

EXCEL4HOUSING4.0

Project

Number: 101194014

19/03/2026



Open Innovation Programme

CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Participation in the EXCEL4HOUSING4.0 Open Innovation Programme

Call Reference: E4H-T3.2-2026-OI

Project: EXCEL4HOUSING4.0 (Grant Agreement No: 101194014)

Programme: Erasmus+ Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE)

Lead Beneficiary: BGT Consulting Group (Belgium)

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1. CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 Rationale

The EXCEL4HOUSING4.0 project (Grant Agreement No. 101194014) is a four-year Erasmus+ Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) initiative (February 2025 – January 2029; total budget: €3,997,862) that establishes a European network of Centres of Vocational Excellence to support the green and digital transition of the construction sector. The project brings together vocational education and training (VET) providers, universities, research centres, businesses, clusters, and public authorities across multiple European countries and Ukraine to co-develop skills, innovation, and partnerships for energy-efficient, digital, and circular housing (“Housing 4.0”).

The European construction sector plays a central role in achieving the European Union’s sustainability, climate, and digital transformation objectives. Buildings account for a significant share of energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions in Europe, while construction activities generate large volumes of material use and waste. At the same time, the sector faces increasing demand for improved productivity, digitalisation of processes, and more sustainable building practices.

To address these challenges, innovation in areas such as digital construction technologies, circular economy solutions, and energy-efficient building systems is essential. However, many innovative solutions developed by start-ups and SMEs encounter barriers when attempting to reach the market, including limited access to industry partners, restricted opportunities for testing in real environments, and insufficient visibility among potential adopters.

Within this context, the Open Innovation Programme under the CoVE EXCEL4HOUSING4.0 aims to strengthen collaboration between innovation providers and organisations operating in the construction and housing sectors. The programme creates a structured framework to connect solution providers (start-ups and SMEs developing innovative technologies or services) with solution adopters (companies, public authorities, research organisations and universities seeking innovative solutions).

Through an open and transparent Call for Expression of Interest, the programme will identify promising innovations and provide selected applicants with opportunities to present their solutions, engage with potential adopters, and explore pathways for piloting and market uptake.

1.2 Objectives

The Open Innovation Call aims to:

- Encourage the identification and promotion of innovative solutions addressing key challenges in the construction sector.
- Facilitate collaboration between start-ups, SMEs, industry actors, research organisations, and public authorities.
- Support the exchange of knowledge and innovation between different regions and stakeholders

within the European construction ecosystem.

- Create opportunities for innovators to present their solutions and explore pathways for real-world application and collaboration.
- Contribute to the broader transition of the construction sector towards digitalisation, circular economy practices, and improved energy performance of buildings.

1.3 Structure of the Open Innovation Programme

The Open Innovation Programme is organised as a structured process aimed at identifying innovative solutions relevant to the construction and housing sectors and facilitating interaction between innovation providers and organisations interested in exploring such solutions.

Through this Call for Expression of Interest, start-ups and SMEs are invited to submit applications describing innovative products, services, or technologies addressing one of the programme's thematic challenge areas.

Following the evaluation procedure described in this document, up to 30 applicants will be selected to participate in the online Open Innovation Programme as Solution Providers.

The programme consists of the following main steps:

1. Open Call for Applications

Start-ups and SMEs submit their applications through the official project website, indicating the challenge area addressed by their proposed solution.

2. Evaluation and Selection

Applications are assessed according to the admissibility, eligibility, and evaluation criteria described in this call. Based on the evaluation results, up to 30 Solution Providers will be selected (maximum 10 per challenge area).

3. Participation in the online Open Innovation Programme Activities

Selected Solution Providers will be invited to participate in programme activities organised by the project consortium, including:

- presentation of their solution during an online transnational pitch event;
- participation in structured matchmaking sessions with organisations interested in exploring innovative solutions;
- opportunities to discuss potential collaboration pathways with organisations operating in the construction ecosystem.

4. Pitch Event and Award Recognition

During the transnational pitch event, the selected Solution Providers will present their solutions to a jury composed of experts and representatives from the project partnership. Following the evaluation of the presentations, one solution provider will receive an excellence award of €7,500 for the best pitch performance, in accordance with the criteria described in this call.

1.4 Expected Results

The Open Innovation Programme aims to generate tangible outcomes by facilitating connections between innovation providers and organisations in the construction and housing sectors, and by promoting the uptake of innovative solutions.

