UNITED NATIONS
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SMIC
Smart Manufacturing Innovation Centre

SMIC SMART MANUFACTURING ACCELERATOR PROGRAM

Open call for applications

Overview

The Smart Manufacturing Innovation Centre (SMIC) in Novi Sad invites manufacturing companies from the Western Balkans to apply for the **SMIC Smart Manufacturing Accelerator Program**, to help them identify priorities and plan their digital and green transformation. The programme is based on the UNIDO Smart Manufacturing Acceleration (USMA) methodology, which helps manufacturing companies modernise step by step. It takes a holistic look at the factory, examining how production is organised, how energy and materials are used, and where digital technologies can bring the greatest benefits. The principle is simple: fix the basics first, then invest in technology.

The programme is implemented under the UNIDO project *Fostering Industry 4.0 for Green Transition and Circular Economy in the Western Balkans*, financed by the Governments of Slovenia and Cyprus and delivered by the Smart Manufacturing Innovation Centre (SMIC) in Novi Sad.

About the programme

The programme runs in two stages:

Stage	Description	Timeline
Stage 1 - Assessment and Transformation Plan	Up to 15 manufacturing companies from the Western Balkans will receive, free of charge, an expert assessment of their factory and a tailor-made Transformation Plan for their digital and green transformation. The plan will identify areas for improvement, recommend concrete actions, establish implementation priorities and estimate the associated costs.	January – May 2027

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Stage	Description	Timeline
Stage 2 - Implementation Support	Selected companies will receive hands-on support to put their Transformation Plans into practice. Selection for Stage 2 will prioritise companies demonstrating a clear commitment to implementation. This includes having already initiated activities under their plan, appointing a person responsible for implementation, committing their own time or budget, and providing the data needed to monitor and measure progress.	July – December 2027

The assessments will be carried out by experienced SMIC advisors.

Eligibility criteria

Who can apply	Manufacturing companies registered in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia or Serbia
What you receive	A factory assessment and a Transformation Plan, free of charge; implementation support for selected companies
Places available	Up to 15 companies, about 3 per economy
Cost to the company	None. The company contributes management time and data
How to apply	Short online form, about 30 minutes → https://smic-rs.com/smic-smart-manufacturing-accelerator-program/
Deadline	4 December 2026

Why take part

- **Know exactly where your factory loses money.** An experienced advisor walks through your production with you. Together you identify where time, materials, energy and capacity are lost today. Many of these losses are invisible from the office.
- **Get a clear plan instead of scattered ideas.** You receive a written plan that puts actions in the right order. Quick, low-cost improvements come first. Larger investments in machines, software or energy come later, when the basics are in place and the investment can pay off.

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- **Avoid expensive mistakes.** Buying equipment or software on top of unstable processes is one of the most common and costly errors. The plan shows which investments make sense for your company now, and which should wait.
- **Be ready for banks and support programmes.** A plan with costed and justified actions makes it easier to apply for a loan, a grant or a public support programme. You know what you need, why, and what return to expect.
- **Stay competitive with your customers.** Buyers in the EU increasingly ask suppliers about quality, efficiency, energy use and digital readiness. The plan helps you prepare answers and act on them.
- **Access expertise you would normally pay for.** The assessment, the plan and the follow-up are delivered by SMIC advisors and backed by UNIDO. There is no cost to your company.
- **Join a regional network.** Participating companies become part of the SMIC network, with access to technology providers, demonstration facilities and peer companies across the Western Balkans.

What your company receives

The programme has two stages. Every selected company completes Stage 1. A smaller group continues to Stage 2.

Stage 1 - Assessment and Transformation Plan (all selected companies, up to 15)

- **Factory assessment.** A SMIC advisor visits your company and works with your management team. The assessment covers how production is organised, quality, maintenance, energy and material use, data and digital tools, and people and skills.
- **Benchmark.** You see where your company stands today, area by area, and where the biggest gains are.
- **Transformation Plan.** A practical document written for your company. It contains:
    - the priority actions that will bring the most benefit;
    - the order in which to carry them out, starting with quick wins;
    - an estimate of the cost, effort and expected benefit of each action;
    - the skills, partners or technology each action needs;
    - the indicators you will use to track progress.
- **Plan discussion.** The advisor presents the plan to your management and agrees the next steps with you.

