

# Guidelines for prospective organisations

## How to become a Topic Centre Organisation

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## Disclaimer

These guidelines are intended for information purposes only and the EEA is not responsible for the use made of their contents. They are offered to support identification of future Topic Centre Organisations. However, they should not be construed as a formal commitment on behalf of the EEA. These guidelines will be adjusted as needed and should not be seen as exhaustive.

## Changes to these guidelines

The EEA may update these guidelines to reflect changes in our practices or for other operational, legal or regulatory reasons. We will post updated guidelines on the EEA website with a revised '*last updated*' date. For significant changes, we will provide a more prominent notice.

## Processing of personal data

Any personal data provided by prospective organisations shall be processed pursuant to European regulations related to personal data protection, notably [Regulation \(EU\) 2018/1725](#).

Personal data shall be processed solely for the purposes of identifying and designating Topic Centre Organisations. The only personal data collected and further processed are the data provided in the digital form. These include the name and contact details of the designated contact person(s) within prospective organisations in EEA member countries.

The designated contact person within a prospective organisation shall have the right of access to their personal data and the right to rectify or update any such data that is inaccurate or incomplete at any time during the identification process. After the submission deadline, any request for access, rectification or erasure of personal data shall be addressed in writing to the EEA, acting as data controller, at [cei.topiccentre@eea.europa.eu](mailto:cei.topiccentre@eea.europa.eu).

## Definitions

**Eionet representative** – an individual designated by their country’s Management Board member to function as the link between national organisations and the EEA.

**European Topic Centre(s)** – the seven consortia in place until the end of 2026.

**Interested organisation** – an organisation indicating its interest with the relevant national Eionet representative.

**Prospective TCO/prospective organisation** – an organisation that has expressed an interest in becoming a TCO with the relevant national Eionet representative. Before expressing an interest, it is a prospective organisation. After expressing an interest, it becomes a prospective TCO.

**Topic Centre Organisation (TCO)** – an organisation designated by the EEA Management Board to be on the list of Topic Centre Organisations. These organisations are eligible to be contracted as Topic Centres. Inclusion on the list does not constitute any contractual commitment by the EEA.

**Topic Centre** – a single TCO that has been contracted as a Topic Centre via a contractual agreement with the EEA. The Topic Centre may subcontract to other TCOs or organisations outside Eionet.

**Topic Centre Consortium (TCC)** – a group of TCOs that has been contracted as a joint Topic Centre via a contractual agreement with the EEA. The TCC may subcontract to other TCOs or organisations outside Eionet.

**Legal entity** – an institution or other organisation, as referred to in Article 4(4) of the EEA-Eionet founding regulation ([Regulation \(EC\) No 401/2009](#)), that possesses legal capacity separate from its owner(s) and can enter into binding agreements in its own right and can be held accountable under the law.

# Introduction and context

## The EEA, Eionet and Topic Centres

The **European Environment Agency (EEA)**, operational since 1994, is the EU agency responsible for providing information on the European environment. The EEA's aim is to support sustainable development and help achieve a significant and measurable improvement in Europe's environment by delivering timely, targeted, relevant and reliable information to policymakers and the public.

To fulfil this mission, the EEA collects and analyses environmental data from its member countries, EU institutions and international organisations through the **European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet)**. Eionet comprises the EEA's member and cooperating countries and operates through four key components: national focal points, dataflow coordination, Eionet groups and the Topic Centres, as outlined in Regulation (EC) No 401/2009. The Topic Centres are hubs of thematic expertise, contracted and funded by the EEA to carry out specific tasks identified in the EEA-Eionet Strategy. They play a central role in supporting the EEA's work, particularly in managing, verifying and assessing environment and climate data reported by Member States under EU legislation, thereby strengthening the science-policy interface.

## Topic Centre design 2027-2030

In June 2024, the EEA Management Board launched a process to designate new Topic Centres from 2027 onwards via a new model. The goal is to ensure that the future generation of Topic Centres is well equipped to support the EEA's evolving priorities and respond to new policy and organisational needs through to 2030. The new model is built around three key elements:

1. **decentralised identification** by Eionet representatives in member countries, aiming at increasing national engagement and diversity in Topic Centre work;
2. **simplified regular designation** by the EEA Management Board without requiring pre-formed consortia, thus lowering entry barriers;
3. **agile contracting**, whereby the EEA may use a broader mix of contractual arrangements, including performance-based models, to reduce complexity and align with service needs.

