



Open Call 1

FAQ

(Frequently Asked Questions)

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1. CITADEL and Open Call 1

1.1. What is CITADEL?

CITADEL is a project co-funded by the European Commission, in the Single Market Programme, part of the Euroclusters initiative.

CITADEL's goal is to support innovation, networking and adoption of new processes and advanced technologies on the security value chain.

The partners in the CITADEL project are SYSTEMATIC Paris-Région (France), AKTANTIS (France), SAFE (France), L3CE (Lithuania), ClujIT Cluster (Romania), Business Tampere - Safety and Security Cluster (Finland)

CITADEL implements a cascade funding mechanism via two open calls, to support the development and deployment of advanced security solutions, in a context of digital and green transitions

A description of the CITADEL Open Call 1 can be found in the CITADEL Guide for Applicants.

1.2. Who can apply to the CITADEL Open Call 1? What are the eligible countries?

Applicants to the CITADEL Open Call 1 must be legal, established in one of the participating in the Single Market Programme (SMP), namely:

- EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
- non-EU countries: listed European Economic Area EEA countries and countries associated to the COSME part of the Single Market Programme (list of participating countries: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/smp/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_smp_en.pdf)

Therefore, the eligible countries are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden (27-EU member states) and Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye, Moldova, Ukraine.



2. Consortium Composition

2.1. What shall be the consortium composition to apply to CITADEL?

Applicants to CITADEL must submit proposals as a two-partner consortium structured as follows:

- Partner 1: SME (Small and Medium-sized Enterprise), from digital / technological sector (offer side)
- Partner 2: a legal entity (private or public), acting as an end-user, representing the security sector (demand side).

All consortium members must be fully autonomous, with no capital ownership or personal links between them.

Applications from a single entity are not permitted, nor are consortia comprising more than two partners.

2.2. What is an SME?

An SME will be considered as such if it complies with the European Commission's recommendation 2003/361/EC. As a summary, the criteria defining an SME are:

- Staff head account in annual work unit less than 250
- Annual turnover less or equal to 50 million € OR annual balance sheet total less or equal to 43 million €

Note that the figures of partners and linked enterprises should also be considered as stated in the SME user guide. For detailed information check user guide to the SME definition: https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition_en

It is mandatory that Partner 1 is an SME.

Only SMEs can be funded in CITADEL.

2.3. How can I check my SME status?

The SME self-assessment tool provided by the European Commission is available on this link: <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/SME-Wizard/>

The outcome of this self-assessment will have to be attached to the application for any SME applicant, on <https://citadel.grantplatform.com/> (application section 2)

2.4. Is it accepted to have a consortium with more than 2 partners?

No. Proposals submitted to the CITADEL Open Call 1 must be composed strictly of two partners.



2.5. Can I submit an application if my company is not yet established?

No. The call is open exclusively to duly registered legal entities. Applicants must be legally established prior to proposal submission.

2.6. Can a public entity participate in the CITADEL Open Call 1?

Yes, a public entity can be part of the consortium as the 2nd partner, as long as it represents a practitioner in the security value chain. However, it cannot receive any funding from CITADEL.

2.7. Can a large company participate in the CITADEL Open Call 1?

Yes, a large company can be part of the consortium as the 2nd partner, as long as it represents a practitioner in the security value chain. However, it cannot receive any funding from CITADEL.

2.8. How does CITADEL define a “digital / technological SME”?

A digital / technological SME is a company (duly registered legal entity) that has the status of SME (see section 2.2), and develops, produces, or commercialises products or services in the digital domaine (e.g. software, applications, hardware) or in photonics / optics, intended for end-users within a specific sector. The technologies developed must fall within at least one of the following areas:

- a) Internet of Things (IoT)
- b) Photonics and optics
- c) Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics
- d) Cybersecurity
- e) Communication, interoperability, response systems



2.9. Can 2 entities that are linked form a consortium and apply to CITADEL Open Call 1?

No. The two partners in the consortium applying as one consortium should be autonomous to one another (without capital or personal links).

3. Security value chain and technologies

3.1. What are the security domains to be addressed?

CITADEL supports projects tackling major security challenges aligned with the protection of critical infrastructures, resilience to natural and technological disasters, and the safety, sustainability, and resilience of urban environments, in line with the green and digital transition.

