FAQS - INTERREG CENTRAL EUROPE

1st call: General information

What is the aim of the first call?
With this call, the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme aims to bring regions and cities together beyond borders to find fitting solutions for their citizens – in a fair and equal way everywhere. Our funding encourages and supports transnational cooperation to make regions more resilient to common challenges that know no borders and which cannot be solved alone.

When does the first call open and close?
The call timeline is organised in two phases.

- Call preview: Between 24 June and 14 November 2021, we provided thematic information and a community matchmaking platform for applicants to exchange on ideas and develop partnerships.

- Call opening and closure: The call officially opened in a one-step procedure on 15 November 2021. The call will close on 23 February 2022.

Is the first call open to all programme priorities and specific objectives?
The call is open in all programme priorities and specific objectives (SOs).

What is the indicative budget for the first call?
Around EUR 72 million ERDF will be indicatively earmarked for the first call for proposals. The indicative amounts allocated to each priority in the first call will be:

- Priority 1: EUR 22 million
- Priority 2: EUR 36 million
- Priority 3: EUR 7 million
- Priority 4: EUR 7 million

Which are the main documents to read before submitting a project proposal?
The main reference source is the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme 2021-27 document (IP). The IP provides applicants with information regarding transnational challenges, funding priorities, specific funding objectives, expected results, examples of actions and much more.

The Programme Manual outlines the main rules, requirements and procedures for organisations that plan to apply for funding from the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE programme and for beneficiaries of selected projects.

The Application Package comprises the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the first call, the off-line template of the application form, the lead partner and partner declaration templates and the simplified financial statement for private lead applicants.

All mentioned documents, along with related complementary tools, are available in the Documents section.

How can project applications be submitted?
Applications can only be submitted through the Joint electronic monitoring system (Jems), which was launched on 31 January 2022.

For more information in Jems, please read the Jems User Manual and watch the related tutorial. A helpdesk for technical support specifically dedicated to Jems can be reached via email at jems(at)interreg-central.eu.

By when will new projects be selected?
The funding decision is expected towards the end 2022. However, this depends among others on the number of applications received.
More detailed information on the timing for the selection of project proposals will be published after the closure of the call.

When are new projects expected to start their activities?
Successful projects are expected to start with their activities in early 2023.

What will the second call look like?
Our second call will be dedicated to Pioneer projects. This new kind of projects is expected to be highly innovative, test concrete solutions through pilot actions on a small scale or focus on new approaches to integrated territorial development. Such projects will have a smaller partnerships, a smaller budget and a shorter duration.

For more information about our second call regularly check our website or subscribe to our newsletter.

1st call: Project and partnership basics

What is a transnational cooperation project?
A transnational project brings together partners from at least three different countries to cooperate and find solutions for common challenges of the programme region. The first call for proposals aims at selecting partnerships which work together in our transnational projects for around 3 years and with an indicative budget between 1.2 and 2.4 million EUR ERDF.

Transnational cooperation actions are expected to address the development and implementation of strategies, action plans, tools, training, and pilot actions. To find out more about transnational cooperation projects, you are invited to browse the result page of the 2014-20 programme.

What are minimum requirements for a transnational project partnership?
When devolping a project partnership, the following minimum requirements have to be met:

- At least three financing partners;
- From at least three countries;
- With at least two of the partners located in the programme area.

Furthermore, the lead partner shall be located in the programme area.
The partnership for a project of the first call, however, should ideally range from 5 to 12 partners.

Who can become a project partner?
- The following institutions can participate in transnational project partnerships:
- National, regional and local public bodies (including EGTCs);
- Private institutions, including private companies, having legal personality;
- International organisations acting under the national law of any Member State participating in the programme or, with restrictions, under international law.

The participation of partners located outside the programme area in Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE projects is allowed only if it brings clear benefits to central European regions. Funds can be granted to partners in EU Member States outside the programme area upon conditions. Partners from outside the EU can participate as observers but cannot receive ERDF co-financing.

What is the lead partner principle and who can become a lead partner?
The “lead partner principle” means that each partnership appoints one organisation to act as lead partner. The lead partner takes full financial and legal responsibility for the implementation of the entire project.

