

# Second call terms of reference

## 1. Legal basis

The Interreg Europe programme is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), whose principles and rules are laid down in the common provisions regulation (EU) 2021/1060, the ERDF regulation (EU) 2021/1058 and the Interreg regulation (EU) 2021/1059.

The expectations and requirements for projects are detailed in the Interreg Europe 2021-2027 cooperation programme and in the programme manual.

## 2. Context

Through its **cohesion policy**, the European Union works to reduce disparities both in the levels of development and in quality of life in European regions. It promotes actions aiming at making the European territory more innovative, more sustainable, and more inclusive, thus improving quality of life of the inhabitants. The large majority of the funds designated to reduce these disparities are managed at the regional or national levels. The European Union believes that regional development can also be improved through cooperation across borders.

In this context, the Interreg Europe programme supports the exchange and transfer of experience, innovative approaches and capacity building among public authorities and other policy relevant organisations across Europe with a view **to improving their regional development policy instruments** including programmes under the Investment for jobs and growth goal.

*A **policy instrument** is a means for public intervention. It refers to any policy, strategy, or law developed by public authorities and applied on the ground to improve a specific territorial situation. In most cases, financial resources are associated with a policy instrument. However, an instrument can also sometimes refer to a strategy or legislative framework with no specific funding (e.g., a Smart Specialisation Strategy) as long as this strategy or legislative framework comply with the above definition (i.e., 'developed by public authorities and implemented to improve a specific territorial situation'). In principle, internal documents of organisations (e.g., mission statements, in-house strategic orientations) does not qualify as policy instruments. In the context of Interreg Europe, operational programmes under the Investment for jobs and growth goal are considered as policy instruments. Beyond the programmes of the EU cohesion policy, local, regional or national public authorities develop their own policy instruments, which can also be addressed by Interreg Europe projects.*

The way projects can achieve policy improvements is explained in section 3.3.2 of the programme manual.

## 3. Eligible area

The programme eligible area covers the whole European Union territory with its 27 Member States, including insular and outermost regions. In addition, Norway and Switzerland are full members of the programme and organisations from these countries are eligible<sup>1</sup> to participate in projects. Partners from other countries can participate at their own costs.

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<sup>1</sup> As long as their legal status meets the programme requirements as mentioned in section 8.1 of the present terms of reference.

## 4. Timing of the call

The second call for proposals opens on **15<sup>th</sup> March 2023** and closes on **9<sup>th</sup> June 2023, at 12:00 p.m. (midday)** CEST (Paris time).

## 5. Action supported

This is a call for proposals for **interregional cooperation projects**. These projects gather policy-relevant organisations from different countries in Europe working together on a common regional development issue. The first three years of the projects ('core phase') are dedicated to exchange and transfer of experience among the participating partners in order to improve the policy instruments addressed by the project. In the fourth and last year ('follow-up phase'), the regions mainly focus on monitoring the results and impact of the cooperation.

A detailed description of this action is provided in section B 'Projects' of the programme manual.

## 6. Priorities

### Programme scope

The programme is structured around one single cross-cutting priority, the Interreg-specific objective 'a better cooperation governance'. This means that beneficiaries can cooperate on **any topics of shared relevance in line with their regional needs, as long as this falls within the scope of cohesion policy**.

This scope includes the topics defined by the policy objectives and specific objectives of cohesion policy as presented in Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR), Article 5 and Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 on ERDF, Article 3. Despite one single priority, the actions of the programme are still organised according to the specific objectives of the cohesion policy listed in table 1 below. This means that projects need to select a specific objective in their application form.

As regards policy objectives 1 and 2, the programme welcomes applications dealing with innovative solutions to mitigate the effects of the energy crisis in the regions and accelerate their energy transition (e.g., policies supporting the development of research and innovation tools or the scaling up and diffusion of such tools).

