

Terms of Reference

Call for Applications

Vulcanus Market Research Initiative 2026-2027

Issued by	EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation
Launch date	15 June 2026
Application deadline	24 July 2026
Participation fee	EUR 500 (invoiced only after successful matching and final confirmation of participation)
Initiative period	September 2026 – March 2027
Eligibility	European SMEs headquartered in the European Union or countries associated with the Single Market Programme
Language	All reports, presentations, and communication must be conducted in English
Deliverables	Market Research presentation, tailored market intelligence report, updated slide deck, and optional follow-up presentation
Contact	vinj@eu-japan.or.jp

1. Background

The EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation announces the launch of the 2026–2027 edition of the **Vulcanus Market Research Initiative**.

The initiative connects European SMEs with STEM students participating in the **Vulcanus in Japan Programme** (VinJ), undertaking eight-month industrial placements from August 2026 to March 2027 at leading companies and research institutions across Japan.

Selected SMEs receive tailored market intelligence reports assessing the Japanese market potential of their product, technology, or service.

Research is conducted by the 2026–2027 cohort of the Vulcanus in Japan Programme. First launched in 1997, the programme marks its 30th anniversary in 2027 and has built an extensive alumni network of nearly 800 professionals, researchers, and academics across Europe and Japan.

Students are selected through a highly competitive application process coordinated by the EU-Japan Centre. For this initiative, student teams are guided throughout the research process by experienced business coaches appointed by the EU-Japan Centre.

2. Objective of the Initiative

The Vulcanus Market Research Initiative aims to support SMEs interested in understanding opportunities, challenges, and market conditions in Japan.

The initiative enables companies to:

- assess market opportunities in Japan
- better understand industry structure and key stakeholders
- identify potential barriers to entry
- evaluate customer needs and purchasing drivers
- explore regulatory, technical, and operational considerations
- support future Japan market entry strategies

The initiative is designed to provide market intelligence and exploratory research. It does not constitute commercial consultancy, legal advice, or direct market representation.

3. Areas of Research

Research projects will be defined based on the company profile, product, technology, or service, and may cover the following areas:

- Market size and demand
- Industry stakeholders
- Competitive and market environment
- Regulatory and technical considerations
- User and operational environment
- Market entry considerations

The exact scope of each project will be defined jointly between the selected SME, the student team, and the EU-Japan Centre at the start of the initiative.

4. Structure of the Initiative

Selected SMEs will be matched with small multidisciplinary teams of Vulcanus students based on academic background, technical interests, and project compatibility. While every effort will be made to ensure an appropriate match, an exact alignment across all criteria cannot be guaranteed.

Prior to the start of the research phase, selected SMEs will be asked to complete a scope of work defining the focus and boundaries of their research project, sign a participation agreement, and where applicable, sign a non-disclosure agreement to protect any confidential information shared during the initiative.

SME responsibilities: Participating SMEs are expected to provide an introductory company briefing about their business in September, attend a 60-minute Market Research presentation in January, and confirm whether a follow-up presentation is required in March. Participants may from time to time be requested to respond to questions from students and/or coaches, and to provide additional information where reasonably deemed appropriate for the purposes of the initiative.

If the SME is satisfied with the contents of the Market Research Presentation, the March deliverables will consist of a final market intelligence report and an updated slide deck only. If the SME prefers an updated presentation, a follow-up presentation of up to 30 minutes will be scheduled in March.

All communication will be conducted in English via video conference or written correspondence.

Research activities: Student teams will conduct research and analysis related to the agreed project scope, supervised throughout by experienced business coaches appointed by the EU-Japan Centre.

5. Deliverables

The initiative is designed to provide exploratory market intelligence to support internal assessment and future business planning. It is not intended as a substitute for professional consultancy or legal advice.

Selected companies will be provided with:

- a 60-minute Market Research presentation in January
- an optional follow-up presentation of up to 30 minutes in March, if requested following the Market Research presentation
- a final market intelligence report and updated slide deck in March

All projects are supervised by experienced business professionals appointed by the EU-Japan Centre to act as coaches throughout the initiative. They support project coordination, guide the student teams throughout the research process, and help ensure the quality and relevance of the final deliverables.

6. Tentative Timeline

Milestone	Timing
Launch of call for applications	15 June 2026
Application deadline	24 July 2026
Evaluation and shortlisting of SMEs	31 July 2026
Matching process between students and shortlisted SMEs	August 2026
Final selection and confirmation of participation	14 August 2026

Scope of work, participation agreement and NDA circulated and signed	August/September 2026
Participation fee invoiced to selected SMEs	September 2026
Introductory meetings with SMEs	September 2026
Research phase	October 2026 – February 2027
Market Research presentation (60 minutes)	January 2027
SME confirmation: final report and updated slide deck only, or follow-up presentation	January/February 2027
Final market intelligence report, updated slide deck, and follow-up presentation (if requested)	March 2027

A more detailed operational timeline will be provided to selected participants following confirmation of participation.

7. Participation Fee

Participation in the initiative is subject to a contribution fee of EUR 500.

The fee covers:

- project coordination and administration
- student matching and assignment
- supervision and mentoring of student teams by experienced business coaches
- organisation of progress meetings and final presentations
- operational management and participant support throughout the initiative

The participation fee will be invoiced only following successful matching and final confirmation of participation. Cancellation terms and refund conditions will be set out in the participation agreement.

8. Selection and Matching Process

Applications will be assessed based on:

- relevance of the proposed research topic
- feasibility within the initiative framework
- alignment with the initiative objectives
- expected educational and strategic value
- alignment with the initiative's priority sectors

Shortlisting does not guarantee final selection. Final participation is subject to the successful matching of suitable Vulcanus students to the proposed project. Final project allocation will

also depend on the matching process with participating Vulcanus students, based on academic background, technical interests, and project compatibility.

Shortlisted SMEs not ultimately selected for the initiative will be invited to participate, free of charge, in EU-Japan Centre [Business Training Modules](#) in 2026–2027 — a two-day online preparation programme combining practical guidance on doing business in Japan with sector-specific market intelligence delivered by industry experts.

9. Eligibility

The initiative is open to SMEs established in:

- the European Union
- countries associated with the Single Market Programme

Research projects must fall within one of the following sectors:

- Artificial Intelligence & Digital Technologies
- Advanced Electronics & Intelligent Systems
- Smart Infrastructure & Mobility
- Industrial Technologies & Engineering Solutions
- Sustainable Innovation & Green Technologies
- Biotechnology & Life Sciences
- Cybersecurity & Digital Trust
- Quantum & Space Technologies

10. How to Apply

SMEs are invited to submit their application through the official application form:

[Market Research Initiative Application Form](#)

Additional details, updates and a preview of all application questions are available on the [Open Call Information Page](#). Applicants are encouraged to prepare their answers in advance, as the online form should be completed in one sitting.

Application deadline: **24 July 2026**

Early submission is encouraged.

11. Contact Information

Please review this document carefully before submitting an enquiry. For any remaining questions, contact the Centre Training Programmes Team at vinj@eu-japan.or.jp