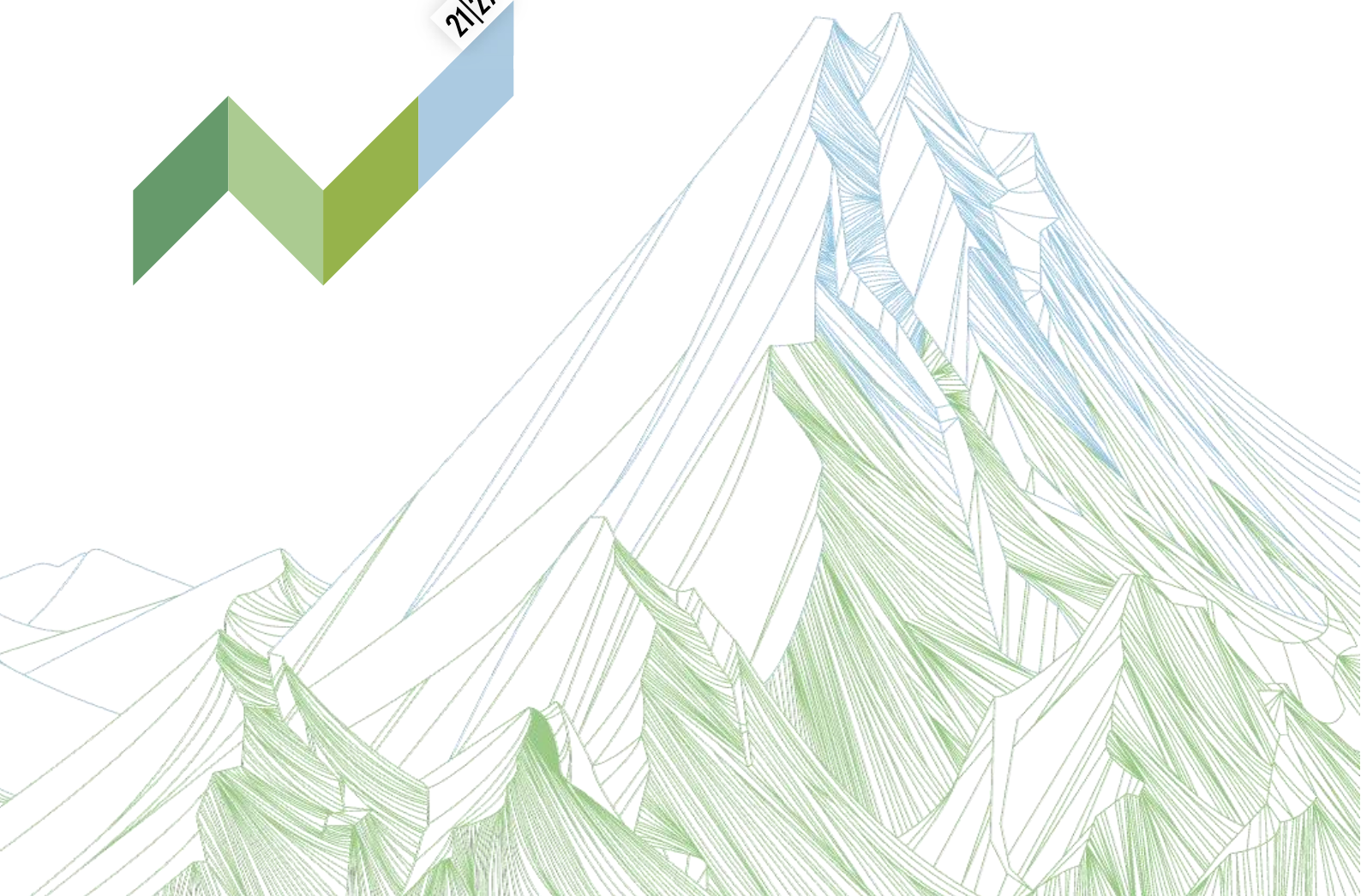


# Terms of Reference

## Second call for classic project proposals

Approved by the Programme Committee on 27 June 2023

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# Interreg Alpine Space programme 2021-2027

## Our mission

The Interreg Alpine Space programme 2021-2027 is an EU transnational cooperation programme, funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under the European Territorial Cooperation objective of the EU Cohesion Policy.

