



## Vinnovate Call 2026 – Guide for Applicants

This Guide for Applicants is the main practical reference document for preparing and submitting Vinnovate 2026 proposals.

*N.B: Persons with reading disabilities can contact the Vinnovate Manager  
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# 1. Intro and background- Grants available for supporting interregional projects

VInnovate Call 2026 will support the implementation of **interregional collaboration projects** through the issuing of grants. The call aims at enabling the development and deployment of SMEs-led solutions, directly contributing to the transitions towards a more sustainable, a smarter or a less dependent industry. Interregional cooperation is very often instrumental in developing such complex solutions, connecting expertise and technologies across borders.

As detailed in chapter 2, projects consortia will be composed of at least one **SME cooperating** with either other SMEs, Large Companies, Universities, Research/Facility centres or Research and Technology infrastructures. The scope of the supported projects will be thematically linked to at least one of the current [6 pilots of the Vanguard Initiative](#) (see chapter 2 for more information).

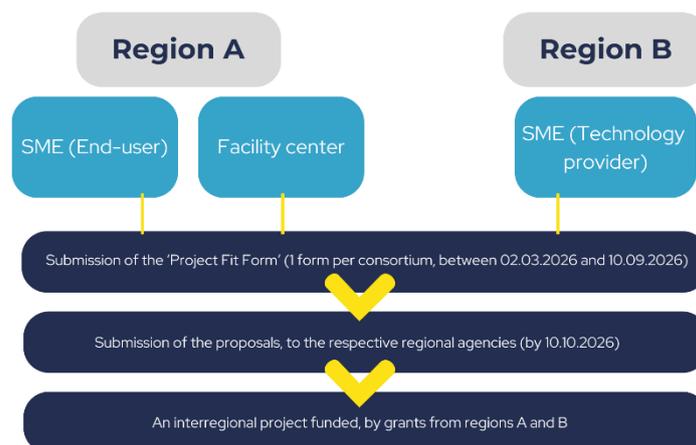
VInnovate Call 2026 is the third Call issued through the VInnovate Mechanism. The VInnovate mechanism has been developed<sup>1</sup> by the [Vanguard Initiative \(VI\)](#) and its participating regions. The strategic objective is to offer appropriate and timely funding opportunities for the implementation of industry-led and strategic interregional projects, therefore fully [realising VI ambition](#).

As detailed in chapter 4, the **following key milestones characterise the submission process**:

- First, an interregional consortium must elaborate and submit a **‘Project Fit Form’** (during the period 02.03.2026-10.09.2026).
- Then, pending a positive assessment made by the VInnovate Manager, each applicant from the consortium will submit, by no later than 10.10.2026, the project **proposal to its respective regional agency, and following the corresponding regional instrument’s requirements**.
- The project is **selected for funding if all regions involved do select the project for funding** (see chapter 4).

The figure below illustrates the submission process and associated funding logic, based on a **purely illustrative (!) example**. Note that such an example does not provide any indications in terms of e.g. types and optimal number of participating partners, nor in terms of optimal number of regions. See chapter 2 for more information regarding the projects requirements and eligibility criteria.

## An illustrative (!) VInnovate 2026 project building



<sup>1</sup> Following a project coordinated by [IDEA Consult](#), which included the following analyses: funding needs of VI pilots, current interregional funding landscape (including review of initiatives like from IRA-SME, ERA-Learn, etc.), preferences and ambitions of regions in terms of mechanisms, operationalisation of preferred option.

## 2. VInnovate Call 2026 Projects requirements

### 2.1. Targeted beneficiaries

The following eligibility criteria will hold for VInnovate Call 2026 projects:

- The VInnovate beneficiaries must all be located in a VInnovate 2026 member “region”, namely East NL (Gelderland and Overijssel provinces), North East Romania, Galicia, Lower Saxony, Lower Austria, Wales, Basque Country, Norte (*pending formal confirmation*), Limburg (*pending formal confirmation*) and Noord Brabant (*pending formal confirmation*). Every VInnovate applicant will have to comply with requirements of the regional/national instrument to which the beneficiary is applying (available [here](#)), as well as with the VInnovate criteria described below.
- The project consortium can be eventually complemented with additional partners (‘associated partners’); not funded through instruments activated in VInnovate 2026. Such associated partners should therefore secure other funding sources (private, regional, etc.).
- Each project consortium will be composed of VInnovate beneficiaries (excl. ‘associated partners’) complying with the following criteria:
  - at least 2 organisations located in at least 2 distinct VInnovate member “regions” (see list above) AND at least 2 states (the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Romania, Germany, Austria, Wales). Beyond ‘interregional cooperation’, each project should therefore promote international cooperation;
  - at least one SME (following EC definition available [here](#)).

