



HDHL Knowledge Hub Call Announcement 2026

“Establishing the link between food processing, human health, and sustainable food systems” – Policy Implementation Network



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General Information

Submission deadline Expression of Interest: **5th of February 2026 (14.00 CET)**

Submission deadline of joint full proposal: **11th of August 2026 (16:00 CEST)**

Link to: [Guideline for Applicants \(Expression of Interest\)](#)

Link to: [Guideline for Applicants \(Full proposal\)](#)

Link to: submission system [MyZonMw](#)

Contact Joint Call Secretariat:

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Amendments made in the document

22nd of January 2026

- Total budget adjustment, from €1,270,000 to €1,280,000 (page 10)
- Inclusion of the Netherlands as funding country in-kind (Page 10)
- Inclusion of ZonMw as part of the Call Steering Committee (Page 11)
- National Annex of the Netherlands was added (Page 26)

22nd of January 2026 – second adjustment

- Financial contribution of the Netherlands is confirmed, therefore “pending a final budget decision at the national level” is removed from the call text (page 10 and 26)

27th of January 2026

- Total budget adjustment, from €1,280,000 to €530,000 (page 10)
- Budget of Romania adjusted from €1,000,000 to €250,000 (page 10)
- National Annex of Romania was added (page 27-28)

16th of March 2026

- Page 2: Deadline joint full proposal adjusted from 21st of May to 23rd of June 2026.
- Page 13: Communication of final decision of EoI stage adjusted from March 2026 to the 17th of April 2026.
- Page 13: Date of networking meeting adjusted from 1st and 2nd of April 2026 to 20th of May 2026. Location added: ZonMw, the Hague, the Netherlands.
- Page 14: Deadline of joint full proposal adjusted from 21st of May to 23rd of June 2026 14:00 CEST.
- Page 14: Opening date of the MyZonMw submission system for the joint full proposal adjusted from the 1st of April to the 20th of May 2026.
- Page 22: Timeline adjusted

22nd of June 2026

- Page 2: Deadline joint full proposal adjusted from 23rd of June 2026 to 11th of August 2026.
- Page 2: Guideline for Applicants (Full proposal) added
- Page 10: Total budget changed from €530.000 to €518.000.
- Page 10: German budget changed from €120.000 to €108.000
- Page 14: Deadline joint full proposal adjusted from 23rd of June 2026 to 11th of August 2026 16:00 CEST.
- Page 22: Timeline adjusted
- Page 28: German budget changed from €120.000 to €108.000

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List of acronyms

AC: Advisory Committee

CSC: Call Steering Committee

DMP: Data Management Plan

ECS: Early Career Scientists

JCS: Joint Call Secretariat

KH: Knowledge Hub

NOVA: Classification system for food processing

SEC: Scientific Evaluation Committee

UPF: Ultra-Processed Food

1 Introduction

Healthy Diet, Healthy Life (HDHL) is a European Research and Innovation initiative bringing together countries to address key societal challenges at the intersection of food, nutrition and health. HDHL addresses societal challenges at the intersection of food and health, uniting key actors to generate new evidence, foster knowledge exchange and drive its adaptation to realise healthy and sustainable diets, lifestyles and levels of physical activity for all. HDHL is uniquely positioned to provide expert advice, align funding for inter- and transdisciplinary research, and connect stakeholders to translate knowledge into policy and practice.

Under the umbrella of HDHL, the Coordination and Support Action (CSA) HDHL Food4Health (funded under Horizon Europe Grant Agreement No. 101188351) aims to align research and innovation priorities among national and regional research funding programmes by identifying research and policy needs in coordination with key stakeholders and initiatives. This call is the first call to be launched under the CSA HDHL Food4Health and intends to fund a dedicated, top-class transnational and interdisciplinary network consortium focusing on the link between food processing, human health, and sustainable food systems.

Within this framework, HDHL launches the 2026 Knowledge Hub Call **“Food Processing Policy Implementation Network” to establish the link between food processing, human health, and sustainable food systems**. The call aims to build a transnational network of leading researchers who will synthesise existing knowledge, harmonise methodologies, and provide science-based input for policy and research agendas.

Knowledge Hubs are coordination-based networks rather than traditional research projects. They foster collaboration between disciplines and countries, enhance data comparability, and strengthen the interface between science and policy. This topic was identified as a strategic priority by experts in the field, policy makers, and participating funders and aligns with growing international policy attention to the role of processing in health, sustainability, and equity outcomes. More information on the Knowledge Hub call process of HDHL can be found in the [‘Information Brochure’](#).

2 Background and Rationale

Food processing has become a critical determinant of both population health and sustainable food system transformation. However, the scientific evidence remains fragmented across disciplines, countries, and methodologies.

