

Phase Three of the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF)

Guidelines for regional and thematic project (RTP) development

EOB's action required: For discussion and decision.

1. Background

EIF Phase Three builds upon over a decade of global experience in supporting the least developed countries (LDCs) to integrate trade into their development strategies and leverage trade as a driver for poverty reduction, economic diversification and sustainable growth. In this new phase, the programme places stronger emphasis on results-based management, national ownership and strategic leveraging of resources to deliver measurable and lasting impact.

While country-level programming remains the cornerstone of EIF Phase Three, many of the challenges that the LDCs face in leveraging trade and investment for sustainable development are inherently regional, cross-border or thematic in nature. Barriers to trade often transcend national boundaries, requiring collective action, regional policy alignment and the pooling of resources. Similarly, thematic priorities such as digital transformation, resilience to climate change and inclusive trade cannot always be addressed within a single country framework. To respond to these needs, EIF Phase Three strengthens and expands the EIF's regional and thematic programming, complementing national interventions and ensuring that the programme achieves scale, systemic impact and long-term sustainability. Therefore, RTPs are not stand-alone instruments. They are explicitly anchored in the Prioritized Action Matrices (PAMs) and Country Programme Documents (CPDs) of the participating LDCs. The PAM defines the "what" at country level, the CPD translates it into the "how" through a national multi-year programme, and RTPs complement this by addressing the "beyond country" dimension, where collective or regional action is required.

RTPs under EIF Phase Three will be financed through two complementary instruments:

- **Funding Facility 1** for institutional development support, focusing on strengthening trade- and investment-related governance, policy frameworks and institutional and human capacities.

Key areas of support under Funding Facility 1 include:

- Training and capacity development for government officials, investment promotion agencies and private sector actors – particularly micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).
- Learning and peer exchange opportunities, enabling countries to share experiences on trade policy, investment facilitation and innovative financing approaches.
- Supporting the LDCs' engagement in regional and multi-lateral trade negotiations and implementation of trade and investment frameworks, including WTO accession.
- Supporting the LDCs in conducting trade and investment diagnostics, digital trade and technology assessments and other analytical studies to inform evidence-based policymaking.
- Supporting the LDCs in developing or updating PAMs, drawing on existing capabilities, strategic studies and assessments (including EIF Diagnostic Trade Integration Studies

(DTISs) and other sectoral or issues-based studies), which serve as the basis for assessing and prioritizing trade- and investment-related interventions.

- Supporting LDC graduation and post-graduation strategies.
- **Funding Facility 2** for catalytic interventions that translate institutional capacity-building into tangible trade and investment competitiveness gains and expanded market opportunities.

Key areas of support under Funding Facility 2 include:

- Value chain development and export diversification pilots to identify and scale high-potential products and services.
- Productivity enhancements and resilience-building in key sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, services and digital trade, enabling businesses to compete more effectively in regional and global markets.
- MSME development, including formalization, productivity improvements and export preparedness, ensuring their integration into national and global markets.
- Upgrading of trade logistics, quality standards and certification systems, reducing barriers to market entry and improving compliance with international requirements.
- Feasibility studies and project preparation, particularly for public-private partnerships and private-sector investment, enabling countries to structure viable and investment-ready projects with transformative potential.
- De-risking of blended and green finance structuring, enabling the LDCs to leverage public and private capital for sustainable development investments.
- Targeted investment promotion and facilitation initiatives, designed to strengthen national capabilities in attracting and retaining high-quality investment.
- Supporting the introduction, promotion, piloting and adoption of innovative technologies and innovative business and financing models.

