



Funding Support To Third Parties (FSTP)

ICT49 working group

Summary and lessons learnt from Open Calls closed until July 2022

Name	Project	Organisation
Author:		
Izabela Zrazinska	BonsAPPs, ICT49 FSTP WG Lead	Fundingbox
Contributors:		
Urszula Sobek	StairwAI	Fundingbox
Thomas Wilczek	I-nergy	Fundingbox
Xenia Ziouvelou	AI4Copernicus	Demokritos
Luisa de Souza Goncalves	AIPlan4EU	F6S
Miriam Garcia	DIH4AI	Innovalia

Abbreviations

AI: Artificial Intelligence
FSTP: Funding Support To Third Parties
ICT: Information and Communications Technology
WG: Work Group
EC: European Commission
DIH: Digital Innovation Hub
GfA: Guide for Applicants

TRL: Technology Readiness Level
HPC: High-Performance Computing
BMP: Bonsel AI Marketplace
ML: Machine Learning
SME: Small and Medium Enterprise
OC: Open Call
KPIs: Key Performance Indicators

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	3
1.1. WHAT IS THE FUNDING SUPPORT TO THIRD PARTIES	4
1.2. WHAT IS AN OPEN CALL	5
2. OVERVIEW OF THE OPEN CALLS AND LESSONS LEARNED	5
3. OVERVIEW OF THE OPEN CALLS RESULTS	20
4. EXAMPLES OF OPEN CALL BENEFICIARIES	22
5. WHAT'S NEXT?	25
5.1 UPCOMING OPEN CALLS	25
5.2 SHOWCASING SUCCESS STORIES	28
6. CONCLUSION	29

Figures

Figure 1 ICT49 projects: Open Calls timeline	3
Figure 2 ICT49, FSTP WG objectives focus per period	3
Figure 3 Cascade Funding scope by Fundingbox	4
Figure 4 ICT49 Open Calls comparative.	21
Figure 5 Timeline of the ICT49 Use Cases presented in this document	22

Tables

Table 1 Summary of ICT-49 open calls closed by July 2022	12
Table 2 Summary of ICT-49 open calls results (closed by July 2022).....	20
Table 3 ICT49 Upcoming Open Calls	28

1. Introduction

The Funding Support to Third Parties (FSTP) Working Group has been created to strengthen synergies across **ICT49 projects** and enhance the EU AI on-demand platform in the realm of Open Calls and redistribution of grants.

The FSTP WG involves at least one representative from each ICT49 project (**StairwAI, BonsAPPs, AIPlan4EU, AI4Copernicus, DIH4AI & I-nergy**) and it is led by Fundingbox.

The group is meeting quarterly since the launch of the ICT49 project at - the beginning of 2021.

The FSTP WG **objectives** change depending on the stage of projects execution and its open-call tasks.

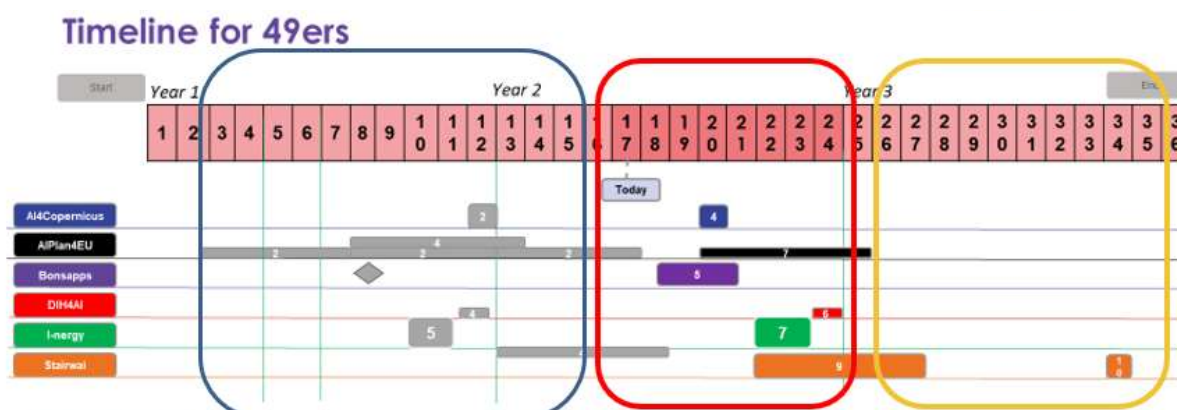


Figure 1 ICT49 projects: Open Calls timeline

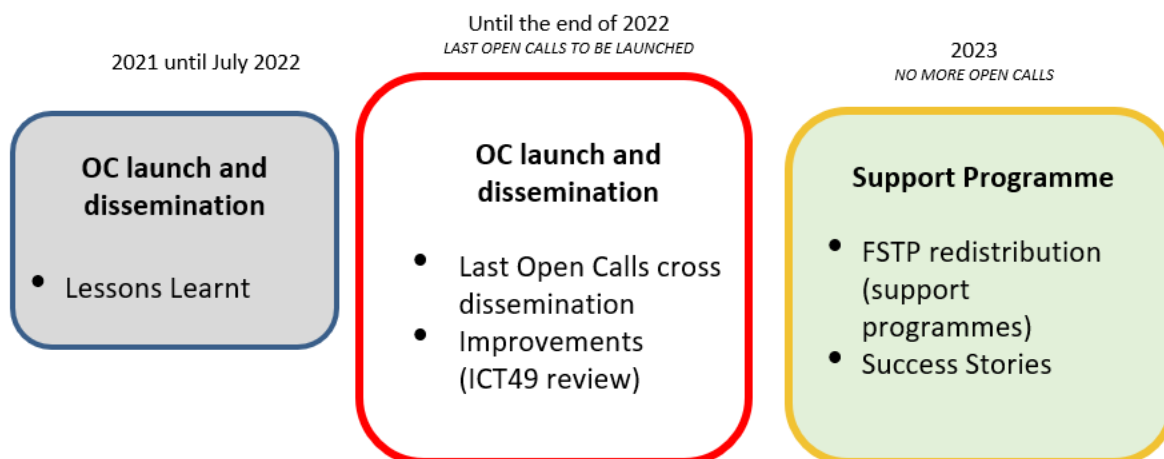


Figure 2 ICT49, FSTP WG objectives focus per period

In the first months of projects execution (M1 - M18), the FSTP WG was focused on:

- Definition and status of project Open Call activities
- Cooperation opportunities
- Cross-dissemination activities between projects
- Connection to AIoD
- Other (for ex. recommendations from ICT49 joint review)

As of today, each project has closed at least one Open Call. That allowed the WG to prepare an overview of the past open calls and lessons learnt gathered from Open Call Managers involved in this phase of the ICT49 projects (until Month 18, July 2022) that are presented in this document (stage marked in blue in the Figures 1 and 2).

