cipher

Cybersecurity Intelligence, Protection, and Holistic Enterprise Resilience

PRESS RELEASE

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EU Project CIPHER Launches €4.32M Cascade Funding Scheme to strengthen critical infrastructure cybersecurity

BRUSSELS, October 26th, 2026

As cyber threats targeting essential infrastructure, such as energy, water, transport, and telecommunications, escalate in frequency and sophistication across Europe, operators face increasingly stringent compliance and technical requirements under the NIS2 Directive and the Cyber Resilience Act (CRA).

To address these critical security challenges, the EU-funded **CIPHER project** (*Cybersecurity Intelligence, Protection, and Holistic Enterprise Resilience*, Grant Agreement No. 101249732) is establishing a collaborative, standardised, "available-as-a-service" testing facility and experimentation laboratory. This platform aims to allow essential service operators, technology providers, and public authorities to evaluate cybersecurity risk governance, test cutting-edge security enablers, and validate complex threat scenarios within a secure, production-like cyber-range environment.

Today, the CIPHER consortium is pleased to announce the opening of **CIPHER Open Call #1**. F6S Innovation, this initiative provides direct Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) to European startups, SMEs, mid-caps, research organisations, and certified cybersecurity auditors.

Key opportunities offered by CIPHER Open Call #1

Selected third-party beneficiaries will receive up to **€60,000.00 in equity-free EU cascade funding** (under a 50% co-funding model) to execute 9-month technical projects starting in April 2027.

Third-party projects will join a structured 9-month Sprint programme, gaining direct technical access to CIPHER's production-like cyber-range laboratory, Wazuh-based XDR SaaS platform, and automated testing toolsets.

Target technical areas funded under the call

Applicants can submit proposals under six open technical challenges reflecting distinct capability modes:

- **Regulatory capability gap assessment (Challenge K1):** Supporting certified lead auditors in evaluating CIPHER platform capabilities against NIS2 Article 21(2) risk management measures and IEC 62443 standards in OT sectors.

- **OT Pentesting & kill-chain methodology (Challenge K2):** Inviting offensive security specialists to document repeatable penetration testing kill-chains for OT assets and benchmark automated pentesting frameworks.
- **Vulnerability Management validation (Challenge T1):** Enabling security engineers to exercise vulnerability toolchains across SBOM, endpoint, and network views, pushing scan proofs to immutable S3 WORM storage.
- **XDR Telemetry & Onboarding (Challenge T2):** Allowing SOC practitioners to connect EDR, IDS/IPS, and OT appliance telemetry to CIPHER's XDR SaaS to test high-volume risk alert correlation.
- **Domain cyber-range contribution (Challenge R1):** Inviting cyber-range providers to contribute or federate operational, sector-emulated cyber ranges that output quantifiable NIS2 readiness metrics.
- **DevSecOps & platform automation (Challenge P1):** Funding platform engineers to deliver Helm charts, version-controlled Infrastructure as Code (IaC), and CI/CD pipelines for core security tools.

Timeline

- **Official application window:** 26 October2026 (13:00 CET) - 6 January 2027 (17:00 CET)
- **Information Webinar & Live Q&A:** 10 December 2026 (14:00 CET)
- **Project execution period:** April 2027 - December 2027 (9 Months)

All applications must be completed and submitted online through the official F6S platform portal: **www.f6s.com/cipher-opencall1**.

For full call guidelines, eligibility criteria, and technical annexes, please visit the official CIPHER project website: **https://cipher-eu.com/**.

Contacts

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Application portal: www.f6s.com/cipher-opencall1

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