



Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
and International Cooperation

# CEI Know-how Exchange Programme (KEP) Call for Proposals 2026

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*Financed by the CEI Fund at the EBRD, contributed by Italy*

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Deadline for application submission: **Friday, 11 September 2026  
12:00 noon (midday) CEST**

Applicants need to carefully observe the criteria and obligations set by this Call before submitting their proposals. Rejection clauses will apply automatically as explained over the text.

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## 1. Background information

### 1.1. The Central European Initiative and the CEI Fund at the EBRD

The [Central European Initiative \(CEI\)](#) was founded in Budapest on 11 November 1989. It is a regional intergovernmental forum committed to supporting European integration and sustainable development through cooperation between and among its Member States and with the European Union, international and regional organisations as well as with other public or private institutions and non-governmental organisations. While acting as a platform for political dialogue, the CEI has developed a strong operational, result-oriented approach to regional cooperation. It combines multilateral diplomacy and fund and project management. The CEI currently counts 17 Member States: Albania, Belarus<sup>1</sup>, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine. In 1992, the Italian Government established the CEI Fund at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), acknowledging the great opportunity the newly created multilateral development bank presented for the objectives of the CEI. The Fund was created “to assist the Bank’s countries of operation in Central and Eastern Europe in their economic and social transformation process.” The KEP is solely financed by the CEI Fund at the EBRD contributed by Italy through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI).

### 1.2. The CEI Know-how Exchange Programme (KEP)

Launched in 2004, the [KEP](#) is a development instrument aimed at supporting the transfer of expertise, best practices and benchmarks from public/private entities in the EU to peers in the non-EU countries within the CEI region. The Programme is primarily aimed at contributing to securing stable, prosperous, and well-functioning democratic societies on a steady path towards the EU. By co-financing capacity building and technical assistance projects, the KEP offers grants to help non-EU members to advance towards EU standards and policies. The KEP focuses on areas of intervention where EU CEI countries demonstrate strong-rooted experience, and where beneficiary states exhibit the strongest need for assistance according to the areas of cooperation outlined in the [CEI Plan of Action 2024-2026](#).

## 2. Rules for this Call for Proposals

### 2.1 Available amount and general rules

The overall indicative amount for this Call for Proposals is up to 550,000 EUR (five hundred fifty thousand Euro) made available through the CEI Fund at the EBRD, entirely financed by the Italian Government. The CEI reserves the right not to award all available funds, to cancel the Call for Proposals and reject all applications at any time prior to the awarding of grants, without thereby incurring any liability. Up to 15 (fifteen) days before the deadline for submission of applications, the CEI reserves the right to amend this Call for Proposals by issuing addenda.

Any addendum published at <https://application.cei.int/application/kep-2026/> will become an integral part of the Call for Proposals. If a project proposal has been submitted before the issuing of the last addenda, the applicant has the right to withdraw or substitute its project proposal within the deadline for the submission of the project proposals.

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<sup>1</sup> According to a decision by the CEI Member States, Belarus has been suspended of its rights of representation in the CEI as of 25 March 2022. Thus, within this Call for Proposals public/private entities registered in the country are not eligible to participate.

## 2.2 Eligibility criteria

Applications must fulfil all the following eligibility criteria:

- Project objectives
- Applicants
- Know-how providers
- Beneficiaries
- Project activities
- Costs, CEI grant ceiling and percentage of the total project cost

The CEI electronic submission system helps detect basic eligibility problems, e.g. issues related to the type and number of required partners or their place of establishment. Since the eligibility rules cannot be fully automated, the applicant is to be fully aware of those rules. The Call requires the participation of at least two partners per proposal. At least one know-how provider and one know-how beneficiary. The applicant institution can coincide with a know-how provider or with a know-how beneficiary institution.

### 2.2.1 Project objectives

This Call for Proposals intends to support projects aimed at boosting the EU integration of CEI Member States that are EU candidates by accelerating reforms and adopting the *acquis communautaire*, in the sectors outlined in the [CEI Plan of Action 2024-2026](#). All project objectives stated in the Application Form must be well defined, attainable and linked to tangible project activities. Overambitious objectives, not directly linked to activities of the project or impossible for post-evaluation, are likely to be poorly scored.

### 2.2.2 Applicants

The applicant institution can be registered in all CEI Member States.

It might coincide with a know-how provider or with a know-how beneficiary institution.

