Call for Applicants

Consortium led by InnovhubSSI srl

Upd. 2nd March 2020

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1. Foreword

This call is developed within the project "Ready2Net" (282/G/GRO/PPA/18/10479), launched by the European Commission (EC) Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship & SMEs. This initiative is a pilot project aiming to assist European SMEs to develop, further expand or improve their international business by creating SME networks aimed at enhancing SME's capacity to exploit foreign markets for export purposes.

The project is carried out by an international consortium led by Innovhub Stazioni Sperimentali per l'Industria srl and composed by:

1. InnovhubSSI srl – ITALY (Leader)
2. Consejo de Camaras Oficiales de Comercio, Industria Y Navigacion de la Comunidad Valenciana - SPAIN
3. Izba Przemyslowo – Handlowa w Krakowie – POLAND
4. Chamber of Commerce and Industry Vratsa Sdruzhenie – BULGARIA
5. Latvijas Tehnologiskais Centrs Nodibinajums - LATVIA

The Consortium will operate in close collaboration with the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN).

The project lasts 24 months, from March 1st 2019 to March 1st 2021.

2. Objectives and purpose of the call of applicants

This call for applicants aims at selecting a minimum of 4 and healthy and dynamic Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) willing to cooperate with each other in the form of a **Network for Export**, able to compete in foreign markets, with a clear growth-potential, and a designed and potential commercial project to implement together.

Selected SMEs will become Ready2Net third parties and will enter into cooperation with other SMEs under the form of a network of purpose, <u>not obliging companies to set-up a new legal entity or association</u>.

The Call aims at selecting 1 Network for Export and if more Networks will be created at creation of Waiting Lists of Networks which will be admitted to the Project in case some of the Networks selected in previous and current calls resign from signing the Network Agreement or permanently loose eligibility before April 1st 2020. The Network shall be created based on the following specific sectors and sub-sectors:
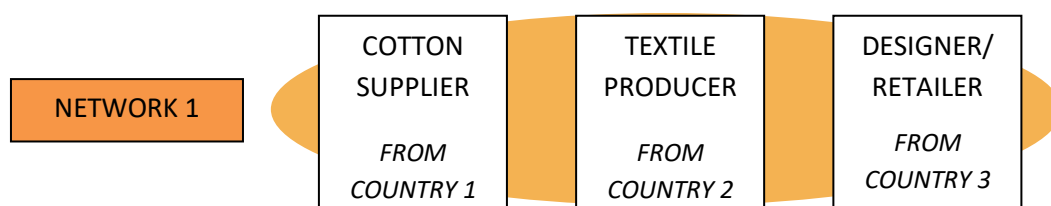
	Sector	Details
1	**Textile**	Silk/polyester and viscose materials; cotton fabrics; leather
2	**Textile machinery**	Machines and processes in silk/polyester and viscose materials; cotton fabrics; leather
3	**Advanced manufacturing**	Industry 4.0 value-chain, including robotics, mechatronics, industrial sensors, IOT, 3D printing, AI, augmented reality, predictive maintenance
4	**Food**	Organic and high quality food products
5	**Interior Design**	Including designers and producers of furniture and home decorations
6	**Bioeconomy**	Intelligent green packaging; value from waste products

Each **Network for Export** will be composed of a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 8 SMEs, coming from at least three different EU countries.

The Networks for export can be shaped in the two following models:

1) **Complementarity/Vertical model** along the production and value chain – for sectors 1, 2, 3 described at point 2:

E.g. sector 1.

NETWORK 1	COTTON SUPPLIER *FROM COUNTRY 1*	TEXTILE PRODUCER *FROM COUNTRY 2*	DESIGNER/ RETAILER *FROM COUNTRY 3*

The **complementarity model** will help companies operating at different production chain stages in transferring best practices and being more competitive together as they are able to cover all steps of production chain and serve all types of clients.

