Interreg Europe
European Union | European Regional Development

Sharing solutions for better regional policies

Interreg Europe 5th (restricted) call

Call for additional activities - Terms of reference

26 February 2021

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 activities financed by the programme are also laid down in the cooperation programme and in the programme manual. Both documents are available on the programme website.

These terms of reference for a call for additional activities open to approved Interreg Europe projects were approved by the monitoring committee of the programme on 24 February 2021.

2. Context and objective

At the present time, the COVID-19 crisis continues all over Europe. It does not only have consequences on the economy but it affects more or less directly all fields of regional development policies. Therefore, in addition to the measures already taken in 2020[1], the Interreg Europe monitoring committee has decided to launch a call for additional activities in order to further help approved projects to deal with the crisis. This exceptional measure offers the possibility for approved projects:

- to further exchange experiences on the way the crisis impacts the issue they address and on possible measures to face and recover from the crisis,
- to further improve their regional development policies to better face and recover from this unprecedented situation.

3. Timing of the call

The call for additional activities opens on **1 April 2021** and closes on **2 July 2021 at 14:00** CEST (Paris time). The date of opening is the date by when the 'Application form for additional activities' will be available and by when the joint secretariat (JS) can start advising projects on the present call. The JS assistance will be available until the call closes.

Since applications will be approved on a rolling basis until available funds are committed (see section 10.4 below), the call may be closed earlier in case the total ERDF amount available for this call is allocated before 2 July 2021.

[1] *https://www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/2020-10-01_Interreg_Europe_COVID-19_measures.pdf*

4. Funding

The amount available for this call is estimated at around MEUR 20 and EUR 200,000 Norwegian funds[2], corresponding to the estimated remaining programme funding available for interregional projects taking into account expected project budget reductions and underspending.

The **maximum** recommended ERDF budget of a request is **EUR 500,000** per project.

5. Who can apply?

The present call is open to all 258 approved projects (including closed projects[3]) and projects from all calls are welcome to apply. The present opportunity may be of particular interest to the 1st and 2nd call projects for the following reasons:

- When the crisis started in March 2020, all 1st and 2nd call projects had already closed their phase 1[4]. Therefore, they could not benefit from the first COVID-19 measures taken in 2020 for their exchange of experience process. At the beginning of 2021, these projects are either closed or under finalisation and they are expected to have made full use of their budget. They have neither the time nor the budget to carry out additional measures to face the COVID-19 crisis and this call is thus their only possibility to continue cooperating.
- In comparison, 3rd and 4th call projects are still running for several months/ years and their level of underspending may be high due to the crisis[5]. With the measures taken in 2020, these projects can already propose additional activities to be financed through their unspent budget. Moreover and regardless of the present call, these projects can also be granted additional funds for implementing pilot actions in case their initial budget is not sufficient.

The scope of this call for additional activities is therefore different according to the calls to which the projects belong as reflected below:

- Opportunity offered to 1st and 2nd call projects

Possibility to apply for additional funding to support up to **one additional year** of exchange of experience activities (including pilot actions if justified) to address the COVID-19 crisis. This additional time will be reflected through an extension of duration.

- Opportunity offered to 3rd and 4th call projects

Possibility to apply for additional funding to implement exchange of experience activities (including pilot actions if justified) to address the COVID-19 crisis, in case unspent budget and pilot actions procedures are not sufficient to do so. The application for additional activites may be combined with an extension of duration depending on the project's situation and justification.

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[2] *Due to the limited amount available and the crucial role of lead partners, Norwegian funding will be allocated in priority to Norwegian lead partners.*
[3] *The subsidy contract is applicable until the end of the archiving period. It is therefore possible to 'reopen' projects that already closed their activities and had their last progress report approved.*
[4] *3rd call projects lasting 48 months ended their phase 1 on 31 May 2020 but these 10 projects were granted the possibility to extend their phase 1 by six months.*
[5] *Due to lump sum for phase 2, 4th call projects would need to organise and finalise any additional activities within phase 1.*

6. Activities supported

The additional activities have to fit in the intervention logic of the programme: these activities have to be dedicated to the exchange of experience among regions on the way to address the crisis (in the field tackled by the project) with the objective that the lessons learnt from this exchange can lead to further policy improvements in these regions.