In addition to one or several SMEs, a VInnovate consortium can potentially be composed of **Large Companies, Universities, Research/Facility centres or Research and Technology infrastructures**. Applicants are requested to consult the description of their [respective regional/national instrument](#) in order to be informed about the specific regional/national eligibility criteria in terms of the types of possible beneficiaries.

The picture below provides a general overview regarding the type of actors eligible per region.

Type of organisations eligible for funding, per region			
SMEs	Large companies	Universities	Research / facility centers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• East NL (Gelderland and Overijssel provinces)</li> <li>• Basque Country</li> <li>• North East Romania</li> <li>• Lower Austria</li> <li>• Lower Saxony</li> <li>• Galicia</li> <li>• Wales</li> <li>• Limburg (<i>pending formal confirmation</i>)</li> <li>• Noord Brabant (<i>pending formal confirmation</i>)</li> <li>• Norte (<i>pending formal confirmation</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• East NL (Gelderland and Overijssel provinces)*</li> <li>• Lower Austria</li> <li>• Galicia*</li> <li>• Wales</li> <li>• Lower Saxony*</li> <li>• Limburg* (<i>pending formal confirmation</i>)</li> <li>• Noord Brabant* (<i>pending formal confirmation</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• East NL (Gelderland and Overijssel provinces)*</li> <li>• Lower Saxony*</li> <li>• Galicia*</li> <li>• Wales</li> <li>• Lower Austria</li> <li>• Limburg* (<i>pending formal confirmation</i>)</li> <li>• Noord Brabant* (<i>pending formal confirmation</i>)</li> <li>• Norte* (<i>pending formal confirmation</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• East NL (Gelderland and Overijssel provinces)*</li> <li>• Lower Saxony*</li> <li>• Galicia*</li> <li>• Wales</li> <li>• Lower Austria</li> <li>• Limburg* (<i>pending formal confirmation</i>)</li> <li>• Noord Brabant* (<i>pending formal confirmation</i>)</li> <li>• Norte (<i>pending formal confirmation</i>)</li> </ul>
* = In cooperation with at least one SME from the region			

For a detailed overview of each the instruments please visit the instruments descriptions [here](#).



## 2.2. Supported activities: types, costs and duration

- VInnovate Call 2026 will support activities at TRL6, TRL7 and/or TRL8, i.e. VInnovate will support post-prototyping activities<sup>2</sup>.
- The total project costs will be of minimum 100.000 € project cost per project (i.e. the sum of total costs of all partners in the project must be higher than 100.000 €, for the entire project).
- The project duration will be of maximum 30 months. Note that in several regions, the maximum project duration is of lower duration (see [here](#) for more details).

In addition to such criteria, every VInnovate candidate will have to comply with requirements (for example, regarding a maximum grant amount possibly set at regional level and/or regarding a possible lower maximum project duration in some regions) of the regional/national instrument to which the beneficiary is applying.

In general, the following types of costs can potentially be eligible for funding: Personnel costs, Subcontracting costs, Purchase costs (travel, equipment, consumables), indirect costs. Applicants are requested to check the regional instrument descriptions for a confirmation of eligible costs.

**In general, and in addition to the criteria above, every VInnovate applicant will have to comply with requirements of the regional/national instrument to which the beneficiary is applying.**

## 2.3. Scope

Each project will aim at developing solution(s) that will support at least one of the following transitions:

- 1) a smarter industry (*namely, the process of integrating advanced technologies, particularly digital technologies, into various industrial processes and value chains, leading to improved efficiency, productivity, and innovation*)
- 2) a more sustainable industry (*namely, the move towards a climate-neutral industry, esp. energy efficiency*)
- 3) a more autonomous/less dependent industry (*namely, reducing the European dependency on other regions for deep-tech innovations as well as for services of strategic interest*).

