SCALEDEM

ScaleDem Scaling Grounds Twinning & Piloting Programmes

Q&A

(Last update: 2 February 2026)

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1. About the Programmes

1.1. ScaleDem in a nutshell

What is ScaleDem?

ScaleDem is a Horizon Europe Coordination and Support Action dedicated to strengthening the uptake of democratic innovations across Europe. It focuses especially on those born from previous EU-funded research actions. While tools like citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting, digital platforms, citizen science, and local dialogue pilots have been widely tested in previous projects, they often remain underused in actual policymaking. ScaleDem bridges this gap by examining, refining, and scaling these innovations so they can be adopted and replicated further.

Who is behind ScaleDem?

ScaleDem brings together a consortium of 13 research and practitioners' organizations from 9 countries, working together the strengthen the translation of democratic innovations between research, practice and policy. The project is coordinated by Missions Publiques.

- *You can learn more about us at https://scaledem.eu/about/.*

What is the mission of ScaleDem?

ScaleDem's mission is to bridge the gap between democratic innovation research and practical implementation by creating an infrastructure to help democratic innovations overcoming structural barriers to their uptake. We refer to this as supporting democratic innovations to scale up, out, deep, and in. To do so, ScaleDem is developing a Theory of Scaling to help practitioners, researchers, and policymakers scale the impact of democratic innovations, in a way that leads to sustainable and impactful change in democratic governance.

- *Read more about our theory of scaling at https://scaledem.eu/insights/theory-of-scaling/.*

How is it funded?

ScaleDem is funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe programme, which supports research and innovation across Europe and associated countries. Through this funding, ScaleDem provides financial and technical support to partners and third-party participants to test and scale democratic innovations.

- *The project is listed here: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101178637*

1.2. What is the Theory of Scaling? What are Scaling Dimensions? What does Scaling mean?

Building literature in both the fields of social innovation and democratic innovation, ScaleDem Theory of Scaling aims to develop a multi-dimensional theory that helps make sense of how democratic innovations can grow beyond isolated pilots to achieve broader and more lasting impact. It is going to be one of the key outcomes of the project. By participating in the Twinning and the Piloting Programme, you would also be contributing to it, helping us to understand how democratic innovations can reach out larger number of people (scaling out), further impacts policymaking (scaling high), leave their mark on political cultures (scaling deep), while always maintaining and strengthening quality (scaling in).

These are what we call the four 'scaling dimensions', democratic innovations' capacity for:

- embedding into formal institutions (Scaling High)
- expanding across people and places (Scaling Out)
- shaping civic culture and values (Scaling Deep)
- and enhancing process quality (Scaling In).

The Theory of Scaling will identify common barriers to scaling and present enabling conditions across macro (institutional and political), meso (innovation-specific), and micro (actor-related) levels. Finally, it will examine how these different scaling dimensions can interact, reinforce, or sometimes constrain each other through feedback loops.
You can read the Theory's analytical framework here: https://zenodo.org/records/15853874

Scaling is a dynamic, context-dependent process, shaped by institutional arrangements, cultural and political support, the design of innovations themselves, and the strategies of diverse actors who drive or hinder change. More than democratic innovations themselves, ScaleDem looks at this process.

Using triangulation of methods and interdisciplinary perspectives from policy, legal, and social psychology research and practice, the project team is now busy exploring empirically the four scaling dimensions and how they relate to one another, to develop an empirically grounded Theory of Change. The Twinning and the Pilot Programmes are one important pillar in this endeavour towards building a Theory of Scaling.

1.3. Can I address more than one scaling dimension?

Projects must address at least one scaling dimension. While we encourage you to consider how dimensions relate to one another, and while addressing multiple dimensions is appreciated, it is not required. You might want to make the case to focus exclusively on one which you consider to be strategic.

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1.4. What types of democratic innovations are we looking for?

