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MALTA

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY
PRIME MINISTER
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PRESIDENZA UE 2017 U GHALL-FONDI
EWROPEJ

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIAT FOR THE EU
PRESIDENCY 2017 AND EU FUNDS

Id-Divizjoni għall-Fondi u Programmi

Funds and Programmes Division

To: All prospective applicants participating in the Interreg Europe 2014-2020 Programme.

From: The Territorial Cooperation Unit within the Funds and Programmes Division (FPD)

Date: 25th May 2015

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As the entity responsible for Malta's participation in European Territorial Cooperation Programmes and also the entity coordinating Malta's involvement in the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument by means of the ENPI CBC Med Programme, the Funds and Programmes Division (FPD) would like to bring to your attention the details in relation to the two types of actions supported under the Interreg Europe 2014-2020 Programme, mainly interregional cooperation projects and policy learning platforms.

INTERREG EUROPE 2014-2020 PROGRAMME

In line with its operational objectives, the INTERREG EUROPE Programme supports two types of actions: Interregional Cooperation Projects and Policy Learning Platforms.

INTERREGIONAL COOPERATION PROJECTS

The section below provides further details on the first type of action i.e Interregional Cooperation Projects, in view of the first call for project proposals which shall focus on such projects. It is important to note that this call is expected to open approximately mid-June 2015 and shall remain open for one month. Public authorities, public law bodies and private non profit bodies may participate in Interreg Europe projects. The budget allocated for this call amounts to €107.5 million.

Projects may be submitted under the four priority axes addressed under this programme namely:

1. Strengthening research, technological development and innovation;
2. Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs;
3. Supporting the shift towards a low carbon economy in all sectors and
4. Protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency.

Parliamentary Secretariat for the EU Presidency 2017 and EU Funds
Triq il- Kukkanja, Santa Venera. SVR 1411
TELEPHONE: +356 2200 1108 FAX: +356 2200 1141
WEBSITE: www.eufunds.gov.mt EMAIL: fpd.meaim@gov.mt

What is an interregional cooperation project?

An interregional cooperation project should include partners from at least three different countries, of which at least two must be from EU Member States and financed by the Interreg Europe programme. Aimed at reinforcing the focus on results and giving the learning process a better chance of leading towards tangible results, an interregional cooperation project is designed in two phases:

- 'Phase 1' is dedicated to interregional learning and the integration of the lessons learnt from cooperation projects by means of the development of action plans, whereas
- 'Phase 2' is dedicated to the joint monitoring by each partner region of the implementation of their action plan by the responsible actors in their territory. When relevant, this phase may also include pilot actions to test certain parts of the Action Plan in practice.

What is the rationale for interregional cooperation projects?

The objective of an interregional cooperation project is to improve the performance of the regional policy instruments of the participating regions, in particular the Investment for Growth and Jobs Goal Programmes (referred to as Structural Funds Programmes), and, where relevant, their European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes. This focus on Cohesion Policy means that at least half of the policy instruments addressed by the EU regions (excluding regions from areas outside the EU) in a project must be related to Structural Funds programmes.

If a region decides not to focus on Structural Funds Programmes, the project should still contribute towards a better performance of the region's own specific policy instrument. Hence, the participation of the relevant entity is strongly recommended. Should this not be the case, a letter of support from such an entity should be obtained at application stage.

What are the project phases?

Phase 1- 'interregional learning'

Phase 1 is dedicated to the exchange of policy experience and to the preparation of the implementation of the lessons learnt. By the end of this phase, each partner region shall produce an **Action Plan** for the integration of lessons learnt from the cooperation in their regional policies and/or (Growth and Jobs, ETC) programmes. An action plan, which is produced by each region, is a document providing details on how the lessons learnt from the cooperation will be implemented in order to improve the policy instrument that is addressed within their region. It specifies the nature of the actions to be implemented, their timeframe, the players involved, the costs (if any) and funding sources (if any). If the same policy instrument is addressed by several partners from the same region only one action plan is required.

Three types of activities will be carried out during phase 1:

- Exchange of experience
- Communication and dissemination
- Management and coordination

Phase 2 – ‘monitoring the implementation of the action plan’

In order to better assess the results of interregional cooperation, phase 2 is dedicated to monitoring the implementation of the action plans. Each partner is responsible for monitoring the progress of the implementation of their action plan and to report to the lead partner. Interreg Europe supports the costs incurred for this monitoring. In the case where several partners from the same region draw up a single action plan, these partners share the responsibility for monitoring the implementation of their action plan.