In addition to the previous criteria, each project must be linked (thematically) to at least one of the 6 VI pilots: 1) *Bio-Economy*; 2) *Efficient Sustainable Manufacturing*; 3) *High-Performance Production through 3D Printing*; 4) *Advanced Manufacturing for Energy-related Applications in Harsh Environments*; 5) *Smart Health* and 6) *Hydrogen*. More information about **the scope of each pilot can be found in the Annex of the present document**. Should applicants have any questions or concerns regarding the linkages between their project idea and the pilots scope, they are invited to first consult the Annex of the present document and then, if needed, contact the pilots leads, whose contact details are indicated on the respective [webpages](#).

**In general, and in addition to the criteria above, every VInnovate applicant will have to comply with requirements (for example, in terms of alignment with regional priorities) of the regional/national instrument to which the beneficiary is applying.**

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<sup>2</sup> While this is not the core target, activities at TRL5 can be potentially eligible for funding in a VInnovate project if a substantial part of the project activities (more than 50% of the project costs) are associated to activities at higher (TRL6 and beyond) TRL levels.

### 3. Timeline VInnovate Call 2026

Below, the timeline is presented. Please consult chapter 4 for information about processes and requirements at every main step.

- 2 March 2026 (17:00 CET): Opening of the Call
- 10 September 2026 (23:59 CET): Closing of the submission of project fit form
  - o *Applicants are encouraged to submit their 'Project Fit Form' as soon as possible, and ideally before 10 September 2026. Indeed, this will give them more time to prepare the full proposals (see chapter 4 for more details).*
- 10 October 2026 (23:59 CET): Closing of the submission of 'full' proposals
- Second half of December 2026: Communication results to applicants
- December 2026/February 2027: Signing of consortium agreement and funding negotiations, according to the respective regional/national rules, if necessary.

### 4. Application Procedure and Funding

The figure below provides a description of the main application steps. Prior to these main steps, the Vanguard Initiative and its Pilots will facilitate the building of project ideas and consortia. All relevant steps are then being described more in details.

## Submission process



#### 4.1. Step 1 – Being supported in designing a project idea and consortium (optional)

Potential applicants (especially SMEs) will receive supports towards elaborating possible proposals in the form of activities organised by VI Pilots and the VInnovate Manager.

More specifically, the following activities and tools are made available:

- **Five VInnovate Call 2026 Project-Building Webinars** are planned.
  - o A first Project-Building Webinar will be held on 19 March 2026 (10:00 – 11:30 CET). Please register [here](#), should you be interested in “pitching” a possible project idea or in connecting with other interested stakeholders.
  - o Below, we list the four other Project-Building Webinars planned.
    - 23 April 2026 (10:00 – 11:30 CET), register [here](#)
    - 27 May 2026 (10:00 – 11:30 CET), register [here](#)
    - 30 June 2026 (10:00 – 11:30 CET), register [here](#)



- 27 August 2026 (10:00 – 11:30 CET), register [here](#)
- An **online matchmaking tool** is made available ([here](#)) and will enable stakeholders to express interest and publish possible project ideas, towards identifying relevant partners or ideas. Any organisation active in one of the 6 pilots' scope can create a profile, express interest in the VInnovate Call 2026 (incl. detailing type of partners they are looking for) and/or contact organisations already having expressed interest on the page.
- **Projects generation-activities will be organised by VI Pilots.** More information about each pilot can be found in the Annex and [here](#). In every of the 6-Pilot dedicated webpages, possible applicants will find the contact details of the pilot lead: applicants are invited to contact targeted pilots leads in order to 1) receive more information about upcoming projects generation activities and 2) eventually ask further information about the thematic focus of a given pilot, to guarantee alignment between a project idea and a pilot's scope.
- Finally, applicants can **contact the VInnovate Manager** ([vinnovate@s3vanguardinitiative.eu](mailto:vinnovate@s3vanguardinitiative.eu)), acting as helpdesk. Applicants can also directly consult the FAQ document available [here](#).