We are at the forefront of the transition to a unique, carbon neutral and climate-resilient Alpine region. With the programme, we want to **foster the integration of sustainable economic development, societal well-being and the preservation of biodiversity**. To do so, we bring together stakeholders from different sectors and regions to work on innovative projects and pioneering ideas for the benefit of those who live and work in the Alpine region.

The programme partner states invest **EUR 107 million ERDF** to co-finance transnational cooperation projects promoted by public and private organisations from seven Alpine countries.

The programme cooperation area is aligned with that of the EU macro-regional strategy for the Alpine Region. This is a deliberate effort to **strengthen the coherence and complementarity between both initiatives** and, at the same time, support the path towards a climate-neutral territory. Our programme is also anchored on several EU policy initiatives, including the European Green Deal and the Territorial Agenda 2030.

## Challenges for the Alpine region

Europe is facing several ongoing mega-trends to which the Alpine region is not immune. Globalisation, climate change and digitalisation are some of the most important ones. Their acceleration influences economies and societies, which calls for adequate responses from stakeholders working across borders.

**Climate change** is paving in its own way the next phase of globalisation. Even though the area is currently already experiencing the first direct impacts through extreme weather events, the impacts on ecosystems, territories and economies are often uncertain and some are not yet known. The implementation of mitigation and adaptation measures are amongst the priorities of governments and civil society organisations.

The implications brought by **digitalisation** on people's everyday life is also demanding in different ways. Digitalisation offers a considerable amount of options for cooperation, both in terms of opportunities and constraints that need to be assessed and weighted up e.g. in the context to achieve carbon neutrality. To reach the latter, the potential of a **circular economy** is key and needs to be further exploited and supported.

## Alpine Space

Coupled with this, is the impact brought by a number of transformative forces that shape the way people live and do business. The rapid **urbanisation** in many regions of the Alpine region goes along with population decline in other regions and a decrease in services of general interest. Equally important is the fact that urbanisation has made it more difficult for public authorities to manage growth and **land use interests in urban and peri-urban areas**. As cities become more populous and urbanised, the demand for energy, food and water has risen steadily. The Alpine region has a finite amount of natural resources to satisfy the demand, which also calls for **place-based approaches** to enable and support the transition towards **energy efficiency** and the intelligent use of renewable energy.

The Alpine region has a long-standing tradition of cooperation through a variety of formats. **All initiatives underline the need for greater coordination between different stakeholders and the alignment of resources and strategies to address challenges that know no borders**. Still, there is scope for improvement in multi-level governance.

In order to take a step forward in **territorial integration**, the programme will act as a driver for stakeholders who are willing to put into practice fresh ideas on **climate resilience and green infrastructure, carbon neutrality, innovation and governance**. The programme is therefore interested in supporting projects that grasp opportunities for economic growth or take stock and capitalise on achievements in place. The ultimate goal is to **make the Alpine region greener and smarter**, and help advance actions in the policy fields covered by EUSALP.

Our four priorities are presented in the table below:

	1 CLIMATE RESILIENT AND GREEN ALPINE REGION	2 CARBON NEUTRAL AND RESOURCE SENSITIVE ALPINE REGION	3 INNOVATION AND DIGITALISATION SUPPORTING A GREEN ALPINE REGION	4 COOPERATIVELY MANAGED AND DEVELOPED ALPINE REGION
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE	Promoting climate change adaption and disaster risk prevention, and resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions	Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies	Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, as well as other territorial strategies
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE	Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution	Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy	Reaping the benefits of digitalisation for citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities	

For a detailed description of contents of each priority and specific objectives, including information on the main challenges, type of actions and the expected contribution to EUSALP, please refer to the [Interreg programme document](#).