Monitoring means regularly checking the extent to which the measures described in the action plans are implemented on the ground, evaluating the results of these measures and gathering evidence of success to be reported on the programme. There are also three types of activities which are required to be carried out during the two years of phase 2, namely:-

- Monitoring the implementation of the action plan
- Communication and dissemination
- Management and coordination

The work plan for phase 2 is pre-defined at the application stage, but the final features of phase 2 will depend on the level of success of phase 1. Before the end of phase 1 the project has the opportunity to review and, if needed, modify the activities of phase 2 through a procedure entitled ‘request for changes’.

The implementation of action plans can take various forms depending on the issue tackled by the project and the territorial characteristics of the partner region. When drafting the Application Form, applicants will have to estimate the budget for carrying out the above pre-defined activities. Certain measures contributing to the improvement of policies do not require specific additional funding. On the other hand, when funding is required for implementing other measures such as those listed in Section 4.6 of the manual, such funding should come from the relevant local, regional and / or national funds.

What is the duration of a project?

In total, a project can last between **3 and 5 years**:

Phase 1 lasts from **one to three years**. Each project proposes a duration that matches its needs and reflects its characteristics. The time needed for this core phase depends on several factors (e.g. number of partners, experience of the partners in cooperation, specific features of the issue addressed, etc.). It is expected that a majority of projects would need a minimum of two years to carry out the activities foreseen under phase 1. A one-year duration may be considered for more experienced partnerships (e.g. partners who have already worked together). In these cases, the interregional learning would be mainly dedicated to adapting lessons learnt from previous cooperation to the relevant policy framework and in particular to the 2014-2020 Structural Funds Programmes.

Phase 2 lasts two years, as the impact of the measures on the territories can usually be assessed within this time. It may be the case that projects approved at a later stage of the programme may have a second phase of only one year.

It should be highlighted that the time dedicated to phase 2 also includes the time needed for **closing the project** (usually estimated at three months).

What is the amount of ERDF contribution?

The total budget and ERDF contribution to projects depends on different factors (e.g. number of partners involved, duration of phase 1). Based on the INTERREG IVC experience, the average total ERDF budget of a project is expected to be between **1 and 2 million Euro**.

Costs financed at each stage

| | Financed by | |
|----------------|--|---|
| | INTERREG EUROPE | Other sources of funding |
| Phase 1 | Staff, administration, travel & accommodation, external expertise: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interregional learning activities (e.g. study visits, workshop, seminars, peer review, staff exchanges) - Possible studies (e.g. SWOT analysis, case studies) - Elaboration of action plans - Elaboration of policy recommendations - Communication activities - Management activities | Any possible costs related to the implementation of the lessons learnt from the cooperation in the partner region (results can be achieved before the finalisation of the action plans) |
| Phase 2 | Staff, administration, travel & accommodation, external expertise related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitoring the implementation of action plan - Interregional learning activities to support the implementation of action plans | All costs related to the implementation of the action plans (<i>with the exception of possible pilot actions financed by INTERREG EUROPE</i>) |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication activities - Management activities including closure activities - <i>pilot actions (in justified cases)</i> | |
|--|---|--|

Pilot actions

There may be cases where the good ideas discovered during phase 1 in a given region will first need to be tested in another region before being rolled out. If this testing requires funding and that the 'importing' region does not have the necessary funding, the project may apply to the Interreg Europe programme before the end of phase 1 to carry out a pilot action. To propose a pilot action, a project must submit a revised application through a request for change procedure before the end of phase 1, justifying why programme funding is required for such pilot actions. This procedure may lead to the involvement of additional partners, if these partners are needed to carry out the pilot actions. In cases where this procedure implies additional funding for the project, approval by the programme's monitoring committee is required. A revised subsidy contract including the additional funding would then be issued to the project.

To be eligible for support from the programme, pilot actions need to fulfil the following three conditions, which apply to any activities proposed within Interreg Europe:

1. Relevance

The pilot action needs to clearly contribute to the policy instrument tackled in the region where it is proposed. As such, it should be part of the action plan of that region.

2. Interregionality

The pilot action needs to clearly derive from the cooperation. Usually it allows a partner to test, in its region, an approach that has been developed in another region. Pilot actions need to be clearly related to the interregional learning process.

3. Additionality

The pilot actions have to represent additional activities that would not be carried out without the support of the Interreg Europe programme. The region proposing a pilot action should therefore demonstrate the reason why this action cannot be taken over by the relevant local, regional or national funds.

In financial terms, and based on the INTERREG IVC experience, the budget for pilot actions is usually between EUR 10,000 and EUR 80,000.

POLICY LEARNING PLATFORMS

The second type of action financed under the INTERREG EUROPE programme relates to policy learning platforms.

What is a platform?