Recent analyses—such as **The Lancet Series on Ultra-Processed Foods (2025)**¹—highlight that high consumption of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) contributes to chronic disease burdens, environmental pressures, and deepening health inequalities. The Series emphasises systemic drivers: industrial-scale processing of low-cost commodities, hyperpalatability engineering, aggressive marketing and corporate influence, and displacement of minimally processed foods.

The **World Health Organization (WHO)’s Guideline Development Group for Ultra-Processed Foods**² is developing global recommendations addressing measurement, definitions, health effects, and regulatory implications—demonstrating the urgency of harmonised scientific input.

At European (EU) level, policies including the **Vision for Agriculture and Food**³, and the **European Green Deal**, reform of nutrient profiling models, and marketing restrictions increasingly require strong evidence on processing impacts.

Despite scientific advances, significant challenges remain:

- lack of consensus on definitions and classifications (e.g., NOVA classification),
- limited harmonisation of measurement methods and indicators,
- insufficient integration between health, sustainability, behavioural and economic domains,
- fragmented evidence limiting policy implementation.

A transnational Knowledge Hub is therefore required to consolidate expertise, align methodologies, and develop a coherent and policy-relevant evidence base. From this point onwards, the term *network* will be used to refer to the Knowledge Hub network.

3 Aim and Objectives of the Call

The overall aim is to develop a robust, interdisciplinary, and policy-relevant understanding of the relationship between **food processing, human health, and sustainable food systems**.

The objectives of the Knowledge Hub call are to:

- consolidate and harmonise existing knowledge on food processing, human health, and sustainability,
- integrate disciplinary perspectives (nutrition, food science, environmental science, public health, economics, behavioural sciences),
- assess implications of processing for health, environmental sustainability, resilience, and equity,
- identify research gaps and future joint programming needs,

¹ <https://www.thelancet.com/series-do/ultra-processed-food>

² <https://www.who.int/news-room/articles-detail/public-notice-and-comment-who-guideline-development-group-for-ultra-processed-foods>

³ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/overview-vision-agriculture-food/vision-agriculture-and-food_en

- provide actionable outputs for policymakers, professionals, and stakeholders,
- strengthen European capacity in this domain, including through Early Career Scientist (ECS) engagement.

4 Scope of the Call

The activities under the Knowledge Hub should take into account the links between food processing and human health, and impacts on sustainable food systems. It may address—but is not limited to—the following thematic areas:

- classification systems for food processing (NOVA and alternatives),
- nutritional, physiological and overall health impacts of food processing techniques,
- environmental and climate impacts of processing, packaging, and distribution of food, considering both plant and animal-based food products,
- socio-economic and behavioural drivers of processed food consumption,
- policy and market levers influencing food processing trends,
- methodological gaps in measuring food processing types, levels of consumption and biological impact,
- implications of food processing for equitable and sustainable diets.

The selected network is **not expected to conduct primary research** but to coordinate, align, synthesise and generate new insights from existing evidence.

5 Knowledge Hub Structure and Expected Outputs

The selected researchers are expected to function as a joint transnational, interdisciplinary (scientific) network. Core activities include:

Coordination and alignment of existing research

- Mapping of and connecting with ongoing national and international projects related to food processing, human health, and sustainability.
- Identifying synergies, barriers, opportunities, and complementarities across participating research groups.

Evidence synthesis and methodological harmonisation

- Producing structured evidence maps and reviews.
- Developing shared conceptual models, clear definitions, and indicators.
- Contributing to global standardisation efforts (e.g., WHO processes).

Policy-relevant outputs

- Development of **policy briefs, recommendations, and guidance documents**.
- Supporting EU and global policy processes (e.g., Vision for Agriculture and Food, WHO development for UPF guidelines).

Stakeholder engagement

- Interaction with policy makers, scientific experts, civil society, and industry where appropriate.
- Participation in HDHL-level dissemination activities (e.g., connecting with other projects funded under HDHL related to the topic of this call).

Capacity building

- Integrating **Early Career Scientists (ECS)** into activities of the network.
- Organising workshops, seminars, and training as appropriate.

6 Funding Framework

The call operates under a **virtual common pot** model, meaning that each funding organisation finances its own national participants in accordance with its respective rules. The indicative total budget is **€518,000**, in addition to the in-kind contributions. The budget indication per country represents the total funding available for all applicants in that country. The expected duration of the funded network is **24 months**.

The participating organisations and their indicative contributions are as follows:

- Belgium (ILVO): in-kind¹
- Germany: €108,000
- Ireland: €150,000
- Romania: €250,000
- Lithuania (KTU): in-kind¹
- Netherlands: In-kind (€10,000)

¹ This institute contributes only in-kind for researchers working at this institute and will cover networking and travel costs.

