



Call for Proposals

MISSIONS: Enhancing Research - Promoting Well-Being

Paving the way to research excellence,
talent attraction and results valorization

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Conoscenza, Sviluppo, Qualità di Vita.
Sosteniamo il futuro.



Fondazione
Compagnia
di San Paolo

Call for Proposals

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- **Publication date:** 9 March 2026
- **1st closing date** 3 June 2026
- **2nd closing date** 3 June 2027

Scenario

The Compagnia di San Paolo Multi-Year Planning Document 2025–2028 reaffirms its commitment to structurally strengthening the competitiveness of the local research system, in line with the guidelines and priorities of Horizon Europe.

Within this framework, the renewed **“Paving the Way to Research Excellence, Talent Attraction and Results Valorization”** call for proposals promotes scientific excellence through two intervention targets. **Target 1** supports research projects that have received positive evaluations in competitive international **and European calls for proposals but were not funded due to budget constraints**. **Target 2** is intended for MSCA Seal of Excellence holders, offering them the opportunity to develop their research projects at institutions in Piedmont and Liguria. This target is complemented by a **structured capacity-building programme** designed to enhance **innovation skills** and **to foster the valorization of research results through technology transfer and scientific entrepreneurship**.

In this context, the call represents a renewed instrument for capitalising on excellence recognised at the European level, fostering both the attraction of highly qualified talent and the transformation of research outcomes into tangible value for the region. The objective is to strengthen the regional



system's capacity to compete in a rapidly evolving scientific and technological landscape, while at the same time enhancing its ability to attract competitive investment. This approach is grounded in two cross-cutting methodological pillars: **learning**, understood as a continuous process of reinforcing institutional capacities and operational models; and **internationalization**, which is essential for aligning the regional system with European standards and enabling more effective access to opportunities offered by European Union research and innovation programmes.

In line with this strategic vision, the call also recognizes the growing relevance of the technological trajectories identified by the European Union, particularly within **Cluster 4 – Digital, Industry & Space**, which channels a significant share of investment into advanced digital technologies, Artificial Intelligence, and industrial transformation. While it does not impose thematic priorities, the call also encourages the development of projects in these fields, acknowledging their key role in enhancing Europe's scientific, industrial and technological competitiveness the **Italian Institute of Artificial Intelligence for Industry (AI4I)** has likewise been identified as a potential host institution for Target 2 projects.

The call for proposals is fully aligned with the “Enhancing Research” Mission, which seeks to strengthen the Northwest's competitiveness in Europe and globally by supporting the local ecosystem in leveraging opportunities offered by major European programmes and attracting high-profile researchers.

Context and specific objectives of the call for proposals

In the first four years of Horizon Europe¹, Piedmont and Liguria have maintained a significant position at the national level, confirming a strong capacity to participate while also revealing room to further enhance the competitiveness of their research ecosystems. Piedmont ranks third in terms of participations (932, with a 17% success rate) and total funding secured (€391.6 million), while Liguria ranks seventh for both participations (520; 15.9% success rate) and financial contribution (€204.3 million).

¹ European Dashboard: , last accessed on 03/12/2025.

However, the distribution of resources among local stakeholders points to different systemic configurations. In Piedmont, universities account for 39% of European funds received, whereas in Liguria this share falls to 16%, with the majority allocated to other research centres (84%). Overall, this picture suggests that, despite the presence of strong scientific expertise, the regional system could further strengthen its capacity to attract competitive funding, particularly in areas marked by rapid technological change and intense international competition.

These trends are also reflected in the most competitive Horizon Europe programmes. In the context of the ERC, a structural condition of untapped potential persists among Italian institutions: although Italy produces outstanding researchers, it does not feature among the Top 30 Host Institutions, highlighting a persistent gap compared to Europe's leading research hubs². Moreover, a comparison between the number of ERC grants awarded to Italian researchers and those secured by Italian Host Institutions in 2025 shows a clear imbalance. Italian researchers ranked second in Europe for both Starting Grants (55) and Consolidator Grants (37). However, many of them are permanently based abroad: Italian Host Institutions secured only 30 Starting Grants and 17 Consolidator Grants.

In light of this evidence, the call for proposals seeks to contribute to the strategic strengthening of the research ecosystems of Piedmont and Liguria through three specific objectives.

- **Enhancing the competitive capacity of regional institutions within European programmes** by supporting initiatives that improve their ability to succeed in the most selective Horizon Europe calls. The aim is to consolidate the region's scientific reputation, reinforce its long-term sustainability, and foster higher-quality project design in sectors with a strong innovation focus.
- **Promoting excellent projects already recognised at the European level** by providing targeted support to proposals that have received positive evaluations but were not funded due to budget constraints, including those awarded the MSCA Seal of Excellence. This

² Source: CSP processing of European Commission and Eurostat data; analysis units: StG, CoG, AdG, PoC, SyG; period: 2007-2022.

