European Commission

I3 Interregional Innovation Investments Instrument

Conference "I3 Instrument: Interregional Innovation Investments - Opportunities for Polish SMEs and the Innovation Ecosystem, Warsaw, 9.9.2026

I3 Instrument calls overview

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European Commission

European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA)

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About EISMEA

The Agency is responsible for developing and implementing the European Innovation Council and manages other EU programmes in the fields of SME support, innovation ecosystems, single market, consumer policy and interregional innovation investments.

Working for EISMEA

We employ highly qualified and motivated professionals who are experts in their respective fields from 27 EU Member States making EISMEA a culturally diverse and interesting place to work.

Contact us

If you have a question, comment or request, get in touch. Our website offers the possibility to contact the Agency by using a contact form.

European Innovation Council

The EIC identifies and supports breakthrough technologies and innovations
with the potential to scale up internationally.

European Innovation Ecosystems

Specific support to enable innovation ecosystem actors to work together across Europe

Single Market Programme

Part of the Single Market Programme covering competitiveness of enterprises, governance of the internal market and standardisation and consumers.

I3 Instrument Strands

€ 490 million
2021–2027

Thematic priorities

- **Green Transition**
- **Smart Manufacturing**
- **Digital Transition**

Strand 1 | support for investments in interregional innovation projects in shared smart specialisation areas

Strand 2a | support for investments in interregional innovation projects for the development of value chains in less developed regions

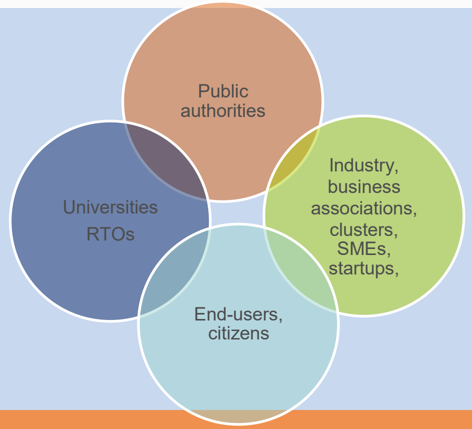
Strand 2b | Capacity building for the development of value chains in less developed regions

I3SF Technical assistance & experimentation

The 3 ‘Is’

Interregional Dimension

- Interrelated innovation investments across regional value chains, coordinated through S3
- Balanced portfolio involving MDRs, LDRs, transition & outermost regions
- Q-helix partnerships in the regional / national ecosystems
- Cross-regional collaboration accelerating innovation deployment and market uptake



Innovation dimension

- TRL 6–9 innovation investments targeting market-ready technologies and solutions
- Testing, validation & demonstration in real operational environments
- Commercialisation & scale-up activities accelerating market uptake

Investment dimension

- Tangible & intangible investments aligned with ERDF regulation
- Investments supported by market analysis and business/investment plans
- Public & private co-investments leveraged by the project
- Multi-level investment architecture: regional, national & EU

PORTFOLIO APPROACH:

Identification and development of investment-ready sub-projects addressing shared regional value chain challenges and bottlenecks.

Specific objectives

STRAND 1

- to increase the **competitiveness and the resilience of EU value chains** in **shared smart specialisation areas**
- the development of already existing or the creation of new interregional and cross-border value chains, better connection between regional innovation ecosystems
- the collaboration between innovation actors (SMEs) using **S3 as coordination principle**
- the support of innovation actors with investment ideas that are ready to be developed into **mature business cases**

