Application Guidelines

European Public Sector Award (EPSA)
EPSA 2025-26

Driving Competitiveness through Reforms and Investments

Introduction

These guidelines aim to assist applicants in submitting projects to EPSA 2025-26.

To submit your project, please fill in the online application form **HERE.**

The call for applications is open until 30 January 2026, 17:00 (CET).

Applications for EPSA 2025-26 must be submitted in English.

To facilitate the project submission, you are invited to compile the information for the application form in any official EU language as well as Serbo-Croatian, Icelandic, Norwegian, Turkish and Ukrainian and to use the European Commission's Machine Translation system "eTranslation" to convert this information into English. The English text can then be inserted into the application form (see Annex I for guidance on automated translations).

In the first step of the evaluation process (online evaluation), projects will be evaluated solely on the basis of the information submitted in this form. Any other accompanying materials submitted in whatever format will not be taken into account.

Eligibility

The European Public Sector Award is open to public sector entities at all levels of government across Europe (see Annex II for the list of eligible countries).

"Public sector" includes all public entities such as EU institutions, departments, divisions or agencies of EU institutions, national governments, national government departments, divisions or agencies, 100% state-owned enterprises, cities, regions, provinces and other forms of sub-national authorities as well as departments, divisions or agencies of them or enterprises 100% owned by them including institutions responsible for scrutiny of public sector entities such as regulatory, audit or judicial authorities.

Projects can be submitted jointly by more than one organisation, including cross-country applications and private or mixed-capital entities, not-for-profit/third sector organisations or academic institutions, but the lead organisation must be a public sector entity.

Award categories

Under the title "Driving Competitiveness through Reforms and Investments", the EPSA 2025-26 edition welcomes the submission of projects in three award categories:

- Category I "Innovating Government, Governance and Policies"
- Category II "Investing in Infrastructure, Mobility and Energy"
- Category III "Delivering User-Centric Services at Subnational Level"

The three categories are defined comprehensively, but across all three categories, data-driven reforms and investment constitute the topical focus (see descriptions of award categories in Annex III).

EPSA 2025-26 will use the following horizontal definitions:

- **Data-driven public administration**- the recognition of the public sector that data is a strategic asset in the design and delivery of policies and services; practices of collection, processing and utilisation of data for informing decision-making, improving efficiency, increasing foresight capacities through calculation of risk, prediction and generally a turn towards proactive governance, sharing of data between public and private entities for improving service delivery.
- **Reform**- an action or process of making changes, improvements and innovations with significant impact and long-lasting effects on the functioning of a market, the functioning of a policy or on progress to relevant policy objectives, on the functioning or structures of an institution or administration, on the processes and functioning of governance. The aim of a reform is to structurally change parameters, improve relevant framework conditions or maximise necessary drivers or remove obstacles. Where applicable, reforms can also be actions aimed at efficient and effective implementation of investments.
- **Investment**- the design, planning, procurement, implementation, and management of an expenditure on an activity, action, project, projected to bring structural positive change and to have lasting impact on governance software and hardware tools and solutions, processes re-engineering, economic conditions, social resilience, infrastructures understood broadly, products and technologies for energy security and independence, advancements in R&D.

Decide which project(s) to submit.

Applicant entities may submit more than one project for EPSA 2025-26, but each project can only be submitted for one of the three award categories.

Before submitting a project, read the scope of the three award categories. Submit the project to the most fitting category. Note that in the application form, applicants have to provide information substantiating the relevance of the project in relation to the respective award categories.

When considering which projects to submit, applicants should also consider that the project must have been in operation long enough to have proven evidence of impact and tangible results for the benefit of citizens. EPSA does not award projects at the conceptual stage and impact is an essential evaluation criterion.

