



# Civil Drones Innovative Programme

*Open Call for Proposals*

*Guide for Applicants*

*Grant Agreement Number: 101236201*

*Project Acronym: ECDI*



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# 1. Introduction

European Cluster for Drone Innovation (ECDI) is a project funded by the European Commission under the Euroclusters Programme. It supports innovative EU SMEs operating in the drone ecosystem in their transition towards dual-use products and business models, as well as in their digital and green (twin) transition.

To achieve these objectives, the ECDI consortium launches its first Open Call, “Civil Drones Innovative Programme”, targeting civil drone manufacturing SMEs. The Open Call is a competitive selection process granting access to a structured Programme combining tailored services and direct financial support. The Programme is designed to help SMEs develop dual-use drone products and, where relevant, adapt their business models to address civil, environmental, security and defence-related needs.

This Guide for Applicants provides an overview of the Programme and detailed instructions on how to apply. It is provided for information purposes only and does not replace applicable legal or contractual documents.

## **The ECDI Consortium**

The ECDI project is implemented by a European consortium of organisations active in the drone, aerospace and innovation ecosystems. The consortium brings together four (4) clusters:

- [Aerospace Valley](#) (AV), France, as coordinator
- [Andalucia Aerospace](#) (AAERO), Spain
- [Silesian Aviation Cluster](#) (SAC), Poland
- [All-Ukrainian Association of Innovative Space Clusters](#) (OIKK), Ukraine

Consortium partners are responsible for the design and implementation of the Civil Drones Innovative Programme. They provide expertise, mentoring, assessments and tailored services to selected SMEs through qualified staff members and affiliated experts within their respective organisations.

The consortium operates in close coordination to ensure a consistent, transparent and fair implementation of the Programme across all participating countries.

# 1.1. Structure of the Document

This document groups relevant information in 6 sections and is structured as follows:

- **Section 1 – Introduction:** Overview of the Programme and document structure.
- **Section 2 – General Information:** Definitions, eligibility criteria and conditions of participation.
- **Section 3 – Submission Process:** Application procedure and timeline.
- **Section 4 – Evaluation and Selection:** Evaluation criteria and selection methodology.
- **Section 5 – Procedures:** Programme implementation and funding procedures.
- **Section 6 – Responsibilities of the Beneficiaries:** Legal, financial and communication obligations.

# 1.2. Programme Overview

An overview of the ECDI Civil Drones Innovative Programme is presented in Figure 1, illustrating both the Open Call phases and the implementation stages of the Programme.

No	WP/Task	Leader	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
			10/25	11/25	12/25	01/26	02/26	03/26	04/26	05/26	06/26	07/26	08/26	09/26	10/26	11/26	12/26	01/27	02/27	03/27
1	Recruiting and Assessing SMEs and startups through dedicated open calls	AV																		
T1.1	Open Call to Civil application SMEs	AV																		
	Creation of the Open Call documents																			
	Launch of the Open Call																			
	Evaluation & Selection Cut-off 1																			
	Evaluation & Selection Cut-off 2																			
	SMEs Projects Implementation Cut-off 1																			
	SMEs Projects Implementation Cut-off 2																			
	SMEs Reports																			

Figure 1: Open Call and Civil Drones Innovative Programme overview

Applications to the Open Call will open on **15 January 2026** and will be organised in two cut-off dates:

- **Cut-off 1:** 16 March 2026, 17:00 CET
- **Cut-off 2:** 15 June 2026, 17:00 CET

Following the evaluation process, selected SMEs will be invited to sign a contract with the Programme Coordinator, acting on behalf of the ECDI consortium, and will then enter the Civil Drones Innovative Programme.

Selected SMEs will receive up to €50,000 in equity-free funding, complemented by a mandatory co-financing of at least 20% from SMEs provided **private financial sources** (in form of debt or own financial resources), thus crowding in private capital into the projects. This co-financing must be explained during the application phase, justified in the final report as stated in Section 6.2 and cannot consist of in-kind contributions.

In addition to financial support, SMEs will benefit from tailored services provided by the ECDI consortium. These services aim to support the technical development of dual-use drone products, as well as the integration of digital and green transformation practices, through expert assessment, mentoring, testing and business support.

### Relevant Links and Contacts

Project website: <https://www.ecdi-euroclusters.eu/#>

Open call application form: <https://3742003280.wiin.io/en/applications/ecdi-civil-drones-innovative-programme>

Help desk: [vidal@aerospace-valley.com](mailto:vidal@aerospace-valley.com)

# 2. General Information

## 2.1. Glossary of Terms and Definitions

Term / Expression	Definition
<b>Application Eligibility Criteria</b>	Criteria used to assess if an application can be considered for the programme. Possible values (Yes/No)
<b>Application Eligible or Non-Eligible</b>	Application that is or is not compliant with eligibility criteria
<b>Application Time stamp</b>	Time stamp of the final submission of an application. If the application is reopened and resubmitted the last date will be considered.
<b>Application Form</b>	Application form available under the <a href="#">Wiin.io Platform</a> .
<b>Contract Deadline</b>	Date and time until when the selected SMEs need to provide contractual information.
<b>Digital Transition</b>	The digital transition, as defined by the European Union, refers to the overall process by which societies, economies, administrations and businesses adopt and exploit digital technologies – infrastructure, skills, public services, business models – in order to increase their performance, resilience, inclusiveness and sustainability, in line with the objectives set out in the Digital Decade 2030 Programme ( <a href="#">Decision (EU) 2022/2481</a> ).
<b>Dual-use</b>	<p>A "dual-use item" means items, including software and technology, which can be used for both civil and military applications and which are listed in Annex I to <a href="#">Regulation (EU) 2021/821</a>.</p> <p>A company that declares having a dual-use product must provide proofs such as Regulatory compliance statement, a declaration of conformity with EU dual-use regulation and a letter of interest from a Military Unit/Ministry of Interior/Ministry of Defence from an EU Member State or COSME country. This proof will be asked in the Application Form.</p>
<b>FSTP</b>	Financial support to third parties. Payments made to entities that are not members of the ECDI project consortium.