### Concentration principle

The programme also recognises the need to concentrate resources on those policy areas that are most relevant and urgent for regions in Europe. For this reason, the programme plans to indicatively concentrate the largest share of its budget (80%) on the thematic areas covered by a selection of specific objectives. This budget concentration is summarised in table 1 below.

**Table 1 – Allocation of programme budget per Policy Objectives and corresponding Specific Objectives**

Share of programme budget	Policy objectives	Specific objectives
80%	1. Smarter Europe	All specific objectives: (i) Research and Innovation capacities, uptake of advanced technologies (ii) Digitisation for citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities (iii) Sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments (iv) Skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition & entrepreneurship (v) Digital connectivity
	2. Greener Europe	All specific objectives: (i) Energy efficiency and reduction of greenhouse emissions (ii) Renewable energy (iii) Smart energy systems, grids and storage (iv) Climate change adaptation, disaster risk prevention, resilience (v) Access to water and sustainable water management (vi) Circular and resource efficient economy (vii) Protection and preservation of nature and biodiversity, green infrastructures, pollution reduction (viii) Sustainable urban mobility for zero carbon economy
	4. More social Europe	The following selected specific objectives: (i) Effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour market, access to quality employment, social economy (v) Equal access to health care, health systems resilience, family-based and community-based care (vi) Culture and tourism for economic development, social inclusion and social innovation
20%	3. More connected Europe	All specific objectives: (i) Climate resilient, intelligent, secure, sustainable and intermodal TEN-T (ii) Sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility
	4. More social Europe	The following selected specific objectives: (ii) Accesses to education, training and lifelong learning, distance and on-line education and training (iii) Inclusion of marginalised communities, low-income households and disadvantaged groups (iv) Socio-economic integration of third country nationals, including migrants
	5. Europe closer to Citizens	All specific objectives (i) Sustainable integrated territorial development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security (urban areas) (ii) Sustainable integrated territorial development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security (other than urban)

In addition, in the context of the Interreg-specific objective ‘a better cooperation governance’, Interreg Europe can support ‘non-thematic’ cooperation on issues dealing with pure implementation related challenges of regional development policies (e.g., state aid, public procurement, territorial tools, financial instruments, evaluation and monitoring). These **governance related issues** are also important when working on more efficient regional development policies.

Further information on the programme priority axes and specific objectives can be found in the Interreg Europe Cooperation Programme and section 2.5 of the programme manual.

### **Innovative character**

The 2021-2027 Interreg Europe programme needs to go beyond the results achieved in the 2014-2020 period where more than 250 projects were supported (detailed information on these projects can be found on: [www.interregeurope.eu/discover-projects](http://www.interregeurope.eu/discover-projects)).

As reflected in Annex 01 of the present terms of reference, the 2014-2020 projects cover a wide range of regional development policy issues and contributed to the identification of numerous **good practices**. Organisations interested in the second call are thus invited to check these projects to ensure that the innovative character of their proposal is demonstrated.

The participation of organisations not yet involved in the first call projects is encouraged. In particular, organisations from regions not yet represented in these projects will be positively regarded. The list of NUTS 2 regions not yet represented in first call approved projects is available as Annex 02 of the present document.

**Further information on the way to demonstrate the innovative character can be found in section 3.3.4 of the programme manual.**

## **7. Funding available and co-financing rates**

Up to 40% of the overall ERDF budget (approximately **EUR 130 million**) of the Interreg Europe programme is made available for the second call for proposals. The final committed budget will depend on the quality of the submitted applications.

The eligible project activities are co-financed by the ERDF at a rate of either 70% or 80% depending on the legal status of the EU partner. Partners from Norway and Switzerland are not eligible to receive ERDF but can receive co-financing from their respective national funds. Organisations from Norway are invited to contact the Norwegian Interreg national point of contact to receive information on Norwegian funding opportunities.

