



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL  
REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY

**PILOT ACTION ON INTERREGIONAL INNOVATION  
CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR  
COVID -19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY PARTNERSHIPS**

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## 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 1.1 The EU has a crucial role to play in supporting all regions and Member States to activate their potential for innovation, competitiveness and sustainable jobs and growth.
- 1.2 In recent years, the Commission has called on national and regional authorities to develop Smart specialisation strategies for research and innovation. The aim was to encourage all European regions to identify their specific competitive advantages, as a basis for prioritising research and innovation investment under cohesion policy in the 2014-2020 programming period.
- 1.3 Smart specialisation strategies have been used to develop more effective innovation policies and encourage interregional cooperation in value chains across borders. Linking research and innovation actors with industrial stakeholders can help to develop complementarities in product development, production processes and take-up activities. This can contribute to building and reshaping EU-wide value-chains by leveraging private sector investments through public funding to go beyond the so-called “valley of death” and bring innovation to the market. Stronger strategic inter-regional cooperation and sustainable linkages between regional ecosystems along Smart specialisation priority areas could help increase competitiveness and resilience while better aligning investment pipelines across borders to create opportunities in new EU value-chains.
- 1.4 At the end of 2017, the Commission launched a pilot action on “Interregional innovation projects”. The pilot action, announced in the Communication “Strengthening Innovation in Europe’s Regions”<sup>1</sup>, sought to test new ways to encourage regions and cities to develop new value chains and scale up their good ideas in the EU single market. This meant bringing together businesses, researchers, and public authorities from across the EU working in similar Smart specialisation priority areas. Each partnership received technical assistance support from the Commission to accelerate the scale-up and commercialisation of inter-regional innovation projects and business investments.
- 1.5 Eight bottom up interregional partnerships were selected by an open call, and a partnership on batteries was established later on the initiative of the Commission. The interregional pilot action has been completed and showed significant potential to accelerate the investment readiness of interregional investment projects. The lessons from the pilot action will be integrated in the new “interregional innovation investment” instrument proposed in the framework of the post 2020 Cohesion Policy package.
- 1.6 Based on current Commission priorities, four new areas are proposed for cooperation in the framework of the interregional innovation partnerships (one partnership per topic):
  - **COVID-19:** mobilising regional capacities to accelerate innovation and rapid deployment of new technologies and solutions to address the COVID-19 pandemic;

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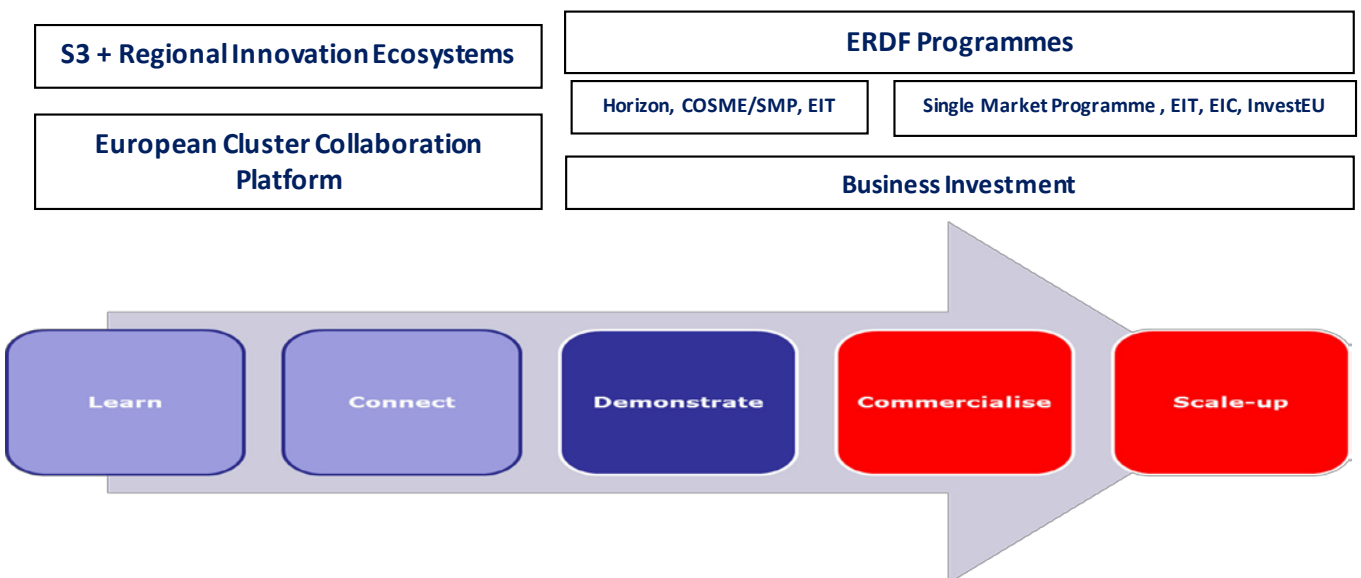
<sup>1</sup> [Strengthening innovation in Europe's regions: towards resilient, inclusive and sustainable territorial growth strategies](#)" (COM(2017)376 final)

