



OPEN CALL

Guide For Applicants

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Abbreviation list

<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Open form</i>
AP	Associated Partner
CA	Consortium Agreement
COO	Coordinator
DoA	Description of Action
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FSTP	Financial Support to Third Parties
GA	Grant Agreement
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LDR	Less Developed Region
MDR	More Developed Region
MoM	Minutes of meeting
S3	Smart Specialisation Strategies

SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
TRL	Technology Readiness Level
UC	Use Case
WP	Work Package
WPL	Work Package Lead

Table 1 - Abbreviation list

Terms and definitions

Consortium	Refers to the partners and entities that constitute the IH-MIE project.
Deliverable	Within the Open Call framework, a deliverable is any verifiable evidence demonstrating that a milestone, result, or stage defined in the Project Plan has been achieved and may take different forms (e.g. reports, demonstrators, datasets).
FSTP	Cascade Funding
LDR	Category of regions considered as Less Developed Region according with COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION (EU) 2021/1130
Lump sum	Pre-agreed fixed payment awarded for achieving specific outputs or deliverables, paid once those results are verified, without the need to report actual expenditures.
TRR	Category of regions considered as Transition Region according with COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION (EU) 2021/1130
MDR	Category of regions considered as More Developed Region according with COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION (EU) 2021/1130
SME	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises. An enterprise that fulfils the criteria laid down in the European Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC , including staff headcount and financial thresholds (turnover or balance sheet total).
Team	Refers to a group of up to three SMEs collaborating within a project proposal submitted to the IH-MIE Open Call.
Use Case	Refers to the seven pilot projects developed within the IH-MIE framework by seven pioneering SMEs across the project's six strategic domains, serving as reference examples for Open Call applicants.

Table 2. Terms and definitions.

1. What is IH-MIE?

The **Interregional Hydrogen Mobility Initiative for Europe (IH-MIE)** aims to accelerate the deployment of hydrogen-based mobility solutions across Europe while reducing regional innovation gaps and empowering SMEs to drive the green transition. Transport accounts for nearly **25% of Europe's greenhouse gas emissions**, and hydrogen offers a zero-emission alternative for sectors where battery-electric solutions are not viable, such as heavy-duty transport, logistics, and public transit.

IH-MIE creates a **Hydrogen Mobility Interregional Hub**, enabling coordinated investments, innovation support, and capacity-building across European regions. The project advances hydrogen mobility technologies from **TRL 6 up to TRL 9**, supporting SMEs through a combination of **cascade funding, mentoring, training, and interregional cooperation**. The initiative has two complementary pillars:

- **Seven pioneer SMEs** develop real-world demonstration projects, generating validated and scalable use cases that strengthen hydrogen value chains.
- An **Open Call will fund up to 30 additional SMEs**, whose solutions will complement and feed into the needs of the pioneer SMEs, reinforcing and expanding the ecosystem.

This balanced, interregional approach addresses barriers such as limited infrastructure, high costs, ecosystem fragmentation, and low public awareness. IH-MIE promotes sustainable transport, green growth, and SME-driven innovation, enhancing Europe's competitiveness, resilience, and leadership in hydrogen-based mobility.

2. Open Call IH-MIE 2026

The IHMIE Open Call 2026 will support up to **30 SME-led innovation projects** aimed at strengthening Europe's hydrogen mobility value chain. Selected SMEs, particularly those from Less Developed Regions (LDRs), will benefit from a dedicated support programme combining financial support, mentoring, training, and technical assistance to validate, integrate, and scale hydrogen mobility solutions over a 12-month programme, advancing technologies **from TRL 6 up to TRL 9**.

The call follows a bottom-up, technology-neutral approach and focuses on **six strategic challenges** pre-identified during the project preparation stage and further validated through WP2 diagnosis activities, covering key deployment bottlenecks across the hydrogen mobility ecosystem, including **fuel cell cost reduction, refuelling infrastructure, hydrogen storage and distribution, supply chain and logistics, and integration with other mobility solutions**.

Any project directly addressing at least one of these challenges and demonstrating a clear progression from TRL 6 up to TRL 9 will be considered eligible.

In parallel, seven pioneer SME-led Use Cases developed within the project illustrate how these challenges are already being addressed under real operational conditions. As reference initiatives, brief descriptions of these pilots will be included within the corresponding challenge definitions to inspire applicants and facilitate potential synergies where relevant and of mutual interest. However, proposals are not restricted to these Use Cases and may explore additional innovation pathways and cross-regional synergies.

Below, the **six challenges** are explained in detail.



Figure 1 – Overview of the six hydrogen mobility challenges

Challenge 1	Fuel cell cost and durability
<p>Challenge definition</p>	<p>Reducing costs while increasing performance and lifetime remains a cornerstone for hydrogen mobility competitiveness. Proposals in this area should contribute to more robust, efficient, and economically viable fuel cell systems, whether through component innovation, system optimisation, digital monitoring, or design approaches that simplify manufacturing and maintenance. Clear industrialisation pathways and lifecycle performance improvements are key.</p>
<p>IH-MIE Pioneer partner reference:</p>	<p>Development of a compact hydrogen fuel cell propulsion system for aeronautical applications, focused on efficiency, low maintenance, and system integration. Cross-sector applications such as autonomous hydrogen-based ground power units are identified as relevant opportunity areas.</p>