On 18 June 2025, the EEA Management Board approved a first phase to pilot the proposed new model, before making a final decision in December 2025. In this first phase, member countries were invited to volunteer to support the EEA in assessing and streamlining implementation of the identification step. The countries volunteering in the first phase were Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland.

On 4 December 2025, the EEA Management Board endorsed the findings from the first phase and adopted the proposed new model and associated implementing rules<sup>(1)</sup>. This opened up for all EEA member countries to participate in subsequent establishment cycles. The board also adopted the first decision designating Topic Centre Organisations (TCOs) as part of Eionet for the period 2027-2030.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Decision EEA/MB/2025/031 of 4 December 2025.

## Purpose and scope

These guidelines have been created to support organisations interested in becoming Topic Centre Organisations, which could carry out scientific and/or technical support tasks in one or several priority areas of the EEA's work, and which could be entrusted with the task of cooperating with the EEA and act as an Eionet Topic Centre under the new model. Please note that only legal entities with headquarters or a registered office in one of the 32 EEA member countries are eligible to participate.

The new model refers to a change in the way in which the EEA designates and contracts organisations as Topic Centres. It is divided into an **Establishment cycle** and a **Contracting cycle**. These guidelines focus on the establishment cycle and the designation of eligible organisations as TCOs, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 Overview of the Establishment cycle



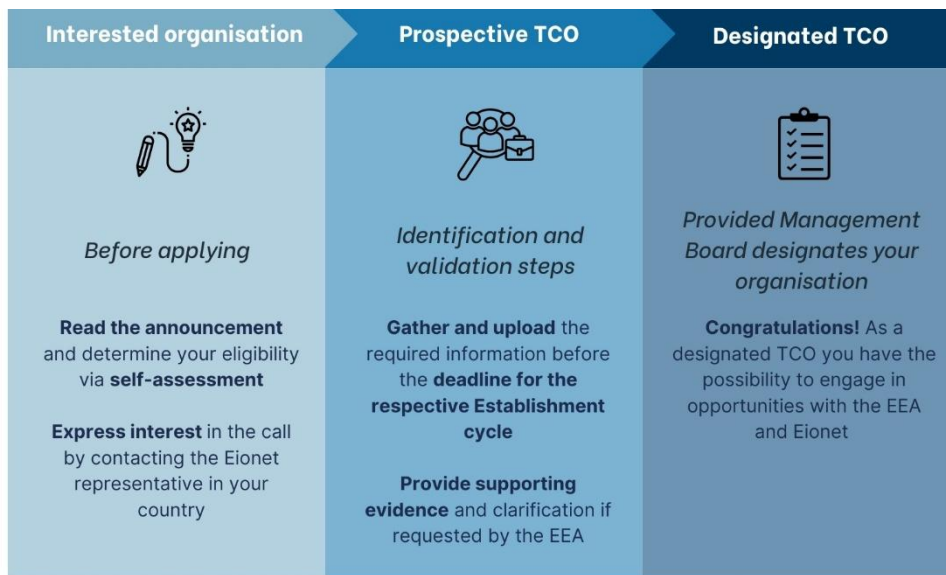
**Please note** that participation in a call for expressions of interest is entirely voluntary and in no way binding on the EEA.

## Becoming a designated Topic Centre Organisation

### Process to be included on the list of TCOs

To become a designated TCO, an individual organisation must indicate its interest in the call by contacting the Eionet representative in the country where it is based. In doing so, the organisation becomes a **prospective TCO** and initiates the process to become a **designated TCO** via the establishment cycle. Being a designated TCO means that the organisation has been designated by the EEA Management Board and therefore included in the list of designated Topic Centre Organisations. Once designated as a TCO, the EEA has the possibility to enter into contractual agreements with the organisation. However, being designated does not entail any obligation on the EEA to enter contractual arrangements with the TCO. It is the legal prerequisite which needs to be in place to conclude contracts.

Figure 2 Overview of the different stages an organisation moves through to become a TCO



**Please note** that if an organisation fails to upload the supporting evidence and information required by the deadline or is not designated as a Topic Centre Organisation by the EEA Management Board, the organisation may still apply in subsequent calls.

The main mission of the designated TCO is to provide quality support for the EEA’s evolving priorities and respond to new policy and organisational needs through to 2030. This is done by being available for contractual arrangements with the EEA to support the various thematic and transverse work areas (see Annex 2).