development of the medical value chain (e.g. medical products, devices to tackle COVID-19).

- **Circular Economy in Health:** circular business models for medical products and services (e.g. remanufacturing and refurbishing of medical devices and equipment, circular economy in the context of health safety, management of medical waste).
- **Sustainable and Digital Tourism:** innovative solutions for the recovery and the development of tourism (including climate neutral and cultural tourism) through new technologies, service concepts and business models. Partnerships covering both the private sector (including start-ups), the public sector and public-private partnerships (e.g. responsible, innovative and smart tourism across different value chains, applying circular business models and resource efficiency, use and management of natural resources, use of public spaces, services and infrastructures, uptake of new technologies, data collection, management and sharing).
- **Hydrogen technologies in carbon-intensive regions:** innovative solutions based on hydrogen technology, which (a) respond to the specific challenges of carbon-intensive regions; and/or (b) capitalise on the specific strengths of carbon-intensive regions in the creation of a European value chain for FCH (e.g. through the conversion of existing coal mines, smelters or production facilities, particularly as regards raw materials).

1.7 This new phase of the pilot action will involve close collaboration between the Commission and associated Member States or Regions on the basis of partnerships involving policy-makers, researchers, businesses and other innovation actors.

1.8 In the context of the crisis, the goal of the pilot is to find solutions to the COVID-19 challenges and to accelerate the recovery thanks to the commercialisation and scale-up of innovation investment.



1.9 Applicants should propose a partnership in one of the four areas identified by the call. The applicants can represent, without any preferential treatment:

- a) One or more partnerships, which are currently operating under any of the existing Thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms on Industrial Modernisation, Energy and Agro-Food. The partnerships could be integrated with relevant additional stakeholders active in the European Innovation Ecosystem (e.g. cluster partnerships, European Technology Platforms, etc.)
- b) Any other S3 public-private partnership, which will be able to demonstrate the capacity to mobilise investments in the four new call areas and relevant solutions for the COVID response and recovery.

The involvement and/or the endorsement of managing authorities/ regional authorities responsible for innovation is strongly recommended.

The Commission reserves the right to request partnerships to integrate additional regions and networks.

1.10 The purpose of the pilot action is therefore:

- a) To **accelerate the response and recovery process** from the COVID-19, joining forces to identify solutions to new emerging challenges (health safety, security, need for a rapid uptake of smart, digital, circular and sustainable solutions).
- b) To **focus on commercialisation and scale-up** of concrete investment projects.
- c) To **attract private investment** for promising, but risky innovation projects, and address the gap for financing the step from technology development and validation to market.
- d) To **explore and strengthen synergies** and develop investment pipelines for projects which are bankable for support from financial instruments, in particular through the European Fund for Strategic Investment, and other EU initiatives and projects supported under INTERREG, Horizon 2020, DEP, EIT KICs, Joint Undertakings, European Innovation Partnerships and Macro-regional strategies.

1.11 The selected partnerships will benefit from support granted through the Technical Assistance from the ERDF. Based on experience, a budget of up to EUR 100.000 will be available for each of the four partnerships. The budget will be made available through expert support.