2. Strategic purpose and added value

The regional and thematic modality serves several critical functions. First, it enables the LDCs to generate economies of scale by pooling resources and capacities, thereby lowering costs and achieving wider impact. Second, it fosters peer learning and exchange of experiences, allowing countries at different stages of reform to learn from each other's successes and challenges. Third, it provides a vehicle for collective action in advancing the implementation of regional and global trade commitments, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the World Trade Organization's Trade Facilitation Agreement and regional trade protocols. Finally, it creates opportunities for the LDCs to jointly address systemic bottlenecks such as fragmented value chains, inadequate connectivity and gaps in regulatory alignment, which cannot be effectively resolved through country-specific projects alone.

Therefore, RTPs pursue the following objectives:

- Complementing national programmes by tackling cross-cutting and transnational issues.
- Promoting collective innovation and regional cooperation in trade and investment.
- Catalyzing systemic change by addressing structural and institutional barriers, common across multiple countries.
- Leveraging partnerships and mobilizing resources for greater scale and impact, beyond what is possible at the national level.

3. Eligibility and scope of action

To ensure strategic relevance and critical mass, RTPs shall preferably involve at least three LDCs. Projects are anchored in CPDs, regional integration strategies or sectoral development plans, and must demonstrate clear alignment with EIF Phase Three objectives. In cases where a participating country does not yet have an approved CPD, it may still benefit from participation in an RTP, provided that the project demonstrates clear strategic coherence with the country's trade and investment priorities and could contribute to the formulation or refinement of its future CPD.

Implementation will be led by any relevant implementing entity, such as regional or multilateral agencies, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), regional private sector chambers, non-governmental organizations or specialized technical partners with proven expertise. National stakeholders, particularly the EIF Focal Points (FPs) and the EIF National Implementation Units (NIUs), are actively engaged in the design, validation and oversight processes to ensure consistency with national trade and investment priorities.

Projects will have a multi-year scope (typically three to five years, up to June 2031, including all implementation and closure activities) and follow a modular, evidence-based and results-oriented approach. The funding envelope for RTPs will be up to USD 1.5 million, subject to resource availability, with phased disbursements tied to performance, work plans and financial progress. Implementing Partners (IPs) are expected to secure co-financing equivalent to at least 50 per cent of the total project cost, with EIF resources serving as catalytic funding to leverage additional investments, strengthen ownership and promote long-term sustainability. At least half of the required co-financing should be in cash, either contributed directly from the IPs' internal resources or mobilized from other external sources.

4. Priority areas of engagement

Building on lessons from EIF Phase Two and emerging global trade dynamics, the regional and thematic modality of EIF Phase Three prioritizes interventions in six interrelated areas:

- LDC graduation and resilience: Supporting smooth transitions for graduating LDCs; promoting export diversification; and building resilience to external shocks, including economic volatility and climate impacts.
- Inclusive trade: Ensuring trade and investment contribute to broad-based development by empowering women, youth, minorities and persons with disabilities; developing inclusive and gender-sensitive value chains; and advancing policy frameworks that foster equitable participation in trade.
- Fostering innovation and technology, including digital trade and e-commerce: Enhancing regulatory frameworks for digital trade, enabling small- and medium-sized enterprises to harness digital platforms, improving digital skills and fostering cross-border e-commerce and paperless trade solutions.
- Regional integration and trade facilitation: Supporting the implementation of the AfCFTA and other regional trade agreements; strengthening logistics and border management; and reducing trade costs through harmonized customs, paperless trade, improved inter-agency coordination and enhanced connectivity.
- Green and sustainable trade: Promoting climate-smart trade and investment; developing sustainable regional value chains; supporting carbon labelling and green certification systems; and mobilizing investment for low-carbon economic transformation.

- Regional value chains and sector development: Strengthening regional clusters in agriculture, manufacturing and services; linking MSMEs to regional and global markets; and promoting regional investment opportunities in priority sectors.