<b>Co-financing rate</b>	<b>Eligible project partner according to legal status and location</b>
80% ERDF	Public bodies and bodies governed by public law from all 27 EU member states
70% ERDF	Private non-profit bodies from all 27 EU member states
Up to 50% Norwegian funding	Public bodies, bodies governed by public law and private non-profit bodies from Norway
Swiss funding	Partners from Switzerland are invited to contact the Swiss Interreg national point of contact to receive information on Swiss funding opportunities

## 8. Partnership requirements

All details related to projects' partnership are available in section 3.4 of the programme manual. The present terms of reference just highlight the most important requirements which are further explained in the manual.

### 8.1 Who can apply?

The following organisations are eligible to receive ERDF or Norwegian funding.

- Public authorities,
- Public law bodies (bodies governed by public law),
- Private non-profit bodies.

Private non-profit bodies and partners from Switzerland cannot take on the role of lead partner.

Beyond the issue of eligibility, one of the key success factors for any application is to ensure that the proposed partnership is coherent with the objective and issue addressed in the proposal (see section 3.4.4.1 of the manual).

### 8.2 Involvement of the policy responsible authorities

In line with the programme's objective, the policy responsible authorities are the core target group of Interreg Europe. These organisations can be national, regional or local authorities as well as other relevant organisations responsible for elaborating and/or implementing regional development policies. In the case of **Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes, the responsible authorities are the relevant managing authorities or intermediate bodies**. Each 'region' involved in a project has to identify the main policy instrument it aims to improve through the cooperation. The direct involvement of the authorities responsible for these instruments is a key feature for projects to achieve their objectives.

Therefore, **the involvement of the policy responsible authority as partner is compulsory for at least 50% of the policy instruments addressed in a project application. For the remaining policy instruments (if any), these authorities must be involved as an 'associated policy authority'**.

The notion of 'associated policy authority' is defined in section 3.4.2.2 of the programme manual.

When preparing an application, it is essential to identify the relevant 'policy responsible authority' of each policy instrument addressed by the project. In case of doubt, the relevant Partner State should be contacted since only the Partner State can confirm whether an organisation from its territory qualify as a policy responsible authority for the policy instrument addressed in its country.

### 8.3 Geographical coverage

Based on Article 23 (1) of the ETC regulation (EC) 2021/1059, projects must involve partners from at least three countries, at least two of which must be beneficiaries from EU Member States, with the latter applying for Interreg Europe funding<sup>2</sup>. In addition, Interreg Europe requires a wide geographical coverage from all applications as reflected in the eligibility criterion 5 defined in section 4.3.1 the programme manual. Therefore, to be eligible in the second call, the applications submitted have to ensure that the **four areas below are represented in the partnership with at least one project partner**:

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<sup>2</sup> This latter specification is required due to the possibility for organisations to use funds from their Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes to be involved in an Interreg Europe project (see section 3.4.1.2 of the programme manual).

Geographical areas	Countries covered
<b>North</b>	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden
<b>East</b>	Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia
<b>South</b>	Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain
<b>West</b>	Belgium, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland

It should however be highlighted that the fulfilment of eligibility criterion 5 is not sufficient to ensure that a partnership goes beyond transnational cooperation areas. For instance, a transnational programme like MED already covers three of the four geographical areas defined by Interreg Europe (South, East with Slovenia and Bulgaria and West with part of France).

#### 8.4 Policy instruments addressed

The objective of an interregional cooperation project (in particular of the core phase) is to improve through exchange of experience the performance of the regional development policy instruments of the participating regions, including Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes, in line with the programme mission stated in Article (3) (3) (a) of the ETC Regulation (EU) 2021/1059.

This particular focus on cohesion policy means that, at application stage, **at least one of the policy instruments addressed in a project must be an investment for jobs and growth goal programme.**

The policy instruments addressed by a project must be carefully selected and clearly defined at the application stage. In particular, the following elements should be ensured:

- Only one main policy instrument is addressed per participating 'region'.
- The scope of the different instruments is in line with the issue addressed by the project.
- The project addresses existing policy instruments whose time span covers at least the duration of the Interreg Europe projects. Policy instruments under preparation may be addressed only if sufficient details are available on its scope and nature (each policy instrument needs to be described in the application form) and if its policy responsible authority is already confirmed.