- 1.12 This support might be complemented, where appropriate, by other DGs (GROW, SANTE, ENV, RTD, CNECT), and other EU programmes and initiatives including the Smart Specialisation Platform<sup>6</sup> managed by the Joint Research Centre. Complementarities with other EU instruments will be promoted, including COSME (TAF and relevant calls for proposals), Horizon 2020 (notably INNOSUP calls), the European Cluster Observatory, the KETs Observatory, InnoFin, Start-up Europe initiative, European IPR Helpdesk, European Institute of Innovation and Technologies (EIT), and European Joint Undertakings.
- 1.13 **Timeline:** the call for proposal will be open until 7 September 2020. The evaluation, negotiation of the proposals and the finalization of contracts should last no more than two months (identification of external experts and the signature of the contract). The pilot would run for one year with the possibility to apply for support under the new programmes and the “Interregional Innovation Investment” instrument in 2021.

## 2. OBJECTIVE OF THE CALL

- 2.1. Under this Call, DG REGIO seeks **expressions of interest from transnational partnerships of regional authorities, including ecosystems of regional stakeholders (universities, research centres, clusters, SMEs, etc.)** willing to pilot interregional innovation partnerships. The objective is to incentivise business investment projects accelerating commercialisation and scale-up of inter-regional innovation.
- 2.2. The expected result of this Call is a **shortlist** of four expressions of interest.

## 3. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- 3.1. By the end of 2021, each selected partnership should have defined a **set of concrete business cases with concrete actions** for the **commercialisation and scale-up** of interregional investments.
- 3.2. By the end of 2021, the selected partnerships should have identified the **financial and legal obstacles to commercialisation and scale-up**, developed cooperation with other EU programmes and initiatives and, if relevant, established connections with partnerships already established under other Thematic Areas covered by the three Thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms.

#### 4. WHO CAN APPLY UNDER THIS CALL? ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- 4.1. An Expression of Interest can be submitted by a partnership made up of statutory regional authorities and their regional innovation ecosystems. Partnerships should be composed of regional authorities from at **least four different EU countries** and **represent to the extent possible the whole value chain** involving representatives of the “quadruple helix”: research, business, public administration and end-users from different countries.
- 4.2. Each partnership submitting an application is, in principle, expected to have already gone through the “**Learn**” and “**Connect**” phase and launched actions to start the “**Demonstrate**” phase with an in-depth analysis of the technology/solutions (Technological Readiness Level (TRL) 5<sup>2</sup> and 6<sup>3</sup>) proposed for the experimental development.
- 4.3. To be considered eligible, the expression of interest will have to meet all the following eligibility criteria:

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA		REFERENCE IN THE APPLICATION FORM
(1)	The partnerships proposed for the pilot are coherent with Smart specialisation strategies established at national or regional level satisfying the relevant regulatory requirements. (Coherence with S3 can be confirmed by relevant S3 authorities or equivalent evidence can be included in the proposal).	Section 2
(2)	A lead partner or equivalent body has been nominated to act as coordinator and be the main contact point with the European Commission.	Section 1.4
(3)	The partnership is working on one of the four areas identified by the call.	Section 1.3 and 1.6
(4)	Partnerships should be composed of regional authorities from at least four different EU countries and represent as much as possible the whole value chain involving representatives of the “quadruple helix”: research, business, public administration and end-users from different countries. Where relevant, third countries participation is possible.	Section 1.4 and 1.5

<sup>2</sup> TRL5 = Technology or solution validated in a relevant environment

<sup>3</sup> TRL6= Technology or solution demonstrated in a relevant environment

## 5. CRITERIA FOR SHORTLISTING EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

The eligible expressions of interest will be assessed against the following criteria:

CRITERIA FOR SHORTLISTING EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST		REFERENCE IN THE APPLICATION FORM
(1)	<u>Rationale</u> – clear and justified explanation for why the thematic interregional partnership should be supported, what support is expected and how it will promote commercialisation and scaling up of innovation projects across EU member states. The proposal should illustrate how the COVID 19 crisis affected the specific sector, how the key actors reacted and the pilot action expected impact on the recovery from the crisis (building resilience).	Section 2
(2)	<u>Engagement</u> – track-record of the involvement of various stakeholders in the development of the partnership and the existing coordination mechanisms. Lead regions have to be identified at the application stage and the application must include a complete list of all the partners (public and private) involved in each region (contact information).	Section 3
(3)	<u>Preparation status</u> – a description of the learning, connecting and demonstration activities, which have already been carried out or foreseen.	Section 3, 4
(4)	<u>Identification of bottlenecks</u> – what bottlenecks are expected during the commercialisation and scale up phase? What further services are needed to make investments happen?	Section 4, 5