ScaleDem uses a broad definition of democratic innovation and is open to projects across all six "families" identified in the ScaleDem Knowledge Map. Your project can sit clearly in one family or combine several of them. We particularly welcome proposals working with (or across) the following types:

- **Administrative innovations**: Innovations that embed citizen participation into the day-to-day work of public administrations, for example: permanent co-management or co-governance committees in a municipality; citizen or stakeholder boards that oversee specific policies or services.
- **Deliberative innovations**: Processes that bring together diverse or randomly selected citizens for structured, informed dialogue ("mini-publics"), such as: local or national citizens' assemblies making recommendations on climate, urban planning or social policy; deliberative polls or standing citizens' panels linked to parliaments or city councils.
- **Digital & AI innovations:** Digital or AI-supported tools that mediate participation, for example: online participation platforms combining e-petitions, proposals and debates; AI-supported tools for moderating discussions, summarising citizen inputs or helping detect misinformation. Technology-based tools or platforms are eligible if they clearly contribute to addressing a democratic innovation scaling challenge.
- **Direct-democracy innovations**: Instruments that give citizens binding decision-making power, such as: referenda and popular initiatives at local, regional or national level; new recall or veto mechanisms that allow citizens to directly influence laws or office-holders.
- **Electoral innovations**: Reforms that change how representatives are elected or how elections work, for example: introducing or testing new voting systems (e.g. ranked-choice voting, proportional reforms); gender or diversity quotas, open or semi-open primaries to broaden who can run and who can participate.
- **Participatory innovations:** Mechanisms that engage broader groups of citizens in public decisions, especially at local level, such as participatory budgeting; neighbourhood or city-wide planning forums and co-creation processes with residents. Similarily, projects focusing on participation in the judiciary fall are eligible.

Both the Piloting and Twinning Programmes are open to innovations from any of these families, as long as the project clearly aims to scale its democratic impact (High, Out, Deep and/or In) and fits the other eligibility and selection criteria described in this Q&A.

Note that a "democratic innovation" can be a service, process, method, platform, or knowledge-based approach etc., and it is also not limited to concrete products.

1.5. Why apply to the Scaling Ground Programmes?

Piloting Programme

Through the piloting programme, participants will benefit from the following support:

- **Financial support:** Selected participants will have the opportunity to receive financial support up to 100.000 € for one year, in order to test their idea for scaling an innovation(s), in the context of a pilot project.
- **Safe and supportive environment** to experiment with approaches that might not yet fit into conventional funding schemes, fostering creativity and learning-by-doing in a failure-friendly (funding) space.
- **Capacity-building support:** Selected applicants will gain peer-to-peer support and mentoring from members of the ScaleDem consortium and take part in capacity building workshops organised in the context of the project, to support and facilitate the success of the funded actions.
- **Networking activities:** The applicants will also get the opportunity to exchange with other participants of the Piloting and Twinning programmes in two onsite gatherings in the 2026 and 2027 European Capitals of Democracy and share on their experience during online networking events.

Twinning Programme

In the twinning programme, selected organizations will form new communities of practice and benefit from:

- **Financial support:** Each community of practice will receive financial support up to 65.500 € for one year, to be shared amongst its members.
- **Safe and supportive environment** to share lessons from successes and failures and collectively learn how to scale democratic innovation from one environment to the next.
- **Capacity-building support:** from peers, within each community, but also collective guidance and 1:1 coaching from an external mentor recruited based on the specific needs of each community. Each twinning community will also be assigned a contact person from the ScaleDem consortium, who will attend meetings and be available for individual guidance and questions Contact points will also document sessions to map progress and evaluate scaling potential to develop a grounded theory of scaling.
- **Networking activities:** communities' members will also get the opportunity to exchange with other participants of the Piloting and Twinning programmes in three onsite gatherings in the 2026 and 2027 European Capitals of Democracy and share on their experience during online networking events.

A learning community typically consists of up to five mentees and one mentor with relevant experience in the shared scaling challenge.

1.6. What are the goals of the Scaling Grounds programmes?

Piloting Programme

The piloting programme wants to support projects that aim at real-world testing of innovative and bold ideas to scale democratic innovations, and doing so, that address current democratic problems. These projects should test how a democratic innovation can be expanded, deepened or intensified thanks to a creative or out-of-the box idea. In the end, the objective is that the innovation scale has a greater positive impact on our democracy, in either, or several dimensions.

The piloting programme is a great 'playing ground' to test experimental ideas to overcoming scaling barriers in specific use cases. Thanks to the pilots, the ScaleDem consortium hopes to complement its Theory of Scaling with innovative experimentations to test different ways to 'scale' democratic innovations, and discover new original ideas coming from new actors in the field.

Twinning Programme

The goal of the twinning programme is to enable scaling through previously identified pathways. The programme addresses persisting well-known scaling gaps and supports learning transfers from actors who already managed to overcome them, with actors still struggling with them.