The EPSA 2025-26 application form has six parts, all of which need to be completed for applications to be valid. Questions marked with a * are required.
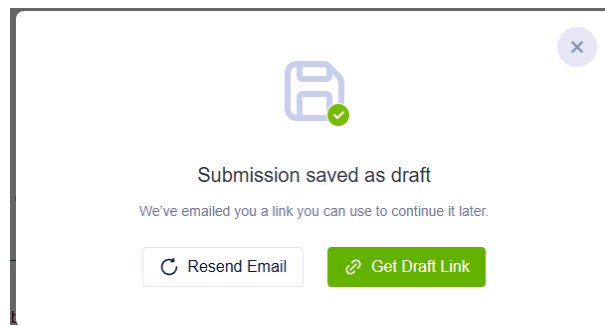
- Part I – Applicant information
- Part II – Contact details
- Part III – Project information
- Part IV – Executive summary
- Part V – Project description
- Part VI – Declarations

Information for all six parts must be submitted via the online application form. Applicants may choose to work offline and insert the required information directly before submitting or to submit information online step-by-step. The online application form allows users to save inserted information and continue the application process later.

Navigating the online application

This section explains the functions of the <u>navigation buttons</u>, helping you move through the application with ease:

- **Next:** This button will take you to the next page of the application. You will not be able to proceed to the next section until all required fields on the current page have been completed.
- **Back:** You can use this button to return to the previous page at any time to review or edit your information.
- **Save:** Click *Save* only when you need to exit your application and return to it later. When you click *Save*, your progress will be saved, and you will receive an email with a unique link. This link will allow you to return to your application at any time and continue right where you left off.

Please note that **drafts that are not submitted within 2 months after saving, will be automatically deleted** form the system. Please make sure that you submit completed application forms within 2 months after the first saving of the draft.

- **Submit Form:** When you're sure you have completed all sections and are ready to finalise your application, click *Submit Form*. After submitting, you **will not** be able to make any further edits. You will receive an email confirming the receipt of your application, along with a complete copy for your own files.

Contact details
In case of questions, please contact:
EPSA Helpdesk at EIPA: Info.epsa@eipa.eu

In the interests of transparency and equality of treatment, the EPSA Team cannot provide project-specific advice about how to improve the quality of project applications, in particular, Parts 4 and 5 of the application form.

Guidance on filling in the application form

Part I – Applicant information

Name of organisation (or lead organisation in case of joint application)

Indicate the organisation with the prime political and institutional responsibility for project design and implementation. This indication should match the response to the question about level of government (see below). In case of joint application, the lead organisation must be a public sector entity in line with the definition provided for in this guidance document.

Please provide the name in English translation and/or transliteration; names in original language/script can be added.

Name(s) of partner organisations (if applicable)

Projects can be submitted jointly by more than one organisation, including cross-country applications. Partner organisations can be other public sector entities eligible to be lead organisations and/or private or mixed-capital entities, not-for-profit/third sector organisations or academic institutions. The lead organisation must be a public sector entity (see above).

Website of lead organisation

In case the lead organisation does not have a separate website, please provide a link to an alternative website with references to the lead organisation, e.g. website government.

Website of the project (if applicable)

By providing a link to the website, applicants can verify and substantiate the institutional context of the project. Note that at the first stage of the evaluation, no additional project information available on the website (e.g. data, reports, etc.) will be considered; only information submitted in this form will be taken into account.

Country

In case of cross-border joint applications, fill in the country of the lead organisation.

Level of government

The level of government must refer to the lead organisation and should match the response regarding the prime political and institutional responsibility (see above).

In case of institutional ambiguity, for instance, as regards attribution to regional or local level, please indicate the closest match. Alternatively, click 'Other' and provide explanation.

Size of organisation (number of employees)

The size refers to the number of employees of the lead organisation. Institutional structures and employment conditions are often subject to change and might include ambiguities, e.g. temporary or part-time staff, contracted agents, etc. Please provide an (approximate) number of all staff to substantiate the institutional context of the project.

How did you learn about EPSA

Multiple answers can be given.

Part II – Contact details

Address of organisation

This refers to the postal address of the lead organisation.

Primary project representative

Please indicate the name of a person who is responsible for or familiar with the project, and who can be expected to be available for correspondence throughout the EPSA 2025-26 timeline.

Position

Indicate the position of the primary project representative in the institutional structure of the lead organisation, e.g. head of unit, and, if possible, the specific role in the project, e.g. project leader.

Phone number and E-mail address

Provide personal contact details of primary project representative. Please do not insert functional/general E-mail addresses.

Alternative project representative

Please indicate the name of a person who is responsible for or familiar with the project, and who can be contacted in case the primary project representative is absent.

Position

Indicate the position of the alternative project representative in the institutional structure of the lead organisation and, if possible, the specific role in the project.

Phone number and E-mail address

Provide personal contact details of alternative project representative. Please do not insert functional/general E-mail addresses to ensure that projects can be reached throughout the EPSA 2025-26 timeline.

Part III – Project information

Name of project

Please provide a meaningful title which conveys central aspects of the project but is not too long. If available, names in line with the 'branding' of the project can be used, e.g. abbreviations, titles in national language, etc. In case such brand names are not directly understandable for third parties, add a meaningful subtitle in English.

The naming (or 'branding') of a project is important because meaningful titles facilitate the processing of the application form during the evaluation process and increase recognition once the project information is entered into the EPSA Database.

Award category

Submit the project to one of three award categories; only one category can be chosen. Multiple submissions which are based on one project will be checked by the EPSA team.

Please consult the description of the award categories before submitting. If the project entails several aspects which are relevant for more than one category, the selection should be based on the main objectives and needs the project aims to address.

The EPSA team reserves the right to re-assign projects in case the selection by applicants does not fit the specifications of the respective award category. The applicant will be informed about such re-assignment and reasons will be given.

Note that submissions to Categories I and II are possible for public sector entities at all levels of government (European, national, regional, local and other). Submissions to Category III are reserved for entities at sub-national level (regional, local and other sub-national); submissions by national level entities will be re-assigned to other the other categories.

Number of staff working on project

Indicate the number of employees from the lead organisation and, if applicable, other organisations and/or partners working on the project. Please provide an (approximate) number of all staff considering, e.g. possible changes in project management, staff fluctuations, etc. during the project duration.

Please note that the number given should be seen as approximation. Details regarding organisational structures and resources including staff should be provided below (see question 2.1 project description).

Dates project start/end; time frame/duration

Please indicate the time frame and/or duration of the project by filling in a start date and an end date. These dates should be aligned as much as possible with the initial strategic decisions regarding project design (see question 2.1 project description) and final (or most recent) steps in the implementation process indicating the end of the project (see question 2.3 project description).

Further clarifications regarding the time frame should be included in questions 2.1 and 2.3 as well as, if applicable, question 3.4 about on-going developments regarding potential institutionalisation of project and continuation beyond initial timeframe.

Is the project supported by EU Funds? Which funding programme?

Indicate whether the project was supported through EU funds and if yes, which one.

Previous EPSA participation; relationship between previous EPSA project and current application

Indicate whether the lead organisation has participated in previous EPSA editions and if yes, which one; provide EPSA project title and/or number.

Please provide an explanation regarding the relationship between the previous project and the new project submitted for EPSA 2025-26.

If the new project is not related to the previous project, simply indicate this; no further explanation needed.

If the current project is related to or builds on the previous project, it is important to indicate because the new project needs to be sufficiently distinctive from the previous project. The substantiation of this distinctiveness needs to be provided for by answering questions 2.1 to 2.4.

In case applicants consider, when answering questions 2.1 to 2.4, that the new project is not sufficiently distinctive, applicants are encouraged to consider participating under the special recognition scheme, which addresses specifically existing/on-going project previously submitted to EPSA.

For these projects, a limited amount of information, focusing on project adjustments and outcomes, is required in the application form (see EPSA 2025-26 website for link to online form).

Part IV – Executive summary

Please provide a summary of the project consisting of three parts: context, objectives and implementation. The summary should provide a general overview of the project and be written in accessible language.

Note that the executive summary, subject to editorial revision, will be published on the EPSA Database.

Part V – Project description

In line with the horizontal definition of 'data-driven public administration', information provided in this section should highlight activities related to collection, processing and utilisation of information in project design, implementation and evaluation.

1. **Relevance**
    1.1. Describe the political, economic and/or social context of the problem and the specific objectives the project aims to address
    1.2. Clarify the relative importance or urgency of the problem vis-à-vis other pending issues in your relevant institutional context (i.e. national, regional, local, cross-border)
    1.3. Explain the distinctive added value of the project in comparison with previously attempted and/or other alternative solutions to address the problem

Highlight, for instance, the use of evidence for

- a better understanding of the problem,
- deriving the needs of target groups to establish the relevance of the project,
- drawing lessons from previously attempted solutions,
- substantiating the added value of the project and specifying project objectives.

