



# 13 Interregional Innovation Investments **Instrument**

## Interreg “a smarter Europe” Network Meeting

**15 December 2025**

EISMEA, I. 01

EU and place-based Innovation Ecosystems

The background features a complex abstract design. On the left, there are intricate blue circuit-like patterns, including lines, dots, and a grid, set against a light orange circular backdrop. A solid orange circle is positioned in the upper right of this circuit area. Below the circuit patterns, there are several concentric orange circles. On the right side, three horizontal lines with blue dots at their ends extend from the concentric circles towards the right edge. The overall color palette is dominated by various shades of orange and blue.

## **Content:**

- I3 instrument overview
- Call for Proposals Cap2b
- I3 & INTERREG



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## I3 instrument overview

**Cohesion Policy: € 392 billion in  
2021-2027**

**European Regional  
Development Fund**

**INTERREG**

**€ 10 billion**

**I3 INSTRUMENT**

**€ 490  
millions**



**European  
Commission**

# I3 Instrument – A Cohesion Policy Investment Tool



- The **Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument** is a funding instrument under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Regulation (article 13).
  - It helps regions mobilise innovation actors around shared or complementary Smart Specialisation priorities – especially where capabilities are fragmented – and translate cooperation into tangible investments.
- ☐ Co-investment between less developed, transition, and more developed regions.

# 13 thematic areas and strands

## THEMATIC AREAS



DIGITAL  
TRANSITION



GREEN  
TRANSITION



SMART  
MANU-  
FACTURING

## STRANDS

**Strand 1** | support for investments in interregional innovation projects in shared smart specialisation areas

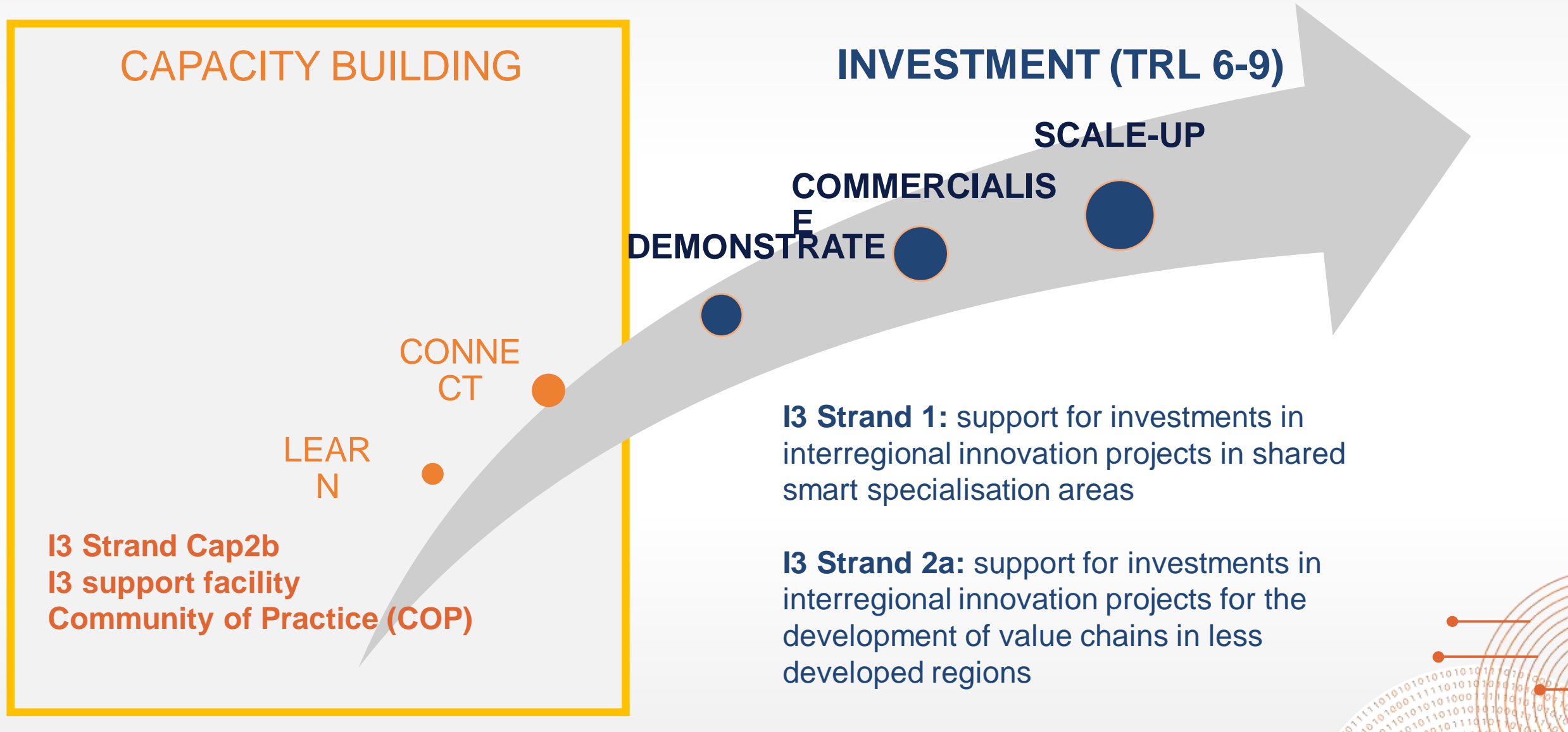
**Strand 2a** | support for investments in interregional innovation projects for the development of value chains in less developed regions