Term / Expression	Definition
<b>FSTP – Lump Sum</b>	Payment made to the third party based on the achievement of a milestone.
<b>Green Transition</b>	The Green Transition is a process supported by the European Commission, the European Parliament and Council and EU Members States through the European Green Deal ( <a href="#">Regulation (EU) 2021/119</a> ). The Green Transition is defined as a new growth strategy that aims to transform the Union into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy, where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use. The Green Transition also implies to protect, conserve and enhance the Union’s natural capital, and protect the health and well-being of citizens from environment-related risks and impacts. At the same time, this transition must be just and inclusive, leaving no one behind.
<b>Civil Drones Innovative Programme</b>	Set of services and direct funding provided by the ECDI project to support drone SMEs in their transformation.
<b>Innovation Plan</b>	Project of the SME as explained in the Application Process, that will be implemented during the 6-months duration of the Civil Drone Innovative Programme.
<b>Open Call</b>	Competitive application process to access the Civil Drones Innovative Programme.
<b>Open Call Deadline</b>	Date and time when possibility to apply closes.
<b>Open Call Evaluation and Selection</b>	Rules used to order applications and select for funding.
<b>Platform</b>	Platform provided by <a href="#">Wiin.io</a>
<b>Reserve List</b>	<p>Eligible SMEs reaching an evaluation score above the minimum threshold and not being selected because of insufficient budget:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The SME that will wait, in case selected SMEs do not provide contractual data and might be proposed funding in such case;</li> <li>- If the SME is applying before the 1<sup>st</sup> cut-off date it will be automatically reintegrated in the evaluations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cut-off date and might be selected after the 2<sup>nd</sup> cut-off date.</li> </ul>

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Term / Expression	Definition														
<b>SME</b>	An incorporated enterprise that complies with the rules defined by the European Commission to be qualified as an SME <sup>1</sup>														
<b>SME Selected</b>	SME that will receive the invitation to participate in Civil Drones Innovative Programme.														
<b>Score</b>	The maximum score that can be attributed to an application is 100 points. A minimum threshold of 50/100 points is required to be considered for selection.														
<b>TRL</b>	<p>Technology readiness levels (TRLs) are a method for estimating the maturity of technologies during the acquisition phase of a program. TRLs enable consistent and uniform discussions of technical maturity across different types of technology. TRL is determined during a technology readiness assessment (TRA) that examines program concepts, technology requirements, and demonstrated technology capabilities. TRLs are based on a scale from 1 to 9 with 9 being the most mature technology.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>TRL Level</th> <th>Definition</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td><b>1</b></td> <td>Basic principles observed</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>2</b></td> <td>Technology concept formulated</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>3</b></td> <td>Experimental proof of concept</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>4</b></td> <td>Technology validated in lab</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>5</b></td> <td>Technology validated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies)</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>6</b></td> <td>Technology demonstrated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	TRL Level	Definition	<b>1</b>	Basic principles observed	<b>2</b>	Technology concept formulated	<b>3</b>	Experimental proof of concept	<b>4</b>	Technology validated in lab	<b>5</b>	Technology validated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies)	<b>6</b>	Technology demonstrated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies)
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<sup>1</sup><https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/support/sme?tab=overview>

Term / Expression	Definition	
	<b>7</b>	System prototype demonstration in operational environment
	<b>8</b>	System complete and qualified
	<b>9</b>	Actual system proven in operational environment (competitive manufacturing in the case of key enabling technologies; or in space)

## 2.2. Eligibility Criteria

### 2.2.1. Type of Beneficiary

Eligible applicants must be **manufacturing SMEs operating in the drone sector** that seek to upgrade their product technologically and to develop or strengthen dual-use applications. They need to meet all of the following conditions:

- Be an SME according to EU rules (Recommendation 2003/361/EC<sup>2</sup>).
- Be independent or compliant with EU definitions of autonomous partner or linked enterprises.
- Employ fewer than 250 persons and have:
  - an annual turnover ≤ €50 million, **or**
  - an annual balance sheet total ≤ €43 million.
- Have at least **one drone product at TRL 6 or higher** and commit to upgrading the TRL by **at least one level** during participation in the Programme.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A32003H0361>

Applications focused solely on market access without product development are not eligible.

Service providers, non-manufacturing companies, or SMEs without an eligible product (below TRL 6) are **not eligible**.

Start-ups without full financial history may be eligible if they meet the SME criteria related to independence and headcount.

SMEs will remain eligible throughout the Programme even if they temporarily exceed SME financial thresholds during project implementation.

Applicants must not:

- Be bankrupt, under liquidation, or considered an “enterprise in difficulty” under Regulation (EU) No 651/2014.
- Have convictions for fraud, financial irregularities, or illegal business practices.
- Be subject to exclusion from EU funding or double funding restrictions.

To ensure you have the correct status, Applicants are asked to fill in the [SME self-assessment](#) from the European Commission and upload the result on the Application Form.

## 2.2.2. Eligible Countries

Eligible applicants must be legal entities established and operating in:

- An **EU Member State**, or
- A country participating in the [EU Single Market Programme/COSME Strand](#).