2. Project design and implementation

   2.1. Describe the design of the project including organisational structures, allocation of resources and planning

Highlight, for instance,

- the integration of lessons learnt in the project design, including allocation of resources and roles/responsibilities within the organisation
- a consideration of the project's coherence with prior or ongoing reforms/investments of relevance,
- the design and timing of activities, milestones and targets including KPIs,
- conducting a feasibility assessment or risk assessment of administrative and institutional capacity for implementation, including measures to mitigate risks,
- procedures for ensuring cost-effectiveness and calibration of budgets.

   2.2 Explain how the design is expected to address directly the root causes of the problem and/or how it provides concrete and effective solutions to the needs identified

Highlight, for instance,

- the tools and methods used, such as impact assessments, scenario weighting or stress testing, to analyse drivers and outcomes of a problem,
- the integration of due diligence or market analysis,
- stakeholder consultation to obtain evidence regarding causes and possible solutions through citizens, businesses, civil society organisations etc.

   2.3 Describe the actual steps in the implementation process including the efficient use of project resources and the progress made towards milestones/targets

Highlight, for instance,

- the progress made towards reaching milestones,
- efficient and cost-effective use of resources,
- instruments and procedures for monitoring the achievement of targets,
- stakeholder consultation throughout project implementation and incorporation of stakeholders' feedback.

2.4 Clarify, if applicable, divergences from the initial planning during the project implementation and/or necessary adaptations due to external or internal changes

Highlight, for instance,

- potential re-orientation/calibration in case of changes in the environment, deviations in budget implementation etc.,
- the utilisation of KPIs for detecting and quantifying divergences,
- changes in the organisational structure and allocation of resources for adapting project design or implementation.

3. **Outcome**
   3.1 Describe the impact of the project and substantiate the project results vis-à-vis the project objectives

Highlight, for instance,

- evidence for the achievement of planned objectives, e.g. realisation of KPIs,
- the use of stakeholder consultation in ascertaining positive policy outcomes,
- methods of evaluating results and impacts vis-à-vis project objectives.

3.2 Highlight the main factors for achieving and/or not achieving specific objectives

3.3 Explain, if applicable, positive spillovers to other policy areas and/or other ongoing/future projects

Highlight, for instance,

- the potential value and lessons relevant to other entities,
- transfer and/or replication of specific approaches and/or components of the project to other contexts.

3.4 Clarify on-going developments regarding the (potential) institutionalisation of the project and/or political commitments for continuation beyond the initial time frame

Highlight, for instance,

- evidence of how the project shows elements that allow it to be sustained beyond the initial time frame,
- considerations of financial and operational sustainability,
- efforts to secure support by senior administrative level support and/or political commitment.

Part VI – Declaration

In this part of the application form, we ask you to confirm that the submitted project complies with the eligibility criteria. Furthermore, we ask for consent to the terms of EIPA's General Data Protection Policy and the Copyright Statement, and the use by EIPA and its official partners of the information provided in the application form as well as any data submitted at later stages of the evaluation process.

In case a project is shortlisted, it is an essential requirement for representatives of the applicants to be available for the online meetings, validation visits and the jury meeting to present the project.

Please note: You will not be able to make changes to any section of the application once you click on the submit button.