What you have at the end of Stage 1: a clear picture of your factory, an action plan you can start using the next day, and a document you can use with banks, investors and support programmes.

Stage 2 - Implementation support (up to 5, ideally one per economy)

- **Coaching during implementation.** Your SMIC advisor works with your team as you carry out the first actions of the plan, helping solve problems as they come up.
- **Matching with providers.** Introductions to technology and service providers that fit your needs and budget, and access to SMIC demonstration facilities to see solutions in practice before you buy.
- **Access to finance.** Guidance on financing and public support programmes available in your economy, and help to prepare the technical part of an application.
- **Visibility.** With your consent, your company can be featured as a reference case in the region.

Who can apply

Your company can apply if it meets all of the following:

1. It is a legal entity registered and operating in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia or Serbia.
2. Its main activity is manufacturing: it makes physical products in its own production facility.
3. It is a small or medium-sized company (< 250 employees; annual turnover ≤ €50 million).
4. It has been operating for at least three years.
5. It is not in bankruptcy, liquidation or serious financial difficulty.
6. The owner or managing director commits to take part in the assessment and the plan discussion.

Each company may submit one application. Companies from all manufacturing sectors are welcome, such as food, metal, plastics, wood and furniture, textiles, electrical equipment and machinery.

How to apply and how companies are selected for Stage 1

Apply online at https://smic-rs.com/smic-smart-manufacturing-accelerator-program/ by 4 December. The form asks for basic company data, your main products, your three main production challenges (with at least one figure where available), the name of the owner or managing director who will take part, the person responsible for the plan, whether you can commit staff time to the first actions, and whether you can share production, quality and energy data.

Data from the application is used only for selection and for the programme (see Confidentiality below).

Selection follows three steps:

1. **Eligibility check.** SMIC checks each application against the criteria above.
2. **Places per economy.** About 3 places are reserved for each of the five economies, so that the whole region is covered.

3. **Ranking.** Within each economy, eligible applications are ranked by a short score from the application form (maximum 10 points): management commitment (up to 4), clarity of production challenges (up to 3), readiness to share data (up to 2) and consistency of self-assessment (1). The level of digital maturity is not scored, as companies at any stage can benefit. Applications with fewer than 5 points are placed on the reserve list. If scores are equal, the earlier application ranks higher, so apply early.

Places not filled in one economy after the deadline go to the highest-ranked companies on the reserve list in other economies. All applicants are informed of the result by email.

For further information or inquiries, please contact Prof. Zoran Jelicic at zoran.jelicic@smic-rs.com, Prof. Miro Govedarica at miro.govedarica@smic-rs.com, or Aleksandar Filiposki at a.filiposki@unido.org.

How companies are selected for Stage 2

At the end of Stage 1, every company may request Stage 2 support. A panel of SMIC and UNIDO experts reviews each Transformation Plan and ranks the companies using six criteria of equal weight, each scored from 0 to 5:

Criterion	What the panel looks for
Management commitment	The owner or director leads the change and assigns people to it
Implementation started	The company has already carried out at least one quick-win action from its Transformation Plan before the selection.
Feasibility	The first actions are realistic for the company's size, budget and skills
Own resources committed	The company has set aside budget or staff time for the first actions of the plan.
Expected impact	Clear gains in productivity, quality, energy or material use
Willingness to measure	The company agrees to share data before and after, so results can be shown

The highest-ranked companies are offered Stage 2 support. If scores are equal, the higher score in management commitment decides.

Indicative timeline

Step	Indicative date
Call opens	6 November 2026
Online info session (Registration link)	19 November 2026
Application deadline	4 December 2026
Companies informed of selection	18 December 2026
Stage 1: Assessments and Transformation Plans	January – May 2027
Selection for Stage 2	June 2027
Stage 2: Implementation support	July – December 2027

What we ask of your company

- Give the advisor access to the production site and the data needed for the assessment.
- Make the owner or managing director available for the opening meeting and the plan discussion.
- Report on the actions taken and share key results by the end of the programme (December 2027).
- Allow SMIC and UNIDO to use anonymised results in programme reports. Publishing a named case study is optional and only with your written consent.

Confidentiality. All company data is treated as confidential. It is used only by SMIC, UNIDO and the assigned advisor to deliver the programme. Results are reported publicly only in aggregated or anonymised form.