Projects are expected to fall within at least one of the following application domains:

- Protection of critical infrastructures, including sectors such as energy, transport, healthcare, water management, digital infrastructure, public administration, space, banking and financial market infrastructure, and large-scale food production and distribution.
- Resilience to natural and/or technological disasters, covering climate-related events, industrial accidents, and cascading failures.
- Urban environments, addressing security, resilience, and continuity of services in cities, public spaces, and large-scale events.

In addition, proposals must position their activities within at least one stage of the security value chain: risk assessment, prevention/mitigation, detection/monitoring, response, or recovery/business continuity.

3.2. What is the definition of “Critical infrastructures”?

Critical infrastructures, as defined by the CER Directive (EU) 2022/2557, are entities providing essential services whose disruption would have significant societal or economic impacts.

These entities are highly interconnected, subject to regulatory requirements, and exposed to physical and cyber threats. Sectors typically covered include energy, transport, banking and financial market infrastructure, healthcare, water management, digital infrastructure, and other services critical to the functioning of society.



3.3. Is it allowed to choose more than one security domain ?

Yes. Applicants may address one or multiple security domains within their proposal, depending on the scope and objectives of their project.

3.4. Are projects related to defense sector allowed in the CITADEL Open Call 1?

No. Only projects with a civil application are eligible. Dual-use projects may be considered only if their civil scope is clearly defined.

4. Application process

4.1. What does TRL mean?

TRL means Technology Readiness Level. The TRLs are indicators of the maturity level of particular technologies. This measurement system provides a common understanding of technology status and addresses the entire innovation chain.

There are 9 technology readiness levels, from TRL 1 being the lowest to TRL 9 the highest.

The following definitions apply, unless otherwise specified:

- TRL 1 – basic principles observed
- TRL 2 – technology concept formulated
- TRL 3 – experimental proof of concept
- TRL 4 – technology validated in lab
- TRL 5 – technology validated in relevant environment
- TRL 6 – technology demonstrated in relevant environment
- TRL 7 – system prototype demonstration in operational environment
- TRL 8 – system complete and qualified
- TRL 9 – actual system proven in operational environment

4.2. How long does it take to fill in the application?

As an average, it is estimated that it takes in the range of 2 working days to fill in the CITADEL application.

Please note that each field on the application has a character limit, so it is recommended to keep the proposal focused on the requested information.



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It is recommended to create an account on the CITADEL application platform <https://citadel.grantplatform.com/> at an early stage and to start drafting the application. Applicants can enter text/data and come back as many times as necessary before submitting the final version.

It is also recommended to submit the application quite in advance before the deadline in order to avoid last-minute problems.

4.3. Will I be able to modify my proposal after submission?

Yes, after you submit your application, you can edit it as many times as you wish, until the deadline on May 5th 2026 at 17:00 CET.

4.4. What happens if I do not submit my application within the deadline?

Applications are not accepted after the deadline. It is strongly encouraged not to wait until the last minute to submit your proposal. Failure of meeting the submission deadline for any reason, including extenuating circumstances, will result in the rejection of the application.

4.5. Which additional documents can I attach to my application?

Only three types of attached documents are accepted:

- SME self-assessment (**mandatory for SME partners**): for each SME partner, outcome of the SME self-assessment <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/SME-Wizard/> , in pdf or jpg format (max 5MB) . Please use the formatting for file name:
ProjectName_CompanyName_date_SMEcheck.pdf
- Financial viability check (**mandatory for SME partners**): for each SME partner, outcome of the financial viability check <https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/lfv/lfvSimulation.do> , in pdf or jpg format (max 5MB) – see also section 3.10. Please use the formatting for file name:
ProjectName_CompanyName_date_FV.pdf
- Letter of support from end-users (optional), in pdf or jpg format (max 5MB). Please use the following formatting for file name: **ProjectName_CompanyName_date_LoS.pdf**



4.6. Should my consortium partners submit a separate application form?

No, as a consortium you should submit only one application on behalf of the 2 partners, thus you need to gather all necessary information from the 2 consortium partners.

