

EU funding opportunities for EU Ecolabel activities

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to present an overview of identified sources of EU funding that could potentially be used for EU Ecolabel-related activities as implemented by EU Ecolabel licence holders, national competent bodies and other relevant organisations, including SMEs.

The document is structured in two sections:

- Section 1: a general description of the identified EU funding programmes.
- Section 2: list of the most relevant calls for proposals that are current or upcoming in the year.

This document aims to be as complete as possible but cannot be considered as exhaustive. For example, many EU funds managed at national or regional level have not been listed in this document. The document will be updated annually (1st quarter of each year).

For a comprehensive overview of EU Funding Programmes for the Environment, please refer to the document '[Find your EU funding programme for the Environment](#)'

Have we missed anything? Do you have any experience of applying to these or other programmes? Please provide us with your feedback at : helpdesk-eu-ecolabel@adelphi.de

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Section I: Description of the identified EU funding programmes programmes

Several EU programmes have been identified as potentially providing funding for EU Ecolabel activities such as: support to certification, capacity building and/or communication.

1.1 Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE)

Available to: businesses, public authorities, NGOs, research institutions, international organisations (registered in the EU).

Aim: LIFE is one of the EU's key financial instruments to support the sustainable transition of the EU economy, with a sub-programme dedicated to circular economy and quality of life objectives.

Webpage: [Programme for the Environment and Climate Action \(LIFE\) - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/programmes/life/)

1.1.1 The Circular economy and quality of life sub-programme

This LIFE sub-programme aims at facilitating the transition towards a sustainable, circular, toxic-free, energy-efficient and climate-resilient economy and at protecting, restoring and improving the quality of the environment, either through direct interventions or by supporting the integration of those objectives in other policies. The Circular economy and quality of life sub-programme provides mostly action grants for projects implementing innovative and best practice solutions in the area of the circular economy, including recovery of resources from waste, water, air, noise, soil and chemical management as well as environmental governance. Two components of this sub-programme clearly mention labelling activities:

- Circular Economy and Waste: Projects tackling the "Implementation of business and consumption models or solutions (...) aiming at reducing or preventing resource use (...) by considering aspects such as: life cycle approach, wide uptake of labelling(...)."
- Environmental Governance: Improving the capacity of public administration to implement a holistic vision of the environment. The EU Ecolabel is explicitly referred to under the list of [LIFE priority topics](#): "The EU Ecolabel, for the promotion of products (goods and services) with excellent environmental performance, in all sectors concerned and in particular in tourism and finance, and as a tool to promote sustainable consumption patterns and lifestyles. In a broader perspective, fostering the use of officially recognised ecolabels".

Types of projects: [Standard Action Projects \(SAPs\)](#) for circular economy and quality of life - Environment: SAPs are the 'traditional' LIFE projects to develop/promote innovative techniques, contribute to application of best practice and catalyse large-scale deployment of successful solutions. They can be '[close to market](#)' projects. SAPs also cover the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of EU environmental policy and law through the so-called Strategic Integrated Projects (SIPs).

Funds: LIFE funds are available mainly in the form of grants. Grants can co-finance 60% to 95% of project eligible costs.



Managed by: LIFE is directly managed fund through calls for proposals/tenders. The programme is managed by the European Commission and the bulk of grants are delegated to the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA).

More information: [CINEA website](#)

1.1.2 The Green Assist facility

Green Assist is an initiative funded under the LIFE programme that aims at helping public and private investors trigger investments in green projects. It is an advisory service that enables beneficiaries to prepare greener investment projects across environmental and circular economy sectors, but also non-environmental sectors.

Type of support: Green Assist provides free, on-demand and customised advisory services for project promoters to grow, sustain or transform their business model. Green Assist provides technical and financial expertise, and can recommend sources of funding, without funding the project itself.