STRAND 2a

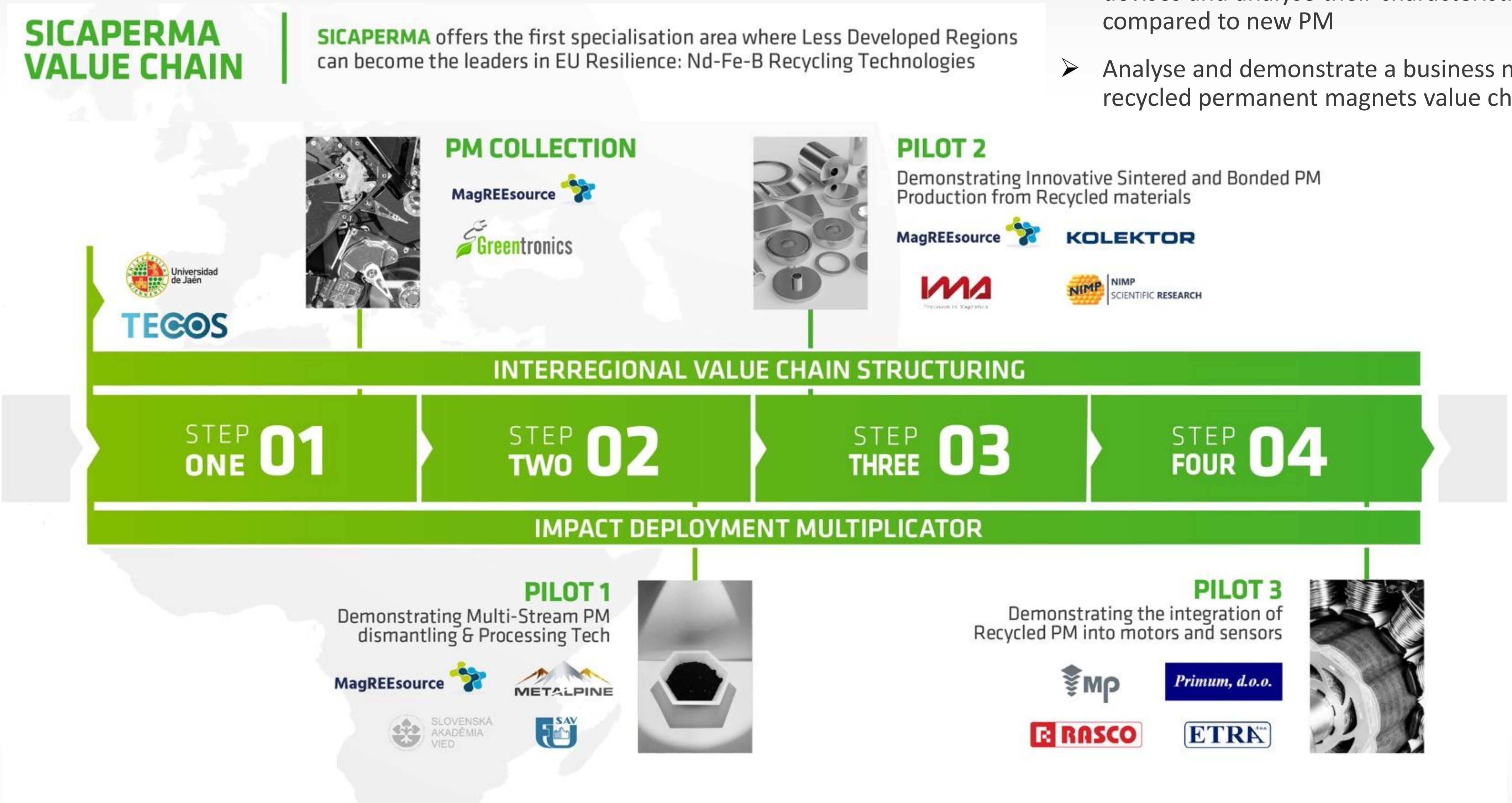
- the **creation of new value chains in LDRs and TRs** and the integration into interregional and cross-border value chains with MDRs
- the interaction and collaboration of SMEs from LDRs and TRs in interregional/multi-national value chains with innovation actors from MDRs
- the application and deployment of innovative technologies and solutions in LDRs and TRs
- the identification of new regional technological domains and market opportunities and bridging the gap between supply and demand sides to help innovation ecosystems overcome market failures
- the improvement of knowledge and practical skills in business and investment planning (for SMEs and other consortium partners)

Expected impact

Non-exhaustive list

	• STRAND 1	• STRAND 2a
Short term at the end of the project	• **Innovative technologies tested and adopted by the market** • Innovative solutions deployed • Market uptake of new solutions • Innovative technologies adopted by SMEs • **Strengthening innovation diffusion channels** • Reinforcing the capacity of regions to co-invest together	• **Creation of new value chains in LDRs and TRs** • **Application and deployment of innovative technologies and solutions (new to the region) in LDRs and TRs (innovation diffiusion)** • **Exploitation of research results** • Innovative technologies tested and adopted by the market • Innovative solutions deployed • Market uptake of new solutions • Reinforcing the capacity of regions to co-invest together, joining forces on common S3 investment priorities (interregional investments).
Long term	• Increased innovation capacity across EU regions • **Increased competitiveness and resilience of EU Value Chains** • Increased productivity and efficiency • Reinforcing/reshaping EU value chains whilst increasing **EU competitiveness** in global markets; Improved level of digital skills • **Unlocking the innovation potential** of EU regions/countries • EU industry more efficient and sustainable	• **Reduction of the innovation divide between MDRs and LDRs;** • Increased productivity and efficiency • Improved public services • Improved level of digital skills • Improved EU innovation capacity and competitiveness • New market opportunities for EU companies • Unlocking the innovation potential of EU regions/countries

