

# Restricted call for proposals: opportunity for Interreg Europe projects from the first call to request pilot actions

## Terms of reference

### 1. Legal basis

The Interreg Europe programme is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the external financing instruments of the Union (jointly referred to as ‘the Interreg funds’), in accordance with the common provisions regulation (EU) 2021/1060, the ERDF regulation (EU) 2021/1058, the Interreg regulation (EU) 2021/1059 and the Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/74 as amended by Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2023/1635 of 14 August 2023. The expectations and requirements for projects to request one or more pilot actions are detailed in the [Interreg Europe 2021-2027 cooperation programme](#) and in the [programme manual](#) available on the website. These terms of reference were approved by the monitoring committee of the programme on 6 March 2025.

### 2. Context and objective

Although ‘traditional’ exchange of experience activities should remain the core focus of any Interreg Europe project, these activities may not always be sufficient to improve policies. In justified cases, they can therefore be supplemented with more operational activities based on a ‘learning by doing’ approach.

**A pilot action** is an implementation-related activity dedicated to testing a new approach to public intervention. This is usually the transfer of a successful practice from one region to another, but it can also be a new initiative jointly designed by the project. The ultimate objective of a pilot action is that, when successful, it is ultimately integrated into the policy instrument addressed and therefore contributes to improving it. Examples of pilot actions can also be found in the **programme manual** (Section 3.2.1.2 Pilot actions).

Requests for approval to carry out one or more pilot actions can be made at two moments during the project, either at application stage or in the semester following the midterm review meeting (i.e., semester 5 of the core phase). To ensure possible policy improvements, a pilot action approved after midterm should be finalised at the latest six months before the end of the project. The objective of the present call is to give the possibility to first call projects to request one or more pilot actions following their midterm review meeting.

### 3. Timing of the call

The call opens on **14 March 2025** and closes on **15 April 2025, at 12:00 p.m. (midday) CEST** (Paris time).

### 4. Who can apply?

This call is open to the 72 first call projects that were approved by the Interreg Europe monitoring committee on 13 December 2022.

### 5. Funding available and co-financing rates

An indicative budget of MEUR 3 of Interreg funds is allocated to this call.

Norwegian funds cannot be allocated to this call. Partners from Norway applying to this call must finance their pilot action activities through their own underspending.

The eligible project activities are co-financed by the Interreg funds at a rate of either 70% or 80%, depending on the legal status of the partner.

Co-financing rate	Eligible project partner according to legal status and location
80% Interreg funds	Public bodies and bodies governed by public law for the EU Member States and 7 EU candidate countries
70% Interreg funds	Private non-profit bodies for the EU Member States and 7 EU candidate countries
50% Norwegian funds	Public bodies, bodies governed by public law and private non-profit bodies from Norway
Swiss fund	Public bodies, public equivalent and private non-profit bodies from Switzerland

The total budget for each pilot action will depend on the nature and duration of the activities to be carried out. **The duration of pilots requested during this call will be limited to one year** since the last semester of the project should be dedicated to monitoring and reporting the pilot actions' results. **In the context of Interreg Europe, the scope of pilot actions must remain 'limited'. Policy testing that may require significant investment or heavy works will not be possible.** Interreg Europe recommends that the total budget of a pilot action per region should be from EUR 50,000 and a maximum of EUR 130,000.

If the project underspends (based on the third progress report and the discussion during the mid-term review), the pilot action will have to be fully or partially financed through this underspending.

In compliance with the programme eligibility rules (see section 6 of the programme manual), only costs incurred and paid by the partners listed in the application form are eligible. This means that a pilot action cannot consist in transferring the project subsidy to third parties (e.g. through a direct subsidy to an SME). This also means that e.g. a voucher scheme is eligible only under the condition that the service provided by the voucher is directly contracted and paid by the Interreg Europe partner. Moreover, any external / third party organisations benefiting from the pilot actions activities must be selected in a fair and transparent way in accordance with EU and national rules.

## 6. Partnership requirements

Pilot actions must take place in the partner regions represented in the project. It is not possible to involve an additional region. However, the integration of an additional partner<sup>1</sup> can be proposed if its participation is essential for the implementation of the pilot action in the region.

