



RISE START CUP 2026
CALL FOR APPLICATIONS
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UNINT

The poster is a large rectangular graphic with a background of stylized, layered hills in shades of orange and red. In the upper center, there is a circular emblem containing a silhouette of a person with multiple arms, each holding a graduation cap. Below this emblem, the text "RISE START CUP 2026" is written in a large, bold, white sans-serif font. Underneath that, "CALL FOR APPLICATIONS" is written twice in the same font style. At the bottom of the text block, the word "UNINT" is displayed in a smaller, bold, white sans-serif font.

01/07/2026

Art 1. Introduction

UNINT, as a member of the RISE Project (**Reinforcing Integration of Skills for Employability and Internationalisation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq**) is pleased to launch the call for applications to select one UNINT team to take part in the **1st edition of RISE Start Cup Competition 2026**. The RISE Project is co-funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ Programme, Key Action 2 (Capacity Building in Higher Education) Strand 1.

The competition aims at:

- Promoting innovation, entrepreneurship, employability, and international cooperation among students from the partner universities of the RISE Project (Italy, Spain, and the Kurdistan region of Iraq).
- Providing students with an opportunity to transform innovative ideas into practical solutions addressing current societal, economic, environmental, and educational challenges.
- Challenging students to launch entrepreneurial projects that enhance job skills, global reach, and university-business cooperation within the framework of sustainable development.

Art 2. Theme of the Competition

Participants are invited to submit innovative project ideas related to the following topic:

“From Local Ideas to Global Impact: Cross-Border Innovation for Sustainable Communities and Regional Development”

Art 3. Objectives

The main objectives of the RISE Start Cup are the following:

- promote an entrepreneurial culture among students
- enhance employability opportunities and skills
- encourage innovative solutions to address societal and economic challenges
- foster cooperation between partner universities
- strengthen international networking and partnership opportunities

- promote sustainable development and digital innovation in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Art 4. Eligibility

UNINT will select a team composed of at least TWO and no more than FOUR students.

All students on the team must be enrolled in a master's degree program at UNINT when they submit the application.

Funds from the project will cover the on-site participation abroad for up to TWO students. The TWO students participating on-site in the start cup competition must still be enrolled in the master's degree program at the time of the competition (NOVEMBER 2026).

Students must be fluent in English (at least B2 level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – CEFR).

Only one team from UNINT will be selected to take part on-site in the startcup competition.

To participate in the selection process, students are required to:

- Form a team of up to 4 participants
- Nominate a team leader who will submit the application on behalf of all the participants in the team

If the team leader graduates or is otherwise unable to participate in the competition, the remaining team members may designate a new leader, subject to UNINT's approval.

The application should be sent to the email erasmus@unint.eu **by the team leader** using their institutional email address, name.surname@studenti.unint.eu, no later than **August 31st**.

A local committee composed of the Rector, the academic and the administrative representatives for Rise at UNINT, and a professor with a background in Business will evaluate the applications and select the team that will represent UNINT in the start cup competition.

The application should contain

1. Executive Summary in English (maximum 2 pages) about the **innovative business idea**.
2. Motivational letter in English on behalf of the team (no more than one page).
3. Curricula of all the participants in the team.
4. A copy of a picture ID of each participant in the team (UNINT Identity card is accepted).

The RISE Project promotes equal opportunities and encourages applications from all genders, backgrounds, and abilities. Teams with a balanced gender composition are particularly encouraged.

Art 5. Event Dates and Venue

RISE Start Cup 2026: 9-10 November 2026 at Duhok Polytechnic University, Duhok.

RISE Networking Event: 11 November 2026 at the University of Zakho, Zakho

All travel, accommodation, and living costs for the two funded students and their UNINT mentor will be covered by the RISE Project budget in accordance with Erasmus+ KA2 regulations.

Art 6. Competition requirements

Selected teams from all the universities involved in the project will follow a training/engagement path starting from mid-September until the Start Cup Competition Day.

UNINT selected team will have to submit the following materials to the RISE jury **by October 29th:**

- Business Model Canvas
- Pitch Deck Presentation (maximum 8-10 slides)
- Short video presentation (maximum 3 minutes) or project poster
- **For all these materials, the university will share the project templates to be used.**

Art 7. START CUP phases and Selection Process

Phase 1 – Publication of the Call for the Start Cup and Internal University Selection

- Applications by the student teams shall be submitted **by August 31st, 2026**
- UNINT will organize a local selection process and nominate the best team **by September 15th, 2026**

Phase 2 – Preparation/online cross-cultural mentorship between mid-September and the end of October

- UNINT team will participate together with the teams selected by the other international partners in at least 4 webinars of preparation (organised with UNIMED Start Cup, University of Murcia, UNINT, and local stakeholders)

Phase 3 – Start Cup competition, evaluation of the Jury and award

- The jury, composed of 1 representative of the HE Ministry + 1 from NGOs and civil society + 1 from local authorities + 1 Alumni + 1 from industry, will evaluate the above-mentioned materials and the pitch on the day of the Start Cup Competition according to predefined criteria (see Article 8) in order to select the best innovative business idea.
- Three finalists will be selected and will present their projects during the Networking Event at Zakho University; all the teams will attend the Networking Event

Art 8. Evaluation criteria

The business ideas are evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Innovation and creativity (25%)
- Feasibility and implementation potential (20%)
- Social and economic impact (20%)
- Contribution to employability and internationalisation (15%)
- Sustainability and scalability (10%)
- Quality of presentation and pitching (10%)

Art 9. RISE Start Cup Awards

- Certificates of Excellence
- Mentorship opportunities
- Visibility through RISE and UNIMED networks
- Opportunities for future collaboration and project development

Art 10. Confidentiality

All application materials will be treated confidentially and used exclusively for evaluation and dissemination purposes related to the RISE Project.

All project ideas submitted remain the intellectual property of the participants and their respective universities. By submitting an application, participants grant the RISE Project consortium the right to use the submitted materials for evaluation, dissemination, and promotional purposes related to the project, provided that appropriate credit is given. Personal data will be processed in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and will be used solely for the purposes of this competition.

Art 11. Participation in the Networking Event

The same student teams selected for the RISE 2026 Start Cup, together with their academic mentors, will participate in the Networking Event. Each partner university is entitled to send two students and one professor to attend both events.

Art 12. Contact Information

For further information, participants are encouraged to contact their university focal points:

RISE Local Coordination Team

Roberta Brotto, International University of Rome, UNINT

Email: erasmus@unint.eu

Project website:

<https://www.risekrdproject.eu/>



Get in touch



info@risekrdproject.eu



<https://www.risekrdproject.eu/>

Social Media



(Associated partner)



(coordinator)



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