The last chapter of this report is focused on the upcoming Open Calls (marked in red on the figures) and an overview of future WG actions related to Success Stories (marked in yellow on the figures).

1.1. What is the Funding Support to Third Parties

Financial Support to Third Parties, also known as Cascade Funding, is a solution implemented by the European Commission to distribute public funding.

It is available for particular programmes and it intends to generate projects that have a budget to assist the final beneficiaries (third parties), such as start-ups, scale-ups, SMEs and/or mid-caps, in the uptake or development of digital innovation.

There are some particularities to this solution: funding comes from public money, and the process is closely monitored; however, the project is managed by a consortium of public and private entities that are highly specialized in the particular topic; this facilitates the selected third parties are as competitive as possible in that area; apart from that, cascade funding does usually involve not only funding but also mentoring (technical and business) and there is the intention to facilitate contact between all those third parties that receive funding.

This means that FSTP offers the final beneficiary (start-up, scale-up, SME, midcap) funding, mentoring, relevant networking possibilities and the opportunity to implement a technical solution that is relevant to them and could have been more difficult (or impossible) to implement otherwise.



Figure 3 Cascade Funding scope by Fundingbox

1.2. What is an Open Call

An Open Call is an invitation to third parties to submit a proposal to get funding. In the context of EU proposal preparation, Open Calls cover specific research areas and are always issued in the context of a Work Programme.

An OC in a cascade funding project is a very specific call, guided by publicly available documents that are aligned with the objectives and commitments of the general project.

Those documents allow applicants to understand the minimum criteria and scope, such as: can apply (type of entity, country of origin, technical characteristics, intent), the type of project (often called Use Case) that may be executed under the support programme if accepted, the type of support that they may expect, etc. One relevant characteristic of open calls is that they are transparent: anyone who wishes to apply may obtain sufficient information to know whether or not they have good chances beforehand.

Open calls involve also the evaluation process, which is defined beforehand, publicly available for anyone who wants to know about it, and based on equal opportunities with specific considerations to diversity when relevant.

2. Overview of the Open Calls and lessons learned

All ICT49 projects were executing financial support to third parties and open calls in line with the conditions set out in [part K of the General Annexes](#). A minimum of EUR 2 million in funding per project has been dedicated to it, with grants between EUR 50.000 to 200.000 per the third party.¹

*The selection process should prioritise projects maximising the impact of the platform and demonstrating the benefit of AI in products, processes or services. Particular attention will be paid to SMEs and the low-tech sector, which can best benefit from the support offered by the platform. The selected projects should also cover a wide spread of application sectors, to demonstrate the versatility and scalability of the platform offers.*²

Despite the common vision to foster the adoption of AI, via use-cases experiments and pre-defined rules mentioned above, each project defined the open call according to its objectives (with a focus on testing the service layer of the AI-on-demand-platform) with experiences of the Open Call leading partners. Thanks to this diversity, the **Open Calls that were launched by the ICT49 group aimed at different types of beneficiaries led to a redistribution of FSTP funding to a variety of sectors, types of entities and geographic coverage (see OC results section of this document).**

The general overview of 11 open calls finished until July 2022 and their characteristics are presented in Table 1.

¹ An amount higher than EUR 60.000 had to be justified, based on the need for expensive hardware or infrastructure for instance.

² Direct quote from ICT-49-2020 Artificial Intelligence on-demand platform. For more information: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/ict-49-2020>

	AI4Copernicus		AIPlan4EU		BonsAPPs	DIH4AI	I-nergy	StairwAI
Consortium Partner leading Open Call	Demokritos		F6S		Fundingbox	Innovalia	Fundingbox	Fundingbox
No. OCs closed until July 2022	3 Open Calls for SMEs (1st, 3rd and 4th)	1 Open Call for Citizen Challenges (2nd)	2 Open Calls for Use Cases	1 Open Call for Innovators	1 Open Call for AI Talents	1 Open Call for SME-centered AI experiments	1 Technology Transfer Open Call	1st Open Call for Pilots
Open Calls websites	1st Open Call 3rd Open Call 4th Open Call	2nd Open Call	1st Open Call 2nd Open Call	1st Open Call	1st Open Call	1st Open Call	1st Open Call	1st Open Call
Scope	Developing and testing AI technical solutions that address industrial challenges (1st and 3rd OC) or	Identifying, defining and addressing particular social problems/challenges that can be solved using Artificial Intelligence and	Provide AI Planning use-cases	3 different tracks, distinguishing three different kinds of contributions. Track A: Planning Technology Track B: Integration of Use Cases	AI at Edge solutions	Extend and improve the DIH4AI catalogue of advanced AI components and tools and/or participate in	Address the developments and implementation of technology and systems applicable to specific cross-sectorial	Low-tech SMEs from any industry to test and validate AI resources to improve their products, services, or value chains

	AI4Copernicus		AIPlan4EU		BonsAPPs	DIH4AI	I-nergy	StairwAI
	selected citizen-driven societal challenges (4th OC) by exploiting AI resources and Earth Observation Data focusing only on 4 industrial domains (1st OC), or any industrial domain (3rd and 4th OC)	Earth Observation Data (1st Stage), by SMEs that will be selected in the 4th AI4Copernicus Open Call for SMEs		Track C: Technology-Specific Bridge for Healthcare Use Cases		innovative experiments in the domain of Artificial Intelligence Type A: Intra-Regional Skills Technology Experiment Type B: Cross-Regional Skills Technology Experiment	Challenges within the Energy sector.	focusing on one of the call-specific challenges.
Role of applicant	SME OCs: tech developer/tech integrator	Citizens OC: social problems/challenges that can be solved using Artificial Intelligence	Provide AI Planning Use-cases in areas such as space, agriculture, manufacturing, logistics, autonomous driving,	Track A: develop software tool/library/technology related to planning Track B: solve a planning use case, exploiting the capabilities of the unified planning	Develop and integrate AI@Edge Solutions to Bonseyes AI Marketplace	Type A: Mini-consortia formed by 2-3 partners: • An AI technology provider SME leads	Develop building blocks and applications for new AI algorithms/services and small-scale experiments (Prototypes)	AI Adopter: defines the AI Adoption Use Case