The possible additional activities are therefore mainly related to the traditional **exchange of experience** as described in section 4.2.1 of the programme manual. However, to provide all necessary means and allow maximum flexibility, the additional activities can also include **pilot actions** in justified cases (e.g. one region needs to test a measure from another region before it can be fully supported by the policy instrument addressed). Further information on pilot actions can be found in section 4.2.2 of the programme manual and on the programme website.

The additional activities have to be considered as an add-on to the existing project. They are not bound to a specific phase of the exising project and they should in principle not impact the activities already approved so far. For 1st and 2nd call projects, they will be organised through an extension of project's duration (these activities can start already before the end of phase 2, depending on the implementation stage of the project). For the 3rd call projects, they can start in phase 1 or in phase 2, also depending on the project's state of play. For 4th call projects, the acitivites have to start and be finalised before the end of phase 1.

7. Partnership

7.1 Composition

Considering that the call targets approved projects, **the partnership should in principle remain the same**. In particular, the involvement of new regions or the replacement of a withdrawing partner are not possible. Any change related to the partnership (e.g. partner's withdrawal due to unavailability of co-financing, integration of an additional organisation due to pilot actions) need to be duly justified. While this seems obvious for running projects, it is important to stress this requirement for projects that are already closed or about to close.

7.2 Policy instruments addressed

The policy instruments addressed may be updated by the project depending on each regional context. If this is the case, these updates should be described and justified in the application form. The next generation of Structural Funds programmes can also be tackled. Again, this remark is particularly relevant for 1st and 2nd call projects who started in 2016 and 2017 respectivley, and whose policy context may have evolved compared to their initial application form.

8. Reporting

For 3rd and 4th call projects, the reporting on the additional activities will follow the regular reporting procedure of the programme. For instance, if additional activities are approved in the last semester of phase 1, they would be reported together with the other activities in the corresponding progress report.

For 1st and 2nd call projects where an extension of duration is needed, the reporting of the additional period will be carried out only once through a single progress report covering the duration of the extension. For instance, when a full year of additional activities is approved, the project will have to submit only one single report covering the whole period of additional activities (one year plus the time needed for administrative closure). This report will have to be submitted by the new project end date at the latest.

9. How to apply?

9.1 Consultation with JS

The application for additional funding shall be prepared in close cooperation with the JS officers (Project and Finance officers). The first step for interested lead partners is thus to exchange with their JS officers on their proposal for additional activities. The aim of this step is to check the overall relevance of the proposal and to advise projects on how their proposal should be improved to best fit the call. When pilot actions are envisaged, their relevance to the programme should be also checked by the JS.

For 3rd and 4th call projects, the justification for the need to apply for additional funding will also be checked by the JS on the basis of the level and reasons for the current underspending of the project.

Only applications that were first checked with the JS shall be submitted to the programme.

9.2 'Application' procedure

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

- the present terms of reference
- a dedicated application form
- the partner declaration template
- the programme manual (version 9)

To apply to the call, lead partners are asked to complete a specific template called 'Application form for additional activities' and created specifically for this call. The form provides detailed information on the proposed additional activities and their budget. It also includes a specific annex in case of pilot actions.

In addition to this form, lead partners also have to provide new partner declarations for all partners involved in the additional activities and requesting additional funding.

Once the request is checked with the JS, the application including the relevant annexes will have to be submitted via iOLF to formalise the application. The submission is possible only once the JS opened the dedicated section in iOLF for the lead partner. Due to the rolling basis assessment and approval (see section 10.4), these documents should be submitted in iOLF as soon as they are ready. In any case, they must be submitted at the latest by the end date of the call. Once the application is submitted in iOLF, it will not be possible to change it (except for the eligibility 'healing procedure' described in section 10.1).

10. Selection process

10.1 Eligibility

The following eligibility criteria apply to this call:

1. **Respect of deadline**

Applications are submitted in iOLF by the deadline of the call, i.e. at the latest by **2 July 2021 at 14:00** CEST (Paris time). The date and time of the submission is automatically recorded in the iOLF system once the lead partner has submitted the application in iOLF.

