

The European Commission  
Centre for Research on Impact Evaluation (CRIE)

## “Evaluation Ready” 2026 open call for ESF/ESF+/YEI funded interventions

Application window	30 March 2026 – 30 June 2026
What it offers	A full Counterfactual Impact Evaluation study
Cost to applicants	Free of charge for the selected Managing Authority
Interventions selected	1–2 ESF / ESF+ / YEI interventions
Duration	Up to 2 years of collaboration with JRC researchers
Apply online	<a href="https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/2026EvaluationReady">https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/2026EvaluationReady</a>

### 1. What is the Evaluation Ready Initiative?

The [Centre for Research on Impact Evaluation \(CRIE\)](#) is launching the 2026 “Evaluation Ready” initiative. The initiative selects one or two ESF/ESF+/YEI funded interventions every year, for which CRIE conducts a Counterfactual Impact Evaluation (CIE) study providing robust scientific evidence of the causal effects of the intervention.

CRIE is a joint project of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) and the European Commission’s Joint Research Center (DG JRC), established to provide scientific expertise and methodological support to the Commission and Member States for the evaluation of the impact of ESF/ESF+/YEI funded interventions.

The main objective of this initiative is to increase the use of Counterfactual Impact Evaluations<sup>1</sup> among ESF/ESF+/YEI Managing Authorities (MAs) and to strengthen the existing scientific evidence regarding the impact of ESF/ESF+/YEI type interventions.

The 2026 “Evaluation Ready” initiative **will select one or two ESF/ESF+/YEI interventions to be evaluated by JRC researchers, using Counterfactual Impact Evaluation methods.**

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about Counterfactual Impact Evaluations, please see Annex I.

## 2. What the selected Managing Authority receives

The Managing Authority of the selected intervention will benefit from a **comprehensive evaluation that will provide evidence of the causal effects of the intervention**. The selected Managing Authority is expected to collaborate with the JRC researchers in the provision of information related to the intervention, provision of data, interpretation and dissemination of results. The MA will receive full methodological support from JRC researchers throughout the evaluation, including guidance on data structure and preparation. **The initiative will be free of charge for the selected Managing Authority.**<sup>2</sup>

The collaboration between the selected Managing Authority and the JRC is expected to **last for a maximum of two years**.

The final evaluation will be **published as a JRC Technical Report** and will potentially be submitted for publication to an international peer-reviewed research journal. Examples of past evaluations performed by CRIE in different Member States are available at <https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/projects-activities/centre-research-impact-evaluation-crie-en/evaluation-ready-%E2%80%93-policy-evaluations-en>

## 3. How to apply

### Eligible applicants

The Evaluation Ready initiative is open to national or regional Managing Authorities in charge of management or evaluation of policies financed by ESF, ESF+ or YEI funds.

Managing Authorities may apply together with:

- ESF/ESF+/YEI beneficiary institutions implementing the intervention (e.g. institutions carrying out training programs) or intermediate bodies;
- Institutions, research centres, consultancies or agencies involved in data collection as co-applicants.

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<sup>2</sup> CRIE will cover the cost of analysing the necessary data for the evaluation as well as writing a JRC report. However, no further costs related to the evaluation, such as purchasing datasets or conducting surveys, will be covered by CRIE.

## Eligible interventions

Interventions eligible for the evaluation should consist of any type of interventions financed by ESF, ESF+ or YEI funds and implemented in the 2014-2020 or 2021-2027 Programming Periods, in the context of national or regional operational programmes.

## Application procedure (30 March 2026 – 30 June 2026)

Managing Authorities are invited to provide a detailed description of the ESF/ESF+/YEI intervention they wish to evaluate by filling out the online application:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/2026EvaluationReady>

In particular, Managing Authorities have to provide detailed information about:

- the intervention to be evaluated (objectives, target group, policy context, design);
- the microdata (either administrative or survey data) available for the evaluation, including outcome variables, participation in the intervention, characteristics of the target group, sample size, and data accessibility;

The **deadline for application is 30 June 2026**.

## 4. Assessment of applications and selection of successful applicants (1 July 2026 – 30 September 2026)

CRIE will assess and rank the applications against the following three criteria:

Criterion	Points	Key dimensions
<b>1. Relevance of the intervention</b>	<b>30</b>	Policy relevance at national & EU level; scarcity of CIE evidence; innovation of approach
<b>2. Data quality &amp; availability</b>	<b>40</b>	Sample size, variable quality, time dimension, accessibility, and data type (administrative preferred)
<b>3. Suitability for CIE methods</b>	<b>30</b>	Intervention design, uptake, policy context and feasibility of applying CIE methods

The proposal(s) with the highest score will be selected. The maximum total score is 100 points. More details on the **terms of participation** and the **selection criteria** are provided in **Annex II**; applicants are encouraged to review these criteria before completing their application.

The applicants will be contacted to clarify relevant elements of the application, such as the description of the intervention, the availability of data, and/or the definition of variables, before the final ranking is produced. Applicants should therefore be available to attend online clarification meetings during the assessment period of the applications.

## 5. Timeline and process

The indicative timeline for this initiative is the following:

27 March – 30 June 2026	Application window open. Submit via the online form.
1 July – 30 September 2026	CRIE assesses and ranks applications. Applicants may be contacted for clarification (1–2 meetings expected).
September 2026	Selected Managing Authorities notified.
October 2026 – January 2027	Kick-off online meetings, signature of data transfer agreement (if needed) and data transfer.
February 2027 – February 2028	Counterfactual Impact Evaluation study carried out.
March – June 2028	Presentation of preliminary results.