Challenge 2	Refueling infrastructure
Challenge definition	The availability of reliable and cost-effective refueling is central to user confidence and fleet deployment. Relevant solutions may enhance refueling system design, safety, efficiency, interoperability, or operational reliability. Innovations that reduce energy consumption, downtime, complexity, or regulatory friction — while improving user and operator experience — are particularly encouraged
IH-MIE Pioneer partner reference:	HRS with onsite hydrogen production. The project addresses barriers to hydrogen refueling station deployment by enabling investment-ready infrastructure. Smart coordination platforms, XR-based training, and modular station designs are identified as opportunity areas to accelerate rollout.
Challenge 3	Supply Chain and Logistics
Challenge definition	Efficient hydrogen mobility depends on a resilient and optimised supply chain. Projects in this area should address challenges related to transport, handling, storage, and coordination among actors. Strong proposals will demonstrate how logistics models, digital tools, or safety systems can reduce costs, emissions, and operational risk while supporting scale-up across different regions and use cases.
IH-MIE Pioneer partner reference:	Development of a modular transportable fuel cell genset for power generation in difficult-to-access construction environments. Portable hydrogen supply systems and standardized deployment solutions are identified as relevant operational extensions.
Challenge 4	Integration with other mobility solutions
Challenge definition	Hydrogen solutions must operate seamlessly within increasingly complex mobility and energy ecosystems. Proposals should enable technical, operational, or digital integration with existing vehicle platforms, fleets, charging infrastructure, and energy systems. Solutions supporting hybrid architectures, range extension, interoperability, and multimodal operation are particularly relevant.
IH-MIE Pioneer partner reference:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hydrogen fuel cell integration in multipurpose electric platforms to extend operational autonomy. Modular architectures are identified as opportunity areas for replication across diverse mobility applications. Integration of hydrogen fuel cell range extenders into light commercial electric vehicles to improve autonomy and operational performance. Hybrid powertrain optimisation is identified as an opportunity area for efficiency and system robustness.

Challenge 5	On-board Hydrogen Storage
Challenge definition	Safe, compact, and cost-effective storage is a critical enabler for vehicle performance and acceptance. Innovations may target materials, tank design, integration constraints, monitoring systems, or end-of-life strategies. Proposals are encouraged to demonstrate improvements in energy density, safety, manufacturability, or environmental performance under real-world operating conditions.
IH-MIE Pioneer partner reference:	The project demonstrates hydrogen-powered mobility applications in the Baltic maritime sector through a small-vessel use case. Advanced energy management and hybrid optimization are identified as relevant opportunity areas.
Challenge 6	Hydrogen distribution
Challenge definition	Reliable distribution links hydrogen production with end-use in mobility applications. Solutions may focus on infrastructure, system interfaces, operational concepts, or digital control that enhance efficiency, safety, and regulatory alignment. Particular attention is given to approaches that reduce complexity, improve compatibility with refuelling systems, and strengthen overall system reliability.
IH-MIE Pioneer partner reference:	Development of a bidirectional hydrogen refuelling simulator for validation of station–vehicle interactions. Interoperability testing and protocol standardisation are identified as opportunity areas supporting infrastructure scaling.

Table 3 - Detailed definition of the six hydrogen mobility challenges

3. Funding availability

IH-MIE has available **€1.8 million** for distribution under the current Open Call. Within this budget, at least €800,000 must be allocated to SMEs established in LDRs.

Funding will be distributed among selected projects following the evaluation and selection process described in this document.

In case of unallocated funds during the Open Call or project implementation, contingency measures may be activated, including targeted additional calls or alternative support mechanisms for selected projects.

4. Participation and Eligibility Conditions

4.1. Beneficiaries

This Open Call is exclusively addressed to **Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)** in accordance with EU Recommendation 2003/361/EC.

Applicants may consult the official EU definition of SMEs here: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32003H0361>

To verify their SME status, applicants may use the European Commission's SME self-assessment tool: <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/SME-Wizard/>

The participation of additional entities such as universities, RTOs, public administrations or large enterprises is allowed only as associated partners. These entities may be part of the team but are not eligible to receive financial support from the IH-MIE project. Associated partners do not affect the eligibility conditions of the proposal, which are assessed exclusively based on the participating SMEs.

4.2. Eligible types of projects

Applications may be submitted by:

- A **single SME**.
- A **Team of SMEs**, limited to a maximum of three SMEs per team. The SME submitting the proposal will be designated as the Project Leader and will act as the main point of contact within the framework of the Open Call.

Only one proposal per applicant will be eligible. If multiple proposals are submitted, only the last submission will be considered eligible.

4.3. Geographical requirement

Applicants must be established in an EU Member State or in an EEA country.

In line with the objective of promoting territorial cohesion, proposals involving SMEs from Less Developed Regions (LDRs) will be prioritised within the evaluation criteria to foster excellence, geographical balance, and interregional cooperation.

Applicants may consult the EU regional coverage tool to verify their region's classification: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/how/is-my-region-covered_en

4.4. TRL eligibility

Projects must begin at **TRL 6** at the time of application and demonstrate a credible pathway to increase until pre-commercial stage by project ends. This follows the TRL discipline and market-readiness logic used in similar I3 actions.

5. Funding conditions

5.1. Form of Support

Financial support is provided in the form of **lump-sum sub-grants**, in line with the EU's cascade-funding good practices. Payments are made upon achievement of deliverables or milestones, rather than through actual cost reporting.

5.2. Funding Rate

Projects are funded at 100% of the approved lump-sum amount.

5.3. Budget Limits (Ceilings and Floors)

Single-SME projects

- Maximum lump sum: up to €60,000.

Projects submitted in team

- Maximum lump sum: up to €60,000 per SME.
- The total project budget equals the sum of funding allocated to participating SMEs, up to €60,000 per SME. As only teams of up to three SMEs are allowed, the maximum total budget is €180,000.

5.4. Eligible Cost Categories

While lump sum grants do not require detailed cost reporting, applicants must justify their requested budget based on a reasonable estimation of the resources necessary to implement the project.