Annex I: Translating Information for Completing the Application Form

To use the European Commission's Machine Translation system "eTranslation" to convert this information into English, follow these two steps:
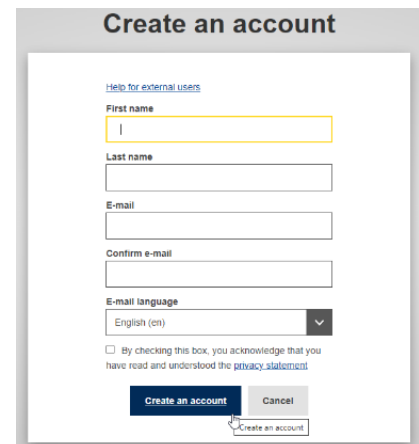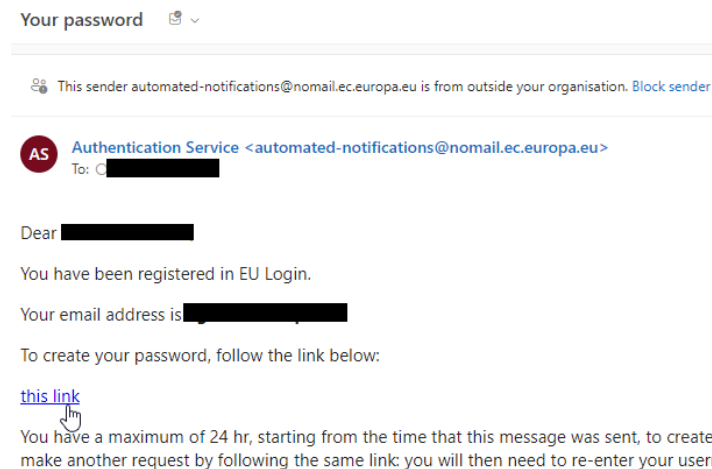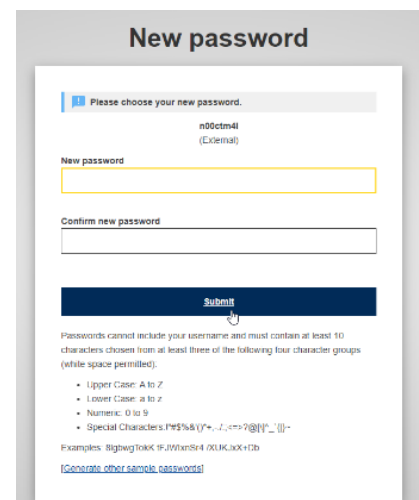
1) **Make sure you have an "EU Login" account**
   Create an account (europa.eu)

To use the translation system, follow these three steps:

Create your EU Login account by entering first and last name, and email address; tick the box related to the privacy statement and click the button "Create an account".

After clicking the button, you will receive an automatically generated Email to create your password (check your spam folder!).

Choose your password, confirm and submit. Once you are logged in, "eTranslation" will recognize your Email and allow you to use the translation system.

2) Access the translation system following this link: eTranslation

When using "eTranslation" for the first time, the system will ask you to enter the email address with which the "EU Login" account was created. After entering the email address, indicate the type of user and click the button "Start Translating".

Welcome to the registration page for eTranslation, the European Commission's safe and secure machine translation system.

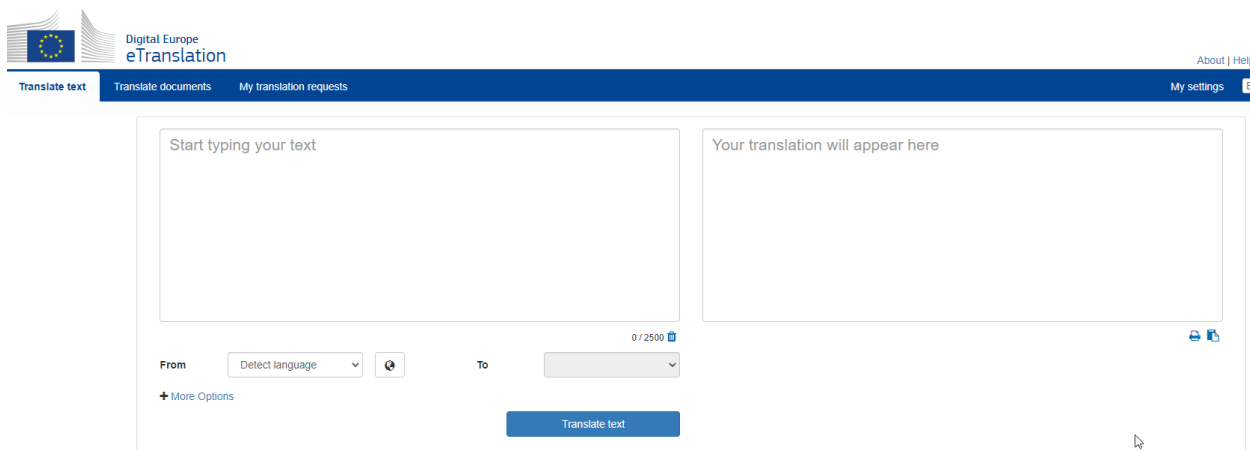To use eTranslation, you need an EU Login ID.

