



Terms of reference - second call for proposals

1. Legal basis

The Interreg Europe programme is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), whose principles and regulations are laid down in Council and Parliament Regulation N°1303/2013 (Common Provisions Regulation), Council and Parliament Regulation N° 1301/2013 (ERDF Regulation) and Council and Parliament Regulation N° 1299/2013 (ETC Regulation). The principles and regulations for projects developed within the programme are laid down in the Cooperation Programme and in the programme manual.

2. Context

The European Union works to reduce disparities in the levels of development, growth and quality of life in European regions through its cohesion policy. For the 2014-2020 funding period, cohesion policy concentrates on supporting the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy to promote actions to make the European territory more innovative, more sustainable, and more inclusive.

The Interreg Europe programme contributes to this objective by supporting policy learning among relevant policy organisations with a view **to improving the performance of regional development policy instruments**.

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 in order 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 legislative framework with no specific funding. In the context of Interreg Europe, operational programmes for Investment for Growth and Jobs and Cooperation Programmes from European Territorial Cooperation are considered as policy instruments, as well as other regional development policies developed at local, regional or national level.

Interreg Europe aims to improve the implementation of policy instruments, in particular programmes for Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, European Territorial Cooperation programmes, through exchange of experiences and policy learning among actors of regional relevance. The way partners involved in projects can improve their policy instruments is further explained in section 4.3.1 of the programme manual.



3. Eligible area

The eligible Interreg Europe cooperation area covers the whole territory of the European Union with its 28 Member States, including insular and outermost areas. In addition, Norway and Switzerland are full members of the programme and organisations from these countries are welcome to participate in projects (organisations from Switzerland cannot be Lead Partner). Partners from other countries can participate at their own costs.

4. Timing of the call

The second call for proposals opens on **5 April 2016** and closes on **13 May 2016, at 12:00 p.m. (midday)** CEST (Paris time).

5. Priorities

The Interreg Europe programme is divided into four priority axes related to the Europe 2020 strategy. As indicated in the table below, the four priority axes correspond to four out of the eleven thematic objectives as set out in the first paragraph of article 9 of the Common Provision Regulation (EU) 1303/2013. Within each priority axis, one or more specific objectives are defined. **Applicants are invited to submit their project application under one of the specific objectives listed below.**

Priority axes	Investment priorities	Specific objective
1 - Strengthening research, technological development and innovation (corresponding to thematic objective 1)	1(a) - enhancing research and innovation (R&I) infrastructure and capacities to develop R&I excellence and promoting centres of competence, in particular those of European interest.	1.1: Improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes, in particular programmes for Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, European Territorial Cooperation programmes, in the field of research and innovation infrastructure and capacities notably in the framework of Smart Specialisation Strategies
	1(b) - promoting business investment in R&I, developing links and synergies between enterprises, research and development centres and the higher education sector, in particular promoting investment in product and service development, technology transfer, social innovation, eco-innovation, public service applications, demand stimulation, networking, clusters and open innovation through smart specialisation, and supporting technological and applied research, pilot lines, early product	1.2: Improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes, in particular programmes for Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, European Territorial Cooperation programmes, that support the delivery of innovation by players in regional innovation chains in areas of “smart specialisation” and innovation opportunity



Priority axes	Investment priorities	Specific objective
	validation actions, advanced manufacturing capabilities and first production, in particular in key enabling technologies and diffusion of general purpose technologies.	
2 - Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs (corresponding to thematic objective 3)	3(d) - Supporting the capacity of SMEs to engage in growth in regional, national and international markets, and in innovation processes.	2.1: Improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes, in particular programmes for Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, European Territorial Cooperation programmes, supporting SMEs in all stages of their life cycle to develop and achieve growth and engage in innovation
3 - Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors (corresponding to thematic objective 4)	4(e) - Promoting low-carbon strategies for all types of territories, in particular for urban areas, including the promotion of sustainable multi-modal urban mobility and mitigation relevant adaptation measures.	3.1: Improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes, in particular programmes for Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, European Territorial Cooperation programmes, addressing the transition to a low-carbon economy notably in the framework of Smart Specialisation Strategies
4 - Protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency (corresponding to thematic objective 6)	6(c) - conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage.	4.1: Improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes, in particular Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, European Territorial Cooperation programmes, in the field of the protection and development of natural and cultural heritage
	6(g) - supporting industrial transition towards a resource-efficient economy, promoting green growth, eco-innovation and environmental performance management in the public and private sectors.	4.2: Improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes, in particular programmes for Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, European Territorial Cooperation programmes, aimed at increasing resource-efficiency, green growth and eco-innovation and environmental performance management

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.

The results of the first call for proposals has resulted in a significant number of applications approved under the priority axes one and two of the programme. **Applications are therefore particularly encouraged under the priority axes which are currently under-represented and in particular priority axis 4.**

As far as the priorities one and two are concerned, the programme welcomes projects seeking to go beyond the improvement of each regional policy instrument to achieving interregional synergies



between the economic sectors of the participating regions. In particular, projects resulting in cooperation between clusters, leading to European strategic cluster partnerships for smart specialisation investments, are welcomed. This focus does not confer any priority during the quality assessment.

Applications involving institutions not already involved in first call projects are also encouraged taking however into consideration the characteristics of small countries where the range of eligible organisations is limited.

6. Actions supported

This is a call for proposals for **interregional cooperation projects**. A detailed description of this action is provided in section C 'Projects' of the programme manual.

