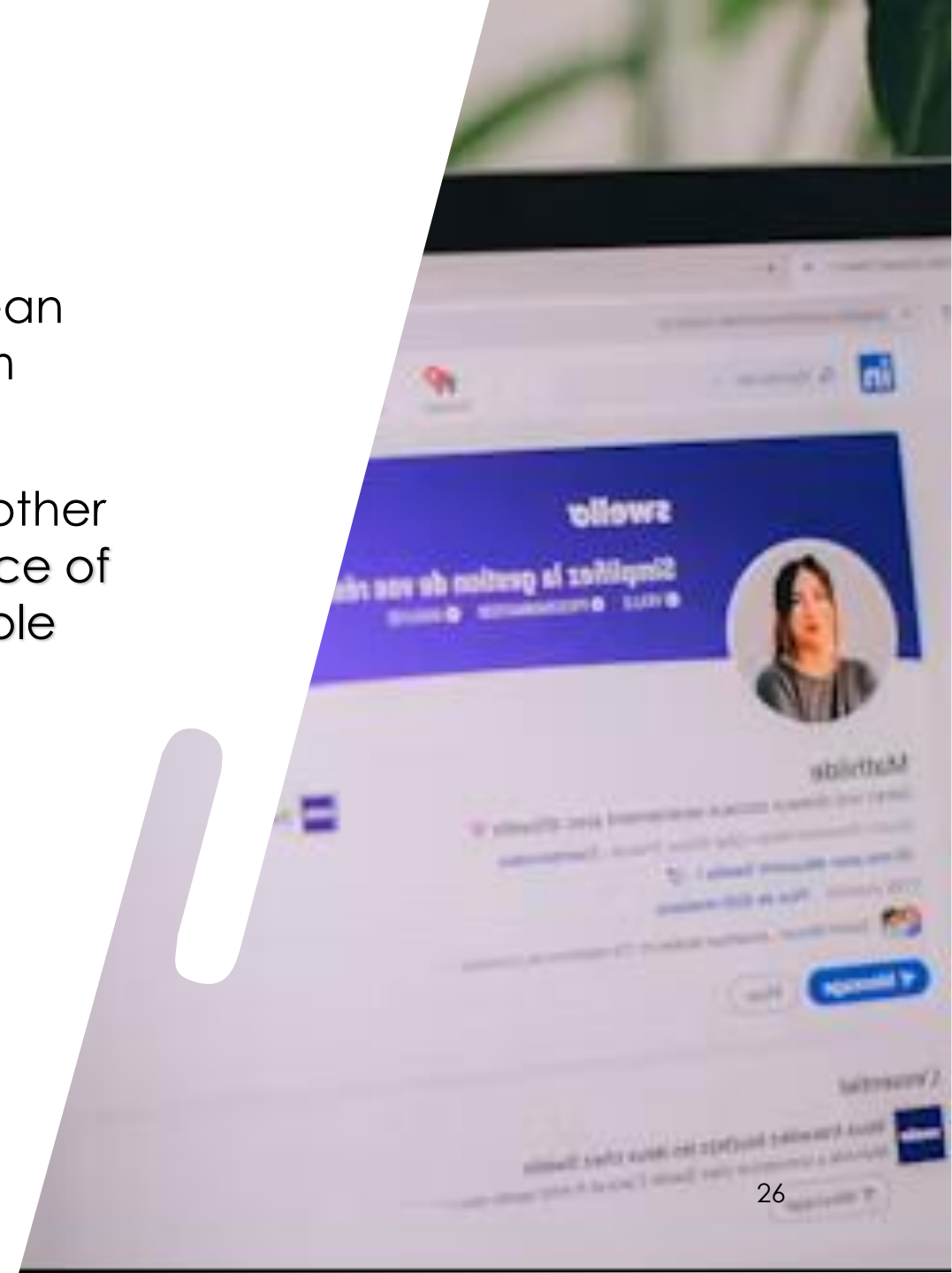
- Finding partners is one of the most critical stages in planning a program
- Carefully reviewing the program's call for proposals will help in finding partners

Formation of a Partnership

- The transnational nature of most competitive European programs makes it necessary to involve partners from different countries.
- The selection of potential partners is based, among other factors, on their geographic distribution, the relevance of their involvement to the proposal's scope, and the role they can play in achieving the project's objectives.

