

IPCEI (Important Projects of Common European Interest)

Expression of Interest for the Participation of Austrian Associated
Partners in the IPCEI Artificial Intelligence (AI)

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Legal notice

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Important Notice

Participation as an Associated Partner (AP) in the IPCEI AI takes place without additional national or European funding.

The present Expression of Interest therefore does not constitute a funding call and neither establishes an entitlement to funding nor a right to be included in the IPCEI AI.

Participation as an Associated Partner in the IPCEI AI is based on the fundamental interest of the participating organisation in cooperation, networking and the resulting benefits. Further details are provided in the description below.

Participation in the national Expression of Interest constitutes the basis for participation in the IPCEI AI.

Motivation

IPCEI Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEIs) are an instrument of the European Union to support highly innovative and strategically relevant projects of common European interest. Their objective is to strengthen the development and industrial deployment of innovative technologies and value chains in Europe.

An IPCEI in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is currently being prepared at European level. The initiative focuses on the development and industrial deployment of responsible and sovereign AI technologies in the European Union along the entire value chain. The initiative is currently being prepared by a Design Group composed of participating Member States considering participation in the IPCEI AI. These currently are Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

During the ongoing design phase, the participating Member States are jointly preparing the strategic and state aid-related foundations of the initiative, including the so-called Chapeau Document, and are conducting national selection procedures for potential Direct Participants and Associated Partners.

Selected projects may subsequently participate in European matchmaking and consortium-building activities. Following the design phase, the IPCEI AI is expected to enter the assessment phase including notification to and assessment by the European Commission under state aid rules. Subject to state aid approval by the European Commission, the implementation phase of the IPCEI AI would subsequently begin.

The planned IPCEI AI follows an integrated approach along European value chains and focuses on research, development, piloting, scale-up, and the first industrial deployment (FID) of sovereign AI technologies. A key element of the initiative is the development of a common technical framework and open ecosystem to ensure interoperability, security, and the avoidance of vendor lock-in. This includes:

1. Sovereign Foundation Models: Development of Large Language Models (LLMs) and Large Reasoning Models (LRMs) tailored to European values and regulations.
2. Sector-Specific Models: Creation of industry-specific foundation models based on non-language data (e.g., machine data, time-series) for high-accuracy results.
3. Data Processing and Orchestration: Secure handling, harmonisation, and provisioning of high-quality industry data, including federated learning and synthetic data generation.
4. AI Deployment and Operations: Tools for managing AI lifecycles, inference, and integration into production environments across hybrid and edge infrastructures.
5. Open Platforms: Establishment of open-source frameworks and marketplaces to enable easy reuse and integration of AI components.
6. AI Services and Sector-Specific Use Cases: Development and deployment of AI services and applications that build on foundation models and address concrete needs in industrial and service sectors, including manufacturing, mobility, energy, telecommunications and public administration.

Furthermore, the initiative emphasizes the establishment of an "AI-Talent Factory" to develop schemes for training AI skills, ensuring that the workforce possesses the necessary technical, cognitive, and managerial competencies to drive adoption. All activities under the IPCEI AI are expected to comply with strict ethical guidelines and regulations, such as the GDPR, DGA, Cybersecurity Act, and AI Act.

Further information on the six components of the AI value chain and the resulting thematic scope of the IPCEI AI is provided in the [IPCEI AI Value Chain Document](#), which forms the basis for the thematic assessment of projects under this Expression of Interest.

Associated Partners (APs)

The status of "Associated Partner" (AP) in the context of IPCEI initiatives refers to a form of participation of companies and research organisations in the IPCEI ecosystem without undergoing the state aid approval process and without receiving state aid under the IPCEI.

APs participate in the IPCEI through their own project activities and thereby contribute to achieving the common objectives along the value chain. They may participate in key activities such as cooperation activities, matchmaking formats, as well as governance and working processes, while assuming largely comparable roles and obligations to Direct Participants, albeit with reduced administrative burden.

The BMIMI intends, through the participation of one or more APs, to enable the integration of Austrian actors into the emerging European value chains, even though Austria does not foresee participation in the initiative with Direct Participants and national funding.

Participation in this context is based exclusively on already existing national or European funding.

Important Clarification

Participation as an AP does not establish an entitlement to additional national or European funding.

Projects considered suitable at national level will be invited by the BMIMI, subject to fulfilment of the formal criteria, to participate in further IPCEI AI activities (e.g. matchmaking).

The final decision regarding the inclusion of Austrian projects as APs is taken at European level by the so-called Design Group of the IPCEI AI together with the European Coordination team.

