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Interreg Surgery The small-scale project call approach

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“United by the Sea into action for a blue and green future Innovative, Sustainable, Attractive and Active South Baltic”

SOUTH BALTIC 2021 - 2027



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The background

- ▶ [Interreg South Baltic Programme 2021-2027](#):
 - ▶ “The South Baltic Area has non-metropolitan, mostly rural character, **with scattered settlement structures.**”
 - ▶ “At the same time, the South Baltic regions show considerable **disparities in socio-economic characteristics, with visible urban-rural** and west-east divides.”
 - ▶ “Besides the differences between countries and regions, the **disparities have a strong urban-rural character.**”
 - ▶ **Inclusion of a new subregion** (olsztynski) to the Programme area in 2023.
- ▶ [ERDF regulation - \(EU\) 2021/1058](#): “The ERDF shall contribute to **reducing disparities** between the levels of development of the various regions within the Union, and to **reducing the backwardness of the least favoured regions** through participation in the structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind and in the conversion of declining industrial regions, including by promoting sustainable development and addressing environmental challenges.”
- ▶ [Interreg.eu](#): Interreg is a key European Union (EU) instruments that strengthens cooperation between regions and countries within the EU. As part of the EU’s Cohesion Policy, Interreg plays a vital role in **promoting regional development, cohesion, and reducing economic disparities.**

The Interreg South Baltic Programme

- ▲ PRIORITY 1 – Innovative South Baltic
 - ▲ Programme Measure 1.1 Digitalising the region (SO1.2)
 - ▲ Programme Measure 1.2 Building connectivity of the region through internationalization (SO1.3)
- ▲ PRIORITY 2 – Sustainable South Baltic
 - ▲ Programme Measure 2.1 Supporting transition towards green energy (SO2.2)
 - ▲ Programme Measure 2.2 Promoting sustainable use of water(SO2.5)
 - ▲ Programme Measure 2.3 Supporting a circular and more resource efficient development (SO2.6)
- ▲ PRIORITY 3 – Attractive South Baltic
 - ▲ Programme Measure 3.1 Developing sustainable, resilient, and innovative tourism (SO4.6)
- ▲ PRIORITY 4 – Active South Baltic
 - ▲ Programme Measure 4.1 Strengthen the cooperation capacity of actors based within the South Baltic Area (including civil society) (ISO6.1)

Small-scale projects concept in the ISBP

- ▲ Basic information:
 - ▲ Maximum budget: 160k EUR of ERDF (200k EUR eligible)
 - ▲ Reimbursement: Staff costs + 40% flat rate for other costs
 - ▲ Duration: up to 18 months
 - ▲ Recommended size of the partnership: 4-6 PPs
- ▲ General objective (Programme Manual): To address the challenges and needs of the Programme Area, for example by facilitating the involvement of the following actors to cross-border cooperation:
 - ▲ NGOs;
 - ▲ small and not experienced organisations;
 - ▲ newcomers to the Interreg cooperation;
 - ▲ public institutions from the hinterlands.

Lessons learnt from three regular and one small-scale projects call

- After three regular and one small-scale projects call:
 - 37 regular projects
 - 5 small-scale projects
- Numerous partners are located in the metropolitan areas of the Programme area, especially Tri-city, Szczecin, Rostock, Malmo, Klaipeda
- There are numerous organisations mainly universities and research institutions that participate in a large number of projects, i.e. more than 5
- There are “uncovered” areas of the Programme area that would have potential, especially municipalities with 20k – 100k inhabitants
- In the 1st small-scale projects call we received projects that are:
 - “regular projects on a smaller scale”,
 - based on partnerships with long history of cooperation.

Do we need newcomers in the Programme?

- What is the impact of supporting a close circle of beneficiaries, especially the ones located in the metropolitan centres on reducing the urban-rural disparities?
- Of course:
 - The thematic focus of the projects is important
 - Results generated by partners in metropolitan centres can occur in rural areas as they might be represented among
 - APs,
 - Stakeholder group,
 - Target group.

Nevertheless, if urban-rural disparities are meant to be reduced then it cannot be done without directly involving representatives from those areas.