Researchers, research groups, and other experts from countries not funding this call or not eligible for funding can apply to participate in the Food Processing Policy Implementation Network at their own expense (in-kind).

7 Governance of the Call

7.1 Joint Call Secretariat (JCS)

The call is coordinated by the Joint Call Secretariat (JCS), operated by:

- **MASAF (Italy)** – for questions regarding the content and scope of the call – Ancy Kollamparambil (asmathew.kollamparambil.ext@masaf.gov.it)

- **ZonMw (Netherlands)** – for technical questions related to the submission system – Bernadette Conrads and Larissa van der Bent (HDHLprojects@zonmw.nl) or reach out to the Servicedesk of ZonMw (servicedesk@zonmw.nl)

The JCS is responsible for:

- call management and communication,
- organising evaluation procedures,
- running the submission system,
- facilitating the networking and co-creation meeting.

The JCS acts as the primary contact point for interested researchers and research groups for information on general issues of the call and its technical aspects. For questions regarding the national regulations, please contact the national contact person (see Annex I).

7.2 Call Steering Committee (CSC)

The Call Steering Committee (CSC) includes one representative per funding organisation and:

- approves documents,
- confirms eligibility,
- decides on funding allocation.

To avoid potential conflicts of interest, CSC members are not allowed to either submit any application to this call or participate in any submitted application. The CSC will supervise the progress of the Knowledge Hub call and the evaluation of applications. The CSC will make the final funding recommendation to the national funding organisations based on the evaluation provided by the Scientific Evaluation Committee (SEC). All decisions concerning the call procedures will be taken by the CSC.

The CSC consists of the following members: Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Romania. MASAF as part of the JCS supports the CSC but has no voting rights.

7.3 Scientific Evaluation Committee (SEC)

The SEC is an independent group of international experts responsible for evaluating the Expression of Interests (EoIs) and the full proposal. It is composed to ensure disciplinary breadth, gender balance, and geographical diversity. SEC members will not submit or participate in proposals within this call. All SEC members must sign a confidentiality form and a statement to confirm that they do not have any conflicts of interest. In addition to the SEC members, external experts chosen for their knowledge in specific fields covered by the proposals and in the absence of conflicts of interest with the proposals might also contribute to the evaluation.

7.4 Advisory Committee (AC)

At the start of the funded network, an Advisory Committee (AC) will be established by the CSC. The AC will provide strategic and scientific guidance throughout the project's duration (especially during the progress meetings). This will ensure policy relevance at European level, societal relevance, stakeholder engagement, and take into account different interests which are relevant to increasing the impact of the project and support delivering clear recommendations and guidelines. More information will be shared once the AC is established.

8 Call Structure and Procedure

The call will be implemented through a two-step procedure. Following the submission of the Expressions of Interests (EoIs) (step one) and the national eligibility check, the EoIs will be evaluated by an external international Scientific Evaluation Committee (SEC). Based on this evaluation, the Call Steering Committee (CSC) will decide on the selection of the network members. The successful researchers and research groups will be invited to a “networking and co-creation meeting”, where they will start working on the design, development, and writing of one joint full proposal (step two). This full proposal will be evaluated by the SEC, after which the CSC will make the final funding decision. An overview of the call structure is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Two-Step Call Structure Overview

Two-Step Call Structure Overview
Step 1 – Expression of Interest (Eoi) → Submission of an Eoi application by researchers or research groups → Eligibility check → Evaluation by the Scientific Evaluation Committee (SEC) → Decision by the Call Steering Committee (CSC) → Invitation to the networking and co-creation meeting
Step 2 – Full Proposal → Networking and co-creation meeting → Submission of full proposal → Eligibility check → SEC evaluation → Final decision by CSC

8.1 Expression of Interest

Within the first stage of the call, interested researchers or research groups have to submit an Eoi before **February 5th, 2026 at 14:00 CET**. The Eoi must be written in English and submitted via the electronic submission system of ZonMw ([My ZonMw](#)). The system will be

opened on **January 12th, 2026**. The structure and the content of the EoI should strictly follow the template included in the “[Guideline for applicants \(Expression of Interest\)](#)”.

The EoI should express the willingness and ability of the applicant(s) to join the network as an active and contributing member. In addition, the EoI should describe:

- The expertise of the researcher or research group,
- The relevant ongoing projects and in-kind contributions,
- The planned activities in the network,
- The motivation for joining the network,
- The contribution to Early Career Scientist (ECS) involvement and stakeholder engagement.

It is recommended to submit only one EoI per institution.