	AI4Copernicus		AIPlan4EU		BonsAPPs	DIH4AI	I-nergy	StairwAI
			<p>automated experimentation, submarine robotics, or any others that prove to be relevant</p>	<p>framework</p> <p>Track C: integrate an existing healthcare use case with the unified planning framework (UPF)</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A regional AI DIH (from the JRC Catalogue) • Optionally, a user SME or a Policy Maker <p>Type B: Mini-consortia formed by 3 partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An AI technology provider SME leads • A regional AI DIH (from the JRC Catalogue) • A second DIH (from the JRC Catalogue) as a testing and experimental 		

	AI4Copernicus		AIPlan4EU		BonsAPPs	DIH4AI	I-energy	StairwAI
						facility		
TRL level	Minimum TRL5 AI prototypes	NA	NA	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	The preferable initial TRL (Technology Readiness Level) should be TRL3. Maximum initial TRL: 4.	NA
Sector/ Vertical	Energy, security, health, agriculture (1st OC) any (3rd OC and 4th OC)	any	Sector independent (AIPlanning solutions in any sector)	Sector independent (AIPlanning solutions in any sector)	Robotics, Manufacturing, HealthCare, Manufacturing	Finance and insurance, public administration, Earth observation, Manufacturing, Agri-Food	Energy	Rethinking and visibility of supply chains Human resources Management of data generated by the internet of things Predictive maintenance Zero defect manufacturing

	AI4Copernicus		AIPlan4EU		BonsAPPs	DIH4AI	I-nergy	StairwAI
								Environmental issues Logistics Chatbots
Legal type of applicant	<p>Consortia of high-tech & at least 1 low-tech SME (1st OC and 4th OC)</p> <p>Single partner projects of SMEs, startups, spin-offs ((3rd OC)</p>	Natural persons	Natural persons, SMEs	<p>Track A: Innovators (researchers, experts, students,...) and organisations (SMEs, MidCaps, larger companies, universities, research institutes, labs,...)</p> <p>Track B: A consortium of 2 organizations (a use-case owner and a TSB provider (SMEs, MidCaps, larger companies, universities, research institutes, labs,...)</p> <p>Track C: Organizations (SMEs, MidCaps, larger companies,</p>	Natural persons, Teams (up to 5), SMEs, and Research and Technology Organisations.	<p>Type A: SME or Startup (AI Technology Provider) who leads the experiment</p> <p>The regional DIH</p> <p>Optionally, an end-user SME or Policy Maker</p> <p>Type B: SME or Startup (AI Technology Provider) who leads the</p>	Single (individual) SMEs, including startups	Low tech SMEs

	AI4Copernicus		AIPlan4EU		BonsAPPs	DIH4AI	I-nergy	StairwAI
				universities, research institutes, labs,...) that can provide TSBs for the given healthcare use-case		experiment The regional DIH Another DIH located in a country other than the one of the regional DIH		
Selection Process stages	Eligibility External Evaluation	Eligibility External Evaluation	Eligibility External Evaluation Optional Interview Consensus Meeting	Eligibility External Evaluation Optional Interview Consensus Meeting	Eligibility External Evaluation Consensus Meeting	Eligibility External Evaluation	Eligibility Pre Scoring External Evaluation Consensus Meeting	Eligibility Pre Scoring External Evaluation Consensus Meeting Jury Day

	AI4Copernicus		AIPlan4EU		BonsAPPs	DIH4AI	I-nergy	StairwAI
Grant	Consortia: Up to 150.000 € (three-partner), up to 120.000 € (two-partner), Single partner: up to 80.000 €	5.000 EUR per challenge	€1500 per use-case to attend a workshop The use-case winner will also be funded to support the use-case implementation foreseen in the future open calls	Track A: €60.000 Track B: €90.000 for each consortium Track C: €90.000	Up to 70.000 € (including up to 10.00 EUR Vouchers for HPC Services)	Up to 100.000 € for consortia	Up to 50.000 €	Up to 60.000 € (including up to 10.000 EUR Vouchers for HPC Services and up to 24.000 EUR for contracting AI Talents)
Support program	For SMEs: 16 months. Resources and tools, business and technical mentoring, certification and visibility.	NA	A workshop where you will get help to further develop and specify your use case in the context of AI Planning	Track A: 7 months Track B: 7 months Track C: 7 months	6 months. Technical Support from BCA mentors. Access to Boneyes marketplace platform, and business support from AI mentors.	8 months Provided by the DIHs: technical support and mentoring, development services	6-month technology transfer program	6 months. Technical and Business support from UNBIO and FBA mentors. Support of AI experts and cloud providers

Table 1 Summary of ICT-49 open calls closed by July 2022

Based on the information gathered in the table and lessons learned shared in the FSTP Working Group by each projects Open Call Manager, the following analysis and lessons learnt were made:

Legal type of applicants:

Of 11 open calls that were closed by July 2022, almost all of them were focused on companies, particularly SMEs.

Some open calls had an option for natural/individual persons to apply. In the cases of AI4Copernicus 2nd OC for Citizens and AIPlan4EU Open Calls for Use Case their profile was focused on defining the challenges/use cases. In the case of BonsAPPs Open Call for AI Talents, natural persons were allowed to apply because the project was looking for an AI supply side to engage AI specialists that would develop AI solutions.

Other types of institutions that were allowed:

- Research and Technology Centers (BonsAPPs 1st Open Call for AI Talents) to allow teams of a researcher to apply
- DIHs (DIH4AI 1st Open Call) to extend the DIH Network ecosystem. DIHs would provide technical support.