## 2.2.3 Eligibility Assessment

The obligatory documents for an eligible application are noted in Section 3.3. If not done during the application process, the SMEs will be contacted by the ECDI consortium and will have to submit them within a deadline of 2 working days. Failure to do so, the application will be considered ineligible.

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## 2.3. Number of Companies to be Supported

The programme seeks to support around 25 SMEs in total and has a total available budget of €1.250.000. However, we reserve the right not to award all available funds depending on the proposals received and the results of the evaluation.

**Civil Drones Innovative Programme 1<sup>st</sup> cut-off date – around 13 SMEs**

**Civil Drones Innovative Programme 2<sup>nd</sup> cut-off date – around 12 SMEs**

Depending on the quality of the applications the consortium may decide to select more applications than foreseen for the first cut-off of the Open Call. A reserve list will be set up after the first cut-off as per the following rules:

- Applications that have been evaluated above the minimum threshold (50/100), but have been ranked after the 13 first selected SMEs will have the choice to either integrate the reserve list and re-integrated in the assessment after the 2<sup>nd</sup> cut-off or to re-apply for the 2<sup>nd</sup> cut-off.
- SMEs that are below the determined threshold but considered eligible will have the possibility to re-apply for the 2<sup>nd</sup> cut-off.

It is to be noted that at least 10% of selected SMEs will be established outside the countries represented in the ECDI consortium. To ensure this principle, at the end of the evaluation process all applications will be ranked in a single list following the rules explained on Section 4.2.

## 2.4. Support Provided

Selected SMEs will receive a combination of **services and direct funding**, including:

- Individual assessment and roadmap definition.
- Mentorship throughout the Programme.
- Tailored technical, regulatory, business and testing services.
- Access to training and internationalisation support.

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- Possibility to participate in the Innovation Drone Alliance.
- Equity-free funding of up to €50,000 per SME.

### **Distinction between mentorship, tailored services and training**

Within the Civil Drones Innovative Programme, support activities are structured as follows:

- **Mentorship** refers to continuous, one-to-one support provided to each SME throughout the Programme. Mentors follow project progress, support implementation, ensure quality and act as the main contact point between the SME and the consortium.
- **Tailored services** consist of targeted, needs-based interventions delivered upon assessment results. These services address specific technical, regulatory, business or market-related challenges and are provided on a case-by-case basis.
- **Training activities** are collective learning actions, such as workshops or webinars, aimed at strengthening SMEs' knowledge and skills on topics of common interest (e.g. dual-use innovation, emerging technologies, market trends).

These three support modalities are complementary and address different stages and needs of SMEs during the Programme.

Finally, some support activities are mandatory to ensure a common framework and consistent outcomes across all selected SMEs, while others are optional and activated based on the SME's needs and strategic objectives.

In summary, the Civil Drones Innovative Programme includes:

- **Mandatory activities:** individual assessment, mentorship, core services and training
- **Optional activities:** internationalisation support and membership in the Innovation Drone Alliance
- **Direct funding:** up to €50,000 linked to the Innovation Plan equaling to maximum 80% of the total costs of the Innovation Plan. Minimum **20 % of the costs of the innovation plan will be supported by the manufacturing SME.**

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## 2.4.1. Individual Assessment

Each of the selected SMEs will receive an individual assessment and a set of recommendations provided by the consortium members, to cover the entire spectrum of dual-use application for the drone ecosystem.

The assessment will consist of a questionnaire all selected SMEs will have to fill in to evaluate four dimensions:

1. Innovation and dual-use maturity
2. Internationalisation
3. Digital transition
4. Green transition

Each dimension is scored from 1 to 5, resulting in:

- A maturity profile per dimension, and
- An overall maturity score.

Based on the results, SMEs will receive a customised roadmap with recommendations to guide their innovation and twin transition, supported by a consortium expert.

### **Consortium experts and mentors**

Mentors and experts involved in the Programme are professionals designated by the ECDI consortium partners. They are staff members or affiliated experts from the consortium organisations and bring proven expertise in drone technologies, innovation, regulation, business development and market access.

Allocation of mentors and experts is organised to ensure relevance of expertise, language compatibility and objectivity, and to avoid conflicts of interest. Consortium experts provide targeted, task-specific support, while mentors ensure continuous follow-up and coordination throughout the Programme.

**Individual Assessment is a mandatory activity.**

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## 2.4.2. Mentorship

Each SME will be assigned a mentor for the full duration of the Programme.

Mentors are professionals designated by the ECDI consortium partners. They are staff members or affiliated experts of the consortium organisations and have proven experience in innovation support, project implementation, and the drone and aerospace ecosystems.

The role of the mentor is to:

- act as the main contact point between the SME and the consortium,
- monitor progress against the Innovation Plan,
- support the SME in the implementation of its activities,
- identify risks or delays and propose corrective actions,
- ensure the overall quality and consistency of the work performed.

Mentors do not replace the SME's management team and do not take operational or strategic decisions on behalf of the SME. They are not involved in the evaluation or selection of applications.

Mentors will meet with SMEs at least once per month. Allocation of mentors ensures language compatibility, relevance of expertise and avoidance of conflicts of interest.

**Mentorship is a mandatory activity.**

## 2.4.3. Tailored Services

Based on the assessment and roadmap, SMEs may receive targeted services, including:

- **Dual-use and twin transition support** (mandatory)
- **Consultancy services** (optional): innovation management, internationalisation, business models, leadership, communication
- **Market and technology assessments** (optional): dual-use market analysis, benchmarking, technology gaps

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- **Regulatory, compliance and certification support** (optional): export control, EU dual-use regulation, CE marking, security standards
- **Testing, demonstration and validation** (optional): pilot testing, field validation, user feedback, technical documentation

A catalogue of services will be finalised at the launch of the Civil Drones Innovative Programme to better explain the proposed services and allow each selected SME to choose the most appropriate service(s) depending on their needs.