8.2 Evaluation of the Expression of Interest

The evaluation consists of:

- **Eligibility checks** (general and national), see chapter 9.1.2,
- **International scientific evaluation and recommendation** by the SEC,
- **Final decision** by the CSC.

Eligible members of the network will be selected based on an evaluation by an external SEC. Each EoI will be allocated to at least three SEC members for written review. The SEC will provide written comments and scores (see Chapter 8.6) based on the following criteria:

- Overall scientific quality of the intended contribution of the researcher, the research group, or the organisation and how it matches the objectives of the network.
- Quality of the planned activities in the Food Processing Policy Implementation Network.
- Scientific excellence, quality of the currently running and previous funded research projects.
- Good balance among the members and their different expertise from all required disciplines.

The final list of eligible researchers and research groups has to be validated and approved by the members of the CSC. The final decision will be communicated to applicants via email in March 2026. The applicant is thereafter responsible for communicating this information to other partners involved (if applicable).

8.3 Networking and Co-creation Meeting

The appointed network members will be invited to join the networking and co-creation meeting. Participation in this network and co-creation meeting is highly recommended. The meeting will take place on the **20th of May 2026**, at ZonMw in the Hague, the Netherlands.

The meeting will be organised by the Joint Call Secretariat (JCS) and aims to:

- support consortium building (agree on governance, select a coordinator, define the writing group for the joint full proposal, etc.),
- facilitate alignment of activities and identify work package structure,
- ensure complementarity across partners.

In addition, a coordinator will be selected during the networking and co-creation meeting and will be the main contact point for the JCS.

Travel expenses will be covered according to national funding rules (Annex I).

8.4 Full Proposal

Following the networking and co-creation meeting, one joint proposal written in English and following a pre-defined template must be submitted before the **11th of August 2026, 16:00 CEST** via the electronic submission system “My ZonMw” (see chapter 14). The system will be opened from the **20th of May 2026**. No other means of submission will be accepted. The structure and the content of the full proposal should strictly follow the template included in the “Guideline for applicants (full proposal)”. The guideline for the full proposal will be made available on the HDHL website on the 20th of May 2026. Adhering to this proposal template is mandatory.

The full proposal must include a:

- detailed work plan and objectives,
- governance model,
- risk analysis,
- impact and dissemination strategy,
- stakeholder engagement plan.

8.5 Evaluation of the full Proposal

The full joint proposal will be evaluated and scored by the SEC, according to the following criteria:

- Relevance to the aim of the call,
- scientific excellence of the proposal,
- coherence of the work plan,
- feasibility of activities (adequacy of the workplan, budgetary and other resources, time schedule, management, in-kind contributions from partners (evidence of funding)),
- stakeholder engagement strategy,
- expertise and complementarity of the consortium,
- Quality of the transnational collaboration (added value of the network, multidisciplinary approach, sufficient expertise to reach the aim of the call, international competitiveness of the network, in case of partners contributing in-kind: role of the partners),
- impact of the expected outcomes for future policies and practices.

The SEC will meet to discuss the full proposal and, after consideration of the evaluation criteria, written reviews, and their own discussions, the SEC will make a recommendation for funding the application. The final summary review report prepared by the SEC members will be sent to the project coordinator.

8.6 Scoring System

Evaluation scores will be awarded for the criteria described for the EoI and the full proposal (see Chapters 8.2 and 8.5). Each criterion will be scored on a scale from 0 to 5. The threshold for each individual criterion is 3.

5 = Excellent. The application successfully addresses all aspects of the criterion in question.

4 = Very good. The application addresses the criterion very well, but small improvements are possible.

3 = Good. The application addresses the criterion in question well, but certain improvements are necessary.

2 = Sufficient. The application generally addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses that need corrections.

1 = Poor. The application shows serious weaknesses in relation to the criterion in question.

0 = Insufficient. The application fails to address the criterion in question or cannot be judged because of missing or incomplete information.

8.7 Funding decision

Based on the SEC evaluation of the full proposal and their recommendation, one of the following decisions will be made by the CSC:

- a) In case of a positive evaluation of the full proposal, the CSC makes the final funding decision based on the evaluation of the SEC and the available funding.
- b) In case of a conditional recommendation, (1) a rebuttal letter will be requested from the project (one- or two-page letter) clarifying unclarities or doubts expressed during the evaluation of the full proposal, or (2) a revision will be asked. The time to either revise the full proposal or to submit the rebuttal is 10 days after receiving the reviewers' comments.
- c) In case of a negative evaluation, not to fund the network proposal.

The coordinator will be informed about the funding decision of the full proposal. After a positive funding decision of the full proposal, partners must directly contact their respective national funder in order to start contract negotiations and accomplish the remaining steps in order for the project to start.