#### 4.2. Step 2 – Submission of VInnovate 'Project Fit Form', anytime between 02.03.2026 and 10.09.2026

The 'Project Fit Form' template is available [here](#). This short form has to be filled-out (1 form per consortium) by the consortium partners, and sent as an attachment to the following email address [vinnovate@s3vanguardinitiative.eu](mailto:vinnovate@s3vanguardinitiative.eu), by the interregional project coordinator<sup>3</sup> of the project. Any project fit form (duly completed) will have to be submitted before 10.09.2026 (23:59 CET). Applicants are encouraged to submit their 'Project Fit Form' as soon as possible: this will give them more time to prepare the actual proposals (see step 4 below).

This is a **compulsory step** aimed at facilitating the generation of **potentially** eligible project ideas. In particular, the form will guide applicants in fulfilling the VInnovate Call 2026 eligibility criteria (through 'self-declaration statements', mainly) and in establishing potentially eligible international consortium.

#### 4.3. Step 3 – Assessment Project Fit Form, in no more than 10 working days

During the period 02.03.2026-10.09.2026, any submitted Project Fit Form will be assessed, by the VInnovate Manager, in no more than 10 working days. This assessment will focus on the VInnovate eligibility criteria and on ensuring that there is no major inadequacy identified between the partners, their activities and the targeted regional funding instruments. Such assessment does not encompass an evaluation of the quality of the proposed project nor a proper and binding regional eligibility check, which will be performed in steps 4 and 5.

Following the assessment, the applicants will receive an email from the VInnovate Manager informing them about the outcome:

- In case of positive assessment, 'regional' proposals (see step 4) can be submitted (of course, the preparation of those proposals can start earlier). A positive assessment should not be considered as an indication of a selection for funding (see steps 4 and 5).
- In case of a negative assessment, modifications to and resubmission of project fit forms are possible (before 10.09.2026 (23:59 CET)).

#### 4.4. Step 4 - Submission of proposals to the respective regional funding agencies

Once the 'project fit form' was positively assessed, applicants can proceed with the submission of 'regional proposals' (i.e. full proposals to be submitted, by every partner, to their corresponding regional/national agencies). The key features (content-wise) from full/regional proposals must remain stable/identical compared to the content from the Project Fit Form. In particular:

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<sup>3</sup> The interregional project coordinator will be the main contact point between the VInnovate Manager and the interregional consortium. The coordinator must submit the 'project fit form' to the VInnovate Manager. Each VInnovate Call 2026 consortium is requested to select one coordinator.



- The scope/topic (technologies, application areas) and general objectives/ expected impacts of the project must remain identical.
- The selected 'international' coordinator must remain in the consortium.
- The key characteristics of the project that enabled its 'positive assessment', at Fit Form Level, in terms of alignment with VInnovate Call 2026 criteria (international dimension, consortium characteristics, etc.) must remain unchanged<sup>4</sup>. This implies that there must be a stable basis, which will not be subject to changes, and which will enable to comply with VInnovate call 2026 criteria "on its own". Therefore, in an hypothetical situation, where only one organisation would be stable/identical between Project Fit Form and Full proposal, the proposals would be deemed ineligible-, since there is in that context e.g. no 'stable' basis that enables to comply with the criteria of 'international cooperation'. Such minimum basis, which guarantees alignment with VInnovate Criteria 2026, cannot be modified.

Each applicant will provide the information requested by the corresponding regional instrument, following the requests and procedures at regional/national level (which can be consulted online here and on the [respective instruments webpages](#)).

This implies that the distinct "full proposals" (submitted, by partners of a single VInnovate candidate project, to distinct regional agencies) will be based on a similar/shared "interregional" content: e.g. the description of the project's scope and main activities, the set of partners, the overall impacts, etc. In addition to this, partners might be requested to provide (to their funding agency) additional specific information, taking into account possible specific regional requirements.

Regional proposals will have to be submitted by 10.10.2026 (23:59 CET) at the latest, in general. Please however check the exact requirements in your corresponding region.

Each applicant must attach to the regional proposal, a draft consortium agreement (unsigned). A template of consortium agreement is available [here](#) and must be adapted. Applicants can depart from other templates/drafts consortium agreements.