① If you don't already have an EU Login, click here to get one, then return to this page.

② Enter the email address associated with your EU Login account:

③ eTranslation is intended for European public administrations, local and regional authorities, small and medium-sized enterprises, EU Freelance Translators, universities, non-governmental organizations and Digital Europe Program projects.

Please indicate the type of user you are: [... ▾]

☐ I certify that I belong to the category indicated above and therefore fall within eTranslation's remit.

④ Don't forget to bookmark the eTranslation page once you are there for easy future access!

+ Privacy Statement

[Start Translating!]

If you have any questions, please contact DGT-ETRANSLATION-ADVISORY@ec.europa.eu.

After clicking the button, you can type or copy paste text in the field on the left. Click "Translate Text" to receive translated texts on the right.

Digital Europe
eTranslation

About | Help

Translate text   Translate documents   My translation requests

My settings

Start typing your text

Your translation will appear here

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From   [Detect language ▾] ⊕   To   [▾]

+ More Options

[Translate text]

Please be advised that the system provides machine translation and that applications should be proof-read before submission. The initial eligibility check of submitted projects will include a language check.

Annex II: List of Eligible Countries

Albania	Liechtenstein
Andorra	Lithuania
Austria	Luxembourg
Belgium	Malta
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Moldova
Bulgaria	Monaco
Croatia	Montenegro
Cyprus	Netherlands
Czechia	North Macedonia
Denmark	Norway
Estonia	Poland
European[1]	Portugal
Finland	Romania
France	San Marino
Georgia	Serbia
Germany	Slovakia
Greece	Slovenia
Hungary	Spain
Iceland	Sweden
Ireland	Switzerland
Italy	Türkiye
Kosovo	Ukraine
Latvia	United Kingdom

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[1] Please click *European* if the submitting lead organisation is an international entity or body at the European level.

Annex III: EPSA 2025-26 Award Categories

Category I "Innovating Government, Governance and Policies"
- Digital and algorithmic solutions for the development of policies and legislation; interoperability and automation solutions for the application of regulations and for the provision of user-centric public services by public administrations and the judiciary;
- Enhancing evidence-informed policy making; solutions and tools for improving impact assessment and ex post evaluation practices; partnerships for production of evidence; deployment of new analytical and monitoring tools; communication of policy challenges, policy experimentation;
- Reforming the set-up, structure and functioning of public sector institutions, aimed at enhancing their strategic approach, transparency, accountability and delivery capacities;
- Data-driven productivity in the public sector and the judiciary – re-engineering work processes, leveraging data, digital platforms, new technologies and whole of government approaches to improve efficiency, quality of policies and create higher public value;
- Data driven people management including strategies for enhancing public sector integrity through systematic use of data; reforming the HR cycle of the civil service and/or public sector institutions and policies in the civil service; effective models for recruitment, workforce planning, upskilling and reskilling, allocating and redeploying staffing and internal resources to address emerging priorities.

Category II "Investing in Infrastructure, Mobility and Energy"
- Digital Innovation Hubs; critical digital infrastructures and networks; digitalisation of public transport; strengthening cybersecurity networks; telecommunication infrastructure sustainability;
- Scaling up hydrogen and renewables, investments in bioeconomy products and technologies; energy efficient buildings environment;
- Support to R&D&I projects; enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies; frameworks for innovation and technological developments in renewable energy;
- Investing in green and digital skills; developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and circular economy.

Category III "Delivering User-Centric Services at Subnational Level"
- Digital and algorithmic solutions for the development of policies; interoperability and automation solutions for the application of regulations and for the provision of user-centric public services by public administrations and the judiciary;
- Evidence informed policies– partnerships for production of evidence, deployment of new analytical and monitoring tools, communication of policy challenges, policy experimentation,
- Data-driven productivity – re-engineering work processes, leveraging data, digital platforms, new technologies to improve quality of policies and create higher public value;
- Data-driven people management - effective models for requirement, workforce planning, upskilling and reskilling, allocating and redeploying staffing and internal resources to address emerging priorities.
- Effective models for cooperation, resource and service sharing.