

**Programme:** EU-HORIZON 2020 Excellent science - 2014-2020

**Call:**

**Specific Challenge:**

The lack of access to skills, to latest knowledge and capacity to manage innovation processes effectively, have been identified as major barriers for innovation in SMEs. Individual SMEs are at a disadvantage to recruit specialised knowledge as they often lack Europe-wide networking connections and do not tend to have established brands as large enterprises. Enterprise-led mobility programmes, supporting enterprises in recruiting expertise, show a high level of satisfaction and return on investment. This methodology is not currently used at European level and this enterprise-led approach is to be further developed and tested, using the first experiences of this pilot action financed by the work programme 2016-2017. This action complements Marie Skłodowska Curie actions (MSCA) which focus on developing research careers, by providing additional work opportunities for experienced researchers in innovating SMEs.

This action is a continuation of the pilot action, which is part of the Innovation in SMEs work programme 2016-2017. The first "innovation associates" supported by the 2016-2017 pilot started working in SMEs as of September 2017 onwards. The detailed provisions and the conditions of the action in 2019-2020 are therefore subject to revision based on the conclusions from the first pilot, including also the findings of the accompanying study to INNOSUP-02-2016 that is conducted in parallel to INNOSUP-02-2016.

**Scope:**

This SME-led pilot is an innovation capacity building action to provide a grant at European level to visionary[1] SMEs that can demonstrate that the skills required for a particular innovation idea are not within reach for them at national level (for example because the required skills are not available or not affordable for SMEs). SMEs are supported to employ a highly skilled experienced researcher (referred to as an 'innovation associate') for a continuous period of one year. The innovation associate's task will be to explore, during the course of his/her contract, the potential of their innovative idea and turn it into an innovation project.

The evaluation of proposals will focus on the demonstrated benefits of recruiting transnationally i.e. the impact for the SME to get access to skills not available on the national labour market; the excellence and impact of the innovative idea, as well as the coherence and effectiveness of the recruitment plan, which should offer the same opportunities for male/female candidates.

SMEs that will receive a grant will be obliged to advertise their vacancy on EURAXESS, unless a contract with an innovation associate has already been signed in line with the provisions above. They are also encouraged to publish the vacancy notice on any other relevant platform or media, with a clear indication that the grant was awarded.

SMEs that are awarded a grant are obliged to employ an "innovation associate" for a continuous period of one year[2]. The innovation associate's tasks shall be to identify

the potential of the company's innovation idea with the objective and turn it into an innovation project and - hopefully - a continuation of the employment of the innovation associate. During the period covered by the grant, the Innovation Associate must work exclusively on the project described in the grant agreement.

During these 12 months of employment, every associate is requested to participate in a core training programme on industrial innovation and business management[3]. Also during that period, SMEs get financial support to implement a training and development plan specifically for the associate, tailored to the needs of the associate and the enterprise to make the associate fully operational in the company. Proposals shall outline how the proposed tailored training contributes to this end and why it is necessary within the context of the innovation idea and the tasks of the innovation associate.

In line with the orientation of the action and with the aim to accelerate the integration of the associate in the company's staff, the following costs shall be eligible for reimbursement under the grant:

Personnel costs of the associate.

Relocation costs of the associate, which may include removal cost, travel cost of the associate and his/her immediate family (if applicable) to the new place of employment, visa cost (if applicable), translation cost of certificates (if applicable), a temporary transition allowance to cover extra costs upon arrival in the place of employment, cost for the relocation in the country of origin after the project, as well as other clearly justified expenditure directly related to relocation.

Travel and subsistence costs of the associate to the core training programme and travel and subsistence for tailored training (as described in the personal development plan). Travel cost and subsistence for the supervisor may be eligible for up to two training sessions.

Travel and subsistence cost for the innovation associate and the supervisor in the enterprise to one kick-off meeting in Brussels (one day), organised by the European Commission[4].

