

# Call for the expression of interest for the participation in the “Important Projects of Common European Interest” (IPCEI) in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Call ID: IPCEI AI 2026

## Introduction

### Artificial Intelligence in the European Continuum

The European Union as a unique digital single market is challenged by rapid digital developments. The European Union faces double challenges: first, it needs to increase the adoption of key digital technologies in its economy to improve its competitiveness and second, and to do so in a way that strengthens its technological sovereignty and the resilience of its infrastructure and societies. The engine of the next industrial revolution will be artificial intelligence (AI), which is a major paradigm shift and the technological foundation for the development and use of digital solutions today and tomorrow.

The use of AI will lead to a paradigm shift in almost every sector of industry. Autonomous production, AI-controlled logistics, AI-driven robotics, AI-supported design or the industrial metaverse are not possible without powerful AI. However, this requires highly specialized AI models that go far beyond generative large language models (LLMs). The industry in Europe controls huge amounts of data that can be used to train specialized AI models. Europe has the potential to become a global leader if it can not only develop next-generation industrial and highly specialized AI models, but also deploy them productively and successfully. To this purpose, Europe’s industry needs access to the latest software, AI models, high-quality data sets as well as high-end computing resources.

In this context, the European Commission has introduced the [AI Continent Action Plan](#) (April 9, 2025), which is a comprehensive strategy to position Europe as a global leader of AI. In the Action Plan, the European Commission identifies five main fields of action in which special efforts are needed: Computing infrastructure, high-quality data, AI algorithms, AI talent development and AI regulation. Therefore, AI may be also supported as so-called “**Important Projects of Common European Interest**” (IPCEI) pursuant to **Article 107(3)(b) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union**. The specific criteria for IPCEI projects are further elaborated in **European Commission’s Communication No. 2021/C 528/02**.

Since the beginning of 2025, several European member states, coordinated by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWE), have been preparing a joint project for industry-specific artificial intelligence. The common goal is to create a powerful AI ecosystem in Europe that is tailored to the AI needs of industry in particular and provides easy to use technologies. IPCEI represent an appropriate instrument for such an application-oriented joint project. Such initiatives are also supported by [Berlin Declaration](#), signed by the ministers of economic affairs from 17 member states, which identifies the fast and bold implementation of the IPCEI AI as a key measure to boost productivity and competitiveness of Europe.

The Slovak Republic is aware of AI importance and therefore, launches this Call for expression of interest in order to compile a list of potential applicants who could become **Direct Partners** of IPCEI projects in the field of AI, as well as to identify other promising projects, the proponents of which could act as **Indirect Partners** or **Associated Partners** (for more information on type of partners see Annex 1).

Further practical information regarding the preparation for and participation in this IPCEI AI will also be provided during the planned workshop entitled '*Participation in the National Selection Process for Important Projects of Common European Interest in the Field of AI*'.

Each of the nominated applicants will subsequently be required to ensure compliance with the rules and procedures established at the level of the Slovak Republic and the European Commission. An essential condition will be the submission of the required complete documentation (including the full Project Portfolio, Funding gap template and other supporting documents) for initiating the pre-notification and notification process at the level of the European Commission.

The next steps will also include international match-making with other EU Member States to identify collaborations and to begin work on the detailed integrated IPCEI project description (commonly referred to as Chapeau document). Detailed Guidance on this process will be provided at that next stage.

## 1. What is IPCEI?

[IPCEI](#) are large-scale, EU multi-country projects and are an increasingly important industrial policy tool for delivering breakthrough innovation and infrastructure when the market alone does not deliver. IPCEI are a unique instrument for large-scale industrial collaborations across the European Union, contributing to sustainable growth and increasing EU competitiveness. Where a [funding gap](#) is evidenced, a State funding contribution<sup>1</sup> may be granted for certain projects that make an important contribution to the growth, competitiveness and productivity of the European industrial sector and to the strategic objectives of the EU. IPCEI also make an effective contribution to national and European climate and digital goals by building European value chains in key sectors. Member States support domestic companies who undertake projects at national level, with significant collaborations across Member States, which feed into the achievement of the overall IPCEI objectives.