## 2.4.4. Tailored Training

At the end of the Programme, SMEs will participate in an online workshop to:

- Present project results,
- Exchange experiences, and
- Explore synergies and collaboration opportunities.

The workshop will also include a high-level overview of trends in the European drone sector and dual-use innovation.

**Training is a mandatory activity.**

## 2.4.5. Internationalization

Participation in internationalisation activities is optional and is not a mandatory requirement to apply to or participate in the Civil Drones Innovative Programme.

If relevant, SMEs may include in the application activities related to exploring international dual-use markets, including:

- Identification of relevant events and trade fairs,
- Matchmaking and networking support.

SMEs that are interested in such activity will have to mention it in the application process and explain its motivation for it.

Financial support for internationalisation is capped at €5,000 per SME. This activity complements, but does not replace, the innovation process.

Commercialised products without further innovation are not eligible for internationalisation support.

**Internationalization is an optional activity.**

## 2.4.6. Innovation Drone Alliance (IDA)

SMEs may be invited to join the **ECDI Innovation Drone Alliance**, a peer-to-peer network supporting collaboration, knowledge exchange and partnerships. Membership is optional and conditions will be defined during the project lifetime.

**Participation in IDA is an optional activity.**

## 2.4.7. Direct Funding (FSTP)

Selected SMEs will receive up to €50,000 in FSTP to implement their Innovation Plan. Eligible costs must be directly related to the approved project activities and comply with EU funding rules.

Eligible cost categories include:

- External services and procurement (e.g. testing, certification, consulting, specialised technical services),
- Equipment, components and consumables,
- Personnel costs of staff directly involved in the project,
- Prototype development, pilot testing and validation activities,
- Travel costs, only when directly linked to approved internationalisation activities, such as participation in international events or meetings related to market access. Travel costs are capped at €5,000 per SME and must be justified in the application and validated by the consortium.

**Subcontracting vs external procurement**

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A clear distinction is made between external procurement of services or equipment and subcontracting:

- External procurement refers to the purchase of specific services, equipment or expertise that support the project (e.g. laboratory tests, certification services, specialised consulting). These costs are eligible, provided they do not replace the SME's core innovation activities.
- Subcontracting refers to the outsourcing of specific project tasks to a third party when the SME lacks the required capacity or expertise.

Subcontracting is allowed up to a maximum of 10% of the total project budget, subject to justification and approval.

The subcontracting of core dual-use innovation tasks is not eligible. In particular, tasks related to the design, development and ownership of the dual-use innovation must remain under the responsibility of the SME.

**Examples of tasks that may be subcontracted include:**

- specialised testing or validation activities,
- non-core engineering support,
- regulatory or certification support,
- specific studies or analyses not central to the innovation.

The SME remains fully responsible for the project implementation and results.

The eligibility of costs listed above is subject to the conditions and limitations described below.

Financial support and payments will be linked to the implementation of the Innovation Plan and the achievement of the associated milestones.

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## 2.5. Additional Conditions and Obligations

The Civil Drones Innovative Programme has a defined duration of 6 months. Selected SMEs are expected to implement their activities and deliver the planned results within this timeframe.

Beneficiaries will be required to submit a mid-term progress report and a final report, in accordance with the reporting schedule and templates defined by the ECDI consortium. These reports will be used to monitor progress, validate milestones and assess results.

Intellectual property generated in the framework of the Programme remains with the SME, in line with applicable EU rules and contractual conditions. Participation in the Programme does not imply any transfer of ownership of foreground intellectual property to the consortium.

SMEs must comply with all applicable EU and national regulations, including ethics, export control, security-related requirements and any rules applicable to dual-use technologies.

Beneficiaries must comply with EU communication and visibility obligations, as defined by the ECDI consortium and the European Commission.

All activities carried out under the Programme are subject to confidentiality and data protection requirements, including compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

## 2.6. Document Formats

Unless otherwise stated in specific questions of the application form, any document requested in any of the phases must be submitted electronically in PDF format without restrictions for printing.

The application process will occur online, on a dedicated platform. No change in format will be accepted and no documents outside of those asked in the application process on the online platform will be considered.

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## 2.7. Multiple Submissions

For each cut-off only one proposal will be accepted per SME. In case an SME submits more than one proposal, only the application submitted last will be considered.

## 2.8. Absence of Conflict of Interest

Applicants shall not have any actual or/and potential conflict of interest with the ECDI partners. All cases of conflict of interest will be assessed case by case by a review committee.

ECDI consortium partners, their affiliated entities, employees, and permanent co-operators cannot become a recipient of support via the Open Call.

## 2.9. Ethical Issues

ECDI complies with the fundamental ethical issues particularly those outlined in the “European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity”.

All applicants must submit a self-assessment ethics questionnaire, which is part of the Proposal Template, to confirm that their proposal does or does not have ethical issues. If the SME must answer “Yes” to any of the questions in the template, the SME needs to contact the ECDI Helpdesk for guidance.

## 2.10. Data Protection

To process and evaluate applications, ECDI will need to collect Personal and Industrial Data. Aerospace Valley, as the Open Call Coordinator will act as Data Controller for data submitted through the [Wiin.io platform](#) for these purposes. The [Wiin.io](#) platform's system design and operational procedures ensure that data is managed in compliance with The General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR). Each applicant will accept the [Wiin.io](#) terms to ensure coverage.