External cost for the tailored training of the associate (for example course fees or other cost required to implement the training and development plan). Activities that fall under normal induction training[5] for any new employee in a company will not be eligible under this call.

Personnel cost may include allowances that are in line with the beneficiary's standard practices (for example child education or housing allowances).

Other costs like recruitment costs, equipment costs or travel costs to action-specific workshops by the supervisor in the enterprise are covered by the flat rate indirect cost.

Any cost not directly related to the employment and training of the innovation associate - for example cost of research, dissemination or promotion activities and other cost relating to the actual implementation of the innovation idea/project - are

not eligible under this call.

For the call in 2020, please note that this topic will take the form of lump sums as defined in Commission Decision C(2017)7151 of 27 October 2017[6]. Details of the lump sum funding pilot scheme are published on the Funding & Tenders Portal[7] together with the specific Model Grant Agreement for Lump Sums[8] applicable.

It is intended to support an indicative total number of 80-100 assignments from the indicative budget. These will be spread over two cut-offs, one for projects starting in 2019 and one for projects starting in 2020.

The following criteria will have to be met by the associate: i) PhD holder (or equivalent), ii) an expertise in line with the job requirements as outlined in the vacancy notice; iii) compliance with transnational mobility criteria as defined in the mobility rule of the Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA)[9].

SMEs having been awarded a grant for this action at the occasion of previous calls for the European SME innovation associate pilot under the work programmes 2016-2017 and 2018-2020, are not eligible.

The preferred start date of the innovation associates' employment is in September of the year following the call opening in order to align the timing of the action with the academic year. The execution of the action will start on the starting date of the associates' employment (exact date to be determined during the grant preparation phase).

In case of non-execution, the Commission reserves the right to terminate the grant agreement according to the provisions of the General mono-beneficiary grant agreement for the Horizon 2020 programme.

The innovation associates are expected to be offered employment contracts or equivalent by the hosting SMEs. In return, the innovation associates must commit to a full-time position, for the full duration of the grant.

#### Expected Impact:

Test that an innovative idea can feed into an innovation strategy and can lead to subsequent research and innovation projects once SMEs have access to the right skills;

Test that public intervention at European level can support innovating SMEs to overcome challenges in accessing scarce skills through a transnational mobility mechanism;

Increased innovation capacity for SMEs, including increased participation in R&I projects and staff employed in R&I;

Increased awareness as well as skills of researchers in innovation management and business environment, through the placement and training.

## Cross-cutting Priorities:

### Gender

[1]Vision: 'A statement about what the organisation wants to achieve in terms of innovation. The vision should set a direction and a challenge that can inspire persons to commit and work towards, be sufficiently ambitious and not constrained by the organisation's current abilities, provide a target against which progress can be measured.' See Innovation management standard CEN/TS 16555-1 (July 2013)

[2]Subject to agreement between the SME and the innovation associate, the employment contract may exceed 12 months. However, the grant awarded under this action will only cover the first 12 months of the employment, starting from the entry into force of the grant agreement.

[3]See in 'Other actions'

[4]The organisation of such a meeting is subject to confirmation by the European Commission at a later stage.

[5]For example, team building, introduction to the company's IT tools, structures, personnel cost of existing SME staff acting as mentor, etc.

[6]<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/legal/lum...>

[7]<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/grant...>

[8]<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/mga/lumpsum/h20...>

[9]Reference to the MSCA mobility rule will be provided at call opening.

### Topic/s:

Agriculture, rural development, fisheries

Biotechnology

Construction, civil engineering, infrastructures

Consumer products and services

Cultural and creative economy

Earth and related environmental sciences

Energy

Engineering and technology

Food and beverages

Health

Information and communication technology (ICT)

Security

Space

Transport and mobility

Co-funding type:

**Co-funding type:** € euro

**Co-funding euro maximum:** 4 000 000,00 €

**Opening date:** 03 Sep 2019

**Deadline date:** 15 Jan 2020