#### 4.5. Step 5 – Evaluation, decision and communication

Following the implementation of the evaluation processes in place at regional level, a project is selected for funding when all regions involved in the project had selected the project for funding.

Information about the list of projects selected for funding will be communicated in the second half of December 2026.

#### 4.6. Step 6 – Agreements, Contracts, Funding and Monitoring

Selected consortia will then have to **sign the consortium agreement**. The consortium agreement will regulate aspect such as the 1) identity of the partners, 2) contract period, 3) IPR ownership, IPR use and exploitation of the project results, 4) subcontracting to third parties, 5) contributions of each partner to the project, 6) confidentiality notes and freedom of publications rights. The consortium agreement is to be signed after the project has been selected for funding, and before applicants sign their actual contracts with the respective funding agencies. The complete set of signatures on the consortium agreement is a prerequisite for funding.

**Funding will be provided to each partner/beneficiary by their corresponding national/regional funding agency** according to its respective rules. Matters related to funding will be handled according to the respective national/regional agencies 'rules. Projects will be monitored according to the rules of the respective country/region. Hence, technical as well as financial reporting will be required according to national/regional rules as well. Arrangements will be made during the funding negotiation process. Projects selected for funding are expected to **start their activities no later than 3 months** after the funding decision was confirmed.

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<sup>4</sup> Should a consortium face a situation where changes to consortium composition is needed (such as adding or removing one consortium partner, without affecting main eligibility criteria), such changes will only be possible if: 1) A communication is sent to inform the VInnovate Manager and their corresponding regional agencies before the submission of the full proposals to corresponding regional agencies. AND 2) The regional instrument/call guidelines (for step 2) are not hampering such changes. In particular, some regions would make the addition/withdrawal of one partner from the consortium impossible. Such constraints will be indicated in the 'Regional Instrument Description' and will be reminded to applicants where necessary.



## 5. Annex – The description of the VI Pilots scope



## 1. Bioeconomy Pilot - Interregional cooperation on innovative use of non-food biomass

### *Thematic coverage of the pilot*

The bioeconomy pilot project aims to strengthen Europe's transition towards a circular, climate-neutral economy by fostering the development of transregional bio-based value chains across participating regions. Through the innovative and sustainable use of renewable resources, the Pilot supports the production of high-value bio-based products, materials, chemicals, fuels, and advanced applications. A strategic pillar of the Pilot is the deployment of second-generation biorefineries, combining cutting-edge technologies with a high potential for innovation and added value to valorise lignocellulosic feedstocks, industrial by-products, and waste biomass into market-ready solutions. In the long term, the bioeconomy pilot seek to:

- Stimulate innovation and industrial transformation in the Vanguard Initiative regions,
- Leverage regional bioeconomy ecosystem and industrial capabilities,
- Trigger new business opportunities for SMEs and technology providers,
- Attract private investment, and facilitate access to EU and regional funding,
- Accelerate market uptake of sustainable and zero-waste bio-based business models.

The **thematic priorities** of the Pilot concern the following areas:

1. **Circular Bioeconomy and Bioeconomy Governance.** Supporting the diffusion of bio-based products and the implementation of regional policy tools, while developing interregional value chains capable of overcoming regulatory barriers and enabling wider market penetration.
2. **Green Chemistry and Sustainable Materials.** Advancing products and processes that replace or reduce the use of toxic, rare, and polluting substances, while improving resource efficiency and lowering energy consumption.
3. **Biorefineries and Advanced Biofuels.** Promoting integrated biorefinery solutions to produce value-added products and renewable fuels from non-food biomass and industrial residues, supporting decarbonisation in hard-to-abate sectors.

### *Current focal points*

1. **Lignin-based bio-aromatic molecules.** Creating interregional value chains for advanced bio-based materials (e.g., BPA-free epoxy resins, functional additives).
  2. **Lignocellulosic biorefinery solutions/Green building and construction materials.** Developing bulk and fine chemicals through circular biorefinery concepts and zero-waste processes.
  3. **Bio-LNG for sustainable mobility and industrial decarbonisation.** Scaling renewable biomethane value chains for heavy-duty transport and industrial end-users.
- Biopolymers.** Supporting market-driven innovation in recyclable, high-performance bioplastics, enhanced through AI-based formulation tools.

### *Possible VInnovate projects beyond the 'current focal points'?*

Yes, any VInnovate 2026 projects linked to the Bioeconomy Pilot may be, thematically, outside the scope of the "current focal points", but must therefore be aligned with the overall "thematic coverage"

## 2. VI 3DP Pilot - HIGH PERFORMANCE PRODUCTION THROUGH 3D-PRINTING

### *Thematic coverage of the pilot*

The pilot focuses on the development and deployment of 3D printing (or Additive Manufacturing)-related solutions. The pilot covers all available printing technologies (powder bed fusion, etc.) and materials. The pilot covers all segments of the value chain: modelling and design, materials, machinery & equipment, process, post-processing, etc. The Pilot includes activities focusing on Smart and Advanced Manufacturing, in particular the connections between 3DP and AI or Robotics.

Overall, the pilot covers, thematically and potentially, any project directly contributing to improving (productivity, sustainability, quality, etc.) industrial printing processes/solutions/parts.

### *Current focal points*

Currently, the following structural areas of cooperation are being addressed. While it will be easier to find collaboration partners within our community on these areas of cooperation, do note however that, in the context of VInnovate 2026,



the pilot is open to any project possibly not fitting with the areas below, but aligned with the description under section 'thematic coverage of the pilot':

Specific Industrial challenges structurally addressed (for all application areas):

- Increasing life of parts (repairing, maintenance)
- Lighter components (hybrid components)
- Smart AM for sustainable production
- Improving finishing (Automated removal and smoothing parts)
- Automatization of AM factories

Specific application areas structurally addressed:

- Materials: Ceramics; Bio-based; Multi-materials
- Sectors: Healthcare, Robotics
- Parts: Large parts, Parts with integrated electronics

*Possible Vinnovate projects beyond the 'current focal points'?*

Yes, possible 3DP-related Vinnovate 2026 projects can be, thematically, outside the scope of the "current focal points", but need then to be aligned with the general "thematic coverage".

### 3. ADMA Energy - Advanced Manufacturing for Energy-Related Applications in Harsh Environments

*Thematic coverage of the pilot*

The Pilot focuses on promoting the development and creation of new interregional value chains in the growing renewable offshore energy and subsea industry, strengthening Europe's industrial competitiveness in harsh marine environments.

The pilot covers advanced manufacturing technologies across traditional and emerging sectors, as well as disruptive innovations related to design, functionality, integration, automation, advanced materials, hydrogen-ready systems, digitalisation and data transmission in offshore renewable energy and subsea applications.

Overall, the pilot covers, thematically and potentially, any project directly contributing to improving manufacturing, reliability, durability, circularity and system integration of components, applications, products and services in renewable offshore energy systems, in alignment with the broader Sustainable Blue Economy framework.

*Current focal points (2026)*

Currently, the following structural areas of cooperation aligned with the active interregional demo-cases are being addressed:

Power Transfer in the Sea

- Integration of power sources – Linking offshore oil and gas operations to offshore renewable energy sources, including electrification of platforms and subsea units.
- Use of offshore energy to produce alternative energy vectors (e.g. hydrogen, ammonia, e-fuels), including offshore production, storage and related manufacturing challenges (Offshore Green Hydrogen & e-fuels).
- Modular and scalable offshore energy solutions supporting hybrid systems and energy hubs at sea.

Critical technologies to improve lifetime, operation, maintenance, efficient decommissioning and circularity of offshore energy systems

- Floating substructure, anchors and moorings (e.g. anchor mutualisation, mooring redundancy), dynamic submarine cables.
- Joining of large components in harsh environments (bolted connections, composite/steel joints, adhesive joining), supporting structural integrity and installation efficiency.
- Development of improved, corrosion-resistant and more damage-tolerant materials (e.g. advanced composites, bio-based fibres and resins), enhancing lifetime extension and sustainability.

Integrated digital tools for extended lifetime and profitability of offshore wind farms

- Digital twins, predictive maintenance, sensor integration and advanced monitoring systems to enhance asset management, risk reduction and long-term performance of offshore infrastructures.

*Possible Vinnovate projects beyond the 'current focal points'?*

Yes. The pilot covers, thematically and potentially, any project directly contributing to improving manufacturing, integration, resilience and performance of components, applications, products and services in renewable offshore energy, while fostering interregional collaboration and SME participation.

Projects focussing on floating wind are highly encouraged to be connected with i3float project (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/i3float-project/>)

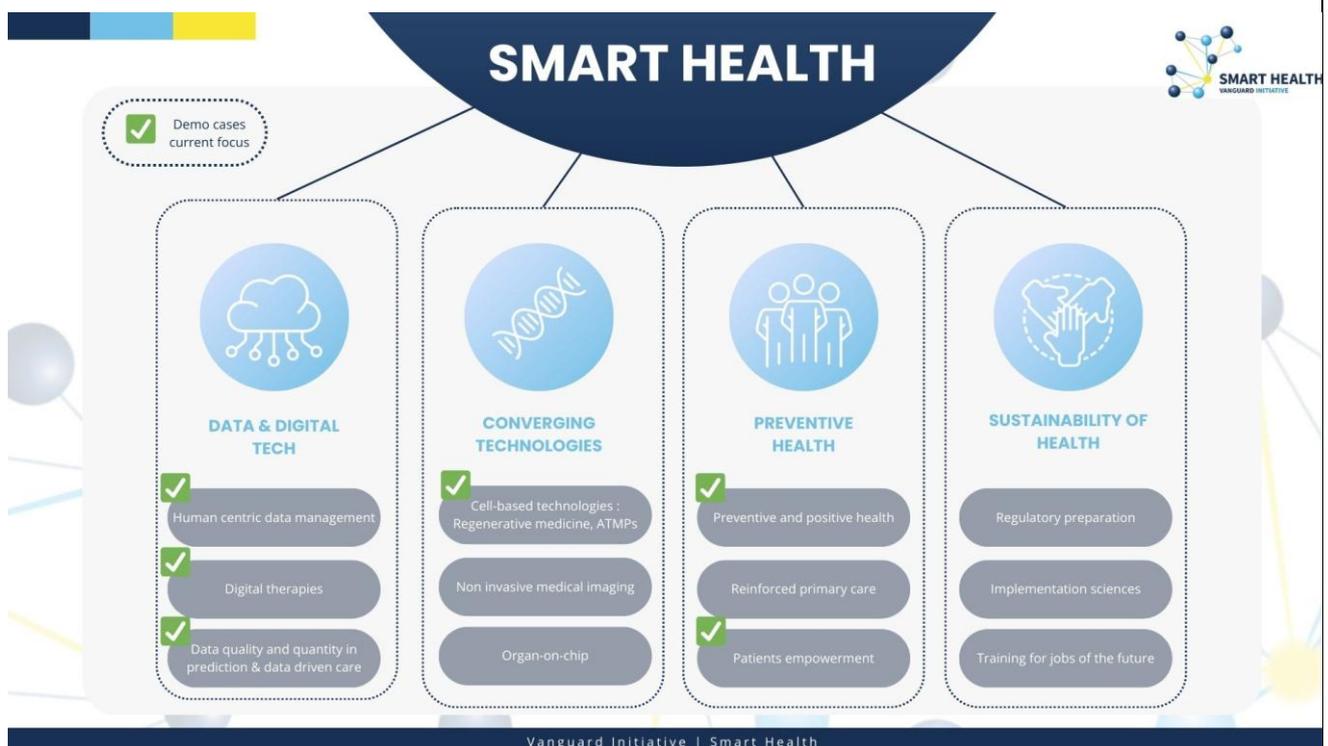
#### 4. VI SMART HEALTH PILOT

##### *Thematic coverage of the pilot*

The development of personalised medicine (PM), stratified or precision medicine is an evolution that cannot be stopped anymore. PM is strongly technological driven and will induce a transformation of how health and wellbeing are approached, and medicine is being implemented. The convergence of knowledge on what determines health and disease or how the process of ageing is determined, with digital technologies and access to data opens a huge potential to develop new applications to improve general health, wellbeing, and will make preventive medicine reality.

##### *Current focal points*

The figure below outlines the priority areas of the Smart Health pilot and the topics of interest where new project ideas are welcome. The pillars highlight the broad topics of interest for the Smart Health pilot while the boxes below indicate more concrete ideas for new demo case projects.