The following cost categories shall be used for the purpose of budget estimation:

- Personnel costs:** costs must be necessary, reasonable and directly related to the implementation of the project.
- Subcontracting:** costs are limited to a maximum of 30% of the total project budget and must be duly justified.
- Direct purchase costs**
 - C1. Travel and subsistence:** costs must be necessary, reasonable and directly linked to the implementation of the project. Is **recommended** to reserve budget to attend the EUHydrogenWeek (or similar) expected by 4Q2027 in Central Europe Region.
 - C2 Equipment:** costs must be estimated on a depreciation basis, reflecting only the portion of use attributable to the project duration.
 - C3. Other goods, works and services:** including consumables and external services necessary for project implementation.
- Indirect costs:** calculated as a **flat rate of 7% of the eligible direct costs** (categories A–C).

Applicants must ensure that the proposed activities are not funded under any other EU programme or funding source.

6. Programme duration and calendar

6.1. Implementation window

- Project duration: 12 months
- Start date (eligible costs): 01/01/2027
- End date: 31/12/2027

The duration of each project is **12 months**, starting on 1 January 2027 and ending on 31 December 2027.

Only activities implemented within this period are eligible for funding under this Open Call. Any activities carried out outside this timeframe will not be considered eligible.

6.2. Open Call timeline

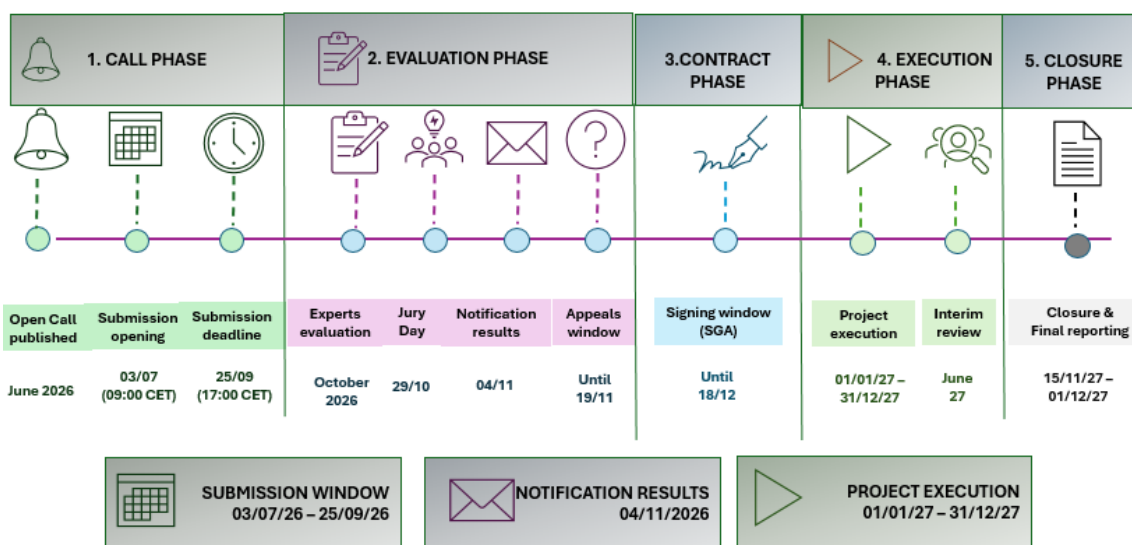


Figure 2 - Open call timeline

7. How to apply

7.1. Single entry point and language

Applications must be submitted online via <https://ihmie.submit.com>

This platform will be the **single entry point** for all applications. Submissions via any other means will not be accepted.

Late or incomplete submissions are inadmissible.

7.2. Language requirements

English is the working language for all application forms and annexes. All submissions must be completed in English.

7.3. Submission package (mandatory)

Applicants must submit a single online application form including all required information.

The application form covers the following key aspects at a general level.

- **Administrative and organisational data:** including project type (single SME or SME team), legal and contact information (legal name, contact person email, website, phone number), project team composition (project staff and C-level management), selection of the relevant IH-MIE Challenge, publication status in the IH-MIE digital hub, and optional supporting information. It also includes structured selection of desired training, business coaching, and technical coaching support areas.
- **Project plan and technical content:** including a project summary, innovation, state of the art and technical soundness, TRL level and development pathway (from baseline TRL 6), alignment with the programme and selected challenge, detailed work plan and milestone logic, risk management measures, and expected economic, **environmental and market impact**.
- **Budget estimation:** including the overall project budget based on a lump sum approach, where funding is linked to the achievement of defined deliverables and milestones rather than the reimbursement of actual incurred costs.
- **Summary PDF:** a single PDF document that summarizes the project proposal in a clear and structured way. It will be used as supporting material during the Jury Day if the project is invited.

Detailed requirements regarding the content and structure of the application form are provided in Annex 2.

Upon submission, applicants will receive an automatic acknowledgement of receipt by email.

7.4. Matchmaking

Applicants are encouraged to use the **IH-MIE digital hub** (<https://www.b2match.com/e/ihmie>) as a support tool during the proposal preparation phase. The platform serves as a central space

to identify potential partners, publish project ideas aligned with the Open Call topics, and explore collaboration opportunities across regions and sectors.

It enables organisations to connect with relevant stakeholders, arrange bilateral meetings, and engage in matchmaking activities aimed at facilitating the formation of SME-led consortia and improving proposal quality through complementary expertise.

Use of the platform is optional but strongly recommended during the application period. As part of the evaluation process, an additional bonus criterion will be applied based on the use of the platform during proposal preparation:

- (0) no idea published on the platform;
- (2) cooperative idea published;

This incentive aims to encourage early-stage collaboration and the co-creation of stronger, more integrated project proposals within the IHMIE ecosystem. Verification will be carried out by requesting the B2Match marketplace URL of the published idea to confirm its status.

8. Evaluation

8.1. Process

The evaluation and selection process of the IH-MIE Open Call follows a **three-stage procedure** designed to ensure transparency, impartiality, and compliance with EU cascade-funding standards.