A pilot action should be an integral part of the interregional learning process contributing to achieving the project objectives. For this reason, it should be jointly developed and implemented by the partnership. According to EC guidance, 'jointly developed' implies the involvement of partners from at least two participating countries. This requirement is obviously met when the same pilot action is tested in several regions from different countries. When it is implemented in one region only, the involvement of a partner from another country will be required. This involvement could for instance be ensured through a coaching role from the donor region to the region testing the pilot action. Moreover, the progress and outcomes of implementing a pilot action need to be shared with all project partners as part of the exchange of experience activities.

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<sup>1</sup> See section 3.4.1.1 of the programme manual for who is eligible for funding

Due to the demanding character of pilot actions, the programme can only authorise a maximum of one pilot action per region per project (see section 3.2.1.2 of the programme manual). It implies that regions already carrying out a pilot action since the start of their project cannot apply to this call.

## 7. How to apply?

The procedure for requesting a pilot action is as follows:

- The lead partner of interested projects applies through the **request for changes procedure** available on the Portal.
- As soon as the call opens, interested projects must send an email to their policy and finance officers and to [projects@interregeurope.eu](mailto:projects@interregeurope.eu) asking to open the request for changes on the Portal.
- The request will be considered as a change in activities/outputs and will follow the procedure as described in section 5.3.2 of the programme manual.
- During the call, a project can submit a maximum of one application. This means that, if more than one pilot action is requested, they must all be submitted within the same request for changes (once the request for changes is submitted, it cannot be reopened during the call to introduce another pilot action).

The application pack includes the following elements:

- the present terms of reference
- the [programme manual](#) (version 4)
- the application form (request for changes in activities) in the online system: the [Portal](#)
- the '[declaration](#)' template – only if an additional partner is integrated due to the pilot action. These declarations must be uploaded to the Portal as a part of the request for changes procedure.

**The complete application has to be submitted [online](#) in the Portal at the latest by 15 April 2025, 12 pm (midday) CEST (Paris time).**

It is the responsibility of the lead partner to submit their application by the above deadline. The programme cannot accept applications which fail to meet the deadline. It is advisable not to wait until the deadline before submitting the application in the Portal, in case of exceptional web traffic or technical failure.

## 8. Selection procedure

### 8.1. General requirements

Selection is based on a simplified version of the assessment procedure described in section 4.3 of the programme manual (Selection of projects). In general, they must fulfil the following conditions:

- **Policy relevance and durability (quality criteria 1 and 2)**

If successful, a pilot action should lead to improving the policy instrument tackled in the region(s) where it is carried out. Since a pilot action involves testing a new approach, the measures required in case of success to ensure its durability must also be made clear (i.e. measures to ensure it can be 'mainstreamed' in the policy instrument addressed).

- **Interregionality and contribution to the learning process (quality criteria 1 and 4)**

The interregional character of a pilot action is not only demonstrated through its joint character (i.e., involvement of partners from at least two different countries) but also by the fact that pilot actions need to be clearly linked to the interregional exchange of experience process. The lessons learnt from carrying out a pilot action should therefore be shared within the whole partnership to enrich this exchange of experience.

- **'Test-oriented' character (quality criteria 1 and 4)**

The activities of a pilot action must be implementation oriented. While feasibility studies and/or meetings may be needed to prepare and adapt a pilot action, its core activity should focus on the small-scale testing of a new practice on the ground with the relevant stakeholders. The innovative character of pilot action is that the approach is new for the region where it is implemented. If successful, the pilot should in principle be continued and / or implemented at full scale within the policy instrument addressed.

- **Additionality (quality criterion 2)**

A pilot action must involve additional activities that would not be carried out without the support of the Interreg Europe programme. The region(s) proposing a pilot action should therefore first verify that the activities proposed for the pilot action cannot already be financed by the policy instrument addressed or by any other local, regional, or national funds (even if, in case of success, the objective remains its mainstreaming into the policy instrument addressed).

## 8.2. Eligibility

The following eligibility criteria apply to this call:

### 1. Respect of deadline

The complete application (i.e., request for changes and, if applicable declaration(s)) is submitted in the Portal by the deadline of the call, i.e., at the latest by **15 April 2025, 12 pm (midday)** CEST (Paris time). The date and time of the submission are automatically recorded in the system once the lead partner has submitted the application in the Portal.