- RCO87 – Organisations cooperation across borders (and RCR84): “At specific objective level, double counting should be avoided at the level of project partners and associated organizations.” (SWD(2025) 61)

Realising the need

- ▶ 11 applications in the 1st Smalls-scale projects call that ended in March 2024
 - ▶ It was opened in all SOs
- ▶ Only 4 applications received in the 3rd regular call for proposal that ended in June 2024
- ▶ Survey implemented during the summer of 2024 among potential applicants and Contact Points to understand better the state of play
- ▶ Discussions on the interpretation of ISO6.1 in the Programme
- ▶ General need to involve more newcomers

The turning point: CPs-JS-MA meeting in September 2024 in Gdańsk

- ▀ Discussing the outcomes of the survey
- ▀ As a novelty representatives of the MA also attended the JS-CPs meeting
- ▀ Working meeting to develop a proposal for the MC on the upcoming calls

The proposal

- ▶ “In projects in ISO6.1 (including small-scale projects) at least **1/3 of project partners** in the project **shall be newcomers** to the Interreg South Baltic Programme 2021-2027.”
 - ▶ “Projects that **do not comply** with this requirement will be **rejected during Admissibility & eligibility checks.**”
 - ▶ In case of rounding, the mathematical rules apply.
- ▶ General focus of small-scale projects as in the ToR:
 - ▶ “The scheme is proposed to form and **test new partnerships** engaging not only the partners experienced in the Programme, with relevant management knowledge and skills, but also small, newcomer organizations, NGOs, and local actors.”
 - ▶ “The Small-scale project facility is seen to implement **focused smaller-scale actions** that do not require the financing as a regular project as well as to serve as a “training platform” or a first step for the project partners before submission of project proposals of higher complexity, more significant impact, and financing volume under regular calls for proposals.”

The definition as in the ToR

- ▶ “The Programme defines newcomer as an organisation that **fulfils both conditions** below:
 - ▶ Did not participate in approved regular project(s) financed under the Interreg South Baltic Programme 2014-2020;
 - ▶ Does not participate in approved regular and/or Small-scale project(s) financed under the Interreg South Baltic Programme 2021-2027.”
- ▶ “Besides organisations that have not participated in any Interreg South Baltic project, the following organisations that previously participated in Interreg South Baltic projects may be considered as newcomers if they were:
 - ▶ Project partners of Interreg South Baltic Programme 2007-2013;
 - ▶ Associated partners in any Interreg South Baltic Programme project type and financial perspective;
 - ▶ Seed money project partners in any edition of the Interreg South Baltic Programme.”

The call

- The proposal was accepted by the MC and the call was open between 5 October 2024 – 4 February 2025
- The JS published a list of organisations that are not considered newcomers
- MC training in Palanga on 28-29 November 2024 that focused on newcomers as well as on ISO6.1
- In-person partner search event in Gdańsk on 3 December 2024 with 70+ participants (strong CP representation)



The initial outcomes

- ▲ Partners in the 2nd SSP call
 - ▲ 5 small-scale projects were submitted –“not great, not terrible”
 - ▲ No projects in SSP call were rejected on eligibility basis 😊
 - ▲ 8 newcomers out of 21 project partners are newcomers
 - ▲ 2 projects exceeded the minimum requirement 😊
 - ▲ 2 newcomer LPs 😊
- ▲ Same requirement in regular call in ISO6.1 resulted in 21 newcomers out of 45 project partners

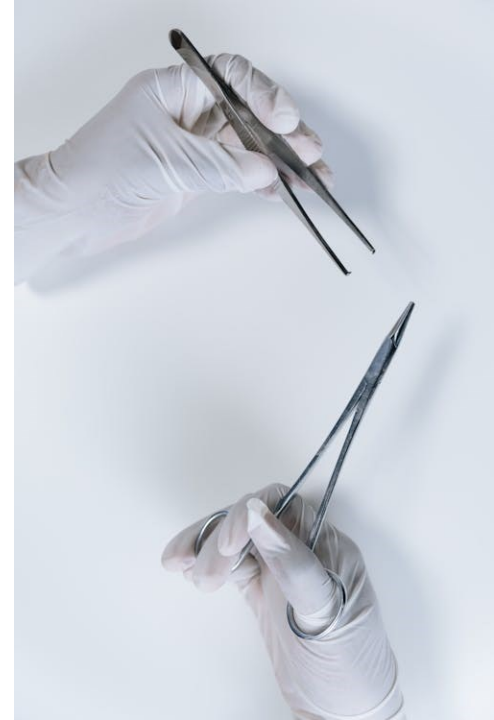
Projects will be selected by the MC on 17-18 June 2025.

The (potential) shortcomings of the approach

- Difficult to develop a definition of newcomers that fully covers every intention of the Programme:
 - Newly established organisations of experienced people are also newcomers
 - Inexperienced departments, units of experienced organisations are not newcomers
 - Question of merging organisations, organisational changes
- Reduces the possibility of new partnerships of experienced partners
- Can become a compliance exercise
- One newcomer organisation is counted as newcomer in all applications submitted within the same call

Take aways and keys to success

- ▲ Make sure every key actor is on board
- ▲ Know your Programme, especially your strengths and weaknesses
- ▲ Be realistic and precise when imposing call specific criteria
- ▲ Use the appropriate tools
- ▲ Support, not only demand!
- ▲ Make sure the applicants have clear information
 - ▲ Communicate
 - ▲ Clear requirements
 - ▲ Publish information on organisations not considered newcomers



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Thank you!

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