

Open Call

Call Text



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1 Introduction

This document provides an introduction and summary of the EENergy open call. Two further documents are available providing detailed information for SMEs interested in applying to the call, and for EEN advisors who are supporting SMEs to apply. All interested parties are encouraged to read the corresponding additional guidelines to find out all relevant information about the open call.

1.1 About EENergy

The climate crisis is becoming continually more severe. Aiming to address this topic, the EU has implemented major measures such as the REPowerEU plan, to rapidly reduce dependence on non-European and non-renewable energy sources, and the Net-Zero Industry Act, to accelerate the transition to a carbon neutral economy. As a result, the topic of energy efficiency and sustainability, especially in SMEs, continues to take an ever more prominent and vital role in reaching Europe's climate goals, such as the Green Deal Initiative and the fit for 55 framework. The European climate law sets out a legal obligation to reduce EU emissions by at least 5%. EU countries are working on new legislation to achieve this goal and make the EU climate-neutral by 2050.

SMEs form a critical part of the EU economy, accounting for over half of Europe's GDP, and representing 99% of all businesses. In this sense, SMEs have a major role to play in Europe reaching its energy efficiency and sustainability goals. While SMEs have the flexibility and innovative nature required to adopt new technologies, processes, and approaches to improving efficiency, the time and financial constraints associated with this transition can be an obstacle to widespread adoption. The EENergy project aims to address these challenges, and to systematically increase the competitiveness of European SMEs, by providing a framework for implementing the measures necessary to reach these goals.

The EENergy project has been funded by the EU's Single Market Program (SMP), to support SMEs to define an action plan to improve their energy efficiency performance, and to carry out this action plan. The goal of EENergy is to support at least 1800 SMEs to identify their energy efficiency needs and define a corresponding action plan for solving these needs. A maximum of €9 Million will be provided to at least 900 SMEs across countries participating in the SMP, allowing them to increase their resilience to energy price fluctuations and energy supply chain disruptions, while also increasing their sustainability and reducing their environmental impact. This direct financial support, realised through investments in technological solutions and access to dedicated consultancy and upskilling expertise, aims to lead to an efficiency performance improvement of at least 5% for the participating SMEs.

EENergy will be executed by, and with the support of, the **Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)** which, since 2008, has been supporting European SMEs to grow, scale, and reach their business goals. The EEN acts within the policy goals defined in the SME and EU Industry Strategy with a core focus on sustainability. The EEN is the world's largest SME support network, present in 39 countries in Europe with around 300 publicly financed regional support nodes for SMEs offering services across several topics including innovation, sustainability, digitalisation, internationalisation, and access to finance, all of which shall help SMEs become active in and beyond the EU Single Market. Within the network, specialised sustainability advisors support SMEs on the topics of green transition and energy efficiency. These advisors, along with experts from EEN's dedicated experts on Renewable Energies and Energy Intensive Industries, will work hand in hand with SMEs to develop and carry out an energy efficiency action plan. Through this direct support, EENergy aspires to provide valuable sustainability advice, not just to those SMEs selected for funding, but for every SME that participates in the EENergy process, by enabling access to critical expertise and by providing a streamlined process for European SMEs to advance in

their green transformation. All eligible SMEs applying to the call, regardless of the outcome of the funding selection process, will continue to be supported by their sustainability advisor and receive a detailed benchmark to identify their weaknesses and areas of opportunity.

As part of a pilot, EENergy additionally aims to understand the effectiveness of the financial grants provided. For this purpose, the World Bank is cooperating with the EENergy consortium and the European Commission to conduct a rigorous impact evaluation. The core impact evaluation question is the identification of the additional impact of the financial support on firms' energy efficiency, as well understanding in which contexts and for which firms this support generates bigger impact, in order to improve and identify complementary types of support to be promoted in the future. The analysis will be carried out by experts from the World Bank.

1.2 Implementation

EENergy is being implemented through this open call, which aims to support at least 1800 SMEs through services to be provided by the EEN sustainability support services. 900 of these eligible SMEs will receive direct financial support (funded beneficiaries) in addition to the regular services, with the remaining SMEs continuing to receive advisory services (regular beneficiaries). To ensure a fair geographical spread across eligible countries, the applicants will be targeted to include a minimum representation of 2% from each SMP country, and at least 20% of SMEs will be active in energy intensive.

Meaningful financial support to improve energy efficiency outcomes is limited and thus will be allocated in a fair and transparent process amongst equally eligible applicants to finance energy efficiency activities for up to **€10,000**. These funds are provided by the EU SMP and hence not subject to state aid rules. In total, **€9 million** will be allocated amongst funded beneficiaries.

Table 1 displays the indicative budget for the action.

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Total budget of the open call | Number of funded beneficiaries | Financial support per SME |
| €9,000,000 | At least 900 | Up to €10,000 |
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Table 1: Indicative budget distribution for the EENergy Open Calls

The open call is open from 2nd February 2024 and will close on 15th April 2024 at 17:00 CET. Following the call closure, all applications will be checked for eligibility, followed by the selection process and contracting with the funded beneficiaries, after which the implementation of the action plans can begin. The planned schedule of the call is shown in Figure 1. The EENergy Open Call is open to any SME incorporated before 01.01.2023, that is operating and registered in a country that is part of the EU's Single Market Program.