**Strand 2b** | Capacity building for the development of value chains in less developed regions

Technical assistance & experimentation

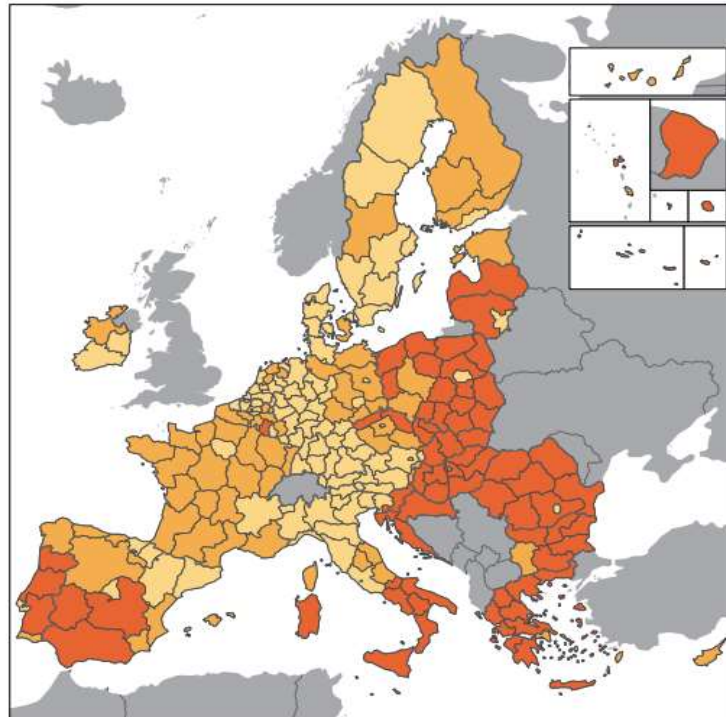
€ 490 million

# I3 Instrument - Financing mature innovation to bridge the innovation divide through interregional collaboration





# How I3 Supports Closing Territorial Disparities



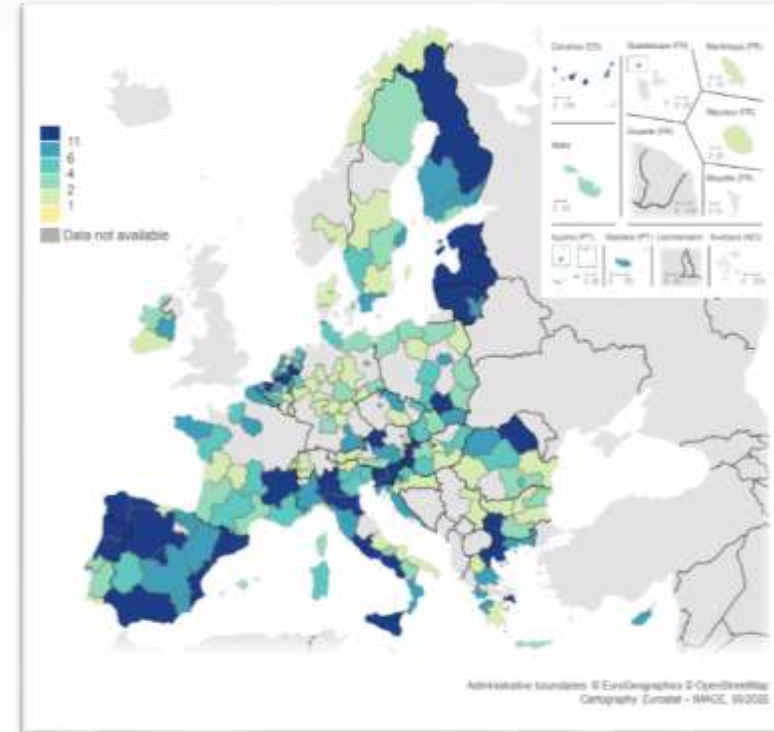
Category of regions for Cohesion Policy (ERDF and ESF+), 2021-2027

- Less developed regions (GDP per head (PPS) less than 75 % of the EU-27 average)
- Transition regions (GDP per head (PPS) between 75 % and 100 % of the EU-27 average)
- More developed regions (GDP per head (PPS) above 100 % of the EU-27 average)

GDP per head: average 2015-2016-2017.

0 500 km

© EuroGeographics Association for the administrative boundaries



- I3 grants distribution 2021-2025: Actual participation in I3 projects is broad but uneven – with strong engagement from some regions.

→ A large share of partners come from LDRs and TRs – more than in any comparable innovation programme.