The following institutions can act as lead partners if located in the programme area:

- Public bodies;
- Private institutions;
- International organisations acting under national law.

Can a private organisation become a lead partner?
Private bodies can take the lead partner role. Private lead applicants, however, must meet minimum financial capacity requirements in order to be eligible as lead partners.

Other than in the previous programming period, private lead applicants are not requested to submit a bank guarantee in the contracting phase, if the project is selected for funding.

Private bodies planning to apply as lead applicant shall carefully check the financial capacity requirements in chapter II.4.2 of the programme manual and fill in the financial capacity self-assessment tool.

1st call: Work plan development

What makes a good project proposal?
Transnational cooperation has to be at the heart of every Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE project. This means that each project has to demonstrate that the challenges addressed cannot be solved efficiently by individual regions or countries alone. Moreover, each project has to clearly address the territorial challenges and needs of the programme area and especially of the regions involved.

Other important features of a good transational project are innovativeness, building on available knowledge, a sound methodological approach and a mature work plan.

Can an Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE project address more than one programme priority or specific objective?
Each project can target only one programme priority and within the priority only one programme specific objective.

What are Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE projects expected to achieve?
The types of results achieved by transnational projects can be classified as follows:
- Improved policy development, learning, and change;
- Increased knowledge and capacity, including the knowledge transfer and exchange;
- Better coordinated cooperation and enhanced governance at different levels;
- Reduced barriers;
- New or better services;
- Behavioural change;
- Leverage of public and private funds, including the preparation for follow-up investments.

For more information regarding the expected results for each specific objective (SO), please consult the relevant section of the IP - Chapter 2.
To find out more about the results achieved in the previous programme, you are invited to browse our results page.

What kind of activities and outputs are expected from Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE projects?

Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE has pre-defined the following categories of project outputs, which focus on policy support and implementation activities.

- Cooperations
- Strategies and action plans
- Pilot actions
- Solutions

More specific information on supported actions for each Specific Objective (SO) and related thematic fields and examples of actions can be consulted in the IP document - Section 2. The programme supports pilot investments as part of pilot actions and projects can contribute to the preparation of large scale investments.

What is the difference between the output indicator RCO87 and the related result indicator RCR84?
The output indicator RCO87 “Organisations cooperating across borders” counts the number of organisations formally cooperating in supported projects, i.e. the project partners and the associated partners participating in the project as foreseen in the application form. This indicator has to be selected by all projects. It should be included in the first work package but it should not be the only output selected for the work package. This indicator will be reached through the establishment of cooperation in the project (e.g. subsidy contract/partnership agreement signatures).
The related result indicator RCR84 “Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion” counts the organisations (i.e. project partners and associated organisations) that continue cooperating across borders after the completion of the supported project. The value for RCR84 should be equal to or less than the value of the corresponding output indicator RCO87. Cooperation with other stakeholders after the project end should be described in section C.8 “Long-term effects and durability” of the application form.
For further details please see annex 6 to the programme manual.

What is the difference between activities, deliverables and outputs?
Project activities are the main implementation steps that contribute to the development of project outputs and/or their subsequent roll-out or upscaling.

A deliverable captures the implementation of project activities, e.g. analysis reports, feasibility studies, strategy documents, pilot action reports, training documentations. It presents in an aggregated form outcomes of intermediate steps of a certain activity. A deliverable has to be sufficiently comprehensive. It is recommended to limit the number of project deliverables.

An output is a product that results from the implementation of project activities.

Which horizontal principles have to be respected by the projects?
Transnational cooperation actions will have to respect the horizontal principles of equal opportunity, non-discrimination, gender equality and environmental sustainability during project design and implementation.

In particular, all actions financed by the programme will follow an "environmental sustainability by design approach". This means that partnerships are strongly encouraged to identify and consider any potentially significant environmental and health issues during project design and integrate them from the beginning into all activities.

What is a pilot action in the context of Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE projects?
A pilot action is an implementation-oriented activity which tests novel approaches and leads ultimately to the implementation of newly gathered knowledge and related solutions.

A pilot action should have an experimental or demonstration character, be limited in scope, be jointly developed, implemented and evaluated in terms of results as well as jointly exploited and transferred to other institutions and territories.

