

JOINT INNOVATION FACILITY (JIF)

ELIGIBILITY & SELECTION CRITERIA



A. Overview

The **Joint Innovation Facility (JIF)** is a new Africa-Europe initiative designed to accelerate the scaling of digitally enabled commercially viable innovations with strong growth- and cross-border cooperation potential between Africa and Europe. JIF supports innovation that contributes to the **digital and green transition**.

Launched under the **Africa-Europe Digital Innovation Bridge (AEDIB)** – a project under the EU's **Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment package** – JIF is co-developed by the **German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)**, the **Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland** and the **European Union (EU)**. It is jointly implemented by **Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)** and the **Finnish Public Management Institute (HAUS)**, leveraging their combined experience in international cooperation, innovation support and strengthening innovation ecosystems.

JIF is designed as a **partnership-driven facility** that funds **cross-border cooperation ventures** between African and European actors. Its primary objective is to **scale established, revenue-generating solutions** and promote investments in:

- ▶ further development of their **digital components**,
- ▶ enabling **cross-border market expansion** for Africa-Europe scaling pathways,
- ▶ mutually reinforcing African and European digital agendas.

The facility targets **digitally enabled solutions with proven commercial viability** and strong potential for market expansion or replication. Beyond scaling, JIF aims to **strengthen collaboration between economic actors**, particularly private sector partners, across innovation ecosystems from Africa and Europe.

All supported ventures must be **climate-positive**, meaning they generate a measurable positive contribution to **climate change mitigation, adaptation, and/or resilience or present a credible pathway to doing so through project design and**

implementation. By doing so, JIF contributes to accelerating high-potential innovations that drive sustainable economic growth while supporting Africa's and Europe's digital and green transitions.

A core priority of JIF is to support **context-relevant and sector-focused AI applications** that go beyond generic or experimental use of artificial intelligence. To advance **high-quality applied AI** and strengthen **Africa-Europe cooperation on AI**, JIF will establish a **dedicated thematic window for AI-enabled solutions** with a clear sectoral use case. In line with EU priorities on **applied and trustworthy AI**, JIF promotes the **meaningful integration of AI where it delivers clear, problem-driven value**, supporting AI applications that are **integral to the functionality, scalability, and impact** of the underlying product or service.

There will be **2 main tracks** to choose from in this main call: an **open track** and an **AI focus track**. In each track the lead partner could either be a **for-profit entity**, an **Entrepreneurship Support Organisation (ESO)** or **Innovation Support Organisation (ISO)** including **Innovation Hubs**. Only one application will be considered per lead applicant.

B. What We're Looking For

We are inviting joint venture proposals from innovation consortia that:

- ▶ Consist of at least two partners forming a consortium collaborating across Sub-Saharan Africa* and the EU and are led by either an African private sector entity or an African ESO/ISO together with a private sector entity.
- ▶ Advance digitally enabled innovations, where the digital technology component is central to the proposed solution with a preference for frontier technologies. A special window will be opened for applications that further develop high-quality AI solutions crucial for the underlying product.
- ▶ Aim to scale an existing, market-ready product or service or to add or further develop digital functionalities of a solution that is already established and generates revenue.

* The African partner(s) must be from one of the 14 priority countries which are Benin, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

The European partner(s) must be based in one of the 27 EU Member States.

- ▶ Present a project with a demonstrated climate-positive impact, generating a measurable positive contribution to climate change mitigation, adaptation, and/or resilience or present a credible pathway to doing so through project design and implementation.
- ▶ Are led by committed and capable teams with a track record of technical and operational capacity required to scale the innovation.
- ▶ Demonstrate strong representation of women in leadership and/or founding roles across all consortium organisations, as well as within the project implementation team.
- ▶ Require strategic funding to accelerate the next phase of growth, and demonstrate commitment to the project's success, including a contribution of own resources.