The first pillar – data and digital technologies – is largely about observation, measurement, data collection, data capture, analysis and most importantly synthesis leading towards decisions. These decisions have to be precise and effective.

The second pillar – convergence of technologies – is about adding and combining state-of-the-art technologies, using them to create more insights as well as new therapies or diagnostics.

The third pillar – preventive health – is stemming from the understanding that it's better to keep people healthy than to restore health. Health is not solely an aspect of the body, but also of the mind.

All of these factors need to converge in order to maintain health. The patient needs to be empowered, aware of the importance of prevention, have easy access to primary care, and have tools that will support his own desire to stay healthy, which leads to the fourth pillar – sustainability of health.

*Possible Vinnovate projects beyond the 'current focal points'?*

Yes, possible Smart Health/PM-related Vinnovate 2026 projects can be, thematically, outside the scope of the “current focal points”, but need then to be aligned one of the four pillars of the pilot.

## 5. VI Hydrogen Pilot (H2)

*Thematic coverage of the pilot*

The Hydrogen Pilot aims to strengthen all segments of the European hydrogen value chain by promoting interregional collaboration among industrial actors, academia, and research and technology organisations (RTOs). It focuses particularly on fostering new business relationships, with an emphasis on SMEs and startups.

*Current focal points*

The following structural areas of cooperation are currently being addressed. In the context of Vinnovate 2026, the Hydrogen Pilot remains open to projects that may not fall directly within the areas listed below, provided they are aligned with the thematic coverage described above:

- **H<sub>2</sub> for Decarbonising Carbon-Intensive Industries** (e.g., innovative H<sub>2</sub> applications across various sectors)
- **Logistics, Storage, and H<sub>2</sub> Transportation** (e.g., new technologies for H<sub>2</sub> transportation and dispensing, high-pressure composite storage and tanks, hydrogen compression technologies)
- **Interregional Collaboration for H<sub>2</sub> Development** (e.g., one-stop-shop platforms, matchmaking activities, online collaboration platforms)
- **H<sub>2</sub> for Mobility Applications** (e.g., advanced H<sub>2</sub> refuelling technologies, portable and flexible solutions, fuel HRS - Hydrogen Refuelling Stations – development, cryogenic and compressed storage, certification processes)
- **Technologies for Clean H<sub>2</sub> Production** (e.g., cost reduction, increased efficiency and flexibility in hydrogen production through electrolysis and other renewable-based technologies)

*Possible Vinnovate projects beyond the 'current focal points'?*

Vinnovate 2026 projects can be, thematically, outside the scope of the “current focal points”, but need to be aligned with the general “thematic coverage” as:

- Development of more affordable fuel cells
- Biohydrogen production technologies
- Applications for energy, steel, cement, refinery, chemicals sectors, including CCU/CCS solutions
- Hydrogen for aviation applications

## 6. EFFICIENT AND SUSTAINABLE MANUFACTURING

*Thematic coverage of the pilot*

The pilot focuses to integrate a multidisciplinary set of advanced and innovative enabling technologies and digital innovations (TRL7/8) and to exploit the regional Smart Specializations in synergic way to offer services to European end-users, mainly manufacturing companies, to solve specific industrial challenges related to their products.

*Current focal points*

Currently (February 2026), the area of interests are the following :

- De- and Remanufacturing: Technologies and business models for circular economy to re-use, remanufacture and recycle products and materials in all sectors.



- Polymer-based functional products: Advanced sustainable surface treatments and material technologies for functional polymer components in various applications.
- Digital Transformation: “Industry 4.0” technologies applied to manufacturing environments to realise highly performing and human-centred digital/virtual factories.
- Energy-flexible and resource-efficient factory operation: Technologies and methods to optimize energy/materials consumption in manufacturing processes and to realize emission-neutral factories.
- Enabling technologies: Innovations driving and/or evolving manufacturing processes to be smarter and environmentally cleaner, as well as more efficient and sustainable.

*Possible Vinnovate projects beyond the ‘current focal points’?*

Yes, possible ESM-related Vinnovate 2026 projects can be, thematically, outside the scope of the “current focal points”, but need then to be aligned with the general “thematic coverage”.