Funds: free advisory services to project promoters

Managed by: [InvestEU](#) Advisory Hub

1.2 EU Single Market Programme (SMP)

Available to: public and private entities, in particular SMEs in the EU-27. [Members of the European Economic Area \(EEA\) accession candidate countries and Partnership countries participate in some strands of the programme.](#)

Aim: The SMP focuses on strengthening the governance of the internal market, supporting the competitiveness of industry and in particular of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The SME pillar of the Programme supports a better access to markets, a more favourable business environment and promoting entrepreneurship (including the continuity of impactful COSME actions). It aims to foster the competitiveness, capacity building and sustainability of enterprises, especially SMEs, including the tourism sector.

Types of projects: Calls aim to set up programmes that provide support, training and in some cases direct financing to SMEs. Cascade funding, also known as Financial Support for Third Parties (FSTP), is a Commission mechanism to distribute public funding in order to assist beneficiaries, such as start-ups, scale-ups, SME and/or mid-caps, in the uptake or development of digital innovation. The most relevant direct opportunities to support SMEs to obtain the EU Ecolabel are the subsequent funding opportunities launched by these SMP programmes: In 2019 a call was launched for 'Recovery Through Sustainable Tourism Growth and SME support'. In 2024, a call was launched for '[Transitioning to a more sustainable and resilient ecosystem – empowering tourism SMEs](#)'. Once approved, this 2024 programme will organise training



activities for key tourism stakeholders, provide targeted consulting, coaching and technical support to SMEs, including on EU Ecolabel/EMAS certification.

[See all current calls under the SMP programme.](#)

Funds: Mainly grants with direct financing of up to 100%, but also [procurement](#) opportunities.

Managed by: The programme is managed both by the Commission (direct) and through implementing partners (indirect). Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW)/ Partly implemented by: European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA)

Webpage: [EU Single Market Programme](#)

1.3 Taix (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange) EIR Peer 2 Peer

Available to: national authorities implementing environmental policy and legislation.

Aim: TAIEX supports Member States' public administrations and is focused on enhancing the implementation of EU legislation and sharing best practices. It is driven by demand and covers all policy areas. Support is provided through workshops, expert missions and study visits. The "TAIEX-EIR PEER 2 PEER" tool facilitates learning between environmental authorities. It provides tailored support to national authorities implementing environmental policy and legislation through expert advice, study visits and workshops. Expert exchanges can address all issues covered by the Environmental Implementation Review [country reports](#): for example circular economy and waste management, nature protection, biodiversity, green infrastructure and soil protection, improvement of air quality, water quality and management, sustainable urban development.

Funds: as a capacity building programme, TAIEX PEER 2 PEER covers the travel, accommodation and organisational costs linked to missions or workshops, and per diems for staff involved.

Managed by: Directorate-General for the Environment

Webpage: [TAIEX - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

1.4 European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)/European Territorial Cooperation Goal (Interreg)

Available to: public authorities, SMEs and NGOs (via Public Authorities) in EU and in associated countries

Aim: The aim of Interreg programmes is to promote cooperation between regions and countries to support their economic and social development and tackle the obstacles of borders. Interreg programmes are financed from the ERDF and support projects addressing the



protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution. There are four strands of Interreg programmes: cross-border, transnational, interregional and outermost regions. The most relevant for companies interested in EU Ecolabel certification are the cross-border and transnational programmes. Public authorities can benefit from capacity building and communication support also from the interregional programmes.

Types of projects: Cooperation projects involving participants from at least two participating countries (depending on the specific programme area). Within the four strands of Interreg programmes, the most relevant for SMEs interested in certification are the cross-border and transnational programmes as private entities are eligible partners. Public authorities can benefit from capacity building and communication support also from the interregional programmes.

Funds: Funds, mainly in the form of grants, are allocated under each Interreg programme to fund research & innovation, but also investments in infrastructure, services, etc. Co-financing rates of up to 80% are generally available. Projects must necessarily have at least two participating countries – the conditions are defined by each programme.

Managed by: Interreg programmes are implemented in line with the principle of shared management (i.e. shared between the Commission and the Managing Authority located in one of the Interreg programme's participating Member States). Each programme is assisted by a Joint Secretariat, which is the main contact point for applicants.

Webpage: The [entry portal to all Interreg programmes and open calls](#).

