

Western Balkans Innovation Vouchers Call

**POLICY ANSWERS project -"R&I POLICY making,
implementation ANd Support in the WEsteRn BalkanS"**

Project basics

Project title	POLICY ANSWERS: “R&I POLICY making, implementation ANd Support in the WEsteRn BalkanS”
Project funding	Coordination and Support Action under Horizon Europe WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-06-01 Support for R&I policy making in the Western Balkans ; Grant Agreement 10105887
Project duration	48 months: March 2022 – February 2026
Project partnership	14 partners + wide stakeholder network
Project contact	policy-answers@westernbalkans-infohub.eu
Project website	www.westernbalkans-infohub.eu
Project social media	@WBInfoHub

The POLICY ANSWERS consortium

Coordinator: Centre for Social Innovation from Austria

Other beneficiaries from:

- Albania
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Kosovo*
- Montenegro
- North Macedonia
- Serbia
- Austria, Croatia, Germany and Italy



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* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Introduction to the scheme – Western Balkans Innovation Vouchers

Western Balkans Innovation Vouchers (IV) are a simple direct financial incentive used by companies to cover part of the costs of the services provided by research and development (R&D) organizations, thus intensifying the volume and dynamics of the development of products and services as well as their placement on the market.

The goal of the IV is to encourage cooperation between enterprises and academic and scientific research institutions in the direction of implementing innovation activities; thus, the enterprises will increase their competitiveness.

Innovation Vouchers can be awarded in the field of science and technology with the priority given to green and digital transition within the evaluation criteria.

The Innovation Vouchers scheme is aligned with the Smart Specialization Strategies for the Western Balkans (WB) economies from 2023 until 2027, which focuses on their respective main priority domain.

<https://www.westernbalkans-fohub.eu/documents/smart-specialisation-development-in-the-wbs-state-of-play-and-jrc-support/>

Introduction to the scheme – Western Balkans Innovation Vouchers

Innovation Vouchers can be used to transfer scientific, technological or innovative knowledge that is new to the company or to solve a technical/technological problem that will be identified by the company.

- Development of new or improvement (in terms of function and quality) of existing products, processes or services
- Proof of concept;
- Feasibility study;
- Production of laboratory prototypes;
- Manufacturing demonstrational prototypes;
- Different types of tests (in laboratory, production plant);
- Validation of technology;
- Validation of new or improved products, processes or services;
- Development and introduction of special software for a product or process (within the product development);
- IPR and technology transfer.

Eligibility criteria for Applicants

- Legal business entity registered as a micro, small or medium-sized company (users of the Innovation Vouchers) and registered in any of the WB economies (at least 51% privately owned), incorporated under the current respective company law, registered at any WB Business Registration Agency and located in the WB.
- Geographic eligibility: Western Balkans economies: North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- The applicant may receive a maximum of one Innovation Voucher under this public call
- More than one application for an Innovation Voucher can be submitted by the same applicant referring to the public call, only the highest scored application will be awarded
- Applicant must be matched with previously found public Service Provider and submit all application documents in the name of both entities.

Service provider – eligibility criteria

- Eligible entities are the public sector Higher Education Institutions (HEI) or public sector R&D organizations (PROs) (at least 51% directly or indirectly state-owned), registered in any of the WB economies, incorporated under the current respective law on Higher Education Institutions and/or PROs and accredited by the relevant Ministries in the respective WB economy.
- Companies registered in any of the WB economies are companies that are predominantly owned by the public sector, Higher Education Institutions or PROs (50.1% or more). Specific areas of use (R&D, technology development, testing, etc.)
- **The applicant and the service provider must be from two different WB economies.**

Financial aspects of the WB Innovation Vouchers 1/2

- The total budget for this public call is EUR 240,000
- A single voucher can cover up to a maximum of 80% (eighty percent) of the total costs of a service provided by the HEI/PRO, up to maximum amount of EUR 8,000
- Value-added tax (VAT) is a cost that is not eligible for financing but is calculated in the total amount. The recipient company should additionally cover the cost of VAT if applicable
- The recipient of the voucher is obliged to co-finance the remaining amount of the total costs of the service, which is at least 20% of the total amount of the invoice, including VAT of the total costs.

Financial aspects of the WB Innovation Vouchers 2/2

In the contract signed between FITD and the companies will be pointed out the precise amount that FITD should pay to the service provider.

The support granted to business entities through Innovation Vouchers, regardless of their legal status and the way they are financed, will be arranged under the de minimis aid regime ¹ (state aid of small value), so the recipients are obliged to act in accordance with the Regulation on the List of State Aid Rules in the respective economies.