A policy learning platform is a service for project partners and for all other organisations involved in regional policy around Europe to promote continuous policy learning and capitalisation of good regional policy practices. To ensure clear communication and visibility, there is one policy learning platform per thematic objective, i.e. Research & innovation, Competitiveness of SMEs, Low-carbon economy, Environment & resource efficiency (four platforms in total).

Each platform consists of:

- An international team of experts, specialised in the thematic policy fields addressed by the programmes' investment priorities, contracted to organise activities and provide information and support to the regions of Europe to help them improve the planning and implementation of their policies.
- An interactive web interface designed to facilitate networking, information sharing and knowledge management and exchange: actors dealing with regional development policies in Europe can find information and analysis on the thematic policy fields addressed by the programme's investment priorities, thematic reports and publications, as well as a database of the relevant practices and results from interregional cooperation projects. Registered users have access to practitioners' and experts' database and further services upon demand, e.g. peer reviews for regions, thematic workshops.

The policy learning platforms are established at programme level for the duration of the seven-year period, i.e. from 2015 until 2021. The platforms run their activities based on a work plan for two years, planning annual objectives, main activities and expected results and renewed by decision of the monitoring committee. The platforms are different from the projects because they are sub-contracted by the managing authority through a public procurement procedure.

Who can benefit from the platforms? Users

The platforms' services are available to any interested stakeholders involved in regional development policies related to innovation, SME competitiveness, low-carbon economy, the environment and resource efficiency.

In particular, the platforms' target audience are:

- regions and stakeholders involved in the management and implementation of Structural Funds programmes (including final beneficiaries of these funds) or of similar thematic policies in particular in the case of Norway and Switzerland;
- other institutional stakeholders whose policy mandates are relevant for the topics addressed by the platforms e.g. the European Commission, the Committee of Regions, the European Environment Agency, the OECD, and other EU programmes.

Targeted communication activities will be organised to inform the stakeholders of Structural Funds programmes of the opportunities offered by the platforms.

What kinds of services do the platforms provide?

The platforms provide services for the whole community of regional policy stakeholders, in particular those involved in Investment for Growth and Jobs and European Territorial Cooperation programmes across Europe.

Indicatively, the services of the platforms may include (non-exhaustive):

- organise and facilitate thematic events, workshops and meetings for the community of stakeholders and stakeholders registered on the platforms;
- organise and facilitate peer reviews between European regions in support of policy improvement and capacity building;
- monitor, as far as possible, the developments of Structural Funds programmes and other relevant sources around Europe on topics related to the four thematic objectives so as to identify possible interesting experiences, synergies and links;
- analyse, benchmark and disseminate the content of the interregional cooperation projects approved under the four programme priorities;
- provide thematic material and guidance, such as newsletters, studies, policy recommendations, good practice examples related to regional challenges;
- advise running projects on thematic issues where relevant;
- answer requests for information and data from individual stakeholders involved in Structural Funds and European Territorial Cooperation programmes;
- organise specific activities upon request of the Partner States e.g. targeted thematic workshops;
- contribute to the promotion of Interreg Europe by disseminating the platform's activities and results;
- advise Interreg Europe programme bodies on the programme's strategic orientation;
- cooperate with the Smart Specialisation platform in Seville to share information and ensure complementarity of activities in particular related to the thematic objective on Research & innovation.

How to access the services of the platforms? Registration and costs

Online access to the platforms is through the Interreg Europe website: www.interregeurope.eu.

To benefit from the services of the platforms, interested stakeholders need to fill in an online registration form and describe their relevance to a topic tackled by the platforms. Their registration will be then confirmed and access to the platforms will be granted.

- Registration is required in order to access the online information and databases and submit a request for advice or a service (e.g. peer review, thematic workshop etc.) to the platforms expert team.
- Registration and participation to all the platforms services, information, events, workshops etc. is free of charge; should there be any costs involved in connection

with participation, for instance travel costs, registered stakeholders are advised to use, if possible, the technical assistance of Structural Funds and European Territorial Cooperation programmes or other financial resources to participate in the activities of the platforms.

N.B. The platforms are not a funding mechanism nor do they provide any kind of financial assistance to regions.

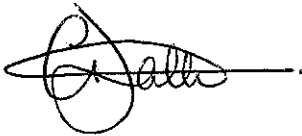
Policy learning platforms are expected to start operating in 2016.

Further details

For further details on these two types of actions to be financed under the Interreg Europe Programme, one should consult the programme manual which is available on the programme website: <http://www.interreg4c.eu/interregeurope/callforproposals/>

Whilst thanking you for your cooperation, FPD staff remains at your disposal for any clarifications with regard to the above.

Best regards.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Dalli', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Carmen Dalli
Director, Programmes and Projects