Please refer to the [Wiin.io](#) Contract annex and security measures.

# 3. Submission Process

## 3.1 Overall Process

Applications to the Civil Drones Innovative Programme must be submitted electronically via the online application platform indicated in the Open Call documentation. Applications submitted by any other means or after the deadline will not be considered.

As already mentioned, the Open Call is organised in two cut-off dates. Eligible applications not selected in the first cut-off may be resubmitted to the second cut-off, provided that the application is updated and improved based on feedback received. As mentioned in Section 2.3, eligible applications that were above the minimum threshold in the 1<sup>st</sup> cut-off will have the choice to either integrate the reserve list and re-integrated in the assessment after the 2<sup>nd</sup> cut-off or to re-apply for the 2<sup>nd</sup> cut-off provided that the application is updated and improved based on feedback received.

## 3.2 Application Timeline

The timeline of the Open Call is as follows:

- **Opening of the Open Call:** 15 January 2026
- **Cut-off 1 deadline:** 16 March 2026, 17:00 CET
- **Cut-off 2 deadline:** 15 June 2026, 17:00 CET

Evaluation results will be communicated to applicants after each cut-off. The exact dates of communication and Programme start may vary depending on the number of applications received and the completion of the evaluation process.

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## 3.3 Application Form and Required Information

Applicants are required to complete the online application form and provide all requested information and supporting documents. Incomplete applications may be rejected.

The application form includes, at minimum, the following elements:

- General information about the SME
- Description of the innovation and its dual-use potential
- Current development stage and objectives of the proposed activities
- Innovation Plan outlining the main activities to be implemented during the Programme
- Expected results and impact
- Requested financial support and indicative budget
- Information related to eligibility and compliance requirements

Applicants are responsible for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the information provided.

In addition to the information provided in the application form, applicants will be required to upload supporting documents via the submission platform. These may include:

- [proof of SME status](#),
- [the Ethics Questionnaire](#),
- [The Declaration of Honour](#).

The exact list of required documents are specified on the submission platform. All templates are available on the submission platform and at the end of this document. All documents listed on the submission platform are mandatory.

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## 3.4 Submission Rules

Each SME may submit one application per cut-off date. Multiple submissions within the same cut-off are not allowed.

Applications must be written in English. Supporting documents may be requested during the evaluation process.

Applicants may be contacted by the ECDI consortium for clarification purposes during the evaluation. Failure to respond within the specified timeframe may result in rejection of the application.

## 3.5 Modification and Withdrawal of Applications

Applicants may modify or withdraw their application at any time before the cut-off deadline through the submission platform.

Requests to modify an application after submission must be sent via the submission platform or helpdesk no later than two (2) calendar days before the relevant cut-off deadline. In such cases, the consortium may reopen the application to allow resubmission.

Requests received less than two (2) calendar days before the cut-off deadline will not be processed, and no resubmission will be possible.

After the deadline, applications can no longer be modified.

# 4. Evaluation and Selection

All applications submitted within the cut-off deadlines will be evaluated by the ECDI consortium in accordance with a transparent and fair evaluation process. Only applications that meet the eligibility requirements will be admitted to evaluation.

The evaluation process is organised separately for each cut-off date.

Following submission, applications will first undergo an eligibility check to verify compliance with the eligibility criteria defined in this Guide for Applicants.

## 4.1. Proposals Evaluation

Eligible applications will be evaluated by independent evaluators appointed by the ECDI consortium. Evaluators will be selected based on their expertise and will be required to comply with confidentiality and conflict of interest rules. Together, they form the Evaluation Committee of the Civil Drones Innovative Programme.

The application will be evaluated by two persons that are part of two partners of the consortium. The overall score of an application is the average of the scores given by both evaluators rounded to the nearest higher value. In case of a difference larger than 20 point between both evaluators scores, a third evaluator will be designated to ensure consistencies.

Eligible applications will be assessed against the following evaluation criteria and maximum scores:

### 1. Excellence and Innovation (30 points)

- Degree of innovation of the proposed solution (10 points)
- Dual-use potential and relevance to civil and defence-related needs (10 points)
- Technical feasibility and maturity of the solution (10 points)

### 2. Impact (30 points)

- Expected impact on the SME's competitiveness and growth (10 points)

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- Market potential and relevance of the targeted use cases (10 points)
- Contribution to digital and green transition objectives, where relevant (10 points)

### 3. Quality and Implementation (40 points)

- Coherence and feasibility of the Innovation Plan (15 points)
- Adequacy of the proposed activities, budget and timeline (15 points)
- Capacity of the SME to implement the proposed activities (10 points)

To be considered for selection, applications must:

- achieve a **minimum overall score of 50 points out of 100**, AND
- score at least: criterion 1- 16/30, criterion 2 - 16/30 and criterion 3 - 21/40.

The evaluation may include a clarification phase, during which applicants may be requested to provide additional information. Failure to respond within the specified timeframe may result in a lower score.

Based on the evaluation results, applications will be ranked after each cut-off date.

## 4.2. Selection and Notification

Applications will be selected in descending order of score, subject to the available budget.

The criteria for the ranking will follow the rules:

I. Rule 1; The Applications will be ranked based on their **overall score** (sum of the criterion I to III).

II. Rule 2: In case following Rule 1 there are Applications with the same total score, priority will be given to Applications that have higher scores in the criterion **Feasibility of the project**.

III. Rule 3: In case following Rule 2 there are Applications in the same position, priority will be given to Applications that have a higher score in the criterion **Impact**.

IV. Rule 4: In case following Rule 3 there are Applications in the same position, priority will be given to the one situated **outside of the countries** of the consortium.

