

# **New Solutions Social Innovation Fund-**

**Creating better outcomes**

**Pilot Grants**

**Applicant Guidance**

**February 2026**



**Closing date for application: 13<sup>th</sup> March**

**Interviews: 11<sup>th</sup> May – 5<sup>th</sup> June**



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland



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## **Supports Available to Applicants**

The New Solutions Hub will host **two support webinars** with the aim of providing more information on fund eligibility and the application process, and offer an opportunity to answer any questions:

- **1<sup>st</sup> Webinar: 18 February, 11AM - 12PM**
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Webinar: 25 February, 11AM - 12PM**

Queries:

For any queries related to clarification on details of eligibility, the application materials or the selection process:

- As a first step we recommend checking the guidelines and the webpage as well as register for or watch back the support webinar(s);
- If this does not resolve your query, you can contact [pilotgrants@new-solutions.ie](mailto:pilotgrants@new-solutions.ie)

In relation to any ICT technical queries received 48 hours in advance of the closing date advertised time the Hub cannot guarantee that these will be resolved in time to submit your application.

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**Only applications received via the New Solutions Hub portal by the relevant closing date (13 March 2026 at 6pm for full applications) will be considered.**

**Do not send applications by email or post as these will not be considered.**

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## Introduction

Welcome to this Applicant Guidance Note for the Pilot Grants under the New Solutions Social Innovation Fund – creating better outcomes; hereafter referred to as New Solutions. This note aims to provide applicants with clear information and guidance prior to submitting an application. It provides practical information on the eligibility, application and interview stages as well as:

- An overview of New Solutions
- The roles of key parties involved
- What is on offer under the Pilot Grants
- What the funding can be used for
- The Eligibility Check
- The application and appraisal process
- The interview stage
- The budget and eligible costs

Please read this full Guidance Note prior to commencing your application.

### 1. About New Solutions

In the 2021-2027 programming period, the European Union (EU) is placing a renewed emphasis on social innovation through the ESF+ Regulation, focusing on early-stage innovation and scaling up efforts. Article 14(1) underscores the commitment of Member States to support social innovation and experimentation.

This renewed focus on Social Innovation, which includes the New Solutions Fund, stems from a comprehensive 2018 review of the ESF for the 2014-2020 period, recognising its role as a "lab" for experimenting with new policies at national or regional levels.

Informed by this 2018 review, the ESF+ Regulation promotes and supports social innovation and experimentation by Member States, aligning with the EU's commitment to fostering innovation to address societal challenges. Additionally, another review of the EaSI Programme recommended a more robust transition from small-scale EaSI testing to larger ESF-funded projects, reflecting the EU's recognition of the value and potential of social innovation in shaping effective policies on a broader scale.

The Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training Programme (EIST) is Ireland's ESF+ programme for the 2021 to 2027 period. EIST focuses investment in five key areas:

1. Access to employment
2. Skills and life-long learning
3. Social inclusion
4. **Social innovation**
5. Food and basic material support to the most deprived

New Solutions falls under Priority 4: Social Innovation, of the ESF+ EIST Programme 2021-2027.

This programme is complemented by:

- The Achieve Together Social Innovation Coaching and Mentoring Programme, where 50% of organisations being supported by the Community Services Programme will receive a tailored coaching/mentoring/training programme to address individual social innovation needs, and by;
- The Sport Ireland ESF+ Action "Sport 4 Empowerment" (S4E) that implements socially innovative programmes, using sport and physical activity, to foster social inclusion and enhance the wellbeing, education, and economic prospects of people at risk of social exclusion.

All three Actions combined make up Priority 4 of the EIST Programme.

New Solutions is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the EU through the ESF+ EIST 2021-2027 Programme. The EIST Programme involves a total investment of over €1.08 billion (€508 million from the EU and €573 million from the Government of Ireland).

Under the EIST Programme, the breakdown of co-funding specifically for New Solutions is as follows:

- EU allocation: 95%
- Government of Ireland: 5%

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A total of **€9.8 million** has been committed to the New Solutions Social Innovation Fund.

The overarching objective for New Solutions is to enhance the social innovation ecosystem in Ireland by, *'fostering active inclusion, promoting equal opportunities, non-discrimination and active participation, and to improve employability, for disadvantaged groups including through the social enterprise business model.'*

This objective of the fund has been broken down further as follows:

Objective Number	Description
<b>Objective 1</b>	Support the development of a Social Innovation ecosystem through awareness-raising and maximising synergies with other key public policies in the areas of social inclusion, social enterprise and community led local development
<b>Objective 2</b>	Capacity building supports for Social Innovation initiatives at national, regional, local and/or community levels
<b>Objective 3</b>	Fund Social Innovation Pilot Programmes to address significant social and environmental challenges

Objective Number	Description
<b>Objective 4</b>	Create an enabling environment which will allow social innovation to thrive and to support scaling up of social innovations

Turning these objectives into tangible, implementable actions to be achieved during the timeframe for the programme, New Solutions will include three core elements.

1. The development of the ***Social Innovation Hub*** which provides awareness raising, advice & capacity building support to social innovation initiatives at all stages of the SI Development Curve in Ireland.
2. Scaling Up Grants – being already in progress by the Hub
3. Pilot Grants –to which this Applicant Guidance Note relates

## 2. Roles of key parties involved

### The Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)

DFHERIS is the Managing Authority for the EIST Programme and is responsible for managing the overall EIST programme in accordance with Article 72-74 of the Commission Provisions Regulation (EU) 2021/1060. The New Solutions Social Innovation Fund is one of the approved actions under the EIST Programme.

### The Department of Rural & Community Development and the Gaeltacht (DRCDG)

DRCDG is the Beneficiary Body as identified by the ESF+ Managing Authority and is responsible for the delivery of this social innovation programme. DRCDG is working with Pobal who are supporting the management of the programme on behalf of the Department.

### Pobal

Pobal is responsible for assisting DRCDG with the development and design of the programme and is acting as the Contracting Authority for the Social Innovation Hub. The application and appraisal process for the Pilot social innovation initiatives will be conducted by the Hub, however, Pobal will be the contract holder for Pilot Grantees also.

### The Social Innovation Hub Consortium

The New Solutions Consortium is composed by leading social innovation organisations, combining national expertise with strong regional and community reach:

- **Rethink Ireland** – Consortium Lead, coordinating delivery and supporting high-impact social innovations nationwide.
- **Local Development Companies Network (LDCN)** – Case Management Lead, providing community-level support across all regions.

- **Western Development Commission (WDC)** – Co-leading case management and ensuring strong delivery in the Western Region.
- **Údarás na Gaeltachta** – Leading case management in Gaeltacht areas, supporting innovation through language, culture, and community development.
- **Dublin City University (DCU)** – Monitoring and evaluating the pilot to inform future policy and practice.
- **The Wheel** – Leading communications and awareness raising to ensure national visibility and engagement.

### 3. Shared understanding of Social Innovation

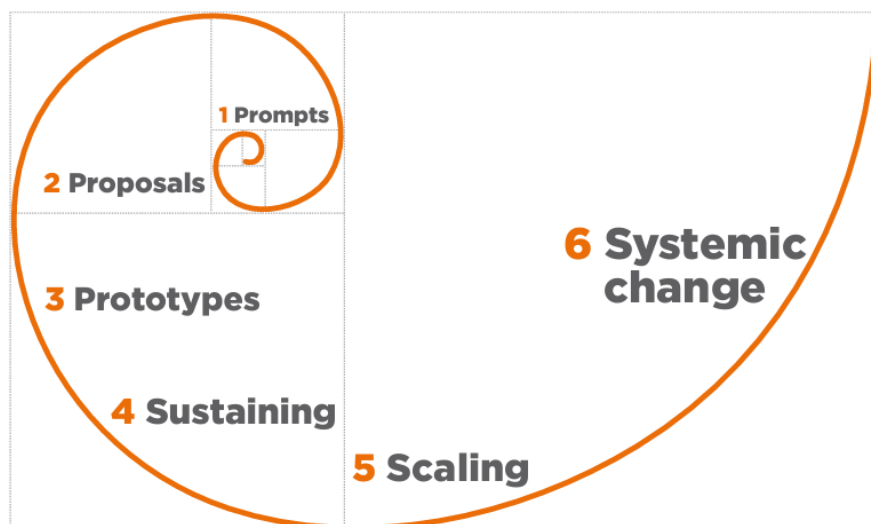
As per Article 2.1.8 of the ESF+ Regulation 2021/1057, Social innovation

‘... means an activity, that is social both as to its ends and its means and in particular an activity which relates to the:

- development and implementation of new ideas concerning products, services, practices and models
- that simultaneously meets social needs and creates new social relationships or collaborations between public, civil society or private organisations
- thereby benefiting society and boosting its capacity to act

### 4. Social Innovation Development Curve

There are six recognised stages to the development of social innovations. Each of these stages are sequential and take place along a development curve – see image below:



[The-Open-Book-of-Social-Innovation.pdf](#)



**Please note:** Under the Pilot Grants, organisations will only be supported if they have progressed from the ideation stage and are at the prototyping stage (Stage 3), trialling the social innovation. Innovations and organisations already at “sustaining” or “scaling” stage will NOT be eligible for support to move to the “systemic change” phase.

## Important Dates

Key Milestone	Important Dates	Notes
Launch of Pilot fund & Application Opens	11 February 2026	
Applications Submission Period	11 February 2026 – 13 March 2026	The Application Form can be found in New Solutions Hub website.
1 <sup>st</sup> Online Application Clinic	18 February 2026	Webinar to support the application process and clarify additional questions.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Online Application Clinic	25 February 2026	Webinar to support the application process and clarify additional questions.
Application period closes	13 March 2026	
Interviews	11 May 2026 – 5 June 2026	Interviews will be scheduled from May.

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## Overview of New Solutions Pilot Fund

### 5. Definition of Pilot

A pilot refers to a small-scale trial or experiment of a new idea, service or model. It is part of the “Prototyping and pilots” stage (from the 6 stages of Social Innovation Development Curve) — where ideas are tested with prototypes and pilot projects in practice rather than just remaining conceptual.

The aim of a pilot is to test feasibility and learn quickly, under realistic but limited conditions — keeping costs and risks relatively low, while gathering feedback from users and providers. Learnings and practical understanding often lead to major changes in the concept, and just as the prototypes of products, many different alternatives have to be tested, in order to find the perfect fit. This is often done before scaling or sustaining the idea.

### 6. Fund Objective

The objective of the Pilot grants under New Solutions is to fund social innovation initiatives which fall under at least one of the social inclusion themes below, to trial and experiment a new idea, service or model.

## 7. Social Inclusion themes

All selected initiatives must fall under at least one of the following themes:

1. Increasing access to employment for disadvantaged groups;
2. Increasing access to education for disadvantaged groups;
3. Personal and social development of young people most at risk of poverty and social exclusion;
4. Harnessing the potential of sport for social development and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups;

## 8. Budget: minimum & maximum grants

A total of €4m has been allocated for the New Solutions Pilot grants.

Applicants can apply for a minimum of €70,000 to a maximum of €100,000 for 24 months. The grantees will also have access to the New Solutions Social Innovation Hub's networks and support.

As an exemption from the minimum grant size, applicants who have received prior funding under De Minimis Aid may still apply. However, this may reduce your grant allocation award if application is deemed successful.

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## 9. Timeframe

Successful Grantees will have a maximum of **24 months** from contract signing to complete the project funded through New Solutions. Assuming the grant agreement is signed by 1 October 2026, this would result in a completion timeline of 30 September 2028.

## 10. Eligibility

The following is a list of eligible organisations for the Pilot Grants:

- ✓ Not-For-Profit Organisations
- ✓ Non-Governmental Organisations
- ✓ Local Authorities
- ✓ Community and Voluntary or Charitable Organisations
- ✓ Social Enterprises / Profit for Purpose Organisations - social enterprises must meet the definition as outlined in the Trading for Impact – national social enterprise policy 2024-2027 (trading-for-impact-national-social-enterprise-policy-2024-2027.pdf)
- ✓ Designated Activity Companies
- ✓ Co-operatives
- ✓ Entities that are either incorporated (CRO or Co-op) or a registered charity except for the below examples of HEPs and ETBs which have a different statutory setup.

Types of incorporated entities: any type that can meet the definition of a social enterprise is eligible; this will be checked and verified.

- ✓ Higher education providers
- ✓ Education and Training Boards

**Note:** Organisations must be incorporated by 31 May 2026.

## 11. Ineligible entities

The following types of organisations or individuals are ineligible to apply:

- Applicants under 18 years of age
- Commercial companies
- Staff or immediate family members and consultants/sub-contractors of Rethink Ireland or the New Solutions Consortium Members (The Wheel, DCU, WDC, LDCN or Údarás na Gaeltachta).
- Staff or immediate family members, or board members of Pobal or the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht that are responsible for administering or overseeing the New Solutions Pilot Grants Fund.
- Required under theme 4: Statutory or public bodies (with the exception of ETB's), companies limited by shares and organisations that are state bodies or agencies that are not registered charities or meet the social enterprise definition
- For profit organisations other than those described above.
- Private Individuals
- Sole Traders
- Unincorporated entities if they are not registered charities
- Government Departments

**Note:** Private entities cannot apply. However, applicants may procure services from private entities if proper procurement rules are followed. Applicants are responsible for ensuring adherence to procurement regulations.

## 12. Partnerships

If your application involves a partnership, you will be required to provide details for each of the partner organisations. However, it is important to distinguish between collaborations and partnerships.

Collaborations are where in your day-to-day work, you collaborate with other organisations, e.g. through a referral system, joint projects etc. – these collaborators would not be directly involved in the application.

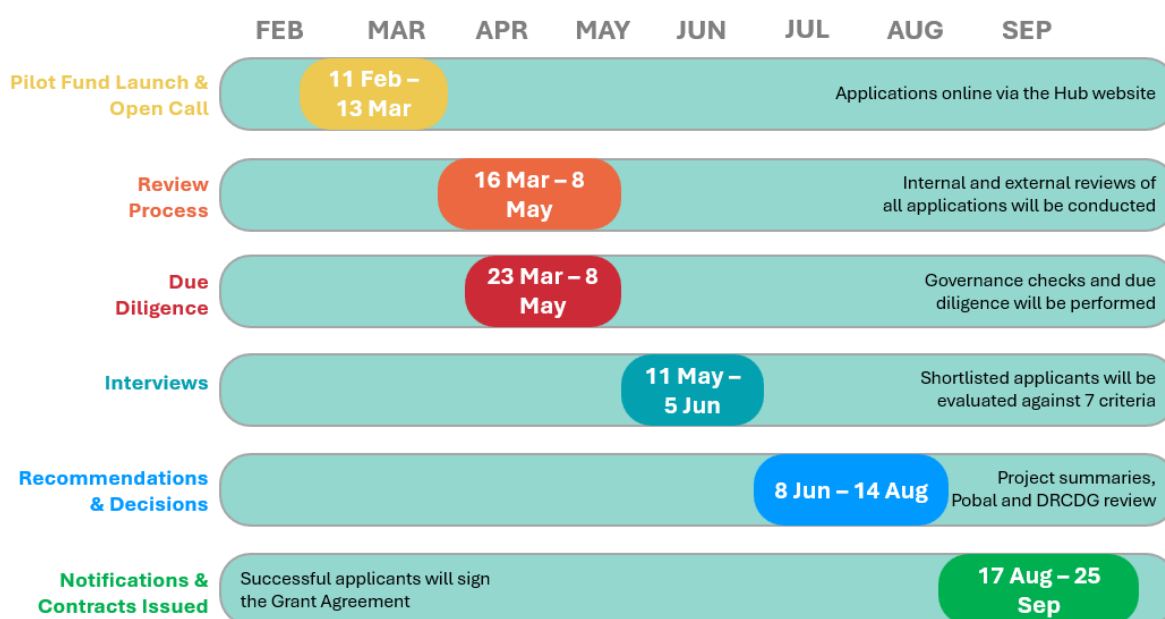
Partnerships refer to a joint funding application for the Pilot grant, meaning that while you as the lead applicant complete the application and would sign the Grant Agreement if successful, the

grant will be distributed amongst the partners, to implement the project jointly. Their work would directly contribute to the project applied for.

If you make this application under a partnership arrangement, you will need to provide details for each of the partner organisations as well as clearly outline their roles and how you, as the lead partner, will manage governance arrangements, monitor progress and manage any risks e.g. if a partner does not deliver results or drops out of the project. You will also need to provide an organisational chart outlining the partnership structure as an attachment and provide any partnership governing documents that are already in place. This could for instance be a Memorandum of Understanding.

### 13. Application Process Overview

The timeline below provides you with a high-level overview of key dates. The following sections of this guide will provide you with further detail on each stage.



## Application Process

The online application form can be accessed through the New Solutions Hub website. The form will consist of several fields and upload document requirements.

These documents are designed to complement each other in terms of information. You may find that some questions appear similar and build on each other but no two questions will have the same focus or aim. It is therefore important to familiarise yourself with the purpose of each

document and ensure that you fully understand and respond to the questions and information requirements within each section. You may find it helpful to cross-reference documents and sections to remain within the word limit.

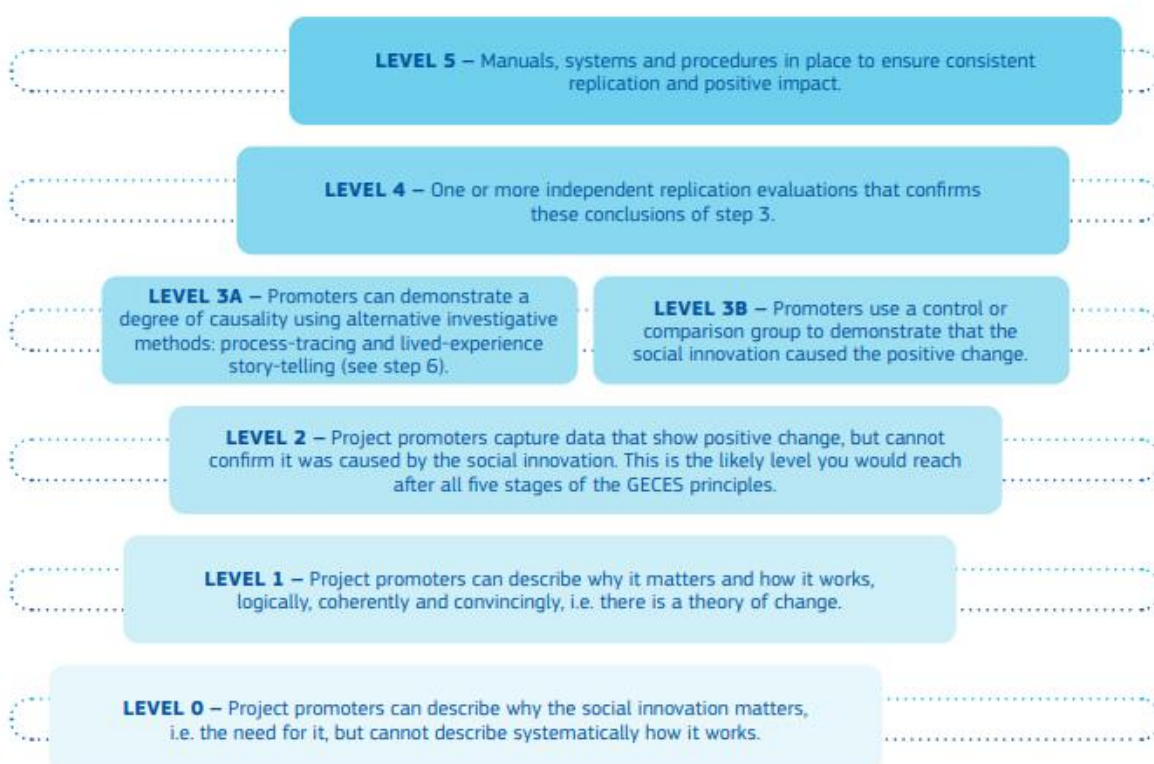
In completing the application, please note that we can only appraise your application based on the information you provide us with. We cannot rely on knowledge obtained through other sources and will not open and review links provided in the application, except for the link to the optional application video. Where we ask you for evidence, we suggest that you reference sources to give us an understanding of the level of evidence available. While we may check the existence of sources, we will not rely on the information it entails, therefore it is advisable to briefly mention key data or insights in your responses.

As part of your application, you should provide the clearest and strongest evidence available to you to support your case. The evidence base should demonstrate both the need for the social innovation and rationale for trial and experiment. Applications should be grounded in robust evidence, drawing on your own data where available, as well as relevant academic research, evaluations and/or grey literature. The strength and clarity of this evidence will be used in assessing the potential impact of your proposal. The below model was adapted for ESF purposes from NESTA's model and may provide a point of reference in determining which type of evidence to refer to in your application.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Barnett, S., Scaling Up social innovation: seven steps for using ESF+, Publications Office, 2022

**Figure 2. Levels of evidence for social innovation**



Source: Puttick, R. & Ludlow, J., 2013. *Standards of Evidence*. London: Nesta, p. 2, [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#). Changes have been made on the wording of each level and two levels have been added. The modified work is licensed under the same licence.

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The following contents are required from each applicant:

- Completed Application Form (online)
- Completed Results Framework template
- Completed De Minimis Aid Declaration
- Completed Project Budget template
- Completed Organisation Income & Expenditure template
- Recent signed Annual Financial Statements OR Completed Management Accounts template if your organisation has no annual accounts.

Additional documents are required if certain criteria apply to you or your project:

- VAT not recoverable template
- Partnership organisational chart
- Partnership governing Documents
- Letter evidencing engagement with your local Sports Development Officer

## 14. Application form

The application form is the main document at this stage of the process. It will ask you to provide information on your social innovation across the following main sections:

- Eligibility
- Section 1: About your organisation
- Section 2: About the issue and your solution
- Section 3: Impact & Innovation
- Section 4: Financial Information
- Section 5: Disclosures and other details
- Additional questions (if relevant/applicable)

The application form is designed and set up in a way to ensure that you stay within the word limit and add the required type of data, e.g. financial figures in the budget section.

Most questions will include guidance/instructions on what to include in your response. Importantly, you must address each of the points listed (except where a question may not be applicable) to allow us to conduct a full appraisal. We recommend that you read the form and its instructions in full before you commence completing it and that you later check the completed answers against the requirements for each question.

Please note that you should be as precise as possible when answering each of the questions, if useful you may use bullet points to structure certain parts of your response.

Applicants are required to demonstrate their alignment with the following Equality and Human Rights principles in the application form:

- Gender Equality (including equality between men and women, gender mainstreaming and the integration of a gender perspective): All applicants are required to demonstrate how they have considered gender and the identification of any gender gaps and inequalities within the design and implementation of their proposal.
- Non-Discrimination (based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation): All applicants must demonstrate in their project design and future implementation, steps in relation to preventing discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation, civil status, family status, membership of the Traveller community.
- Equality of Opportunity and Accessibility (based on any grounds, including consideration of intersectionality): All applicants must demonstrate how equality of opportunity and accessibility considerations have been inbuilt into their project design and implementation and processes to continuously refine their efforts to ensure fulfilment of these principles. Particular reference to intersectionality considerations should be made. Intersectionality is not simply about experiencing one form of discrimination (e.g., racism) and another (e.g., sexism) independently. Instead, it acknowledges how these categories interact and create a unique experience. For example:

**A woman with a disability from a marginalized ethnic background**



She might encounter barriers to accessing services, employment, or education due to the combined effects of her disability, ethnicity, and gender.

- Sustainable Development and the principle of Do No Significant Harm: Applicants in developing their project should consider the environmental impact of the activity for funding. The scheme will support activities that respect the climate and adhere to the environmental standards and practices of the EU.

## 15. Results framework

Applicants are required to define how they will measure and report progress over the funding period. Progress will be measured using Outcome Indicators, Activities and Outputs.

- An Activity is the action your project takes to achieve its objectives (e.g. delivering workshops or providing services.).
- An Output is an immediate, measurable result of the activity (e.g. Number of workshops held, number of participants reached.).
- An Outcome is the longer-term change that results from your project (e.g. The number of participants who progress to employment and/or further education)

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The steps for completing the reporting framework are provided within this section. A summary of these steps is as follows:

1. Select **at least one** Thematic Objective (these are the Social Innovation **themes**).
2. For each selected **theme** set a minimum of 2 outcome indicators.
3. For each selected **theme** set the **primary activity** undertaken by your project/programme.
4. Set a minimum of 2 **outputs directly resulting from the activity**.
5. Set **targets** for Year 1 and 2 against the outcome indicators and outputs.
6. Detail any risks to achieving the targets set against the outcome indicators and outputs, and any actions to mitigate these risks.

Applicants will be provided with an Excel Template to detail their monitoring plan for their project that will cover Outcome Indicators, Activities and Outputs.

Definition of the four possible **Thematic Objectives**:

- Increasing access to employment for disadvantaged groups;
- Increasing access to education for disadvantaged groups;
- Personal and social development of young people most at risk of poverty and social exclusion;
- Harnessing the potential of sport for social development and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups;



Within each social inclusion themes, applicants must set the following:

- **A minimum of two Outcome Indicators.**
- The **primary Activity** applicants will carry out to achieve the objective.
- **A minimum of two Outputs** relating to the primary Activity.

Outputs and Outcome indicators **must be quantifiable**, and applicants will be required to set targets against them. A list of example outcome indicators is provided below. Applicants are free to choose indicators from this list if they are applicable to their proposal, however, applicants are also free to assign their own relevant indicators.

Example outcome indicators:

**Increasing access to employment for disadvantaged groups:**

Example Outcome Indicator 1: Number of participants who progressed to employment (please detail both full-time and/or part-time employment)

Example Outcome Indicator 2: Number of participants who progressed to an internship or work placement

**Increasing access to education for disadvantaged groups:**

Example Outcome Indicator 1: Number of participants who received a QQI qualification

Example Outcome Indicator 2: Number of participants who progressed to further education

**Personal and social development of young people most at risk of poverty and social exclusion:**

Example Outcome Indicator 1: Number of young people who feel more hopeful and optimistic about their future

Example Outcome Indicator 2: Number of young people who feel more included or accepted in their social circles

**Harnessing the potential of sport for social development and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups:**

Example Outcome Indicator 1: Number of participants who report feeling more socially included after participating in the project

Example Outcome Indicator 2: Percentage of participants who report an increased sense of belonging, trust or community engagement

## 16. De Minimis Aid Declaration

As part of the eligibility check, we will need to confirm if you have received any De Minimis Aid funding as this needs to be considered in assessing if you can receive further funding under the De Minimis Aid rule and if yes, how much.

Under De Minimis Aid small amounts of aid granted to one undertaking, that is, less than €300,000 in any rolling 3-year period, are so small as to have no appreciable effect on competition or trade. Under the [De Minimis Regulation \(EU\) 2023/2831](#) rule, these are exempt from the general ban on State Aid.

However, De Minimis payments to one undertaking under a number of measures or schemes must cumulatively observe the €300,000 limit, and Member States are required to closely monitor De Minimis payments to ensure that the limit is not breached. For this reason, you are required to declare any De Minimis Aid received since 2024 or are likely to receive in 2026 or in the 2027, or 2028 fiscal years.

Any De Minimis Aid received would have been notified to you. We recommend that, if unsure, you check your relevant Grant Agreements/Terms and Conditions etc. for any reference to De Minimis Aid. Please note that it is imperative to notify us of any De Minimis supports received, as a false declaration resulting in the threshold being exceeded, could result in you having to repay the aid with interest.

The three-year period applies from the moment your legal right to the budget committed for each year arises from, e.g. the date the budget was signed.

### Calculation of De Minimis

The period of 3 years to be taken into account for the purposes of this Regulation should be assessed on a rolling basis. For each new grant of De Minimis Aid, the total amount of De Minimis Aid granted in the previous 3 years needs to be taken into account.

The key date for calculating the three-year period is the date of the decision to offer funding, and not the date of payment:

"De Minimis aid shall be deemed granted at the moment the legal right to receive the aid is conferred on the undertaking under the applicable national legal regime, irrespective of the date of payment of the De Minimis aid to the undertaking".

Accordingly, if application for aid is due to be approved on 01 August 2026, the applicant must examine the aid received in 2026 and in the previous two years i.e. 2025 and 2024.

#### Example 1

The applicant's fiscal year runs from 01 January to 31 December. If the applicant is approved for De Minimis funding on 01 August 2026, then the period pertinent to De Minimis is:

01 January 2026 to 01 August 2026.

01 January 2025 to 31 December 2025.

01 January 2024 to 31 December 2024.

#### Example 2

The applicant's fiscal year runs from 01 April to 31 March. If the applicant is approved for De Minimis funding on 01 August 2026, then the period pertinent to De Minimis is:

01 April 2026 to 01 August 2026.

01 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

01 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

## 17. Further documents

- **Income and Expenditure Template:** This should present a projection of the organisation's overall planned income and expenditure for the financial years in which the project will be funded. You should clearly break down the different income streams across the years, as well as the expenditure categories that make up your organisation's budget.
- You must provide your **most recent full audited (if applicable) Financial Statements**. If your organisation is too new for annual financial statements, please upload your **management accounts**, using the provided template.
- **VAT not Recoverable Template:** This is only needed if you are registered with Revenue for VAT but cannot recover it. In this case, your auditors or accountants will need to complete the template provided to confirm this. If this is applicable, you should include VAT in your budget for the grant. If you can recover VAT, you must not include VAT in your grant budget.
- **Letter evidencing engagement with local Sports Development Officer:** This should be a letter on headed paper/an email from the relevant Sports Development Officer with full email signature, confirming that you are engaging with them in your work already. This is only required for projects contributing to Social Innovation theme 4: Harnessing the potential of sport for social development and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups.
- **Governance Documents:** if your organisation **is not** incorporated with the Companies Registration Office (CRO), please upload your governing documents/constitution. Please note that governance documents may be assessed at application stage to further confirm your eligibility.

## Budgets and eligible costs

This section should guide you in completing the budget-related sections of the application form and the budget template itself. You will need to make sure that you include only costs eligible under New Solutions.

