

Transformation and Internationalisation – NRW.Europa 2022 – 2025

Successful, digital, sustainable and resilient –
with new partners, markets and innovative products



Editorial

A historic turning point?

We have the feeling in many socio-economic areas of our lives that the foundations forming the basis for our daily activities are changing dramatically: from the need to invest in private and public infrastructure in various areas, also beyond transport and digitalisation, to tipping points in climate targets and challenges arising from the lack of security for businesses. It is significant that the EU is now giving especially its economic and industrial policy a new compass so that companies can operate more innovatively and competitively not only in the European Single Market but also on the global playing field. An ambitious undertaking! And the exact starting point for NRW.Europa, which as the regional hub of the Enterprise Europe Network wants to help stakeholders in North Rhine-Westphalia position themselves (better) for the future. In this brochure, we present some examples from practice and our answers to the questions of our times.

First and foremost: our service offer is always needs-based. And it works. While overall economic growth in Germany is stagnating or declining, NRW.Europa's clients are registering growth rates of around 30 percent and going against the trend by finding structural solutions and new partners. Adapting business models, new technologies as well as access to markets and financial support offer potential that conventional SMEs can unlock just as well as start-ups and scale-ups. The Enterprise Europe Network works closely with companies and places their growth in the forefront. To do this, NRW.Europa operates across borders. Over 300 of our clients have confirmed that they are now more innovative thanks to the Network or are working internationally to open up new markets. In addition, we have been able to help more than 4,000 SMEs in NRW by answering their questions on the internal market.

Alongside ZENIT GmbH as consortium leader and NRW.BANK as consortium partner, NRW.Global Business GmbH and IHK NRW e. V. have been associated partners since 2022. This is complemented by a wide network of stakeholders and multipliers committed to the successful development of the region's SMEs.

The project is financed by the EU, the Ministry of Culture and Science and the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Industry, Climate Action and Energy in NRW and NRW.BANK. Funding for NRW.Europa's services has recently been secured for the next phase until the end of 2028.



Petra Milesevic,
NRW.Europa Project Manager,
NRW.BANK

”

“In challenging times like these, many companies need financial assistance to stay successful. We are at their side, accompany them on their journey into international markets and identify public funding and financing instruments that are customised to their requirements and support their goals as well as possible.”

“



Tim Schüürmann,
NRW.Europa Coordinator,
ZENIT GmbH

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“Innovations, regardless of the type, and the ability to respond smartly to external conditions are the foundation for corporate growth. Providing assistance and at the same time creating sustainable access to suppliers and markets – that is the task of ZENIT and NRW.Europa.”

“

Hot off the press: As of 1 July 2025, the Landes-Gewerbeförderungsstelle des nordrhein-westfälischen Handwerks will join NRW.Europa as an associated partner.

Against this background, we wish you exciting reading!

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**30TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE SINGLE MARKET**
#SingleMarket30



We are part of it because...



... we began helping small and medium-sized enterprises to turn good ideas into successful products and services back in the mid-1980s, strengthening North Rhine-Westphalia as a business location in the process. As the State of North Rhine-Westphalia's agency for innovation and European affairs, each year we accompany the innovation projects of around 4,000 primarily technology-oriented companies. We do this, for example, in our five specialist fields: digitalisation, AI and Industry 4.0, sustainability and circular economy, HR development, public procurement of innovations, and health, medical technology and life sciences.

Integrated in European networks from the very outset, networking is part of our inherent self-perception. Not only are we the consortium leader of NRW.Europa, this philosophy is also reflected in our shareholder structure. With the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, a group of banks and Netzwerk ZENIT e.V., we bring together all the partners required to develop practice-oriented solutions for ever-changing challenges, strengthen cooperation between business and science, and accompany companies on their path to transformation and internationalisation.

www.zenit.eu



... together with our partners in the NRW.Europa consortium, we want to empower North Rhine-Westphalia even more. As the promotional bank for North Rhine-Westphalia, NRW.BANK assists the state with its structural and economic policy tasks, for instance by providing promotional loans for companies. Since the bank's foundation in 2002, over 900,000 projects have been funded, many of them in the business sector. The bank also offers promotional funds and financial instruments for internationalisation projects.