As such, the twinning programme aims to explore the replicability of 'scaling actions' through community-based mentoring networks. Mentors, who have previously succeeded in scaling a democratic innovation, are matched with mentees, who face scaling gaps in their projects. The immediate goal of the programme is to help mentees in scaling their democratic innovations.

With the Twinning Programme, the ScaleDem consortium is hoping to gather insights into the generalization and replicability of scaling actions, to feed in its Theory of Scaling. As such, the twinning program intends to provide input for the ScaleDem grounded theory of scaling, by exploring the influence of context and conditions on scaling actions.

- *While the pilot programme is about testing new ways to scale, the twinning programme is about testing how easily we can replicate existing ways to scale.*

1.7. How much funding can I apply for? How many projects will be funded?

ScaleDem Scaling Grounds Programmes will fund up to €65,500 per Twinning community and €100,000 per Pilot project. Those are maximum grants; you can apply for less!

The Piloting Programme funds at least 5 projects, possibly more if selected projects requests a smaller amount that the maximum grant.

The Twinning Programme funds up to 8 learning communities.

1.8. How do I decide between the Piloting and the Twinning Programme?

Yes, you can apply to both programmes, but you cannot receive funding from both.

If you hesitate between the two programmes, and need a decision helper:

- please fill out our **Declaration of Interest**: https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/ScaleDem_DOI
- contact us via **E-mail**: opencalls@scaledem.eu
- and/or join one of our two **informative sessions**
    - 20th January 2026, 6 – 7.30 PM CET, https://zoom.us/meeting/register/y20Py9b3S9qShKPQd2XsAQ
    - 29th January 2026, 10 – 11.30 AM CET, https://zoom.us/meeting/register/URlcKDmFSUCCaKvCAdBeqA

Both informative sessions will be recorded, and the recording together with the presentation materials will be published after the event.

1.9. Can I apply to both programmes?

You can apply to both programmes, but you cannot be funded as lead applicant by both programme. In case both your applications are selected, the ScaleDem selection jury will decide which programme suits you best.

If different partners within a project consortium apply for both programmes, once as lead applicant, once as beneficiary, then you could in theory received funding under both programmes. However, be advised that the ScaleDem selection jury is committed to high diversity and in giving this opportunity to as many applicants as possible.

It is also possible to apply with multiple projects to both programmes.

1.10. Is the Declaration of Interest mandatory?

The DOI is optional but recommended for applicants who would like to receive early feedback. Applicants will receive a short-written assessment indicating whether the project idea fits one or both programmes. Due to the volume of submissions, detailed feedback cannot be guaranteed. Feedback is typically provided within two to three weeks. Applicants may modify their project idea after submitting the DOI when submitting the full proposal.

1.11. What do you mean by failure-friendly environment?

In both programmes, we are very keen to set up and enable a safe and supportive environment to experiment (for the piloting programme) with approaches that might not yet fit into conventional funding schemes, fostering creativity and learning-by-doing in a failure-friendly (funding) space, and share (for the twinning programmes) what might or might not work across different contexts, based on local challenges. Testing and adapting a solution inevitably involve the possibility that this solution will not work. We do not see failure as a mistake or defeat, but rather as a learning opportunity, a

valuable experience that helps us improve the resilience of democratic innovations, and a practice-oriented Theory of Scaling.

Through the piloting programme in particular, we want to create the conditions for participants to dare new things. We want to help you test that bold idea that always lacked funding!

2. Prerequisites for an application

2.1 Who is eligible to apply?

ScaleDem's open calls are designed to support organizations and projects that want to test and scale democratic innovations in real-world settings. We strongly encourage actors working beyond the narrow field of democratic innovations to apply, including:

Applicant Status

- Public authorities at the local, regional, or national level
- Civil society organizations and non-profit organizations
- Research institutions, universities, think tanks
- SME or similar innovation-driven stakeholders

Eligible Countries

Applicants need to be registered in an eligible country to apply. Legal entities eligible under HORIZON-CL2-2024-DEMOCRACY-01-12 are also eligible to apply to ScaleDem Open Calls.

This includes legal entities established in EU Member States, countries associated to Horizon Europe, some low- and middle-income countries listed in the Annex B document below, and exceptionally Algeria, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine[1] and Syria.

Local offices that are legally registered with entities in an eligible country may apply independently of their headquarters.

- ❖ *Please refer to Annex B of the Work Programme General Annexes, notably pages 9, 10, 11.*

We have no upper or lower limit for the participation of applicants from different countries. The selection jury does, however, take diversity into consideration in its selection, in order to ensure that a diversity of countries of origins, sectors, and organisation types benefit from the Scaling Grounds.