5. General guiding principles

All RTPs under EIF Phase Three must be designed and implemented in line with the programme's overarching philosophy: catalytic, inclusive, sustainable and evidence-based interventions that complement country-level efforts, while adding unique regional or thematic value. The following principles should underpin every proposal.

a. Ownership and alignment

RTPs must be firmly rooted in the LDCs' priorities and demonstrate a strong sense of ownership at both the national and regional levels. Validation by the National Steering Committee (NSC) of each country – or by an equivalent body where an NSC is not active – is a precondition for submission. Depending on the project size, validation could be carried out by the country's FP. This ensures that projects are demand-driven and not supply-driven, reflecting a consensus among governments and stakeholders.

Projects should also demonstrate alignment with the existing CPDs of participating countries, ensuring complementarity and avoiding duplication. In addition, they should be clearly anchored in regional strategies and frameworks (such as the AfCFTA, regional development strategies or sub-regional integration initiatives), as well as in EIF Phase Three objectives of institutional strengthening, competitiveness and market expansion.

b. Evidence-based design

Proposals must be grounded in credible diagnostics and analytical studies. This could include findings from DTIS/DTIS Updates (DTISUs), AfCFTA readiness studies, thematic value chain analyses, sectoral competitiveness assessments, innovation and technology assessment or regional integration diagnostics. A strong evidence base is essential to:

- Justify the choice of a regional or thematic approach (i.e., explaining why joint action is more effective than isolated national actions);
- Identify systemic bottlenecks and shared challenges across countries; and
- Demonstrate how proposed interventions respond to concrete opportunities or gaps.

Evidence should be used not only to define the problem but also to articulate the intervention logic, expected results and potential for replication or scaling up.

c. Catalytic impact

RTPs must be catalytic in nature, meaning they add value beyond what national interventions could achieve. Proposals should clearly demonstrate:

- **Additionality:** Avoiding duplication with ongoing initiatives and instead complementing or scaling them.
- **Scalability:** Potential for interventions to be expanded geographically, replicated in other contexts or scaled up through partner support.

- Transformational potential: The likelihood of systemic change in policies, institutions, or market dynamics, rather than isolated outputs.

Moreover, co-financing serves as an important mechanism to achieve catalytic effects. RTPs are expected to demonstrate a minimum co-financing ratio of 1:1 – meaning that for every dollar of EIF financing, at least one dollar is mobilized by the IP. This mobilization of resources reflects the catalytic role of the EIF and underscores partner commitment.

d. Inclusivity and cross-cutting issues

RTPs should include at least two of the following EIF Phase Three cross-cutting priorities:

- Gender equality: Ensuring women entrepreneurs and workers benefit equally, addressing gender-specific barriers and promoting gender-responsive policies.
- Youth employment: Fostering skills development, entrepreneurship and digital opportunities tailored to young people.
- Climate resilience: Supporting low-carbon, climate-smart value chains, trade in green goods and services, and improved access to climate finance.
- Digital transformation: Promoting paperless trade, e-commerce readiness and digital literacy for MSMEs.

Inclusivity also extends to engaging marginalized and vulnerable groups, people living with disabilities, informal sector actors and MSMEs that may otherwise be excluded from trade and investment opportunities. Regional or thematic projects should go beyond token references and set clear targets and indicators to measure their impact on these groups.

e. Sustainability and leveraging

Proposals must articulate a clear strategy for sustaining results beyond the duration of EIF support. This involves embedding technical and institutional capacities into regional organizations (e.g., RECs, trade promotion agencies, sector-specific associations, regional private sector associations and non-governmental organizations), so that they become permanent actors in the trade and investment ecosystem.

Sustainability also requires developing financial pathways that enable successful pilots or policy reforms to continue, scale up or transition into government budgets, regional financing streams or private-sector partnerships. Resource mobilization must be framed as an integral part of project design, highlighting opportunities to leverage additional funds (including blended finance, climate finance, impact investment and private-sector finance).

By ensuring strong ownership, robust evidence, catalytic design, inclusivity and long-term sustainability, RTPs are expected to serve as powerful complements to national CPDs, enabling EIF Phase Three to deliver systemic, scalable and transformational impact across multiple LDCs.

