

Call for Proposals

MISSIONS: Harnessing the value of research - Promoting Well-Being

TRAPEZIO - paving the way to research excellence ad talent attraction

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Fondazione
Compagnia
di San Paolo

Call for Proposals

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- **Publication date:** 5 October 2023
- **1st closing date** 31 May 2024
- **2nd closing date** 30 May 2025

Background

The European Innovation Scoreboard 2022 rates Italy as being among the Moderate Innovators in the European research and innovation landscape, 8.4 points below the continental average according to a wide spectrum of 32 reference indicators¹. Despite the 17.5% increase in Italian innovation performance between 2015 and 2022, well above the European average (9.9 percentage points)², the gap that separates Italy from the Innovation Leader countries remains and is demonstrated by two fundamental indicators relating respectively to the financial resources allocated to this area and the personnel employed. In terms of the ratio between expenditure on research and development (R&D) and GDP, Italy is at 1.53% compared to a European average of 2.32%, ranking 14th out of 27 European countries and 12th if only public investments are considered³. Looking at human capital, in 2021 the number of FTE (full time equivalent) researchers per million inhabitants was just 2,252, a ratio which is approximately double in France (4,312) and Germany (4,995) and which relegates Italy to twenty-second place among the 28 European countries considered⁴.

¹ Source: European Commission data from the European Innovation Scoreboard 2022 report.

² Source: European Commission data from the European Innovation Scoreboard 2022 report.

³ Source: Eurostat data.

⁴ Source: CSP processing of Eurostat data.



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The strength of a national research system can be measured by its ability to win grants - and therefore financial resources - awarded internationally on a competitive basis. In the Horizon Europe framework programme, Italian scientific production remained in a good position in absolute terms in the first two years. In terms of the number of proposals presented it came second behind Spain and in terms of grants won it came third behind Germany and Spain, confirming its fifth position for financing received (behind Germany, France, Spain and the Netherlands), with a total of €1.75 billion raised⁵. As regards the success rate of the proposals presented, compared to H2020, which saw Italy (11.7%) chasing the European average (12.0%), significantly behind its main direct competitors (e.g., France (15.3%) and Germany (15.0%)), the first two years of Horizon Europe recorded a significant increase in the Italian success rate, which exceeded the continental average by more than 1.5 percentage points⁶.

The scenario changes when the total funding received is no longer viewed in absolute terms but in relation to the number of inhabitants of the country. Viewed in these terms, in fact, Italy falls back into 16th place in Europe, albeit recording a slight improvement compared to its 18th position in Horizon 2020⁷.

Among the programmes financed at European level, the European Research Council (ERC), introduced in 2007 as the "backbone" of European basic research, is particularly relevant considering the combination of prestige attributed and quantity of resources assigned to a single researcher (the so-called Principal Investigator). Alongside the ERC, which supports scientific excellence through pan-European competition, the European Innovation Council (EIC) made its appearance within the scope of H2020, an instrument designed to support the development of disruptive technological innovations with the potential to create markets and be scaled up internationally. Within H2020, EIC was tested in the form of pilots, respectively the EIC Pilot in 2018 and Enhanced EIC Pilot in the 2019-2020 period, with the aim of making the instrument fully operational for the advent of Horizon Europe: FET-Open and FET-Proactive were used to test EIC Pathfinder while SME Instrument made it possible to develop EIC Accelerator, also introducing blended finance to combine grants and equity investments. The three intervention

⁵ Source: European Commission data.

⁶ Source: European Commission data.

⁷ Source: European Commission data.



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lines supported by the European Innovation Council - EIC Pathfinder, EIC Transition, EIC Accelerator - are fully expressed in Horizon Europe.

Looking at the figures in the EIC context, Italy has four institutions among the top 20 in terms of funding obtained, with the *Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche*, the top ranking Italian organisation, in fifth position, and comes fifth in terms of budget obtained (€108 million) and grants won (103). Looking at the performance of public universities and research bodies alone, Italy comes third in terms of budget obtained (€61 million) and grants won (75), behind Germany (€84 million and 114 grants won). and Spain (€63 million for 82 grants)⁸.

It is however useful to observe this Italian performance in connection with the three programmes offered by the European Innovation Council. If we isolate the data relating to the EIC Pathfinder calls, which are intended to support researchers in the development of innovative technologies TRL stages 1 to 4, we find that approximately 60% of the aforementioned budget (63 M€) won by Italy is actually related to projects which are still far from potential industrial use⁹. Only 14 grants were won by projects nominated for an EIC Transition call, which supports projects at TRL stages 4 to 6, for a budget of just over €11.5 million; a result which, despite placing Italy in fourth position among the beneficiaries, shows that the country is lagging well behind both the Netherlands (€20.1 million) and Germany (€25.3 million)¹⁰.

Italian competitiveness plummets if we look at the results from EIC Accelerator programme calls, which support SMEs and start-ups in the development of innovations and game-changing technologies already beyond TRL level 5. Italian companies in fact won 15 grants during the Horizon Europe period of activity. With just €30 million of funds attracted, they place Italy in tenth position on a continental scale, over €100 million behind France and Germany¹¹.

Applications submitted by Italian institutions to the European Innovation Council's call recorded a success rate of 8.4%, slightly lower than the continental average of 9%. However, if we look at the percentages for the three programmes, once again the performance is better in the case of

⁸ Source: European Commission data; analysis units: Pathfinder, Transition, Accelerator; period: 2021-2022.

⁹ Source: CSP processing of European Commission data; analysis units: EIC Pathfinder; period: 2021-2022.

¹⁰ Source: European Commission data; analysis units: EIC Transition; period: 2021-2022.

¹¹ Source: CSP processing of European Commission data; analysis units: EIC Accelerator; period: 2021-2023.



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EIC Pathfinder, where the Italian success rate is higher than average (7.8% compared to 7.4%), while it is four percentage points below average in the case of EIC Transition (12.7% vs. 16.8%) and 7 percentage points below average in the case of EIC Accelerator (1.9% vs. 9.1%)¹².

In the ERC context, however, there is a clear example of the “Italian syndrome”: the existence of a multiplicity of critical problems that determine an unexpressed potential among Italian research organisations, which are struggling to capitalise on their talents.

First of all, there is a patent lack of Italian organisations among the Top-30 Host Institutions in the history of the ERC¹³. This situation reveals the gap between Italian research organisations and the club of ERC “champions” competing for leadership on a continental scale.

Finally, to complete the unfavourable picture there is a brain drain: while Italian researchers are rewarded, they are often expatriates. Comparing the number of ERC grants won by researchers of Italian nationality with the number of grants won by Italian Host Institutions, in 2022, researchers of Italian nationality stand out on a European scale - coming second in the StGs (41 grants) and in the CoG (31), third in the MAs (21) - but many of them operate permanently abroad: Italian Host Institutions have in fact achieved 28 StGs, 21 CoGs and 14 MAs, slipping into sixth position for all three types of calls¹⁴. Aggregating the data relating to the three main types of ERC grants, Italy presents a net balance of -31 for 2022, placing it at the very bottom of the list of countries suffering from the brain drain, preceded at some distance by Greece (-13), to the benefit of countries which successfully attract leading foreign researchers, including the United Kingdom (+73), France (+23) and Germany (+22)¹⁵.

¹² Source: CSP processing of European Commission data; analysis units: EIC Pathfinder period 2021-2023, EIC Transition period 2021-2022, EIC Accelerator period: 2021-2023.

¹³ Source: CSP processing of European Commission and Eurostat data; analysis units: StG, CoG, AdG, PoC, SyG; period: 2007-2022.

¹⁴ Source: CSP processing of European Research Council data; analysis units: StG, CoG, AdG; period: 2022. NB: the Host Institutions considered are those listed at the time the applications are presented.

¹⁵ Source: CSP processing of European Commission and Eurostat data; analysis units: StG, CoG, AdG; period: 2022. NB: the Host Institutions considered are those listed at the time the applications are presented.



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Context and specific objectives of the call for proposals

Looking at the results achieved in H2020 by the two regions involved in this call, Piedmont came 4th in terms of participations and success rate (13.5%) and 3rd in terms of financial contribution (€537 million); Liguria is closely behind in 7th position in terms of participations and financial contribution (€315 million) and first in terms of success rate (14.9%), well above the national average which remained at 11.8%¹⁶. In terms of recipients, universities (31.3%) and research centres (20.4%) in Piedmont are awarded more than half of the financial resources, and figures for Liguria are higher, at 11.3% and 45.1% of the available budget respectively¹⁷. A detailed analysis of the data available for the first two years of the Horizon Europe framework programme shows substantial stability in the position on a national scale in terms of the number of participations and funds attracted (€180 million for Piedmont and €104 million for Liguria), whereas the general increase in the success rate and the average Italian one (18.4%) shows a slowdown in the performance of the two regions of interest, with Liguria falling to sixth position (19.8%) and Piedmont in seventh (19.6%)¹⁸.

Taking the regions individually, the initial results made available by the European Innovation Council for the two-year period 2021-2022 show how Host Institutions in Piedmont were beneficiaries of 6 grants, with the Polytechnic of Turin having won over 55% of the budget provided for the region, and the Host Institutions of Liguria 12 grants, with the Italian Institute of Technology receiving approximately 66% of the total budget for the region¹⁹. In relation to the country as a whole, Liguria is in third position, together with Veneto and Tuscany, while Piedmont slips into ninth position in terms of number of grants. Even if the two regions are combined into one macro-area, which would put them in third position, the gap between them and Lazio and

¹⁶ Source: CSP processing of European Commission data.

¹⁷ Source: European Commission data.

¹⁸ Fonte: CSP processing of European Commission data.

¹⁹ Source: CSP processing of European Commission data; analysis units: Pathfinder, Transition, Accelerator; period: 2021-2022.



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Lombardy, with 34 and 32 grants signed respectively, remains significant²⁰.