AI4PlanEU: *widening the legal type of applicants in our open calls helped us to reach excellent results. After the change, not only SMEs but also any type of company, individuals and research centres/university are accepted. The change was implemented because most of the knowledge on AI Planning is still concentrated in academia. This **diversity enabled applicants to build consortia that involved applicants both from academia and industry.** As an outcome, the number of applications has increased significantly and brought diversity and synergies between academia and industry, which boosts innovation.*

Role of applicants:

An interesting difference can be noticed in the profiles of applicants as per the role. Depending on the role of the selected applicant and the outcome expected, each ICT49 project has defined its open-call scope using 2 main roles:

- Technology provider / Innovator: these open calls were focused on finding an innovator that will develop AI solutions. Technology Provider could be defined as any entity which designs, builds or rebuilds, programs, installs, modifies, distributes, or supplies systems and/or technology for AI.

Projects that were looking for this role: AI4Copernicus Open Calls for SMEs, AIPlan4EU Innovators Open Calls, BonsAPPs AI Talents Open Call, DIH4AI 1st Open Call, I-nergy 1st Open Call)

- Adopter / Use Cases / Challenge owners: these open calls were focused on defining the challenges/use cases that could be solved by Innovators. Such applicants are companies interested in improving their products, services, or value chains with AI / defining the challenge.

Projects that were looking for this role: AI4Copernicus Open Calls for Citizens, AIPlan4EU Use Case Open Calls, and StairwAI Open Call for low-tech SMEs.

*BonsAPPs: Since AI Talents/Innovators are connected to the AI ecosystem already, it was much easier to reach those types of stakeholders (more than for ex. Adopters/low-tech companies that require the creation of dedicated **awareness campaigns**).*

Some projects were conducting individual open calls to define the challenge that could be solved by innovators selected in another type of open call (AI4Copernicus and AIPlan4EU).

AI4Copernicus 2nd Open Call for Citizens: It is important to include citizens in the innovation process, despite the lower number of (expected) proposals. The same is true for the inclusion of low-technology SMEs that can collaborate with more high-technology companies, acquire significant knowledge and technology transfer and establish a supporting network.

Other projects were looking for projects that involve directly Innovators with institutions that can support them in AI Solutions development (DIH4AI).

Another example is BonsAPPs where AI Talents were developing AI Solutions that will be reused for the upcoming call for Adopter SMEs.

TRL level:

TRL level was applied mostly in the open calls for Technology Providers type of applicants. Only 2 out of 6 projects applied the filter for the TRL level.

AI4Copernicus: Balancing between very innovative proposals with a potentially higher failure rate versus less innovative but more realistic projects (higher feasibility). It would be beneficial to allow for highly novel and lower feasibility projects that would enable more conclusions to be reached on the technological and business challenges.

Sector/Vertical:

The range of sectors is quite wide. Those that stand out in many projects are Energy (AI4Copernicus, I-nergy) Healthcare (AI4Copernicus, BonsAPPs), and Manufacturing (BonsAPPs, DIH4AI).

Some projects (AIPlan4EU and StairwAI) did not apply any sector focus. In AIPlan4EU the key was to apply AI to planning and in the case of StairwAI which aimed to reach low-tech SMEs the sector was wide open.

*StairwAI 1st Open Call for Pilots: In the challenge-based open call, special efforts should be dedicated to the selection of the **appropriate challenges, that are not very narrow or too specific, to not limit the number of potential applicants**. The scope of challenges, in the case of StairwAI, determined the type of applications submitted to the open call. What helped us to reach the great number of applications (116 submitted) was a **broad approach to the definition of the challenges**.*

During the first call, StairwAI focused more on industry-driven challenges, while some interesting projects not fitting any of the 9 challenges, remained out of the scope. For the next open call, we extended the list of challenges by adding the challenges related to health, education, energy, public services and arts.

Specific requirements of each open call:

It is important to underline that some Open Calls had specific requirements for applicants that allowed them to narrow down the applications to those that fit the project scope and support to be provided to selected beneficiaries. In most cases, the scope was focused on testing the tools that are being developed by each project for AIoD platform.

AI4Copernicus: use of technologies available in the AI4Copernicus platform

AI4Copernicus: *The level of difficulty of the open call and its specifications impact significantly the number of proposals. However, this may not be necessarily a negative aspect.*

BonsAPPs: developing AI Solutions with Bonseyes Marketplace tools

BonsAPPs: *One of the main difficulties in 1st BonsAPPs Open Call was the requirement of using the Bonseyes Marketplace platform workflow and the need for applicants to refer to it already in the proposal phase. It was solved by additional materials and demos prepared by technical partners, nevertheless, it is an important lesson learnt: **when launching Open Calls that are connected to the platform development process and requirements make sure that detailed information about the platform is provided.***

AIPlan4EU: robust collection of planning engines within the UPF (Unified Planning Framework)

AIPlan4EU: *Launching an open call in the **early stages of the project was frustrating as the technical concepts and the dissemination & communication activities were in the early stages.** So, it was very difficult to design an open call with few resources.*

DIH4AI: To test and validate the previously mentioned DIH L-BEST Service Pipeline in the “AI Providers” [and, possibly, “AI Users”] Customer Journeys.

DIH4AI: *The most important challenge was to integrate the Open Call Winners on the DIH4AI framework because they were not used to our **METHODIH (an internal methodology) and they have had to learn how we operate.***

StairwAI: testing, validating and feasibility assessment of AI resources offered by StairwAI to improve low-tech SMEs products, services or value chains. SMEs have to focus on solving a specific challenge using a set of AI tools and resources that are available as a service layer of the AIoD platform.

StairwAI: *Elaborating on the Low-tech SMEs definition: StairwAI is aiming to select and support low-tech SMEs. During the open call preparation, special attention was given to the proper definition of low-tech companies and the explanation of the type of applicants that are eligible for funding. As a result, the StairwAI consortium agreed on a low-tech definition based on AI Readiness Index (AIRI). The methodology was developed by AI SINGAPORE and adjusted to the StairwAI project.*

For StairwAI Open Call, the low-tech SMEs are considered to be companies (SMEs) with AI Readiness Index (AIRI) below or equal to 2.0 (classified as AI Unaware or AI Aware). The AIRI was measured based on the 6 questions included in the application form.

Energy: developing building blocks and applications for new AI algorithms/services and small-scale experiments (prototypes) using own resources (modules, models and components) that address the developments and implementation of technology and systems applicable to at least one of the outlined specific cross-sectorial Challenges in the Energy Sector to enrich the AI resources and tools catalogue for Energy on Europe's AI-on-demand platform.