6. Process for RTP development and approval

RTPs follow a structured but flexible cycle that ensures coherence with national priorities, technical rigor and EIF Phase Three principles. The process involves five main stages: Inception; Appraisal; Implementation; Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL); and Closure and Sustainability.

a. Inception

The inception phase marks the starting point of project development. The initiating entity must demonstrate legitimacy, technical expertise and convening power across the participating LDCs.

A concept note is the first formal deliverable. This should be a concise document (2–3 pages) that outlines the strategic rationale, objectives, proposed scope, alignment with EIF Phase Three priorities, and an indicative budget. The concept note is submitted to the Executive Secretariat for the EIF (ES), which conducts an early alignment check. This step ensures that proposals are consistent with the EIF's Theory of Change (TOC), do not duplicate other initiatives and demonstrate catalytic potential before substantial resources are invested in full proposal preparation.

Critically, during this phase, consultations with the FPs and the NIUs of all participating countries are mandatory. This guarantees national endorsement, ensures complementarity with CPDs and anchors RTPs in country-owned trade and investment strategies. Endorsement by NSCs (or an equivalent body where NSCs are inactive), or by FPs, must be documented through meeting minutes or official communication (e.g., a letter or an email), which are later attached to the full proposal.

b. Appraisal

Once the full proposal is prepared, it undergoes a rigorous joint technical and fiduciary review by the ES and the EIF Trust Fund Manager (TFM). This "Quality at Entry" (Q@E) process examines:

- Strategic relevance (alignment with EIF Phase Three outcomes, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Doha Programme of Action).
- Technical soundness (clarity of the TOC, robustness of design, and based on evidence).
- Value for Money (VfM) (economy, efficiency, effectiveness, equity).
- Financial viability (realism of the budget, adequacy of co-financing commitments).
- Fiduciary standards (procurement, human resources, sub-granting compliance).
- Results framework (robust MEL plan with indicators and baseline data, as well as adaptive learning mechanisms).

Based on the Q@E assessment, the ES and the TFM jointly prepare an appraisal report that consolidates findings and recommendations. This report accompanies the proposal to the EOB for final approval.

For projects with EIF financing amounting to USD 1 million or below, the EOB delegates approval authority to the Executive Director of the ES, thereby expediting decision-making for smaller-scale initiatives. For larger projects (project where the EIF's contribution is above USD 1 million), the EOB's approval is mandatory. If substantive issues are raised, the proposal may be returned for revision and resubmission.

c. Implementation

Approved projects are implemented under the leadership of IPs with proven expertise and credibility. Sub-IPs may be engaged to deliver specific components, but overall accountability remains with the lead IP.

Implementation must be carried out in close coordination with the ES and the TFM for technical and fiduciary guidance and oversight, and with active participation of the NIUs and other national stakeholders to ensure complementarity with CPDs.

Work plans and budgets are prepared on an annual or biennial basis, approved by the ES/TFM and shared with the NIUs to maintain transparency and accountability. Flexibility is encouraged, allowing projects to adapt to emerging opportunities or challenges, provided that the suggested changes are justified and approved.

d. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

MEL is fully integrated into the lifecycle of RTPs and must align with the EIF's Management Information System (MIS) and the global MEL framework.

- **Monitoring:** Progress is tracked through standardized indicators and reported in semi-annual and annual reports. Data must be disaggregated by gender, age and other relevant factors to measure inclusivity.
- **Evaluation:** Independent mid-term reviews and final evaluations are required for projects exceeding three years in duration or USD 1 million in EIF financing.
- **Learning:** Projects are expected to contribute actively to regional knowledge-sharing and peer learning. This includes organizing regional learning events, producing knowledge briefs and uploading relevant materials to the EIF MIS and website.
- **Dashboards and digital reporting tools:** These are used to enhance transparency and real-time tracking, enabling adaptive management.

The MEL system is not only about accountability but also about generating lessons that inform communications efforts as well as future CPDs, regional projects and broader Aid-for-Trade programming.

