

# Restricted call for proposals: opportunity for the Interreg Europe approved projects to extend their partnership to EU candidate countries – Terms of reference

***Disclaimer:** The terms of reference have been approved by the Interreg Europe monitoring committee. References to the funding for partners from five EU candidate countries financed by the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), i.e., Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, are still subject to the provision of the related IPA funding and approval of the amended programme by the European Commission. This situation may lead to certain features of the restricted call being modified retrospectively. When applying, applicants have to be aware and accept this risk. The programme, the managing authority and the participating partner states cannot be held liable in any way for any claims, damages, losses, expenses, or costs.*

## 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 financed by Interreg Europe are detailed in the Interreg Europe 2021-2027 cooperation programme and in the programme manual available on the website.

## 2. Context and objective

At the end of 2023, 7 EU candidate countries joined the Interreg Europe programme: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine, offering new opportunities to the projects and Policy Learning Platform.

First and second call projects were developed at a time where these opportunities did not exist yet. Therefore, the objective of the present call is to give the possibility to all approved projects to work with organisations from the new Partner States through the extension of their partnership.

## 3. Timing of the call

The call opens on **20<sup>th</sup> March 2024** and closes on **7<sup>th</sup> June 2024, at 12:00 p.m. (midday) CEST** (Paris time).

## 4. Who can apply?

The present call is open to all 150 projects approved in the first and second calls of Interreg Europe.

## 5. Funding available and co-financing rates

At this stage of the programme's implementation, sufficient funds are available to meet the request of the approved projects. No specific amount is therefore allocated to this call. The final committed budget will depend on the number of submitted requests approved by the Monitoring Committee.

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 fund	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

## 6. Partnership requirements

### 8.1 Who can join approved projects?

The following organisations from the 7 new Partner States are eligible to join approved projects and receive Interreg funding:

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

### 8.2 Type of involvement

An organisation from the new Partner States has different options to become a partner in an existing Interreg Europe project. It can be involved:

- As a partner addressing a specific policy instrument,
- or as a discovery partner,
- or as an advisory partner.

These different options are further explained in section 3.4.2.1 of the programme manual. For first call projects however, the programme recommends that the new organisations are involved as **discovery partners** considering that these projects have already started more than one year ago.

In case a new policy instrument is introduced in the project (first option mentioned above), the programme's requirements related to the involvement of the policy responsible authorities applies: this authority must be involved either as partner or as associated policy authority. The notion of 'associated policy authority' is also defined in section 3.4.2.2 of the programme manual.

Only the Partner State can confirm whether an organisation from its territory qualifies as a policy responsible authority for a specific policy instrument.

## 9. How to apply?

The procedure for requesting a partnership extension is as follows:

- Interested projects apply through the **request for changes procedure** available on the Portal. The request for involving an additional partner can be submitted at any time during the call.
- The possibility to extend the existing partnership is limited to a maximum of **two additional partners per project**.
- In addition to the budget allocated to the new partners, the project will be able to increase its original total project budget by up to **3% of the initial amount**. This increase would mainly benefit the lead partner, considering their additional coordination efforts. It can also reflect any potential additional activities for the existing partnership resulting from the inclusion of the new partners.
- The request for partnership change follows the procedure as described in section 5.3.5 of the manual. Although it is not subject to a full quality assessment, the JS will assess whether the request for change is acceptable. This means that the requested changes are **relevant** and that the related **budget** is justified. If this is not the case, JS will ask clarifications to the lead partner who may have to revise its request.

The application pack includes the following elements (the first three documents are available on the programme's website ([www.interregeurope.eu](http://www.interregeurope.eu)):

- the present terms of reference
- the programme manual (version 3)
- the 'declaration' template
- the application form (request for partnership change) in the online application system: the **Portal**

All new partners and new associated policy authorities - if applicable - must provide a declaration using the template provided by the programme (see Annex 01). These declarations must be uploaded to the **online system** as a part of the application.

**The complete application has to be submitted online at the latest by 7<sup>th</sup> June 2024, 12 pm (midday) CEST (Paris time).**

## 10. Selection procedure

### 10.1. Eligibility

The following eligibility criteria apply to this call:

#### 1. Respect of deadline

Applications are submitted in the Portal by the deadline of the call, i.e., at the latest by **7<sup>th</sup> June 2024, 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 has to be complete, meaning it includes:

- the request for extending the partnership including the revised application form,
- the relevant declarations.

### 3. Correctness

The application has to be fully and properly filled, and the number of additional partners must not exceed two.