# Thematic focus per strand

computing\_and\_cloud  
mobility **biotech** sustainability  
**circular\_economy**  
standards battery soil energy\_transition  
**blue\_economy**  
wine **agri-food** health  
sport digitalisation hydrogen  
bioeconomy  
critical\_raw\_materials

INV 1

medical\_devices  
heating\_and\_cooling energy\_transition  
**digitalisation**  
**circular\_economy** buildings  
**sustainability**  
blue\_economy  
agri-food **green\_transition**  
key\_products biotech hydrogen  
medical\_research  
decarbonisation

Cap2b

sustainability  
internet\_of\_things **mobility** energy\_transition  
**critical\_raw\_materials**  
agri-food **hydrogen** forestry  
climate\_change green\_tech health biotech ai chronic\_disease  
**circular\_economy**  
precision\_farming plastic urban\_mine extended\_reality  
agriculture digitalisation  
healthcare  
digital\_health

INV 2a



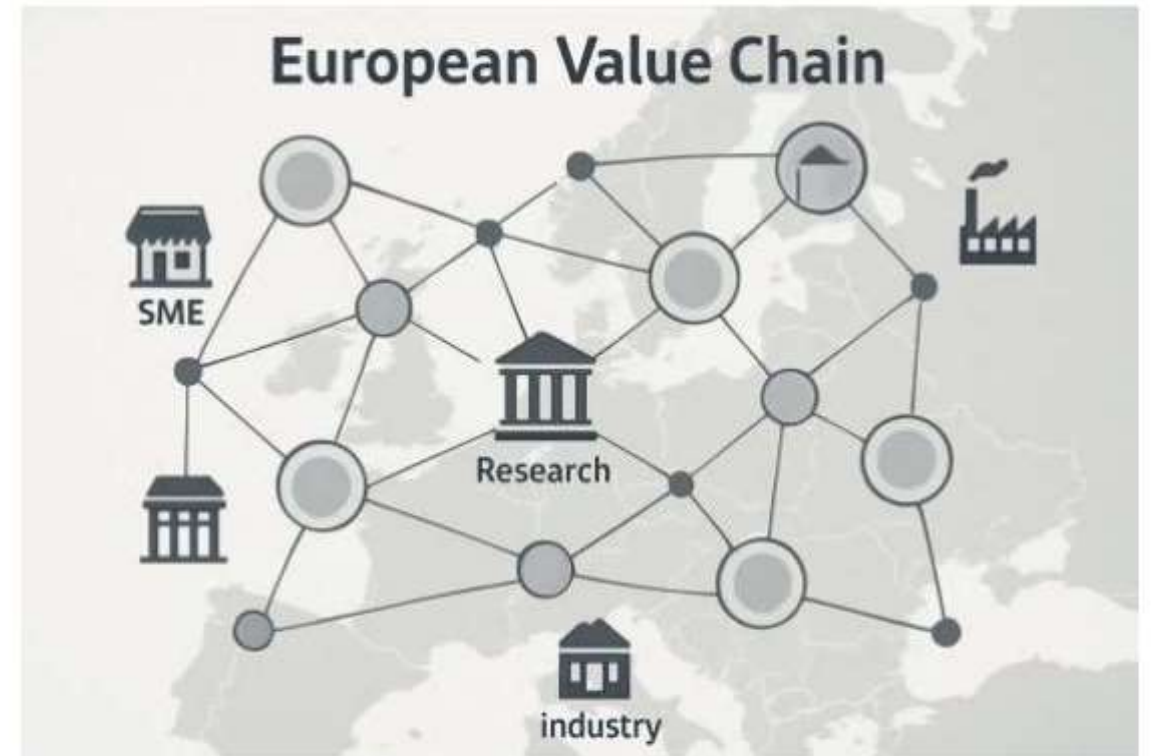
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## Strand 2b – Capacity Building in Less Developed Regions