### 9. Application

The application pack for the call is available on the programme website ([www.interregeurope.eu](http://www.interregeurope.eu)) and includes the following:

- the present terms of reference
- the programme manual
- the application form template in the online application system: the **Portal**
- the 'declaration' template

Project applicants who would like to submit a proposal must complete an application form in English, as it is the working language of the programme. Applications submitted in another language will be considered ineligible.

The online system runs a number of automatic validation checks which prevents user from submitting the form if it is not properly filled.

All partners (including the lead partner) and associated policy authorities - if applicable - must provide a declaration using the template provided by the programme (see Annex 03). Those declarations must be uploaded in the **online system** as a part of the application.

**The complete application has to be submitted online at the latest by 9<sup>th</sup> June 2023, 12 pm (midday) CEST (Paris time).**

## 10. Selection procedure

### 10.1. Eligibility

All applications are subject to a two-step assessment procedure, eligibility and quality assessment.

**The non-fulfilment of only one eligibility criterion leads to the ineligibility of the whole application. Therefore, applicants must carefully check these criteria (as described in section 4.3.1 of the programme manual) to ensure that their proposal comply with the eligibility requirements.** These criteria are summarised below.

Eligibility criteria	
1. Respect of submission's deadline	The online application is submitted by the deadline set for the call.
2. Completeness of the application	The application is complete. It includes the application form itself and all declarations.
3. Correctness of the application form	The application form is fully and properly filled in according to the instructions.
4. Correctness of the declarations	The declarations are correct. The programme template is used and the declarations are properly filled-in and signed.
5. Geographical coverage	The application involves partners from the four geographical areas <sup>3</sup> defined by the programme (North, East, South and West). These partners also represent at least three countries, of which at least two partners must be from EU Member States with the latter applying for Interreg Europe funding.
6. Focus on Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes	At least one policy instrument addressed in the application is an Investment for jobs and growth goal programme.
7. Participation of policy responsible authorities	The policy responsible authorities are involved as partners for at least 50% of the policy instruments addressed in the application. For any instruments where this is not the case (if any), the relevant policy responsible authority are involved as an 'associated policy authorities'.

<sup>3</sup> This eligibility criteria do not apply to applications where more than one **outermost regions** is involved. In such a case, the minimum regulatory requirement applies (project must involve partners from at least three countries, at least two of which shall be beneficiaries from EU Member States and shall apply for Interreg Europe funding).

## 10.2. Quality assessment

The quality assessment applies only to applications that pass the eligibility check. It consists of evaluating the quality of the eligible applications according to the following five criteria:

Criterion 1 – Relevance of proposal

Criterion 2 – Quality of the expected results

Criterion 3 – Quality of partnership

Criterion 4 – Coherence of the proposal and quality of approach

Criterion 5 – Budget

**Full details on the selection procedure and assessment criteria are provided in section 4.3 of the programme manual.**

Based on the results of the quality assessment, the decision on applications is made by the monitoring committee of the programme which is composed of representatives from both national and regional authorities within the 29 Partner States (27 EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland). Decisions are communicated to all lead applicants via an electronic notification.

## 11. Further information

The programme supports applicants during the project development and application stage. Full details of the assistance offered to applicants is available in section 4.1 of the programme manual and on [www.interregeurope.eu](http://www.interregeurope.eu).

A comprehensive description of the programme's strategy and priorities, together with a socio-economic analysis of the European Union, are included in the Interreg Europe Cooperation Programme. Further guidance for project applicants is provided in the **programme manual** which is available as part of this application pack. All official documents and contact details of the joint secretariat as well as of Points of Contact are available on the programme website: