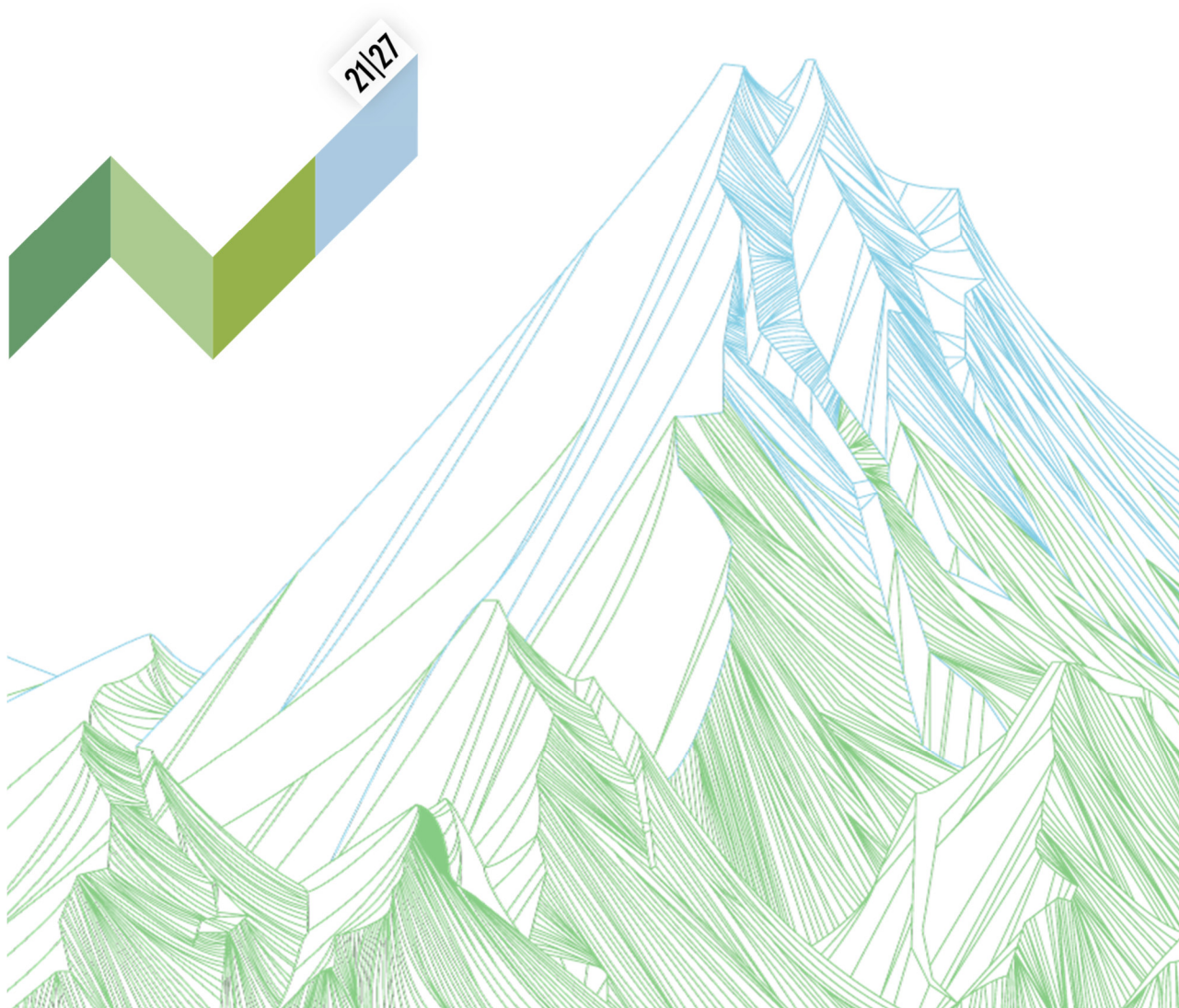


Call for tenders for the performance evaluation of the Interreg Alpine Space programme 2021-2027