Companies that put projects into practice abroad strengthen their market position and thus also the economy in North Rhine-Westphalia. As the EU Funding/Foreign Trade & Investment Promotion Department of NRW.BANK, our aim within the NRW.Europa consortium is not only to contribute to a competitive, sustainable and future-oriented business landscape but also to further strengthen it over the longer term. With publications and events, we support SMEs on their international journey and provide information on public funding. With an individual approach, we show companies which customised funding and financing options are available for their planned foreign trade activities at state, federal and EU level as well as in the target country of their project.

www.nrwbank.de



... with the EEN we can complement our core activities in an ideal way. As the state-owned foreign trade promotion company, we are the first point of contact for all companies when it comes to investment projects and settling in North Rhine-Westphalia, developing growth markets and networking with international business partners. As Germany's leading business location, the state is in demand among foreign investors worldwide as well as home to numerous companies with global growth potential.

With our international offices abroad, we are represented in the markets of the future around the world and, with this extensive network, facilitate a direct dialogue with companies and investors who want to benefit from the advantages of North Rhine-Westphalia in both directions. Through our cooperation with the Enterprise Europe Network, we offer these clients extensive, sound and expert advice on how to make the most of opportunities in NRW and throughout the world.

www.nrwglobalbusiness.com



IHK NRW – Die Industrie- und Handelskammern in Nordrhein-Westfalen

... we in the NRW.Europa consortium aspire to a common goal: to empower and support small and medium-sized enterprises on their path to internationalisation. This necessitates bundled expertise and using synergies between stakeholders in the area of foreign trade.

Here, the chambers of industry and commerce in North Rhine-Westphalia have many years of practice-oriented expertise in supporting their member companies: around two thirds of all NRW companies, with almost six million employees, are members of the chambers.

With numerous specialist events and a broad range of information and advisory services, particularly in the field of customs and foreign trade law as well as market data, the chambers assist companies with their international business activities as a reliable partner. In addition, the global network, comprising chambers of commerce and industry and the German Chambers of Commerce Abroad, which are represented in 140 locations in 92 countries, contributes country-specific know-how across the world.

www.ihk-nrw.de

Cooperation

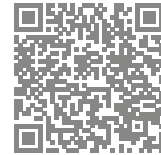


JHT Jakobs-Houben Technologie GmbH

When a blank piece of paper becomes more:
Development of a 3D-printed vacuum roller

“The NRW.Europa team has a fantastic network that helped us to find a professional manufacturing partner for our innovative 3D-printed rollers. We have been working extremely well with ZENIT for over 20 years and are looking forward to many more exciting projects.”

Alexander Houben
Managing Director
JHT Jakobs-Houben Technologie GmbH, Geilenkirchen
www.jht.eu



portance GmbH

Sustainable, made in Europe and doesn't smell:
New sportswear label benefits from NRW.Europa's support

“I can only advise every start-up entrepreneur to use the Network. Without the NRW.Europa team, we would not have found the European suppliers for our high-quality sportswear. We are convinced that good networking is the warp and woof of success.”

Dominic Hammann
Founder and Managing Director
portance GmbH, Essen
www.portance.de



portance

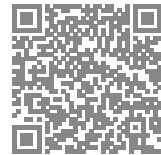


Alteva Technologies GmbH

Lightweight high-performance batteries for heavy (aircraft) equipment: Start-up utilises EU funding

“The funding brings us a whole lot closer to our vision of contributing to a better future by producing more sustainable batteries. To this end, we want to commercialise our innovative approach for the production of lithium-sulphur (LiS) batteries, which is specifically geared to applications in aircraft, long-haul trucks and other areas of transportation. We can only advise all start-ups to avail themselves of the NRW.Europa team’s expertise.”

Aiko Bernehd and Ida Milow
 Founding Team
 Alteva Technologies GmbH, Cologne
www.alteva.tech



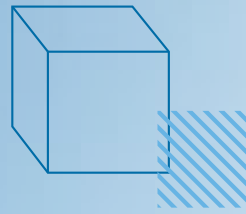
Nature Compound GmbH

Less is more: Development of a bio-based granulate as an alternative to plastic

“With the help of the NRW.Europa team, we were able to obtain start-up funding for the construction of our manufacturing facility, where we are developing and producing high-quality bioplastics from natural raw materials that are suitable for a wide range of sectors. But the team’s advice is always helpful in other areas as well, such as participation in matchmaking events or information related to growth. Its support has enabled us to establish valuable contacts and successfully develop our company.”