Expected results include:

- identification and selection of up to 30 innovative solutions (start-ups and SMEs) across the three thematic pillars;
- increased visibility of innovative solutions within a European ecosystem of potential adopters;
- establishment of new collaboration opportunities between solution providers and solution adopters;
- contribution to the adoption of digital, circular, and energy-efficient practices in the construction sector.

2. THEMATIC CHALLENGE AREAS

Applicants must submit a proposal addressing one (1) primary Pillar. Proposals must demonstrate a clear contribution to improving productivity, sustainability, transparency, or performance in the construction and housing sector.

Pillar A — Digitalisation in Construction

This pillar focuses on digital solutions that support improved coordination, productivity, transparency, and decision-making across the construction and building lifecycle.

Relevant solutions may include (non-exhaustive):

- BIM-based workflows and digital collaboration tools supporting design, construction, and asset management;
- digital twins, monitoring platforms, or data analytics solutions enabling performance tracking and evidence-based decision making;
- AI-enabled tools supporting design processes, project planning, site management, or project monitoring;

- IoT-based systems, sensing technologies, and digital tools supporting building performance monitoring or construction site operations;
- field-oriented digital tools that improve documentation, transparency, coordination, and access to project information;
- digital platforms or tools supporting interoperability, data exchange, and collaboration among different stakeholders in the construction value chain.

Solutions that also support the practical adoption of digital technologies within organisations, including tools facilitating training, knowledge transfer, or workforce upskilling, may also be considered relevant.

Pillar B — Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency

This pillar focuses on solutions that contribute to reducing material consumption, improving resource efficiency, and enabling circular practices within construction and renovation activities.

Relevant solutions may include (non-exhaustive):

- tools supporting lifecycle assessment, circular design strategies, and decision-making in sustainable construction;
- innovative circular construction materials and products, including modular, reusable, bio-based, or low-impact components designed to extend lifecycle, enable disassembly, and reduce environmental footprint;
- material traceability systems, material passports, and digital tools facilitating the reuse or recycling of construction materials;
- technologies or processes supporting selective deconstruction, material recovery, and reuse in renovation or demolition projects;
- solutions enabling improved waste management, recycling, or valorisation of construction and demolition waste;
- innovations supporting the use of low-carbon, recycled, or bio-based construction materials.

Solutions that facilitate the practical integration of circular practices into construction workflows, procurement processes, or supply chains are particularly relevant.

Pillar C — Energy Efficiency and Net-Zero Housing Solutions

This pillar focuses on solutions supporting improved energy performance of buildings and the transition towards low-carbon and energy-efficient housing.

Relevant solutions may include (non-exhaustive):

- technologies supporting building renovation and energy performance improvements, including solutions related to building envelopes, insulation, or retrofit systems;
- building energy management systems (BMS), home energy management systems (HEMS), and monitoring tools supporting improved energy performance;
- integration of renewable energy technologies and energy storage systems in buildings;
- solutions supporting energy performance assessment, monitoring, or optimisation of building operations;
- technologies or tools contributing to the reduction of lifecycle carbon emissions associated with buildings.

Solutions supporting scalable renovation approaches, integrated energy systems, or improved monitoring of building performance are particularly relevant.

Cross-Cutting Considerations

While applications should address one primary Pillar, proposals may also demonstrate additional value where they contribute to factors that facilitate the practical adoption of innovative solutions in the construction ecosystem.

Examples include:

- solutions that support collaboration between industry, research organisations, and education or training providers;
- innovations that enable measurable performance improvements or provide evidence of environmental or operational benefits;
- tools or approaches that facilitate the implementation, replication, or scaling of solutions across different contexts;
- solutions that contribute to improving skills, knowledge transfer, or workforce capacity in the construction sector.

3. CALL CONDITIONS: ADMISSIBILITY, ELIGIBILITY & EXCLUSION CRITERIA

3.1 Admissibility Conditions

Applications will be considered admissible only if they meet all of the following conditions:

1. **Submission Method:** The application must be submitted through the online form available on the official project website. Applications submitted by email or through any other means will not be accepted.
2. **Language:** The application must be submitted in English.
3. **Completeness:** All mandatory sections of the application form must be completed and must respect the specified character limits.
4. **Submission Deadline:** The completed application must be submitted before the deadline of 29 May 2026 at 17:00 (Brussels time).

3.2 Eligibility Conditions

Applicants must meet all of the following conditions:

a) Applicant type

The applicant must be a start-up or SME applying as a single legal entity.

b) Establishment in eligible countries

The applicant must be legally established in:

- an EU Member State
- Third countries associated with the Programme¹ or
- Ukraine

c) SME / start-up status

Applicants must qualify as an SME or start-up according to the EU definition (fewer than 250 employees and annual turnover ≤ €50 million or balance sheet total ≤ €43 million).

d) Sector relevance

Applicants must operate in fields relevant to construction, housing, or related value chains, and the selected programme Pillar.

e) Operational capacity

Applicants must demonstrate the capacity to participate in programme activities (including application, pitching, and matchmaking) and to engage in follow-up discussions with potential adopters if selected.

3.3 Exclusion Criteria

Applicants may be excluded if they:

- are bankrupt or subject to insolvency proceedings;
- have been convicted of fraud, corruption, or serious professional misconduct;
- submit false or misleading information.

¹ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/eligible-countries>

4. PARTICIPATION RULES

The following participation rules apply to all applicants submitting a proposal under this Call for Expression of Interest:

1. Single Application per Organisation

Each organisation may submit only one application under this call. Multiple submissions from the same organisation will not be considered.

2. Single Challenge Area (Pillar)

Each application must clearly indicate one programme Pillar to which the proposed solution is aligned. Applications addressing multiple Pillars will not be considered.

3. Submission Deadline

Applications must be submitted before the deadline indicated in this call. Applications submitted after the deadline will not be accepted or evaluated.

4. Submission Channel

Applications must be submitted exclusively through the official online application form available on the project website. Applications submitted by email or through any other channel will not be considered.

5. Compliance with Call Requirements

Applicants must ensure that their submission complies with all admissibility and eligibility conditions described in this document. Applications that do not meet these requirements may be excluded from the evaluation process.

6. Equal Treatment and Transparency

All admissible and eligible applications will be evaluated in accordance with the evaluation criteria published in this call and under the principles of equal treatment, transparency, and impartiality.

5. BENEFITS FOR SELECTED APPLICANTS

Organisations selected through this Call will participate in the Open Innovation Programme and benefit from a structured set of activities designed to increase visibility, facilitate connections with potential adopters, and explore opportunities for collaboration within the European construction ecosystem.

Access to a European Demand-Side Ecosystem

Selected Solution Providers will gain visibility within a network of **Solution Adopters** engaged through the Centres of Vocational Excellence partnership. These adopters include companies, public authorities, research organisations, and educational institutions operating in the construction and housing sectors across multiple European countries.

Participation in the programme will provide access to:

- a transnational innovation ecosystem connecting industry, research, and education actors;

- organisations that have expressed concrete interest in exploring innovative solutions aligned with the programme's thematic areas;
- opportunities to engage in dialogue with potential adopters seeking technologies, services, or tools relevant to their operational needs.

Opportunity to Present Solutions at an Online Transnational Pitch Event

Selected applicants will be invited to present their solutions during the Open Innovation Programme Pitch Event, organised at European level in an online format.

During this event, Solution Providers will:

- present their innovation to a European audience of sector stakeholders, including potential adopters and project partners;
- participate in a moderated session including questions and discussion with expert evaluators and industry representatives;
- be featured in event-related communication materials, such as a participant catalogue or programme booklet, where applicable.

This event aims to provide innovators with increased visibility and a platform to showcase their solutions to organisations that may be interested in adopting or testing them.

Excellence Award

During the transnational pitch event, an Award Jury composed of representatives from the evaluation committee will assess the presentations using the agreed evaluation criteria.

Based on the jury assessment, one solution provider will be recognised with an excellence award of €7,500 for the best pitch performance.

Important Notice

Participation in the Open Innovation Programme does not constitute a procurement procedure and does not guarantee the implementation of pilot projects, commercial agreements, or procurement contracts.

Any potential collaboration, pilot activity, or commercial engagement between a Solution Provider and a Solution Adopter will be subject to separate bilateral agreements between the respective organisations and must comply with the internal procedures and regulatory requirements of the adopting organisation.

6. EVALUATION PROCEDURE FOR THE SELECTION OF SOLUTION PROVIDERS

The evaluation process will be conducted in accordance with the governance structure of the Open Innovation Programme and will follow a **three-stage procedure** designed to ensure transparency, fairness, and consistency. Only applications that successfully pass each stage will proceed to the subsequent stage of evaluation.

Table 1. Selection Procedure and Evaluation Criteria

Stage	Description	Assessment Elements	Outcome
Stage 1 – Eligibility Check (Administrative Screening)	The eligibility check is carried out by the Evaluation Secretariat, to ensure that applications comply with all formal requirements of the call.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Submission through the official application portal before the deadline •Completeness of the application and submission in English •Establishment of the applicant in an eligible country •Compliance with the SME/start-up definition (based on self-declaration and, where relevant, verification checks) •Selection of one eligible challenge area (pillar) and basic relevance of the proposal 	Applications that fulfil all eligibility requirements proceed to Stage 2 – Expert Evaluation. Applications failing any eligibility criterion will not be further evaluated.
Stage 2 – Expert Evaluation	Eligible applications will be assessed by the Evaluation Committee, composed of representatives from project partners with expertise in industry, research, and innovation ecosystems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Relevance to the selected challenge area – 30% •Level of innovation and technological maturity – 25% •Impact, scalability, and market potential – 25% •Team capacity and implementation capability – 10% •Contribution to sustainability, circular economy, and EU priorities – 10% 	Each criterion will be scored on a scale from 0 (poor) to 5 (excellent). Weighted scores will be applied to determine the final evaluation score for each proposal.
Stage 3 – Final Selection	Following the expert evaluation, applications will be ranked according to their final weighted score.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Ranking based on the overall evaluation score •Maximum 30 applications selected in total •Maximum 10 applications per challenge area (pillar) 	Selected applicants will be invited to participate in the Open Innovation Programme Pitch Event and Matchmaking Activities.

Tie-break rule:

In the event that two or more applications receive the same final score, priority will be given to the proposal with the higher score under **Impact, scalability and market potential**, reflecting the programme’s objective to promote solutions with strong potential for real-world adoption.

Appeal Procedure:

Applicants may submit an appeal concerning the evaluation result within 5 calendar days from the date of notification. Appeals must be submitted in writing to the contact indicated in Section 15.

7. EVALUATION FOR THE PITCH EVENT AWARD

During the transnational pitch event, the selected Solution Providers will present their solutions to an **Award Jury** composed of members of the Evaluation Committee. The evaluation of the award will be based on the quality of the live presentation and the relevance of the proposed solution to the needs of the sector.

Table 2. Pitch Evaluation Criteria for the €7,500 Award

Evaluation Criterion	Weight
Clarity and persuasiveness of the pitch	20%
Relevance to adopter needs	25%
Level of innovation and differentiation	20%
Scalability and business potential	20%
Engagement and interaction during the discussion (including responsiveness during Q&A)	15%

The pitch receiving the highest overall score will be awarded the €7,500 excellence award.

Tie-break rule:

In the event of a tie, priority will be given to the solution obtaining the higher score under Relevance to adopter needs, reflecting the demand-driven orientation of the programme.

Award Jury and Decision-Making

- The Award Jury will consist of selected members of the Evaluation Committee.
- Jury deliberations and scoring will be documented to ensure transparency and traceability of the decision-making process.
- The disbursement of the award will be subject to final verification of eligibility and administrative compliance prior to payment.

8. TIMELINE OF THE PROGRAMME

The following timeline provides an overview of the main stages of the Open Innovation Programme and the selection process.

Milestone	Date
Launch of the Call	26 March 2026

Submission Deadline	29 May 2026 – 17:00 (Brussels time)
Evaluation Period	June – July 2026
Notification of Selected Applicants	July 2026
Online Pitch Event	October 2026
Award Announcement	October 2026

The project consortium reserves the right to adjust the timeline if necessary. Any changes will be communicated through the official project communication channels.

9. HOW TO APPLY

Applications must be submitted through the official online application form available on the EXCEL4HOUSING4.0 project website: <https://excel4housing.eu/news/join-the-excel4housing4-0-open-innovation-programme/>

Applicants must complete the application form and provide the required information.

Applications must be submitted before the deadline indicated in Section 8 of this call.

Only applications submitted through the official online form will be considered.

Applicants are responsible for ensuring that the application is complete and submitted before the deadline.

Composition of the Application Package

The application package consists of the online application form available on the EXCEL4HOUSING4.0 project website. The form includes the following sections: Applicant Information, Solution Description, Impact and Market Potential, Implementation Capacity, Ethics and Sustainability, and Declarations. Applicants must complete all mandatory fields marked with an asterisk (*).

10. RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS OF SELECTED APPLICANTS

Applicants selected through the evaluation procedure will participate in the activities of the Open Innovation Programme as Solution Providers.

Selected applicants are expected to:

- participate in the activities organised under the Open Innovation Programme;
- present their proposed solution during the transnational pitch event;

- engage in matchmaking sessions with organisations interested in exploring innovative solutions;
- provide relevant information required for the organisation of programme activities and for communication and dissemination purposes.
- Selected applicants shall contribute to the dissemination and promotion of the EXCEL4HOUSING4.0 project and its results through their own communication channels (e.g. website, social media, events), where appropriate. They shall also ensure appropriate visibility of European Union funding in all relevant communication and dissemination activities related to their participation in the Open Innovation Programme, in line with the applicable EU communication and visibility requirements.

Participation in the Open Innovation Programme does not create any obligation for participating organisations or project partners to establish pilot projects, commercial partnerships, or procurement agreements.

Any potential collaboration between a Solution Provider and a Solution Adopter will be subject to separate bilateral agreements between the respective organisations and must comply with the internal procedures and legal requirements of the organisations involved.

11. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

All intellectual property rights (IPR) related to the solutions submitted and presented under this Call for Expression of Interest shall remain the sole property of the respective applicants.

Participation in the Open Innovation Programme does not imply any transfer of ownership, licensing, or granting of rights over the applicants' intellectual property to the project consortium or to other participating organisations.

Any results, developments, or innovations generated independently by third parties in the context of the programme shall remain the property of those parties. Any potential use, exchange, or commercial exploitation of solutions or results shall be subject to separate agreements between the concerned parties.

12. CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION

All personal data provided in the context of this call will be processed in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council (General Data Protection Regulation – GDPR).

Personal data collected during the application and evaluation process will be used exclusively for the purposes of:

- administering and evaluating applications submitted under this call;
- organising the activities of the Open Innovation Programme;
- communicating with applicants regarding the status of their application and programme

participation.

Access to the information provided in the applications will be limited to authorised persons involved in the management and evaluation of the call, including members of the Evaluation Secretariat, the Evaluation Committee, and the Award Jury, where applicable.

All submitted applications will be treated as confidential. Information contained in applications will not be disclosed to third parties outside the evaluation process without the consent of the applicant, unless required for administrative, audit, or legal purposes.

13. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Members of the Evaluation Committee and the Award Jury must perform their duties impartially and independently.

All evaluators will be required to declare any actual or potential conflict of interest before participating in the evaluation process. A conflict of interest may arise, for example, where an evaluator has professional, financial, or personal connections with an applicant.

In cases where a conflict of interest is identified, the concerned evaluator will not participate in the evaluation of the relevant application.

The evaluation process will be conducted in accordance with the principles of transparency, fairness, and equal treatment.

14. DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this Call for Expression of Interest, the following definitions apply:

Term	Definition
Solution Provider	A start-up or small or medium-sized enterprise (SME) that submits an application under this Call for Expression of Interest proposing an innovative product, service, or technology addressing one of the programme's thematic challenge areas. Applicants selected through the evaluation procedure participate in the Open Innovation Programme as Solution Providers.
Solution Adopter	An organisation operating within the construction or housing ecosystem (such as a company, public authority, research organisation, or educational institution) interested in exploring innovative solutions and engaging with Solution Providers through programme activities such as matchmaking and the pitch event.
Pillar	One of the three thematic challenge areas addressed by this call: Digitalisation in Construction, Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency, and Energy Efficiency and Net-Zero Housing Solutions. Each application must address one pillar only.
Open	The structured process was established under the EXCEL4HOUSING4.0 project to identify

Innovation Programme	innovative solutions and facilitate interaction between Solution Providers and organisations interested in exploring such solutions.
Pitch Event	A transnational event organised by the project consortium during which selected Solution Providers present their solutions to a jury and to an audience of sector stakeholders. The event includes the evaluation of presentations and the selection of the recipient of the excellence award.
Award Jury	The group of evaluators responsible for assessing the presentations delivered during the pitch event and for determining the recipient of the €7,500 excellence award based on the evaluation criteria defined in this call.

15. CONTACT

For questions related to this Call for Expression of Interest, applicants may contact the **Open Innovation Programme Responsible**.

Eric Kota

Open Innovation Programme Responsible

BGT Consulting Group (Belgium)

EXCEL4HOUSING4.0 – Open Innovation Programme

Email: eric.kota@bgtconsultinggroup.com

Questions related to the Call for Expression of Interest may be submitted during the application period using the contact details provided above. Applicants are encouraged to consult the call document carefully before submitting enquiries.

Disclaimer

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