# The I3 Instrument: Driving Cohesion through Smart Specialisation

- 1 Funding Source**  
Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument under the **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** Regulation (Article 13)
- 2 Core Principle**  
Supports interregional cooperation in innovation, guided by **Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3)**
- 3 Policy Goal**  
Develop and strengthen **EU and regional value chains**, with focus on less developed and outermost regions
- 4 Mechanism**  
Promotes innovation creation and diffusion (uptake), by linking regions with **shared or complementary capabilities**
- 5 Stakeholders**  
Encourages cooperation across the **Quadruple Helix** (public authorities, businesses, academia, civil society)



# I3 Strand 2b: Bridging Capacity Gaps to Unlock Investment Potential

## 1 Core Function

While Strands 1 and 2a support investment-ready projects, Strand 2b focuses on **strengthening regional innovation ecosystems**

## 2 Target Regions

Less Developed Regions (LDRs), Transition Regions (TRs), Outermost Regions, and those facing **specific challenges**

## 3 Identified Weaknesses

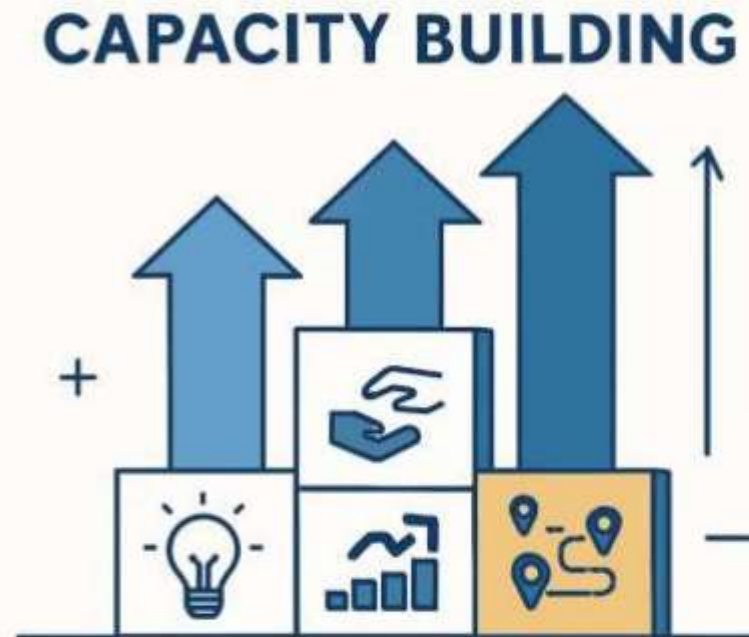
Institutional/administrative shortcomings, fragmented ecosystems, **human capital constraints**, limited interregional collaboration

## 4 The Consequence

Underrepresentation in EU funding, restricted market access, **reduced capacity** to tackle global challenges

## 5 The Solution provided by I3 CAP 2b

Build operational, technical, institutional, and governance capacities to prepare for **future participation in I3 investment projects**





# Call Objectives: Empowering Less Developed Regions to Engage in EU Value Chains

## General Call Objective

Build capacity in **less developed regions** to develop and strengthen their **regional innovation ecosystems** and **value chains** through **coordinated and interlinked investments** in several regions.