Note that there is no formal requirement for selected projects to focus on the local level. Proposals can target different level of governance.

Targeted Organizations

ScaleDem particularly encourages applications from:

[1] This designation is not to be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

- Organisations with experience in civic engagement
- Public bodies seeking to strengthen participatory governance
- Practitioner groups and SMEs developing participatory tools, methods, or platforms
- Consortiums bringing together researchers and/or practitioners and/or public authorities

2.2 What is the desired target audience of the selected projects?

There are no specific targeted audiences for the applicating projects. Our aim is to better understand how democratic innovations scale. To do so, you are free to test hypothesis while engaging different publics, and projects may focus on specific target groups.

What matters is the relevance of the project and that the addressed scaling challenge you seek to overcome is clearly described.

2.3. What do we expect from Piloting Programme Participants?

Each pilot project is expected to identify concrete scaling challenges and test solutions that address at least one of the scaling dimensions (ideally several). Project efforts should be geared towards achieving a measurable real-world impact within one year, and the implementation of the pilot project, including all reporting requirements, must be completed **within the 12-month funding period**.

We expect selected project teams to:

- **Commit actively to the programme**, dedicating sufficient time and resources to ensure successful implementation of the pilot project.
- **Collaborate closely with the ScaleDem consortium**, including participation in accompanying research (e.g. interviews and questionnaires).
- **Engage in networking and peer exchange** with the other Scaling Grounds projects.

In addition, participating projects are expected:

- **To attend two mandatory onsite meetings** at the beginning and at the end of the funding process:
  - A Kick-off meeting in Cascais, Portugal (European Capital of Democracy) in fall 2026.
  - A final meeting in the European Capital of Democracy in fall 2027 (to be elected in March 2026).
- **To take part in three mandatory online Capacity Building events**, which will include:
  - Targeted consultation on challenges based on pilots' needs.
  - Capacity building inputs.
  - Presentation and discussion of interim progress reports.
  - Peer review and advisory input from nexus and the consortium on progress, goal achievement, challenges, and any needed adjustments.
- **To prepare an Interim Report** midway through the funding period, describing:
  - Progress made so far.
  - Challenges encountered and how they were addressed.
  - Anticipated upcoming challenges and possible solutions.

Finally, we invite (but do not require) participating projects to join two additional voluntary online events dedicated to peer-to-peer exchange, networking, sharing experiences and receiving interim feedback.

2.4. What do we expect from Twinning Programme Participants?

The Twinning Programme connects actors who have successfully scaled democratic innovations with actors who are currently facing a concrete scaling challenge. The Twining Programme builds on a genuine commitment to collaboration and mutual learning. Together, they work on scaling democratic processes across the four ScaleDem dimensions**:** high, out, deep and in. Over a 12-month period, we expect mentors and mentees to work together on tangible scaling actions that address a clearly identified scaling gap in the mentee's context.

Twinning Programme participants are expected to **attend three mandatory onsite meetings** at the beginning, during, and at the end of the funding process:

- A Kick-off meeting in Cascais, Portugal (European Capital of Democracy) in fall 2026.
- A mid-term meeting in the European Capital of Democracy in spring 2027 (to be elected in March 2026).
- A final meeting in the European Capital of Democracy in fall 2027 (to be elected in March 2026).

The amount of time allocated to the role of mentor or mentee depends on the needs of the mentees and the offers of the mentor in each learning community. In the proposal form you may indicate the minimum number of financed hours you expect to require to sustainably commit to the programme.

Expectations for mentors

Mentors are experienced practitioners who have already implemented one or more concrete actions that helped scale their own democratic innovation. We expect mentors to:

- Bring at least one proven, tangible scaling action (or set of actions) they have previously used successfully.
- Teach and transfer this action to mentees through active guidance, troubleshooting and reflection.
- Support mentees in adapting the action to their specific context and scaling gap.
- Engage consistently over the 12-month programme, including regular exchanges with their mentees.
- Document their efforts and contribute to an evaluation report, reflecting on:
  - How the scaling action was transferred and adapted.
  - What worked, what did not, and why.
  - The broader scaling potential of the approach.

