MALTAENTERPRISE

Issued by Malta Enterprise

Circular Return Infrastructure Grant Scheme

INCENTIVE GUIDELINES

Document information

Scheme Call Dates	15 September 2026 – 31 August 2027 *[or until budget is exhausted]*
Application deadline	31 August 2027
Guideline version	Version 1.0
Publication date	15th September 2026
State Aid Framework	Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/2831 (the *de minimis* Regulation)
Further information	maltaenterprise.com/support

Legal Basis

Malta Enterprise is enabled to issue and publish official Incentive Guidelines in terms of Article 8(3)(a) of the Malta Enterprise Act, Chapter 463 of the Laws of Malta.

Contents

Purpose and Policy Rationale

The Circular Return Infrastructure Grant Scheme (the "Scheme") aims to accelerate the deployment of reverse vending machines and comparable automated take-back solutions by wholesalers and retailers to enable the recovery of materials for recycling and/or reuse. Recovered materials address various waste streams including beverage packaging (such as PET bottles, aluminium cans and glass beverage containers), used textiles (such as fabric, clothes, shoes and bedding), and reusable packaging systems (such as reusable coffee cups and reusable meal boxes).

By supporting convenient return infrastructure at points of sale, the Scheme contributes to circular economy objectives by increasing capture rates, improving the quality of collected materials, enabling reuse loops where applicable, and reducing litter and residual waste, as well as associated waste management costs.

Definitions

For the purposes of these Guidelines, the following definitions shall apply:

Applicant:
An undertaking submitting an application for support under the Scheme.

Beneficiary:
An undertaking which has been awarded support under the Scheme.

Cash Grant:
A non-repayable grant paid to the beneficiary following eligible expenditure verification and in line with these Guidelines.

Reverse Vending Machine (RVM):
An automated machine that accepts specific used/empty items, verifies and sorts them, and issues a refund/receipt/reward or proof of return.

For the purposes of this Scheme, RVMs may include (as applicable to the supported project):

(i) beverage packaging RVMs (e.g., PET bottles, aluminium cans and glass beverage containers);

(ii) specialised RVMs for used textiles (e.g., fabric, clothes, shoes, bedding); and/or

(iii) RVM-enabled take-back systems for reusable packaging (e.g., reusable coffee cups and reusable meal boxes) with identification/verification and return confirmation functionality.

Undertaking:
Any entity engaged in an economic activity, regardless of its legal status and the way in which it is financed.

Single undertaking

All enterprises having at least one of the following relationships with each other:

(a) one enterprise has a majority of the shareholders' or members' voting rights in another enterprise;

(b) one enterprise has the right to appoint or remove a majority of the members of the administrative, management or supervisory body of another enterprise;

(c) one enterprise has the right to exercise a dominant influence over another enterprise pursuant to a contract entered into with that enterprise or pursuant to a provision in its memorandum or articles of association;

(d) one enterprise, which is a shareholder in or member of another enterprise, controls alone, pursuant to an agreement with other shareholders in or members of that enterprise, a majority of shareholders' or members' voting rights in that enterprise.

Enterprises having any of the relationships referred to in points (a) to (d) through one or more other enterprises shall also be considered to be a single undertaking.

Scope of the Measure

The Scheme supports the installation and related investments required to operationalise RVMs and similar automated take-back solutions at retail and wholesale points (including supermarkets, convenience outlets and cash-and-carry operators). The investment should be justified within an integrated solution that addresses the logistics requirements for the collection/recycling/reuse of:

(i) beverage packaging, namely PET bottles, aluminium cans and glass beverage containers; and/or

(ii) used textiles, such as fabric, clothes, shoes and bedding; and/or

(iii) reusable packaging, such as reusable coffee cups and reusable meal boxes

Projects may include one or multiple RVM units and associated infrastructure across one or more sites, provided that all supported equipment relates to the same eligible item stream.

Budget, Aid Instrument and Aid Ceiling

The scheme has a total budget of €2,000,000 and a single undertaking may be awarded a cash grant of up to €300,000 (subject to the *de minimis* ceiling and cumulation rules). The cash grant shall cover 50% of the eligible costs incurred.

Eligible Applicants

Applicants must be operators of wholesale or retail facilities and must possess the necessary operational permits/licences to operate the outlet(s) where the RVM will be installed. Applicants should also be in a position to demonstrate the right to install and operate the equipment at the proposed site(s) (ownership, lease, or written permission).

Eligible Investments and Costs

Eligible costs must be directly linked to the deployment and operation of the RVM solution for the eligible item stream(s) supported by the project and must be incurred on or after the "Start Date" specified in the Letter of Approval (unless otherwise permitted). Eligible costs are the following:

(a) Purchase (or finance lease) of new automated RVM units that include identification/recognition modules and internal sorting or compaction mechanisms (where applicable);

(b) Installation and commissioning costs, including delivery, positioning, calibration, initial testing and acceptance when included with the purchase documentation and provide through the RVM supplier;

(c) ICT and software required for operation and reporting (e.g. RVM management software, connectivity modules, API integration with store POS/loyalty systems), limited to costs necessary for the project.

Project Implementation Rules General conditions

Retention of investment:
The RVM(s) must remain in operation at the location for a minimum period of 3 years from final payment of the cash grant.

Project duration
Unless an extension is granted in writing by the Corporation, projects must be completed (installed, commissioned, and operational) within twelve [12] months from the Letter of Approval.

Variations
Any variation to the Project (e.g., change of site, equipment model, supplier, budget reallocation) as approved, requires prior written approval by the Corporation.