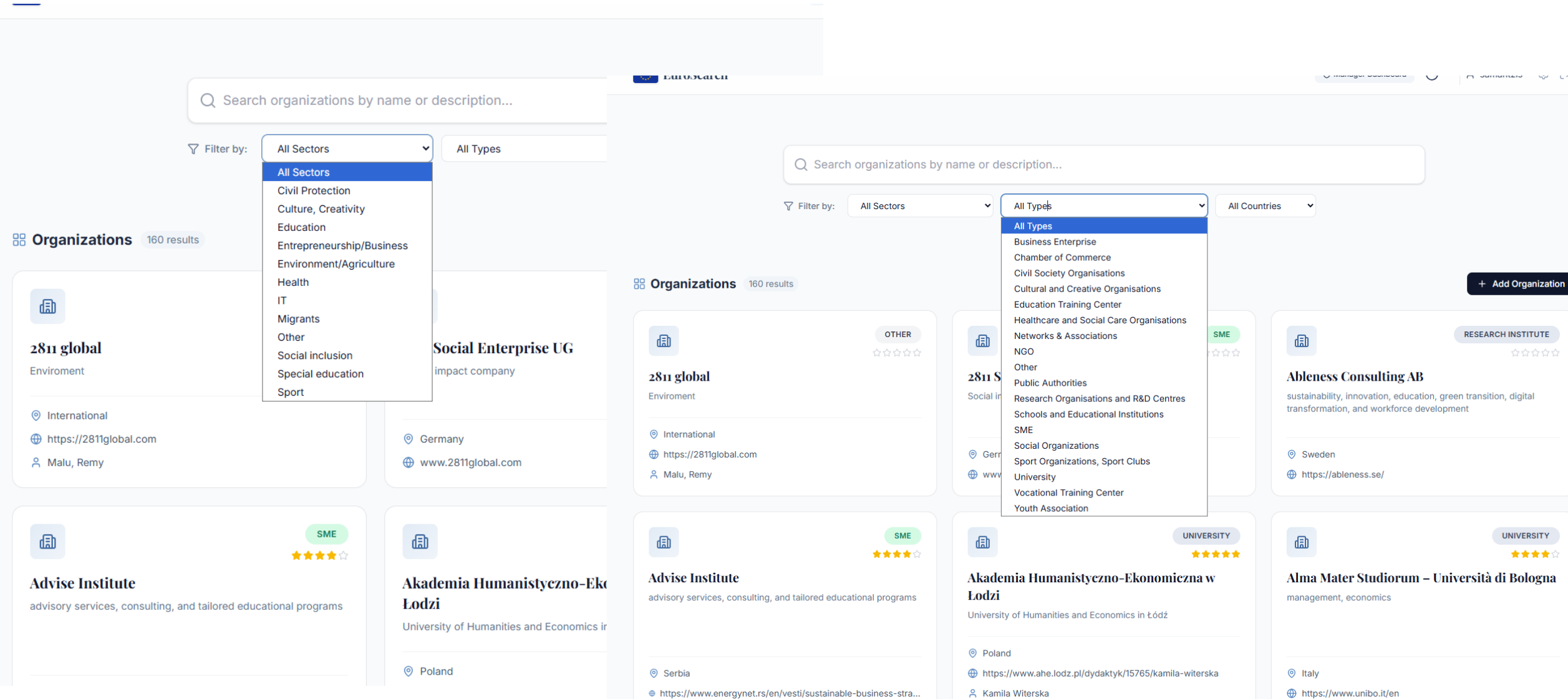
How do you search for partners?

- From previous projects
- From networks in which we participate
- From specialized portals **[ATTENTION]**



Data Search Platform

We have created an internal search platform for potential partners



Funding Portal

News & events ▾

Work as an expert

Guidance & documents ▾

Start submission

To access the Electronic Submission Service, please click on the submission-button next to the **type of action** proposal. You will then be asked to confirm your choice, as it cannot be changed in the submission system. U

To access existing draft proposals for this topic, please login to the Funding & Tenders Portal and select the b

Please select the type of your submission:

☐ ERASMUS Lump Sum Grants [ERASMUS-LS], ERASMUS Lump Sum Grant [ERASMUS-AG-LS]

Start submission

Topic Q&As

9 item(s) found



Do we need to fill the "Estimated Budget – Resources" and "Staff Effort" tables in Part B?