8.1.1. Stage 1 – Eligibility and Admissibility Check.

The process begins with an Eligibility and Admissibility Check carried out by the Open Call Management Team, composed of two representatives per project partner organisation. This team oversees the evaluation workflow and ensures procedural impartiality.

During this stage, the consortium verifies whether each submitted proposal meets all formal requirements. The check includes (but is not limited to):

Requirement	Description	Reference
SME eligibility	Applicant must qualify as an SME under EU Recommendation 2003/361/EC.	Section 5
Geographical eligibility	Compliance with location requirements, including LDR conditions where applicable.	Section 5
Scope alignment	Proposal must align with the objectives and scope of the Open Call.	Section 3

Funding limits and cost eligibility	Budget and funding request must comply with defined limits.	Section 5
Project duration	Project must comply with the defined implementation period.	Section 7
Submission requirements	Application must be complete in English, submitted via the official platform and before the deadline.	Section 8

Table 4 - Eligibility and admissibility check requirements

Only proposals that fully comply with these requirements will be considered eligible and will proceed to the external evaluation phase.

Proposals that do not meet one or more of the requirements will be rejected at this stage. Applicants will be informed accordingly, including the reasons for rejection.

8.1.2. Stage 2 – External evaluation

Proposals that pass the eligibility check will undergo a remote evaluation process conducted by **two independent experts**. Each expert will be selected based on their proven technical, industrial, or market expertise relevant to the hydrogen mobility value chain.

To ensure impartiality and confidentiality all evaluators must sign a Confidentiality Agreement, a Conflict of Interest (CoI) Declaration to guarantee an objective, transparent, and impartial assessment, aligned with best practices of EU-funded cascade funding programmes.

The evaluation criteria include four dimensions as following:



Figure 3 - Evaluation framework and scoring criteria

1. Excellence

1.1 Innovation, State of the Art & Technical Soundness

This subcriterion assesses the degree of innovation and the technical robustness of the proposed solution. The proposal must clearly articulate the problem being addressed, demonstrate awareness of existing solutions, and explain how the proposed approach advances beyond the current state of the art.

Evaluators will examine the extent to which the innovation is tangible, differentiated, and capable of delivering measurable improvements over existing products or services. In parallel, the technical approach must be credible, well-founded, and supported by a sound methodology.

A strict requirement is that projects must start at **TRL 6** or higher, meaning that the technology has already been demonstrated in a relevant (operationally representative) environment. Proposals that fail to demonstrate this level of maturity will not meet the eligibility expectations of the call.

1.2 TRL and Development Pathway

This subfield focuses on technological maturity and the clarity of the project's progression towards market readiness. Beyond meeting the minimum requirement of TRL 6 at project start, the proposal must present a structured and realistic development trajectory.

Evaluators will assess:

- The justification and evidence supporting the declared starting TRL.
- The coherence of the progression towards higher TRLs during the project lifecycle.
- The definition of validation, demonstration, or testing activities required to reach advanced stages.

The development pathway must be logically sequenced, technically feasible, and aligned with the project duration, ensuring that no unjustified leaps in maturity are assumed.

1.3 Programme Alignment & Relevance

Strong alignment with the programme priorities is essential. The proposal must explicitly demonstrate how it contributes to the strategic framework defined by the call.

It is **mandatory** to clearly identify and justify the contribution to:

- One of the six programme challenges, and
- Where applicable, any of the seven SME-driven Use Cases.

Evaluators will assess the depth and consistency of this alignment, ensuring that the proposed activities directly contribute to these challenges and, where relevant, meaningfully support or extend the defined Use Cases.

2. Implementation / Quality

2.1 Work Plan & Milestone Logic

Given the lump-sum funding model, where payments are directly linked to milestone achievement, this section is of critical importance.

The work plan must be precise, structured, and outcome oriented. Evaluators will assess:

- The clarity and completeness of task definitions.
- The internal consistency between tasks, months and deliverables.
- The measurability, verifiability, and relevance of deliverables as progress indicators.

A **mandatory requirement** is the inclusion of a mid-term milestone at month 6, clearly linked to a deliverable and associated with a payment trigger. This milestone must demonstrate concrete progress and be objectively verifiable.

The overall milestone logic must enable transparent tracking of progress and provide confidence that the project can be executed within the proposed timeline under the lump sum scheme.

2.2 Risk Management

Relevant risks must be identified across technical, operational, and financial dimensions.

Evaluators will consider:

- The specificity and relevance of identified risks.
- The assessment of their likelihood and potential impact.
- The quality and feasibility of mitigation and contingency measures.

The objective is to demonstrate preparedness and the ability to manage potential deviations effectively.

2.3 Team Capacity and Execution Capability

The consortium or team must demonstrate the ability to deliver the proposed work with a high level of reliability.

This includes:

- Proven technical and managerial expertise.
- Experience in similar projects or comparable initiatives, particularly in related domains or technologies.
- Clearly assigned roles and responsibilities.
- Complementary skill sets ensuring full coverage of project needs.

The overall composition should provide confidence in the team's capacity to execute the project successfully.

2.4 Gender Balance

Gender balance is not subject to qualitative assessment. The relevant data is collected during the application phase.

If the project meets the threshold of more than 50% female workforce, the associated points are automatically awarded in accordance with the programme rules.

2.5 Female-led SME

This criterion is also not evaluated qualitatively. Eligibility for the corresponding points is determined based on the information submitted in the application.

If the SME is female-led or majority owned/managed by women, points are automatically assigned.

3. Impact

3.1 Economic, Environmental and Market Impact

The proposal should present a credible and well-structured value creation pathway, demonstrating how the solution will generate economic value, support market uptake, and contribute to broader environmental objectives.