What is a pilot investment in the context of Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE projects?
Pilot actions can include pilot investments, which are implemented at a small scale and are necessary for the successful implementation of a pilot action.

A pilot investment must clearly contribute to the project specific objectives as well as to the project overall objective: it must have a demonstration, model or pilot character and show a clear transnational implementation dimension and effect that the partnership evaluates together. The investment should ideally pave the way to large-scale investments, thus increasing the impact of the project.

1st call: Budget development

What makes a good project budget?
The project budget needs to be realistic and in line with the principles of adequacy of costs and sound financial management (i.e. economy, efficiency and effectiveness).

It needs to be consistent and transparent ensuring that it reflects the work plan and its timing.

What is the timeframe for eligibility of expenditure?
From a time-wise perspective, expenditure is eligible according to the following three phases:

- Project Preparation and Contracting Phase: Costs for the preparation and contracting of an approved project can be compensated through a lump sum.

- Project Implementation Phase: Costs for the implementation of an approved project are eligible from its start date until its end date as set in the approved application form.

- Project Closure Phase: Costs referring to these activities are eligible and must be paid by the deadline for submitting the last joint progress and joint finance reports as set in the subsidy contract.

How can the co-financing of 20% be provided by the beneficiary?
The co-financing can either be provided through own resources or through other schemes that might be set up at the national, regional or local level. This means that the 20% financing can be covered by funding received from the national, regional or local level if there is such possibility.

However, it is important to note that the programme only reimburses costs incurred and paid by the beneficiaries. This means that each beneficiary must fully pre-finance its project expenditure. Then, once verified by the controller and included in a joint finance report, the MA reimburses 80% (ERDF) to the lead partner who in turn has to transfer the respective amount to the beneficiary.

The sum of the ERDF and co-financing received by a beneficiary can never exceed 100% of the costs occurred for the concerned item(s).

By selecting the simplified cost option “40% Flat Rate for Eligible Direct Costs other than Direct Staff Costs”, does the project partner need to document expenditure other than direct staff costs?
When a project partner selects this SCO for the reimbursement of costs, this partner does not need to document that the expenditure in cost categories 2-6 has been incurred and paid out. Only expenditure claimed on a **real costs basis** has to be supported by relevant documents. In this case staff costs are the calculation basis and the beneficiary’s controller checks the eligibility of staff

costs (cost category 1) solely, in compliance with general and specific provisions on eligibility of expenditure, as outlined in the programme manual.

Is it necessary to indicate the budget for each work package in the application form?
There is no budget at work package (WP) level. The budget in the application form is to be inserted per project partner, per cost category (CC) and per period.

Are investments above 25.000 EUR possible?
Yes, but for each investment exceeding EUR 25.000 total cost (i.e. CC5 Equipment and CC6 Infrastructure and works) a clear and concise description needs to be provided in the relevant section of the application form. Investments are only to be foreseen if they are necessary for the successful implementation of pilot actions. For more detailed requirements regarding pilot investments please refer to chapter I.3.3.3 of the programme manual.

Are full purchase costs for equipment eligible?
If the equipment is used for project purposes only, then the full cost is eligible. However, if an institution is not allowed to account the full cost due to national or internal rules on the matter, depreciation can be an eligible cost.

How are staff costs calculated on a real costs basis for staff that works part-time on the project?
It is stated in the programme manual chapter I.4.3.1 that "The percentage of the assignment has to reflect an employee's related tasks, responsibilities and functions to be performed in the project and shall be individually fixed for each employee."

The percentage should be allocated for the whole project duration. This percentage may change provided this is justified due to changes in tasks or responsibilities of the employee. However, the percentage shall remain fixed for an entire financial reporting period.

Can associated partners be subcontracted?
In principle, since associated partners are not financing partners, they can be sub-contracted. However, procurement rules have to be applied and the principle of transparency has to be ensured.

How shall costs for in-house contracted bodies be reported?
If a body can be considered as in-house and fulfils all the requirements that are stated in chapter I.4.4.1 of the programme manual, then this body can be contracted by the beneficiary through a direct award.