- 14 partners from 7 countries demonstrate the technologies for producing recycled permanent magnets, test their performance in the new electronic devises and analyse their characteristics and quality compared to new PM
- Analyse and demonstrate a business model for recycled permanent magnets value chain



Consortium composition

• **STRAND 1**	• **STRAND 2a**
– **at least *5 independent legal entities* established in *5 different regions* of at least *3 eligible countries*** – **at least 2 *legal entities established in a less developed region***	– **at least *3 independent legal entities* established in *3 different regions* of at least *2 eligible countries*** – at least ***1 legal entity*** established in ***a more developed region***

The ***consortium coordinator*** must be a:

- Public body or
- Non-for-profit organisation or
- **Entity entrusted by national or regional governments** to develop or implement innovation and investment actions for SMEs (i.e. a cluster organisations, development agencies, or innovation agencies etc.).

Type of support & specific requirements – *both calls*

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Direct funding of consortium's beneficiaries
- Through cascade funding / financial support to third parties (optional)

NON FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Advisory support (i.e. IPR, standardisation certification, etc.)
- Networking activities (matchmaking for market penetration, trainings for the introduction of innovative technologies and solution etc.)

Specific requirements:

- **Min 70%** of the total direct eligible costs must be allocated to investments in companies with focus on SMEs:
  - SMEs Consortium partners
  - Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP)
  - non-financial support provided to the SMEs belonging to the portfolio.
- ***Min 50%** of the total eligible costs must be incurred in LDRs*
- **Max 30%** of the total eligible costs for FSTP

The proposal should describe how these 3 requirements are met

KPIs – cohesion & territorial indicators – both calls

- Location - Interregional dimension
- Type of project participants
- Innovation dimension
- Socio-economic benefits
- Employment
- Investment
- IPR dimension
- Gender balance

Mandatory deliverables – both calls

- annual report on the **engagement with the managing authorities** of ERDF programmes and the authorities responsible for S3 in the regions represented in the consortium
- **data management plan**
- full **dissemination and exploitation plan**
- yearly report for **cumulative payments** (for projects with more than EUR 5 million requested EU contribution)
- **business and investment plan**
- report on the **implementation of the business investments** belonging to the portfolio
- **assessment of the innovation readiness at the end of the project** (technology, market or investment readiness)
- list of remaining **bottlenecks**

Budget, duration & funding rate

BOTH STRANDS

Budget

€ 2 – 10 million

Duration

18 – 36 months

Funding rate

70% for all other cost categories

100% for FSTP – Up to 100.000,00 euros NEW

Strand 1

€ 28.2 million
2026

Strand 2a

€ 30.2 million
2026

Payment arrangements

prefinancing	70% of the maximum grant amount paid after the grant signature
interim payment	Interim payment cannot exceed 90% of maximum grant amount
payment of the balance	At the end of the project

Indicative timeline

13/05/2026
CALL OPENING

12/11/2026
CALLs CLOSE

November 2026 - April 2027
Evaluation

May 2027
Evaluation results

July 2027
Grant agreement signature

Automn 2027
Projects implementation start

Content novelties

Policy Role & Competitiveness Compass

Greater emphasis on the I3 Instrument's policy role, with explicit alignment to the EU's agenda on **competitiveness**, industrial transformation, innovation, **security**, and **resilience** — guided by the **Competitiveness Compass framework**.

Intermediary Organisations

More emphasis in the implementation role of **clusters**, **innovation agencies**, and universities in structuring interregional partnerships and in supporting SMEs.

De-risking and Investment Readiness

Stronger accent on **investment readiness** and creating credible pathways for follow-up investments (sustainability) beyond the project lifetime.

Award criteria

		MIN	MAX
RELEVANCE *Interregional Dimension | Innovation Dimensions | Investment Dimension*	The proposal is strategically relevant for the overall call objectives and the themes and priorities of the call by fostering regional integration, innovation, and investment	2.5	5
QUALITY *Methodology and Technical Quality | Quality & Composition of the Consortium | Feasibility and Risk management*	The proposal exhibits a well-founded approach and organisation to achieve project objectives.	2.5	5
COST EFFECTIVENESS *Appropriateness | Allocation of resources | Subcontracting | FSTP*	The proposal demonstrates prudent and strategic allocation and management of financial resources, aligned with the project's objectives.	2.5	5
IMPACT *Long-term Impact | Target Groups and Stakeholders | E/S/T/EC Impacts | Replication and Sustainability*	The project is expected to generate substantial and lasting benefits, fully aligned with the call's strategic objectives.	5	10
OVERALL (PASS) SCORES		**17.5**	**25**

NEW Budget table – at application / GAP stage

- **Lighter budget table** required at submission
- No need for detailed sheets per partner and per work package
- Same simplified table will be used during the application / GAP stage
- **Detailed budget table** obbligation remains for the **mid-term** and **final reporting**

Detailed Estimated Budget Table

[proposal acronym]

Important:

Before completing this document, please check in Call document which cost categories are eligible for your proposal as this may be different depending on the call/topic.
No budget should be indicated in cells related to cost categories that are not eligible.
You may add rows but no additional tabs. This may result in your proposal being considered inadmissible.
Please ensure that the file can be printed on a format of 1 page wide (number of pages depending on the number of participants).
Please make sure that the figures in this table are consistent with the total budget provided in Part A section 3 of the application
In case of inconsistencies Part A will prevail.

Staff effort allocation

Fill in the effort per work package and Beneficiary/Affiliated Entity.
Please indicate the number of person-months over the whole duration of the planned work.
Adapt the columns to the number of work packages in your proposal.
Identify the work-package leader for each work package by showing the relevant person-month figure in bold.

Participant Number/Short Name	WP1	WP2	WP3	WP4	WP5	WP6	WPx...	Total
1.								0
2.								0
3.								0
4.								0
5.								0
6.								0
7.								0
8.								0
9.								0
10.								0
Total person-months	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

A. Personnel costs

Present your estimated "Personnel costs" split into 3 categories as per the table below. If you do not have any personnel costs falling under "A.4 SME owners and natural person beneficiaries", all personnel costs should be budgeted under "A1. Employees (or equivalent); A2. Natural persons under direct contract and A3. Seconded Persons".

Key change: higher FSTP threshold for SMEs

- From **EUR 60,000 → to EUR 100,000**

Expected benefit:

- increase the critical mass for sub-granted projects, allowing them to achieve greater results and make a more lasting/scalable impact.

- Stronger support to the main I3 investments actions

HE / I3 approaches …. *differences!*

Horizon-like approach:

- Research & scientific excellence
- Early-stage innovation
- Project related innovation
- Research focus
- Stand-alone projects

I3 Instrument approach:

- Market deployment & scale-up
- Mature innovation (TRL 6+)
- Interregional value chains
- Cohesion dimension
- Investment focus
- Smart specialisation strategies
- Strong SMEs participation
- Concrete investments into companies
- Cross-border value chains

Read the Call … 💡 strategically!

Priority documents

- 📌 Work Programme
- 📌 Call text
- 📌 Proposal template
- 📌 Model Grant Agreement (MGA)
- 📌 Annotated MGA
- 📌 Financing decision
- 📌 Topic Q&QA and updates

Important reminders ⚠️

- Do **NOT** simply repeat the call text. Explain YOUR project's concrete contribution.
- Different strands have different objectives.
- Look for the **right partners** → F&T Portal or I3SF partner search tool or Enterprise Europe Network
- Check out your region's status here.
- Portfolio approach

Pay attention to 👀

- Cohesion dimension (LDRs, TRs, MDRs)
- Interregional investment logic
- KPIs
- Sustainability after project end
- Investment readiness and scale-up pathway

Policy/regulatory background docs → Competitiveness Compass, Clean Industrial Deal, Single Market Strategy, European Competitiveness Fund, Start-up and Scale-up Strategy, European Innovation Act.

Websites: I3 Instrument, I3 Support facility, S3 Community of Practice, S3 Thematic Platforms & Partnerships

Think Like an Evaluator … *do **NOT** get in touch with them!*

What helps evaluators

- ✅ Clear and concise writing
- ✅ Logical structure
- ✅ Consistent information across sections
- ✅ Realistic implementation plan
- ✅ Readable charts and visuals
- ✅ Glossary
- ✅ Clear investment pathway
- ✅ SMART KPIs

What weakens proposals

- Endless text and long sentences
- Generic statements
- Excessive abbreviations
- Inconsistent budget figures
- Visuals without purpose
- Unrealistic ambitions
- Unclear partner roles

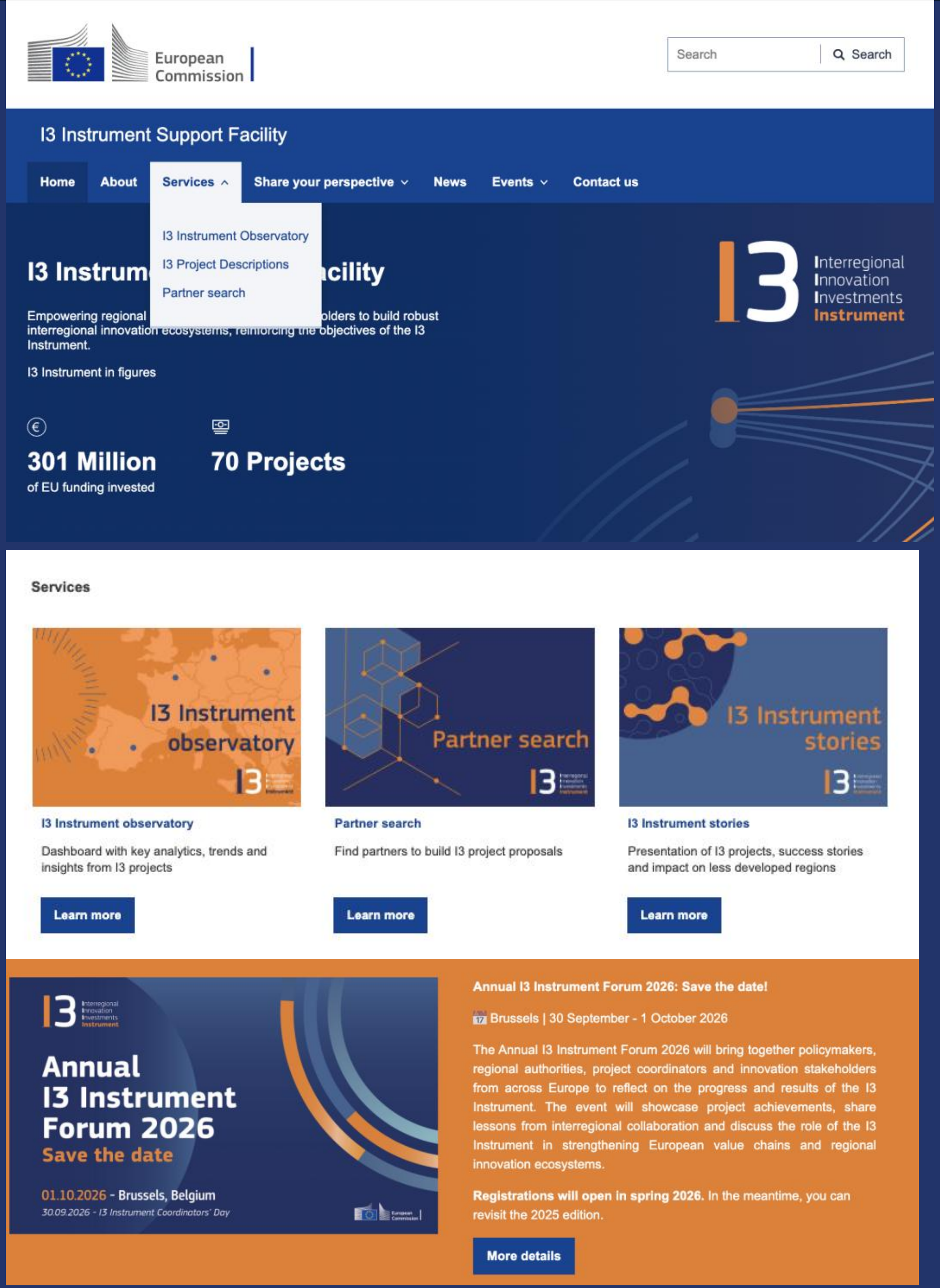
Technical reminders

- Part B: max 70 pages – Arial 9 – A4 format
- Respect margins and template structure
- Do not delete template instructions
- Upload all mandatory annexes

I3 SUPPORT FACILITY

- **I3 Instrument Observatory** - access statistics on all I3 projects
- **detailed descriptions of I3 projects** highlighting their focus on building interregional innovation investments
- **monthly virtual events** on practical topics relevant for beneficiaries and innovation community
- **I3 policy discussion groups** provide valuable recommendations
- database of **good practices** and success stories from I3 projects
- **Articles & publications** on interregional innovation investments

https://interregional-innovation-investments.ec.europa.eu/



Thank you!

https://eismea.ec.europa.eu
https://eismea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/interregional-innovation-investments-i3-instrument_en

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#I3Instrument