## 2. What is IPCEI-AI?

The European Union as a unique digital single market is challenged by rapid digital developments. The European Union faces double challenges: first, it needs to increase the adoption of key digital technologies in its economy to improve its competitiveness and second, and to do so in a way that strengthens its technological sovereignty and the resilience of its infrastructure and societies. The engine of the next industrial revolution will be artificial intelligence, which is a major paradigm shift and the technological foundation for the development and use of digital solutions today and tomorrow. Europe's industry needs access to the latest software, AI models, high-quality data sets as well as high-end computing resources. European industries need equal access to sufficient computing and data resources for AI to reduce their dependence on non-European solutions and providers. The European industries must have the choice to increase resilience as well as security. This shall be achieved by combining new and existing European technologies through increased interoperability

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<sup>1</sup> The majority of the total project funding must come from the companies proposing the project. Applicants have to demonstrate that their project would not be carried out without State support because it displays a 'funding gap'. In other words, without public funding you will not implement your project. Therefore, you have to provide realistic and credible financial projections justified by company internal documents or independent studies. It must be calculated using the IPCEI Funding Gap template, which can be found at the bottom of this page. There is no pre-determined ratio between private and public funding and the amount of State-aid funding sought for any project must be supported by a funding gap assessment and this will be examined on a case-by-case basis. Project proposals that rank highest against the criteria of the call, which includes a return-on-investment assessment, may be considered for co-funding. As this is a competitive call, where projects rank equally on innovation, the ratio of funding sought may be a determining factor in terms of projects selected.

## Goal of the IPCEI AI

The goal of the IPCEI AI is the development of a next-generation AI ecosystem for the European Union providing latest AI training and development technologies. This requires secure access to high-quality data sets and ensuring the availability of state-of-the-art AI technologies, thereby significantly increasing the adoption rate of AI solutions in European industries by offering easy-to-use AI applications with low ramp-up effort.

The projects should focus on:

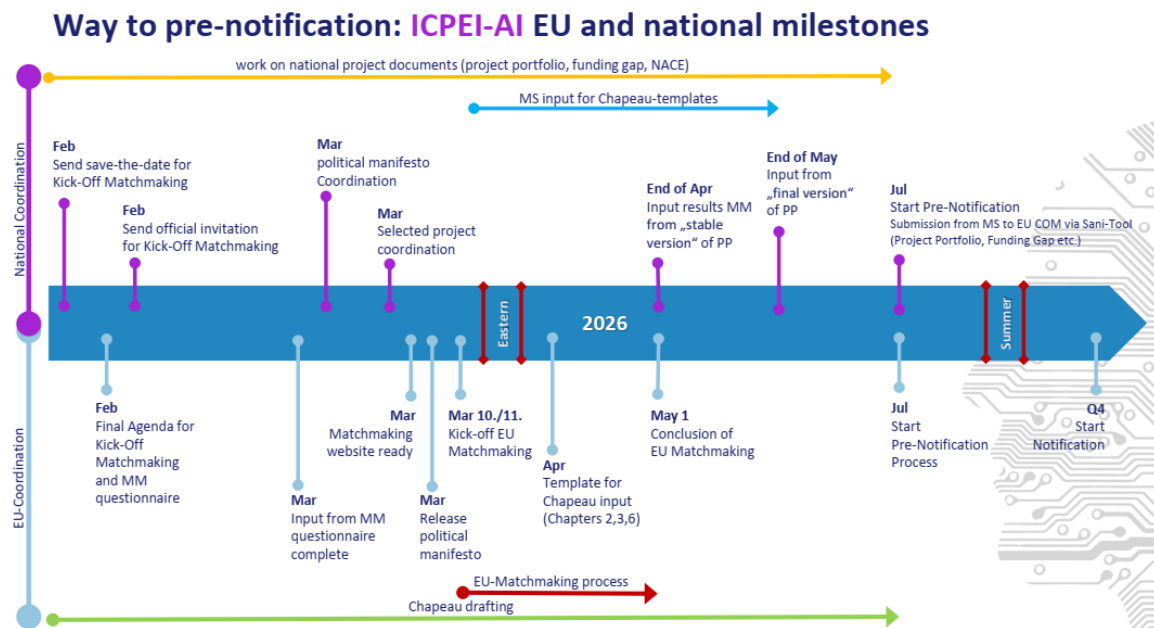
- **Development of a first ever next generation AI ecosystem for the EU that includes:**
  - Research and development of open and competitive AI foundation models: New foundational frontier models, next-generation AI model training technologies and methods, incl. innovative post-training techniques, such as fine-tuning for specific sector offerings.
  - Enablement of sovereign European cloud services and essential components for AI training and deployment (including resource management and computation distribution).
  - Development of new energy efficiency technologies to train and run AI models.
- **Secure and safe access to high-quality data sets for AI:**
  - Development of technologies for the availability and access to high-quality and structured data sets for AI under European data privacy and security regulations.
  - Integration of new solutions for data storage and management, database administration, data processing, and analytics.
- **Development of advanced AI-as-a-Service (AlaaS) approaches** tailored to the needs of AI developers and users, especially SMEs. This will enable the broad adoption of AI models to address specific use cases across various industrial sectors. This includes:
  - Development of advanced tools and frameworks to facilitate the development process and the deployment of AI models.
  - Creation of a framework enabling access to AI models and end-to-end capabilities through APIs.
  - Development and deployment of next generation inference and AI training services.
- **Development of a common open-source framework to ensure security and high interoperability of European solutions.** Substantial building block is an active developer community to create and maintain the code for an open-source toolbox to allow for easy creation of highly customisable AI solutions for industries.
- **Systematic integration of next generation AI models into applications and interconnection services** (for example, telco network services), addressing common use cases within specific industrial sectors and public administrations