## Our priorities for the call

This call for project proposals is aimed at co-financing classic projects across all specific objectives under thematic priorities 1, 2 and 3. The programme welcomes project applications in all three thematic priorities provided it fits in with the challenges and needs of the Alpine regions as described above. For further information about classic projects please refer to section A.3 of the [programme manual](#).

The programme has approved so far 22 projects for the funding period 2021-27, which can be found on the programme website. Compared with the objectives and topics as set out in the programme document, the programme committee still sees potential in the topics of biodiversity and innovation. Therefore the programme would like to underline the broad range of these topics in the non-exhaustive list provided below for inspiration:

- Strengthening, improving and restoring multifunctional blue and green infrastructure and securing ecosystem and landscape services for peatlands, rivers, multifunctional forests, and urban green infrastructure.
- Addressing water scarcity and water management.
- Restoring biodiversity and enhancing ecological connectivity.
- Addressing conflicts between renewable energy production and biodiversity conservation.
- Shaping solutions for sustainable settlement development and soil protection.
- Demonstrating that the digital transformation can have a strong focus on social aspects with impacts on sectoral policies (nature conservation, tourism, e-health/smart health, etc.) as well as on the general public.
- Making use of the potential of social innovation to further develop economic and social structures in the Alpine region and accommodate the societal changes.
- Working with social innovation to develop a green and inclusive Alpine Space.
- Shaping an innovation ecosystem that also builds on the natural and the cultural heritage of the area, supporting the development of sustainable and innovative value chains.
- Supporting experimental models and start-ups to better address innovation topics in the Alpine region, involving greening practices building upon the natural and cultural heritage and knowledge of the actors in the Alpine region.

Classic projects offer a result oriented approach, helping to identify the expected contribution of projects in a defined policy field. These projects can tackle a wide range of challenges, and depending on the maturity of the topic subject to cooperation, they may address several phases of the policy cycle. The three phases are summarised below:

- **Strategic policy development** activities through the elaboration of common strategies or

methodologies;

- **Explorative and piloting** activities to test models or tools and validate solutions that are applicable to different contexts;
- **Dissemination and capitalisation activities** to encourage **policy implementation** across sectors and regions.

Projects shall apply a result-oriented approach and deliver tangible results to the challenges identified above, embedded in a broader strategic context, such as EUSALP or other EU or pan-Alpine policies.



The indicative budget earmarked is EUR 26 million ERDF for classic projects in the second call for proposals, depending on the quality of assessed received applications.

## Our expectations for classic projects

All projects are expected to contribute with innovative solutions to reach the objectives of the programme. The approaches can be new, even experimental, the programme is therefore particularly suited for testing new methods in a transnational network. The ready to use developed solutions and results are addressed to defined target groups.

Transnational cooperation projects bring together project partners from the seven countries participating in the programme, to work on a shared challenge and achieve innovative solutions that can be applied transnationally but also regionally or locally.



The development of these joint solutions requires enthusiasm and commitment during project development and implementation. Transnational cooperation enables the establishment of strong and lasting ties with partners in other Alpine regions. The partnership composition is crucial to leverage respective knowledge and ensure the uptake of results. When choosing your partners, consider that the topics can be tackled from different angles and solutions developed should be also practically anchored.

## Which cornerstones require attention?

Applicants need to keep in mind the following cornerstones:

- Please consider that the lead partner shall be a public or public equivalent institution. A good mix of project partners including implementation-oriented organisations, the local level and multipliers should be considered. All information can be found in the [programme manual](#) (chapter B.2.1 Project Partners, page 29-30).
- Eligible expenses from EU Members States are co-financed and reimbursed up to 75%;<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, project applicants are strongly encouraged to consider the reference values as outlined below:

- The total financial size of each project shall range between EUR 1 and 3 million;
- The duration of the projects shall range between 24 and 36 months;
- In order to ensure transnationality, the partnership must involve 7 to 12 partners from at least four different countries of the programme area (including the lead partner).