C. What We Offer

Selected ventures will benefit from:

- ▶ **Non-dilutive funding of 100.000 or 200.000 EUR** provided through a milestone-based grant structure.
- ▶ Tailored needs-based support through the **JIF Venture Studio**, including:
 - Mentorship from seasoned experts for targeted learning and strategic support,
 - Access to toolkits, investment readiness support, and tailor-made technical advisory services,
 - Networking and peer learning opportunities across Africa and Europe.
- ▶ Strategic visibility, capacity strengthening, and alignment with the EU–Africa partnership goals and Agenda 2063.

D. Who can apply?

A consortium should consist of:

1. Lead Partner

For profit companies which are at least 3 years in operation – These are legal entities formed under state law to conduct business activities with the primary goal of generating profit (small and growing businesses (SGBs) or larger companies).

ESOs or ISOs which are at least 3 years in operation – By this we mean legally registered organizations supporting, mentoring, training, and/or funding entrepreneurs.

2. Second & Third Partners

For profit companies – These are legal entities formed under state law to conduct business activities with the primary goal of generating profit (small and growing businesses (SGBs), or larger companies).

Applied research organisations – These are entities, universities, research centres, nonprofit institutes or government affiliated centres that conduct systematic, problem-oriented research aimed at addressing specific societal, industrial or technological challenges.

Non-profit organizations – A nonprofit organization is an entity that is created and operated for charitable or socially beneficial purposes rather than making a profit.

E. How to Apply

Applications to the Joint Innovation Facility are open from 10th February to 30th April 2026 via the [good grants platform](#) and will be reviewed on a rolling basis. Shortlisting will be done in two batches:

1st Batch: Proposal reviews from 3rd week of March 2026

2nd Batch: Proposal reviews from 1st week of May 2026

Learn more:

<https://project-spark.africa/joint-innovation-facility/>

The application process consists of the following steps:

1. Pre-Screening

- ▶ Interested consortia are invited to respond to pre-screening questions. As part of the pre-screening, a high-level commercial viability assessment will be carried out to assess operational, financial, governance, and compliance capacity in line with the selection criteria.
- ▶ Only applicants who successfully pass the pre-screening stage will be invited to submit a full grant proposal.

2. Grant Proposal Submission

- ▶ Eligible consortia will then proceed to submit a full **grant proposal**.
- ▶ Proposal requirements will be **aligned with the eligibility and selection criteria** outlined in the call documentation to ensure consistency and transparency throughout the evaluation process.

F. Eligibility Criteria

To be considered for funding through the JIF, applicants must meet the following minimum eligibility requirements, organized under **five core pillars**.

1. Strategic Alignment

Aligning with **JIF's objectives**:

- ▶ Strengthening **Africa–Europe collaboration**,
- ▶ Supporting the **digital transition and scaling of commercially viable innovations**,
- ▶ Demonstrate a climate-positive impact (contributing to **climate mitigation/adaptation and/or resilience or present a credible pathway to doing so through project design and implementation**).

2. Partnership & Team

a) Consortium Formation

- ▶ **Consortium of 2–3 partners, led by an African for-profit entity or African ESO/ISO** partnering with an EU-registered entity.
- ▶ A Consortium with a lead partner as ESO or ISO can only partner with for-profit companies. While consortia with a lead partner as for-profit company can work with any of the other entities as described under **section D (Who can apply)**.
- ▶ Provide a signed and dated **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or Letter of Intent (LoI)** between all consortium partners, clearly outlining partnership roles and collaboration intentions. Demonstrate a **clear partnership objective** e.g. Jointly improve or extend a product/service/process, enter a new market, scale across borders and demonstrate mutual value of partnership and local ownership.
- ▶ Commit a **minimum 20% co-financing contribution (of the grant amount)** including a minimum cash contribution of 15%. Higher commitment to cash contribution is encouraged. **Note that first project expenses will be catered to using the cash contribution**.
- ▶ Any partner receiving funding must have **generated revenue in the past 12 months of at least 50% of the funds requested by JIF**.