Slovak Republic is one of 13 EU Member States which, in collaboration with the EU Commission as part of the JEF-IPCEI has developed a [Value-Chain document for IPCEI AI](#). This comprehensive document provides the necessary background, scope and objectives of this IPCEI proposal to assist applicants with their applications.

The Programme for Government contains a commitment to *“Boost participation in Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEIs) to increase competitiveness and productivity for Slovak companies and create more jobs.”*

### 3. IPCEI AI Indicative Roadmap

Figure 3.1: Illustrative roadmap with important milestones of IPCEI AI; final date for approval depends on further processes



### 4. What projects can be supported?

Supported can be highly innovative:

- Research & Development & Innovation (“R&D&I”) projects**, which must be of a major innovative nature or constitute an important added value in terms of R&D&I in the light of the state of the art in the sector concerned.
- Projects comprising of first industrial deployment**, which must allow for the development of a new product or service with high research and innovation content or the deployment of a fundamentally innovative production process. Regular upgrades without an innovative dimension of existing facilities and the development of newer versions of existing products do not qualify as first industrial deployment.

### 5. Who can participate and be supported?

Funding recipients can be company of any size, which has permanent establishment in the Slovak Republic. Participation in IPCEIs can be in the form of direct participants (DPs), associated partners (APs) or indirect participants (IPs). Direct participants may be funded under the IPCEI instrument, whereas associated partners may be funded under the General Block Exemption Fund (GBER).

#### Direct participants

Direct participants are companies that are funded by Member States to conduct research, development, and first industrial application projects, contributing to a larger, integrated European value chain. Their primary role is to carry out their own projects in close collaboration with other DPs through cross-border partnerships, creating synergies and driving innovation. They must also share their results and knowledge widely with the wider European scientific and industrial community.

Direct participant projects are typically funded under the IPCEI instrument and receive a minimum State aid contribution of €50 million and must be notified to, and approved by, the EU Commission. They undergo detailed annual reporting nationally and to the EU Commission.

### Associated partners

The goal of the category of [associated partners](#) is to give interested companies or Research Organisations (ROs) – that are not IPCEI direct participants – the chance to participate in the IPCEI and to strengthen the IPCEI ecosystem in Europe. Associated partners' projects, depending on the nature of the IPCEI, can be all different kinds of organisations (undertakings of any size or ROs) and projects (not limited to research projects as it has been the case in previous research-related IPCEIs) located within an EU Member State, EEA state, or EU candidate country.

Associated partner projects are typically funded via GBER, receiving a smaller amount of State aid contribution. Unlike IPCEI direct participants, associated partners are not subject to the (pre)-notification process to the Commission under the IPCEI Communication. However, based on past IPCEIs, their contribution to an IPCEI can play an important complementary role (for example, in contributing to fulfilling and adding to the objectives of an IPCEI, enlarging the IPCEI direct participants spillover commitments, and so on).

### Indirect partners

Organisations or undertakings, such as research organisations, academics, SMEs and large enterprises which neither participate as IPCEI direct participant nor are involved as associated partner in an IPCEI, which are located within Ireland, and which collaborate with at least one IPCEI direct participant or associated partner within an IPCEI, can be represented as [indirect partners](#) in an IPCEI. These indirect partners contribute to the objectives of an IPCEI through their collaborations with IPCEI direct participants or associated partners. They may be invited to networking activities with the IPCEI direct participants and associated partners. Indirect partners are not assessed by the EU Commission in the context of the IPCEI process but by their respective Member State as far as the fulfilment of the conditions agreed by Member States for the qualification of indirect partner. Indirect partners do not receive notified State aid approval based on the IPCEI Communication from their respective Member State. Indirect partners may or may not receive State aid from a national funding scheme (not limited to RDI work), including GBER, including support not necessarily qualifying as aid, - they can also be self-financed.

Please see Annex 1 to this document and use the links above for more detailed information on the role of each participant.