Costs of the contracted in-house body will always have to be charged on a real costs basis or using simplified cost options (SCOs) in the same way as the project partner. Such costs shall be accounted under each relevant cost category according to the nature of the service provided, as well as under the same general and specific provisions on eligibility, reporting and audit trail as provided for in the programme manual.

1st call: State aid

When does the State Aid occur in an Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE project?
Public support granted by the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE programme to project(s) is State Aid when all of the below listed criteria are met:

- The recipient of public support is an "undertaking" (an entity carrying out an economic activity in the context of the project);
- The undertaking is given an economic advantage that it would not gain under normal market conditions;

- Advantage given is selectively favoring certain undertaking(s) or the production of certain good(s);
- Given support distorts or threatens to distort competition and affects trade within the European Union.

Project applications are assessed against these criteria, given in the article 107 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

In case of State Aid relevance of projects selected for funding, specific contractual obligations on State Aid are given in the project Subsidy Contract.

How is State aid granted to project partners?
Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE grants direct State aid to affected project partners under General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) Article 20. The aid granted by the Programme amounts to the whole ERDF budget of the concerned partner(s), up to a ceiling of 2 million EUR of total public contribution per partner and per project.

Is there any way to receive national public co-financing if I receive State aid in the project?
For project partners who intend to receive external public co-financing to their budgets and are State aid relevant, as an exception, the Programme may award the ERDF under the de minimis regime.

De minimis aid would then be granted to the project partner(s) by the Member State Austria and it amounts to the whole ERDF budget of the concerned partner(s). Applicable de minimis threshold applies (per Member State and per undertaking), which may result with the reduction of ERDF contribution from the Programme. Moreover, external public co-financing to be received by the project partner is also State aid relevant.

All partners intending to receive external public co-financing or wishing to apply for it, must include information on additional public co-financing in the application form, section "Origin of partner contribution".

What is indirect State aid?
When project activities result in advantages given to undertakings outside the project partnership (which they would not have obtained under normal market conditions), State aid is granted to third parties - final beneficiaries of project activities. This is called indirect State aid.

How is indirect State aid granted?
Indirect State aid is granted to final beneficiaries of State aid under GBER Article 20a. Value of indirect aid cannot exceed EUR 20.000 per recipient of aid and per project.

Prior to starting implementation of project activities affected by indirect aid, concerned project partners have to determine the amount of indirect aid to be granted to each undertaking final beneficiary and obtain a MA/JS verification for calculation of aid value.

1st call: Project management and communication

What makes good project management?
A good project has a strong management that ensures high quality outputs and results and mitigates risks in coordination with partners.

The implementation of a transnational cooperation project with partners from several countries, different institutional backgrounds and working cultures can be challenging. Therefore, an effective project management structure with clear decision-making procedures as well as clear definition and distribution of roles is essential.

What makes good project communication?
External communication that is driven and coordinated by an experienced communication manager is essential for a successful project. Well-defined communication objectives support the achievement of thematic objectives and communication activities complement thematic activities.

If done well, communication raises the necessary awareness and provides information on thematic activities. It might even help to change the attitude of relevant stakeholders towards the changes aimed for by the project. Communication activities furthermore contribute to the capitalisation of achieved project outputs and results and aim at their roll out into broader policies, strategies and action plans.

What are the "must-have" project communication channels and activities?
All projects have to implement a set of standard communication channels and activities (project website, poster, etc.). At project start-up and then during the project lifetime, the communication manager and all other partners have to ensure that at least the following communication channels and activities are implemented:

- Project website hosted on programme website
- Project information on beneficiary websites and their social media channelsite
- Posters displayed at all partner premises
- Branding and visibility requirements

Why are there no work packages (WP) for management and communication?
Communication supports the achievement and capitalisation of project outputs and results. To this end, external communication is closely linked to thematic work packages. Communication objectives and activities have to be directly planned and integrated in thematic work packages.

Project management activities are to be considered as horizontal tasks and concern all thematic work packages. The overall approach to project management, including e.g. the set-up of management structures, responsibilities and procedures, as well as risk management etc., has to be described in the section “C.7 Project management” of the application form. The reporting requirements are defined in the programme manual and in the subsidy contract.