Invitation to submit an offer





Content

Procurement procedure.....	3
Background information	4
State of play of programme implementation	4
Regulatory framework for the evaluation	4
Specification of services	5
Scope and tasks.....	5
Evaluation approach and methodology.....	8
Evaluation process	9
Services and timing	9
Award criteria	10
Indicative budget.....	11
Deadline	11
Information and data sources	11
Annexes	12

Procurement procedure

The Interreg Alpine Space programme (hereafter referred as programme) is an EU transnational cooperation programme co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) whose purpose is to support transnational cooperation projects between partners that promote economic, environmental and social development. The total ERDF budget for the 2021-2027 period is €107 million.

The implementation of the funds is done through the Interreg Programme (IP), which sets out a joint strategy for the programme's contribution to key objectives of the EU Cohesion Policy in the 2021-2027 period. The IP consists of four priorities and seven specific objectives. Within the framework of the programme priorities and programme objectives two types of projects are funded, namely: classic and small-scale projects (SSP). Classic projects are the main tool to deliver the change that the Interreg Alpine Space programme aims at. Classic projects prepare, pilot and transfer practical and durable solutions to the challenges identified by the programme. In turn, SSPs have shorter durations and involve fewer partners compared to classic projects. This type of project is intended to bring newcomers into transnational cooperation and address innovative subjects from a thematic and/or territorial perspective.

The programme is bound to carry out evaluations with the aim to improve the quality of the design and implementation of its activities. The evaluation plan outlines several evaluation activities whose purpose is to enable informed management decisions and make improvements in result orientation.

The state of Salzburg acts as Managing Authority (MA) of the programme. Within this role, the state of Salzburg bears overall responsibility for the implementation of the programme, including the launch of public procurement procedures for the provision of services needed for the fulfilment of its tasks. The MA and the Partner States of the programme are supported by the Joint Secretariat (JS).

The programme is supervised by a Programme Committee (PC), which is composed of representatives of national and regional authorities from the Partner States. Both the Alpine Convention and the European Commission act as observers.

The contract between the service provider and the programme will be set up based on Austrian law and concluded with the state of Salzburg. The tender follows a direct award procedure as provided in § 46 of the Austrian procurement law (BVerG 2018).

Background information

State of play of programme implementation

The programme has reached an advanced stage of its implementation following the launch of six calls for project proposals, three of which on small-scale projects, while the other three on classic projects. Up until now, 47 projects have been approved across all thematic priorities bringing together 350+ beneficiaries from a wide range of sectors, from public administration to academia. The programme has already committed €69.4 million ERDF, which represents nearly 65% of the budget for the 2021-2027 period.

All classic projects approved in the first call are already completed or will be completed by April 2026. The same applies to the small-scale projects selected in the first two calls whose implementation ended in 2024. The programme has also co-financed a project to support the implementation of EUSALP whose activities ended in December 2025 and is now also financing a second project to support EUSALP which kicked off activities early 2026. In total, 22 projects have been or will be completed before the start of this evaluation activity.

The remaining 25 projects will continue under implementation in 2026, of which six are small-scale projects. In addition, the programme will select approximately 15 projects as part of the third call for classic project proposals. Later this year, it will also launch a capitalisation call aimed at supporting the wider dissemination and uptake of project outputs. This call will probably result in the selection of two projects.

Regulatory framework for the evaluation

The EU (legal) provisions that regulate the evaluation process and are relevant for the scope and contents of this assignment are:

- Article 35 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments (hereafter referred to as Interreg Regulation);
- Article 18 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy, so-called Common Provisions Regulations (hereafter referred to as CPR);

- Commission Staff Working Document (SWD(2021) 198 final): Performance, monitoring and evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, and the Just Transition Fund in 2021-2027.

These provisions were considered in view of ensuring that the requested evaluations are planned and that these comply with the set requirements. The programme's evaluation plan specifies how the programme evaluation will be organised during the 2021-2027 period. The plan, which sets out the priorities and needs for evaluation, is related to the IP.