## **6. ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

- 6.1. Expressions of Interest will be assessed against the eligibility criteria listed in paragraph 4.3 and shortlisted based on the criteria listed in section 5 of this Call.
- 6.2. The assessment will be carried out by a selection panel consisting of representatives of the European Commission. The final decision on a shortlist will be taken by the European Commission.
- 6.3. Each applicant will be informed about the decision taken.
- 6.4. At this stage of the Call, the shortlisting of an expression of interest does not constitute a binding commitment – either implicit or explicit – on the part of the European Commission to provide support to a partnership. A partnership may be requested to modify its proposal.

## **7. PROCEDURE FOR SUBMISSION OF EXPRESSION OF INTEREST**

- 7.1. Partnerships willing to submit the expression of interest are requested to complete the application form provided in the Annex 1 of this Call.
- 7.2. The application form shall be completed in English, French, or German.
- 7.3. The expression of interest should be submitted electronically to the following email address: [REGIO-SMART-GROWTH@ec.europa.eu](mailto:REGIO-SMART-GROWTH@ec.europa.eu)

## **8. DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST**

- 8.1. The deadline for submitting an expression of interest is **7 September 2020**.
- 8.2. Expressions of interest submitted after the date indicated in paragraph 8.1. of this Call will not be considered.

## **9. CONTACT**

- 9.1. In case of any questions, please contact [REGIO-SMART-GROWTH@ec.europa.eu](mailto:REGIO-SMART-GROWTH@ec.europa.eu)
- 9.2. All information related to this Call will be published online at:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/newsroom/funding-opportunities/calls-for-expressions-of-interest/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/funding-opportunities/calls-for-expressions-of-interest/)

## Annex 1: Application Form

### Call for Expression of Interest for COVID 19 Response and Recovery Interregional Innovation Partnerships

Please complete this form electronically and send it to:  
[REGIO-SMART-GROWTH@ec.europa.eu](mailto:REGIO-SMART-GROWTH@ec.europa.eu)

1. Information about the Applicant			
1.1.	Name of the lead body		
1.2	Contact Person for this application	Name, Last Name	
		Job title	
		Phone (e.g. +32-00000000)	
		Email	
1.3	Thematic area of cooperation	COVID-19 innovation/Circular Economy/Tourism/ Hydrogen	
1.4	Leading Region, partner Regions and number of total EU countries represented		
1.5	Representatives of the quadruple helix within the partnership (name, country)	Academia/research centres: Industry sector: Governments/public institutions: End-users' representatives from different countries:	
1.6	Is the partnership already a beneficiary of support from any of the three existing Thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms (if yes, please indicate the name of the partnership and the Thematic Area).		
1.7	Is the partnership already a beneficiary of support from the European Union budget (if yes, please indicate the programme/instrument)?		

## 2. Rational and linkage with regional Smart specialisation strategies

Please provide a clear and justified explanation why support to your research and business collaboration activities at interregional level can add value to Smart specialisation strategies in the chosen Thematic Area. Explain how the commercialisation and scaling up of the partnership's activities will contribute to the creation or reshaping of a EU value chain?

(max 500 words)

## 3. Partnership maturity

Please explain the existing mechanisms for partnership coordination and the track-record of the partnership. Please explain the extent to which learning, connecting and demonstration activities have already been carried out as well as their main outcomes.

(max 500 words)

#### 4. Identification of bottlenecks

Please explain which bottlenecks to commercialisation and scale-up have been identified and the possible solutions already identified by the partnership, where appropriate.

(max 500 words)

**5. Potential synergies with other EU initiatives and projects**

Please explain how other EU programmes and initiatives such as Horizon, INTERREG, EIT KICs, Joint Undertakings, European Innovation Partnerships and macro-regional strategies can be beneficial to your activities and how your potential involvement in these could be further exploited e.g. which projects you have already identified to establish synergies or what kind of results/deliverables can be helpful for your partnership?

(max 500 words)

**6. Please use this space to provide any other relevant comments/ clarifications, if necessary**

(max 500 words)