Monitoring, Reporting and Records
Beneficiaries may be required to submit periodic operational data for monitoring, including volumes returned. Beneficiaries must maintain an asset register and ensure that supported equipment remains identifiable (e.g., via labels or serial numbers) throughout the retention period.

Application Process and Documentation

Submission
Applications must be submitted through the Corporation's online client-portal by 31st August 2027.

Required documentation (indicative)
Applications that do not include all the documentation requested by the Corporation as shall be listed in the application form, will not be evaluated. Applications must be signed by an authorised signatory. All applications will be required to include:

(a) A *de minimis* declaration covering the relevant rolling three-year period.

(b) Itemised quotations and technical datasheets for the proposed equipment;

(c) A layout/site plan showing installation area, endorsed by an architect confirming that the RMV(s) can be installed at proposed location in accordance with all applicable regulations.

(d) Proof that the applicant has the necessary agreements for the recycling and/or reuse of the collected material.

(e) Evidence that the applicant has or will establish a system for rewarding consumers that use the installed RVMs.

Evaluation and Award Process

Applications will be assessed for eligibility and completeness in the order received. Once the scheme budget is allocated, any remaining applications will be placed on a waiting list and will be allocated funding should there be savings from approved projects or should the scheme budget be increased.

Should the Corporation receive an application which contains missing or incomplete documentation, the Corporation will require the applicant to submit additional or updated documentation. In these instances, the effective submission date of the application shall be the date when the additional and/or updated documents are submitted to the Corporation.

Grant Payment, Claims and Verification

Grants are paid by reimbursement following the completion of the Project. On completion, the beneficiary shall submit a claim form which shall contain:

(a) Paid invoices and proof of payment (bank statements/remittance advice).

(b) Photographic evidence of installation.

(c) Model and Serial numbers of installed equipment.

The Corporation may carry out on-site inspections before and/or after payment, including during the retention period.

De minimis Aid

This scheme will be implemented in line with Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/2831 of 13 December 2023 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid [OJ L, 2023/2831, 15.12.2023] (the *de minimis* Regulation).

The total amount of *de minimis* aid granted to a single undertaking shall not exceed the amount of €300,000 over any period of three consecutive years.

This maximum threshold would include all State Aid granted under this aid scheme and any other State Aid measure implemented in line with the *de minimis* Regulation, including that received and/or applied for from any entity other than Malta Enterprise. Any *de minimis* aid received in excess of the established threshold will have to be recovered, with interest, from the undertaking receiving the aid.

Aid payable in several instalments shall be discounted to its value at the moment it is granted. The interest rate to be used for discounting purposes shall be the discount rate applicable at the time the aid is granted.

The *de minimis* declaration form indicating any other *de minimis* aid received and/or applied for over the applicable three-year period, must be filled in and submitted together with the application form.

Applicability of the Aid

Assistance approved under this aid scheme shall NOT result in:

(a) aid granted to undertakings active in the primary production of fishery and aquaculture products;

(b) aid granted to undertakings active in the processing and marketing of fishery and aquaculture products, where the amount of the aid is fixed on the basis of price or quantity of products purchased or put on the market;

(c) aid granted to undertakings active in the primary production of agricultural products;

(d) aid granted to undertakings active in the processing and marketing of agricultural products, in one of the following cases:

  I. where the amount of the aid is fixed on the basis of the price or quantity of such products purchased from primary producers or put on the market by the undertakings concerned;

II. where the aid is conditional on being partly or entirely passed on to primary producers;

(e) aid granted to export-related activities towards third countries or Member States, namely aid directly linked to the quantities exported, the establishment and operation of a distribution network or other current expenditure linked to the export activity;

(f) aid contingent upon the use of domestic goods and services over imported goods and services.

Where an undertaking is active in one of the sectors referred to in points (a), (b), (c) or (d) above as well as in one or more of the other sectors falling within the scope of the *de minimis* Regulation, or has other activities falling within the scope of this Regulation, aid may be granted in respect of the latter sectors or activities. Malta Enterprise will ensure, by relying on appropriate means such as separation of activities or separation of accounts, that the activities in the sectors excluded from the scope of the *de minimis* Regulation do not benefit from the *de minimis* aid granted in accordance with this scheme. Only those sectors eligible for assistance under the *de minimis* Regulation will be assisted. Activities in the sectors excluded from the scope of the *de minimis* Regulation will not benefit from assistance under this aid scheme.

Cumulation

In terms of Article 5 of the *de minimis* Regulation, *de minimis* aid granted under this incentive may be cumulated with:

(a) *de minimis* aid granted in accordance with Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/2832;

(b) *de minimis* aid granted in accordance with Commission Regulations (EU) No 1408/2013 and (EU) No 717/2014 up to the relevant ceiling laid down in Article 3(2) of the *de minimis* Regulation.

Aid granted under this incentive shall not be cumulated with State aid in relation to the same eligible costs if such cumulation would exceed the highest relevant aid intensity or aid amount fixed in the specific circumstances of each case by a block exemption regulation or a decision adopted by the Commission.

Publication in Central Register

In line with Article 6(1) of the *de minimis* Regulation, as of 1 January 2026, information on *de minimis* aid granted under this scheme shall be made publicly available in a central register on *de minimis* aid.

The following information shall be made public:

- the identification of the beneficiary,
- the aid amount,
- the granting date,
- the aid instrument, and
- the sector involved on the basis of the statistical classification of economic activities in the Union ('NACE classification').

Contact Details

Further information on the scheme, as well as information and guidance on the filling in of the application form may be obtained by contacting the Business First during office hours.

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