2. **Completeness**

The application has to be complete, meaning it includes:

- the 'application form for additional activities',
- the partner declarations,
- if applicable: the pilot action request(s).

3. **Correctness**

The application has to be fully and properly filled.

For criteria 2 and 3, there will be a possibility of 'healing procedure' after the submission of the application. However, the date of eligibility of the application, which is taken into account for the approval of the application (see section 10.4), will then be the date of the new submission of the correct application (automatically generated in the iOLF system).

10.2 Quality assessment

Since the projects targeted in this call already went through a full selection process, the quality assessment of the requests will be light. It consists in checking whether the following three criteria are met: relevance, coherence and budget. The set of evaluation questions is listed below for each criterion. In order for the request to be recommended for approval, the answer to all the questions listed below has to be positive. There will be therefore no scoring sytem and no priority list of applications.

1. **Relevance**

For all activities (including pilot actions if relevant):

- ✓ Are the additional activities clearly defined?
- ✓ Do they address the COVID-19 crisis?
- ✓ Do they clearly contribute to the exchange of experience process in the thematic area addressed by the project?
- ✓ Can they contribute to the improvement of the policy instruments addressed?

For pilot actions only:

- ✓ Is the testing character of the pilot action clear?
- ✓ Is its durability demonstrated (i.e. is there any clear plan how the pilot action can be continued and/or generalised in case of success)?
- ✓ Is its additionality demonstrated (i.e. is it clear why local, national, regional funds cannot finance the implementation of the pilot action)?

2. **Coherence**

- ✓ Are the planned activities feasible in terms of scope and timing?
- ✓ In case of partnership changes, is the change clearly justified? Does it not question the overall quality of the initial partnership?
- ✓ In case of policy instrument change, is the change properly justified?

3. **Budget**

- ✓ Is the requested budget coherent (i.e. in line with the additional activities)?
- ✓ Is the requested budget reasonable compared with the proposed activities?
- ✓ For 3rd and 4th call projects, is the additional budget really needed (convincing justification): is it clear that the underspending of the project cannot be used to finance the additional activities?

10.3 Approval process and timing

The decisions on the applications will be taken by the monitoring committee (MC) of the programme on the basis of the JS recommendations either through written procedure or during the MC meetings. This process will be managed on a rolling basis: the assessment will start as soon as an application is submitted in iOLF. The MC will also take decisions on a monthly basis (if relevant, depending on the timing of the applications' submission).

Shortly after the MC decision, the projects which submitted an application, will be informed about the decision concerning their project.

10.4 Availability of funds

In case the amount of funds available (see section 4) is not sufficient to support all recommended applications, the programme will apply a 'first come first serve' principle. The date of submission of the eligible applications will be taken into consideration to apply this principle. This date will be the initial submission date in iOLF if the application meets all the eligibility criteria. However, as indicated in section 10.1, in case of the 'healing procedure', this date will be the date of the resubmission of the (eligible) application. The applications will be approved by the monitoring committee in the order of the dates of submission of the eligible applications.

To increase the chance of approval, projects should therefore submit their request as soon as it is ready and make sure that all the eligibility criteria are met.

11. Finalisation and start

Once the application form for additional funding is approved by the MC, the JS will open a 'Request for Changes' (RfC) procedure in iOLF. The lead partner will then have to complete the RfC justification and update the original application form based on the information provided in the 'Application form for additional activities'. Once the request for change is validated by the JS in iOLF, the lead partner will receive a final notification letter confirming the approval of the revised application form.

In order to match with the existing reporting periods, the official start date of additional activities for 1st call projects is expected to be 1 October 2021. For the 2nd call projects, the official start date of additional activities is expected to be 1 September 2021. For 3rd and 4th call projects, the start date of activities should be discussed with the JS.

This start date is important to determine if an extension of duration is needed. However, activities and costs will be eligible even before this date, as long as they are related to the approved additional activities or preparation of the application form for this call.