1.5 European Urban Initiative (EUI) financed by ERDF

Available to: urban authorities in EU-27

Aim: EUI is a tool to support cities to build capacity and knowledge, to support innovation and develop transferable and scalable innovative solutions to urban challenges of EU relevance. A minimum of 8% of European Regional Development Fund resources in each Member State have to be invested in projects and priorities decided by cities based on their sustainable urban development strategies. This initiative is designed to support cities and the related city-based organisations develop and deliver integrated and sustainable strategies. Costs for certification may be eligible for funding depending on the specific objectives of each individual project.

Funds: Funds are provided in the form of grants for innovative action investments, and can co-finance up to 85% of project costs. Capacity building support for peer exchange and knowledge sharing are available for urban authorities. In the call for sustainable tourism in 2023, specific result indicators were expected concerning the number of enterprises supported to register to EMAS or EU Ecolabel.



Managed by: Managed by Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO), via a Permanent Secretariat in Région Hauts de France.

Webpage: [European Urban Initiative](#)

1.6 Horizon Europe

Available to: public authorities, NGOs, research institutions.

Aim: Horizon Europe is the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation. The Horizon Europe mandate for Cluster 6 in particular is to provide opportunities to strengthen and balance environmental, social and economic goals and to set human economic activities on a path towards sustainability.

Funds: Funds, mostly in the form of grants, are available for research & innovation, coordination & support, programme co-fund, innovation & market deployment, and training & mobility actions. Most relevant funding can be found in the calls published under [Work Programme 2023-2025 Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment](#) as listed below. These are annual calls where EU Ecolabel activities could be potentially eligible:

- HORIZON-CL6-2023-CircBio-02-2-two-stage: Novel, sustainable and circular bio-based textiles
- HORIZON-CL6-2024-CircBio-01-2: Circular solutions for textile value chains based on extended producer responsibility
- HORIZON-CL6-2024-CircBio-01-3: Innovative circular solutions for furniture
- HORIZON-CL6-2024-CircBio-01-4: Systemic circular solutions for a sustainable tourism
- HORIZON-CL6-2024-CircBio-01-5: Programmed biodegradation capability of biobased materials and products, validated in specific environments
- HORIZON-CL6-2024-CircBio-02-2-two-stage: Increasing the circularity in plastics value chains
- HORIZON-CL6-2024-CircBio-02-3-two-stage: Increasing the circularity in electronics value chains
- HORIZON-CL6-2024-CircBio-02-4-two-stage: New circular solutions and decentralised approaches for water and wastewater management
- HORIZON-CL6-2024-CircBio-02-5-two-stage: Circular design of bio-based processes and products
- HORIZON-CL6-2023-ZEROPOLLUTION-01-4: Environmental sustainability and circularity criteria for industrial bio-based systems

Managed by: The programme is implemented through direct management by the Commission, with the support of the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency ([CINEA](#)) (for 3 of the 5 missions under the Horizon Europe framework programme).

Webpage: [Horizon Europe](#) work programmes



1.7 Other sources of guidance/support

The **Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)** supports small businesses in becoming more sustainable. The EEN provides advice on EU certification schemes such as the EU Ecolabel or EMAS and local funding opportunities: [Sustainability | Enterprise Europe Network \(europa.eu\)](#).

There are many other potential sources of funding/support that are managed by national or regional managing authorities.



Section II: Most relevant calls for proposals

The main source of information on open and upcoming calls for proposals is the [EU funding and tenders portal](#).

The following table provides a synthetic list of calls that are open, at the time of publication. This table will be updated on an annual basis.