### 18. Eligible costs

In general terms, costs will be considered eligible when they meet all of the following requirements:

- They are for the sole purpose of implementing the New Solutions element of your pilot project;
- Must be included in the budget submitted and declared eligible, as the budget will become part of the Grant Agreement

- Do not duplicate public funding or EU funding received from other sources for the same purpose;
- Costs that come from a third party and are verifiable e.g., supported by evidence of compliance with public procurement in Ireland and tax requirements, an invoice and receipt for payment.
- Be reasonable in their nature and amount i.e., is not excessive and is what would be incurred by a prudent person in the conduct of delivering a project of this nature.
- The cost must occur within the duration of the grant agreement (contract) for the project.

**Definitions:** Direct Costs: These are costs directly related to the implementation and delivery of the project. You must demonstrate the direct link with the project. It is intended that programme expenditure will be claimed from ESF+ based on vouched expenditure/real costs.

Direct staff costs are a sub-set of direct programme costs and include:

- Salaries and pension costs for staff directly engaged on the New Solutions programme and included in the agreed budget of the grant agreement. Direct staff costs shall be eligible if they are in line with the beneficiary's usual remuneration practice.
- Costs include employers' PRSI

Salary scales should be commensurate with current scales within the relevant sector. All funded projects must clearly demonstrate that staff costs are directly linked to the delivery of the New Solutions funded project.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of other eligible direct programme costs:

- Travel & Subsistence
- Venue, room hire, meeting costs
- Training costs
- Marketing and publicity
- ICT costs, which are specific to website development, online support and information, small items of furniture and equipment (e.g. laptop) where critical to the project and only used for the delivery of the project.

**Indirect Costs:** Costs not directly connected to the implementation of the project in question. Such costs include administrative expenses, for which it is difficult to precisely determine the amount attributable to the specific projects e.g., overhead costs such as an accountant, telephone and utility bills, cleaning costs, furniture, ICT infrastructure and supports, insurance, postage etc. Indirect costs must be no more than 10% of the total direct costs of the grant amount sought. For these costs an apportionment policy will be required.

## 19. Ineligible costs

This is an indicative list of ineligible costs:

- The purchase of furniture, equipment and vehicles, except where such purchases are necessary for achieving the objective of the operation, or the purchase of such items is the most economic option, or where part of the economic life of the furniture, equipment

and vehicles falls outside the period of the operation being co-financed and also costs under €10,000.

- Purchase of land or buildings • Costs associated with the Grantee's own facilities e.g., meeting room(s), photocopier.
- Retrospective costs i.e., expenditure which has taken place prior to approval date of the project.
- Costs for which more appropriate funding opportunities already exist. The New Solutions funding is not a substitute for other public funding which is currently available.
- VAT costs (where the VAT costs can be re-claimed from Revenue) Article 6 (CPR (Common Provisions Regulation)).
- Bank charges such as interest costs, fines, financial penalties, and legal dispute costs.
- Routine repairs and maintenance of buildings.
- Costs for staff, actions, equipment, and programmes already supported by statutory and public funding.
- Legal Fees/ Professional fees that are not directly attributable to the delivery of the project.
- Sponsorship and Charitable Donations: to individuals and other organisations.
- Depreciation: of fixed assets; all costs must be paid out to a third party.
- In-kind contributions: all costs must represent real costs that are paid out to a third party.
- Opportunity Costs: all costs must represent real costs that are paid out to a third party.
- Redundancy costs.
- Debt and debt service charges.
- Vouchers e.g., gift vouchers.

## 20. Budget template

The budget template is based on cost categories. It provides reporting periods for completion.

In completing the template, please consider the following points for reference:

- The Project Costs Summary will automatically fill (based on information entered on other areas) and this represents the total cost of your project including the grant costs amount sought.
  - There is a validation in cell B39, which must read OKAY prior to the budget template being submitted to the Hub.
  - The validation in cell B39 checks that the total of the Indirect Costs of the grant amount sought is less than or equal to 10% of the Total Direct Costs of the grant amount sought.
- There are 5 areas in the budget template that you are required to complete: Salary Costs, Pension Costs (which must be completed separately to Salary costs), Project Delivery Costs, Equipment Costs and Indirect Costs.
- Please complete the sections that are highlighted in yellow and enter costs for each year of the programme. Please note, the pilot grants run for 24 months, but the budgets span three calendar years (Q4 2026, Q1-Q4 2027, Q1-3 2028). Please also provide a

justification for each cost entered under the Justification column that is included in each of these sheets.

- Please remember that each item of Equipment included in the budget template using the grant funding cannot exceed €10k.
- Please also include details of each individual Indirect Cost required to be funded by the grant (i.e. rent, light & heat, phone etc) and provide a justification for each cost being sought to be funded by the grant.

Costs identified as ineligible as part of the budget application will be requested to be removed and resubmitted before a final decision is made. The Hub will consider each cost on a case-by-case basis. Pilots supported are not permitted to make a profit in the implementation of the project, and as such, the eligible expenditure of the operation to be co-financed from the ESF+ shall be reduced by the net revenue not taken into account at the time of approval of the operation, and which is directly generated only during its implementation.

## Application appraisal process

Following submission of your application, the New Solutions Hub will proceed to appraise your application against set criteria. There are two types of reviews that take place at this stage:

- *Eligibility Screen* - To screen all completed applications for eligibility based on legal form of the applicant as well as satisfying the other essential requirements of the fund criteria.
- *Internal Reviews* - To conduct a review of all eligible applications based on their alignment with the fund criteria and strength across the criteria of the assessment framework using the Hub team members.

### 21. Scoring criteria

The scoring criteria your application will be assessed against are listed below, outlining specific aspects feeding into the assessment.

Selection Criteria	Max Score	Min Score
Problem & Impact Potential	10	6
Innovation	10	6
Team capability & readiness	10	6
Value for Money	5	3
Horizontal Principles:	5	3

<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>24</b>
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## 22. Interview appraisal

The objective of this stage is to conduct interviews with shortlisted applicants that will further assess their project's strength across the metrics of the assessment framework, giving the Hub team the opportunity to raise any issues for clarification to re-assess the applications' score. The scoring criteria your application will be assessed on in this stage are listed below, outlining specific aspects feeding into the assessment.