All applicants will be informed of the outcome of the evaluation. Selected SMEs will receive an invitation to enter the Civil Drones Innovative Programme and to proceed with the contractual process.

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Unsuccessful applicants will receive feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of their application.

## 4.3. Redress Process

Any complaints against the project selection process must be submitted by the applicant to [vidal@aerospace-valley.com](mailto:vidal@aerospace-valley.com) within 5 calendar days after the announcement of the Open Call results. Your email should include the following information:

- Application name
- Lead contact name and details
- Object of your complaint
- Information and evidence of the alleged breach

The Evaluation 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 Evaluation Committee will notify the evaluators to re-evaluate the application. The evaluators will then provide the Evaluation Committee with an updated assessment. The final decision on the complaint will be communicated by the Evaluation Committee 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.

# 5. Procedures

During the Civil Drones Innovative Programme, SMEs will implement their Innovation plan submitted for evaluation and selected for support.

## 5.1. Implementation of activities

Selected SMEs will implement their Innovation Plan, which defines the objectives, activities and expected results of their participation in the Programme.

The Innovation Plan will serve as the main reference document for the implementation of activities and will guide the delivery of mentoring, tailored services and training support provided by the ECDI consortium.

Activities will be monitored throughout the Programme to assess progress against the Innovation Plan, validate milestones and ensure compliance with the contractual conditions.

## 5.2. Procedures Related with Direct Funding

The granted SMEs will be called to deliver two progress reports (mid-term and final) where they will describe the status of their project and their results. The mid-term progress report is due by the end of month 4 of the Civil Drones Innovative Programme. The final progress report is due at the end of the Civil Drones Innovative Programme, by the end of month 7. While the Programme duration is six (6) months, the final progress report is due one month after the end of the Programme for administrative closure purposes.

Payments will be made after positive assessment of the progress reports. The consortium commits to evaluate all reports within one month of delivery and complete payment procedures within three weeks after the acceptance of the report.

Payment scheme will be as follows:

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- 40% as pre-financing after contract signature
- 30% as midterm payment after the acceptance of the interim progress report.
- 30% as final payment after the acceptance of the final progress report.

# 6. Responsibilities of the Beneficiaries

Selected SMEs are responsible for the proper implementation of their activities under the Civil Drones Innovative Programme, in accordance with the contractual conditions and applicable EU rules.

## 6.1. Implementation Responsibilities

Beneficiaries are responsible for implementing their Innovation Plan as agreed with the ECDI consortium. They must ensure that activities are carried out in a timely manner, using adequate resources and in compliance with the approved scope, budget and timeline.

SMEs remain fully responsible for the technical, operational and financial execution of their project.

## 6.2. Reporting Obligations

Beneficiaries must submit progress and final reports in accordance with the reporting schedule, templates and requirements defined by the ECDI consortium.

Reports must accurately reflect the activities carried out, the use of financial support and the results achieved.

**The final report will contain supporting documents for the co-financing of 20% of the Innovation Plan:** accounting documents for invoices for services, staff records or personnel payslips (if applicable), other accounting documents that are clearly linked to the project activities.

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## 6.3. Financial and Administrative Responsibilities

Beneficiaries are responsible for the proper use of the financial support received and for maintaining adequate records to justify costs, in line with the contractual conditions and applicable EU rules.

Supporting documents and evidence of expenditure may be requested by the consortium or competent authorities for audit and control purposes.

## 6.4. Promoting the Action and Give Visibility to the EU Funding

The beneficiary SMEs are obligated to promote the sub-project, the ECDI project and its results, by providing targeted information to multiple audiences (including the media and the public) in a strategic and effective manner and to highlight the financial support of the EC. The ECDI Communication team will guide and support these communication activities.

Unless the European Commission or the ECDI coordinator requests or agrees otherwise or unless it is impossible, any communication activity related to the action (including in electronic form, via social media, etc.), any publicity, including at a conference or seminar or any type of information or promotional material (brochure, leaflet, poster, presentation etc.), and any infrastructure, equipment and major results funded by the grant must:

- I. display the EU emblem.
- II. display the ECDI logo
- III. include the following text: This project is co-funded by the European Union's Single Market Programme under grant agreement No. **101236201** .

When displayed in association with a logo, the European emblem should be given appropriate prominence. This obligation to use the European emblem in respect of projects to which the EC contributes implies no right of exclusive use. It is subject to

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general third-party use restrictions which do not permit the appropriation of the emblem, or of any similar trademark or logo, whether by registration or by any other means. Under these conditions, the Beneficiary is exempted from the obligation to obtain prior permission from the EC to use the emblem. Further detailed information on the EU emblem can be found on the Europa web page.

Any publicity made by the beneficiary SME in respect of the project, in whatever form and on or by whatever medium, must specify that it reflects only the author's views and that the EC or ECDI project is not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

- i. The EC and the ECDI consortium shall be authorized to publish, in whatever form and on or by whatever medium, the following information:
- ii. the name of the beneficiary SME.
- iii. contact address of the beneficiary SME.
- iv. the general purpose of the project.
- v. the amount of the financial contribution foreseen for the project; after the final payment, and the amount of the financial contribution actually received.
- vi. the geographic location of the activities carried out.
- vii. the list of dissemination activities and/or of patent (applications) relating to foreground.
- viii. the details/references and the abstracts of scientific publications relating to foreground and, if funded within the sub-project, the published version or the final manuscript accepted for publication.
- ix. the publishable reports submitted to ECDI.
- x. any picture or any audio-visual or web material provided to the EC and ECDI in the framework of the project.

The beneficiary SME shall ensure that all necessary authorizations for such publication have been obtained and that the publication of the information by the EC and ECDI does not infringe any rights of third parties.