Support actions focused on **SMEs** to help them cooperate, grow, compete, and play an important role in Europe's economy.

Help less developed regions to **connect to EU value chains** and prepare for future interregional investment projects.

## Call Specific Objectives

- 1 Capacity Improvement**  
Improve capacity of **public authorities and innovation intermediaries** to support companies in identifying interregional investment portfolios
- 2 Interregional Cooperation**  
Enhance interregional cooperation with focus on identifying and sharing **good practices (including investments identification)**
- 3 Innovation Approaches**  
Experiment with new approaches to capacity building and ecosystem strengthening
- 4 Policy Recommendations for Evidence-Based Policy Interventions**  
Develop practical policy recommendations and **strengthen institutional capacities**  
Design evidence-based, targeted **policy interventions**, including updates to regional S3 strategies and innovation policy frameworks for investments
- 5 Added Value**  
Promote participation of EU **outermost regions** and support regions with **specific challenges**

# CAP 2b - Eligible Activities: A Comprehensive Approach to Capacity Building

1

## Institutional & Governance

Strengthening institutional and governance frameworks, fostering **policy learning**, and embedding effective practices.

2

## Policy Alignment

Policy focus linked to **EU strategic priorities**: New European Innovation Agenda, Clean Industrial Deal, STEP, Blue Economy.

3

## Investment Portfolio Identification

Developing methodologies and tools for mapping and identifying **interregional investment opportunities**.

4

## Skills & Talent Development

Fostering staff exchange, peer learning, and talent development to strengthen human capital and transfer know-how.

5

## Ecosystem Connection

Enabling cluster/company missions and connecting regional ecosystems through **twining activities**.

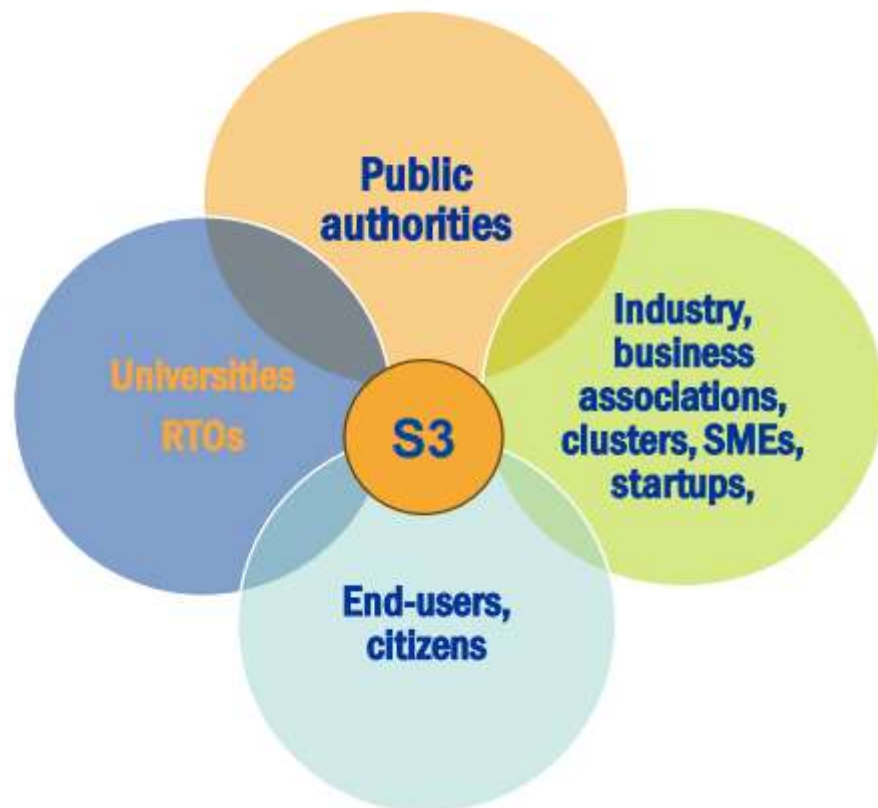
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## Innovation Management

Building capacity of innovation managers and business developers to engage in **interregional investment processes**.