- If the applicant coincides with a know-how provider, it shall be registered in an EU CEI Member State, namely: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech republic, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.
- If the applicant coincides with a know-how beneficiary, it shall be registered in a non-EU CEI Member State, namely: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Ukraine.

The following types of applicants are eligible to apply: all public and private sector bodies (not individuals) as well as international and non-governmental organisations operating in the public interest. The applicant shall demonstrate and give evidence of experience in project management. The applicant is expected to be directly responsible for the management and implementation of the project for its entire duration. Preference will be given to projects displaying the ability of applicants to integrate or align project proposals into wider frameworks of related interventions.

### 2.2.3 Know-how providers

The know-how providers shall be registered in an EU CEI Member State, namely Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The following types of know-how providers are eligible: all public and private sector bodies (not individuals), international and non-governmental organisations operating in the public interest. The know-how provider shall prove to have a broad experience in the specific sector addressed by the project proposal.

### 2.2.4 Know-how beneficiaries

The know-how beneficiaries shall be registered in a non-EU CEI Member State, that are also EU candidates, namely: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia,

and Ukraine. The following types of know-how providers are eligible: all public and private sector bodies (not individuals). In case of more than one beneficiary, projects will be assessed on their potential to effectively and sustainably affect all beneficiaries, according to the overall budget and objectives. Whenever a project engages more than one beneficiary, the project is to address the know-how needs of all beneficiaries.

### 2.2.5 Project Activities

Project activities are to be designed to transfer know-how aimed supporting the beneficiary countries in their path towards the EU integration process. Types of eligible activities are on-the-job training, workshops, staff secondment, study visits, peer review missions, assistance in the preparation of strategic documents (e.g. development plans, reforms, strategic studies, etc.), technology transfer, technical and capacity building assistance. Applicants are requested to clearly state when the activity is expected to begin and end, how it will be organised, who will be responsible for its implementation, and the expected outputs in relation to the project objectives. Project activities are strongly recommended to include the organisation of a final event (e.g. conference, workshop or promotional gathering) aimed at disseminating and promoting the project outcomes to stakeholders, policy-makers and the wider public. The applicant shall also describe any planned follow-up activities after the official conclusion of the project. All project activities shall take place in the CEI region and the CEI shall approve any exceptions to this rule. The applicant is required to present a realistic and verifiable work plan and timetable. The project implementation phase can start as of 1 January 2027. The project duration should not exceed 24 (twenty-four) months, while the minimum duration is 6 (six) months.

### 2.2.6 Costs, CEI grant ceiling and percentage of the total project cost

The estimated total project budget as well as the requested CEI grant shall be Euro-denominated and clearly indicated in the application form and related Annex 1 and Annex 2. In principle, the CEI grant can be requested for any type of costs linked to the project implementation. The applicant is entirely responsible for the calculations leading to the outlined budget estimates including currency conversions, local taxes and levies. The CEI is not responsible for and will not reimburse currency rate variations, nor can the CEI be charged with potential shortages or financial consequences of exchange rate fluctuations and underestimation or disregard of national fiscal regulations by the applicant. Budget calculations in countries not using the Euro currency can take the exchange rate of the National Bank of their country on the day the application is submitted. The CEI grant will be transferred in Euro. The CEI will not be responsible for any depreciation of the transferred instalments of the CEI contribution. Any grant awarded under this Call for Proposals shall not exceed 50% (fifty per cent) of the total cost of a given project, and the maximum grant amount allocated to a single project cannot exceed 40,000 EUR (forty thousand Euros). Any application requesting more than the above-mentioned percentage and/or ceiling will be automatically rejected. The balance must be financed from the project partners' own resources or from other sources, including in-kind contributions. An in-kind contribution is a non-cash, other than monetary contribution or input which can be given a cash value. In-kinds are expenditures not giving rise to an actual payment: they can take the form of: (i) donation of goods or services, time or expertise, rather than cash or appreciated property; (ii) infrastructure support, office supplies support, equipment support, etc.; (iii) human resources of the applicant and/or project partners.

## 3. How to apply

### 3.1 Application Package

The CEI Application Package consists of:

- Online Application Form
- Annex 1 - Breakdown of costs
- Annex 2 - Co-financing scheme
- Annex 3 - Applicant's signature

It shall be completed in accordance with the instructions provided in this Call for Proposals and in the KEP 2026 Application Form Guidelines. The applicant is requested to complete the documents as carefully and as clearly as possible. Please note that:

- The assessment of the application will be based exclusively on the Application Form and Annexes submitted.
- The Application Form and Annexes must be completed in English.
- Incomplete applications and Annexes will be rejected.
- Under this Call for Proposals, applicants can submit one project proposal only.
- Handwritten Annexes will be rejected.