Niclas Beutler
 Managing Director
 Nature Compound GmbH, Schwerte
www.nature-compound.com





Transformation

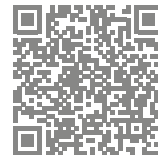
Kerz Innenausbau GmbH

Tradition meets modernity:
EU support for modern compressor technology



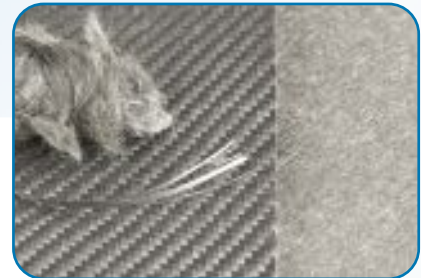
For over 20 years, Kerz has combined digital technology and traditional craftsmanship to produce everything from simple furniture to complex projects and individual interior fittings for private and commercial applications. “We used the subsidy for our joinery to replace a conventional screw compressor in our furniture production line with a speed-controlled version. The old compressor consumed around 8,500 kWh of electricity per year; our consumption is now just under 5,000 kWh, which equates to an energy saving of over 40%. A fantastic result!”

Christoph Kerz
Managing Director
Kerz Innenausbau GmbH, Stolberg
www.kerz-innenausbau.de



FibreCoat GmbH

Innovative high-performance materials for a global future:
Coating specialist’s vision for growth



“In early 2024, when we were thinking about entering the Japanese market, we immediately had competent sparring partners at our side.” Having done some research, the NRW.Europa team suggested a programme run by the “EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation”. The training programme is designed for SMEs and enables them to develop an understanding of the Japanese market as well as establish initial contacts on site. “A tremendous opportunity that gave us many valuable market insights. The NRW.Europa team has constantly helped us to expand our international network. A partnership we thoroughly recommend!”

Richard Haas
Founder and Chief Operating Officer
FibreCoat GmbH, Aachen
www.fibrecoat.de



FloodWaive Predictive Intelligence GmbH

Flood prediction software:
Start-up uses ESA funding for feasibility study



With its AI software “DeepWaive”, the start-up FloodWaive has developed an innovative solution for predicting urban flood risks in the event of heavy rainfall and high water, taking the local terrain and geography into account. To be able to use the system worldwide, FloodWaive applied for funding from the European Space Agency (ESA) and was successful. “This lays the cornerstone for the development of extended and more comprehensive functions that will enable us to scale up and expand our services for better early warning and risk mitigation. To increase their chance of funding, start-ups and companies looking for ways to finance their innovative ideas should definitely make use of the expertise offered by the NRW.Europa funding team.”

Dr Julian Hofmann
Managing Director
FloodWaive Predictive Intelligence GmbH, Aachen
www.floodwaive.de



FRABA GmbH

Search for new location and service providers:
Automation specialist uses NRW.Europa's support



“As a provider of solutions in the field of automation and distributor of sensor systems and safety products with facilities in the USA, Singapore, China, Poland, Malaysia, the Netherlands and Germany, an international presence and R&D partnerships are a significant competitive advantage. The research and provision of important country information and key data on the overall conditions in the target markets helps us with our investment decisions. We are grateful for the EU's support – in the shape of NRW.Europa's advisors – on our growth trajectory.”

Dimitri Pritzkau
R&D Project Manager
FRABA GmbH, Cologne
www.fraba.de



Internationalisation

Start-up Support

Wax Solutions GmbH

Natural barrier coatings for the paper and packaging industry



The goal pursued by Wax Solutions, a start-up founded in May 2023, is to replace petroleum-based plastics by substituting such products in paper coatings with renewable raw materials. “We are very pleased that we can further advance our development with the help of this funding. The support from the NRW.Europa team at ZENIT has helped us a lot. The funding is also accelerating our scaling, which is enabling us to produce industrial quantities in line with market demand.”