## 6. What are general eligibility criteria of IPCEI projects?

The **Call for Expressions of Interest for participation in IPCEI AI** is launched in accordance with **European Commission's Communication No. 2021/C 528/02**, which sets out the criteria and specific eligibility conditions for IPCEI projects.

The key conditions are as follows:

- **Potential stakeholders** must be prepared to provide sufficient information enabling other applicants to understand opportunities for cross-border cooperation.
- **Each project** should be sufficiently mature to allow for its early implementation. Adequate readiness in terms of project governance and financial arrangements is also required.
- **Direct Partners** may receive aid for their projects of up to **100% of the funding gap** calculated on the basis of the eligible project costs.
- **The project must include co-financing** by the beneficiary.

- **Projects must be developed in cooperation with other companies.** Applicants shall ensure their participation in IPCEI coordination meetings at EU level.
- **The benefits of the projects** must not be limited solely to the companies or the sector in which they operate, but must have broader relevance and applicability for the European economy through positive externalities (“**spillover effects**”).
- **Applicants must not be subject to an obligation to repay aid** following a previous decision of the European Commission in which such aid was declared unlawful and incompatible with the internal market.

## 7. What is the submission and selection procedure at national level?

The submitted project proposal must include all mandatory documents listed below. More detailed instructions on how to complete these documents are provided directly within the individual documents.

**The applicant shall complete the project documentation in the English language and submit it electronically via the Central Public Administration Portal (ÚPVS) at <http://podatelna.gov.sk>.** The submitted documentation must be signed with a qualified electronic signature (KEP).

### **Mandatory documents to be submitted:**

1. **0\_IPCEI Registration Form** – contains basic information about the company and the submitted project proposal. The IPCEI Registration Form must be completed and submitted electronically together with the mandatory annexes listed under points 2 to 5 below.
2. **Annex\_1\_IPCEI Application\_Template\_RDI\_FID**  
**Project Portfolio** is a document whose structure (mandatory chapters) has been prepared by the European Commission. In the Project Portfolio, the applicant describes various aspects of the project, such as the project objectives, the innovative character of the project, which must go beyond the current state of the art or the current technical solutions in the relevant sector, the project benefits, the planned cooperation within the EU, the budget, the need for aid, etc. For the purposes of this Call, the applicant is required to complete only selected chapters of the Project Portfolio, in accordance with the instructions provided directly in the Project Portfolio document.
3. **Annex\_2\_Preliminary\_Funding\_Gap\_Template\_IPCEI\_RDI\_FID**  
**Preliminary Funding Gap template** summarizes the expected project investments (OPEX and CAPEX) for the individual years of implementation. While preparing this document, the applicant shall proceed in accordance with the instructions set out directly in the Preliminary Funding Gap template.
4. **Annex\_3\_Solemn Declaration**  
Through the **Solemn Declaration**, the company declares that it complies with the basic rules laid down in **European Commission Communication No. 2021/C 528/02**, as well as selected provisions pursuant to **Section 8a(4) of Act No. 523/2004 Coll. on Budgetary Rules of Public Administration and on amendments to certain acts**.
5. **Annex\_4\_Project Summary SVK**  
**Project Summary** is a summary of the project translated into the Slovak language.



Submission of the above-mentioned documents in the required form and scope will enable the assessment of the eligibility of projects with regard to the rules laid down in [European's Commission Communication No. /2021/C528/ 02.](#)

#### Other important documents and references:

- [COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION Criteria for the analysis of the compatibility with the internal market of State aid to promote the execution of important projects of common European interest No. /2021/C528/02](#)
  - [CELEX 52021XC1230\(02\) SK TXT](#)
- [IPCEIs application of EU antitrust rules 2025](#)
- [IPCEI - Technical guidance on conditions and process RDI-FID IPCEI](#)
- [JEF IPCEI Technical guidance on conditions and processes](#)
- [Value-Chain document for IPCEI AI](#)
- [Recommendation of the JEF-IPCEI on the roles of associated and indirect partners in an IPCEI ecosystem](#)
- [DG COMP Code of good practices for a transparent, inclusive, faster design and assessment of IPCEIs](#)
- [Berlin Declaration 2025](#)
- [Test undertaking in difficulty](#)

## 8. Expert Evaluation Committee

The list of selected project proposals to be nominated for pre-notification and notification to the European Commission will be approved by the Minister of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic (the 'Minister'), based on the assessment carried out by the Expert Evaluation Committee, which acts as an advisory body to the Minister.

The composition, rules of procedure, and evaluation methodology of the Expert Evaluation Committee are governed by the Statute and Rules of Procedure of the Committee for the Evaluation of Applications submitted under this Call.