Evaluators will focus on:

- The clarity and credibility of the business opportunity.
- The scalability of the solution and its competitive positioning.
- The expected contribution to revenue generation, growth, or market transformation.
- Measurable environmental benefits and sustainability contributions.

Assertions must be supported by realistic assumptions, market understanding, and, where possible, evidence.

3.2 Territorial, Social and Inclusiveness Impact

If the proposal is submitted by a single SME established in a LDR, or in the case of a team, if at least 50% of participating SMEs are established in LDRs, the corresponding points are automatically awarded.

3.3 Budget Balance and Coherence

The budget must reflect a high level of internal consistency and alignment with the work plan. Under the lump sum approach, particular attention is required to ensure that:

- Resources are appropriately allocated to tasks and deliverables.
- The overall budget is realistic and proportionate to the scope of work.

Where subcontracting or external services are included, these must be clearly reflected in the overall project design and demonstrate full consistency with the work plan and deliverables.

8.1.3. Stage 3 — Jury Day & Consensus Selection

Projects scoring above 60/100 in the expert evaluation will be invited to a Jury Day. The invitation list will include the top 30 ranked applications, plus additional proposals within 3 points of the cut-off score, subject to a cap of 10% of total submissions (rounded down). This threshold may be extended in case of ties at the cut-off.

Invited SMEs will pitch to the OC Management Team using the submitted pitch PDF. Each presentation will be limited to 5 minutes, followed by Q&A.

Final ranking will be decided through a structured voting process by the OC Management Team, **distributing 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 points** across the proposals. Any deviation from the initial ranking must be duly justified and will be based on complementary criteria not fully captured in the expert evaluation, such as geographical and thematic diversity or the quality of the pitch presentation. To ensure integrity, OC Management Team members will not assign points to projects where a conflict of interest is identified.

Based on the voting results, a provisional list of selected SMEs will be agreed. Up to 30 SME will be selected, and the provisional results will be published through IH-MIE communication channels.

8.2. Selection and notification

A provisional ranking list will be published on the project communication channels on **04/11/2026**.

Unsuccessful applicants may submit a complaint regarding procedural errors in the evaluation or selection process within **15 calendar days** following the notification of results, until **19/11/2026**. Complaints concerning disagreements with the external evaluators' scores, assessments, or judgments will not be considered. Complaints must be submitted by email to **info@ihmie.eu**.

Applications included in the ranking list but not funded due to budget limitations will be included in a reserve list.

Selected applications will receive a notification by email inviting them to sign the sub-grant agreement on **19/11/2026**.

9. Contracting

Selected SMEs (applicants with formula of single SME or in team of SMEs) proceed to **SubGrant Agreement (SGA)** signature **by 18/12/2026**.

The signing process will be carried out digitally via <https://ihmie.submit.com> once the applicant duly submit the required following documentation:

- Declaration of Honour (DoH).

- SME Declaration.
- Registration certification. An official documentation confirming that a is lawfully registered and recognized within a specific jurisdiction. This certification might contain information related region where the company is registered.
- VAT
- [Financial capacity self-assessment](#)
- Holder bank account certification.

In the event of a withdrawal by an applicant or failure to duly submit and sign the SGA, the reserve list will be used to invite the next eligible applicants to proceed to signature.

10.Payment, reviews and deliverables

10.1. Payment schedule (per awarded project)

Payment #1 — Pre-financing: 40% of project lump-sum **within 45 days** of sub-grant signature by each party (SME and CTAG).

Payment #2 — Interim: 25% after **successful Interim Review** (June 2027), **paid within 45 days** after approval interim report.

Final payment — Balance (35%) after **Final Report** submitted **by 15/11/2027**, **paid within 45 days** after approval final review.

Milestone-linked, lump-sum payments follow the “deliverables achieved - payment”.

10.2. What you must submit

Beneficiaries are required to submit structured technical and financial evidence at key stages:

- **D1 (Interim, June 2027): Progress report** vs. Project Plan, including evidence substantiating the achievement of interim milestones and deliverables, KPI tracking (technical performance, TRL progress, and compliance with safety/standards where relevant).
- **D2 (Final): Final report**; evidencing substantiating completion of the planned milestones and deliverables.

In addition, beneficiaries will continuously upload supporting evidence (e.g. KPI validation, deliverable proof, technical documentation) through the SUBMIT platform during project implementation as will further explained in the next section. These updates may be requested by the assigned mentor as part of ongoing monitoring activities.

11. Project Management & Reporting

The project management framework defines the governance, monitoring, and reporting structure for project implementation. It ensures compliance with programme requirements, traceability of activities, and structured evidence collection throughout the project lifecycle.

All governance-related activities (monitoring, reporting, communication, and evidence submission) are carried out through the SUBMIT platform, which acts as the single digital interface for administrative and operational documentation throughout the project lifecycle.

11.1. Governance and monitoring structure

Each selected project will be assigned a dedicated mentor acting as the official programme representative for monitoring and control purposes.

The mentor is responsible for:

- overseeing project progress against the approved Project Plan
- ensuring compliance with TRL progression (TRL 6–9)
- identifying deviations, risks, and corrective actions
- ensuring proper documentation of all project activities
- validating consistency between implementation and programme requirements

All communications between mentors and beneficiaries are formally recorded in the SUBMIT platform to ensure full traceability and auditability.

Meetings, mentoring sessions, and project interactions stored in the system constitute official evidence for monitoring, review, and payment justification

11.2. Monitoring cycle

Monitoring follows a structured governance cycle aligned with project milestones.

After each mentoring session, the mentor will produce a structured monitoring report capturing progress, deviations, and required actions. All reporting and justification activities will be carried out through the SUBMIT platform. Beneficiaries shall submit structured documentation using predefined templates to ensure consistency, transparency, and compliance.