Energy 1st Open Call: We need to make a second effort (especially now that the new CSA has been launched) and clarify the strategy and vision of the AIoD (also a joint review comment) as the current strategy is not clear enough and this affects both the services found on the platform and the Open Calls.

Beneficiaries feel detached from the AIoD platform and their assets. Our second call is about re-using the assets from AIOD, however, no useful assets can be found so far. There is a continuous struggle with the beneficiaries from the 1st Open Call to ensure that they understand contributing to AIoD is the main goal. There is a risk of beneficiaries also contributing the minimum for the AIoD.

Selection Process:

All projects applied the obligatory stage of eligibility and external evaluation. Most of them include also the final phase of the Consensus Meeting.

Additional phases applied by some of the projects include:

- Optional Interviews (AI4PlanEU)
- Jury Day (StairwAI)

Many projects underline that the final phase of **signing the Sub Grant Agreements with beneficiaries is very time-consuming.**

DIH4AI 1st Open Call: it should be noted that signing the contracts with the winners of the Open Call is time-consuming because of all the different documents and requirements that must be fulfilled by them. For this reason, all the processes can incur delays, and the starting date of the project can be delayed.

Type of support:

All open calls included different types of support, with the particularity of DIH4AI in which direct support was provided by the DIH(s) involved in the applicant consortium.

Funding available is quite similar in most projects (**60k EUR per ticket per the third party** - otherwise according to a topic it would need justification). Grants higher than this (for ex AI4Copernicus or DIH4AI) involve consortia so the grant is always divided and 60k EUR is never exceeded.

Two projects - BonsAPPs and StairwAI have implemented voucher procedures. In those cases, beneficiaries (Adopters) will be able to select AI Talents and HPC Cloud services from a validated pool of suppliers. Those services will be contracted and paid directly by Adopter and reimbursed at the end of the project.

BonsAPPs and StairwAI: joint application form for external providers validation (AI Talents and HPC Providers). Thanks to this collaboration each entity that applied could be considered in both projects, even though the validation criteria and process were slightly different (each project was executing is separately). Joint dissemination efforts allowed reaching a great number of submissions.

As per **support programmes, the typical duration is 6 months with exception** of AI4Copernicus whose programme lasts 16 months.

Connection with AIoD:

An important note was made concerning the commercial use of applications that would be developed during the projects that had to be defined already at the Open Call stage.

Inergy: We missed a well-defined strategy from AIoD about priorities that each project should keep between a selection of open-source applications OR innovative commercial but private products. AIoD is it a platform to promote commercial -mostly private - products of SMEs or a platform to share openly tools/publications/outcomes of EC projects? Initially, the AI4EU project was focused on both, however, the site didn't make that clear. The recent technical coordination WG defined as an open source first and if not possible commercial / closed, therefore this ambiguity remains.

This cascades into the context of the Open Calls goals -> Is the ultimate goal to boost the competitiveness and promotion of commercial European startups / SMEs with their private product or reinforce the AIOD with great open and re-usable assets? The balance between those should have been crystal clear, we can't serve both adequately.

StairwAI: it would be great to have a Technical contact point (a person) in the AIOD development team to address our needs.

Some projects underlined that to promote AIoD to applicants through Open Calls it should have a better user interface and some promotional materials that could have been used during open calls dissemination.

*Inergy: Better evaluation of the assets published in AIoD by all contributors including beneficiaries so it doesn't end up as a catalogue of outdated / not useful or re-usable assets, more tutorials for the AIoD platform – common effort from the ICT-49 projects and a **revamp of the platform UX. Make AioD more relevant for applicants.***

Timing:

Some projects mentioned the importance of timing for the Open Call launch and duration. Summertime and Christmas break should be avoided.

Early planning and all consortium partners involved were mentioned by many projects as a key for open call definition. It is important to align the open call with the support programme definition as well.

Ethics:

The assessment list for TrustworthyAI and environmental impact analysis was included in most project's selection processes to ensure the beneficiaries take it into account from the start.

I nergy: We plan to share the results of the TrustworthyAI assessment of the applicants with the TAI WG and work towards providing a common procedure/lessons learnt for trustworthy Ai assessment of the solutions of OC applicants.

BonsAPPs project applied pseudonymization techniques (evaluators couldn't see personal or sensitive data like gender). *"We believe this additional ethical measure allowed us to avoid biases in evaluation. Experts were recruited from a pool of evaluators that were part of AI4EU and ELISE projects."*

Open Calls Dissemination:

All projects agree that cross-dissemination between the ICT-49 (actions made under FSTP and Communication workgroups) and other EU projects and initiatives related to AI, ML and digital technologies was very helpful to reach the target audience.

It has been underlined that common open calls dissemination strategy should have been planned since the beginning.

BonsAPPs: it would help if the plan for joint actions were included since the beginning of the GA of each project with clear responsibilities and tasks for the FSTP/Communication workgroups as a part of the project dissemination strategy.

Other communities that should be contacted during OC dissemination could be also SMEs/Digitalization/Research oriented.

AIPlan4EU: Start checking where most of the experts/companies focused on your project AI topic is concentrated (Academia, Big Companies, SMEs). Your open call should cover these communities, otherwise, the number of applications will be very low.

AI4Copernicus: Create a joint ecosystem of SMEs that after the funding will need more rounds of funds and support to be sustainable. Linkages and value-added aspects of the AI-on-Demand platform/AI4Europe project should be examined.

Linkages with key European SME associations (i.e., EU Digital SME Alliance) would be beneficial for all ICT-49 projects and the SMEs that participate in the open calls.



Funding Support to Third Parties Working Group

DIH4AI: Moreover, it would help to increase the participation of proposals if we increase our connections. With the help of the Digital Transformation Accelerator (DTA) EDIHs Network we could involve more partners in specific dissemination actions in each country to cover more countries and receive more proposals from more different countries.

All projects collaborated with AI4EU project, although some sources were overloaded.

BonsAPPs: It was difficult to book an Info Session through AI4EU WebCafes it had to be booked one year in advance (!)

To each bigger audience in different countries, all projects were organizing the Info Days/Webinars.