Expectations for mentees

Mentees are actors who are planning or running a democratic process with a foreseeable scaling problem during the programme timeline. We expect mentees to:

- Have a concrete democratic process (existing or upcoming) with a clear and plausible scaling gap they want to address.
- Be ready to attempt to overcome this scaling problem by applying one or more scaling actions taught by a mentor.
- Willingness to share experiences, challenges and insights with each other and with the wider ScaleDem community.
- Commit the necessary time and resources to implement the agreed actions within the 12-month funding period.
- Initiate first steps towards the implementation of the action, not just plan them.
- Document their efforts and contribute to an evaluation report, including:
    - What actions were implemented.
    - How they were adapted locally.
    - Lessons learned and reflections on scaling potential and context.

When applying, mentee applicants **do not necessarily yet know** which specific scaling action they will work with. In the application form, they can indicate what types of scaling actions they consider suitable for their needs and context, or one action already if they have a clear idea. Based on this, the ScaleDem consortium and the selection jury will match mentors (and their scaling actions) with mentees (and their scaling problems).

Once a mentee is offered a place in a twinning community, they will be informed about the proposed scaling action they are expected to apply. If they consider this action infeasible in their context, they may reject the proposal.

2.5. Can we apply as a coalition for the Twinning Programme?

Applicants may apply as a pre-defined community, provided that the roles of mentor and mentees are clearly specified. In the case of a joint application as a coalition, we invite you reflect on whether you are open to more mentees joining your community. We have set up this programme as a matchmaking process, where we connect mentors and mentees, and there will probably be other organizations applying, which could benefit from the knowledge shared within your community. Please include your reflections in your applications to guide our selection jury.

Alternatively, applicants may apply individually and will be matched by the selection jury. Applicants may apply as a single mentor or as a single mentee. Matching into learning communities will be carried out during the evaluation process and submitted for approval to all prospective community members.

2.6. What do we and what don’t we fund?

The programmes fund costs for personnel, travel, equipment and other services, including an overhead of 25% where applicable, provided they are justified and aligned with the project objectives. Please note that subcontracting should be limited and justified in the budget explanation. Infrastructure costs are not eligible for funding.

Co-financing is very welcome where it strengthens the project or adds value to its implementation.

2.7. Can a Consortium apply?

Yes. Consortia can apply for both programmes. A few key points to keep in mind however:

- Every application must have one coordinating organisation as lead applicant, which:
  - is a public or private legal entity based in an eligible country, and
  - signs the sub-grant agreement and manages the funds on behalf of the consortium.
- Consortia may consist of organisations from a single country or from multiple countries, depending on the project and the scaling challenge addressed.

Applicants should demonstrate sufficient capacity by naming key team members and describing remaining roles, even if not all individuals are confirmed at the time of application.

Applying within a Consortium formation is optional, not mandatory. Single-organisation projects can be funded, if team quality and impact are strong.

2.8. Can individuals apply as natural persons?

No. The coordinator (and applicant) must be a public or private legal entity established in an eligible country.

Individuals cannot apply in their personal capacity, except for the mentoring position for the Twinning Programme.

2.9. Can my project already run at the time of applying? Should my project last exactly the time of the programme or can it be shorter or longer?

As long as your project timeline overlaps with the programme timeline and that valuable lessons can be drawn by the end of the ScaleDem programmes, the project is in theory eligible for the Piloting and Twinning programme.

There is no specific measure of maturity/technology readiness level of the pilots. Projects do not need to be already running. Applicants must, however, present a concrete and well-defined project idea that they intend to test during the duration of the Piloting Programme. Preparatory or early-stage activities are acceptable, provided that the main implementation takes place during the Scaling Grounds funding period.

Please be aware that only activities carried out after the sub-grant agreement is signed and within the agreed 12-month implementation period can be funded.

2.10. Is a project eligible for Piloting depending on previous research?

Piloting projects are not required to originate from previous research activities. Practical testing of theoretical concepts through real-world pilots is considered an appropriate form of Piloting.

3. Application Process

3.1. How does the application process look like?

General process

Two open calls are launched: one for the Piloting Programme and one for the Twinning Programme (mentors and mentees). All information (Guide for Applicants, links to the online forms, FAQs, etc.) are available via the ScaleDem website and the EU Funding & Tenders Portal, which is where applications are formally submitted.

The calls will remain open for three months. During this period, ScaleDem partners will offer:

- Two online information sessions (one per call), and
- A helpdesk to answer questions from prospective applicants.