## 9. Final Provisions



### Important Deadlines

Interested parties may submit their project proposals, in the required scope and form, **by 10 March 2026, by 3:00 p.m.**



### Contact Details

Questions related to this Call may be addressed to:

**Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, Department of Investments and Strategic Development**

E-mail: [IPCEI\\_AI\\_CIC.gov.sk](mailto:IPCEI_AI_CIC.gov.sk)

Answers to frequently asked questions, as well as new information, will be published on the website **smartcity.gov**



## Confidentiality

All parties involved in this **Call for Expressions of Interest for participation in IPCEI AI** are obliged to ensure and maintain the confidentiality of information provided for the purpose of submitting project documentation under this Call, **regardless of the outcome of the selection process.**

## 10. Annexes

### *Annex 1 Overview of roles of associated partners and indirect partners in an IPCEI*

	<b>Associated partners</b>	<b>Indirect partners</b>
<b>Origin</b>	should be located within an EU Member State, EEA state or EU candidate country	
<b>Contribution to IPCEI</b>	with their own projects which are of reasonable size and volume and, meaningfully and in an impactful way, contribute to the objectives of the IPCEI	by collaborations with at least one IPCEI direct participant or associated partner of the IPCEI
<b>Selection</b>	underwent a national selection procedure to participate in the IPCEI	may undergo have undergone a national selection procedure to participate in the IPCEI
<b>Public funding</b>	do not receive notified State aid approved based on the IPCEI Communication	
	receive funding from a national (or regional) funding scheme, including GBER, or EU funds, including support not necessarily qualifying as aid, for their contribution within the IPCEI ecosystem	have no requirements on public funding. Indirect partners may or may not receive funding from a national (or regional) funding scheme, including GBER, or EU funds, including support not necessarily qualifying as aid – indirect partners can also be self-financed
<b>Governance</b>	are represented in the governance structure of the IPCEI, as established by the participating Member States for each IPCEI can be represented in the governance structure of the IPCEI, as established by the participating Member States for each IPCEI	can be represented in the governance structure of the IPCEI, as established by the participating Member States for each IPCEI
	can participate in IPCEI conferences and networking events - and can thus benefit from (but also contribute to) the wider IPCEI ecosystem	may be invited to participate in IPCEI conferences and networking events - and can thus benefit from (but also contribute to) the wider IPCEI ecosystem
<b>Visibility</b>	the Recommendation is based on the expectation of the Member States that the identity of associated partners would be given public visibility by the European Commission.	the identity of indirect partners should be mentioned in the Chapeau document and on the respective website of the IPCEI prepared by the Member States.
	are represented on the respective IPCEI website, newsletters etc.	may be represented on the respective IPCEI website, newsletters etc.



<b>Preparation</b>	participate in setting up the IPCEI (e.g., in the matchmaking process) and contribute to drafting the IPCEI Chapeau document	Neither participate in setting up the IPCEI nor in drafting the IPCEI Chapeau document
<b>Collaborations</b>	in an RDI-related IPCEI, have effective cross-border collaborations (compliant with the R&D&I Framework) with at least two IPCEI direct participants or associated partners in the context of their IPCEI projects for large enterprises or ROs, and at least one for SMEs. At least one of the effective cross-border collaborations should be with an IPCEI direct participant	contribute to the IPCEI through collaborations with at least one IPCEI direct participant or associated partner
<b>Spillovers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- spillover activities in at least 3 Member States</li> <li>- commit to the generation of spillover activities related to, for example, the dissemination of non-IP covered results (conferences, workshops, training events, etc.) in at least three Member States</li> </ul>	No requirements on the generation of spillovers. May benefit from spillover activities through their collaborations with an IPCEI direct participant or associated partner and through the spillover activities of IPCEI direct participants or associated partners (such as conferences, workshops, training events, etc.)
<b>Reporting</b>	<p>upon request by the Member States, inform the PAB (or any other similar IPCEI coordination body) about the progress of their respective projects in a yearly simplified report, which should include non-confidential information</p> <p>may contribute, upon request by Member States, to the annual reporting made at the level of the overall IPCEI (annual executive report). This annual report at the EU level is notwithstanding the national annual reports that may be required by the respective national authority of the associated partner</p>	are not required to provide any kind of annual reports at the level of the IPCEI. However, the respective national authority may require an annual report (in particular if indirect partners are receiving State aid) while limiting any administrative burden
<b>Assessment</b>	are not assessed by the European Commission in the context of the IPCEI process but by their respective Member State as far as the fulfilment of the conditions agreed by Member States for the qualification of an associated or indirect partner	