Communications, in return, are a critical enabler of successful RTP implementation. By building on MEL findings, communications efforts can amplify learning, strengthen visibility and sustain engagement with partners and stakeholders. Each RTP should therefore include a communication plan that outlines clear activities, tools and processes for showcasing progress, sharing achievements and supporting resource mobilization throughout the project lifecycle.

e. Closure and Sustainability

The closure phase ensures that project achievements are consolidated and carried forward beyond the EIF's direct support. Each project must present a closure plan that includes:

- A Project Completion Report, documenting outputs, outcomes, financial performance, challenges and lessons learned.
- A sustainability strategy, showing how capacities, institutions or services created by the project will be maintained or scaled up. This may include integration into the budgets of RECs, adoption by private-sector platforms or transition to donor-funded facilities.
- A knowledge dissemination component, ensuring that achievements, results, innovations and lessons are widely communicated across the EIF partnership.

A comprehensive fiduciary closure guarantees that all financial and asset obligations are properly documented and resolved.

Projects are considered successfully closed only when both financial and programmatic obligations are fulfilled and sustainability measures are in place.

APPENDIX: RTP template [30 pages maximum, including annexes]

Cover page

Name and logo of the IP
Project title
Participating countries
Version and date (draft/final, date)
EIF logo, with name and logo of other funding partners

Summary page

| | |
|---|---|
| Title | Title of the project |
| Implementing Partner | Specify name of the IP. |
| Participating countries | List name of participating countries. |
| Sub-IP(s) | Indicate names of sub-IP(s), where relevant. |
| Duration | e.g., five years – January 2026 to December 2030. |
| Total cost and sources of funding | Indicate the total cost of the project in U.S. dollars (USD). |
| ● EIF Trust Fund | Indicate the funding sought from the EIF, providing a clear breakdown between: - Funding Facility 1 - Funding Facility 2 |
| ● Co-funding from IP(s) | Indicate any co-funding provided by the IP. |
| ● Co-funding from xxxxxx | Indicate any co-funding secured from other sources. Add as many lines as necessary. |
| ● In-kind contribution from IP(s) | Provide a financial estimation of the expected in-kind contribution from the IP in terms of office space, staff time or seconded personnel, equipment, vehicles, utilities, services, etc. |
| ● In-kind contribution from participating countries | Provide an estimation of the expected in-kind contribution of the participating country's government in terms of office space, staff time or seconded personnel, equipment, vehicles, utilities, services, etc. |
| Endorsement | Indicate for each participating country the name of the endorsement body/entity and the date of endorsement (e.g., endorsed by the NSC on 12/01/2026). |
| Submission date | Indicate the date of submission (e.g., submitted on 15/01/2026). |
| Contact person | Indicate the name, function and contact details of the lead manager responsible for coordinating the project implementation. |

Executive summary (2 pages max.)

Provide a short overview summarizing the project purpose, duration and expected outcomes.

1. Strategic context and rationale (2 pages max.)

Describe the regional trade and development landscape, show clear alignment with EIF Phase Three priorities (gender equality, youth employment, digital transformation and climate resilience) and refer to relevant regional integration frameworks, such as AfCFTA, ASEAN, SADC, SAARC, BIMSTEC or PACER Plus. Draw on diagnostics, such as DTIS/DTISU or AfCFTA readiness studies; it is advised to highlight the regional or thematic added value, including economies of scale, cross-border impact or harmonized policy reforms. In addition, explicitly demonstrate how the proposed RTP builds on and

complements the CPDs of each participating country, and contributes to the implementation of their PAMs.

2. Participating countries and endorsement process (1 page max.)

Present the participating countries and coordination mechanisms. List all countries and their focal institutions, specify their roles and contributions, and document consultations with the FPs and the NIUs. Confirm the status of NSC or FP validation for each participating country and attach documentary evidence as annexes.