Specification of services

Scope and tasks

The purpose of this award procedure is to select a service provider to assess the programme's performance and draw evidence-based lessons that can be used in view of preparing the programme 2028-2034. The programme is particularly interested in increasing the knowledge of what works and what does not, and in which context. This includes a territorial perspective to analyse potential differences in performance across the participating countries and regions.

The performance evaluation should address several criteria, as stipulated in Article 35 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, with the view to improve the quality of the design and implementation of the programme in the current and next period. These criteria are:

- **Relevance:** meaning, how well do the programme and the interventions it funds align with the needs of the target groups or the issues they aim to address; how are the objectives of the programme pertinent to the challenges it intends to address;
- **Coherence:** meaning, to what extent are the programme and the interventions it funds consistent with other pertinent EU policies, national or macro-regional strategies and international agreements; if the programme aligns with broader objectives and does not create contradictions or conflicts with other existing policies;
- **Effectiveness:** meaning, whether the programme and the interventions it funds achieve the intended objectives or results; how well do the outcomes align with the original goals of the programme;
- **Efficiency:** meaning, how well resources are used to achieve the desired results; what is the relationship between the resources spent, such as time, money, and human resources and the outcomes achieved;



- **EU-added value:** meaning, what is the added benefit that the programme and the interventions it funds provide compared to what could be achieved by the partner states and involved organisations acting alone; what is the justification for the programme involvement, in terms of why a particular action should be taken within its transnational framework rather than at the national or local level.

Bidders are also free to address additional aspects, such as sustainability or long term benefits brought by the programme's procedures and new features.

The evaluation service shall comprise three tasks to assess:

1. New features which the 2021-2027 programme has introduced for projects
2. Support for the implementation and governance of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)
3. Programme implementation procedures and tools

1. New features for projects

In this period, the programme has introduced new features to facilitate the participation of organisations and keep administrative workload to a minimum. This craving for simplification and new types of cooperation led the programme to introduce small-scale projects (SSPs) and simplified-cost options (SCOs). The questions to be investigated are listed below:

- What is the performance of SSPs compared to classic projects? In which topics do SSPs work well, and in which not? What is distinctive about SSPs' achievements compared to classic projects' achievements? How did SSPs attract different types of organisations and newcomers compared to classic projects?
- How effective were the terms of reference of the calls for SSPs in steering project submission, assessment and selection? How did the terms of reference and the selected SSPs contribute to the programme's mission statement?
- Has the focus on pilots and on testing of solutions led to more tangible results on the ground resp. in the territories?
- Are the outputs and results delivered by these SSPs responding to challenges of the programme area? Did SSPs benefit specific regions, such as sparsely-populated areas or functional urban areas?
- Which have been the most effective mechanisms and practices of transfer and uptake of solutions? Have they differed depending on the target groups, thematic objective or regions and countries?
- How much has the use of additional SCOs reduced the administrative burden for the project partners related to project implementation? How much has the use of additional SCO reduced the risk of financial corrections applied on the level of beneficiaries?

- How effectively have SCOs accelerated the control and payment processes compared to real cost reimbursement methods?
- What challenges have arisen in using SCOs, and how can they be improved?
- To what extent did the programme, with its new project features, manage to attract newcomers, local authorities and stakeholders representing civil society as project partners? Which project features made the programme attractive to these organisations?

2. Support for the implementation and governance of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)

The programme is dedicated to elevating governance and multi-level cooperation across the Alpine region. ERDF funds were under Priority 4 to co-finance governance projects in the Alpine area and to specifically also support the implementation of EUSALP (EUSALP secretariat, activities of EUSALP action groups and youth council as well as presidencies). The funding provided over the past three years has been recently renewed for an additional three and a half years until June 2029 through approval of a second project. The importance attached to this commitment explains why the programme designates the provision of support to EUSALP as an operation of strategic importance. Moreover, all other funded projects are required to explain and demonstrate their contribution to EUSALP objectives and, when relevant, to the work of action groups (AG). The questions which the service provider is requested to assess are the following:

- Did the “Support EUSALP” project succeed in providing facilitation services to EUSALP governance bodies? Did the “Support EUSALP” project help enhance the institutional capacities of the EUSALP governance bodies?
- How has the cooperation between the EUSALP secretariat and the MA/JS worked in practice? How relevant was the JS and MA role as observers in the AGs and the Executive Board, respectively? What added value did it bring to EUSALP and to the programme?
- Which contribution did Alpine Space projects make to EUSALP action groups both in terms of governance (priority 4) and implementation of their work plans (priorities 1-3)?
- Has the current call system been effective in fostering projects of a strategic nature, for example in relation to EUSALP or the Alpine Convention and their stakeholders? What new or alternative approaches could help generate projects of even greater strategic value?
- How and to which extent did the “Support EUSALP” project contribute to the establishment of thematic and cross-cutting synergies among EUSALP AGs?
- Which measures have been adopted to establish links between Alpine Space projects and EUSALP AG throughout the project lifecycle? How efficient were they? What added value did these synergies bring to EUSALP AG and to Alpine Space projects?

3. Programme implementation procedures and tools

The programme is also keen to assess the procedures and tools that support the full programme cycle. Many of them are inspired by Harmonised Implementation Tools (HIT), which were developed by Interact. HIT provide a harmonised and simplified approach to programme management, covering the full project lifecycle, from selection to monitoring. Moreover, HIT serve as the foundation for Jems, an electronic monitoring system for programme and project management that is widely used by Interreg programmes, including ours. The questions to be addressed are listed below:

- Are there any elements of the project application process which could be improved?
- What improvements can be made to the project assessment and selection process?
- How can the assessment and selection procedure better reflect strategic prioritization of projects beyond the apparent precision of the existing points system?
- How to make the reporting process more efficient? Is the monitoring system effective in validating outputs and results and meeting quality standards?
- What are the applicants' and projects' experiences in using Jems? What are the Jems features that applicants and project partners find most useful and user-friendly? Where do applicants and project partners see potentials for improvement?
- What is the perception of national controllers in using Jems? Do they also appreciate the functionalities offered by Jems?

Evaluation approach and methodology

Bidders interested in this procurement shall specify in their offers the tools and methods they intend to apply during the evaluation. The methodology shall reflect existing information sources, the need to search for additional information as well as the scope of the planned interventions. Bidders are encouraged to combine desk-based research with interviews, focus groups and other methods to gather multiple perspectives for more robust conclusions. These methods are considered important and should engage lead partners and project partners, end users and/or multipliers of project outcomes, organisations involved in or affected by EUSALP, among others. Bidders are also free to suggest different or additional evaluation questions in their bid, or do some benchmarking with approaches from other programmes in the same cooperation strand to identify possible improvements

The proposed methodology must be the most suitable and effective in order to allow the provision of comprehensive answers to the evaluation questions formulated in this tender and produce conclusions and recommendations for future action.

Evaluation process

The responsibilities and functions are set out in the Interreg Regulation. According to Article 35, the MA is responsible for the design and delivery of the plan while the PC takes over the supervisory function, as indicated in Article 30.

The MA and the JS will carry out the operational work related to the implementation of the evaluation plan, including the preparation and follow-up of meetings, the implementation of public procurements for external support, and the coordination with stakeholders. The MA/JS will inform and involve the PC in the evaluation throughout the 2021-2027 period.

The PC will examine the progress made in carrying out evaluations according to the evaluation plan as approved by the PC, syntheses of evaluations and any follow-up given to findings.

In addition to this, the PC will be supported by an ad-hoc working group whose members represent programme stakeholders and provide expertise in support of evaluation activities.

Services and timing

During the assignment, the evaluator is expected to collect and build reliable evidence on the programme's performance, focusing on its new features for projects, support for the implementation and governance of EUSALP, and the programme's implementation procedures and tools. Based on the evidence presented and analysed, the evaluator shall provide answers to the evaluation questions.