Decision Helper / Declaration of Intent

Before starting your full application, we **strongly recommend** that you complete our short online **Decision Helper / Declaration of Interest**. This non-binding tool helps you check basic eligibility, reflect on whether the Piloting or Twinning Programme is a better fit for your idea, and allows us to better anticipate interest and tailor support (e.g. information sessions, FAQ). Filling it in is *recommended but not mandatory*, and your answers are **not** used in the formal evaluation.

- *You can find the link here:* https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/ScaleDem_DOI
- *Please be aware that we extended the timeline for submitting the Declaration of Intent until* ***February 13th***.

Twinning-specific steps

A distinct call for mentors is launched first, to identify experienced practitioners who bring proven scaling actions. In parallel, organisations apply as mentees, describing their democratic process and scaling challenge. The jury then proposes twinning communities (coalitions of mentors and mentees) and may invite shortlisted candidates to a short online interview to clarify fit and expectations. Once a community is confirmed, a light budgeting and planning session is facilitated so partners can agree on the distribution of tasks and resources within the available budget.

Piloting-specific steps

Applicants submit a single full proposal for their pilot project via the online form. After the initial eligibility check and evaluation, shortlisted projects are invited to an online pitch/interview, where they briefly present their idea and answer questions from the jury. The jury then agrees on a final ranked list of projects to be funded, and selected applicants proceed to sign a sub-grant agreement with one of the ScaleDem grant-managing partners.

3.2. What does the evaluation process look like?

All applications follow the same basic steps:

1. **Eligibility check**: After the deadline, the ScaleDem team checks that applications meet the basic eligibility criteria (e.g. country, type of organisation, completeness of the form, required declarations). Ineligible or incomplete applications cannot be evaluated.

2. **Independent jury evaluation**: Each call (Piloting and Twinning) is assessed by its own independent jury, bringing together members of the ScaleDem Scientific Advisory Board, End-User Advisory Board, randomly selected citizens, and consortium partners

3. **Shortlisting and interviews**: Based on the scores, the jury establishes a shortlist. Shortlisted applicants may be invited to a short online interview to clarify questions and, for the Twinning Programme, to help shape viable mentor–mentee coalitions.

4. **Final ranking and selection:** The jury then agrees on a final ranking and selection list. If proposals have very similar scores, aspects such as geographical spread can be used as a tie-breaker.

5. **Communication of results**: All applicants are informed of the outcome (selected / not selected). A summary of the results and statistics of the call will be published on the ScaleDem website.

3.3. What is the timeline?

- Call opening: 1 December 2025
- Submission deadline for voluntary Declaration of Interest: 13 February 2026
- Application deadline for both Piloting and Twinning: 31 March 2026
- Notification of results: ca. July 2026
- Sub-grant agreements finalised: September 2026

Both programmes are planned to kick off with a joint in-person meeting in Cascais, Portugal (European Capital of Democracy) **in autumn 2026**, and to conclude with a final in-person meeting in the European Capital of Democracy **in late 2027**.

Only the Twinning Programme additionally expects participation in a third in-person mid-term-meeting in **Spring 2027**.

Please be aware that travelling expenses should be included in the budget.

3.4. What are the selection criteria?

All eligible applications (for both the Piloting and Twinning programmes) are first checked against basic **eligibility criteria** (e.g. see above) They are then assessed by an independent jury. The jury will look at how well each proposal fits the objectives of the call and the four scaling dimensions (high, out, deep, in), using five main evaluation criteria, each scored from 0 (not addressed) to 5 (excellent). Proposals must reach the threshold for each criterion to be considered fundable. Among fundable proposals, the weighted overall score (based on the percentages above) is used for ranking.

- **Relevance (threshold 4/5, weight factor of 30%)**: Does the proposal clearly define its objectives and target groups, and show how it builds on the learning and solutions identified in ScaleDem (especially WP1)?

- **Impact (threshold 3/5, weight factor of 25%)**: Does the project address a real democratic challenge, create clear value for the targeted community, and have potential to be replicated or scaled further? Is there a reasonable idea of how impact will be generated and assessed, given local barriers and enablers?

- **Team quality (threshold 3/5, weight factor of 25%)**: Does the team have the experience, motivation and skills to deliver what they propose? Is there a good mix of competencies (and attention to diversity, including gender balance)? A track record of sharing results (e.g. open source / open data) is considered an asset.