Upon a duly substantiated request by the sub-project coordinator, if such permission is provided by the EC, the ECDI, may agree to embargo project publicity if disclosure of the information indicated above would risk compromising the beneficiary's security, academic or commercial interests.

## 6.5. Financial Audits and Controls

The European Commission (EC) will monitor that ECDI beneficiaries, and the beneficiary SME comply with the conditions for financial support to third parties set out in Annex 1 of the ECDI grant agreement and may take any action foreseen by the grant agreement in case of non-compliance vis à vis the beneficiary concerned.

Moreover, the EC may at any time during the implementation of the ECDI project and up to four years after the end of the ECDI project, arrange for financial audits to be carried out, by external auditors, or by the EC services themselves including the European Anti-Fraud office (OLAF). The audit procedure shall be deemed to be initiated on the date of receipt of the relevant letter sent by the EC. Such audits may cover financial, systemic, and other aspects (such as accounting and management principles) relating to the proper execution of the grant agreement. They shall be carried out on a confidential basis.

The beneficiary SME shall make available directly to the EC all detailed information and data that may be requested by the EC or any representative authorised by it, with a view to verifying that the grant agreement is properly managed and performed in accordance with its provisions and that costs have been charged in compliance with it. This information and data must be precise, complete, and effective.

The beneficiary SME shall keep all sub-project deliverables and the originals or, in exceptional cases, duly authenticated copies – including electronic copies – of all documents relating to the sub-project contract for up to five years from the end of the project. These shall be made available to the EC were requested during any audit under the grant agreement.

To carry out these audits, the beneficiary SME shall ensure that the EC's services and any external body(ies) authorised by it have on-the-spot access at all reasonable times, notably to the sub-project applicant offices, to its computer data, to its accounting data and to all the information needed to carry out those audits, including information on individual salaries of persons involved in the project. They shall ensure that the information is readily available on the spot at the moment of the audit and, if so requested, that data be handed over in an appropriate form.

Based on the findings made during the financial audit, a provisional report shall be drawn up. It shall be sent by the EC or its authorized representative to the beneficiary concerned, which may make observations thereon within one month of receiving it. The Commission

may decide not to consider observations conveyed or documents sent after that deadline. The final report shall be sent to the beneficiary concerned within two months of expiry of the aforesaid deadline.

Based on the conclusions of the audit, the EC shall take all appropriate measures which it considers necessary, including the issuing of recovery orders regarding all or part of the payments made by it and the application of any applicable sanction.

The European Court of Auditors shall have the same rights as the EC, notably right of access, for the purpose of checks and audits, without prejudice to its own rules.

In addition, the EC may carry out on-the-spot checks and inspections in accordance with Council Regulation (Euratom, EC) No 2185/96 of November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1996 concerning on-the-spot checks and inspections carried out by the Commission to protect the European Communities' financial interests against fraud and other irregularities.

The EC is creating a survey specifically dedicated to the SMEs that will be selected in the Programme. An answer to this survey is mandatory in a timely manner.

## 6.6. Internal Communication

Formal and informal communications channels will be agreed with SMEs selected on onboarding to the ECDI Civil Drones Innovative Programme. Indicative rules are as follows:

Formal communications will be performed via email. Beneficiaries will need to notify the project coordinator of updates in contact persons and email addresses.

Informal communications, day-to-day communications, will be performed via email, teams or webex depending on the preference of the SME. A monthly meeting will be held between each beneficiary and its mentor. To facilitate the internal communication, all beneficiaries will be asked to appoint a contact person.

Three persons from the consortium will be the contact points for the beneficiaries:

AV Coordination team – for all administrative and legal matters

SAC Communication team – for publication and dissemination on the Programme

Mentor – day-to-day contact for any other matters.

# 7. Annexes

## 7.1. Ethics Questionnaire

### ETHICAL ISSUES TABLE

	YES
<b>Informed Consent</b>	
• Does the proposal involve children?	
• Does the proposal involve patients or persons not able to give consent?	
• Does the proposal involve adult healthy volunteers?	
• Does the proposal involve Human Genetic Material?	
• Does the proposal involve Human biological samples?	
• Does the proposal involve Human data collection?	
<b>Research on Human embryo/foetus</b>	
• Does the proposal involve Human Embryos?	
• Does the proposal involve Human Foetal Tissue / Cells?	
• Does the proposal involve Human Embryonic Stem Cells?	
<b>Privacy</b>	
• Does the proposal involve processing of genetic information or personal data (e.g. health, sexual lifestyle, ethnicity, political opinion, religious or philosophical conviction)	
• Does the proposal involve tracking the location or observation of people?	
<b>Research on Animals</b>	
• Does the proposal involve research on animals?	
• Are those animals transgenic small laboratory animals?	
• Are those animals transgenic farm animals?	
• Are those animals cloned farm animals?	
• Are those animals nonhuman primates?	
<b>Research Involving Developing Countries</b>	
• Use of local resources (genetic, animal, plant etc)	
• Benefit to local community (capacity building i.e. access to healthcare, education etc)	

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<b>Dual Use</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research having direct military application</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research having the potential for terrorist abuse</li> </ul>	
<b>ICT Implants</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the proposal involve clinical trials of ICT implants?</li> </ul>	
<b>I CONFIRM THAT NONE OF THE ABOVE ISSUES APPLY TO MY PROPOSAL</b>	YES/NO

## ETHICS

If you have entered any ethics issues in the ethical issue table, you must:

- submit an ethics self-assessment, which:
  - describes how the proposal meets the national legal and ethical requirements of the country or countries where the tasks raising ethical issues are to be carried out;
  - explains in detail how you intend to address the issues in the ethical issues table, in particular as regards:
    - research objectives (e.g. study of vulnerable populations, dual use, etc.)
    - research methodology (e.g. clinical trials, involvement of children and related consent procedures, protection of any data collected, etc.)
    - **the potential impact of the research (e.g. dual use issues, environmental damage, stigmatization of particular social groups, political or financial retaliation, benefit-sharing, malevolent use, etc.).**
- provide the documents that you need under national law (if you already have them), e.g.:
  - an ethics committee opinion;
  - the document notifying activities raising ethical issues or authorizing such activities

**⚠ If these documents are not in English, you must also submit an English summary of them (containing, if available, the conclusions of the committee or authority concerned).**

**⚠ If you plan to request these documents specifically for the project you are proposing, your request must contain.**

## SECURITY

**Please indicate if your project will involve:**

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- Activities or results raising security issues: \_\_\_\_\_(YES/NO)
- 'EU-classified information' as background or results: \_\_\_\_\_(YES/NO)
- **Any potential “dual use” of results: \_\_\_\_\_(YES/NO)**

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## 7.2. Declaration of Honour

### APPLICANT DECLARATION OF HONOUR

Project title: \_\_\_\_\_

Project acronym: \_\_\_\_\_

On behalf of \_\_\_\_\_ [Company/ organisation name]  
established in \_\_\_\_\_, [Official address], VAT number<sup>3</sup>  
\_\_\_\_\_, represented for the purposes of signing and submitting the proposal and  
present Declaration of Honour by \_\_\_\_\_ [Name of legal  
representative].

By signing this document, I declare that:

1. I have the power of legally binding the above-mentioned organisation upon submitting this proposal.
2. Neither the above-mentioned company/ organisation nor any linked company/ organisation or any individual member of the proposal team has submitted any other proposal under the ECDI Innovation Programme. In case the above-mentioned company/ organisation or any individual member of the team has submitted more than one proposal to this open call, all associated proposals will be automatically excluded from the evaluation process.
3. I and the above company/ organisation that I legally represent are fully aware and duly accept all ECDI rules and conditions as expressed in the respective open call documents and Annexes and will respect any evaluation decision and proposal selection.
4. The information included in the SME self-assessment questionnaire document is true and legally binding (*applicable to SMEs*).
5. All provided information in this declaration is true and legally binding.
6. I give the consent and permission to the ECDI coordinator to use the attached information to contact me for any issue associated with the associated proposal.

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<sup>3</sup> VAT is mandatory during the contract preparation. Failure to provide a valid VAT of the specific SME will result in automatic rejection of the proposal.

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**Company/ organisation contact information:**

<i>Title (Mr., Ms., Dr.)</i>	
<i>Name</i>	
<i>Surname</i>	
<i>Full address</i>	
<i>Country</i>	
<i>E-mail address</i>	
<i>Telephone/ Mobile phone</i>	
<i>Signature/ Date</i>	

## DECLARATION OF HONOUR ON EXCLUSION CRITERIA AND ABSENCE OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

By signing this declaration of honour, I declare that all provided information below is true and legally binding both for me and for the company/ organisation that I legally represent:

1. I declare that the mentioned company/ organisation is not in one of the following situations:
  - a. Is bankrupt or being wound up, is having its affairs administered by the courts, has entered an arrangement with creditors, has suspended business activities, is the subject of proceedings concerning those matters, or is in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations.
  - b. It or persons having powers of representation, decision making or control over it have been convicted of an offense concerning their professional conduct by a judgment which has the force of res judicata.
  - c. Has been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the contracting authority can justify including by decisions of the European Investment Bank and international organizations.
  - d. Is not in compliance with its obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or the payment of taxes in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which it is established or with those of the country of the contracting authority or those of the country where the contract is to be performed, to be proved by the deliverance of official documents issued by the local authorities, according to the local applicable rules.
  - e. It or persons having powers of representation, decision making or control over it have been the subject of a judgment which has the force of res judicata for fraud, corruption,

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involvement in a criminal organization or any other illegal activity, where such illegal activity is detrimental to the Union's financial interests.

- f. Is subject to an administrative penalty for being guilty of misrepresenting the information required by the contracting authority as a condition of participation in a grant award procedure or another procurement procedure or failing to supply this information or having been declared to be in serious breach of its obligations under contracts or grants covered by the Union's budget.
2. I declare that the natural persons with power of representation, decision-making or control over the above-mentioned company/ organisation are not in the situations referred to in (a) to (f) above.
  3. I declare that:
    - a. Neither any person nor I that I know is subject to an ECDI project conflict of interest.
    - b. Neither any person or I that I know participates, controls, submits, or is associated in any way with more than one proposal to the ECDI Innovation Programme
    - c. I have not made false declarations in supplying the information required by participation in the open calls of the ECDI project or does not fail to supply this information.
    - d. I am not in one of the situations of exclusion, referred to in the above-mentioned points (a) to (f).
    - e. I am aware and fully accept all ECDI conditions and rules as expressed in the open call documents.
  4. I certify that the company/ organisation that I represent:
    - a. Is committed to participate in the above-mentioned project.
    - b. Has stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain its activity throughout its participation in the above-mentioned project and to provide any counterpart funding necessary.
    - c. Has or will have the necessary resources as and when needed to carry out its involvement in the above-mentioned project.

<p><b><i>Full name:</i></b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p><b><i>Signature and stamp (if applicable)</i></b></p>
<p><b><i>Done at (place) _____, on the _____ (day) _____ (month) _____ (year)</i></b></p>	