## Benefits of becoming a TCO

### *The EEA-Eionet Strategy towards 2030*

The EEA and Eionet bring together hundreds of organisations, including European institutions, public authorities and research bodies across Europe. Eionet covers EU Member States, countries engaged in the EU accession process and several non-EU member countries. Together we form a unique knowledge network, connecting robust data as well as analytical and scientific expertise to European, and in some cases global, policy processes. This allows the EEA to deliver assessments covering the widest range of topics backed by solid data and expertise from Eionet.

The EEA-Eionet Strategy aims to strengthen the impact of our network through more active engagement and work with other leading organisations to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and expertise.

To deliver the knowledge Europe needs to achieve its sustainability goals, we will:

*Strengthen Eionet’s identity – national networks and Topic Centres – highlighting its **scientific expertise** and **strategic role in knowledge generation**, so that the value is better understood within EU institutions and by actors beyond the environment community.*

### *What is the role of a TCO?*

As organisations designated by the EEA Management Board, TCOs have the opportunity to respond to EEA calls and form or become a Topic Centre, based on the Agency's needs. When contracted as a Topic Centre or as part of a Topic Centre Consortium, an organisation receives funding from the EEA to carry out tasks defined in the EEA-Eionet Strategy.

The Topic Centres play a central role in supporting the EEA's work, particularly in managing, verifying and assessing environment and climate data reported by Member States under EU legislation, thereby strengthening the science-policy interface.

### Why become a TCO with the EEA?

- **Agile contracting opportunities**, whereby the EEA may use a broader mix of contractual arrangements, including performance-based models.
- Access to discussions on **EU environment and climate policies** and priorities, including the *acquis* and emerging issues.
- The opportunity to **operate at the science-policy interface**, as part of the EEA/Eionet/Topic Centre delivery of data and knowledge supporting Europe's environment and climate ambitions.
- For contracted Topic Centre, **access to the Eionet network**, including Eionet Groups, network events and organisations in other European countries.
- For contracted Topic Centre, **branding** of your organisation as a Topic Centre.
- **Exposure to and visibility** in European environment and climate fora.

### Eligibility criteria

To be designated as a TCO, an organisation must demonstrate that it meets the following criteria:

- a) It carries out scientific and/or technical support tasks listed in Article 2 of [Regulation \(EC\) No 401/2009](#) in the EEA's priority areas of work referred to in Article 3(2) of the regulation and/or in line with the [EEA-Eionet Strategy 2021-2030](#).
- b) It is a legal entity with headquarters or a registered office in an EEA member country, whose activities support the EEA and Eionet objectives laid down in Article 1(2) of Regulation (EC) No 401/2009.
- c) It possesses relevant and demonstrated expertise in one or several of the priority areas of work referred to in Article 3(2) of Regulation (EC) No 401/2009.
- d) It has the capacity to operate in Eionet as referred to in Articles 1 and 4 of Regulation (EC) No 401/2009 and to undertake the types of tasks (see Annex 3) the EEA may entrust to it.

To that end, an interested organisation must perform a self-assessment and collect the following supporting evidence:

- ◆ an official document attesting the organisation's legal status (e.g. extract from a national trade and/or VAT register, article of incorporation, status, etc.)
- ◆ the organisation's profile, including an organigram and/or the last annual activity report.

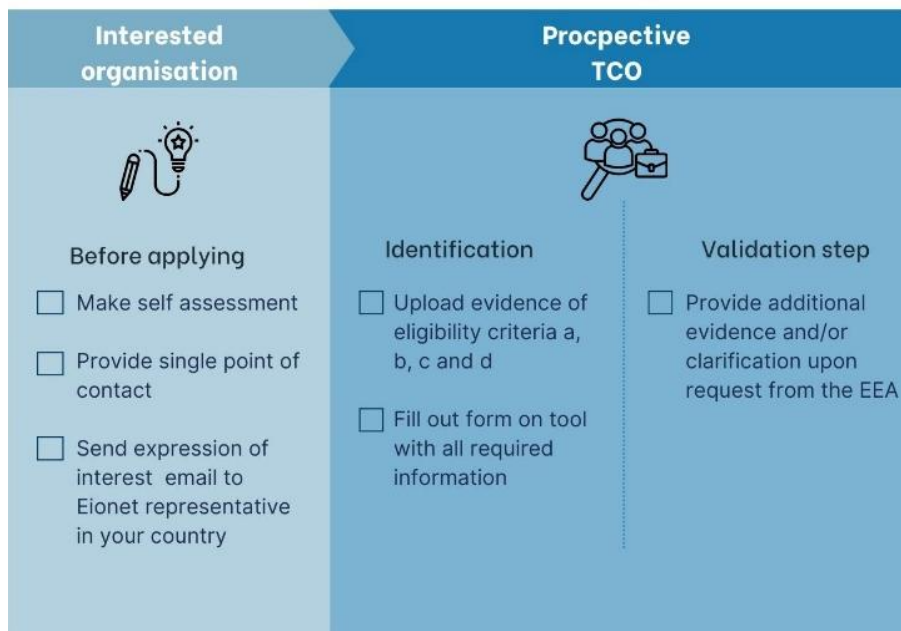
Once collected, an organisation must express their interest in the call by emailing Eionet representative from their respective country. This email address can be found on the EEA website when a call for expressions of interest is active.

## Submission period

Upon receipt of written confirmation that the prospective organisation meets all the above criteria from the Eionet Representative, the EEA will send a link to the digital tool where the application and requested supporting evidence must be uploaded. This tool is an independent space on Microsoft Teams, providing a secure environment for uploading and managing submissions. It is the sole channel for applying and submitting the required evidence.

All submissions must be **completed by the set deadline for the Establishment cycle**. The relevant deadline for any active calls can be found on the [EEA website](#).

Figure 3 Checklist for an organisation interested in becoming a TCO



## Good to know

When applying to become a Topic Centre Organisation, the following points are important to keep in mind:

**Access:** organisations must request access via the Eionet representative in their country. The EEA will provide a link to the digital tool. Each organisation must designate a single contact point with editing and uploading rights during the submission period.

**Login:** access requires a personal email address. Shared or group accounts are not accepted. Information may be updated directly on the digital tool, if necessary, up to **the set deadline for the Establishment cycle**.

**Submission:** organisations are added to a dedicated Microsoft Teams space where a digital form is available for uploading the required documents and information. All information is visible to the EEA. Submission is complete once the form and documents are uploaded. Organisations can edit their contributions throughout the submission period. Once the submission period has ended, applications will be locked regardless of their state of play.

**Validation:** after the submission deadline, the EEA will assess each application with reference to the eligibility criteria. Should further clarification be necessary, the EEA may contact the prospective organisation for more information and evidence. In this case, the organisation will be able to edit the initial submission and add the requested information and evidence.

**Changes in contact point:** if the designated contact person leaves the organisation during the period of application, the Eionet representative must be informed. A new contact point must be assigned, a new login created, and the relevant information and evidence will need to be re-uploaded. It is the organisation's responsibility to ensure that the application and evidence is accurate and complete, as well as accessible for the organisation to edit if requested.

## Questions?

The relevant contact points at the EEA are listed below. Please address enquiries as follows:

- ◆ Related to the registration tool: [servicedesk@eea.europa.eu](mailto:servicedesk@eea.europa.eu)
- ◆ Related to the call for expressions of interest and the process: [cei.topiccentre@eea.europa.eu](mailto:cei.topiccentre@eea.europa.eu)
- ◆ Related to data protection and privacy: [DPO@eea.europa.eu](mailto:DPO@eea.europa.eu)

When sending an email, please indicate the topic in the subject line using the following format:

**Country - Organisation name: Topic of email**

Examples:

*Denmark – EEA: Expression of interest in becoming a TCO*

*The Netherlands – Europol: Expression of interest in becoming a TCO*

*Sweden – EFSA: Expression of interest in becoming a TCO*

## Annexes

- ◆ Annex 1 – Topic Centre Organisations' workflow
- ◆ Annex 2 – Template table of thematic and transverse work areas
- ◆ Annex 3 – List of tasks to be entrusted to designated Topic Centre Organisations

## Annex 1 – Topic Centre Organisations’ workflow

<i>Status</i>	<i>Task</i>	<i>Checklist of completion</i>
<b>Interested organisation</b>	Read and understand the announcement and notice for the call for expressions of interest	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Conduct self-assessment for evidence	<input type="checkbox"/>
	An official document attesting the legal status of the organisation (e.g. extract from a national trade and/or VAT register, article of incorporation, status, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Organisation profile, including an organigram and/or the last annual activity report	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Contact the national Eionet representative and indicate interest	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Confirm that the organisation meets all the criteria	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Prospective TCO</b>	Receive login for the submission platform	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Work on application	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Submit all required information and documentary evidence via the digital tool by <b>the set deadline for the respective Establishment cycle.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Respond to requests for further documentation if requested by the EEA	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Designated TCO/ Declined application</b>	Receive notification on the application result and if the EEA Management Board has designated the organisation as a TCO	

## Annex 2 – Template table of thematic and transverse work areas

(part of the digital selection form to be filled in by prospective organisations)

Thematic areas			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Agriculture and food system	<input type="checkbox"/>	Freshwater
<input type="checkbox"/>	Air emissions	<input type="checkbox"/>	Greenhouse gas monitoring, reporting and verification
<input type="checkbox"/>	Air quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	Health impacts and inequalities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Biodiversity	<input type="checkbox"/>	Industrial accidents
<input type="checkbox"/>	Building systems	<input type="checkbox"/>	Industry
<input type="checkbox"/>	Carbon removals	<input type="checkbox"/>	Land use
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chemicals	<input type="checkbox"/>	Marine environment
<input type="checkbox"/>	Circular economy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Maritime sectors
<input type="checkbox"/>	Climate and health	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mobility systems
<input type="checkbox"/>	Climate change impacts, vulnerability and risks	<input type="checkbox"/>	Noise
<input type="checkbox"/>	Climate change resilience and adaptation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Offshore renewable energy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Climate mitigation in the land sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	One Health
<input type="checkbox"/>	Energy systems	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ozone-depleting substances and F-gases
<input type="checkbox"/>	Finance and economics	<input type="checkbox"/>	Soil
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fisheries and aquaculture	<input type="checkbox"/>	Urban
<input type="checkbox"/>	Forests and forestry	<input type="checkbox"/>	Waste

Transverse areas			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Eighth Environment Action Programme and indicators	<input type="checkbox"/>	Governance

<input type="checkbox"/>	Artificial intelligence	<input type="checkbox"/>	Just and fair transitions
<input type="checkbox"/>	Broader sustainability issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	Skills strengthening
<input type="checkbox"/>	Digital transition/transformation	<input type="checkbox"/>	State of the Environment
<input type="checkbox"/>	Earth observation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Communication products and outreach
<input type="checkbox"/>	Foresight	<input type="checkbox"/>	General <sup>(2)</sup>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Geospatial		

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<sup>(2)</sup> The purpose of 'General' is for organisations to identify their willingness to provide support for the different categories of tasks in Article 4(2) where this support would not be for any of the thematic or transversal areas listed.

## Annex 3 – List of tasks to be entrusted to designated Topic Centre Organisations

The EEA may entrust the following tasks to designated Topic Centre Organisations, either to one Topic Centre or to several working together:

Reporting services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribute to routine quality checking, and supporting aggregation of data after submission, including assisting data reporters</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the preparation of dataflows, including translating legal acts into specifications for dataflow tools in Reportnet, contribute to documentation of dataflows and provide support for designing and testing quality checks</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support continuous improvement by providing recommendations, as well as contributing to simplification and efficiency initiatives for specific legislative reporting obligations</li> </ul>
Data services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribute to EEA routine data processing and analytical capabilities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance the interoperability, efficiency, integration and optimisation of EEA data and information platforms, including through application of relevant methodologies and standards. Strengthen data services through innovation and application of new methodologies such as artificial intelligence and digital twins</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design and improve data visualisation and/or distribution tools, including dashboards on EEA web services and for information systems</li> </ul>
Knowledge services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interlink and synthesise knowledge across multiple environmental thematic areas and socio-economic dimensions to underpin cross-cutting, systemic or integrated assessments. Factors may include risks, resilience and societal preparedness</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare assessments on Europe’s climate and environment, including on drivers, state, impacts, policy responses and sustainability transitions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harvest and/or apply the results of research to translate or transform them into policy-relevant information</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support projections, strategic foresight and outlooks</li> </ul>

## Network and collaboration services

- Strengthen EEA collaboration with Eionet member and cooperating countries. Provide support for capacity building, training and performance benchmarking as well as preparation for enlargement. Cover geographical areas identified in the EEA's strategy for cooperation with third countries and international organisations
- Strengthen connection with science/research capacities to improve diffusion of results and support for policy development and EEA services
- Support communication activities as well as the EEA's networking and outreach efforts to stakeholders, including business and civil society