Added Value of Participation as an Associated Partner

Participation as an AP enables Austrian companies and research organisations to:

- participate in a strategic European innovation ecosystem in the field of AI,
- participate in matchmaking and networking opportunities as well as further activities within the framework of possible joint programme management at European level,
- establish European cooperation activities along the value chain,

- increase their visibility within the European innovation ecosystem,
- gain valuable insights into the results of other partner projects, for example within working and governance formats.

Participation Requirements

Formal Criteria

Funding Status

Only national standalone projects, national consortium projects, and national project parts of European consortium projects receiving or expected to receive funding for research, development or innovation activities within the scope defined below are eligible for participation.

At the time of submission, either the funding contract or a conditional grant approval for a funding contract must already be available. In the latter case, the existence of the funding contract must be demonstrated by 31 March 2027 at the latest.

Participation as an Associated Partner ceases if the underlying funding is withdrawn or the project is terminated.

Location

The project or the Austrian project part must be implemented in Austria.

Type of Organisation

The following entities are eligible to participate:

- companies,
- non-university research organisations,
- universities.

Research organisations and universities are eligible provided that a clear pathway towards industrial exploitation or application can be demonstrated.

Project Type

The following project types are eligible:

- R&D standalone projects,
- Austrian R&D consortium projects (represented by one consortium partner),
- Austrian project parts of European R&D consortium projects.

Project Size

The Austrian project or project part must demonstrate eligible costs of at least EUR 1,000,000.

This requirement is intended to ensure sufficient critical mass and integration into the IPCEI ecosystem.

Project Character and Strategic Relevance

The project must demonstrate clear relevance to industrial application, scale-up or deployment along the value chain.

Purely exploratory activities or preliminary studies without a recognisable perspective for further development in the context of the IPCEI AI are not addressed.

Project Duration and Relevance

As a general rule, the funding period of the project may not end before 31 March 2028. Exceptions apply to FFG Basisprogramm projects.

Where a project or project part (in particular national consortium projects) allows for a cost-neutral extension, the project end date may be considered under inclusion of such a cost-neutral extension (maximum extension of one year).

For national FFG projects, participation as an Associated Partner in the IPCEI AI may be regarded as a valid justification for a cost-neutral extension.

Submission Language and Submission Platform

Submission takes place via the website www.ffg.at/IPCEI_AI_EOI.

Submissions must be made in English.

Content-related Criteria

Projects selected for participation are expected to focus on the following key areas:

Next-Generation AI Continuum:

- R&D of Foundation Models: Developing open, competitive, and frontier AI models, including innovative training methods and post-training techniques like fine-tuning for specific sector offerings.
- Sovereign Cloud Services: Enabling essential components for AI training and deployment, including resource management and computation distribution.
- Energy Efficiency: Creating new technologies to optimise the energy consumption of training and running AI models.

Secure Data Access:

- Developing technologies to ensure the availability of high-quality, structured datasets that comply with European data privacy and security regulations.
- Integrating advanced solutions for data storage, management, database administration, processing, and analytics.

Advanced AI-as-a-Service (AlaaS):

- Tailoring approaches for AI developers and users, with a specific focus on SMEs, to enable broad adoption across industrial sectors.
- Developing advanced tools, frameworks, and API-based access to AI models and end-to-end capabilities.
- Deploying next-generation inference and AI training services.

Open-Source Framework & Interoperability:

- Developing a common open-source framework to ensure security and high interoperability of European solutions.
- Fostering an active developer community to maintain an open-source toolbox for creating highly customizable AI solutions.

Systematic Integration:

- Integrating next-generation AI models into applications and interconnection services (e.g., telco networks) to address common use cases in specific industrial sectors and public administrations.

AI-Talent Factory:

- Establishing schemes for training AI skills, recognised as a critical enabler for successful adoption.
- Addressing the full range of required competencies, from basic to highly specialised, including technical, cognitive, managerial, and social skills.
- Prioritizing AI literacy and knowledge promotion within micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and their workforces.

These focus areas aim to create a resilient, sovereign, and competitive European AI ecosystem that supports the entire value chain from research to industrial deployment.

The final assignment to European work streams may be further specified during the European design and matchmaking process.

Position within the Value Chain

The proposed projects must be attributable to at least one of the following components of the AI value chain:

a. Data Processing, Orchestration, and Provisioning

This foundational layer manages, processes, and delivers data for AI models. It includes data collection, transfer, storage, labelling, transformation, and access.