9 Facts and Rules of the Call

9.1 Eligibility

In general, applications may be submitted by applicants working in universities (or other higher education institutions), in research institutes and public research organisations, in non-profit organisations, and as well as public stakeholders. The eligibility of the aforementioned entities, together with the proposal approached and details of eligible costs (personnel, material, consumables, equipment, travel money, etc.) are subject to the administrative and regulatory requirements of individual funding organisations and may therefore vary. Details of the national eligibility criteria from individual funding organisations are provided in Annex I.

9.1.1 Applicant Eligibility

Eligibility depends on **national rules** defined by each participating funding organisation. National eligibility criteria will be published in the **National Annex I**.

General requirements:

- applicants must be based in eligible institutions according to national regulations,
- applicants must demonstrate scientific excellence and relevant expertise,
- in-kind contributions must be clearly described,
- It is recommended to submit only one EoI per institution,
- Researchers and other experts from countries not funding this call or not eligible for funding due to national funding criteria can apply to participate in the Food Processing Policy Implementation Network at their own expense.

9.1.2 Eligibility Check

The Joint Call Secretariat (JCS) will check the Expression of Interest (EoI) applications and the full proposal to ensure that they meet the call formal conditions (date of submission; inclusion of all necessary information in English; inclusion of all relevant documents (Curriculum Vitae and Expression of Interest Letter); and compliance with the EoI template and the full proposal template). In parallel, the JCS will forward the applications to the national funding organisations, which will check the compliance with their respective regulations. Submissions that do not comply with the formal conditions will be rejected. Applications fulfilling eligibility rules will be peer reviewed.

9.2 Financial Modalities

Applicants of the Food Processing Policy Implementation Network will be initially funded for a period of 24 months. Project partners will be funded by their relevant national funding organisation according to their respective rules and regulations. The eligibility of costs (e.g., personnel, material, consumables, equipment, and travel expenses) is subject to the

national regulations of individual funding organisations and may therefore vary. Each project partner is responsible for providing financial reports to its national funding organisation. Prior to submitting a proposal, applicants should verify their eligibility and financial support and are strongly advised to contact their national contact person (see Annex I for national contact details).

In order to minimise the variability in the project starting dates between partners, the project coordinator will be requested to seek a common starting date for all the partners of the consortium. Each project partner will then be in charge of communicating the common starting date to its respective funding organisation. The goal should be to start the consortia of the call as closely as possible. Once an award has begun, every effort should be made to ensure the work is delivered to the original timetable. An extension to an award (even if no additional funding is sought) cannot be relied upon and will depend on the decision of each national funding organisation and its national grant rules.

9.3 Legal Modalities

Ownership and transfer of newly developed intellectual property, as well as access to existing intellectual property are a core part of project success and contribution to society and therefore, should be properly managed from the beginning of the project. Any particular protection and exploitation strategy should be agreed upon before the project's activities start, and arrangements need to comply with the relevant national and/or European legislation (please refer to Annex I for national requirements).

Consortium Agreement

The successful consortium must negotiate and sign a consortium agreement within the 6 first months from the start of the project. The consortium agreement will specify at least the following issues: decision-making, monitoring, reporting, intellectual property rights, open access and sharing data/knowledge and (financial) resources. The exact content of the project consortium agreement will vary according to the nature and scope of the specific project. It is therefore recommended that each project partner thoroughly assess the content of the consortium agreement. Further guidance and model consortium agreements can be found at [DESCA \(Development of a Simplified Consortium Agreement\)](#) website. There is a shared responsibility between all project partners of the consortium for the progress of the project. Upon request, this consortium agreement must be made available to the concerned funding organisations.

10 Responsibilities and Reporting Requirement

10.1 Progress Report

The project coordinator is required to submit a mid-term progress report, on behalf of the project consortium, to the Joint Call Secretariat (JCS) detailing how the project is

progressing in relation to planned objectives. Furthermore, a final report must be sent to the JCS within a period of three months after the project ends. National funding organisations may also request (annual) progress reports and a final report on the project from the different project partners from their respective country.

In addition, the project coordinator and project partners may be asked to present two progress updates, one intermediate and one final status symposium. Travel costs associated with the symposium may be requested within the application, based on the specific funding regulations of the various participating funding organisations.

10.2 Communication

The project coordinator represents the consortium externally and is responsible for all communication with Healthy Diet, Healthy Life (HDHL) and the JCS. For the effective contribution of the project to the objectives of HDHL, the project coordinator should be available to participate in meetings with the aim to:

- Exchange project results with other funded networks or projects under HDHL.
- Develop a joint strategy to coordinate and facilitate integration of the planned activities of HDHL.
- Share and exchange results with other relevant initiatives and networks.