2) **Traditional/Horizontal model** – for sectors 3, 4, 5, 6

E.g. sector 4

NETWORK 4	BEER PRODUCER *FROM COUNTRY 1*	WINE MAKER *FROM COUNTRY 2*	BEER PRODUCER *FROM COUNTRY 3*

3
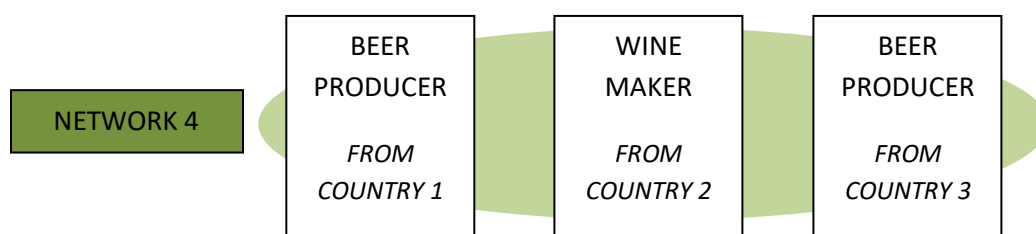
The **traditional model** will gather companies that are willing to export as a network, being thus able to offer to clients a wider range of choice.

The creation of the Network for Export is fostered on the basis of the following process:
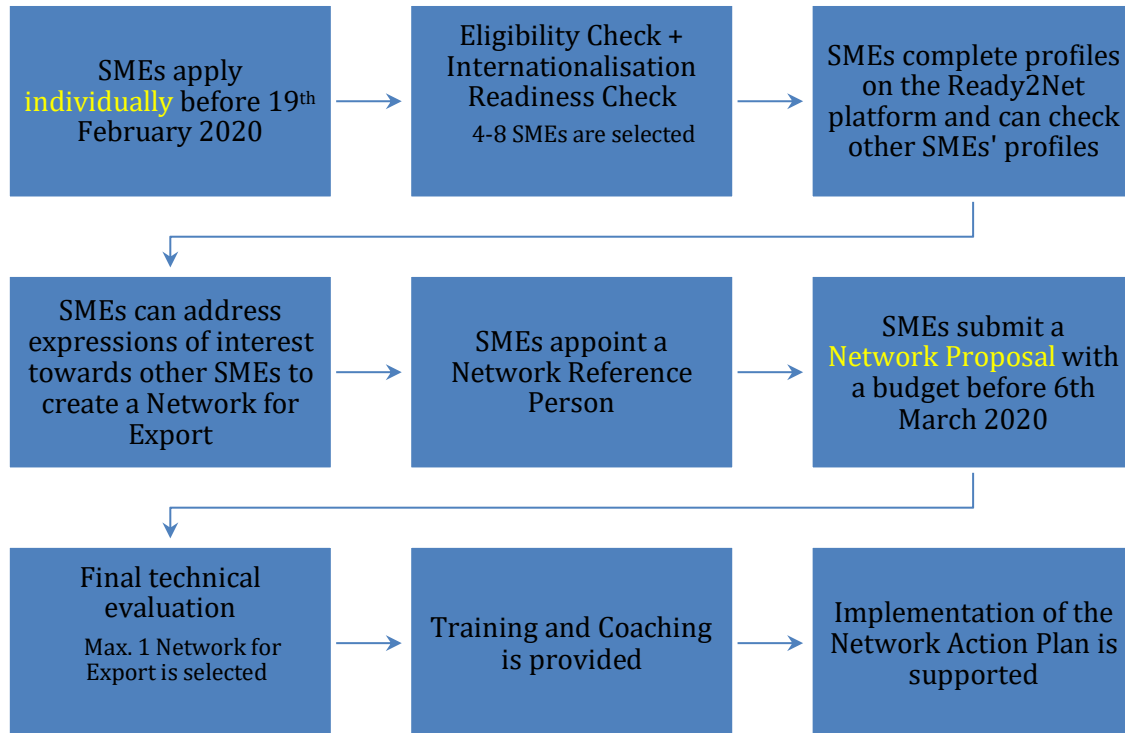
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┌─────────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ SMEs apply              │      │ Eligibility Check +     │      │ SMEs complete profiles  │
│ individually before 19th│  →   │ Internationalisation    │  →   │ on the Ready2Net        │
│ February 2020           │      │ Readiness Check         │      │ platform and can check  │
│                         │      │ 4-8 SMEs are selected   │      │ other SMEs' profiles    │
└─────────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ SMEs can address        │      │                         │      │ SMEs submit a           │
│ expressions of interest │      │ SMEs appoint a          │      │ Network Proposal with   │
│ towards other SMEs to   │  →   │ Network Reference       │  →   │ a budget before 6th     │
│ create a Network for    │      │ Person                  │      │ March 2020              │
│ Export                  │      │                         │      │                         │
└─────────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Final technical         │      │                         │      │ Implementation of the   │
│ evaluation              │  →   │ Training and Coaching   │  →   │ Network Action Plan is  │
│ Max. 1 Network for      │      │ is provided             │      │ supported               │
│ Export is selected      │      │                         │      │                         │
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3. Eligible entities