3. Theory of Change and results framework (2 pages max.)

Articulate the TOC, explaining the logic linking inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and long-term impacts. A visual diagram must accompany the narrative. Regional impacts and outcomes should be defined, with measurable outputs linked to both regional and country-level contributions. Indicators should be SMART and disaggregated by country, wherever possible. The detailed Logical Framework must be attached as an annex.

4. Proposed activities and work plan (2 pages max.)

Describe the main actions under each output, distinguishing between regional- and national-level interventions, and setting out the implementation timeline. A modular work plan presented in a Gantt chart must be included in the annexes.

5. Stakeholder engagement, inclusiveness and cross-cutting priorities (2 pages max.)

Document consultations at regional and country levels and explain how private-sector actors, civil society, and regional organizations will be engaged. Present strategies to ensure the meaningful inclusion of women, youth, marginalized groups and MSMEs. Additionally, explain how gender, youth, climate and digital issues are being considered.

6. Institutional and implementation arrangements (2 pages max.)

Describe the role of the lead IP, the responsibilities of national executing partners, including NIUs, and the oversight, accountability, procurement and fiduciary arrangements that will govern implementation. Clearly outline the personnel assumptions in terms of qualifications, levels, and whether positions are international or national staff. Attach an organogram to clarify reporting lines and fund flows.

7. Fiduciary and financial management (1 page max.)

Describe the legal status of the IP, including its registration and institutional placement, confirming its authority and capacity to manage EIF funding (complemented by the TFM Capacity Assessment, as relevant). Outline the financial management personnel, oversight mechanisms and systems in place that ensure efficient transactions, quality control, reporting and segregation of EIF funds. Demonstrate how procurement procedures and systems will uphold timeliness, quality and VfM in delivering CPD outputs. Indicate how human resources/recruitment systems will cover engagement of consultants and the use of government staff (shared or dedicated), consistent with the organizational chart. Finally, present the systems established to ensure timely annual audits of financial statements and compliance with rules and procedures, in line with EIF standards.

8. Budget and resource mobilization (2 pages max.)

Include the total budget, broken down into Facility 1 and Facility 2, along with co-financing (minimum 1:1) and in-kind contributions from both IPs and participating countries. Outline the project's resource mobilization strategy for leveraging additional funding from development partners, climate finance or private sector sources.

9. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (1 page max.)

Describe the MEL approach in accordance with the EIF's MIS and global MEL framework. Explain how progress will be tracked, how data will be disaggregated, and how lessons will be captured and shared. Projects longer than three years with budgets exceeding USD 1 million must undergo independent mid-term and final reviews or evaluations.

10. Value for Money (1 page max.)

Explain how the project will demonstrate VfM across the dimensions of economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity, with a detailed VfM framework as an annex.

11. Risk management (1 page max.)

Identify regional- and country-specific risks, assess their likelihood and impact, and set out mitigation measures. A risk matrix should be annexed.

12. Partnerships, communication and visibility (2 pages max.)

Identify national and regional development partners, describe the engagement of the private sector and other stakeholders, and set out the communication strategy and visibility measures to ensure that results are effectively disseminated to stakeholders and the public.

13. Sustainability strategy (1 page max.)

Describe how institutional arrangements, technical capacities and financing mechanisms will ensure the continuation of results beyond EIF support. Include details on integration into regional or national frameworks, resource mobilization pathways, and measures to strengthen ownership by relevant stakeholders.

Annexes

- **Annexe 1:** Logical framework (regional + country indicators)
- **Annexe 2:** TOC diagram
- **Annexe 3:** Modular work plan (Excel)
- **Annexe 4:** Budget breakdown (Excel)
- **Annexe 5:** MEL plan
- **Annexe 6:** Risk matrix
- **Annexe 7:** VfM matrix
- **Annexe 8:** NSC/FP endorsement letters or minutes
- **Annexe 9:** Organogram of implementation arrangements