10.3 Utilisation of Knowledge

Funding recipients must ensure that all outcomes (publications, etc.) include a proper acknowledgement of HDHL and the respective funding partner organisation. National funding organisations may request additional statements regarding national funding. In addition, it should include the following text: “This project received funding from [name of funding organisation(s), or an acknowledgment as requested by your national funding organisation] under the umbrella of the European Initiative “Healthy Diet, Healthy Life” (HDHL)”

11 Ethical Issues

Projects supported by Healthy Diet, Healthy Life (HDHL) must respect fundamental ethical principles. Applicants have to describe any potential ethical aspect of the work to be carried out, and how the project will fulfil applicable requirements in institutional, national and European Union legislation (including the ethical standards and guidelines of Horizon Europe). It is the responsibility of the applicants to identify if their proposed research requires ethical approval to be obtained from the relevant national or local ethics committee prior to the start of the projects.

12 Data Protection and Confidentiality

All applicants, evaluators, and funders must comply with the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**. The Joint Call Secretariat (JCS) is responsible for ensuring that all proposal materials are handled confidentially and stored securely.

The JCS will ensure that:

- all evaluators sign confidentiality and conflict of interest declarations before accessing any material,
- proposal documents and personal data are used solely for the management and evaluation of the call,
- data are stored on secure servers with controlled access and retained only for as long as is needed for the purpose for which the data was collected,
- only aggregated or anonymised information is shared beyond the governance bodies.

Applicants must:

- provide only the personal data strictly necessary for evaluation,
- ensure that all individuals referenced in the proposal have given appropriate consent,
- follow applicable national and institutional data protection policies.

Confidentiality applies to all stages of the call. Proposal content, reviewer identities, scoring, and internal deliberations will **not** be disclosed outside the authorised governance structure. Only the final list of selected participants (including organisations) in the Food Processing Policy Implementation Network will be made public.

13 Open Science

Healthy Diet, Healthy Life (HDHL) requires grant holders to make data and research findings resulting from their project available following the principle “as open as possible, as closed as necessary”. To this end, HDHL supports consortia in implementing Open Science practices, focusing on data management according to FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Re-usable), and sharing research findings via open access publications. The open science requirements for HDHL funded projects are in line with [the guidelines for research data management of Horizon Europe](#).

13.1 Open Access

Peer-reviewed publications must be open access by depositing the final version or peer-reviewed manuscripts in a trusted repository. The research outputs, tools, or instruments necessary to validate the publications’ conclusions should be deposited in a trusted repository.

Each grant holder may also be required to comply with the Open Access policy of its national funding organisation (see country-specific information in Annex I). To find out if a scientific journal complies with open access, check the [Directory of Open Access Journals](#) or the [Journal Checker tool](#). All research projects funded by HDHL are eligible to be published on [Open Research Europe \(ORE\)](#), the Platform of the European Commission (EC) at no cost.

Results, including scientific publications, must be disseminated to the public as soon as possible. Guidelines and options to comply to the requirements are available on [How to comply with Horizon Europe mandate for publications](#).

13.2 Data Management

Applicants must ensure that they plan the appropriate activities for their project, enabling them to make data available as soon as possible and re-usable for verifying results, and future research and innovation. Their plan must include the necessary expertise and sufficient budget to be able to manage research data, in line with the FAIR principles.

More information is available in the '[Research Data Management toolkit for Life Sciences](#)'.

13.2.1 Application phase (full proposal)

Projects funded under HDHL need to adhere to the European and national regulations in place with regard to data management. Applicants do not need to deliver a data management plan yet. However, in the full project application phase, they must plan carefully what is needed for re-using existing data (including the permission required therefore), and for managing data (and other resources) to become findable and re-usable for future users. The application must particularly include:

- A plan and budget to involve experts in the project to realise data re-usability.
- Sufficient budget to make use of tools, services and infrastructures to realise planned and required data re-usability. Be aware of the requirement to provide access to research data in trusted repositories.

13.2.2 Project phase

It is mandatory to prepare a Data Management Plan (DMP) in the first six months of the project and keep it updated throughout the course of the project. A [template](#) to prepare a DMP is available on the website of the EC. The funded project will be asked to submit a DMP using this template. More guidance will be provided by the start of the project. An updated version of the DMP has to be submitted to the Joint Call Secretariat (JCS) together with the progress reports.

At the end of the project, research data and other outputs, software and other tools or instruments necessary to validate the publications' conclusions must be made available by depositing in a trusted repository. The final DMP must be completed and delivered, including information on how resources can be found, where they are stored, and access conditions.