In order to be eligible to participate in the present invitation, each company should fulfill all the following requirements:

- be a Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise (SME) according to the definition of the EU recommendation 2003/361;
- be established in a EU Member State;
- be active in one of the target sectors of the Call (see point no.2);
- be active, not in liquidation or bankruptcy and not have been subject of bankruptcy proceedings or in the pre-settlement procedure;
- not be in receipt of an outstanding recovery order following a European Commission decision declaring the aid received illegal and incompatible with the common market;
- fulfill obligations related to payment of tax liabilities and liabilities for pension and health insurance in accordance with the legal provisions in the applicant's Country;
- comply with the rules concerning accidents at work and occupational diseases, safety in the workplaces, the collective labor agreements and regulations relating to environmental protection, in accordance with the legal provisions in the applicant's Country;
- comply with the so-called "Anti-Mafia Code" (D. Lgs. No. 159 of 2011);
- be proficient in English language for the purposes of the project. The working language of the project is English.

4. Benefits for the Participant SMEs

The participation to Ready2Net project is **free of charge** and a **financial support** of max € 25.000,00 will be provided to cover the eligible costs incurred to implement the operations of the Network for Export.
The beneficiary SMEs will benefit from:

- **Set-up of a Network for Export** that will strengthen the export capacity of participant SMEs
- A **2-days training programme** taking place in **Milan** to enhance SMEs' export capacity. The training will be focused on every aspect relevant to the internationalisation process and it is an obligatory element of each Action Plan.
- A **distance coaching** to elaborate and finalize an **Action Plan of the Network**, including a budget. The Action plan will define the internationalisation strategy of the network for export in max 2 foreign markets
- The **implementation of internationalisation activities**, as detailed in the Action Plan, with 100% of project financing of eligible costs up to € 25.000,00 per Network, e.g.
  - development of a common brand,
  - participation to conferences, brokerage events, international exhibitions,
  - partner research,
  - recruitment of experts (export manager, technical experts for technological transfer),
  - subscription to relevant e-commerce platforms,
  - development of common projects to increase sales and/or international visibility,
  - any other relevant activity for the purpose of the network for export.
- **Tailor made Enterprise Europe Network internationalization services**, e.g. market information, IPR information, partner research, brokerage events and company missions.

5. Funding Scheme

A grant of **maximum € 25.000,00** will be provided for each Network for export, based on the **reimbursement** of actual eligible costs incurred when implementing the supported activities.
This grant is co-funded by the European Commission and Innovhub SSI funds, in the following respective proportion: 90% EC funds, 10% Innovhub SSI funds.
Eligible costs may only include:

  - Brand design and development of logo and graphics of the Network;
  - Preparation and publishing, online and printing, of promotional material: Network's products sheets, pricing lists, leaflets, web-pages, promotional brochures;
  - Subscription to relevant e-commerce platforms and tools;
  - Participation to International exhibitions and/or events (booth rental, entrance fees, etc.);
  - Travel costs: travel and accommodation for participating in the training programme in Milan, events, conferences and international exhibitions;
  - Recruitment of 1 export manager per Network;
  - Recruitment of 1 Technical Expert to facilitate technology transfer and/or enhancement

The eligible costs must be detailed in the Action Plan.