Key capabilities involve data orchestration, vectoring of databases, knowledge graphs, and ensuring high-quality, scalable input for training and inference. It supports both on-prem and cloud environments.

b. Sovereign Foundation Models (LLM/LRM)

Focuses on the development of common sovereign Large Language Models (LLMs) and Large Reasoning Models (LRMs).

These models are designed to be independent of third-country providers, customizable to local laws and values, and capable of complex reasoning beyond basic pattern matching.

c. Sovereign Industry Sector-Specific Foundation Models (SFM)

Involves creating pre-trained, non-language foundation models tailored to specific industries (e.g., healthcare, finance, automotive, aerospace, manufacturing).

These models utilize structured business and machine data (such as time-series or signal data) to produce high-accuracy results for sector-specific tasks and regulations.

d. AI Deployment and Operations (AI Ops)

Covers the end-to-end process of bringing AI models into production, including maintenance, monitoring, and updating throughout their lifecycle.

This includes tools for inference, model ensembles, automated retraining, and managing AI across hybrid or resource-constrained environments (cloud and edge).

e. Open Platform for AI

Aims to create an open ecosystem (marketplace) for AI models, applications, components, and tools to enable easy reuse and integration.

It includes the development of a common open-source framework, multi-agent systems, and APIs to ensure security, high interoperability, and the avoidance of vendor lock-in.

f. AI Services and Sector-Specific Use Cases

Focuses on the development and deployment of AI applications that deliver value to specific industrial and service areas (e.g., agrifood, energy, public sector, telecom).

This includes systematic integration of next-generation AI models into applications and interconnection services.

The final assignment to European work streams may be further specified during the European design and matchmaking process.

Transversal Descriptions

In addition to the specific components above, the IPCEI AI Design group has identified transversals as fundamental elements necessary to operate the entire value chain. Applicants must indicate that their project entails (implicitly or explicitly) the five relevant transversal descriptions.

1. **Compliance:** Ensuring adherence to legal, ethical, and regulatory standards (e.g., GDPR, AI Act).
2. **Trust & Resilience:** Guaranteeing reliability, transparency, fairness, and the ability to recover from disruptions.
3. **Security & Safety:** Protecting against threats (data breaches, adversarial attacks) and ensuring systems operate without causing harm.
4. **Energy Efficiency:** Minimizing environmental impact and optimizing resource use.
5. **Accessibility & Openness:** Promoting open-source models to improve sovereignty and transparency.

Further information on the six components of the AI value chain as well as the transversal descriptions is provided in the [IPCEI AI Value Chain Document](#), which forms the basis for the thematic assessment of projects under this Expression of Interest.

Rights and Obligations of Austrian Associated Partners

Transparency Obligation

Participating companies and research organisations agree that their identity as well as non-confidential project content may be published in connection with the IPCEI AI.

Participation Obligation

Participating companies and research organisations agree:

- to contribute to matchmaking and networking activities,
- to participate in selected governance, workshop and conference formats,
- to actively contribute to the European innovation ecosystem of the IPCEI AI.

Cooperation Obligation

APs generally commit to establishing at least three effective cross-border cooperation activities with Direct Participants or Associated Partners of the IPCEI AI during the implementation of the initiative.

The cooperation activities may be initiated within the framework of the European matchmaking activities.

At least one of these cooperation activities must involve a Direct Participant of the IPCEI. By the time of the official notification at the latest, at least one cooperation activity with a Direct Participant must be substantiated by a meaningful Letter of Intent.

At the time of submission, a general willingness to implement such cooperation activities must be demonstrated.

Effective cooperation activities are understood as cooperation activities within the meaning of the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER).

Spillover Obligation

APs generally commit to carrying out at least one spillover activity with effects in at least three EU Member States.

Spillover activities are understood as all activities generating additional value beyond the direct project objective(s) and which are not directly necessary for achieving the project objective(s). See also IPCEI - Technical guidance on conditions: “Your project must deliver positive spillover effects” on p. 4.

Reporting Obligations

Associated Partners commit:

- to submit a short annual report to the BMIMI on non-confidential project progress as well as cooperation and spillover activities,
- to contribute to the preparation of European reporting formats, in particular the Annual Executive Report.

Financial Contribution Obligation

Associated Partners commit to contributing, where appropriate, to the establishment and implementation of long-term governance and programme management structures at European level, including through in-kind and/or financial contributions. The specific structure and amount of this contribution will be determined during the subsequent European-level process.

Maintenance of AP Status

The maintenance of the status as an AP requires the continuous fulfilment of the obligations undertaken within the framework of this Expression of Interest throughout the duration of the IPCEI.