Criteria	Max Score	Min Score
Problem & Potential Impact	20	12
Innovation	15	7
Team capability & readiness	20	12
Value for Money & Project Feasibility	15	7
Learning and Evaluation	10	6
User-centred design & stakeholders' engagement	10	6
Horizontal Principles	10	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>56</b>

## 23. Thresholds

The following thresholds have been applied to this Programme:



Score	Proceed to Interview	Outcome
Below 70	No	Below the threshold for funding
70 and above	Called to interview	If score remains above 70 post-interview, recommended for funding.*

\* Please note that this does not indicate that a grant will be awarded. See the following section on decision-making.

## Decision making

Final decision making for all applications lies with DRCDG and may include consideration of overall geographic and thematic spread of the fund as well as taking into account funding awarded to the entity from other similar funding schemes to ensure no double funding. Final decision making for all applications lies with DRCDG and may include consideration of overall geographic and thematic spread of the fund as well as considering funding awarded to the entity from other similar funding schemes to ensure no double funding. DRCDG will provide New Solutions Hub Consortium with the final decisions in writing. The Hub will issue notifications to each applicant by email and Pobal subsequently issue a grant agreement (contract) on behalf of DRCDG. Please note that a recommendation for funding does not automatically mean that a grant offer will be made. The number of grant offers made will be subject to budget restrictions.

## Appeals

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All unsuccessful applicants, including those deemed ineligible, will have the opportunity to appeal the decision on their application. Unsuccessful applicants will be provided with guidelines for this process with their decision. There will be no guarantee that those whose appeals are upheld will receive funding.

Before making the appeal, the applicant needs to have a feedback call first with the Hub members.

Appeals regarding the appraisal outcome will be accepted within two weeks of receipt of the notification letter and Pobal and DRCDG will complete the review within six to eight weeks of receipt.

## Terms and Conditions for Successful Applicants

### 24. Payment schedule

Grantees will receive 50% of their Year 1 grant in advance on receipt of the signed grant agreement.

Payments will be made every six months, after approval of the reports based on the annual budget.

The payments will be made following the submission and approval of the 6-monthly financial reports showing at least 50% of the last payment and 100% of all previous payments have been spent.



50% of Year 1 budget will be paid after review and approval of the 1<sup>st</sup> financial report.

In Year 2, 50 % will be paid after the second financial report is reviewed and approved, 40% of Year 2's budget will be paid after the 3rd financial report is reviewed and approved and 10% will be paid following submission and approval of the final reporting for the fund.

Example, assuming Grant Agreement signed in October 2026:

Instalment	Timeline and requirements
50% of Year 1 Budget	October 2026, on receipt of signed grant agreement.
50% of Year 1 Budget	April 2027, following review and approval of 1st financial report, showing at least 50 % spend on previous instalment.
50 % of Year 2 Budget	October 2027, following review and approval of 2nd financial report, showing at least 50% spend on last instalment, and 100% of previous instalments.
40 % of Year 2 Budget	April 2028, following review and approval of 3rd financial report, showing at least 50% spend on last instalment, and 100% of previous instalments.
Final 10 % of Year 2 Budget	October 2028, following review and approval of final reports.

## 25. Monitoring and Reporting

### Financial reporting

Formal financial reporting will be required on a 6-monthly basis, with Grantees reporting directly to Pobal. Grantees will be provided with a template and access to financial reporting systems. Expenditure on the grant will need to be clearly identifiable from other expenditure, either through maintenance of a segregated bank account for the pilot grant, or via a cost-centre setup in the organisations' accounting system to track expenditure. The ESF+ Claim for Grantees will be based on real costs and Grantees will be required to comply with corresponding requirements.

### Narrative reporting

Grantees must submit progress reports every six months directly to the Hub. Reports are due within two weeks of each period ending (by mid-April and mid-October each year). Reports are due within two weeks of each period ending (by mid-April and mid-October each year).

Each Progress Report should include the following sections:

- Executive Summary
- High-level overview of achievements to date
- Outcomes & Outputs
  - Updates against the Reporting framework and provision of the current status, i.e. On track / Behind schedule / Deferred / Completed
  - Qualitative outcomes or testimonials where relevant
- Stakeholder Engagement & Participation

- Summary of how target-group and stakeholder involvement took place (e.g. focus groups, co-design sessions)
- Number of participants engaged since last report
- Impact Measurement:
  - Survey Results
  - % of respondents who agree the intervention met the identified need (>50% threshold)
  - Any other outcome metrics collected
- Risks, Issues & Mitigations
  - New or emerging risks identified in this period
  - Actions taken or planned to mitigate each risk
  - Any impact on project scope, timeline, or budget

Case studies and narrative reporting will be required.

Grantees also agree to have their projects submitted as a case study to the ESF+ Social Innovation Match (SIM) database.

## 26. Hub engagement

The Social Innovation Hub will enhance the social innovation ecosystem in Ireland and deliver supports to social innovation projects. The Hub will play an important role in supporting Grantees throughout their project, including by providing case management and capacity building supports.

Grantees will be required to have monthly check ins with their allocated case manager, which will include updates on progress and expenditure against the project plan. Their case manager will also be the first point of contact to flag and assess mitigating measures should the project encounter any obstacles. The Hub will furthermore provide supports to social innovations generally and Grantees in particular, including workshops and networking opportunities. Grantees are encouraged to attend any relevant offerings and may be required to participate in those identified by the case manager as important for their pilot and organisational development. The Hub will also be able to direct and point Grantees to other resources and supports as relevant.

## 27. GDPR

### The purpose of the processing:

The New Solutions Social Innovation Fund pilot grants have 4 priority themes for investment:

1. Increasing access to employment for disadvantaged groups
2. Increasing access to education for disadvantaged groups
3. Personal and social development of young people most at risk of poverty and social exclusion
4. Harnessing the potential of sport for social development and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups.

Within these areas, social innovation initiatives will be funded to test and experiment their demonstrated approach.

### **The Controllers:**

The Controllers for the delivery of this fund is: the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Trinity Point, 10-11 South Leinster Street, Dublin 2, D02 EF85 and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 52 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, D02 DR67.

The Controllers have engaged Pobal as a Data Processor for the administration of the New Solutions pilot grants, source the operator of the Hub and hold Grantee contracts for the New Solutions Pilot Grants.

### **What is the Lawful Basis relied upon:**

Article 6(1)(e) of the GDPR: *Processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the Controller.*

### **Where is personal data processed:**

All data is processed within the EEA.

