

SESAR Engage 2 KTN – Call for PhDs in the domain of air traffic management (ATM)

Opening date: 18 December 2023

Deadline model: single-stage

Call deadline: 18 February 2024 17:00:00 (Brussels time)

Total funding available € 600000.00

Project acronym Engage 2

Full name of the EU funded project The SESAR 3 Knowledge Transfer Network

Grant agreement number 101114648

Topic HORIZON-SESAR-2022-DES-ER-01-WA3-1 - Knowledge Transfer Network

1. Overview

Engage 2 will support the growth of a community of early-stage researchers in Europe, dedicated to advancing the state of the art in air traffic management (ATM). Indeed, it will, not only financially contribute to their PhD, but it will provide mentoring as well as opportunities to attend summer schools and workshops organised within the Engage 2 framework or during relevant events such as the SESAR Innovation Days and the ATM seminars.

A core part of Engage 2's activity is the financial support of PhDs. A total budget of 600k euros is allocated to this activity, with a maximum of 60k euros available to be requested to financially support each PhD with a clear European dimension. Technical expertise will also be available via mentoring from Engage 2 and access to members of the Industry Board.

Cost constraints are set out below. Evaluation ranking will be applied based on merit alone. The Awards Board comprises Engage 2 consortium members¹, the SESAR 3 Joint Undertaking, ASDA (Association for the Scientific Development of ATM in Europe, <https://www.asda.aero/>), CANSO (Global voice of the ATM Industry, <https://canso.org/>) and industry partners. It is chaired by EUROCONTROL (with a casting vote).

2. Research themes

Proposals must contain innovative research ideas and address the (long-term) evolution of the European ATM system. Alignment with the thematic challenges of Engage 2 (published on the Engage 2 website at the beginning of December 2023 and available at the following link: <https://engagektn.eu/thematic-challenge/>) is not a requirement, nor will this confer any advantage in the evaluation per se. However, such alignment may help candidates by having thematic challenge research activities running in parallel with their research and may also be more likely to receive industry co-funding.

Engage 2 also welcomes 'blue sky' / exploratory research, which may be aligned with interdisciplinary areas or, indeed, other fields as judged by the Awards Board to offer suitable potential contributions to the wider

¹ Deep Blue, Technische Universitaet Braunschweig, University of Belgrade – Faculty of Transport and Traffic Engineering, Fundacion Instituto de Investigacion Innaxis, Frequentis, EASN Technology Innovation Services, EUROCONTROL, University of Trieste and University of Westminster

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benefit of ATM, enhancing cross-fertilisation. When appropriately motivated, student mobility between academia and industry is encouraged.

Submissions should carefully consider the selection criteria specified in Section 3.4.

3. Submission and selection procedures

3.1 General conditions

Proposals may be submitted by a single entity or by a consortium of entities. A consortium may be composed of three entities at most. The preferred option would be to have an educational establishment and an industry partner. In any case, at least one of the entities must be an educational establishment entitled to issue PhDs.

The proposal is led and submitted by a 'proponent'. In case of a submission from a single entity, the proponent must be the academic supervisor. In case of a consortium of entities, and if the proponent does not belong to an educational establishment entitled to issue PhDs, a formal letter of commitment from an academic supervisor with such an entitlement should be enclosed with the application.

The entity requesting funding should be located in a country eligible to receive funding through Horizon Europe grants (see Annex). Please note that the same eligibility conditions apply to this PhD Call as for the original Call for Proposals leading to the award of Engage 2 (refer to [1] for the current edition of Horizon Europe's General Annexes).

Funding is allocated to the proponent's institution, which is responsible for managing the payments to the student. Payments will be made by Engage 2 every six months (see Section 4), however it is not possible to arrange pre-financing.

Each student will be hosted by an institution that can be either the educational establishment issuing the title, the proponent's institution or any other entity in the consortium submitting the proposal.

36 months is the maximum amount of funding for PhDs; the final payment will be brought forward if the end of the 36 months falls outside the duration of Engage 2.

This Call closes on **18 February 2024** at 17:00 (Brussels time).

3.2 Eligible costs

Only the following costs of the funded research degrees will be covered by Engage 2 financial support:

1. Gross salary (or grant/scholarship) of one PhD student for three years for the duration of his/her programme.
2. Data and other supporting material costs, including computing infrastructure (e.g., cloud resources) and open-access publications.
3. PhD travel expenses for attending Engage 2 summer schools, pertinent (Engage 2) thematic workshops, and the annual SESAR Innovation Days (2024, 2025 and 2026). With prior agreement, travel bursaries may be made available for other events within Europe (see Annex).

