

Considering that applicant projects must demonstrate their contribution to the [National Action Program to Combat Desertification](#) (NAPCD), focusing on promoting the sustainable ecosystem management of susceptible areas and the recovery of affected areas, soil protection and conservation and should demonstrate their benefits to biodiversity and climate change mitigation and adaptation in susceptible areas to desertification;

Bearing in mind that the selected projects must promote participation mechanisms in the fields of science, politics and society and bear in mind the uncertainties associated with the threats and opportunities deriving from climate change.

Considering that the projects have to address and contribute to combat desertification in key hotspots of land degradation, having as baseline an ecosystem services approach and have an innovative or experimental nature (pilot projects). **The innovative character of the projects may result from new approaches or methodologies**, as well as integrated cooperative approaches with secondary benefits to circular economy and bioeconomy. **They are, thus, experimental projects.**

#### **Priority Area A - Resilience of forest and burnt areas**

This priority area aims to enhance the resilience of forest areas and its susceptibility to fires and desertification. The goal is to intervene on areas affected by rural fires, soil erosion, other degraded land, through restoration and requalification. **In this priority area, ecosystems' restoration must foresee activities that contribute to increase greenhouse gases storage by enhancing the forestry management and new forest areas, and by the development of technologies, practices and processes.**

In terms of the geographical application, priority area A must be applied to one or more of the following administrative units at NUTSIII level: Terras de Trás-os-Montes; Douro; Beiras e Serra da Estrela.

#### **Priority Area B - Resilience of the productive systems at oak trees agro-forests and grazing areas**

This priority area aims to promote and enhance sustainable production methods and management in agroforest systems and extensive grazing, focusing on soil protection. **Ecosystems' restoration must foresee activities that contribute to increase greenhouse gases storage by enhancing and developing agronomic practices, technologies and processes.**

The priority area B aims to improve soil's physical and chemical quality, comprising good practices regarding soil use and conservation, such as minimum mobilizations, direct seeding, greening between lines and crops rotation, among others. Also, it should ensure biodiverse pastures.

In terms of the geographical application, priority area B must be applied to one or more of the following administrative units at NUTSIII level: Algarve; Baixo Alentejo; Alentejo Central.

### **Priority Area C - Resilience of productive systems**

Priority area C aims to reduce the susceptibility to desertification in semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, **by smart management and the use of technologies, aiming the sustainable use of local products and land.**

This Priority area aims to focus on interventions towards ecosystems restoration, foreseeing **activities that contribute to CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration, improve soil functions and improve the response to fires, since these areas are vulnerable to rural fires and to land degradation through soil erosion.**

In terms of the geographical application, priority area C must be applied to one or more of the following administrative units at NUTSIII level: Beira Baixa; Alto Alentejo.

In the aforementioned context and considering the aspects of industrial research and experimental development established in the priorities of this Call, and previously highlighted in bold, our understanding is that the mentioned activities fall under **Article 25.º of the GBER, (Aid for research and development projects)**, namely, in what concerns, in paragraph 2:

**(b) industrial research;**

**(c) experimental development;**

**(d) feasibility studies;**

In fact, the priority areas that guide the projects covered by this Call involve industrial research work, as they involve planned research aimed at acquiring new knowledge for the development of new products, processes or services, or to introduce a significant improvement in products, existing processes or services, integrating the construction of prototypes.

As for the category "Experimental development", this Call also implies it, since it implies the acquisition, combination, configuration and use of relevant scientific and technological knowledge and capabilities, and others, already existing, with the objective of develop new or improved products, processes or services.

Moreover, in accordance with subparagraph (d) "Feasibility Studies", this Call also indicates it, since it leads to increased technical and practical value of products, technologies or services, provided it relates to a research and development project complying with at least one of the research categories mentioned above, under article 25.º, which is the case.

It should be noted, also, that the present Call includes the elaboration of pilot projects.

Also under the GBER, aid may also be granted under:

**Article 17.º - Investment aid for SMEs;**

**Article 18.º - Aid for consultancy in favour of SMEs;**

**Article 19.º - Investment aid for SMEs; and**

**Article 31.º - Training Aid**, considering training activities that are planned to be provided under the approved projects;

There is also, in this Call, the possibility of granting ***de minimis aid***, under the terms established in Regulation (EU) no. 1407/2013, of the Commission, of 18 december 2013, on *de minimis aid*.