This timeline might be subject to change in case of delay in the signature of the agreements and/or the provision of data.

## 6. Collaboration expectations for selected Managing Authorities

The Managing Authority of the selected intervention will collaborate with the DG JRC providing the necessary information and data to carry out the evaluation. This agreement may include a data transfer agreement in accordance with data protection legislation. In that case, DG JRC will provide templates for the data transfer agreement to make the process smoother.

Applicants will be responsible for providing the datasets for the evaluation. Ideally, the application team would include a person with basic statistical knowledge and a good

understanding of the data available for the evaluation. JRC will provide full support to the applicants in deciding which data should be provided and how the data should be structured, etc. Once the raw data is received, JRC will take care of the data preparation so to run the evaluation analysis.

Applicants agree to collaborate with JRC researchers in the following ways, if selected:

- **Regular progress meetings.** Availability for bi-weekly or monthly meetings during the early stage of the evaluation. Attendants to these meetings should include the applicant/co-applicants and representatives of the data holding institution(s). (October 2026 – April 2027).
- **Country-visit hosting.** Hosting JRC researchers on a country visit in the first months of the evaluation to meet relevant counterparts (including data holding institutions) and get insights about the implementation of the programme (JRC will fund all travel and accommodations arrangements of the JRC researchers).
- **Provision of information and documentation.** Supply information and relevant documentation about the intervention under evaluation requested by JRC researchers.
- **Data transfer agreement.** Signature of a data transfer agreement following the data protection legislation (if needed), by January 2027.

**Micro-data exchange.** Provide individual-level data for the evaluation, including outcome variables, participation in the intervention, characteristics of the target group

The lack of collaboration of the Managing Authority under the above lines can result in a termination of the evaluation and the inability to request future technical support from CRIE.

## Additional information

For additional information, please contact the Centre for Research on Impact Evaluation at [JRC-CRIE@ec.europa.eu](mailto:JRC-CRIE@ec.europa.eu)

Annex I – What is a Counterfactual Impact Evaluation?

Annex II – Criteria for selecting the intervention under the “Evaluation Ready” 2026 call.

## Annex I: What is a Counterfactual Impact Evaluation?

Counterfactual Impact Evaluations (CIEs) may provide good quality evidence of the net effects (impacts) of interventions, including ESF+ interventions. They only achieve this goal, however, if they are well-planned and executed appropriately.

CIE methods use statistical techniques to examine the causal effects of an intervention. They may provide an answer to questions such as "What is the effect of vocational training on employment probability?" or "What is the effect of a minimum income scheme program on the probability of being above the poverty threshold?". CIE methods generally compare two groups: a "treatment" group of individuals who participate in the program or intervention, and a "comparison" group of individuals who do not participate in the program or intervention. Individuals in the comparison group serve as a counterfactual for those in the treatment group as they are similar to the treatment group but are not affected by the intervention. By comparing the treatment and the comparison group one can infer the causal effect of the intervention.

The main methods for counterfactual impact evaluation are randomised controlled trials (RCTs), difference-in-differences (DiD); regression discontinuity design (RDD); instrumental variables (IV) and propensity score matching (PSM).

The application of CIE methods requires the availability of data related to individuals in both the treatment and comparison groups.

## Annex II: Criteria for selecting the intervention under the “Evaluation ready” 2026 call

To select the intervention(s) under the “Evaluation ready” 2026 call, the Centre for Research on Impact Evaluations will take into account: 1) the relevance of the intervention; 2) the quality and availability of data sources; 3) the suitability of the intervention design for counterfactual impact evaluation.

These elements will be evaluated to assess the potential of the proposals in terms of the applicability of Counterfactual Impact Evaluation methods. The proposals will be ranked according to these criteria. The first proposal in the ranking will be selected for counterfactual impact evaluation under the “Evaluation Ready” initiative.

The Centre for Research on Impact Evaluations will assess the eligible proposals according to the criteria listed below. The maximum rating for each criterion is indicated in parentheses. The maximum total points that a proposal may obtain is 100.

### Relevance of the intervention (30 points)

The relevance of the intervention to be evaluated as measured along the following dimensions:

- Policy relevance at the Member State (i.e. intervention addressed key challenges of the country/region); and at the EU level (i.e. has a degree of external validity to potentially be scaled up to other Member States)
- Intervention is in a country/region where Counterfactual Impact Evaluations are scarce;
- Intervention is in a policy domain or target group where Counterfactual Impact Evaluations are scarce;
- Intervention is innovative, meaning it includes new and original content not commonly found in the country and/or in other EU Member States

### Data (40 points)

- Size of the population affected by the intervention and representativeness of the sample.

- Quality of the datasets (availability of outcome, treatment and additional control variables for both participants in the intervention and non-participants that could serve as control group);
- Clarity of description of variables;
- Time dimension (availability of pre-intervention data; period of post-intervention period);
- Accessibility to data (time required to access, data transferable to JRC researchers).
- More points will be given to data from administrative data sources.

### **CIE methods (30 points)**

- Suitability of employing one or more Counterfactual Impact Evaluation methods. This may depend on some factors such as the intervention design, intervention uptake, policy context, etc.