Beneficiary companies will be reimbursed in two phases: mid-term and final stage. When asking for reimbursement of costs, companies will submit all the evidences related to all the expenses incurred, on the basis of the rules stated in the contract signed with Innovhub SSI srl.

6. Obligations

After the first selection step, the selected companies must sign a formal agreement with the Ready2Net Consortium leader (Innovhub SSI srl) by 5 days from the date of publication of the results. In case the company will not pass the second selection step, the signed contract will cease.
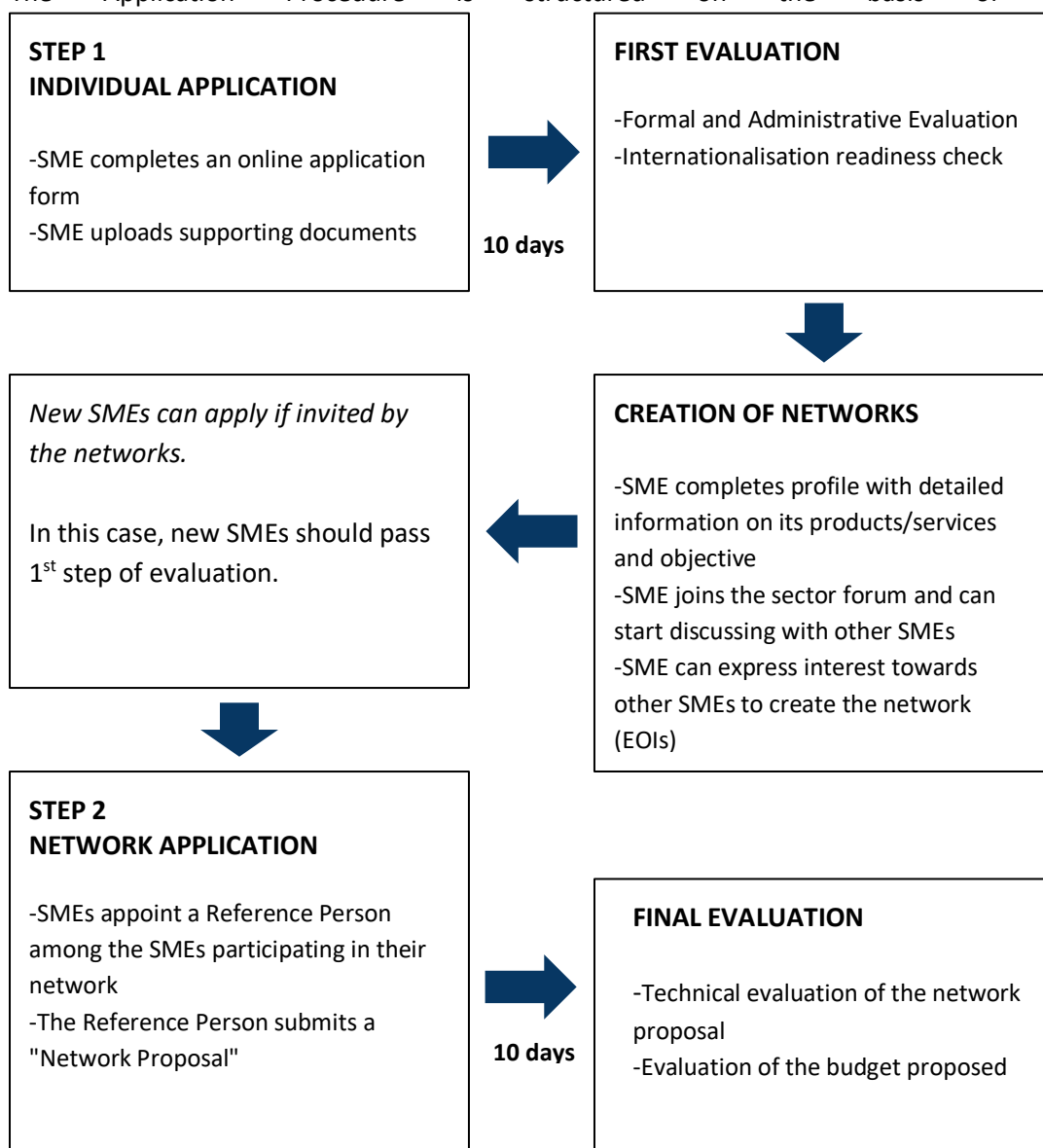
After the second selection step, the selected companies must sign a formal Network agreement with the Ready2Net Consortium leader (Innovhub SSI srl) and the other partners of the same Network by 5 days from the date of publication of the results.