DIH4AI: To promote the Call and reach a wider audience we established some webinar info days, and as a result, in the end, countries such as Romania, Greece, France and Portugal are the countries that follow them, presenting 5 proposals each.

Common events strategy could have been planned to join world-class events:

BonsAPPs: Long-term planning for events participation - if planned we could have joined forces to participate in World Class events with one common ICT49 booth and workshops or events to organize our joint events.

3. Overview of the Open Calls results

In total 11 Open Calls were closed until July 2022 with 606 applications submitted and 105 third parties selected for funding and support.

A summary of the Open Call results is presented below:

	AI4Copernicus		AIPlan4EU		BonsAPPs	DIH4AI	I-nergy	StairwAI	TOTAL
Consortium Partner leading Open Call	Demokritos		F6S		Fundingbox	Innovalia	Fundingbox	Fundingbox	
OC	3 Open Calls for SMEs (1st, 3rd and 4th)	1 Open Call for Citizen Challenges (2nd)	2 Open Calls for Use Cases	1 Open Call for Innovators	1 Open Call for AI Talents	1 Open Call for SME-centered AI experiments	1 Technology Transfer Open Call	1st Open Call for Pilots	11 Open Calls
OC: applications submitted	34 + 51 + 7 = 92	12	17+37=54	48	126	73 + 7 = 80	126	116	606
OC: projects selected	6 + 8 + 3 = 17	2	3 + 7 = 10	5 + 7 = 12	30	7+3 = 10	10	14	105
TOP countries of application submission	Spain, Italy, Greece, Germany	Austria, Spain, Italy	Spain, Italy, Germany, UK	Spain, Italy, UK	Spain, Italy, Greece, Tunisia, France	Spain, Italy	Italy, Spain, Germany, Greece, Portugal	Spain, Italy, Greece	Spain, Italy, Greece

Tabla 2 . Summary of ICT-49 open calls results (closed by July 2022)

Based on the results it can be observed that in the majority of the projects the highest number of proposals submitted comes from Spain and Italy.

DIH4AI: High participation from these countries is because they are familiar with DIH Networks and companies know about their existence and how they work and which are the services they offer.

All projects achieved satisfactory results of applications submitted that allowed to select the high potential applicants.

Open Calls with the highest number of applications submitted are 1st BonsAPPs Open Call for AI Talents, 1st StairwAI Open Call for Pilots and 1st I nergy Open Call for Technology Transfer.

When reviewing these results it is important to take into account the analysis made in section 2 of this document - especially the type of applicant. It can be observed that open calls for consortia (AI4Copernicus or DIH4AI) have a lower number of submissions but as at least 2 companies had to be involved in those proposals it is more complex to create a proposal. It should be noted that the total number of SMEs/companies engaged in consortia open calls can be compared to the success of open calls for individual companies (BonsAPPs, StairwAI) if the number of SMEs engaged in the Open Call is counted instead of several proposals submitted.

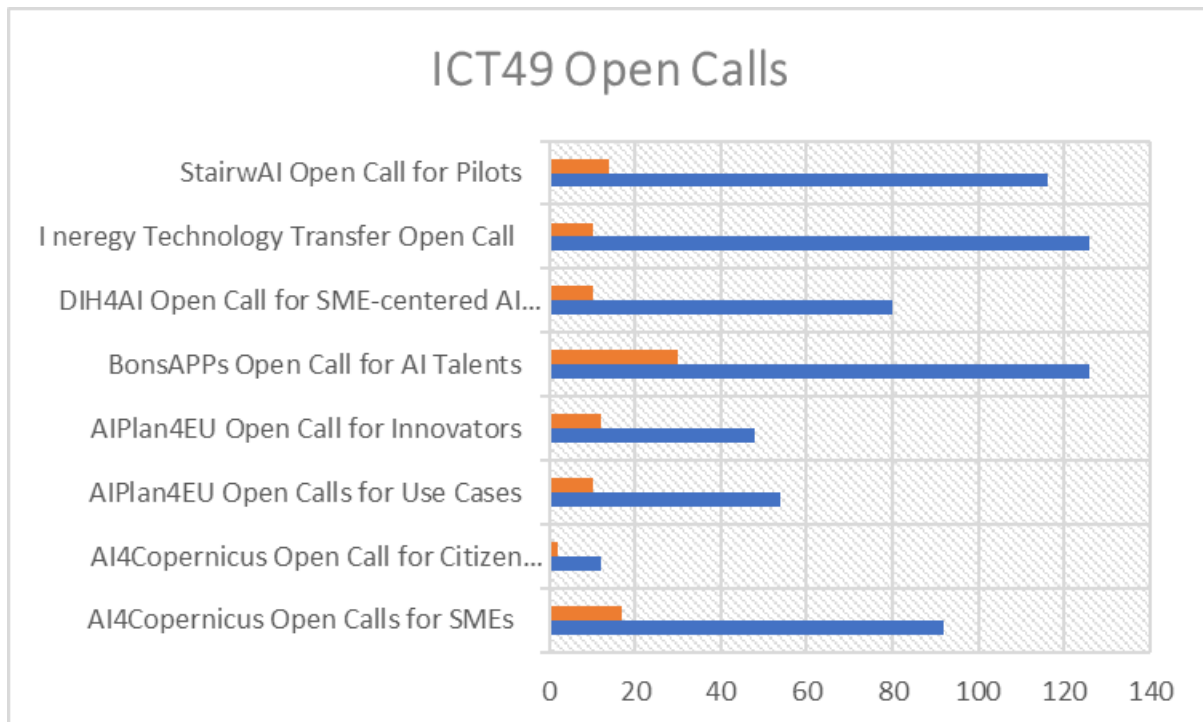


Figure 4 ICT49 Open Calls comparative. In orange applications selected. In blue applications submitted.

4. Examples of Open Call beneficiaries

It is relevant to point out the relevance of the availability of the proposed solutions, and their potential for reuse. All projects specifically call for unified systems, the production of building blocks to be readily available for other uses, or other solutions that ensure the effectiveness of the proposed solutions, the interoperability and the ease of integration for future users.