1st call: Assessment

What are the main criteria for assessing the quality of project proposals?
Selection criteria are grouped in two categories, strategic (“Relevance” and “Partnership”) and operational (“Implementation”).

The quality assessment is performed along these three criteria by applying guiding questions to all project proposals and it is based on a standardised procedure, to safeguard the principles of transparency and equal treatment. The assessment criteria are presented in detail in the Term of Reference for the first call.

What is the relevance filter assessment and how will it be applied?
The quality assessment of the first call for proposals is carried out in two phases. The first phase aims at excluding from the selection process those proposals that lack relevance for the programme (relevance filter). The second phase assesses all details of the proposals (full assessment).
The relevance filter focuses on particular aspects of the strategic assessment criteria ‘relevance’ and ‘partnership’:

- Relevance and clarity of the intervention logic, notably its contribution to the targeted programme specific objective, as well as the added value of the proposed transnational cooperation approach.
- Relevance of the partnership composition including its transnationality.

Proposals not showing a sufficient quality when assessed against the above aspects of the two strategic criteria are rejected.

How can I find out whether my project proposal matches the assessment criteria?
The self-assessment tool will help you to determine if your project proposal covers all important aspects of a good project proposal and identify possible shortcomings. The self-assessment tool is available on a dedicated section of our website. It includes the assessment criteria and guiding questions, against which your application will also be assessed by the programme.

1st call: Support measures for applicants

What kind of support and training are offered?
When searching for information, applicants are recommended to consult the programme website, where they can find all relevant call information, including documents and templates.

In addition, audio-visual applicant support measures are available. These measures include tutorial videos that introduce the new programme’s thematic priorities and specific objectives (SOs). These are complemented by work-plan and budget-related video tutorials as well as recordings of live Q&A webinars. All videos and recordings are available in the programme YouTube playlist New Funding: First Call for Proposals 2021/2022.

In addition, an English-language helpdesk team can be reached during office hours at +43 (1) 8908088 2403 and at helpdesk(at)interreg-central.eu. Furthermore, you are invited to browse our regularly updated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

For inquiries on the national level, the network of National Contact Points provides support in national languages.

How can I become part of a project idea proposal?
The Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Applicant Community has been newly developed to facilitate transnational matchmaking. This community brings together organisations from all over central Europe and aims to facilitate partner search and project idea generation. It helps applicants to effectively present project ideas and build project partnerships.

Organisations interested in joining an existing partnership can register with the platform and search project ideas created by other organisations in the "Browse ideas" section. This section gives an overview of public project ideas and the type of partners that are still needed to build a successful partnership. Once you find a project idea which could benefit from your competences, you can contact its holder directly on the platform and exchange bilaterally on a potential cooperation and joint project development.

For further information please see the community section "How to become a partner".

How can I find partners for my project idea?
The Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Applicant Community has been newly developed to facilitate transnational matchmaking. This community brings together organisations from all over central Europe and facilitate partner search and project idea generation. It helps applicants to effectively present project ideas and build project partnerships.

Organisations looking for partners to join their project idea can register with the platform and submit their project idea in the "Browse ideas" section. In order to find suitable partners from a specific field of expertise or country, you can also browse organisation profiles in the section "Find partners" and get in touch directly on the platform.

For further information please see our community section "How to find a partner".

How can I book an individual consultation on my project idea?
As of 29 November 2021, lead applicants with a project idea in an advanced stage can request a non-compulsory individual consultation with the JS team. The aim of these consultations is to advise

lead applicants on the relevance of their project ideas and to clarify technical questions related to contents, communications and finances.

Individual consultations will take place as virtual meetings and can be booked exclusively based on project ideas uploaded in our applicant community.

Please note that only one consultation is granted per project idea. Ideas should therefore be in a more mature stage when requesting the consultation.

How can I get support in my country?
The network of National Contact Points (NCPs) provides support in national languages on primarily national application issues.
On the transnational level, English-language inquiries are answered by an experienced helpdesk team that can be reached by phone +43 (0) 1 8908 088 2403 or at info(at)interreg-central.eu.