You have to fill in the "Subcontracting" and "Events" tables in Part B. You do not have to fill "Estimated Budget – Resources".



How can I make sure that my organisation is a legal entity according to the requirements of the EU grants?

In order to receive EU grants, applicants need to fulfil a certain number of conditions which must be checked before submitting a proposal.



What kind of financial reporting will be required?

The financial part of the periodic report will include a statement on the use of the previous prefinancing payment.

B. PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT & SUBMISSION

WRITING THE PROPOSAL:

KEY STEPS

CHALLENGES AND RISKS

Part II: Proposal Design

Writing a proposal typically includes three main sections (indicative description / call for proposals):

Part A – Technical Excellence

- Project Scope and Objectives [description & objectives]
- Innovation and Added Value [innovation & added value]
- Relationship with Other Initiatives (Previous Programs) [complementarity]



Part B – Implementation

- Work Packages [WPs description]
- Deliverables & Milestones
- Timeline (Gantt chart)
- Budget per partner and work package
- Risks and Mitigation Plan [Risk Analysis]



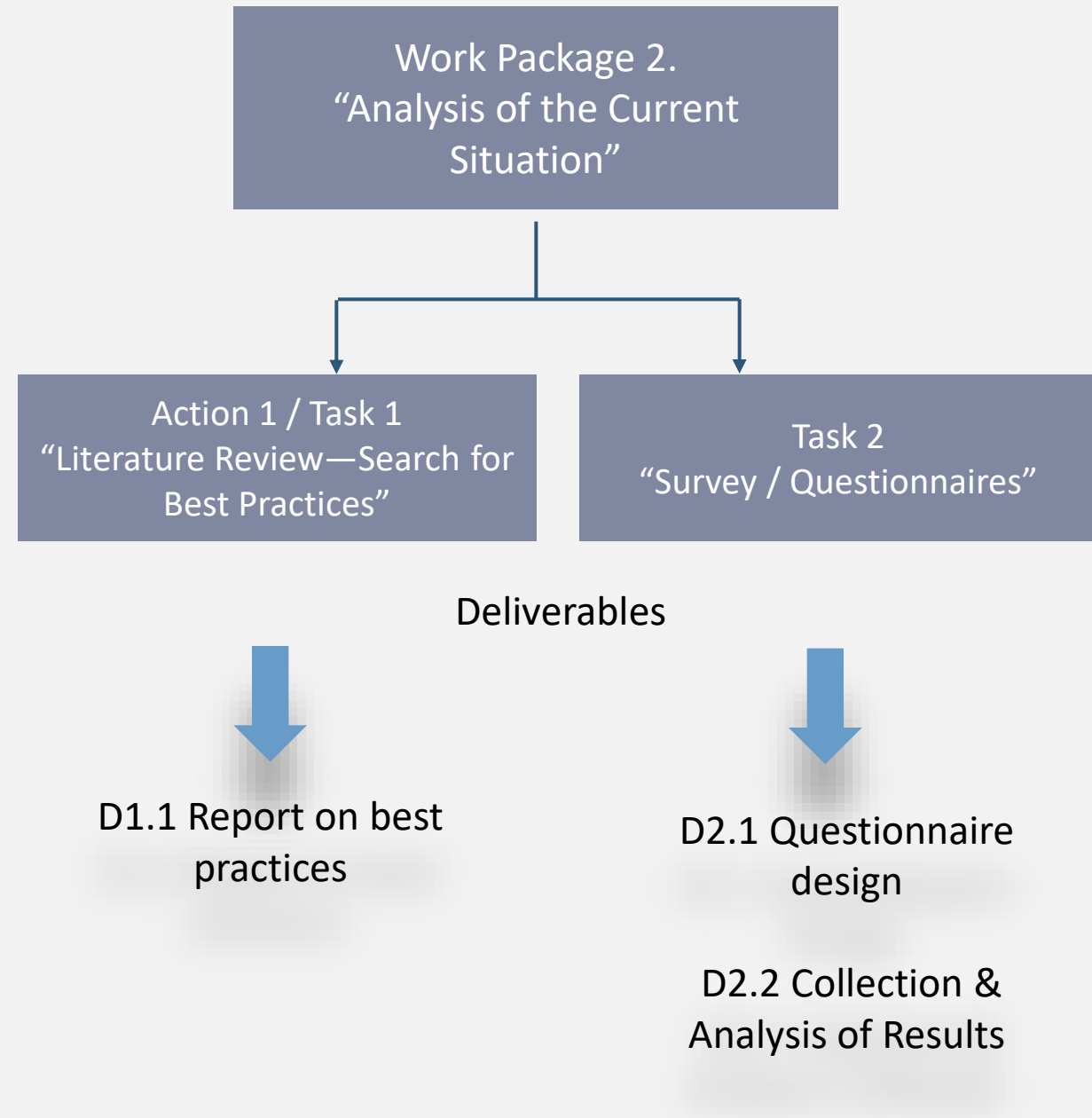
Part C – Impact

- Expected Social/Economic Impacts [Impact]
- Dissemination & Exploitation of Results
- Stakeholder Analysis