Dr Kasper van der Zwan
Innovation Manager
Wax Solutions GmbH, Versmold

www.wax.solutions



Kunststoffverarbeitung Hoffmann GmbH / Lamb Space Tec GmbH

Development and qualification of sustainable satellite structures: Plastics specialist awarded EU funding



“We develop miniature satellites from high-performance plastic. In comparison to conventional aluminium structures, our CubeSat modules made of PEEK are more resource-efficient, lighter and more robust. The funding enabled us to cover the initial costs for the development, testing and qualification of the new structure made of recycle or biopolymers. The solution will contribute to a better circular economy and less dependence on critical raw materials in the aerospace industry. The NRW.Europa team is a partner that no company should forego when it comes to advice on and obtaining EU funding.”

Dr Sven Langbein
Managing Director
Lamb Space Tec GmbH, Heiligenhaus

www.lambspace.com



I.M.A. Pilzling GmbH

Urban farming:
Using technology to grow mushrooms



“Urban. Sustainable. Organic – Mushrooms straight from your city.”

This is the slogan that welcomes visitors to start-up Pilzling’s website. The founding team’s goal is ambitious: it aims to revolutionise urban agriculture and sustainable food production. The company is using EU funding to develop and install a state-of-the-art monitoring and control system. “Thanks to the funding, we are able to automate and optimise several aspects of the mushroom cultivation process, which boosts our competitiveness and contributes to sustainability in the region around Cologne.”

Christian Vetter, Trevor Weiss
Managing Director and Founder, Co-Founder
I.M.A. Pilzling GmbH, Cologne
www.pilzling.site



cylib GmbH

Pioneering and sustainable:
Innovative battery recycling



The scale-up cylib offers a sustainable and innovative solution for the recycling of lithium-ion batteries that allows all critical raw materials, such as lithium and graphite, to be recovered. An EU grant obtained with advisory support from the NRW.Europa funding team in 2023 helped to put the idea into practice. cylib works together with leading OEMs and battery manufacturers and is currently using extensive funding to scale up its own production capacities to an industrial level. “Especially research-intensive, technology-oriented start-ups need a lot of capital. That is why we advise everyone to make use of free services such as those provided by the Enterprise Europe Network.”

Dr Lilian Schwich, Paul Sabarny, Dr Gideon Schwich
Founding Team
cylib GmbH, Aachen
www.cylib.de





