

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

SAFE - Support and Assistance Facility for Experts

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The European Media and Information Fund (EMIF), established by the European University Institute (EUI) and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, serves as a pivotal mechanism to uphold the integrity of information ecosystems across Europe.

In response to the alarming rise in threats targeting journalists, fact-checkers, researchers, and media organizations, EMIF launches the Support and Assistance Facility for Experts (SAFE) Initiative. This initiative is designed to address urgent

needs that jeopardize the safety, operational capacity, and resilience of actors committed to combating disinformation and safeguarding democratic discourse.

Recent assessments, supported by evidence from the European Digital Media Observatory and the European Parliament, reveal a concerning escalation of physical, digital, and legal threats against information professionals. These threats—ranging from physical violence and online harassment to strategic lawsuits and digital surveillance—undermine not only the individuals directly affected but also the broader mission of fostering a trustworthy and fact-based digital landscape in Europe.

In this context, SAFE aims to provide targeted financial assistance to mitigate the adverse impacts of such threats, ensuring that essential work can continue without fear or obstruction.

1. Objectives

The primary objective of this Call is to provide timely and effective financial support to entities within the European counter-disinformation ecosystem that are exposed to imminent threats affecting their operational capacity, security, and well-being.

This initiative seeks to empower journalists, fact-checkers, researchers, and media organizations to continue their vital work by offering support in critical situations.

Grants provided under this Call will fund initiatives aimed at:

- Offering legal assistance for those facing strategic lawsuits or legal intimidation intended to suppress free expression and investigative reporting.
- Enhancing digital security infrastructure, particularly for those affected by targeted cyberattacks or surveillance measures.
- Providing psychological support for professionals experiencing harassment or other adversarial behaviour.

- Covering costs related to the documentation and archiving of adversarial incidents, ensuring evidence is preserved for future legal or institutional action.
- Facilitating emergency training on how to respond to threats, harassment, and digital attacks.
- Addressing other urgent needs arising from harassment or adverse actions, evaluated on a case-by-case basis, supported by compelling evidence.

2. *Conditions of Admissibility*

2.1. Deadline for Applications

This is a permanent call open until 27 February 2026, at 12:59 CET. Applications may be submitted at any time before this date.

2.2. Size and Duration of Projects

Grants awarded under this Call will provide financial assistance up to a maximum of €10,000 per request, with the possibility of exceeding this amount in duly justified cases. The supported actions must be initiated promptly upon grant approval and concluded within a timeframe of three months from the date of disbursement, unless otherwise approved by the EMIF Management Committee.

2.3. Eligible Applicants

The following categories of applicants are eligible to apply:

- (i) Past and present EMIF Grantees
- (ii) Fact-checking organizations within the EDMO and European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN) networks
- (iii) Other organisations that are members of the EDMO Network consortia (including EDMOeu and the Hubs)

2.4. Eligible Activities

Only applications addressing urgent needs related to the safety and operational capacity of media and information professionals will be considered. The following types of activities are eligible:

- Legal support for defense and protection against intimidation;
- Enhancement of digital infrastructure security;
- Psychological assistance for individuals facing harassment;
- Documentation and archiving of evidence related to threats or attacks;
- Emergency training sessions on handling threats and harassment;
- Other relevant measures responding directly to the threats faced, evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

2.5. Exclusion Criteria

Applicants which are in one of the following exclusion situations cannot participate:

- bankruptcy, insolvency or winding-up procedures, affairs or assets administered by a court or a liquidator, arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities or other similar procedures;
- in breach of social security or tax obligations, established by a final judgement or a final administrative decision;
- guilty of grave professional misconduct (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant), established by a final judgement or a final administrative decision;
- committed fraud, corruption, links to a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant), established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision;
- shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations in the performance of a procurement contract, a grant agreement, or a grant decision, which has led to its early termination or to the application of liquidated damages or other contractual penalties, (including if done by

persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant);

- guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Regulation (EC) No 2988/95 (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision making- or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant);
- creation of an entity under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant), established by a final judgement or a final administrative decision;
- resident or ordinarily resident of an EU or US embargoed country;
- as a natural person, an employee of the government or an employee of a government-controlled entity.

The applicant must provide an original “blue ink” signed declaration on their honour certifying that they are not in one of the situations referred to above.

EMIF shall not award a grant to an applicant who:

- is in one of the exclusion situations mentioned above; or
- has misrepresented information required as a condition for participating to the Call, or has failed to supply that information; or
- was previously involved in the preparation of this Call, thereby causing a distortion of competition that cannot be remedied otherwise (conflict of interest).

3. Submission of Applications

Applications shall be submitted using the simplified online application form available on EMIF’s website: emifund.eu.

Applications shall be submitted in English and specify the requested grant amount. Supporting documents shall be submitted in their original language, as well as in an English translation. Applications submitted on paper are not accepted.

The application should include the following elements:

- A completed eligibility questionnaire to ensure compliance with the scope of this Call;
- A detailed description of the situation and rationale for applying;
- A clear breakdown of the requested amount and a justification for the use of funds;
- Disclosure of other forms of support received or pending;
- Relevant supporting documents or evidence.

Once a proposal is submitted, the applicant will receive a confirmation e-mail (with date and time of application). Absent this confirmation e-mail, the proposal should be considered as not submitted. If the applicant concerned believes this is due to a fault in the submission system, EMIF should be alerted within 5 days by email to be sent to info@emifund.eu with a reference to the Call's title, explaining the circumstances. EMIF's Management Committee will decide on such cases.

4. Evaluation and Award Procedure

4.1. Eligibility Checks

Based on the documentation provided by the applicant, the EMIF Unit at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation will identify all eligible projects that may be funded, by performing the following checks:

- Regularity of the application
- Eligibility of applicants
- Eligibility of the proposed activities
- Exclusion criteria
- All mandatory annexes/supporting documents in their original language, as well as in an English translation.

The applications that fail to satisfy any of the above eligibility checks will not go through the admissibility phase. Based on these checks, the list of organisations admitted to the evaluation phase will be established.

Applicants whose applications are rejected at this stage shall be informed and have 5 working days to appeal, counted from the day after the notification. Appeals may be sent via email to: info@emifund.eu. Received appeals shall be analysed by the EMIF Unit and forwarded with an opinion to EMIF's Management Committee, which will make the final decision.

Applicants will be kept informed at each step of the process and a specific timeframe will be communicated to them regarding the selection and decision-making process, upon receipt of their application. All applicants will be informed about the decision by email.

All projects included in the list of admitted projects will move forward to the evaluation phase.

4.2. Evaluation procedure

All eligible applications will be reviewed by an independent Evaluation Committee composed of experts appointed by the EMIF Management Committee. This committee will ensure a fair and impartial assessment of each application based on the relevance of the request and the urgency of the situation presented.

4.3. Decision on Grants

The Evaluation Committee will provide recommendations to the EMIF Management Committee, which will make the final decision regarding the approval of grants. The decision-making process will prioritize:

- The immediacy and severity of the threat faced by the applicant;
- The potential impact of the requested assistance on enabling the applicant to continue their essential work;
- The justification provided for the requested amount and the appropriateness of the proposed use of funds.

The Management Committee reserves the right to:

- Approve the grant in full or partially, depending on the justification and available budget;
- Request additional information from the applicant before making a final decision;
- Reject the application if it fails to meet the necessary standards of eligibility or justification.

Applicants will be duly notified by email about the outcome of the evaluation.

4.4. Grant Agreement

Successful applicants will enter into a Grant Agreement with EMIF, specifying the terms and conditions of the awarded funding, including reporting obligations, and payment arrangements. The Agreement will ensure that the funds are used strictly for the purposes outlined in the approved application.

Portuguese law governs all agreements and the place of jurisdiction for any disputes is Lisbon.

4.5. Form of Grant and Funding Rate

The grant will be defined by applying a funding rate of 100% to the eligible costs actually incurred and declared by the beneficiary, up to a maximum of € 10 000, with the possibility of exceeding this amount in duly justified cases.

The estimated budget of the action must be attached to the Application Form. It must be drawn up in euros.

5. Reporting and Payment Arrangements

5.1. Reporting

Beneficiaries must provide valid invoices or equivalent proof of expenditure for all costs incurred under the grant, in accordance with the approved application and Grant Agreement.

5.2. Payment Arrangements

To facilitate immediate response and reduce administrative burden, the following payment modalities will be available:

- A) Direct reimbursement: Payments will be made upon submission and verification of eligible invoices and supporting documentation.

or,

- B) Lump sum payments: Where applicable, pre-agreed lump sum payments may be issued to cover specific costs outlined in the approved application. These payments will not require detailed expense reporting but will be subject to verification that the funded activity has been duly implemented.

The applicants must specify which modality they are requesting.

5.3. Audit and Verification

While maintaining the need for flexibility due to the emergency nature of the fund, EMIF reserves the right to conduct audits to ensure that funds have been used appropriately in accordance with the Grant Agreement. Beneficiaries must retain all financial documentation, including invoices and proof of payment, for a minimum of five years following the completion of the funded activities.

In the event of non-compliance or misuse of funds, EMIF reserves the right to recover the disbursed amount, either partially or in full. However, audits will be conducted with due consideration for the urgency and exceptional circumstances surrounding the support provided.

6. Budget

The allocation for this Call is € 150 000.

7. Processing of Personal Data

If processing of grant applications under this Call involve the recording and processing of personal data (such as your name, address and CV), such data will be processed only for the purposes of evaluating the submitted proposal and in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 and Decision No 1247/2002/EC.

8. Contacts

Questions and requests for clarification may be sent to info@emifund.eu with a reference to the Call's title: SAFE – Support and Assistance Facility for Experts.