At the beginning of the application form, you will be asked to provide the name and contact details of the person, who will be the contact point and coordinator in your consortium.

4.7. Can a company submit two project ideas?

No. If more than one proposal is submitted by any organisation, by any consortium, only the last edited proposal (counting back from the deadline) which has been submitted will be evaluated. The other proposals submitted by the same organisation will be considered as ineligible.

So each organisation applying to CITADEL is requested to carefully check that its partner with which it forms the consortium is not engaged in another proposal applying also to CITADEL Open Call 1.

4.8. Are applicants required to include the budget plan in the application?

In the application form, it is asked to provide information on how the grant amount will be distributed among the consortium, and among the main budget categories (personnel costs, equipment, subcontracting, travel costs).

Subcontracting cannot exceed 30% of the partner subcontracting part of the work.

Drafting a budget will also help to evaluate the project's feasibility and plan the activities accordingly.

The total funding requested to CITADEL must be equal to 60 000 €.

For consortia composed of two SMEs, the total CITADEL contribution of 60 000 € can be shared between them. The financial split is decided by the SMEs, but any SME requesting funding must receive at least 10 000 €.

4.9. What is the cofinancing rate of CITADEL?

- For SMEs, CITADEL can fund up to 80% of eligible project costs.
- Non-SMEs are not eligible for funding, so their co-financing rate is 0%.

This means that the minimum total project cost must be 75 000 €.

For SME partners, at least 20% (15 000 €) must come from private financial resources.

It will be up to the applicants to declare which type of private financial sources they will use (debt or own financial sources) for their project, and to confirm this amount into the final report of their project, if



selected for funding. Crowding-in of private resources means financial resources invested in the project, i.e. not as in-kind contributions, staff costs or similar.

This therefore excludes the valuation of staff time, the provision of equipment, and in-kind contributions.

SMEs can demonstrate eligible financing through:

- Own funds mobilised
- Capital contribution
- Bank loan
- Private investments
- Cash resources dedicated to the project

4.10. What is the Financial Viability check?

It is an online self-evaluation questionnaire provided by the European Commission which allows you to evaluate and confirm that your company is in a healthy financial situation and will be able to successfully implement the project you propose in your application. It is available here:

<https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/lfv/lfvSimulation.do>

The document on how the ratio are calculated is here:

https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/agd/h2020-calc-financial-viability-ratios-guide_en.pdf

This Financial Viability check is requested only for SME partners.

4.11. How can I upload information about my SME’s ‘financial viability check’?

Once you have fill in the requested fields on

<https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/lfv/lfvSimulation.do> , you have to click on “Calculate ratio”.

The results will appear on the bottom of the web page. Here is an example of the type of outcome from the Financial viability check that you should get:

Indicators	Ratio's Results			Analysis	
	Value	Qualification	Quote	Concis	More-in-depth
Quick Ratio	2.06282862489	Good	2	Good	Good
G.O. Profit Ratio	0.06432454274	Good	2	5	9
Profitability (1)	0.12945146336	Acceptabl	1		
Profitability (2)	0.11037989002	Good	2		
Solvency	0.60740081436	Good	2		
Noteworthy value's Results					
Equity Flags	Good	0.60740081436			



Then, you have to print the completed page and the result page in pdf or take a screenshot, which then can be uploaded in the CITADEL application form.

Please use the following formatting: **ProjectName_CompanyName_date_FV.pdf**

Please note that each SME of your consortium will have to provide this financial viability check as a separate file to be uploaded in the application form. Other consortium members (not SMEs) are not requested to do it.

4.12. Can I apply if I have received FSTP grants from other projects before?

Yes, applicants may apply to open calls other than CITADEL.

However, if you are selected for funding under multiple EU projects, you must strictly comply with the “no double funding” rule. Double funding occurs when the same costs and/or activities are financed more than once using public funds, which is not permitted under any circumstances. Therefore, you must be able to demonstrate that the funding received from CITADEL does not cover costs or tasks already funded by another EU project.