Deviations may be accepted in well-justified cases.

## How to apply?

The project application follows a two-step procedure. In the first step, applicants need to submit a short version of the application form (AF step 1) via the Joint Electronic Monitoring System (JEMS). Promising proposals will be selected and invited to submit the full application form (AF step 2). Guidance on how to fill out the application form is provided in the [programme manual annexes](#) (Annex Ia, page 3-29). Technical guidance for JEMS is available on the [dedicated webpage](#).

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<sup>1</sup> All project partners from Switzerland and Liechtenstein are asked to contact the national alpine contact points (ACP) for more information on the co-funding.



Furthermore, the **following advice should be considered** for the project development and application:

- Visit our [“How to apply” webpage](#), where all the relevant documents and information are gathered.
- Read our [programme](#) document carefully. All project proposals are required to identify the priority and specific objective they will be contributing to.
- Read our [programme manual](#) as well as the [FAQ section](#) on the programme website.
- Get a first contact with the [Alpine Space Contact Point \(ACP\)](#) in your country for more information well ahead of the submission deadline. They will provide general consultation on the project idea, partner search and advice on the consistency between your project idea and the priorities of the programme.
- Make sure to demonstrate in depth your proposal’s significant contribution to wider strategies and policies (EUSALP, EU Green Deal, Territorial Agenda 2030, UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, etc.) in the application form. Please consider that purely scientific project proposals are not foreseen in the programme.
- Discover the results already delivered by the Alpine Space programme in the [output library](#). Another source of interest are the ARPAF projects, implemented as part of the EUSALP (see section of Action Groups); whose results are accessible from the [EUSALP website](#).
- Before submitting your application form, use our Checklist Classic Project (“How to apply” webpage, Application kit section) to ensure you meet the eligibility criteria.
- For step 2, present a coherent communication plan: Through which channels do you want to reach and involve your target groups and the policy representatives? How do you want to disseminate the outputs and communicate the results?

## How are projects selected and supported?

The Joint Secretariat (JS) will assess all the projects submitted on time with the support of the ACP according to pre-defined selection criteria (see [programme manual annexes](#), Annex IIa, page 55-62). The Programme Committee of the Alpine Space programme will make the final selection by consensus.

Use the service provided by the [Alpine space contact points](#) of the lead partner’s country. They serve as a first interlocutor for project applicants and partners in the respective country. They assist you in project development and application and can be contacted for any other information in your language.

As part of the project development support, the Managing Authority/JS will provide online support to all potential applicants in developing high standard applications. A seminar to improve project proposals is foreseen for all applicants invited to step 2. For all successful projects approved in step 2, lead partners

will be invited to a 'Get started! Seminar'. Further training in relation to effective project implementation will be offered to successful applicants throughout the programming period, including Q&A sessions and online tutorials.

## What is the timeline?

The following timeline is valid in case up to 75 project proposals are received for assessment. In case more project proposals are received, the assessment period will be extended proportionally and published on the programme website soon after the submission deadline:

Step	Description	Indicative date or period	Calendar week
1	Publication of the call	3 July 2023	30
3	<b>Deadline for submitting (AF step 1)</b>	13 October 2023 at 13:00	41
4	Assessment	16 October 2023 - 4 December 2023	42-49
5	PC decision and invitation to submit full proposal	19-20 December 2023	51
6	Lead Applicant Seminar	Second half of January 2024	3/4
7	<b>Deadline for submitting (AF step 2)</b>	16 February 2024	7
8	Assessment	19 February - 9 April 2024	8-15
9	PC decision	May 2024	
10	Lead Partners' seminar	June 2024	