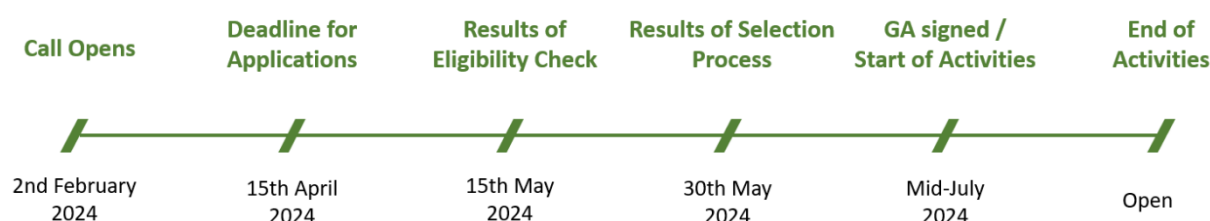


Figure 1: Expected timings for key milestones in the EENergy Open Call

1.3 Eligible Activities

1.3.1 Financial Support to Selected Eligible SMEs

Financial support of up to **€10,000** will be allocated to the funded beneficiaries. These funds provided by EENergy must be used for the implementation of actions resulting in improved energy efficiency for the beneficiary SME. The contractual aim of the activities is to achieve a 5% reduction in energy consumption. These actions must fall within one or several of the following three categories:

A. Investment: This category covers the implementation, acquisition, purchase, and/or installation of new software, hardware, equipment, or other technologies. Some examples include:

- Contributions to the purchase and installation of renewable energy systems such as solar panels, wind turbines, invertors, storage systems or any other relevant equipment.
- The implementation of energy optimisation / management software on a production line.
- The replacement of an old boiler with a modern one using more efficient technologies.
- The replacement of outdated power supply units with modern and effective ones.

B. Consultancy: This category covers advisory & consultancy services related to the identification and implementation of energy efficiency improvements, as well as energy audits. Some examples include:

- Performing a detailed needs analysis for the SME beneficiary and defining a detailed investment roadmap for energy efficiency improvement.
- Performing a technical consultation to identify areas for energy efficiency improvement and suitable technologies on the market.
- Execution of an energy audit.

C. Skills & Training: This category covers access to trainings, courses, classes, and programs for education and upskilling of employees in energy efficiency topics. Some specific examples include:

- Training for employees on best practices, awareness, regulatory aspects, and behavioural change related to energy efficiency.
- Qualification of employees to become certified energy auditors.
- Training on energy efficiency technologies, digital tools for energy analysis.

A mixture of the activities across the three types is possible, with overall budgets larger than €10.000, but the overall grant funding to be provided will not exceed **€10,000 per SME**. Hence, an SME may either apply for financing 100% of an activity with a budget up to €10.000, or it may propose a larger activity with a larger budget, to be co-financed from alternative private sources.

The planned activities must be designed to target an energy reduction of at least 5%. To fulfil the contractual obligations, this reduction will be measured in terms of energy consumption in kWh (or kWh-equivalent units provided by the SME) and will be measured within the appropriate scope of the activity performed. Depending on the proposed activity, such an appropriate scope could be, for example: the whole company; a single department of the company; a single building, where all or part of the company activities are carried out; a specific production line (including plants and subsidiary equipment); a single piece of equipment or a set of equipment; and a single activity (in the case of training, skills, or consultancy).

1.3.2 Advisory Support to All Eligible SMEs

Independent of the financial support, all eligible applicants shall benefit from all EEN advisory services which support increased energy efficiency activity implementation (e.g., innovation, sustainability, resilience, digitalisation, internationalisation and business partnering, patenting and standardisation, access to finance). All services will be provided in line with the needs of the company. As a qualified, public, neutral, and not for profit support structure, all network nodes provide individualised strategic support on sustainability via sustainability advisors. This advice is **available free of charge** to any eligible applicant under the EENergy call.

An innovative product will be offered to all eligible applicants/, including both funded and regular beneficiaries: the so-called “**benchmark reports**”. The application process for the program includes a detailed feedback mechanism that is activated following the submission of the application. Eligible applicants will receive a comprehensive report based on the information provided during the application stage. Moreover, in addition to this initial report, the firm will receive three additional follow up benchmark reports. To access these reports, the firm needs to provide further information with a focus on its energy consumption. These reports offer a comparative statistical analysis of the firm’s energy efficiency performance against others in the same size category, region, and industry. The analysis is tailored to provide insights into the firm’s position in relation to its peers, allowing to identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement with the EEN advisors. The reports shall encourage informed decision-making and strategic adjustments in the operations of all eligible SMEs.

1.4 Tracking Changes in EE Outcomes

A core aspect of EENergy is the impact evaluation study which will run in parallel to the execution of the open call and the activities implementation. This study aims to generate learning for future programming and funding measures. To serve the needs of the study, the final allocation of funds to beneficiaries is conducted through a random selection process amongst eligible actors. This process ensures fairness (each eligible candidate is treated in same manner) and allows a rigorous evaluation as the funded and regular beneficiaries are ex-ante comparable across many characteristics. The process will help identifying the effectiveness and efficiency of the financial investments and will foster a culture of continuous learning and innovation in program design and delivery. The relevant outcome data to conduct the impact evaluation will be collected in the course of the program implementation and after its completion.