¹ De minimis is a legal principle which allows for matters that are small scale or of insufficient importance to be exempted from a rule or requirement.” <https://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/legal/glossary/de-minimis>

Validity period of the Innovation Vouchers

- Innovation Vouchers must be used by the recipient within a period of up to 9 months from the date of the contract being signed among the Fund for Innovation and Technology Development – North Macedonia (FITD) and the recipient of the voucher
- The period can be extended of one month only under exceptional circumstances based on the request of the company if the FITD assesses that the reasons stated in the request are justified.

Ineligible costs for the Innovation Vouchers

- Repayment of interest or debt of another party
- Costs and commissions for past or possible future losses or debts
- Coverage of losses due to currency exchange, fees and penalties
- Expenses for entertainment and catering
- Creation of Business plans and economic appraisals
- Sales activities
- Standard website or mobile application development
- Staff recruitment costs (costs for publishing an advertisement, commissions from employment agencies, costs related to selection of candidates, etc.) and migration costs
- Purchase of land or buildings, including renovation

Ineligible costs for the Innovation Vouchers

- Export activities (costs directly related to the export of products, by establishing and operation of a distribution network, etc., or for other current costs of the applicant related to export activities);
- Annual patent maintenance fees (with the exception of well-justified cases assessed as an allowable cost when evaluating the project proposals);
- Costs for consulting services provided by the owner/s of the recipient company;
- Rental of business premises;
- Costs for procurement of equipment
- Costs of carrying out activities previously funded by other sources are not eligible for funding.

Application process

- **FITD web site** at the specific page - Open Calls, Western Balkan Innovation Vouchers
- **Web page of the project-** <https://www.westernbalkans-infohub.eu/calls/western-balkans-innovation-voucher-scheme/>

On Download documents, you can download all the needed documents for the Application.

- Project Application Form, with included Statement of the Company-Applicant
- Financial Offer

* They should be filled in, printed, signed and scanned.

* All documents should be filled and submitted in English language.

Submitting is on the "Apply" button on the same page, and will automatically direct you to the application form, where you have to upload the documents.

Document Explanation 1/2

- The Innovation Voucher application should be completed, printed and signed in a determined form by the FITD, scanned in PDF format
- Current status for the company (legal form)
 - applicant issued by the respective institution in the WB economies (e.g., Central Registry in North Macedonia) of the respective economy,
 - The document should not be older than 6 (six) months, from the deadline for submission of the application stated in the public call

Document Explanation 2/2

Financial offer/s from the service provider/s, signed, printed and scanned in PDF format which must contain:

1. Specification of the service according to the need stated in the Innovation Voucher application;
2. Name of the service provider/s and contact person responsible for the requested service;
3. Financial offer for services with value-added tax (VAT) expressed as a separate cost, if applicable;
4. Deadline for completion of the requested service;

In one application, the applicant company can include a maximum of two service providers.

Evaluation criteria and approval of the Innovation Vouchers

All received applications that have passed the administrative check will be appraised by an Evaluation Committee consisting of three members.

All received applications will be evaluated according to the following evaluation criteria by the Evaluation Committee:

- Relevance of the service to the objectives of the Call (20/100)
- Level of innovation (30/100)
- Quality of the proposal (30/100)
- Impact on Green and/or Digital Transition (20/100)

The highest-ranking applications will be awarded funding until all the available budget will be absorbed

Payment modality

FITD will make two payment instalments directly to the bank account of the service provider:

- An advance payment of 30% of the awarded amount of the IV once:
 - the contract for awarding the IV is signed
 - the company submits a proof of payment of min. 20% of the total service amount (including the VAT amount of the total costs of the advance payment (if applicable))

A final payment of 70% of the awarded amount of the IV once:

- the company submits a confirmation that the service for which the Innovation Voucher has been granted is delivered to the company
- the company submits a final report

According to this information, Evaluation Committee confirms that the Innovation Voucher has been diligently implemented.

General data protection and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

- General information on the data protection is laid out in the in the Innovation Vouchers guideline for applicants in the 13 section - General data protection.
- The beneficiary will process personal data under the Agreement in compliance with the applicable EU, international and national law on data protection (in particular, Regulation 2016/679).
- The company (recipient) and the service provider should manage any IP that may arise in the framework of the implementation of the Innovation Voucher.

- The deadline for submitting the application is: 20 Nov 2024, 16:00h (CET)
- Don't wait until the last day!
- Additional information can be found on the FAQ website under the following link:
<https://www.westernbalkans-infohub.eu/news/western-balkans-innovation-vouchers-a-policy-answers-pilot-programme-faq/>
- Or ask us by email: innovationvouchers@fitr.mk

**THANK
YOU!**