# Who can benefit from I3 capacity building opportunities?



## Q-helix partnership

on behalf of regional / national innovation ecosystems

## Partners from regions with different cohesion status

(MRD, LDR, TR) at the appropriate NUTS level

(different for strand 1 and 2a, Cap2b)

## Consortium covering demand & supply side

# Expected Results: Concrete Outputs and Long-Term Outcomes

## Concrete Outputs

- **Policy measures** (in place or ready for adoption) to increase innovation capacity
- **Cooperation arrangements** with industry associations and key players
- **Membership** in relevant networks and innovation platforms
- **Tested tools** for mapping demand-driven business opportunities
- **Pipeline** for 13 investment projects based on value chain mapping
- **Business cases** ready to apply for 13 investment calls
- **Increased maturity of business cases** (technology, business, market readiness assesment)
- **Dissemination and exploitation plan** for replication and scaling up

## Outcomes

- **Increased capacities of less developed regions** to deliver concrete interregional innovation investments
- **Enhanced capacity of regional innovation ecosystems** to strengthen participation in EU value chains
- **Capacity to design synergies** and to tap into other funding instruments to cover additional funding needs
- **Enhanced SME capacity** to cooperate in interregional value chains
- **Ability to attract** private investments or create public-private partnerships

## Long-Term Impact

- **Committed intermediaries** supporting companies in innovation and value chains
- **Increased capacity** to contribute to Europe's innovation competitiveness
- **Improved support measures** for innovation diffusion and collaboration
- **Improved cooperation to de-risk investments** and leverage market potential
- **Improved business climate** for competitive ecosystems
- **Reinforced cooperation** capacity of quadruple-helix ecosystems
- **Increased readiness** to cooperate in globally competitive EU value chains



# Financial and Administrative Overview

## Available Call Budget

**EUR 9,800,000**

Estimated total budget. The Agency reserves the right not to award all available funds or to redistribute them between I3 call strands.

## Indicative Project Budget Range

**EUR 500K – EUR 1.5M**

Expected range per project. Proposals requesting other amounts may be considered if duly justified.

## Indicative Project Duration

**18 to 24 months**

Projects should range between 18 and 24 months. Extensions possible if duly justified.

## Submission Deadline

**19 March 2026**

17:00:00 CET (Brussels). Submit electronically via Funding & Tenders Portal.

## Mandatory Document

**Endorsement Letter** from Member State's or regional competent body for all consortium members, confirming alignment with national/regional S3 policies

## I3-2026-CAP2b CALL SCHEDULE



## Proposal Limit

**Maximum 70 pages**

Part B of Application Form. Evaluators will not consider additional pages or annexes.

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# I3 & INTERREG

# The relationship between the I3 Instrument and INTERREG is defined by Article 13 of the ERDF Regulation:

“7. When implementing this instrument, the Commission shall ensure coordination and synergy with other Union funding programmes and instruments and in particular with strand ‘Interreg C’ as defined in point 3 of Article 3 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059.”





STRENGTHENING COOPERATION BETWEEN EU REGIONS AND COUNTRIES

EUR 394 Million  
budget 2021-2027

**INTERREG EUROPE**

**I3 INSTRUMENT**

EUR 570 Million  
ERDF budget 2021-  
2027

Supporting local, regional and national governments  
across Europe to develop and deliver better policy

**SCOPE**

Promoting mature innovation through interregional  
collaboration and S3 to bridge the EU regional  
development gaps

Public authorities and other organisations relevant  
for regional development policies

**BENEFICIARIES**

Companies and especially SMEs, public authorities,  
universities, end-users and other innovation actors