b) Lead partner Legal & Operation Requirements

The lead applicant must:

- ▶ **Be legally registered as a private venture entity or a legally registered entity in the case of ESO/ISO with a minimum of 3 years of operation within one or more of the 14 Sub-Saharan African countries*.**
- ▶ Provide a registration certificate, business license, MoI (Memorandum of Incorporation), valid tax compliance certificate, and evidence of physical presence.
- ▶ Provide **reviewed and/or audited financial statements** for the past **2 years** (audited being preferred).
- ▶ Have an **operational accounting system** and provide access screenshot thereof.
- ▶ Possess internal policies:
 - **Procurement Policy**
 - **Finance Policy**
 - **Documented Internal and external Controls / Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)**

Applicants must demonstrate the ability to manage donor funding, including:

- ▶ **Prior experience with grants or donor-funded programs** (preferred but not mandatory). Provide a short description of donor funded projects (2 lines max), year, donor amount - relating to project. **We will be asking for reference contact for the finalists!**

A non-disclosure agreement (NDA) must be signed and submitted.

c) Team

The team must demonstrate:

- ▶ **At least 30% women representation** in leadership or founding roles.
- ▶ Technical and operational capacity is required to scale innovation and ensure completion of milestones and the project's success.
- ▶ **Clearly defined roles and responsibilities** including time commitments to the project.
- ▶ **Provide company organizational chart – clearly indicating the finance and procurement staff as well as project staff for implementation of the JIF project.**

Applicants will be asked to submit:

- ▶ **Team profiles** summarizing experience and capabilities.

3. Digital Innovation

Demonstrate that digital technology is central to its innovation model. The solution must represent a genuinely innovative approach.

Applicants must show/demonstrate how digital technology is used to:

- ▶ **Enable, enhance, or differentiate** the proposed innovation.
- ▶ **Drive scalability, efficiency, impact, or access** within the business model.

- ▶ **Demonstrate innovativeness through new or better products, services, or processes, new business models and disruptive market approaches.**

Applicants should articulate how their innovation fills a gap or solves a pressing problem in a unique or significantly improved way.

AI-specific project window:** Projects applying under the AI-specific window must meet the following additional requirements:

- ▶ Provide a **high-quality, applied AI solution** that goes beyond a generic or experimental use of AI.
- ▶ Clearly demonstrate how the **AI solution delivers a specific, problem-driven value**, addressing a clearly defined challenge within the sector and target market.
- ▶ Demonstrate the **centrality of the AI component** to the JIF-funded project, meaning that the proposed objectives **cannot be achieved without the AI solution**.
- ▶ Clearly explain **why AI is the appropriate and necessary approach**, compared to non-AI or simpler digital alternatives.

4. Business Model

The Business model must be **commercially viable** beyond JIF funding and the solution must:

- ▶ Demonstrate clear need and sufficient market to drive scale.
- ▶ Be **tested and show clear market potential with product-market fit**.
- ▶ Provide a clear **scaling strategy** and pathways for growth (incl. cross-border where relevant)
- ▶ Demonstrate potential for a **joint proof of concept (PoC)** leveraging the consortium structure.
- ▶ Business model must be **commercially viable** beyond JIF funding.

For the AI-specific project window: Projects applying under the **AI-specific window** must meet the following additional requirements:

- ▶ Demonstrate how the **AI solution is integral to the functionality, scalability, and/or impact** of the underlying product or service, rather than being an add-on feature.
- ▶ Show how the AI component **enhances the innovative character** of the solution.

5. Climate Positive Impact

Demonstrate a **measurable positive impact** on:

- ▶ **Climate mitigation** and/or
- ▶ **Climate adaptation and resilience**
- ▶ **Or present a credible pathway to doing so through project design and implementation**

** Projects where AI is included primarily as an auxiliary/generic feature, without being essential to the core functionality or impact of the solution, will not be considered under the AI-specific window.