### **Whose personal data is processed:**

- Representatives and staff of Organisations applying for funding.
- Representatives and staff of Organisations contracted by Pobal to assist in delivering of services.
- Recipients of services delivered by Funded organisations.
- Members of the public accessing the information website hosted by New Solutions Hub.

### **Personal Data processed will include:**

Representatives of Organisations Attending Events:

- Title, First & Last Name, Address, Contact Number, Email (optional), organisational role.
- Event attendance and feedback.

Representatives of Organisations Applying for Funding (Primary Authorised Users):

- Title, First & Last Name, Address, Contact Number, Email (optional), organisational role.
- Salary and expenses information

Details of individuals supported by the Funded Organisations:

- Title, First & Last Name, Address, Position held, Services Received, eligibility criteria.

Visitors to the Fund website or accessing portals for interacting with Pobal system:

- Technical information such as IP address and device information.

### **How long will the personal data be retained:**

The retention period for personal data processed is up to 31 December 2035, in accordance with the rules of the Fund (excluding any authorised extensions provided for under the fund rules).

### **Who has access to the personal data:**

Staff charged with delivering the scheme within the Controllers' organisations and Pobal, the Processor, will have access on a need only basis. Auditors shall also have access for the purposes of ensuring the fund is administered in accordance with the fund's rules and legislation. Reports of the scheme will also be produced but these shall utilise aggregated and anonymised data.

### **Is the data secure:**

Pobal as the scheme administrator has implemented technical and organisational measures to industry standard to secure any personal data processed. Data is encrypted at rest and in transit.

### **Your rights if your personal data is processed:**

As a data subject under the GDPR, you have a range of rights in relation to the processing of your personal data:

- The right to be informed about whether and why your data is processed and by whom.
- The right of access to your personal data held by and on behalf of the Data Controllers.
- The right to rectification if the data held is incorrect.
- The right to erasure/right "to be forgotten" though this right is not absolute and there may be legal requirements for the Controllers to continue to hold your personal data.
- The right to restrict processing such as when there is no longer a requirement to process the data or when it is believed to be unlawful to do so.
- The right to data portability.
- The right to object.
- Rights in relation to automated decision making and profiling.
- The right to withdraw consent if consent has been relied upon for the processing of your data.
- The right to lodge a complaint with a Supervisory Authority.

As the Data Controllers are established in Ireland, the lead Supervisory Authority is:

THE DATA PROTECTION COMMISSION,  
21 FITZWILLIAM SQUARE SOUTH,  
DUBLIN 2,  
D02 RD28,  
IRELAND.

Their website: [www.dataprotection.ie](http://www.dataprotection.ie) provides useful information on understanding your rights and how to exercise them.

To contact the Controllers to enquire about the processing of your personal data, you can contact either of the Controllers or Pobal as the Processor administering the scheme using the addresses provided above or email: [dataprotection@pobal.ie](mailto:dataprotection@pobal.ie)

## 28. Further regulatory requirements

Grantees will be required to comply with regulatory requirements where relevant in their activities. These include e.g. procurement requirements, audit and the Grantee requirements of [Circular 13/2014](#).

Grantees will also be required to comply with EU Regulatory requirements.

# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Key Definitions

### Social Innovation

Article 2(8) of the ESF+ Regulation provides a definition of social innovation that is a useful basis for building a shared understanding, summarised as an activity that is social both in its ends and means.

"Social innovation"<sup>2</sup> means an activity that:

- relates to the development and implementation of new products, services, practices, and models.
- meets social needs.
- creates new social relationships or collaborations between public, civil society, or private organisations.
- thereby benefiting society and boosting its capacity to act'.

### Pilot

A pilot refers to a small-scale trial or experiment of a new idea, service or model. It is part of the "Prototyping and pilots" stage (from the 6 stages of Social Innovation Development Curve) — where ideas are tested with prototypes and pilot projects in practice rather than just remaining conceptual.

### Disadvantaged Groups

<sup>2</sup> [Call for expression of interest final 23 07.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#) and Regulations ESF: [Publications Office \(europa.eu\)](#)

For the purposes of this funding, the following has been defined as disadvantaged groups:

- People with Disabilities
- Long-term unemployed
- Migrants, Refugees and asylum seekers
- Ethnic Minorities, including Travellers & Roma
- Those experiencing poverty or social exclusion, including homeless people, jobless households, and single-parent families
- Recovering drug users and those with a criminal history
- Educationally disadvantaged (ISCED0-2<sup>3</sup>)
- People living in remote or rural areas/island residents

### Do No Significant Harm

‘Do no significant harm’ means not supporting or carrying out economic activities that do significant harm to any environmental objective, where relevant, within the meaning of Article 17 of Regulation (EU) 2020/852.

Such economic activity shall be considered to do significant harm:

- To climate change mitigation, where that activity leads to significant greenhouse gas emissions;
- To climate change adaptation, where that activity leads to an increased adverse impact on the current climate and the expected future climate, on the activity itself or on people, nature, or assets;
- To the sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources, where that activity is detrimental: to the good status or the good ecological potential of bodies of water, including surface water and groundwater; or to the good environmental status of marine waters;
- To the circular economy, including waste prevention and recycling, where: that activity leads to significant inefficiencies in the use of materials or in the direct or indirect use of natural resources such as non-renewable energy sources, raw materials, water and land at one or more stages of the life cycle of products, including in terms of durability, reparability, upgradability, reusability, or recyclability of products; the long-term disposal of waste may cause significant and long-term harm to the environment;
- To pollution prevention and control, where that activity leads to a significant increase in the emissions of pollutants into air, water, or land, as compared with the situation before the activity started; or
- To the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems, where that activity is: significantly detrimental to the good condition and resilience of ecosystems; or

<sup>3</sup> ISCED0-2 refers to lower secondary education or less.

detrimental to the conservation status of habitats and species, including those of Union interest.

- When assessing an economic activity against the criteria above, both the environmental impact of the activity itself and the environmental impact of the products and services provided by that activity throughout their life cycle shall be considered, by considering the production, use and end of life of those products and services.

Only activities or assets assessed as not significantly harmful to any of the mentioned environmental objective can be considered compliant with the Do No Significant Harm principle.