13.3 Re-use of Data

The Knowledge Hub call aims at enhancing reusing, sharing and combining existing data, standards, tools and infrastructures. At the one hand, applicants are encouraged to reuse existing resources in their planned project. On the other hand, applicants must ensure (supported by their DMP) that they deliver data that can be reused in future research. To accomplish this, the aim is to improve the quality and the FAIRness of the data. It is therefore strongly recommended to collaborate with research groups for reusing relevant resources, and to involve FAIR data experts, tools and services.

14 Submission System

All submissions must be made exclusively through the **ZonMw online submission platform (My ZonMw)**, which serves as the central and secure submission environment for the entire call process. The platform ensures confidentiality, controlled access, and complete traceability of all submissions in alignment with Healthy Diet, Healthy Life (HDHL) governance procedures and Horizon Europe standards.

The submission system will:

- provide structured electronic forms for both the Expression of Interest (Eoi) and the full proposal stages,
- automatically check completeness and consistency of the submitted information,
- support eligibility checks carried out by the Joint Call Secretariat (JCS),
- maintain an auditable log of all submissions, revisions, and applicant communications.

Representatives of participating funding organisations do **not** have direct access to the system. Instead, evaluation materials are shared with Call Steering Committee (CSC) members using secure, encrypted channels coordinated by the JCS. This guarantees equal treatment of all applicants and preserves the integrity of the process.

Detailed submission instructions, platform guidance, and technical support is available in the Guideline for applicants (Expression of Interest) which includes the manual for the submission system. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit in advance of the deadline to avoid last-minute technical issues.

15 Timeline

- **8th of January 2026** – Launch of Expression of Interest (Eoi) submission
- **5th of February 2026** – Deadline Eoi (14:00 CET)
- **3rd of April 2026** – Evaluation of Eois by the Scientific Evaluation Committee (SEC)
- **17th of April 2026** – Decision of Eoi evaluation and invitation to networking meeting

- **20th of May 2026** – Networking and co-creation meeting (please save this date already in your agenda)
- **11th of August 2026** – Deadline for full proposal (16:00 CEST)
- **21st of September 2026** – SEC meeting for evaluation of proposal
- **September-October 2026** – Final funding decision
- **Start of project** – within 6 months after funding decision

16 Annex

Annex I – Regulations and Contact information of the National Funding Organisations participating in this call

Funding organisations

Country	Germany
Funding organisation	Bundesanstalt für Landwirtschaft und Ernährung on behalf of Bundesministerium für Landwirtschaft, Ernährung und Heimat
National contact person	Stefanie Schumacher - stefanie.schumacher@ble.de - tel. +49 228 6845-3232 Maximilian Grimm - maximilian.grimm@ble.de - tel. +49 228 6845-2425 Johannes Bender - johannes.bender@ble.de - tel. +49 6845-3610
Funding commitment	108,000.00 € for all German applicants
Anticipated number of fundable applicants	Non applicable
Maximum/Minimum funding per grant awarded to an applicant	Non applicable
Eligibility of partners	Universities, Universities of applied science, Research institutes
Eligibility of costs	Personnel, travel, other costs related to the networking activities
Networking meeting	Participation is strongly recommended
Submission of the proposal at the national level	Selected applicants will be contacted by the funding organisation (BLE) with further details on the procedure.
Submission of financial and scientific reports at the national level	Selected applicants will be contacted by the funding organisation (BLE) with further details on the procedure.
Further guidance	Selected applicants will be contacted by the funding organisation (BLE) with further details on the procedure.

Country	Ireland
Funding organisation	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)
National contact person	Manuel Lopez Vernaza - Manuel.LopezVernaza@agriculture.gov.ie - Tel. +353 (0)1 607 2617
Funding commitment	€150,000.00
Anticipated number of fundable applicants	Non applicable
Maximum/Minimum funding per grant awarded to an applicant	Non applicable
Eligibility of partners	Only RPOs eligible for grant-aid under DAFM's Competitive Research Funding Programme can make applications and submit funding requests, either as partners or coordinators, under the Call. RPOs eligible for grant-aid from DAFM are those institutions which fall within the meaning of Section One of the HEA Act, 1971 (Universities and Institutes of Technologies, etc.), plus Teagasc, the Marine Institute, Irish Cattle Breeding Federation, the National Botanic Gardens, Birdwatch Ireland and Indigo Rock Marine Research Station. Public RPOs based in Northern Ireland are not eligible for national funding. Research Institutions must be an approved RPO at the time of the launch of the Call. A project partner should be either a permanent member of staff at an eligible RPO or an experienced researcher with a PhD qualification contracted to work with an eligible RPO over the full duration of the project.
Eligibility of costs	Personnel, travel, other costs related to the networking activities.
Networking meeting	Participation is strongly recommended.
Submission of the proposal at the national level	Research - Open Calls
Submission of financial and scientific	Research - Open Calls