4.13. What is a conflict of interest?

A conflict of interest may arise where there are capital, economic, or personal links between two or more entities (the applicant, a CITADEL consortium partner, or any person involved in the selection process). In particular, a conflict of interest may include, but is not limited to, the following situations:

- Ownership or economic links, such as shareholding, financial interests, or other economic connections (e.g. joint ventures, holdings, joint participation, silent partnerships). This includes cases where the applicant holds shares in a CITADEL consortium partner, or vice versa, including links involving partners or linked enterprises. Economic links may also include exclusive licences or sales agreements related to the product or solution covered by the application.
- Family or personal relationships, including marriage, kinship, relationships by affinity up to the second degree (direct or collateral line), adoption, custody, guardianship, cohabitation, or other close personal ties between the applicant, a CITADEL consortium partner, or any person involved in the selection process.
- Material interests, in particular financial relationships, such as the receipt by a person involved in the selection process of significant gifts, donations, promises of future contracts, employment, or other benefits from the Applicant.
- Employment or professional relationships, including employment, cooperation, or existing civil-law contracts between CITADEL consortium partners and individuals within the applicant's organisation, particularly where these involve managerial, supervisory, or governance roles
- Any other legal or factual situation that may give rise to justified doubts as to the impartiality of persons involved in the selection process (such as experts, evaluators, employees, or members of management or supervisory bodies).



The situations described above may constitute a conflict of interest if they exist at the time of the action or occurred during the two years preceding the start of the action. This time limitation does not apply to family or personal relationships.

As the concept of conflict of interest must be interpreted broadly, applicants are encouraged to consult the CITADEL project team in case of any doubt. All potential conflicts of interest will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

5. Evaluation and selection process

5.1. What are the selection criteria?

As detailed in the Guide for Applicants (section 9), each eligible proposal will be evaluated by external independent evaluators with 3 main awarding criteria:

1. Excellence
2. Impact
3. Implementation

For the applicants shortlisted to the Jury Day stage, the evaluation criteria will be the following:

1. Quality of the team
2. Matching with CITADEL objectives, including :
 - a. Innovative step in solving security issues
 - b. Feasibility of the project implementation
3. Transversal criteria (environmental impact, low carbon, equal opportunities)

5.2. How do I get the extra 1 score for “transnational consortium”?

To get this extra point (assigned after external evaluation stage), the 2 partners (Partner 1 = Digital / technological SME and Partner 2 = security end-user) should be from different eligible countries.

5.3. What type of support is available for preparing the proposal?

The ‘Guide for Applicants’ is the main reference document. It provides detailed information about the requirements of the evaluation and selection process, and the Support Program offered by CITADEL.

If you encounter any technical problems while filling in the application form, contact citadel@aktantis.com and we will do our best to help you.



Concerning partner search, two matchmaking sessions will be organised by the CITADEL project consortium. For more details and links, please refer to CITADEL LinkedIn account on <https://www.linkedin.com/company/citadel-euroclusters-project>

5.4. What are the phases of evaluation and the expected schedule?

- 24 February 2026: Opening of the call
- **05 May 2026: Deadline of the call at 17:00 CEST**
- 05 May 2026 – 10 May 2026: Eligibility assessment (administrative check)
- 11 May 2026 – 26 May 2026: Evaluation by external experts
- 01 June 2026 : Information to shortlisted applications invited to Jury Day
- 15 – 16 – 17 June 2026: Online jury day (pitching auditions)
- 18 June 2026 : Information to selected applicants, with request of administrative documents
- 01 July 2026 – 11 September 2026: Sub-grant Agreement signature for the selected applicants
- 01 October 2026 – 30 June 2027 : Execution / implementation of selected projects

5.5. What is the jury day ?

Projects shortlisted after the evaluation phase will be invited to take part in the Jury Day. This online pitching session will take place on 15–17 June 2026 and will give pre-selected applicant consortia the opportunity to present their project during a 5-minute pitch to the CITADEL Jury, composed of members of the project consortium and, where relevant, external experts.

Ahead of the Jury Day, shortlisted applicants may receive a set of specific questions to be addressed during their pitch. Consortia will also be required to submit their presentation slides in advance, for review by the Selection Committee. Based on this review, the Selection Committee will define a targeted Q&A session for each team, in order to optimise the efficiency and relevance of the discussions during the Jury Day.

Participation in the Jury Day is mandatory for eligibility for funding. Further details are provided in the Guide for Applicants, Section 9.4.