Monitoring cycle	Format	Date
Kick-off monitoring: validation of project Plan and setup of monitoring log	One-to-one (60 min)	January 2027
Periodic monitoring: progress control and risk tracking	One-to-one (60 min)	From February 2027 to November 2027

Interim review: formal progress assessment and compliance check	One-to-one (60 min)	June 2027
Final review: validation of final results and TRL achievement evidence	One-to-one (60 min)	From 15/11/27 to 1/12/27

Table 5 - Monitoring cycle and reporting schedule

11.3. Reporting and compliance

Reporting constitutes a mandatory compliance requirement for all selected projects and is an integral part of the programme governance framework. Its purpose is to ensure traceability of implementation, verification of results, and validation of eligibility for funding disbursement under the conditions defined in Section 11.

All reporting activities are conducted through the SUBMIT platform, ensuring structured submission, validation, and archiving of project evidence.

Beneficiaries are required to provide documented evidence demonstrating:

- progress against the approved Project Plan
- achievement of technical and operational KPIs
- TRL progression (TRL 6–9)
- validation of technical results and project outputs
- any other supporting evidence required for financial justification of payments (as defined in Section 11)

The reporting system ensures:

- audit-ready traceability of project implementation
- consistent and standardised documentation across all projects
- secure storage of evidence supporting both technical and financial verification
- alignment between implementation progress and payment eligibility conditions

12. Project window (implementation)

This section describes the set of non-financial support services made available to SMEs to strengthen their technical, business, regulatory, and investment readiness during project implementation. These services are optional support tools aimed at maximising project impact, innovation performance, and scalability potential.

12.1. Investment assessment

Support to assess SME maturity, funding needs, and market readiness.

Scope:

- Assessment of SME funding needs, maturity level, and market and investment readiness (technology, team, traction, financials).

- Evaluation of investment readiness and scalability potential
- Analysis of business model robustness and market attractiveness

Format: Online one-to-one advisory sessions (1 hour)

Timing: January – May 2027

12.2. Tailored business and technical coaching services

- **Business Coaching Services:**

Scope:

- Tailored support to strengthen SMEs' market positioning, commercial strategy, and business model
- Includes (non-exhaustive) benchmarking, Blue Ocean Strategy, customer journey mapping, Go-to-Market design, value proposition (USP) refinement, investor pitch preparation, and impact assessment (environmental and societal)
- Focus on improving overall business and investment readiness

Format: Online one-to-one advisory sessions (1 hour), complemented where relevant by other formats (e.g. group sessions or workshops).

Timing: February – November

- **Technical Coaching Services**

Scope:

- Tailored technical support to identify and address project-specific gaps and needs aligned with the Project Plan.
- Access to an integrated hydrogen innovation services portfolio provided and RTOs (ITECAM, CNH2, FHA, CTAG), covering concept design, engineering, simulation, integration, safety, compliance, testing, and validation.
- May include guidance on test plans, test specifications, HIL simulations, and facilitation of lab access to optimise testing strategies and reduce costs.
- Services are flexible and may evolve depending on SME needs and implementation constraints.

Format: Online one-to-one advisory sessions (1 hour), complemented where relevant by other formats and potential lab-based interactions

Timing: February – November.

12.3. Training activities

Scope:

Structured training programme to strengthen SME capabilities in hydrogen mobility innovation

and industrialisation. The content will be tailored to the general needs of participating SMEs, based on the following thematic areas (indicative and adaptable):

- **Pre-Industrialisation:** Design for Manufacturing (DfM); industrial-grade prototyping; supply-chain readiness (qualification, traceability, reliability); quality systems (ISO 9001 / IATF 16949)
- **Validation & Certification:** safety standards (ISO 19880, ISO 23273, relevant IEC/EN standards); performance validation and stress-testing; hydrogen material compatibility; functional safety (ISO 26262 where applicable)
- **Business & Market:** go-to-market strategies for hydrogen mobility; IP management and technology transfer strategies
- **Regulation:** EU regulatory frameworks for hydrogen mobility infrastructure
- **Navigating the funding landscape:** EU research and innovation programmes; European partnerships (e.g. Clean Hydrogen Partnership)

Format:

Blended training package per module, which may include

- 30–40 pages of structured learning content
- Practical case study and assessment test (20 questions)
- Presentation deck
- Microlearning video (approx. 1 hour, AI-supported production allowed)

12.4. Investment planning and funding strategy

Scope:

- **Funding Landscape Analysis:** identification of relevant public and private funding opportunities (e.g., EU grants, venture capital, innovation funding schemes)
- **Specialized Guidance:** webinars and expert advisory on financial projections, investor pitching, and navigation of the funding ecosystem
- **Investment Plan Development:** tailored investment strategies including financing sources, timelines, and capital access pathways, delivered through an Investment Memo and one-page investor document
- **Investor Day:** matchmaking and pitching session with relevant investors and funding stakeholders. Attendance at European Hydrogen Week (or a similar event) expected in Q4 2027.

Format:

- **Funding Landscape Analysis:** desk research and advisory support, complemented by targeted guidance sessions
- **Specialized Guidance:** webinars and expert-led online sessions
- **Investment Plan Development:** one-to-one or small-group advisory sessions with deliverables (Investment Memo and One-Pager)
- **Investor Day:** in-person or virtual pitching and matchmaking event. Attendance at European Hydrogen Week (or a similar event) expected in Q4 2027.

Timing: From May to Dec

12.5. Regulatory alignment

Scope:

- **Policy and Regulatory Guidance:** support to connect with relevant regulatory bodies and ensure project solutions align with applicable EU hydrogen mobility standards and requirements.
- **Barrier Analysis:** identification of regulatory and market-entry barriers, with the development of action plans to address them.

Format:

- Online one-to-one advisory sessions (1 hour) complemented where relevant by other formats such as targeted consultations or action-oriented guidance workshops.