NRW.Europa

Your regional partner on the path to transformation and internationalisation

NRW.Europa – Your partner in the Enterprise Europe Network

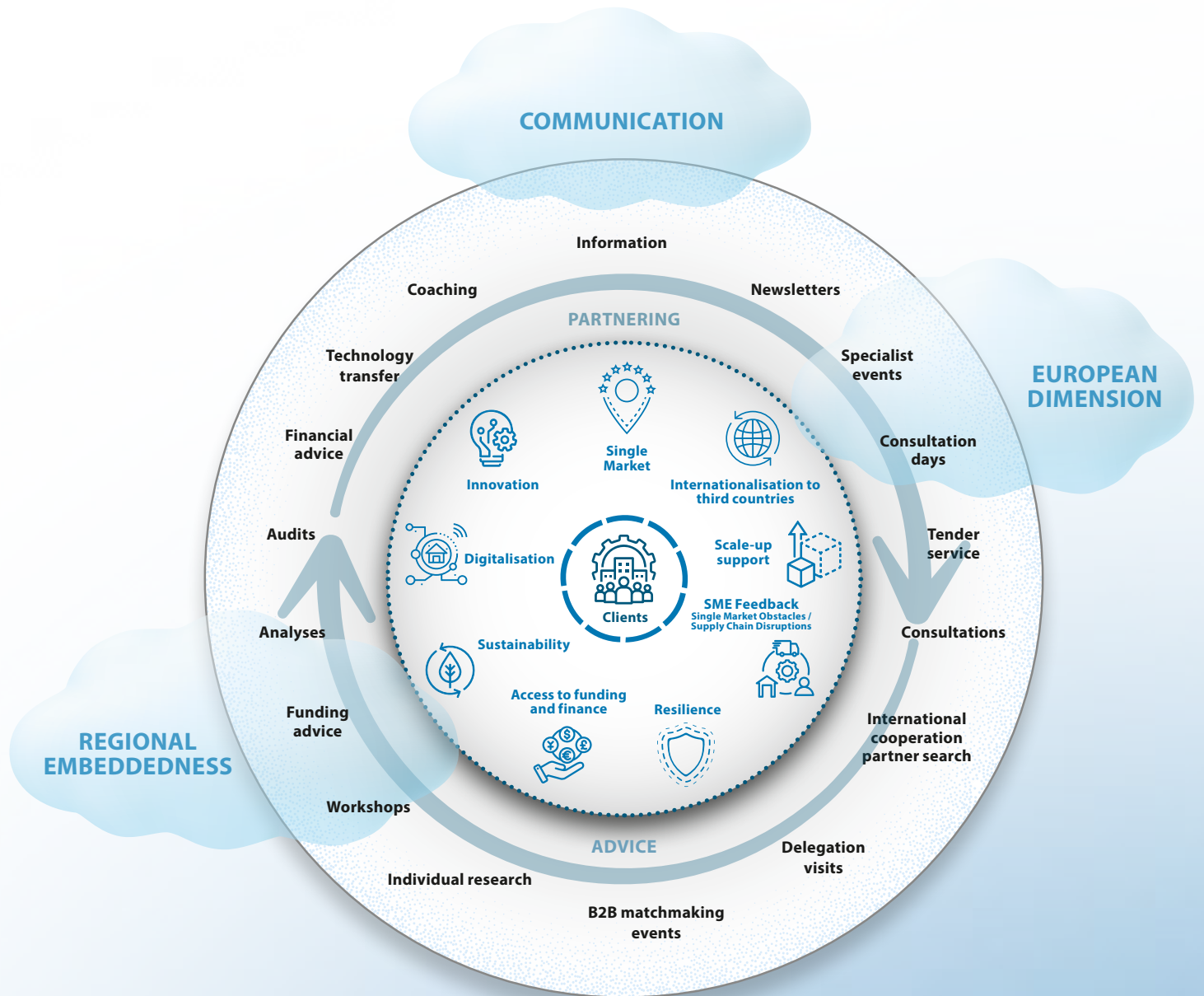
NRW.Europa is the North Rhine-Westphalian hub of the Enterprise Europe Network, an initiative of the European Commission. The Network supports small and medium-sized enterprises at regional level in over 50 countries, helping them – on a very individual basis – to shore up resilience, internationalisation, innovation, digitalisation and sustainability in their day-to-day business operations – also by utilising the potential offered by the Single Market. Among other services, Network advisors answer questions about going international in third countries or access to financing and funding, also for fast-growing companies. Also important to the European Commission is feedback from SMEs on barriers or problems.

These services are provided in North Rhine-Westphalia by ZENIT GmbH, NRW.BANK, IHK NRW e. V. and NRW.Global Business GmbH. NRW.Europa is financed by the EU, the State of North Rhine-Westphalia and NRW.BANK. As of 1 July 2025, another strong partner will join NRW.Europa: the Landes-Gewerbeförderungsstelle des nordrhein-westfälischen Handwerks.

Especially small and medium-sized enterprises are deeply entrenched in supply chain structures and dependent on them. The Network's task is to help them innovate and develop new markets as well as point out suitable financing and funding opportunities. That is why one of NRW.Europa's core activities is to highlight the importance of cross-border supply chains as a source of opportunities for international B2B relationships and partnerships in purchasing, the skilled craft sector, technology transfer and research.

The starting point for NRW.Europa's support is the specific requirements of the individual company, which benefits from the consortium's advisory expertise and its international connections with over 500 partner organisations in the Enterprise Europe Network. This "Network effect" is unique and helps companies to grow even in times of crisis as well as to develop and maintain viable business foundations and models.