The following deliverables are to be submitted by the evaluator in English:

Deliverable	Description	Due date
Inception report	Detailed methodology and timeline for the evaluation based on available data and the outcome of the kick-off meeting	Late April 2026
Interim evaluation report	Information about work performed so far, presentation of first conclusions and recommendations to the programme	Late June 2026
Draft evaluation report	Detailed analysis of all collected data and input, concrete answers on all agreed evaluation questions and conclusions and recommendations to the programme	Early September 2026

Final report	Submission of a consolidated version of the draft evaluation report, considering all inputs and requests made by work group	Early October 2026
--------------	---	--------------------

The draft evaluation report and the final version of the evaluation report shall include at least the following information:

- An **executive summary** of conclusions and recommendations from the evaluation;
- A short description of the **methodology**, outlining the approach of the evaluators, including a description of the research undertaken as well as the sources of data and information;
- Results, followed by **conclusions and recommendations**, for each of the evaluation tasks;
- Bibliography, data sources and list of interviewees.

The kick-off meeting with the selected bidder will take place online on 13 April 2026 in the afternoon or 14 April 2026 in the morning. Bidders are asked to reserve these dates, as the MA/JS are unable to consider other options. During this meeting, the work plan for the following months will be discussed and fine-tuned, if needed. Further two meetings will be organised to present and discuss deliverables whereby one of these meetings might take place in person in Salzburg. These meetings must be considered in the evaluator's budget and thereby specified.

Award criteria

The following criteria will be applied by MA/JS to assess the offers of the tenderers:

Criterion	Weight	Points
Experience and qualification of the evaluator(s) (education, relevant projects)	45%	45
Evaluation approach and methodology	35%	35
Price	20%	20

As a result, it is imperative that the offers provide information about the:

- Qualification and experience of the proposed evaluator(s), notably in terms of education, knowledge and expertise in the evaluation of Interreg programmes or ERDF operational programmes at national or regional level;



- The methodological approach and work plan for the delivery of the service. Tenders must cover all tasks defined in this document. Offers on only some of the tasks will not be accepted;
- Budget proposal (using the template provided by the programme in Annex 1).

Incomplete offers will be excluded from the selection procedure.

Please also consider that Land Salzburg as contracting authority may request additional documents to verify the authorisation of the company to deliver the service, countercheck its professional reliability as well as its financial, economic and technical ability to perform the service.

Indicative budget

The price requested by the tenderer must be a lump sum that covers all costs arising from the complete delivery of the service, including office and administrative costs, travel and accommodation costs, and overhead costs, if any. Additional costs will not be reimbursed, such as preparation costs associated with the drafting and submission of the offer. VAT is to be indicated separately, and prices have to be indicated as fixed prices. Please note that the Land Salzburg as MA has reserved an indicative amount of €60.000 excluding VAT for the present service contract. Offers must not exceed this budget threshold.

Deadline

Offers must be drafted in English and sent electronically in PDF format via email to js@alpine-space.eu no later than **13 March 2026 1pm CET**. Tenders submitted after the deadline or in hard copy will be excluded from the selection procedure.

Any changes in the team of evaluators after the conclusion of the contract will require the approval of the MA, particularly if the expertise is not comparable.

All questions related to this procurement procedure must be formulated in English and sent to js@alpine-space.eu by 2 March 2026. The programme will publish the answers to questions received on the same website where this procurement document is available by 4 March 2026. Tenderers are encouraged to read these questions and answers before submitting an offer.

Information and data sources

The key sources, which the evaluator shall refer to, are the following:

- Interreg programme (https://www.alpine-space.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Interreg_Alpine_Space_programme_2021-2027-1.pdf)



- Evaluation plan¹ (https://www.alpine-space.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/20230519_Evaluation_Plan_2021_2027.pdf)
- Programme manual (https://www.alpine-space.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/20250814_ASP_ProgrammeManual_August2025.pdf)

Additional documents and data can be provided to the evaluator by the MA/JS for the fulfilment of the tasks described above. This includes data about SSPs, SCOs and programme procedures.

Annexes

Annex 1: Financial offer template

¹ Please note that the mid-term review of milestones mentioned in the evaluation plan is not applicable to the programme and not relevant for the present tender.