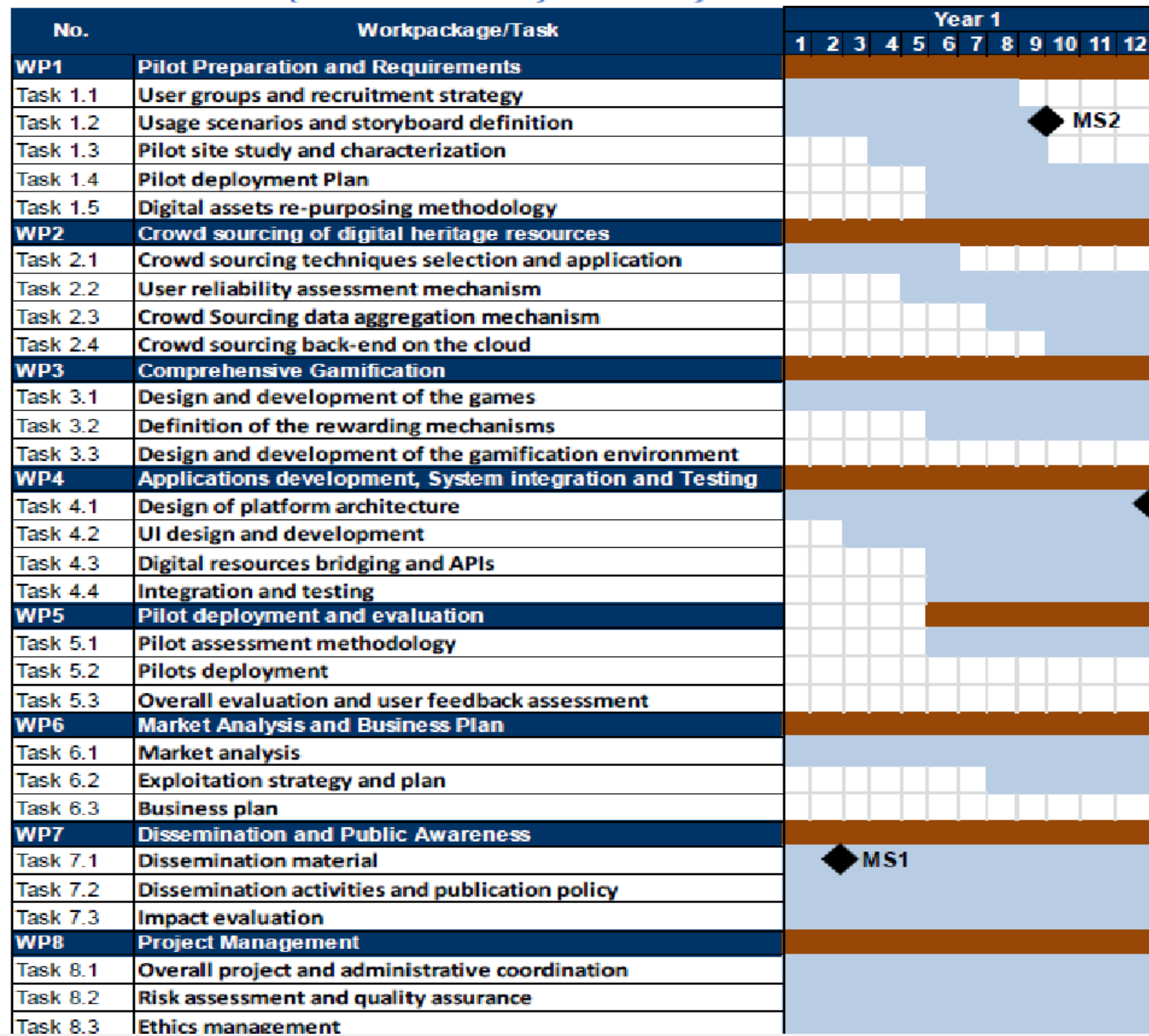
Part B – Implementation

Development and description of work packages

- Allocation of all activities to teams/work packages (breakdown into smaller tasks/objectives).
- Estimation of the time and resources needed to complete a work package (Gantt Chart)
- Work packages often depend on one another (one begins when the previous one ends; if possible, this should be avoided due to the high risk of delays)
- Each work package produces at least one deliverable



3.1.2 Gantt Chart (Time schedule of Activities)



Gantt Chart - Activity Schedule

- Frequent interdependencies between work packages (one starts when the previous one ends) should be avoided whenever possible (high risk of delays)
- Planning must be particularly careful to ensure the realistic implementation of all actions
- It is very important to avoid: a) overlapping activities in terms of timing, as well as b) in many cases, an overly “optimistic” approach to planning activities

Budget of the Proposal – Project Budget

All programs provide a standardized form for completing the budget

Despite the differences that exist from project to project, the cost categories—with minimal variations—are:

- **Personnel**
- **Travel**
- **Third-party expenses/subcontracting**
- ***Operating expenses/indirect costs***

During the initial proposal development phase, it is understandable that we have only reached the stage of allocating the budget per partner. In the final submission phase, however, the allocation is broken down by partner/cost category and then by work package and deliverable



*“Winning a
Project Is Only
the Beginning”*

Excellence in
Project
Management

Major challenges

Once a European project is approved, the focus shifts from *winning the grant to delivering the project successfully*. This transition introduces a different set of challenges:

Challenge Area

Typical Problems

Grant Agreement Preparation

- Delays in contract signature, budget revisions, ethics requirements, partner documentation

Consortium Management

- Unstable partner commitment, communication gaps, cultural differences, conflicts, partner withdrawal
- Unclear responsibilities, weak coordination, slow decision-making