Examples of beneficiaries presented below represent a variety of sectors and geographic scopes. It is important to underline that due to the different timing of the projects most of them are still undergoing (only BonsAPPs have finished).³

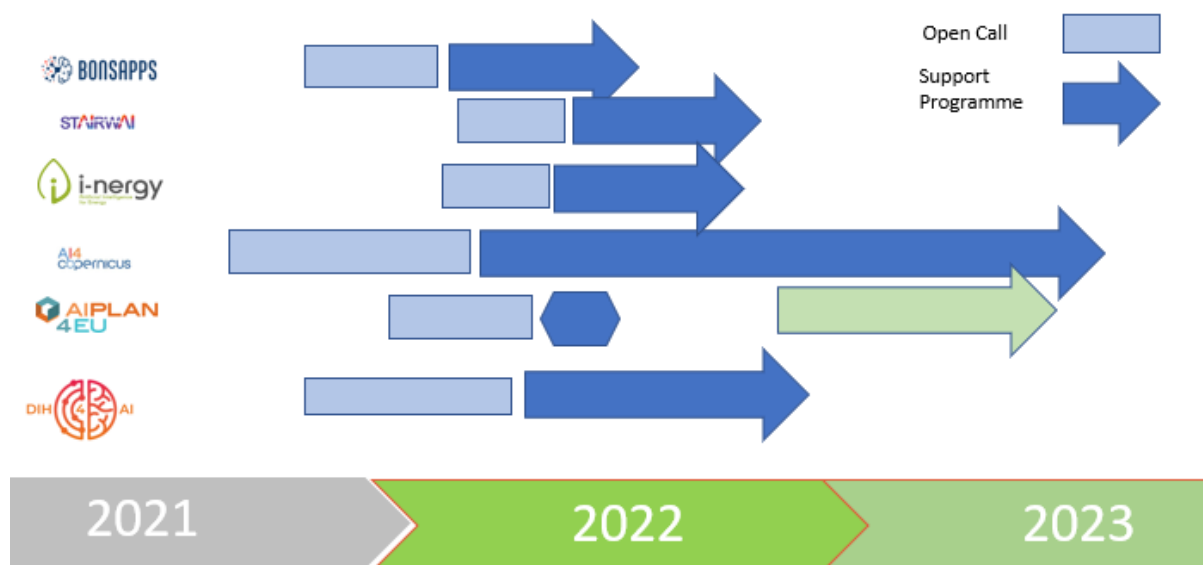


Figure 5 Timeline of the ICT49 Use Cases presented in this document

StairwAI:

Beneficiary from: Open Call 1 for Pilots (Nov 21 - Jan 22) for low-tech SMEs from any industry to test and validate AI resources to improve their products, services, or value chains focusing on one of the call-specific challenges.

Use Case participant: iBreve Ltd, Ireland

Use Case: HEALTH - Chatbots Challenge

EscalAitor: Emotion Sensing Chatbot And Lingual AI Treatment in Oncology Rehabilitation based on lingual analysis & real-time sensing

Funding received: 60.000 EUR, Ongoing Support Programme



³ Use Cases listed in this document took a part in discussion session organized by ICT49 projects during the European Week of Regions and Cities on 13th October. The summary and video from the discussion panel are available [here](#).

AIPlan4EU:

Beneficiary from: Open Call 2 Use Cases (Nov 21 - Feb 22) for individuals and companies to provide AI Planning use cases.

Use Case participant: Antoine Marot, Lead AI Scientist at RTE chez RTE Réseau de Transport d'Electricité

Use Case: L2RPN (Learning to run a power network with planning). This use case is in the energy sector. At a time of Energy Transition and Climate Change, AI-based assistant with planning capabilities are urgently needed for human operators to operate the grid with anticipation in this complex world.

Funding Received: 1.500 EUR per use-case to attend a workshop to further develop and specify use-case in the context of AI Planning

Antoine will participate in the next open call for innovators-Track C (Nov 2022). The project will select technology specif bridge (TSB) - developers (organisations and/or individuals) to address his use case. He will be funded with 30,000 Eur and the selected company/individual will be with 60.000 EUR.

I-energy:

Beneficiary from: Open Call 1 Technology Transfer 1 (Nov 21 - Jan 22). Looking for building blocks for new AI algorithms/services and small-scale experiments (Prototypes)

Use Case participant: Rebase.energy, Sweden

Use Case: E-ModelOps, the world's first ModelOps platform tailored for energy open source forecasting, optimisation and simulation use-cases it will solve challenges in different domains: AI applications in energy, Data governance and data valorisation for energy services, Analytical applications in energy, Monitoring, energy usage optimization and Demand forecast.

Funding received: 50.000 EUR, Ongoing Support Programme

DIH4AI:

Beneficiary from: DIH4AI 1st Open Call (Sep 2021 – January 2022) for SMEs and DIHs to promote and develop innovative experiments in any AI domain.

Use Case participants: R4P (Italy), MADE s.c.a.r.l (Italy) and Technická univerzita v Košiciach (Slovakia)

Use Case: Boosting AI vision system for robotics assembly line through cross-regional DIHs cooperation (DIH_okAI). Developing an AI algorithm integrated with the machine vision system allowing to boost automated process flexibility, handling larger and heavier components; customizing measuring system configuration in a parametric way on each plant and robot allowing for conformity check; availability, having higher pick availability. Enhanced manufacturing process competitiveness by delivering an innovative AI vision system for robotics assembly line leveraging cross-regional DIH L-BEST services

Funding received: 100.000 EUR, ongoing support programme.



AI4Copernicus:

Beneficiary from: AI4Copernicus 1st Round of Open Calls for Use Cases (Jun- Sept) 2021 for developing and testing AI technical solutions that address industrial challenges by exploiting AI resources and Earth Observation Data.

Use Case participants: SOLAIS and Transvalor, France

Use Case: SLIDE: Satellite Images Prediction with Deep Learning.

Forecasting solar power based on satellite imagery typically has trouble extrapolating cloud motions for this forecast horizon. Increasing this forecasting performance is particularly important for the management of energy systems and the safe operation of the power grid.

Funding received: up to 120.000 EUR (2-partner consortia)

Ongoing: will be concluded in July 2023

BonsAPPs:

Beneficiary from: Open Call 1 for AI Talents, (Sep 21 - Nov 21) demonstrates the capacity to execute the AI model training (Data Science), AI development and integration tasks with resources and services available through Boneyes Marketplace.