Beneficiary SMEs undertake to:

- notify any change occurred after the application delivery relating to the requirements stated in art. 3;
- sign one formal agreement with the Ready2Net leader, Innovhub SSI srl (after first step selection);
- sign one formal Network agreement with the Ready2Net leader, Innovhub SSI srl and the other parties of the Network (after second step selection);
- sign one internal agreement with other SMEs to create the Network for Export;
- within the Network for Export, finalize a <u>detailed Network Plan of Action and a Budget,</u> as indicated in art. 4;
- submit a financial reporting including proofs of expenditures related to the grant received;
- actively participate in the project's activities (e.g. Training session in Milan, Italy);
- deliver the satisfaction questionnaires at any stage of the project and disclose information on the results of internationalization and matchmaking activities;
- provide prompt information about the status of commercial negotiations that will sprout from project's activities;
- promote the action and give visibility to the EU funding
- respect the minimum conditions for Network constitution throughout the whole duration of the project: 4 companies per Network from minimum 3 EU countries.

7. How to apply and deadline for submission of applications

The Application Procedure is structured on the basis of the following steps:

STEP 1
INDIVIDUAL APPLICATION

-SME completes an online application form
-SME uploads supporting documents

10 days

FIRST EVALUATION

-Formal and Administrative Evaluation
-Internationalisation readiness check

CREATION OF NETWORKS

-SME completes profile with detailed information on its products/services and objective
-SME joins the sector forum and can start discussing with other SMEs
-SME can express interest towards other SMEs to create the network (EOIs)

New SMEs can apply if invited by the networks.

In this case, new SMEs should pass 1st step of evaluation.

STEP 2
NETWORK APPLICATION

-SMEs appoint a Reference Person among the SMEs participating in their network
-The Reference Person submits a "Network Proposal"

10 days

FINAL EVALUATION

-Technical evaluation of the network proposal
-Evaluation of the budget proposed

Each company can apply for 1 sector only and become part of 1 Network exclusively. Beneficiaries of Ready2Net project cannot be a member of networks created and financed in the frame of other projects financed by the same COSME action i.e. BEE NET project and LookEUNet project.

For the purpose of the first formal evaluation and internationalization readiness check the applicant shall complete the online form available at: www.ready2net.eu **no later than February 19th 2020, h 17:00 Brussels time**.

Together with the online application form, for the purposes of the selection, applicants must fill in and upload the following supporting documents, to be downloaded from page http://ready2net.eu/register-now :

- Legal Entity Form in English language with supporting documents as specified in the form (copy of VAT registration and registration document together with a translation in English language) available at the following link: https://www.gsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/procurement/gsa-op-01-17_annex_i.b_template_legal_entity_form.pdf
- Self-declaration signed by the legal representative stating that they are fulfilling all the eligibility criteria

For the purpose of the second and final technical evaluation the SME must submit, together with the members of its network, a Network Internationalization Action Plan including a provisional budget, by **no later than March 6th, h.17:00 Brussels tim**e, using an online form provided by the Ready2Net Consortium. In case of positive evaluation, the SMEs must fill in and upload the following supporting documentation, in accordance to the approved budget:

- Bank Account Information of the SMEs receiving the grant: financial identification form https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/financial-identification_en, in English language

8. Criteria, methods and evaluation procedures

The selection process consists of two evaluation steps and will be supervised by an Evaluation Committee formally appointed by InnovhubSSI srl as leader of the Ready2Net Consortium. The selection will be made on the basis of the principles described below, but it is however subject to the unquestionable judgement of the Evaluation Committee.