Work Package Management

- Delayed tasks, dependencies between WPs, unrealistic planning

Financial Management

- Ineligible costs, budget overspending/underspending, cash-flow issues, procurement errors

Human Resources

- Staff turnover, recruitment delays, lack of expertise, workload imbalance

Administrative Burden

- Extensive documentation, timesheets, reporting, supporting evidence

Exploitation & Sustainability

- No clear plan for using results after project completion

Communication & Dissemination

- Weak stakeholder engagement, poor visibility, low participation in events

European Project Implementation: Major Practical Challenges

Managing Change

Projects rarely proceed exactly as planned. Changes may involve:

- ❑ Staff replacements.
- ❑ New technical challenges.
- ❑ Delays in pilot activities.
- ❑ Legislative or policy changes.
- ❑ Deviation KPIs.

Effective project management requires adaptive planning while remaining aligned with the Grant Agreement.



European Project Implementation: Opportunities & solutions proposed

Many of these challenges can also become opportunities:

- Build stronger international partnerships.
- Improve institutional project management capacity.
- Develop robust quality assurance systems.
- Strengthen financial and administrative procedures.
- Increase the organisation's reputation as a reliable European partner.
- Generate long-term collaborations beyond the project.



General comments & observations

Helpful Tips

- Start writing at least 3 months before the deadline
- Appoint an experienced “proposal coordinator”
- Use cloud-based tools (e.g., Google Docs) for collaborative writing
- Arrange for a mock evaluation by external collaborators
- Communicate with the organization’s administrative services well in advance

Common mistakes

- Vague objectives or non-measurable results
- Excessive number of partners without clearly defined roles
- A copy of a previous proposal without adaptation to the call **[be careful with AI]**
- Lack of internal coordination
- Incomplete or unrealistic budget

Many thanks for your attention!!

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- Many thanks for your attention !!!