BMIMI reserves the right to revoke the status as an AP in the event of substantial or persistent breaches of these obligations or in the absence of active participation in the IPCEI ecosystem.

Participating companies and research organisations may also withdraw their participation as an AP at any time in written form.

Submission and Application Process

Submission

Interested companies and research organisations must complete the Application Form in full and submit it via the designated submission platform by 4 August 2026, 12:00 CEST at the latest.

Submissions received after the deadline cannot be considered.

Required Documents

The submission within the framework of the Expression of Interest must contain the following documents and information:

- project description,
- proof of existing funding or financing,
- assignment of the project:
 - to the content-related criteria,
 - to the value chain,
- description of planned cooperation activities,
- description of planned spillover activities,
- statement of motivation for participation in the IPCEI AI,
- declaration of intent regarding the fulfilment of the obligations described above.

A form covering the above-mentioned contents is available for download at www.ffg.at/IPCEI_AI_EOI and must be completed for submission.

Selection Process

National Level

At the Austrian level, suitable projects are selected based on fulfilment of the following formal criteria:

- Was the submission made within the indicated submission deadline?
- Was the submission made in English?
- Was the submission completed in full and are all required documents included?
- Was the submission made via the indicated submission platform (website)?
- Is a valid funding contract or a written provisional funding commitment for the project available? (Note: in the case of a provisional funding commitment, the funding contract must without exception be available by 31 March 2027 at the latest.)
- Is the project a national standalone project, a national consortium project, or a national project part of a European project?
- Does the project or project part demonstrate eligible costs of at least EUR 1,000,000?
- Does the funding period end after 31 March 2028? If not, can the project end date be considered after 31 March 2028 under inclusion of a possible cost-neutral extension? If not, is the project a FFG Basisprogramm project?
- Is a clear relevance for industrial application, scale-up or deployment along the value chain demonstrated?
- Is the project or relevant project part implemented in Austria?
- Is the submitting organisation an Austrian company, Austrian university or Austrian non-university research organisation?
- Can the project be assigned to at least one component of the IPCEI AI value chain?
- Does the project entail (implicitly or explicitly) the five relevant transversal descriptions?
- Are the planned three cross-border cooperation activities described in a substantial manner?
- Is there a clear motivation to foresee at least one cooperation activity with a Direct Participant?
- Are the planned spillover activities described in a substantial manner?
- Is the motivation for participation in the IPCEI AI as an Associated Partner described in a substantial manner?

- Is the declaration of intent regarding fulfilment of the above-mentioned obligations confirmed?

Each block of questions (bullet point) must contain at least one positive answer in order to fulfil the formal criteria.

Upon fulfilment of the formal criteria, BMIMI will invite applicants to participate in further activities (Online European matchmaking, etc.).

Fulfilment of the formal criteria at national level and the invitation to further activities do not constitute acceptance as an AP by the Design Group of the IPCEI AI.

European Level

The national selection does not constitute automatic acceptance as an AP in the IPCEI AI.

The final decision regarding acceptance is taken at the European level by the Design Group of the IPCEI AI (association of the participating Member States under the leadership of the Coordination team).

Timeline and Further Process

The national Expression of Interest is open until 4 August 2026, 12:00 CEST.

The formal selection process will be carried out by BMIMI and FFG by 31 August 2026.

Selected projects will be informed about the next steps.

Subsequently, the following activities may in particular take place:

- participation in online matchmaking formats,
- preparation of European cooperation activities,
- involvement in preparatory activities for the state aid approval procedure (Chapeau Document),
- possible inclusion as an Associated Partner in the IPCEI AI.

Please note that prospective Austrian Associated Partners must have initiated three cross-border cooperation activities by the official pre-notification date applicable to the final pre-notification wave, currently planned for 30 September 2026, including at least one cooperation activity with a Direct Participant in the IPCEI. The German Coordinator provides an online matchmaking platform for the identification of potential cooperation partners and the initiation of cross-border cooperation activities.

The envisaged cooperation activities must be sufficiently substantiated by that date. The cooperation activity with a Direct Participant must subsequently be documented by a meaningful Letter of Intent as part of the notification documentation. Only projects fulfilling these requirements can be proposed as Austrian Associated Partners.

Further Information

Important Links

- [IPCEI AI Website](#)
- [IPCEI AI Value Chain Document](#)
- [BMIMI IPCEI Website](#)
- [Application Form and Submission Platform](#)

Advisory Services and Contact

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