- **Justified resource allocation (threshold 3/5, weight factor of 15%)**: Is the requested budget realistic and well explained? Do the main cost categories (e.g. staff time, events, materials, travel, overheads) make sense in relation to the work plan, milestones and expected results? This also includes considering travel costs and the feasibility of building and sustaining a community of practice during and after the project (especially for the Twinning Programme).

- **Sustainability (threshold 3/5, weight factor of 5%)**: Is there a plausible plan for how the results can live on after ScaleDem funding ends, for example by being integrated into ongoing work, partnerships or wider networks?

3.5. How should I explain the budget? How detailed should the budget plan be?

Your budget should be simple, realistic and clearly justified, not overly technical. The selection jury will look at whether you are making good use of the funds in relation to your work plan (the “justified resource allocation” criterion), including your minimum viable implementation budget and, where relevant, your estimated hourly/daily rates.

Please:

- Group costs by main category (e.g. personnel, travel and events, materials, communication, external services/subcontracting, overheads where applicable).

- Explain briefly what each category covers and why it is needed to achieve your objectives (e.g. "X days of staff time for facilitation and coordination", "travel for 2 workshops with local partners", etc.).

You do not need to provide detailed accounting or attach invoices at the application stage. In the application form, you will find this template to help you structure your budget:

How will you use the budget?			
Budget category	**Cost over 12 months**	**Overheads (25%)**	**Total in Euro**
Personnel			
Travel			
Equipment			
Other goods and services			
Subcontracting		**n/a**	
Grand total in Euro			
Briefly explain the main cost items.			

3.6. When is the exact deadline for the application?

There are two key dates:

- Deadline for Declarations of Interest (optional): **31 January 2026**
- Deadline for Full Applications (for both Scaling Grounds – Piloting and Twinning): **31 March 2026, 23:59** (local time of the applicant)

❖ *We strongly recommend submitting your application early to avoid any last-minute technical issues or connectivity problems. Applications submitted after the deadline cannot be considered.*

3.7. Can I only submit the application online?

Yes, please use our application form online via the EU Survey platform.

- Decision Helper / Declaration of Interest
- Piloting Programme
- Twinning Programme

3.8. In which language should I submit my application?

Applications (including all annexes) must be submitted in English.

3.9. Who should I contact in case of technical problems or questions regarding the content?

Please reach out to opencalls@scaledem.eu

3.10. What documents do I have to provide to apply?

In addition to completing the EU Survey form (for either the Piloting or the Twinning Programme), you will be asked to upload the following documents, as specified in the form:

- **Detailed description of the project**: Explain what you want to do, your main milestones, and the impact you aim to achieve.
- **CVs of the core team members**: Show that your team has the expertise and experience needed to implement the project. We encourage the use of the Europass format, but it is not mandatory. All CVs must be in English. Having pictures in a CV is not a requirement.
- **Budget plan**: indicate how much funding you request, how you intend to spend it, and whether there are other sources of funding.
- **List of previous projects (optional):** If relevant, you may include examples of past projects or activities that demonstrate your experience.

Note that during the sub-grant agreement negotiation and signature process, **a signed declaration of honour and ethics disclosure**, signed by the legal representative of the applying/lead organisation will be requested.

3.11. Is there a template for the main project submission?

There is no mandatory template. A concise and compact project concept is welcomed, but there is no formal page limit, but we strongly recommend not going beyond 10 pages. To help you, here is a suggestion (this is only a recommendation and not binding).

1. Title
2. Short abstract (half a page max)
3. Scaling challenge(s) you are addressing
4. Objectives and expected outcomes of the project
5. Description of the action: rough project plan and timeline (work packages/phases, milestones)
6. Geographical scope and target group(s) of the project
7. Societal impact of the project: what is the expected impact and how do you suggest evaluating it?

8. Description of the project team/consortium: CVs of the team are uploaded as separate documents. In this section, we recommend briefly presenting the organizations, their expertise, and complementarity (if consortium).

Budget proposal is uploaded as separate document

4. Implementation

4.1. How will funds be distributed?

For **Piloting**, funding will be provided to the lead organisation, which is responsible for the management of the other partners, if any. There is no minimum funding amount. Applicants may request less than the maximum available budget, provided the budget is realistic and appropriate for the project.

For **Twinning**, the Mentees will decide how to split funds within their communities, together with their Mentor. Each Mentee will receive funding directly. The total budget allocated to a Twinning learning community must cover both mentor and mentee costs. Budget allocation will be adjusted after matching during the sub-grant agreement preparation phase, with guidance from the ScaleDem team if needed.