Timing: From Feb to Nov.

13. Obligations from beneficiaries

Beneficiaries shall implement their projects in accordance with the approved Project Plan and the conditions set out in the Sub-Grant Agreement.

They are required to ensure full compliance with programme rules and maintain appropriate documentation to demonstrate proper implementation of activities.

13.1. Implementation obligations

Beneficiaries shall:

- implement activities as described in the approved Project Plan
- promptly notify any significant deviations, delays, or risks affecting implementation
- cooperate with the assigned mentor and programme representatives as required under the governance framework
- participate in mandatory programme events, including kick-off meetings, interim review sessions, and dissemination activities where applicable

13.2. Record keeping and audit requirements

Beneficiaries must maintain adequate records to demonstrate that funded activities have been properly implemented under the lump sum financing model.

Such records may include (non-exhaustive):

- deliverables and technical outputs
- technical reports and validation results
- test documentation and acceptance evidence
- supporting visual evidence (e.g. photos, videos)

Timesheets are not required.

All documentation must be retained for a minimum of **five (5) years after the final payment** and must be made available upon request to the consortium, European Commission services, or any authorised audit or control body, including OLAF, EPPO, and the European Court of Auditors (ECA).

13.3. Visibility and communication obligations

Beneficiaries must acknowledge the support received from the IH-MIE project and the European Union in all communication and dissemination activities related to the project.

This includes:

- use of the EU emblem
- reference to EU/I3 funding support
- compliance with visibility guidelines provided by the consortium.

Full branding and visibility requirements will be specified in the Sub-Grant Agreement and accompanying communication guidelines.

14. IPR principles

Each beneficiary shall retain ownership of its Background knowledge, data, and pre-existing intellectual property.

Results generated during project implementation shall remain the property of the beneficiary that generates them. In the case of jointly developed results, joint ownership shall apply, and a **Joint Ownership Agreement** shall be established between the concerned parties to define conditions for use, protection, and exploitation.

Access and use rights between beneficiaries shall be defined in the **Sub-Grant Agreement** prior to the start of project implementation and shall be limited to what is necessary for the execution of the project, unless otherwise agreed.

Results shall be appropriately protected whenever justified, in line with their potential for exploitation and innovation impact. Restrictions on transfer or licensing of results to non-eligible countries may apply in accordance with applicable EU rules.

The granting authority shall have royalty-free access rights to results for non-commercial purposes, including monitoring, evaluation, dissemination, and policy-related use, as established in the Sub-Grant Agreement.

15. Ethics, safety and legal compliance

All projects must comply with applicable **EU, national, and regional legislation** throughout the entire project lifecycle, including, where relevant, regulations related to hydrogen handling and storage, transport of dangerous goods, refuelling infrastructure (HRS), occupational health and safety, environmental protection, data protection, and industrial operations, among others.

Beneficiaries shall apply state-of-the-art safety engineering and risk management practices appropriate to the nature and maturity of the proposed activities. This may include, where relevant, risk assessments, safety cases, testing protocols, contingency measures, and compliance validation procedures.

Projects are also expected to align, where applicable, with relevant European and international standards, certification schemes, and pre-normative activities, including ISO, EN, IEC, and hydrogen-related technical standards.

Any ethical, safety, security, or regulatory issues identified during proposal preparation or project implementation must be properly disclosed and addressed by the applicant. Where necessary, beneficiaries may be requested to provide mitigation measures, authorisations, or additional compliance documentation prior to contracting or during project execution.

16. Data protection (GDPR)

Personal data will be processed in line with GDPR (EU) 2016/679, solely for Open Call management, monitoring and reporting. Access is restricted to authorised staff/evaluators under confidentiality. Retention follows EU/I3 rules (up to 5 years after project balance or longer if audits are ongoing).

17. Frequently asked points

1. **Who can apply?** Only Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) as defined under EU Recommendation 2003/361/EC are eligible to apply. Applicants must be established in an EU Member State or EEA country.
2. **Can a team include non-SME partners?** Yes. Universities, research centres, public bodies, and large enterprises may participate as associated partners. However, they are not eligible to receive funding under this Open Call.
3. **Can the same SME submit multiple proposals?** No. Only one application by SME is allowed.
4. **Is collaboration between SMEs mandatory?** No. Applications may be submitted by a single SME or by a team of SMEs. Nevertheless, collaboration and interregional partnerships are strongly encouraged.
5. **Is the use of the matchmaking platform mandatory?** No. The IH-MIE digital hub is optional but strongly recommended. Its use may contribute positively to the evaluation under the collaboration and openness criteria.

6. **What if the LDR (Less Developed Region) status is unclear?** Applicants should use the official ERDF/I3 NUTS2 classification and provide supporting documentation. In case of doubt, the helpdesk should be contacted for clarification.
7. **What is the project duration?** All projects must have a duration of 12 months, starting on 01/01/2027 and ending on 31/12/2027. No extensions will be considered.
8. **Can the project be modified after submission or during implementation?** Minor adjustments may be allowed during implementation, subject to approval by the assigned mentor. Any change must not affect the project objectives, TRL pathway, eligibility, or overall scope.
9. **What is the required TRL level?** Projects must start at TRL 6 and demonstrate a credible and realistic pathway to reach up to TRL 9 by the end of the project.
10. **How is funding provided?** Funding is awarded as a lump sum and paid in instalments linked to milestone achievement: pre-financing, interim, and final payment, subject to approval of deliverables and reports.
11. **Is co-funding required?** No. The programme provides 100% funding of the approved lump sum amount.
12. **What happens if milestones are not achieved?** Failure to demonstrate sufficient progress or to meet required deliverables may result in payment reduction, suspension, or termination of the Sub-Grant Agreement.
13. **What subcontracting rules apply?** Subcontracting is allowed if justified, limited, and offering best value for money. Core activities must remain with the SME(s).
14. **Can equipment be purchased?** Yes, if necessary for project implementation. Equipment costs are typically considered on a depreciation basis and only for the duration of the project use.