### 3.2 Submission procedure

Applications must be exclusively submitted electronically using the CEI Electronic Submission System accessible at <https://application.cei.int/application/kep-2026/>. Access to the CEI Electronic Submission System is subject to registration as a CEI user at <https://application.cei.int/wp-login.php?action=register>.

**Who?** Applications must be submitted by a representative/contact person of the applicant entity.

**How?** Once you have your CEI Login username and password you can start the submission process by logging in at <https://application.cei.int/wp-login.php> and accessing the CEI Electronic Submission System.

The CEI Electronic Submission System is an online wizard that guides you through the preparation of your proposal step by step. In order to allow an early preparation of the proposal, please note that the submission process consists of the following parts (additional information is available in the KEP 2026 Application Form Guidelines):

- Project description (be prepared with structured project information including title, implementation period, origin and background, summary and objectives, activities and workplan, results and impact).
- Contact data (be prepared with indication of the project applicant and partners, identification of know-how provider institution(s) and know-how beneficiary institution(s); brief descriptions for each partner, indication of project partners' previous cooperation experience - if applicable).
- Project visibility (be prepared with info on project promotion and dissemination, use of the CEI logo as well as the logo of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy - MAECI)
- Two financial Annexes (be prepared by downloading and filling-in Annex 1 with a breakdown of estimated costs, Annex 2 with co-financing scheme). *Please note that these two templates can be*

*downloaded in Excel format and shall be converted into PDF format by the applicant before uploading.*

- *Annex with signature of the applicant's legal representative/authorised legal representative (be prepared: download, fill-in, print and sign Annex 3 template in advance). Please note that this template can be downloaded in Word format and shall be scanned into PDF format by the applicant before uploading.*

**Please note that each Annex must be uploaded as a PDF file not exceeding 3MB size.**

Filled-in application forms can be saved during the submission procedure while they cannot be modified once they are submitted unless the Call is amended according to point 2.1. of the Call for Proposals. After call closure, the submission is prohibited, and proposals are locked.

### 3.3 Deadline and IT assistance

Applications must be submitted no later than Friday, 11 September 2026, 12:00 noon (midday) Central European Summer Time (CEST). IT assistance for submission and system-related issues is available from the launch of the Call until 48 hours before the application deadline, between 09:00 and 16:00 on weekdays and should be addressed exclusively to [kep@cei.int](mailto:kep@cei.int). IT assistance includes support with accessing the online application platform, resolving login or password issues, addressing system errors, and troubleshooting file upload or submission malfunctions. Applicants are strongly advised to submit their applications sufficiently in advance. The CEI cannot guarantee the availability or proper IT support services and troubleshooting in the final 48 hours before the deadline and cannot be held liable for technical issues occurring during that period.

### 3.4 After proposal submission

After proposal submission, the applicant will receive an email confirmation with the reference number assigned to the proposal. Should the applicant not receive the email confirmation within 5 minutes it is suggested to crosscheck the "junk mail" box. There is no further contact between the CEI and the applicants on the proposal until after the completion of the evaluation with the exception of the following cases:

- If the CEI needs to contact the applicant to clarify matters such as eligibility or to request additional information.
- In response to an enquiry or complaint made by the applicant.

## 4. Evaluation procedure

Project Proposals will be evaluated according to the following steps:

- STEP 1: Administrative check
- STEP 2: Eligibility check
- STEP 3: Evaluation of the Project Proposals

Please note that only proposals passing steps 1 and 2, will go on to step 3.

### 4.1 Administrative check

Project Proposals will be checked according to the following criteria. If a proposal does not meet all criteria, it will be rejected.

Rejection clauses	Yes/No
Have all the mandatory parts of the Application Form (including the 3 mandatory Annexes) been filled-in and submitted through the CEI Electronic Submission System?	
Have the 3 mandatory Annexes been filled-in, converted into PDF format and uploaded through the CEI Electronic Submission System?	
Has Annex 1 been signed by the Legal Representative/Authorised Legal Representative of the applicant?	
Have Application Form and the 3 Annexes been completed in English?	
Does the partnership include at least one know-how provider and one know-how beneficiary partner?	

## 4.2 Eligibility check

Project Proposals will be assessed according to the criteria outlined below. If a proposal does not meet all criteria, it will be rejected.