Use Case participants: Elif Lab, Italy

Use Case: Robotics sector, AVOID (Collision Avoidance). Developing an artificial intelligence solution that could allow the onboard camera input of an autonomous vehicle, drone or robot to be used to estimate the probability of collision with obstacles during navigation and to autonomously activate the right indications (action and steering angle) to avoid these obstacles and continue the navigation safely.

Funding received: 70.000 EUR, Finished on July 22



5. What's next?

5.1 Upcoming Open Calls

From all ICT49 projects, only AI4Copernicus project has already finished its Open Calls round. Most of the remaining Open Calls will be finished by the end of 2022. The FSTP WG will now focus on promoting the final round of 6 Open Calls launched presented in the table below:

	AIPlan4EU	BonsAPPs	DIH4AI	I-nergy	StairwAI	
Consortium Partner leading Open Call	F6S	Fundingbox	Innovalia	Fundingbox	Fundingbox	
No. OCs to be launched	2nd Open Call for Innovators	2nd Open Call for Adopter SMEs	2nd Open Call for SME-centered AI experiments	2nd Technology Transfer Open Call	2nd Open Call for Pilots	3rd Open Call for Adopters
When?	22 November 2022 – 24 January 2023	15 August - 2nd November 2022	17 October - 17 December 2022	10 October - 12 December 2022	13 October - 15 December 2022	February -April 2023
OC website	https://www.aiplan4eu-project.eu/ (TBC)	https://bonsapps-2nd-oc-adopters.fundingbox.com/	https://www.dih4ai.eu/open-call-2	https://i-nergy-2-oc.fundingbox.com/	https://stairwai-2nd-open-call.fundingbox.com/	https://stairwai.fundingbox.com/ (TBC)

	AIPlan4EU	BonsAPPs	DIH4AI	I-nergy	StairwAI	
Role of Applicant	<p>Track 1: contribution of planning technology to the AIPlan4EU ecosystem</p> <p>Track 2: development of a technology-specific bridge applying the AIPlan4EU library to an existing use-case in collaboration with the use-case owner</p>	<p>Define high potential Use Case for the development of low-cost, highly scalable AI Apps and Edge Solutions with the Use Bonseyes AI Marketplace services and resources</p>	<p>Type A: SME or Startup (AI Technology Provider) who leads the experiment</p> <p>The regional DIH</p> <p>Optionally, an end-user SME or Policy Maker</p> <p>Type B: SME or Startup (AI Technology Provider) who leads the experiment</p> <p>The regional DIH</p> <p>Another DIH located in a country other than the one of the regional DIH</p>	<p>Developing new services on top of existing technologies (Minimum Viable Products). Services for an energy-related domain are being developed and tested within a pilot set to get to a fully functional stage with produced assets being published on the AIoD platform.</p>	<p>low-tech SMEs from any industry to test and validate AI resources to improve their products, services, or value chains focusing on one of the call-specific challenges.</p>	<p>low-tech SMEs from any industry to prepare a feasibility assessment for the adoption of AI</p>
Legal Type of Applicant	<p>Organisations in general (Researcher Institutes, Universities, SMEs, Start-ups, Mid-Caps, larger</p>	<p>SMEs</p>	<p>Type A: Mini-consortia formed by 2-3 partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An AI technology 	<p>Consortia: 1 service developer/provider: SME,</p> <p>1 Pilot infrastructure provider/ Data Owner (EPES stakeholder):</p>	<p>SMEs</p>	

	AIPlan4EU	BonsAPPs	DIH4AI	I-nergy	StairwAI	
	companies) and Individuals.		<p>provider SME leads</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A regional AI DIH (from the JRC Catalogue) • Optionally, a user SME or a Policy Maker <p>Type B: Mini-consortia formed by 3 partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An AI technology provider SME leads • A regional AI DIH (from the JRC Catalogue) • A second DIH (from the JRC Catalogue) as a testing and experimental facility 	any entity.		
Grant	60.000 EUR	Up to 74.000 EUR (including up to 8k EUR Vouchers for HPC Services and up to 39k EUR for contracting AI Talents)	up to EUR 100,000 EUR per consortium	Up to 100.000 EUR for a consortium	(including up to 10.000 EUR Vouchers for HPC	Up to 10.000 EUR

	AIPlan4EU	BonsAPPs	DIH4AI	I-nergy	StairwAI	
					Services and up to 24.000 EUR for contractin g AI Talents)	
Expected number of projects selected	16	10	10	15	14	32

Table 3 ICT49 Upcoming Open Calls

5.2 Showcasing success stories

Another important goal for the FSTP WG is to agree on a common approach on how to position the results of beneficiaries selected through an open call that finished the support programme on the AI on-demand platform.⁴

It is an ideal moment to define a common way to present Use Cases on the AIoD platform as those will become pioneers in presenting how ICT49 funding was used. Success stories will become an inspiration for future Adopters.

Until now some projects published their Use Cases in the AIoD Case Studies section: <https://www.ai4europe.eu/business-and-industry/case-studies>.

⁴ At this moment almost all of the support programmes are still ongoing (only [BonsAPPs 1st Support Programme](#) has finished).

6. Conclusion

Even though joint efforts among ICT-49 projects yielded relevant results, particularly in terms of dissemination, there is still some potential to be exploited.

The AI-on-Demand platform has relevant potential, and yet its strategy and vision must be defined to improve service offers and OC descriptions. Without a clear vision, there is the risk that it ends up as a catalogue of outdated or not reusable assets when it could be an attractive environment for applicants.

Including joint dissemination actions in the GA since the beginning of projects would lead to better results and more efficiency. Also, long-term planning allows for joining world-class events or organising relevant or larger events.

Together with that, it would be relevant to create a joint ecosystem of SMEs that will need support after participation in these projects to be sustainable. This could be synergistic with the growth of the AIoD platform and the AI4Europe project. Links with key European SME Associations should be studied and would benefit all projects.

Joint efforts can go beyond dissemination and platform building - which is relevant enough. It would be interesting to expand towards data and tools exchange or running joint calls as happened between BonsAPPs and StairwAI

Future actions of the FSTP WG will be focused on promoting the last round of Open Calls and preparing for showcasing the success stories to raise awareness about AI Adoption and AIoD platform.