STEP 1: INDIVIDUAL APPLICATION

All interested SMEs will be able to submit their INDIVIDUAL application through the Ready2Net platform at any time during the opening of the call up to the **deadline of February 19th 2020, h.17:00 Brussels time**.

Registration form must be completed in English and all supporting documents, that are not in English language, must be accompanied by an English auto-declaration.

The Evaluation Committee will verify the **eligibility** of applicant SMEs as specified in point 3 and will check the completeness and conformity of the application form and all supporting documents.

The **selection criteria** for the internationalization readiness check are:

- Motivation to participate in the project and to become part of a Network for export *(max 2 points)*
- Experience in international markets (export turnover, experience, international strategy, internationalisation skills, organisation, international marketing tools, language skills) *(max 9 points)*
- Competitive advantages (cost, product/service differentiation, niche, etc.) *(max 2 points)*

In case of doubt or in order to clarify any possible aspect of the applications, the Evaluation Committee may carry out telephone / skype interviews with candidate companies.

The threshold is 6 points. The evaluation process will result in the selection of minimum 4 and maximum 8 SMEs. In case of receipt and positive evaluation of more than 8 SMEs, the order of arrival of the online applications will be considered.

In case the minimum number of SMEs (4) is not reached, the deadline will be extended.

After the application, the formal eligibility and internationalization readiness check takes place and applicants are informed by email about the result of the first evaluation in maximum 10 working days.

STEP 2: NETWORK APPLICATION

SMEs passing STEP 1 will be asked to complete an online profile with details on their product/service, objective, etc. and will access the specific sector Forum, where they will be able to check all SMEs' profiles and express interest to other applicants (EOIs) with the purpose to join and prepare and submit a Network project proposal.

SMEs interested in creating the network will appoint a Network Reference Person, who will submit the Proposal on behalf of the Network.

Each network must involve minimum 4 SMEs up to a maximum of 8 SMEs, coming from at least 3 different EU Countries.

If needed, Network participants can invite other SMEs to join the call if they figure out the need to include a specific know-how for the purpose of network implementation. In this case, invited SMEs can apply and pass the same first step of evaluation in the respect of the 8 SMEs max limit. If admitted, they will join the network.

Network Proposals will be evaluated on the basis of the following **criteria**:

● Structure of the Network for Export (min. 4 - max 8 SMEs coming from at least 3 different EU Countries): adherence to the type of Network for relevant sector (see Chapter 2) *(max 2 points)*
● Quality of action plan proposed *(max 3 points)*
● Cost-effectiveness of the proposed budget *(max 2 points)*. In this phase a check of the eligibility of costs will be done
● One or more of the SMEs that are part of the network own/s voluntary certifications e.g. EPD, GOTS, ecolabel, MRLS, FSC etc. *(max 0,5 points)*

After the application of the Network proposal, within the deadline of **March 6th 2020**, the technical evaluation takes place.

The Evaluation Committee will publish the official ranking list, according to which the beneficiary Network for Exports is selected.

9. Communication and publication of results

With regard to step 1, the selected SMEs are informed by email about the result of the evaluation in 10 working days at maximum, after their online application.

With regard to step 2, the Network Reference Person and the SMEs joining the awarding Network are informed by email about the result of the evaluation in 10 working days at maximum, after online submission.

The list of awarded Networks for Export will be officially published in the website of the project and on Innovhub SSI srl website, on a dedicated page. For any possible information please refer to the following e-mail address: info@ready2net.eu

10. Responsible for the procedure

Responsible for the procedure is Dr. Attilio Martinetti, InnovhubSSI srl Director General.