18. Contacts and helpdesk

IHMIE Open Call Helpdesk: info@ihmie.eu

Questions will be accepted until two business days before the call deadline. Answers might be published in a public **Q&A** (anonymised), ensuring equal treatment.

19. Annex 1. Less Developed Regions.

According to COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION (EU) 2021/1130 of 5 July 2021 setting out the list of regions eligible for funding from the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund Plus and of Member States eligible for funding from the Cohesion Fund for the period 2021-2027.¹

BE34 Prov. Luxembourg (BE)	FRY1 Guadeloupe	PL52 Opolskie
BG31 Северозападен (Severozapaden)	FRY3 Guyane	PL61 Kujawsko-pomorskie
BG32 Северен централен (Severen tsentralen)	FRY4 La Réunion	PL62 Warmińsko-mazurskie
BG33 Североизточен (Severoiztochen)	FRY5 Mayotte	PL63 Pomorskie
BG34 Югоизточен (Yugoiztochen)	HR03 Jadranska Hrvatska	PL71 Łódzkie
BG42 Южен централен (Yuzhen tsentralen)	HR04 Kontinentalna Hrvatska	PL72 Świętokrzyskie
CZ04 Severozápad	ITF2 Molise	PL81 Lubelskie
CZ05 Severovýchod	ITF3 Campania	PL82 Podkarpackie
CZ07 Střední Morava	ITF4 Puglia	PL84 Podlaskie
CZ08 Moravskoslezsko	ITF5 Basilicata	PL92 Mazowiecki regionalny
EL41 Βόρειο Αιγαίο (Voreio Aigaio)	ITF6 Calabria	PT11 Norte
EL43 Κρήτη (Kriti)	ITG1 Sicilia	PT16 Centro (PT)
EL51 Ανατολική Μακεδονία, Θράκη (Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki)	ITG2 Sardegna	PT18 Alentejo
EL52 Κεντρική Μακεδονία (Kentriki Makedonia)	LV00 Latvija	PT20 Região Autónoma dos Açores
EL53 Δυτική Μακεδονία (Dytiki Makedonia)	LT02 Vidurio ir vakarų Lietuvos regionas	PT30 Região Autónoma da Madeira
EL54 Ήπειρος (Ipeiros)	HU12 Pest	RO11 Nord-Vest
EL61 Θεσσαλία (Thessalia)	HU21 Közép-Dunántúl	RO12 Centru
EL62 Ιόνια Νησιά (Ionia Nisia)	HU22 Nyugat-Dunántúl	RO21 Nord-Est
EL63 Δυτική Ελλάδα (Dytiki Ellada)	HU23 Dél-Dunántúl	RO22 Sud-Est
EL64 Στερεά Ελλάδα (Sterea Ellada)	HU31 Észak-Magyarország	RO31 Sud - Muntenia

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021D1130>

EL65 Πελοπόννησος (Peloponnisos)	HU32 Észak-Alföld	RO41 Sud-Vest Oltenia
ES42 Castilla-La Mancha	HU33 Dél-Alföld	RO42 Vest
ES43 Extremadura	PL21 Małopolskie	SI03 Vzhodna Slovenija
ES61 Andalucía	PL22 Śląskie	SK02 Západné Slovensko
ES63 Ciudad Autónoma de Ceuta	PL42 Zachodniopomorskie	SK03 Stredné Slovensko
ES64 Ciudad Autónoma de Melilla	PL43 Lubuskie	SK04 Východné Slovensko

20. Annex 2. Submission sections.

1. **Project type.**
 - Single SME.
 - SMEs Team.
2. **Legal name.**
3. **Contact person mail.**
4. **Website.**
5. **Phone number.**
6. **Project staff.**
7. **C-Level Management.**
8. **Budget.**
9. **Selected IH-MIE Challenge**
 - Fuel cell cost and durability
 - Refuelling Infrastructure
 - Supply Chain and Logistics
 - Integration with other mobility solutions
 - Hydrogen storage
 - Hydrogen distribution
10. **Project summary.**
11. **Published idea on IH-MIE digital hub?**
12. **Innovation, State of the Art & Technical Soundness**
13. **TRL and Development Pathway**
14. **Programme Alignment and Relevance**
15. **Work Plan & Milestone logic**
16. **Risk Management**
17. **Expected economic, environmental and market impact of the solution**
18. **Desired training.**
 - Design for manufacturing
 - Industrial-grade prototyping
 - Supply-chain readiness
 - Quality systems
 - Safety standards
 - Performance validation and stress-testing
 - Material compatibility with H2
 - Functional safety
 - Go-to-market strategies
 - IP management and tech-transfer strategies
 - EU regulatory frameworks for H2 mobility infrastructure
 - European Programme for Research and innovation
 - Other
19. **Desired business coaching or support.**
 - Company Benchmarking

- Blue Ocean Strategy
- Customer journey
- Go-to-Market design
- Redefine unique value proposition (USP)
- Business model optimisation
- Investor pitch & pitch deck review
- Environmental and societal impact
- Internationalisation & market expansion
- Leadership, team scaling & organisational development
- Other

20. Desired technical coaching or support.

- Resolve key technical blockers
- Prototype optimisation and performance improvement
- Testing, validation and experimental planning
- Safety, certification and compliance readiness
- Simulation, modelling and digital twin support
- Sustainability and life-cycle assessment
- Environmental and durability testing
- Control systems, instrumentation and electrical integration
- Smart sensing, mechatronics and autonomous systems integration
- Other

21. Summary PDF.

22. Optional Supporting information.



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