The final list of selected applications will be established after the Jury Day.

5.6. What documents do I need to deliver during the evaluation process?

For applications that will be successfully evaluated and ranked, and before signing the Sub Grant Agreement, the CITADEL consortium is going to verify the status and financial viability of the partners. More specifically, the following documentation will be requested:



1. Status information of the beneficiaries
2. Legal existence. Company Register, Official Journal or similar, showing the name of the organisation, the legal address and registration number and, if applicable, a copy of a document proving VAT registration (in case the VAT number does not show on the registration extract or its equivalent).
3. Financial information. It includes the staff headcount (annual working units), balance, profit & loss accounts of the latest closed financial year and the relation, upstream and downstream, of any linked or partner company.
4. In the event the company declared being non-autonomous in the SME check list: the balance sheet and profit and loss account (with annexes) for the last period for upstream and downstream organisations.
5. In cases where either the number of employees or the ownership is not clearly identified: any other supporting document which demonstrates headcount and ownership such as payroll details, annual reports, national regional, association records, etc.
6. Bank identification form
7. Copy of the ID Card or passport of the legal representative of the beneficiaries.
8. Information about participation in other acceleration programmes and/or other European grants received.

Those documents will have to be provided in English language (French will be accepted as well).

6. Support programme

6.1. What are the payment conditions and schedule?

The selected projects will receive up to 60.000 € per project in the following 2 instalments:

- Pre-financing (up to 20%): A pre-financing payment of up to 20% of the requested financial contribution (i.e. up to 12 000 €) may be provided at the beginning of the project. This payment is subject to prior approval and a risk assessment. Depending on the beneficiary's financial capacity, risk profile, or other relevant factors, the CITADEL consortium reserves the right to withhold pre-financing.
- Final payment (up to 80% or up to 100%):
 - If pre-financing is granted, the remaining balance of up to 80% (i.e., up to 48 000 €) will be paid after approval of the final report.
 - If no pre-financing is provided, up to 100% of the requested contribution may be paid upon approval of the final report

Approval of the final report will verify that the project KPIs, as defined in the application, have been satisfactorily achieved and that deliverables and demonstrators meet the expected quality standards. Additionally, a physical or remote interactive session may be organised to further assess the technical results. If the technical evaluation is unsatisfactory, the CITADEL Steering Committee may decide to revoke the funding, in whole or in part.



6.2. What types of costs does the grant cover?

Eligible costs are direct and indirect costs that correspond to the project budget which are set out in the application form, and they are eligible as long as corresponding tasks or parts of the project will be properly implemented (including personnel costs, purchase of goods, services, equipment, travel costs,; subcontracting (if any, up to 30% maximum)).

6.3. What services does CITADEL offer in the Support Programme?

During the Support Programme (up to 9 months period), the awarded projects will cooperate with the CITADEL project consortium.

Each CITADEL project partner will support several awarded projects. The role of the assigned CITADEL project partner will be: organisation of follow-up sessions, coordinate and control the correct implementation and execution of projects, through the lump sums by the SMEs; communication and promotion actions.

Specific template will be provided by CITADEL to the funded projects for the mid-term reporting and the final reporting.

6.4. Will I need to provide invoices and other financial documents on how I spent the grant money?

The lump sum is a simplified method that means that beneficiaries (the awarded SMEs) are not required to present accounting documents like invoices, timesheets, etc., to prove that the cost was actually incurred.

CITADEL project consortium will assess the progress of the funded projects and quality of the work during Interim Reviews, but not the accountancy of the participating SMEs. In this sense, we will ask the awarded projects to demonstrate the implementation of the project in line with the milestones set. In any case, the lump sum methodology does not release the awarded SMEs from the obligation to collect documentation to confirm the costs under fiscal regulation.

The co-financing of at least 20% will have also to be demonstrated at the project closure.

Applicants shall bear in mind that by participating in the CITADEL support programme, receiving the grant and signing the Sub Grant Agreement, they will also be responsible towards the competent tax authorities, external auditors, and the EC audit bodies such as European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) or European Court of Auditors (ECA). Audits may cover finances, management, and compliance with the grant agreement.