Rejection clauses	Yes/No
Are the project objectives compliant with the criteria set out in section 2.2.1 of this Call for Proposals?	
Does the applicant fulfil the criteria set out in section 2.2.2 of this Call for Proposals?	
Does the know-how provider fulfil the criteria set out in section 2.2.3 of this Call for Proposals?	
Does the know-how beneficiary fulfil the criteria set out in section 2.2.4 of this Call for Proposals?	
Are project activities compliant with the criteria set out in section 2.2.5 of this Call for Proposals?	
Is the grant request in line with the criteria set out in section 2.2.6, i.e. it shall not exceed 50% of the project total cost and the requested amount does not exceed 40,000 EUR?	

## 4.3 Evaluation of the Project Proposals

The evaluation of the project proposals will be carried out according to the Evaluation Grid below. At the end of the evaluation, project proposals will be ranked according to a merit point system. To assist in the examination, evaluation, and comparison of the project proposals and qualification of the applicants the CEI may, at its discretion, ask any applicant for clarifications. The request for clarifications from the CEI and replies shall be in writing. No change in the substance of the project proposal shall be sought, offered, or permitted. If an applicant does not provide clarifications of its project proposal by the date and time set by the CEI, its project proposal may be rejected. Any attempt by an applicant, direct or indirect, to interfere and/or breach the confidentiality of the tendering, evaluation and awarding process may result in the rejection of the applicant's proposal. Scoring guidelines: the evaluation grid is divided into subsections. Each question is answered on a scale from 0 (zero) to 10 (ten), where 10 is the highest possible score, and 0 is the lowest. These scores are added to give the total score for the section concerned. The maximum overall score is 100. In order to be considered for funding, proposals must score above 70.

Evaluation Grid		Maximum score
1	Does the applicant have sufficient experience in project management?	10

2	Does the know-how provider have sufficient knowledge and technical expertise of the issues to be addressed?	10
3	How relevant is the proposal to the KEP objectives (primarily supporting EU integration of beneficiary countries) and to one or more of the areas of cooperation outlined in the CEI Plan of Action 2024-2026?	12
4	How relevant are the project activities and planned deliverables for strengthening regional cooperation and EU integration?	12
5	Does the project proposal appropriately address the needs of the know-how beneficiary and contribute to the effective building up of its expertise?	10
6	Are the proposed activities coherent, appropriate, practical, and consistent with the objectives and results as laid down in the application form?	10
7	Are the proposed activities clear and feasible in the given timeframe?	8
8	To what extent are the benefits of the project likely to continue after the cease of the current funding?	8
9	What is the quality of the proposed communication plan and the CEI and MAECI visibility?	10
10	Are the estimated costs coherent with the project activities and expected results?	10
<b>Maximum total score</b>		<b>100</b>

## 5. Approval procedure and CEI grant

### 5.1 Approval procedure

CEI grants will be approved on the basis of ranking and the availability of resources of this Call for Proposals.

### 5.2 Awarding of grants and Grant Agreement

If a proposal is successful, the applicant will receive a notification on the selection for funding. Applicants will be informed on the amount of the approved CEI grant and related conditions. Applicants will be requested to sign a Grant Agreement on the terms of project implementation and management of the CEI grant. The Grant Agreement enters into force on the day of the last signature. Usually, applicants sign first, followed by the CEI-Executive Secretariat. The results of the call including the ones related to the Administrative and Eligibility checks will be published at <https://application.cei.int/application/kep-2026/>.

## 6. Timetable

- Date of publication: Thursday, 11 June 2026
- Deadline for application submission: Friday, 11 September 2026, 12:00 noon (midday) CEST
- Tentative awarding of grants: End of November 2026

## 7. Contact and support

For any questions regarding the KEP Call for Proposals 2026 please write to [kep@cei.int](mailto:kep@cei.int). Questions shall be sent in English no later than seven (7) days before the submission deadline. Answers will be provided no later than three (3) days before the deadline for submitting proposals. All questions received and related

answers will be published on <http://application.cei.int/kep-2026/> in order to give a fair, transparent and equal treatment to all applicants.

## 8. Debriefings

Any requests for clarifications regarding discarded project proposals are to be addressed to [kep@cei.int](mailto:kep@cei.int) by Friday 29 January 2027. A formal debriefing meeting at the appropriate level, and with the relevant staff and the project applicant, will be organised to discuss strengths and weaknesses of the project proposal. No additional information will be disclosed.

## 9. EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016/679

[View e-Privacy Directive Documents](#)