11. Audits

The selected SMEs are required to provide to the Ready2Net partners all the information and documents required. The Ready2Net partners will carry out formal checks on the completeness, accuracy and validity of the declarations on a sample basis.
The selected companies are required to promptly notify any cessation of activities and any other event occurred after the application delivery relating to the requirements stated in art. 3, which could lead to the loss of any of the requirements for admission to the planned activities of the Call for Applicants.

12.   Liability

Each candidate is responsible for the completeness, clarity and accuracy of the data and information contained in the documents and materials prepared as part of the participation to this Call for Applicants. The Ready2Net Consortium is not responsible for such content, or for any inaccuracies, omissions or violations of the rights of other people.

13.   Withdrawals and Revocation

Each winning SME can renounce without any charge to the participation in the program, giving a written notice by 3 days from the date of publication of the results. In case of loss of any eligibility requirement as listed in art.3, the beneficiary is excluded from the project (revocation).

After the publication of the final ranking list, the minimum requirements set by this call, concerning the structure of the network, must always be respected. Namely the Networks must, during all project duration, be composed of a minimum of 4 companies coming from at least 3 different EU countries. If withdrawal of one or more companies causes the breach of such conditions, the remaining companies of that Network are entitled to find a substitute within 30 days from the date of withdrawal of that one company. The substitute must undertake and pass the evaluation step number 1. In the case the substitution is not done, the Network must end its activity within the project. All eligible costs incurred by the companies of that Network up to that moment will be reimbursed, during the mid-term or final payment.

14.   Personal data protection

All personal data provided for the participation to the present Call for Applicants will be processed in conformity / accordance to the current legislation, as per Data Protection Notice here below.

Privacy information notice - *pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2016/679 and current legislation on personal data processing:*
Joint data Controllers
- Innovhub – Stazioni Sperimentali per l'Industria S.r.l.
  Via Meravigli 9/b, 20123 Milano - ITALY
- Consejo de Camaras Oficiales de Comercio, Industria Y Navigacion de la Comunidad Valenciana
  Plaza Alfonso el Magnanimo 12, 46003 Valencia - SPAIN
- Izba Przemyslowo – Handlowa W Krakowie
  Ul. Florianska 3, 31-019 Krakow - POLAND
- Chamber of Commerce and Industry Vratsa Sdruzhenie
  24 Hristo Botev Str., Vratsa - BULGARIA
- Latvijas Tehnologiskais Centrs Nodibinajums
  Krivu iela 11, Riga, LV-1006 - LATVIA

Purposes and lawfulness of processing
Personal data collected will be solely processed, for the performance of tasks carried out in the public interest, in order to process the proposals submitted in response to this Call for Applicants and to manage the participation of successful proposals in the project.
Data processing manner
Personal data collected are processed, held and stored in electronic and paper form by personnel authorised by data controllers, according to specific and defined procedures to guarantee their security and confidentiality.
Recipients or categories of recipients of the personal data
Personal data are processed by the data controllers and may be disclosed or communicated to service providers as data processors, and to the funding authority. Also, other companies selected by the present Call for Applicants will have access to these data through a dedicated website with restricted access, for the purpose of creating business networks.
Data provided and consequences of refusal
Data supply and disclosure take place on voluntary basis. The refusal could prevent the participation in this Call for Applicants.
Data retention
Data provided will be processed and stored for the period strictly necessary to achieve the aforementioned purposes and will be promptly cancelled as soon as those purposes will be definitively reached. In the case of particular legal obligations, the data processing will continue pursuant to current National and European legislation.
Rights of the data subject and how to exercise them
The data subject is entitled to the rights set forth in art. 12 et seq. of Regulation (UE) 2016/679. Precisely, such rights include the right:
- to request from the controller access to and rectification or erasure of personal data or restriction of processing concerning the data subject or to object to processing as well as the right to data portability;
- to lodge a complaint with a supervisory authority
In order to exercise the above-mentioned rights, it is possible to contact the data controllers listed above.