SMART



GREEN



CONNECTED



SOCIAL



CITIZENS



GOVERNANCE

**TOPICS**



DIGITAL TRANSITION



GREEN TRANSITION



SMART MANUFACTURING

**EU Burning  
challenges**

Interregional cooperation capacity building projects –  
exchange and transfer experience on shared regional  
development issues

Policy Learning Platform – policy-learning services  
made available through experts support

**STRANDS FOR  
SUPPORT**

Strand 1 – interregional innovation investment  
projects along shared or complementary S3

Strand 2a – interregional innovation investments  
projects for the development of value chains in LDR

Strand 2b – capacity building for LDR

**LEARN-CONNECT**

**COLLABORATE**

**CO-INVEST**



# INTERREG EUROPE

Supports public authorities to learn, connect and collaborate on the development of regional policies

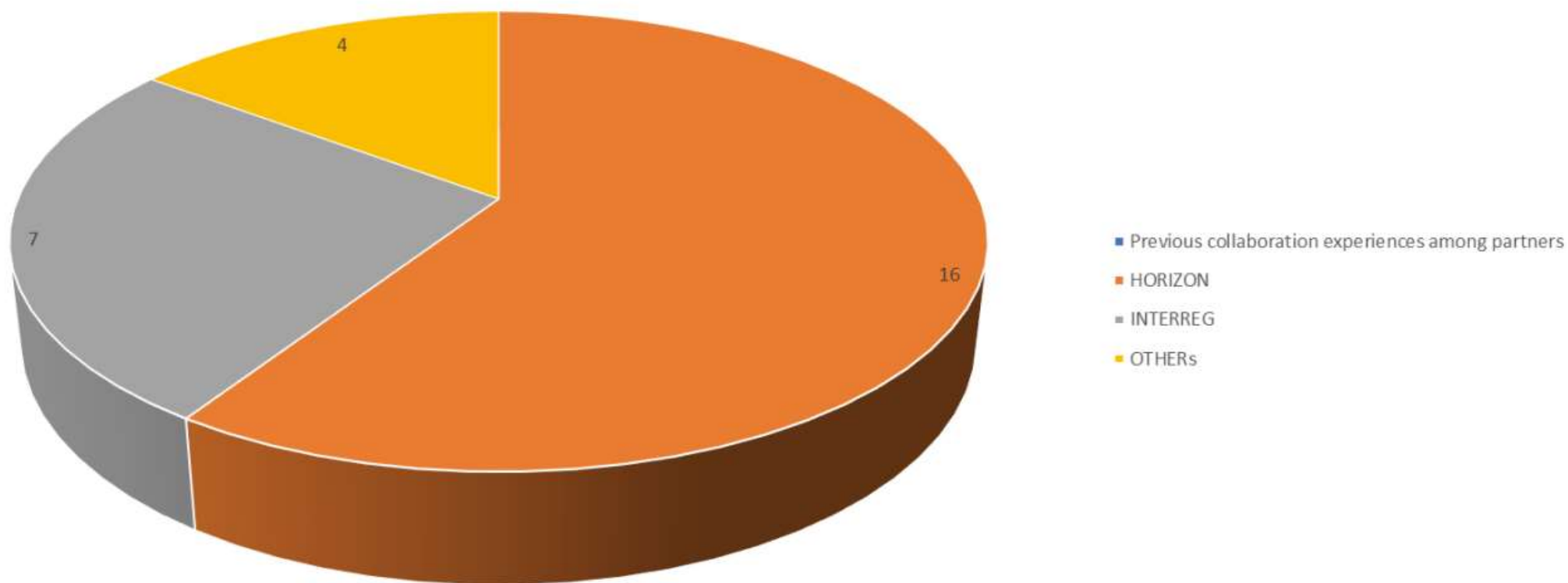
Covers capacity building and interregional peer review processes that prepare the ground for co-investments under the I3 Instrument

Provides Interreg Europe with a useful 'feedback to policy' output for its Policy Learning Platform

Fosters better coordinated investments based on improved regional development policies supported under Interreg Europe

# I3 INSTRUMENT

# Previous collaboration experience of among PPs within the 27 running projects in 2024:





# Thank you!



<https://eisma.ec.europa.eu>



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**#I3Instrument**