7. Partnership requirements

7.1 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 cannot take on the role of lead partner. Further details on eligible project partners and legal status can be found in section 4.4.2 of the programme manual.

Only “contributing partners” (those listed in the application form) can incur costs and receive ERDF. It is therefore not possible to participate with an “observer” or “sub-partner” status.

As indicated in the programme manual, the partnership should contribute to an efficient implementation of the project and reflect its objectives. Due to the programme rationale, policymakers are the main target group. These policymakers can be national, regional or local authorities as well as other organisations having a role in the definition and implementation of regional policy instruments. The participation of these competent authorities is essential to maximise the impact of the programme on regional and local policies across the EU. **The involvement of authorities responsible for the policy instruments addressed by the project is therefore a prerequisite for applying to the programme.**

If the relevant authorities are not involved directly as partners in the project, their participation in the cooperation has to be explained in the application form and **a standard letter of support from these authorities must be provided**. As far as Structural Funds programmes are concerned, the letter has to be signed by the relevant bodies (e.g. managing authorities), which are **listed for each country on the ‘In my country’ page of the programme’s website**. This list is regularly updated and in case of doubts applicants are invited to get in touch with their national point of contact.



7.2 Geographical coverage

In compliance with Article 12 (2) of the ETC regulation (EC) No 1299/2013, projects have to involve partners **from at least three countries, of which at least two partners must be from EU Member States** and financed by the Interreg Europe programme.

7.3 Policy instrument addressed and territorial context

In line with the overall programme objective, all projects should at least partly focus on the improvement of programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal, and when relevant under the European Territorial Cooperation goal. Therefore, in each project, **at least half of the policy instruments addressed by the EU regions must be Structural Funds programmes** (e.g. a minimum of two for a project with four instruments addressed; a minimum of three for a project with five instruments addressed). Further information can be found in section 4 of the programme manual.

8. Co-financing rate

Under the Interreg Europe programme, the eligible project activities are co-financed by the ERDF at a rate of either 75% or 85% depending on the legal status of the project partner. Partners from Norway and Switzerland are not eligible to receive ERDF but can receive co-financing from their respective national funds.

Co-financing rate	Eligible project partner according to legal status and location
85% ERDF	Public bodies and bodies governed by public law from all 28 EU Partner States
75% ERDF	Private non-profit bodies from all 28 EU Partner States
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 Europe national point of contact to receive information on Swiss funding opportunities

9. Application process

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

- the present terms of reference
- the programme manual
- the online application system www.iolf.eu



- the partner declaration template
- the letter of support 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 application is an online system programmed with a number of automatic links and formulae. Error messages appear in the form if it is not properly filled in and the application can then not be submitted. Detailed instructions on how to fill in the application form are provided in the form itself. A user guide is also available. All partner declarations and possible letters of support must be uploaded on the iOLF system. The application submitted to the programme must therefore include the following documents:

- the application form itself,
- the partner declarations for all partners including the lead partner,
- if applicable, the letters of support from the relevant authorities.

The application has to be submitted online (www.iOLF.eu) at the latest by 13 May 2016, 12pm (midday) CEST (Paris time).

10. Selection process

All applications will be subject to a two-step assessment procedure, eligibility and quality assessment. Applications that do not meet all the eligibility criteria will not be further assessed.

In the Interreg Europe first call, one third of the application failed to pass the eligibility step. **Applicants are highly encouraged to carefully study the criteria below and to check before submitting whether they fulfil each of these criteria.** The non-fulfilment of one criterion leads to the ineligibility of the whole application.

Eligibility criteria	
1. Respect of deadline	Is the application online submitted in due time?
2. Completeness of the application	Is the application complete?
3. Correctness of the application form	Is the application form fully and properly filled in according to the instructions?
4. Correctness of the partner declaration	Are the partner declarations correct?
5. Correctness of the support letter	If applicable, are the letters of support correct?
6. Geographical coverage	Does the project involve partners from at least three countries, of which at least two partners are from EU Member States and are financed by the Interreg Europe programme?
7. Focus on Structural Funds	Are at least half of the policy instruments addressed by the EU regions represented in the project Structural Funds programmes?



The experience of the first call for proposals has also shown that the primary cause of ineligibility relates to letters of support. These letters were either missing or not properly completed. Whenever needed, **applicants are therefore strongly encouraged to request letters of support as early as possible in the preparation phase.**

The quality assessment criteria are divided into two categories:

1. Strategic assessment criteria – to assess the project's contribution to the achievement of programme objectives.
 - Criterion 1 – Relevance of proposal
 - Criterion 2 – Quality of results
 - Criterion 3 – Quality of partnership
2. Operational assessment criteria – to assess the consistency and feasibility of the proposed project, as well as its value for money.
 - Criterion 4 – Coherence of the proposal and quality of approach
 - Criterion 5 – Communication and management
 - Criterion 6 – Budget and finance

Further details on the selection procedure and the assessment criteria are provided in section 5.3 of the programme manual.

Based on the results of the quality assessment, final decisions are made by the monitoring committee of the programme, which is made up of representatives from both national and regional authorities within the participating states. Decisions are communicated to all lead partners via a notification letter.

11. Further information

Full details of the assistance offered to applicants is available in section 5.1 of the programme manual and on www.interregeurope.eu.

A comprehensive description of the programme's strategy and priorities, together with a socio-economic analysis of Europe 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 are also available on the programme website:

www.interregeurope.eu

Further information can also be requested at application@interregeurope.eu.