All taxes eligible under Horizon Europe rules are covered.

All other costs, such as overheads, enrolment/registration/tuition fees or supervision, are **ineligible**.

Attendance and participation requirements: three SESAR Innovation Days, plus pertinent thematic workshops and summer schools.

The maximum amount that can be requested is EUR 60 000 per PhD, to cover costs in the above cost categories. In accordance with the applicable legal framework, evidence on co-funding may be requested.

3.3 Material

Proposals are to be submitted in English as a PDF file.

Each proposal is composed of:

- Project description (see details below)

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- Short CV of the academic supervisor (max 3 pages), including his/her five most relevant publications. Any co-supervisors should also be named, however only the CV and publications of the lead supervisor should be included, as only these will be taken into consideration during the evaluation process.

3.3.1 Submission material for proposals

Proposals should include the following parts:

- (1) Summary (1 page): a concise statement of the goals, milestones and significance of the project
- (2) Background and significance to ATM
- (3) Scientific goals and objectives, explicitly highlighting alignment with the themes identified in Section 2, i.e. containing innovative research ideas addressing the (long-term) evolution of the European ATM system, whereby 'blue sky' / exploratory research and interdisciplinary coordination are encouraged
- (4) Research plan:
 - General description of the scientific approach, highlighting its novelty
 - Description of the data sources and their use, if applicable
 - Expected research outputs, including a poster (year 1), a conference paper (year 2) and a journal paper (year 3)
 - Work packages and milestones spanning the funding period, with clear milestones indicating achievements and outputs (e.g. completion of literature review, initial model run, outputs such as scientific publications) for each six month reporting period
- (5) Financial plan (concise summary):
 - Provide evidence of eligible costs, as specified in Section 3.2
 - Provide evidence of co-funding, if the costs of the PhD exceed the 60000 euros funding from Engage 2 and if requested
- (6) Short CV of the (lead) academic supervisor (max 3 pages), including references of his/her five most relevant publications.

And, if the proponent institution is not entitled to issue PhDs, a formal letter of commitment from an academic supervisor within the consortium.

Proposals should be written in a font no smaller than 11-point. Parts (2) – (4) above, inclusive, should comprise no more than 5 pages.

The proposal must clearly state that funding is sought for a new full-time PhD position (one position per proposal), and when the selected PhD student is expected to start his/her activities. In any case, the starting date should preferably be within the second quarter of 2024 and funding is available for a maximum of 36 months (within May 2027). Please be aware that applicants cannot be registered to a PhD before the Call deadline.

Submissions with the attached PDF material should be e-mailed to:

Engage2-coordinator@dblue.it

using the subject line "PhD Call". All proposals received before the Call closes will be acknowledged by email. In the event of a failure with the Engage 2 e-mail account, a message will be posted on the PhD Call page on the Engage 2 website with alternative submission instructions.

Any questions regarding the Call and the submission of proposals should be sent to **Engage2-coordinator@dblue.it**. We will post these questions (anonymised), and their responses, on a dedicated FAQ page on the Engage 2 website. Interested parties are advised to monitor the FAQ page for clarifications. The last date for questions to be submitted will be the 2nd of February 2024, two weeks before the Call closes.

3.4 Selection criteria

Proposals will be evaluated by the Engage 2 Awards Board based on four criteria (Table 1, column C). In order for a proposal to be eligible, each criterion must receive a score higher than, or equal to, the threshold (Table 1, column T). For eligible proposals, the score of each criterion is then weighted (Table 1, column W) to obtain the final score. Eligible proposals are then ranked in decreasing order of the final score until the available

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budget is exhausted. Proponents will be notified about the evaluation outcome one month after the Call closes.

Table 1: Selection criteria, thresholds and weights for PhDs

Criterion (C)	Threshold (T)	Weight (W)
Impact on ATM	7/10	30%
Scientific relevance	7/10	20%
Quality of research plan	7/10	25%
Scientific merit of the academic supervisor	7/10	25%

In the event of a tie, the Awards Board will vote on the order of tied proposals, with the chair having a casting vote.

4. Scientific and financial periodic reporting

Every six months, a scientific and financial progress report shall be submitted to the Engage 2 PhD Coordinator for assessment. The scientific part (4 pages are likely to be sufficient) will report on progress made during the period (with reference to the research plan and milestones) along with activities planned for the following period and any changes or deviations from the research plan. The financial part (1 page) will provide a summary of costs during the period. The scientific and financial progress report should be submitted no later than 30 days after the end of the reporting period. Payments will be made to the proponent after Engage 2 approval of the corresponding scientific and financial progress report.

Final reporting will comprise of a revised scientific and financial progress report along with a final report summarising the study – the latter report will be published by Engage 2 after approval (refer to [2] for final reporting of PhDs supported by the previous Engage KTN). Please note that if final reporting is due after May 2027 (based on elapsed months since the PhD start date), the due date of the final progress and publishable reports will be brought forward and submitted before Engage 2 closes. Also, if the official duration of the PhD programme is longer than three years, then the final reporting will need to be submitted no later than the end of the three years (or before Engage 2 closes if the due date is after May 2027).

Guidance and reporting templates will be made available in advance.

5. Contractual procedure

PhD funding will be made available through ‘financial support to third parties’ in accordance with Article 6.2.D.1 of the Engage 2 Grant Agreement, with obligations on recipients outlined in Article 9.4 (refer to [3]). An agreement will be signed between Deep Blue (as Engage 2 Coordinator) and each proponent’s establishment. This will confirm the compliance of parties to Horizon Europe rules.

Payments will be made by Deep Blue to the proponent’s establishment every six months. Each payment will be released after Engage 2 approval has been given to the scientific and financial progress report.

6. References

[1] European Commission, 2022. Horizon Europe Work Programme 2023-2024 - 13. General Annexes (refer to ‘Entities eligible for funding’ section for a list of countries eligible to receive funding through Horizon Europe).

https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2023-2024/wp-13-general-annexes_horizon-2023-2024_en.pdf

[2] Engage KTN, 2022. Engage PhD final reports (ten PhD candidates received financial support through the previous Engage KTN).

<https://engagektn.com/phd-final-reports/>

[3] European Commission, 2023. EU Grants – Annotated Grant Agreement V1.0 Draft, 01 April 2023 (refer to Article 6.2.D.1 Financial support to third parties and Article 9.4 Recipients of financial support to third parties).

https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/aga_en.pdf

Annex: further information on eligibility and funding conditions

Eligibility

Engage 2 PhD funding will be paid to the proponent's institution. In terms of funding eligibility, it is the country that the proponent's institution is located that is considered, and not the nationality of the PhD candidate. Note that it is the proponent's (or hosting institution's) responsibility to ensure the PhD candidate has the required visas and qualifications to enrol as a PhD student.

For clarification on funding eligibility, please refer to 'Entities eligible for funding' on page 8 of Horizon Europe's General Annexes [1]. Interested parties should also be aware of the following restrictions.

Since 16 December 2022, the conditions imposed by Council Implementing Decision 2022/2506 (http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2022/2506/oj) preclude Hungarian entities operated by public interest trusts from receiving EU funding. However, all other Hungarian entities not affected by these measures are eligible to receive Engage 2 funding.

Whilst the association of the United Kingdom to Horizon Europe will be in place from 01 January 2024, UK entities are ineligible to receive funding through 'financial support to third parties' from Engage 2. This is due to the funding allocated to the Engage 2 KTN pre-dating UK association, coming from the Horizon Europe Work Programme for 2021-2022.

Engage 2 consortium members are ineligible to bid for PhD funding in this Call.

Funding conditions

Engage 2 will provide funding for PhDs (and catalyst projects) through 'financial support to third parties'. Horizon Europe rules permit a third party, such as a proponent's institution, to receive a maximum of EUR 60 000, however this maximum applies for the duration of the network. So whilst a third party can be granted funds from different Engage 2 Calls, the aggregate total received cannot exceed EUR 60 000. For example, a third party awarded EUR 45 000 funding to support a PhD candidate in this Call, would only be able to receive a maximum of EUR 15 000 in a subsequent Call for catalyst funding. Note that two Calls for catalyst funding are planned.



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Regarding the reimbursement of PhD expenses of travelling 'within Europe', travel to/from Member States of the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC) are deemed eligible (refer to

<https://www.ecac-ceac.org/about-ecac/member-states>). All Engage 2 events will be held within Europe, however with prior agreement, travel expenses relating to PhD participation at non-Engage 2 events may be accepted.

Further funding guidance may be posted in the Call FAQ section on the Engage 2 website, as required.