### 2. Completeness

The application is complete, meaning it includes:

- the request for change and the revised application form,
- the relevant declaration(s) (in case of integration of new partner(s)).

### 3. Correctness

In addition to the above-mentioned eligibility criteria which are included in section 3.2.1.1 of the manual, a third criterion "Correctness" will be checked as well in the present call as follows:

The application and, if applicable, declaration(s) are fully and properly filled in.

After the submission deadline of the application, a 'healing procedure' will apply in case the declaration is not correct or missing. This means that the lead partner will have the possibility to complete or correct the declaration(s) within a set deadline.

For all other criteria, the eligibility assessment is a 'yes or no' process. This means that it does not allow for any flexibility in the way criteria are applied. The non-fulfilment of one criterion will render the whole application ineligible.

## 8.3. Quality assessment

Only eligible applications go through to the quality assessment, which is also simplified. Only the parts of criteria 1, 2, 4 and 5 relevant to pilot actions of the programme manual are checked (see section 4.3.2 Quality Assessment of the programme manual):

- **Criterion 1 – Relevance of proposal**

- *Is the contribution of the pilot actions to the learning process clear? (Part D, Part E)*
- *Is the interregional character of the pilot action(s) clear? (Part D, part E)*

- **Criterion 2 – Quality of expected results**

- *Is the testing character of the pilot action(s) clear? (Part D, Part E)*
- *Is the policy relevance (including durability) of the pilot actions properly demonstrated? Is the additionality of the pilot actions confirmed? (Part D, Part E)*
- *Is the innovative character of the pilot actions clear? (Part D, Part E)*

- **Criterion 4 - Coherence of the proposal and quality of the approach**

- *Are pilot actions properly defined? Are they clearly integrated into the exchange of experience process? (Part D, Part E)*
- *If applicable, is the integration of new partner(s) justified? (Part B, Part D, Part E)*

- **Criterion 5 - Budget**

- *Is the pilot action's budget reasonable given the planned activities/outputs and the pilot's duration? Is it in line with the programme's recommendation (between 50,000 EUR and a maximum of 130,000 EUR)? (Part D, E, Part F)*
- *If costs are planned under external expertise and services and/or equipment, and/or infrastructure and works, are the amounts reasonable given the planned activities/outputs? Are such costs clearly described and justified by the planned activities (F.2, F.3, F.4, Part D, Part E)?*
- *Is there any activity that can be classified as state aid relevant? Is this in line with the partner's self-assessment? (Part D)*
- *If the project underspends (based on the third progress report and the discussion during the mid-term review), is the pilot action fully or partially financed through this underspending?*

**The quality assessment does not use scores but indicates whether each criterion is fulfilled, partly fulfilled, or not fulfilled.** Partly fulfilled means that, although certain aspects remain unclear, the pilot action(s) request still reaches the minimum quality requirements set for the criterion. **Where one criterion is assessed as 'not fulfilled', a justification is provided, and the proposal is not recommended for approval.** At the end of the assessment, pilot action requests are either recommended for approval, recommended for approval under conditions, or not recommended for approval.

## 8.4 Availability of funds

In the unlikely situation where the amount of funds available (see section 5 of the present document) is not sufficient to support all recommended pilot actions, the monitoring committee might use the following criteria to prioritise the applications:

- Applications that do not yet have an approved pilot action (at application stage)
- Applications submitted under the topics subject to concentration (see section 2.5.2 of the programme manual)
- Applications where the pilot action takes place in less developed regions (i.e., regions with a GDP per capital lower than 75% of the EU-27 average).

## 8.5 Approval process and timing

The decisions on the pilot actions requests will be taken by the monitoring committee (MC) of the programme on the basis of the JS' assessment either through written procedure or during the MC meetings.

Lead partners will be informed of the decision on their request soon after it has been made via an electronic notification. Decisions are expected before the end of semester 5 of the project's core phase (i.e. before the end of August 2025). The implementation of the pilot action should start as soon as the approval has been officially notified.