Funding will be provided as a *lump-sum grant* for each selected project. The budget submitted and justified in your application will be converted into a lump sum in the sub-grant agreement. Pending final legal confirmation, we foresee payments to be made in two to three instalments along the project with at least one upfront payment. Exact % will be communicated ASAP.

Please be aware that regranting the ScaleDem grant is not possible, i.e.: we would not fund a project that itself grants funding to third parties. However, subcontracting is possible.

4.2. What are reporting requirements?

Both Piloting and Twinning projects must also follow the **standard Horizon Europe rules for administrative and financial reporting for lump-sum projects**. In practice, this entails :

- light reporting at different stages of the project implementation,
- archiving supporting documents (e.g. contracts, invoices, basic records)

The ScaleDem Consortium will provide **clear templates** and guidance so that reporting remains as simple and user-friendly as possible.

With the exception of the final report, which conditions the payment of the second installment, the Consortium is also open to more **creative and interactive reporting**, such as short video clips (e.g. 2–5 minutes) presenting key results, stories from participants, or lessons learned; and/or visual materials (infographics, slide decks) that help communicate the project in an accessible way for interim reports, and interim reporting modalities will be discussed during the sub-agreement negotiation phase with selected applicants.

Piloting Programme

Participants in the Piloting Programme are expected to:

- **Submit a short Interim Report** midway through the funding period. This report should include:
  - Progress made so far;
  - Challenges encountered and how they were addressed;
  - Anticipated upcoming challenges and possible solutions;
  - Specific areas where further advice or support is needed.
- **Submit a Final Report at the end of the funding period**, which will:
  - Summarise the overall implementation of the pilot;
  - Describe results and impact in relation to the intended scaling objectives;
  - Reflect on lessons learned and possible next steps.

This final report must also include a short **public-facing summary** that can be published on the ScaleDem website.

Twinning Programme

Participants in the Twinning Programme (both mentors and mentees) are expected to contribute to a **joint community report**, documenting how concrete scaling actions were taught, adapted and applied. Communities are expected to follow this reporting timeline:

- **December 2026 : First draft**, including:
  - Action plans for each mentee;
  - A timeline for all planned peer and individual meetings;
  - Short summary of meetings held.
- **March 2027 – Second draft (mid-term update)**, including:
  - Mid-term evaluations of ongoing scaling efforts for each mentee;
  - Any amendments to action plans and timelines;
  - Updated minutes from all peer and individual meetings.
- **November 2027 – Final community report**, including:
  - Process documentation for each mentee (what was tried, adapted and achieved);
  - Final evaluations of the scaling efforts for each mentee;
  - Reflections on the programme and the ScaleDem scaling framework;
  - Expectations and recommendations for future work;
  - Minutes from all peer and individual meetings.

The final version of this community report, accompanied by a **short public-facing summary**, will serve as the formal final report for the Twinning Programme.

4.3 Are there specific ethics, data protection or “do no harm” requirements?

Yes. ScaleDem follows the standard Horizon Europe ethics rules, including the principle of “do no harm” and strict data protection requirements. In practice, this means:

- At the grant-agreement stage: you will be asked to sign a short declaration of honour and an ethics disclosure, confirming that your project will respect applicable ethical standards and

data protection rules. These documents must be signed by the legal representative of the applying organisation and uploaded with your application.

- During implementation: if your project involves citizens or collects personal data, you must:
  - respect "do no harm" principles (e.g. avoid exposing participants to unnecessary risks, stigmatisation or harm);
  - comply with GDPR and relevant national data protection laws, including informed consent where required, secure storage of personal data, and anonymisation or pseudonymisation when appropriate.

ScaleDem Gender, Legal, Ethics and Data Manager will provide guidance and templates to help you think through ethics and data protection issues. We will expect you to:

- be transparent about how you work with participants and data, and
- be ready to explain your safeguards in the application (if relevant) and, if selected, during the project.

4.4. Do we keep the IP of our project if we are selected?

Yes. The IP generated by your project remains with you. As a beneficiary, you are responsible for protecting your own IP and for ensuring that you do not infringe third-party rights. ScaleDem will only use non-confidential information, such as project title, abstract, short description, logo and public results, for communication and reporting purposes, in line with Horizon Europe rules.

❖ *For more information on legal and IP framework, please refer to the information note available here: https://scaledem.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/ScaleDem-Programmes-Legal-and-IP-framework.pdf*