Programme	Managed by	Support possible	Target	Link to call and frequency	Deadline for submission
<p>LIFE Circular economy and quality of life sub-programme</p> <p>LIFE-2024-SAP-ENV-ENVIRONMENT — Circular Economy, resources from Waste, Air, Water, Soil, Noise, Chemicals, Bauhaus Objectives</p>	CINEA	<p>Standard Action Projects (SAP) aimed at achieving the objectives of the Circular Economy and Quality of Life sub-programme.</p> <p>Implementation of innovative and best practice solutions in the area of the circular economy, including recovery of resources from waste, water, air, noise, soil and chemical management</p>	Businesses, public authorities, NGOs, research Institutions, international organisations (registered in the EU).	<p>LIFE Calls for proposals 2024 - European Commission (europa.eu)</p>	19 September 2024
<p>LIFE-2024-SAP-ENV-GOV — Environmental Governance</p>	CINEA	<p>Standard Action Projects (SAP) aimed at achieving the objectives of the Circular Economy and Quality of Life sub-programme.</p> <p>Governance: Development, promotion, implementation and/or harmonisation of voluntary instruments and approaches. "The EU Ecolabel, for the promotion of products (goods and services) with excellent environmental performance, in all sectors concerned and in particular in tourism and finance, and as a tool to promote sustainable consumption patterns and lifestyles. In a broader perspective, fostering the use of officially recognised ecolabels".</p>	Businesses, public authorities, NGOs, research Institutions, international organisations (registered in the EU).	<p>EU funding & tenders portal LIFE Calls for proposals 2024 - European Commission (europa.eu)</p>	19 September 2024



Programme	Managed by	Support possible	Target	Link to call and frequency	Deadline for submission
Single Market Programme (SMP) Cascade funding	EISMEA	Overview of current calls for funding in cascade (issued by funded projects)	Public and private bodies	Tender portal for SME funding	dependin g on call
COASTOUR project (funded under SMP-COSME-2021-TOURSME-01 - COVID-19 Recovery Through Sustainable Tourism Growth and SME Support)		Certification at least 80 SME grants to tourism SMEs - 100% financing for up to €9,000 and may be spent amongst others on services provided by ecolabelling specialists, sustainability advisors, and tourism support organisations.	MSMEs in Denmark, Portugal, Italy, Slovenia, and Lithuania	EU funding portal	28 August 2024
ST3ER project (funded under SMP-COSME-2022-TOURSME-01 - Sustainable growth and building resilience in tourism – empowering SMEs to carry out the twin transition)		Certification Individual SME Innovation Projects (€25,000 grant) specifically aimed at tourism-oriented SMEs focussing on innovative responses to the thematic twin transition challenges, including a minimum of one digital or green practice from Table 1 below; Collaborative Innovation Projects involving a partnership of 2 - 4 tourism SMEs (€30,000 grant) targeting experimental (innovative) carbon footprint reduction measures or any of the green practices listed.	SMEs in Denmark, Ireland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain	EU funding portal	30 September 2024
TAIEX Technical Assistance and Information Exchange EIR Peer 2 Peer	DG Environment	Capacity building	National authorities responsible for environmental policy	Application	Ongoing
Interreg cooperation programmes (ERDF)		Overview of current calls for funding by Interreg programmes		Interreg portal	



Programme	Managed by	Support possible	Target	Link to call and frequency	Deadline for submission
Interreg Aurora cross-border cooperation programme	County Administrative Board of Norrbotten (Managing Authority)	Within framework of a cross-border cooperation project, eligible activities could cover environmental sustainability, sustainable tourism, sharing knowledge on Ecolabel certification process, developing new processes for modifying production lines to develop eco products; creating network of eco-tourism locations and encourage accommodation owners to comply with Ecolabel; training tourism stakeholders in Ecolabel standards and promoting offer to visitors	Public and private legal entities from Sweden, Finland or Norway (partner countries)	Call for projects	9 September – 7 October 2024 17 February – 17 March 2025
Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic transnational cooperation programme	County Administrative Board of Västerbotten (Managing Authority)	Certification: Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy Capacity building: Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders	Public and private organisations from Finland, Sweden, Norway, Ireland, Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland	Call for projects	30 September 2024
European Urban Initiative – City-to-city exchange	EUI	Capacity building	Public authorities responsible for urban policy; relevant stakeholders may also participate	Apply for city-to-city exchange	Ongoing
Horizon Europe	European Commission	Overview of Horizon Europe calls		Tender portal for Horizon funding	ongoing; depending on call