The results achieved by the Host Institutions of the macro-area of interest in the history of ERC do not differ greatly from the EIC scenario. In fact, Piedmont's Host Institutions obtained 49 grants and those in Liguria 63, placing them seventh and fifth respectively in the national ranking²¹. Combining Piedmont and Liguria into a single virtual region and delving into the details of the grant recipients shows that the ERC galaxy appears even more "oligopolistic": between Piedmont and Liguria the top 3 institutions in the ranking (Italian Institute of Technology, Polytechnic of Turin, University of Turin) have so far won 90% of the grants²².

The context briefly outlined in the previous paragraphs reveals two priorities that this call intends to interpret:

- Given the multiple obstacles that still limit the extent to which organisations in Piedmont and Liguria can benefit from international programmes intended to fund research, it is important to train local institutions to compete at a European level, in order to strengthen their competitiveness, reputation and financial sustainability over time;
- Given the stiff competition that exists in the most prestigious research arenas in Europe, we want to introduce ad-hoc tools intended to enhance the best project proposals which, despite receiving a very positive assessment (e.g. being awarded the Seal of Excellence), fail to win funding due to existing budget constraints and, at the same time, fail to attract talented researchers to Italy. Thus increasing the propensity to present competitive proposals in the medium term.

²⁰ Source: CSP processing of European Commission data; analysis units: Pathfinder, Transition, Accelerator; period: 2021-2022.

²¹ Source: CSP processing of European Commission and Eurostat data; analysis units: StG, CoG, AdG, PoC, SyG; period: 2007-2022.

²² Source: CSP processing of European Commission and Eurostat data; analysis units: StG, CoG, AdG, PoC, SyG; period: 2007-2022.



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Stages

There are two time windows for the submission of applications under this call. The first deadline is set for 31 May 2024, the second for 30 May 2025.

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

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;
- 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.



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Eligible initiatives and specific contents of the initiatives

Target 1 - Support 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 EIC and ERC, 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.

The call is open to any internal and external staff of the Universities and Research Bodies of the two territories who have submitted a project on behalf of the entity in question, either as Principal Investigator (hereinafter referred to as PI) or manager of the applicant entity's research team stated in the "Person in charge of the proposal within the organisation" section of the specific application. 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



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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 2021, with a request for financial contribution by the Host Institution of € 65,000 or more and a duration of at least 12 months. No projects submitted for Horizon 2000 calls will be admitted.

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.

Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo therefore intends to offer SoE holders the opportunity to develop their research project at a Host Institution in Piedmont or Liguria.

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.

In order to be eligible, the Fellow must have an SoE obtained following participation in a Horizon



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Europe MSCA – European Postdoctoral Fellowships call²³.

Research projects can have a maximum duration of 24 months.

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.

Furthermore, in accordance with the provisions of the Horizon Europe Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions – Postdoctoral Fellowships calls, CSP offers the opportunity to carry out a period of non-academic placement at start-ups and innovative companies, being careful to ensure that the expertise of researchers are matched with the opportunities offered by local start-ups.

Participation in the initiative is voluntary and the expression of interest must be received together with the application. The non-academic placement lasts three months and takes place at an innovative company or startup in the Piedmont area at the end of the 24-month research project. The innovation introduced in this second call is intended to offer highly qualified researchers the opportunity to put their skills at the service of an organisation in the Turin innovation ecosystem, improving career opportunities for talented researchers and promoting the transfer of knowledge and technology, encouraging innovation and establishing efficient collaborations between academic and non-academic organisations.

Finally, Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo offers SoE holders the opportunity to take part in a training workshop on entrepreneurship topics.

Financial provisions

The total provisions for this call amount to € 3,800,000, including € 1,900,000 intended for the first closing date of 31 May 2024 and € 1,900,000 for the second closing date of 30 May 2025.

²³ 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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The allocation of € 1,900,000 for each closing date is split into € 1,000,000 for Target 1 and € 900,000 for Target 2.

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 €120,000 for EICs, 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



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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.

The same expense items presented for the 24 months of research will be guaranteed for the three months of non-academic placement, excluding “Research, training and networking costs”.

How to submit applications

Applications must be submitted using the “OLR 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 OLR for each research project.

Documents required

In addition to the documentation required for the OLR 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



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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);
- Annex 2.2 – if interested, request to activate the period of non-academic placement.

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



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- Annex 2.3 - 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 443 onwards²⁴).

Deadline for the submission of applications

Applications must be submitted using the “OLR 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 deadlines:

- **by 1.00 p.m. at the latest on 31 May 2024, for the first closing date;**
- **by 1.00 p.m. at the latest on 30 May 2025, 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.

²⁴ The reference is to the Annotated Model Grant Agreement drawn up by the European Commission for Horizon 2020, the references for the Horizon Europe AMGA will be supplied as soon as they are available.



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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 deadline. 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.

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 “TRAPEZIO” Call for Proposals in the subject line.

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



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

- 4. Quality education
- 9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure





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