NRW.Europa Services



Would you like our support? We are happy to give you individual advice.

nrweuropa.de/kontakt

@NRWEuropa

#EENCanHelp

#EEN_Deutschland

A compass for Europe and North Rhine-Westphalia: Less red tape, more dynamism

In 2008, the European Commission launched the Enterprise Europe Network as an important instrument to support small and medium-sized enterprises and make them more competitive. In December 2024, a new European Commission took office under the second mandate of President Ursula von der Leyen. At the end of January 2025, the European Commission presented its Competitiveness Compass. The current focus of the new Commission's agenda is sustainable prosperity and competitiveness on the basis of three core areas for action:

1. Closing the innovation gap

To improve conditions for businesses, the Start-up and Scale-up Strategy and the European Innovation Act will be introduced. In addition, SMEs will be assisted with digitalisation and the use of AI and modern technologies.

The European Commission has additionally undertaken to present a Horizontal Single Market Strategy. The aim is to fully unlock the EU's potential and upgrade its economic performance in the long term.

These three core areas are supplemented by five horizontal enablers critical to strengthening competitiveness across sectors: Simplification; Removing barriers in the Single Market; Financing competitiveness; Promoting skills and quality jobs; Better coordination of policies at EU and national level.

2. Decarbonising the economy

The Clean Industrial Deal should ensure a clean and competitive transition. To supplement this, the Industrial Decarbonisation Accelerator Act and the Circular Economy Act are in preparation.

Measures such as the Omnibus Directive aim to lessen the regulatory load for companies, for example by reducing reporting obligations, particularly in the area of sustainability (e.g. ESG reporting). SMEs benefit from simplified due diligence and less administrative burdens, which should strengthen their competitiveness.

3. Increasing security and reducing dependencies

The European Commission wants to modernise and deepen the internal market, reduce regulatory burdens and encourage investment. Measures include the integration of the Western Balkans and Ukraine into the European Single Market, the conclusion of free trade agreements and the development of partnerships for clean trade and investment. At the end of March 2025, the European Commission also presented the Preparedness Union Strategy in response to emerging threats.

Overall, the European Commission's activities aim to shape a business-friendly environment that fosters innovation, creates high-quality jobs and strengthens the internal market. The goal is to provide affordable and safe products and services that are also environmentally sustainable and socially responsible.

EU Feedback

Enterprise Europe Network – The voice of Europe's SMEs



Rules are often complex or impractical, which leads to unintended market barriers.

To adapt existing and future legislation better to business reality, local partners such as the NRW.Europa team collect feedback and forward it to the respective EU institutions.

The Enterprise Europe Network's "EU Feedback" instrument enables small and medium-sized enterprises to relay their experiences, challenges and suggestions on EU regulations directly to the European Commission.

All topics important for the economy – from digitalisation to the Green Deal and the shortage of skilled workers – are relevant. Individual feedback also has an influence, as it is incorporated into public consultations and impact assessments.

Your voice counts – via EU Feedback, the Enterprise Europe Network offers SMEs a direct bridge to Brussels – for more visibility, greater participation and better conditions.

nrweuropa.de/en/unser-angebot/eu-feedback/



Cascade Funding

Simple access to EU funding



Cascade funding facilitates easier access to EU funds for SMEs, start-ups and research institutions. In 2024, around 100 calls for projects in various sectors were published, covering topics such as digitalisation, AI, health, sustainability, production technologies and cybersecurity.

The advantages:

- Funding rates of up to 100%
- Grants of up to €300,000
- Applications without consortium partners are possible in some calls
- Low-threshold application procedure
- Fast application and approval processes (decisions within 1-2 months)

The Enterprise Europe Network helps companies to identify suitable cascade funding calls, structure project ideas, formulate applications and, if necessary, brings together technology or cooperation partners.

Cascade funding is an ideal instrument for SMEs to gather initial EU experience or to secure funding specifically for implementing innovative technologies and solutions. The Enterprise Europe Network provides information on open calls on a regular basis and gives companies practice-oriented support – for more innovation, growth and competitiveness in Europe.

[nrweuropa.de/en/unser-angebot/
foerdermittelberatung/
cascadefunding/](https://nrweuropa.de/en/unser-angebot/foerdermittelberatung/cascadefunding/)



Growth. Internationalisation. Resilience. Innovation.

We support business and science.

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 Printing with financial
climate contribution
ClimatePartner.com/11567-2504-1001

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