Apart from criterion 1, there will be a possibility of a 'healing procedure' after the submission deadline of the application. This means that, in case the eligibility criteria are not fulfilled, the lead partner will have the possibility to complete the application or to correct mistakes within a set deadline.

## 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 very light. There will be no scoring system. It will consist of answering the following two questions:

- **Is the partnership's extension properly explained? Is this extension coherent with the issue addressed by the project and its objective?**
- **Is the revised budget consistent with the activities planned in the revised application form and the inclusion of the new partner(s)? Is it in line with the programme's budget recommendations and present terms of reference? Is the budget of the new partner(s) reasonable and proportionate to their involvement in the project and in line with the planned activities?**

Applications with a positive answer to the above questions may be recommended for approval. In case a proposal is not approved, the lead partner will be notified on the reasons for rejection.

## 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 assessment either through written procedure or during the MC meetings. This process will be managed on a rolling basis: the JS assessment will start as soon as an application is submitted in the Portal. The MC can take decisions on a regular basis (if relevant, depending on the timing of the applications' submission).

## 11. Finalisation

Once the application is approved by the MC, the JS will validate the request for change in the Portal. The lead partner will then receive a final notification letter confirming the approval of the revised application form.

New partners joining first call projects can start participating in the project activities from 01 March 2024 (which is the start date of the third semester). New partners joining second call projects can start participating in the project activities from 01 April 2024 (which is the start date of the project). Activities and costs will be eligible even before these dates, in line with the principles on the timeframe for eligibility of expenditure outlined in section 5.1.2 of the programme manual, as long as they are related to the integration of the new partners and the preparation of the revised application form.

For first call projects, a new subsidy contract to be signed by the lead partner will be issued. The template for this new subsidy contract is available on the programme website. This new version of the subsidy contract is needed to integrate references to the financing agreements to be signed by the 7 EU candidate countries and to replace "ERDF" by "Interreg funds". A new partnership agreement example template (to be signed by partners from the 7 EU candidate countries joining the partnership) is also available on our website.

For 2<sup>nd</sup> call projects, the new subsidy contract template will be used (irrespective of whether they participate in this restricted call or not).

## Annex 01 – Declaration template

Project acronym	
Project title	
Name of the organisation (original)	
Name of the organisation (English)	
Role of the organisation in the project (i.e., partner or associated policy authority)	

Partner declaration	Associated policy authority declaration
<p>In the event of approval of funding for the above-mentioned project applying to the Interreg Europe programme, the indicated <b>partner</b>:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Confirms fulfilling the criterion of a public body or a body governed by public law or private non-profit body as defined in the programme manual.</li> <li>2. Commits itself to the project and the activities laid down in the application form and intends to contribute to the project's budget the amount indicated in the application form from its own or other funding sources.</li> <li>3. Is aware of the programme rules on reimbursement and non-existence of advance payment and confirms the financial capacity to prefinance the activities.</li> <li>4. Is aware of the programme rules on state aid, horizontal principles of gender equality, non-discrimination and sustainable development, public procurement, publicity and information and will act accordingly.</li> <li>5. Declares that it is not under proceedings linked to financial difficulties (e.g., insolvency/bankruptcy proceeding), is not considered as an undertaking in difficulty with regard to European law on state aid (Article 2 (18) of Regulation (EU) No 651/2014), bears full legal capacity, and that its foundation and activities are in line with the respective national legislation.</li> <li>6. Confirms that no expenditure related to the above-mentioned project has been, is or will be co-financed by any other EU-funded programme, except for partners that do not receive co-financing directly from the Interreg Europe programme.</li> <li>7. Declares to accept the obligations as a partner deriving from the subsidy contract signed by the lead partner as well as the project partnership agreement concluded between all partners participating in the project.</li> <li>8. Acknowledges that access and use of the programme online system as well as collection of personal data are subject to the "terms and conditions" published on the online system.</li> </ol>	<p>In the event of approval of the above-mentioned project applying to the Interreg Europe programme, the indicated <b>associated policy authority</b>:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Confirms that its organisation is responsible for the elaboration and/or delivery of the policy instrument for which it is indicated as associated policy authority in the application form</li> <li>2. Confirms that the topic tackled by the project is in line with the scope of this policy instrument</li> <li>3. Commits itself to engage with the stakeholder group and participate, when possible and relevant, in the project activities</li> <li>4. Confirms that it will consider the possibilities for implementing the lessons learned from the project through its policy instrument.</li> </ol>

Name of signatory	
Position of signatory	
Date	
Signature (compulsory) and stamp of partner organisation (if exists)	