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action helps retain and attract highly qualified researchers, encourages resubmission and ultimately strengthens regional performance in European competitions.

- **Increasing the region's attractiveness and reinforce the capacity of its strategic institutions**, with particular attention paid to emerging technological domains and the European Union's priority trajectories, such as those identified under Cluster 4 – Digital, Industry & Space. In this framework, the Italian Institute of Artificial Intelligence for Industry (AI4I) has been identified as a potential host institution for MSCA projects in the field of artificial intelligence. AI4I serves as an enabling hub for advanced digital and industrial research, offering dedicated infrastructure, international scientific networks, and a highly specialised ecosystem capable of supporting projects in AI, industrial digitalisation, and deep-tech technologies. This approach not only strengthens AI4I's role as an emerging hub within the European research landscape, but also encourages the submission of project proposals in strategic areas that are crucial for regional competitiveness and alignment with Horizon Europe priorities.

Stages

There are two time windows for the submission of applications under this call. The first closing date is set for 3 June 2026, the second for 3 June 2027.

The same application, meaning the same research project, cannot be submitted for both closing dates.

Eligible entities

The following types of entities with active operational headquarters in Piedmont and/or Liguria are eligible to take part in Target 1 and Target 2 of the call, as detailed in the following section:

- Universities;
- Public and private non-profit research entities;



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- Public or private treatment and research institutes [*Istituti di Ricovero e Cura a Carattere Scientifico (I.R.C.C.S.)*];
- Hospital Trusts and University Hospital Trusts.

The Instrumental Bodies of Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo are only allowed to take part in Target 2 of the call.

All beneficiaries of the grant must fulfil the subjective eligibility requirements pursuant to the Statute, the Regulations for Institutional Activities and the Application Guidelines of the Regulations for Institutional Activities of Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo.

Eligible initiatives and specific contents of the initiatives

- Target 1 - Supporting competitive research

The general aim of the measure is to support high quality international projects in the field of research, enhance participation in international and European competitive calls, such as the ERC and RIA, and increase the ability of public and private research bodies in Liguria and Piedmont to attract funds.

The measure provides for funding to be granted to research projects which have been positively evaluated by an international funding entity, but which have not been financed due to lack of funds. The funds granted may be used by the Host Institutions for actions to consolidate research activities and the scientific profiles of researchers internationally, to strengthen the scientific and cross-cutting skills of research staff, including design skills, and to promote international networking activities.

Given these premises, projects not focused primarily on research, mobility projects (for example Erasmus +) and, within the ERC programme, projects related to the PoC target will not be eligible for funding. Proposals submitted under the European Innovation Council (EIC) calls are not eligible for this edition of the call. Such projects may instead benefit from a dedicated support instrument,



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the vEIColo call, specifically designed to accompany the submission, resubmission and competitive strengthening of EIC Pathfinder and Transition proposals.

All permanent and fixed-term staff of universities and research institutions based in the two regions may apply, provided they have submitted a project on behalf of their institution as Principal Investigator (hereinafter “PI”) or as the scientific lead of the applicant institution’s research unit within the specific proposal, as indicated in the application form under the section “Person in charge of the proposal within the organization”.

If the PI or scientific manager of the team has moved to another entity, the name of the person who has taken over scientific responsibility for the project presented in response to the call may be entered.

External staff (e.g. research fellows, doctoral students, project collaborations) may also submit an application for ERC calls, provided that they have stated the research body as the Host Institution and that, as of the date of submission of the application, they are not employed by any other institution, whether public or private.

For ERC Starting Grants only, applications from projects with a different Host Institution from that of the European application are allowed, provided that this is located in the territories of Liguria or Piedmont and provided that on the date of submission of the application the PI is in the same Host Institution.

Each entity may submit multiple projects, even with the same PI. Several projects of the same entity may be funded, but only one project per PI.

All projects eligible for funding under this call for tenders must have characteristics that allow them to be evaluated and, therefore, must necessarily have a final evaluation report similar or equivalent to the Evaluation Summary Report of European projects (Horizon Europe), which reports the score obtained in relation to a maximum attributable score.

Projects will be eligible if they were submitted in response to an international call or a Horizon Europe call as of 1 January 2024, with a request for financial contribution by the Host Institution of € 65,000 or more and a duration of at least 12 months.



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- [Target 2 - MSCA Seal of Excellence – European Postdoctoral Fellowships Horizon Europe](#)

This target is intended to fund researchers who have been awarded the Seal of Excellence (SoE) in response to a “Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions – European Postdoctoral Fellowships” call in the context of the Horizon Europe framework programme.

The European Commission awards the Seal of Excellence to all proposals that have obtained a score of 85% or more under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions European call but which have not been funded due to limits on the available budget. The SoE certifies that the project proposal was rated excellent and is thus recommended for funding from other sources.

Compagnia di San Paolo intends to offer SoE holders the opportunity to develop their research project at a Host Institution located in Piedmont or Liguria. For the current edition, two positions available for each closing date are specifically reserved for the Italian Institute of Artificial Intelligence for Industry (AI4I), which has been identified as a potential Host Institution for MSCA applications in the field of artificial intelligence.

The beneficiaries of the grant, which will constitute the Host Institutions, may therefore be different from those stated in the application presented in response to the European call, but must necessarily have active operational headquarters in Piedmont and/or Liguria. If the Host Institution is different from the one stated in the original application submitted for the European call, any changes made to the research project (which must not be substantial) must be highlighted in the request.

In order to be eligible, the Fellow must have a SoE obtained following participation in a Horizon Europe MSCA – European Postdoctoral Fellowships call³.

Research projects can have a maximum duration of 24 months.

[Bridging Research and Innovation: the capacity-building pathway for Target 2](#)

³ Participants in the last year of the MSCA - European Postdoctoral Fellowships call who obtained a score of 85% or more, but do not yet have the Seal of Excellence, can send their application, which will be accepted subject to the certification being made official.



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In line with the priorities of the European Horizon Europe programme, which promotes the strengthening of researchers' skills, the valorization of scientific results, and their translation into high-impact solutions, the Fellowship combines financial support with a targeted capacity-building pathway. Within an innovation ecosystem increasingly focused on knowledge transfer, a significant gap persists between academic output and access to innovation value chains. This gap cuts across disciplines and is particularly pronounced in the humanities and the socio-economic fields.

To help bridge this divide, the Fellowship will offer Fellows tailored support programmes aligned with their disciplinary backgrounds, delivered in collaboration with leading experts in open innovation and technology transfer.

The six-month programme, running alongside the final stages of the research activities, may include initiatives aimed at project identification and development. These may encompass the creation of microlabs to test the real-world scalability of ideas, the identification of use cases and strategic stakeholders, and the definition of development pathways consistent with the needs of the local ecosystem. Fellows will also be supported in mapping and engaging with innovation infrastructures and initiatives, such as incubators, acceleration programmes and technology transfer centres, thereby fostering stronger integration between research and innovation systems, in line with the evolving European Research and Innovation Area.

Financial provisions

The total provisions for this call amount to € 5,000,000, including € 2,500,000 intended for the first closing date of 3 June 2026 and € 2,500,000 for the second closing date of 3 June 2027.

The allocation of € 2,500,000 for each closing date is split into € 1,000,000 for Target 1 and € 1,500,000 for Target 2.



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For both targets in this Call, the funding cannot be transferred to any entity other than the one awarded the grant.

- [Target 1 - Supporting competitive research](#)

The contribution may vary between a minimum of €50,000 and a maximum of €150,000 for ERCs and a maximum of €100,000 for all other projects (including ERC Synergy).

For each project, a series of parameters will be considered, which will converge in a final score that will translate into a share of funding. This will be no less than € 50,000 and no more than 80% of the contribution provided for within the original project.

In the case of ERC applications, PIs who submitted an application under the Horizon Europe ERC programme, excluding PoCs, and who obtained an “A” score in the second (or, in the case of Synergy, the third) evaluation step.

Each entity may submit multiple projects, even with the same PI. Several projects of the same entity may be funded, but only one project per PI.

The Evaluation Committee will establish a ranking in decreasing score order. In the event of a tie, or if projects obtain the same score, the institution with the lowest number of applications eligible for funding and the project presented by the youngest PI will be given priority.

Detailed verification of the information provided will be carried out for the winning projects, on penalty of exclusion from funding.

- [Target 2: MSCA Seal of Excellence – European Postdoctoral Fellowships Horizon Europe](#)

The budget of the project presented must correspond to the one presented to the European Commission and awarded the Seal of Excellence, in terms of both the amount and cost items.

The final funding disbursed by the Foundation will correspond to the amount stated in the European application. Where necessary, for example if the Host Institution is different from the original application, the total will be recalculated using the coefficient for the country of Italy.

Activation or not of the specific “Family Allowance” and “Special Needs” items will be evaluated at the time the grant is made, based on the Fellow's needs.



How to submit applications

Applications must be submitted using the “ROL online requests” procedure accessible via the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo website homepage, making sure that the specific form for the call is selected in the “List of calls and requests” section.

Entities submitted multiple applications must complete an ROL for each research project.

Documents required

In addition to the documentation required for the ROL procedure, the following documents must be sent using the form provided by Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo where required.

- Target 1 - Support competitive research

- Annex 1.1 - Allocation of the project to an ERC area (PE, LS, SH) and information needed for scoring: PI, funding programme, call, acronym, project title, project duration, score received, maximum score expected, role (coordinator, WP leader, partner), total number of partners, total man-months of personnel expected for the research entity, total man-months of personnel expected in the project, contribution requested by the research entity, total contribution requested by the project, composition (m/f) of the research group with statement of roles;
- Evaluation Summary Report where applicable, in other cases a similar final evaluation report;
- Declaration on headed paper of the Host Institution, signed by the legal representative, certifying that the candidate project has not received other funding;
- Annex 1.2 - Plan for the use of resources, which must consider the fact that the contribution may be between €50,000 and €150,000, depending on the type of project, and cannot in any case exceed 80% of the contribution requested from the international funding body, as stated in Annex 1.1. The amount allocated will in any case depend on the Commission's assessment. The beneficiary entity may therefore request a

restructuring based on the contribution allocated. The plan for use of the resources may extend for a maximum of 24 months.

- [Target 2: MSCA Seal of Excellence – European Postdoctoral Fellowships Horizon Europe](#)

- Annex 2.1 - Application form, signed by the legal representative of the Host Institution and by the fellow, stating the MSCA area and declaring that, at the time of the engagement, the fellow will have no other contracts in place or that these contracts will not prevent him or her from working exclusively and full time for the MSCA;
- Fellow's CV and identity document;
- Copy of the project presented to the European Commission in response to the MSCA Call (Part and Part B);
- Copy of the Evaluation Summary Report (ESR) received from the European Commission following the evaluation, stating the final score obtained;
- Copy of the "Seal of Excellence" certificate issued by the European Commission (see note 21);

If the Host Institution is different from the one stated in the original application,

- Annex 2.2 - Statement issued by the Host Institution's legal representative stating the conditions under which the PI will be received and hired by the organisation, as defined in the European Commission's Annotated Model Grant Agreement (page 383 onwards⁴).

[Closing date for applications](#)

⁴ The reference is to the Annotated Model Grant Agreement drawn up by the European Commission for Horizon Europe, available at the following link: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/aga_en.pdf.

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Applications must be submitted using the “ROL online requests” procedure accessible via the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo website homepage, making sure that the specific form for the call is selected in the “List of calls and requests” section, by the following closing dates:

- **by 1.00 p.m. at the latest on 3 June 2026, for the first closing date;**
- **by 1.00 p.m. at the latest on 3 June 2027, for the second closing date;**

Evaluation of the initiatives

Once the fulfilment of the eligibility requirements has been verified, the evaluation will be carried out by an Evaluation Committee set up for this purpose.

Participation in the Call implies acceptance of the final decision on the selection of projects and the subsequent allocation of contributions.

During the evaluation, CSP reserves the right to request any additional documentation to the information provided and to carry out checks and in-depth meetings with the Host Institution to obtain any clarifications that may be necessary.

At the end of the evaluation, the applications admitted to receive the contribution will be funded within the limits of the budget available for each Target of the call. If the budget for a Target is not fully used, it can be assigned to the other Target.

Results

Applications admitted to the contribution for Target 1 and Target 2 will be published on the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo website within three months of each closing date. The decisions will subsequently be formalised in a written communication.

If no mention of a project is made on the website, this should be understood as a communication from the Company of a negative outcome.

Research projects must start within 60 days and within 8 months of the grant award decision for Target 1 and Target 2 respectively.



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Reporting methods

Reporting of the contribution must be sent via the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo online platform as stated in the contribution allocation decision letter and in its attachments.

No extensions of the terms for use of the contribution will be allowed, except in exceptional cases previously authorised by CSP.

Contact details

For further information regarding the call for proposals, contact the Company by writing to: missionericerca@compagniadisanpaolo.it and entering “Paving the way to research excellence” Call for Proposals in the subject line.

For information and technical clarifications regarding the form completion procedure, please contact: assistentzarol@compagniadisanpaolo.it.

Any further communications relating to the procedures for submitting projects or clarifications regarding issues of general interest may be added to the “Frequently Asked Questions” section of the call for proposals on the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo website, and shall supplement the existing text of this call for proposals.

This call for proposals contributes to the achievement of the following SDGs:

4. Quality education

9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure





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