reports at the national level	
Further guidance	Research - Open Calls

Country	Netherlands
Funding organisation	ZonMw
National contact person	Bernadette Conrads - HDHLprojects@zonmw.nl - tel. +31 (0)704126262 Larissa van der Bent - HDHLprojects@zonmw.nl - tel. +31 (0)70 349 53 91
Funding commitment	€10.000
Anticipated number of fundable applicants	3-4 research groups or researcher
Maximum/ Minimum funding per grant awarded to an applicant	Expected budget per research group: around €3.000 but depending on the elected partners from NL. More details will be provided by ZonMw after the Expression of Interest decision.
Eligibility of partners	Eligible applicants are research organisations, such as universities (or other higher education institutions), academic hospitals, and non-university public research institutes. It is required that the research group or researcher is involved in a Dutch project that is currently running or ended in 2025 and receives funding from a Dutch funding organisation. Applications need to fall within the scope of the call and contribute to the aim and objectives of the call.
Eligibility of costs	Eligible cost are project supporting costs, such as: • Travel costs • Dissemination and knowledge exchange costs • Networking, event or workshop cost Non eligible cost: - Personnel cost - Direct cost Funding will be provided according to eligible costs and ZonMw Grant Terms and Conditions.
Networking meeting	Participation of a representative of each selected research group in the network meeting is mandatory.
Submission of the proposal at the national level	After the expression of interest phase, ZonMw will contact the selected researchers or research groups to further discuss the terms and conditions. The general conditions of ZonMw still apply.
Submission of financial and scientific reports at the national level	Budgetary tables will be requested at a national level. No progress reports will be requested from the partners, however, it is obligatory to report changes in the project or planning. You are obliged to report changes in a timely manner to ZonMw.
Further guidance	ZonMw Conditions and obligations

Country	Romania
Funding organisation	ANC
National contact person	Viorel Vulturescu - viorel.vulturescu@research.gov.ro - tel +4021 319.23.26 Alice Grigore - alice.grigore@research.gov.ro - tel +4021 319.23.26
Funding commitment	€250,000
Anticipated number of fundable applicants	1-2
Maximum/Minimum funding per grant awarded to an applicant	250.000 max. if the consortium is coordinated by a Romanian applicant 200.000 max. for Romanian partners in the consortium The total budget is divided to the number of RO applicants, in the case of the same partnership.
Eligibility of partners	Legal entities established in Romania are eligible to get funding, i.e. public and private accredited universities, national R&D institutes, other research organizations, SMEs, large industrial enterprises with R&D activity within their domains. For universities, public institutions, R&D national institutions funding is 100%, and for SMEs and Large companies, financing is under the permit OMCID no. 21.324/02.11.2023 approving the scheme of State aid for Program 5.8: European and international cooperation. The head of the research team from each participating institution has a PhD degree. This condition does not apply if the institution is an enterprise within the meaning of the State Aid legislation. A person in charge of the research team will participate in a single proposal from the trans-national call in this capacity.
Eligibility of costs	Staff costs; Travel expenses; Other costs related to the networking activities.. The current guidelines for grants on an expenditure-cost basis and for allocations for administrative agreements apply.
Networking meeting	Participation is strongly recommended.
Submission of the proposal at the national level	Only for selected project
Submission of other information at the national level	Only for selected project

Submission of financial and scientific reports at the national level	Only for selected project, conforming with the contract agreement
Further guidance	/

Institutes with in-kind contributions

Country	Belgium
Funding organisation	Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (ILVO)
National contact person	Nikki De Clercq - nikki.declercq@ilvo.vlaanderen.be - tel. +32 9 272 30 62
Funding commitment	In kind
Anticipated number of fundable applicants	Non applicable
Maximum/Minimum funding per grant awarded to an applicant	Non applicable
Eligibility of partners	Eligible applicants are researchers from ILVO.
Eligibility of costs	Personnel, travel, other costs related to the networking activities.
Networking meeting	Participation is strongly recommended.
Further guidance	/

Country	Lithuania
Funding organisation	Kaunas University of Technology (KTU)
National contact person	Alvija Šalaševičienė - alvija.salaseviciene@ktu.lt - tel. +37067271219
Funding commitment	In kind
Anticipated number of fundable applicants	2
Maximum/Minimum funding per grant awarded to an applicant	Non applicable
Eligibility of partners	Eligible applicants are researchers from KTU.
Eligibility of costs	Personnel, travel, other costs related to the networking activities.
Networking meeting	Participation is strongly recommended
Further guidance	/