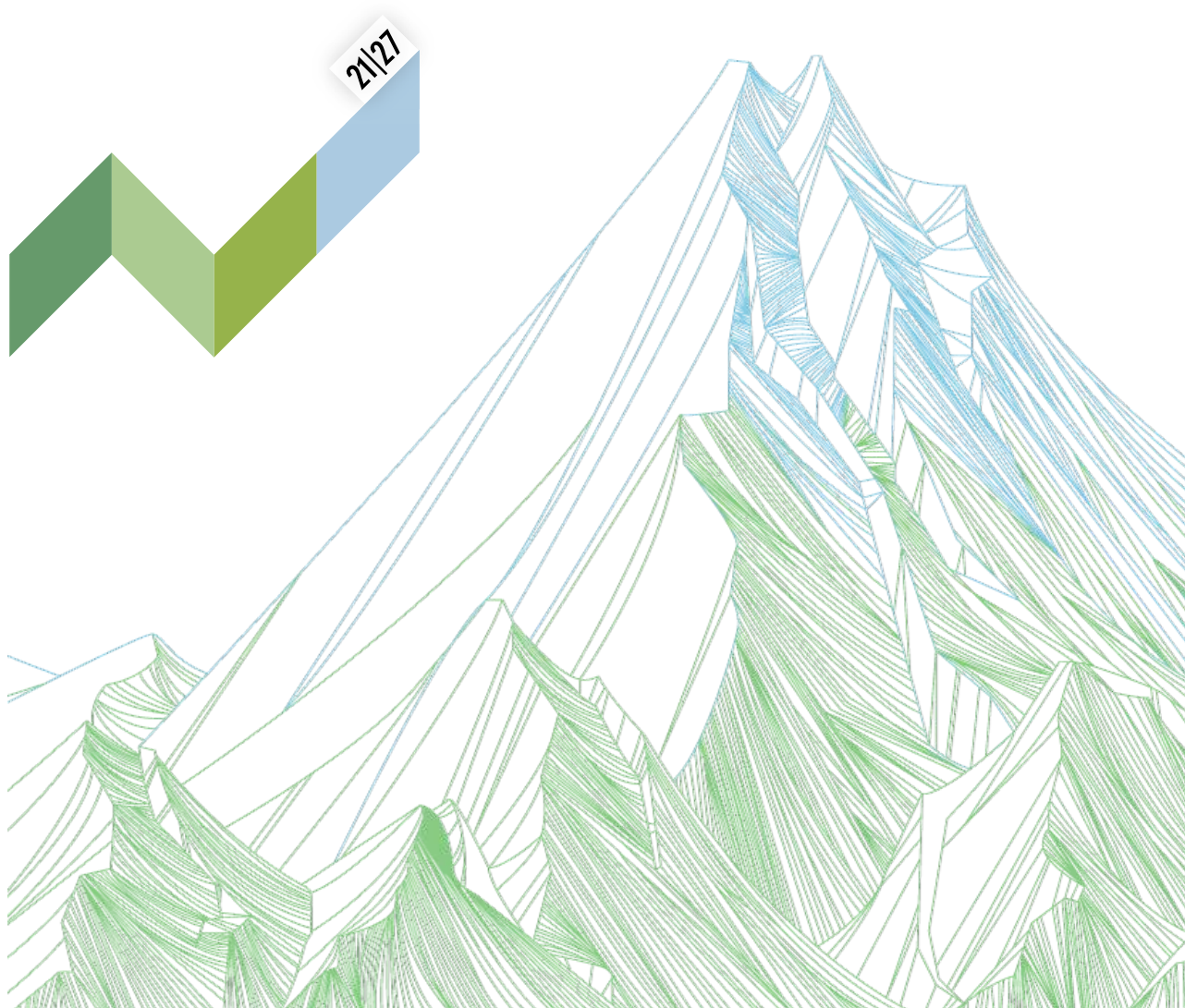


# Terms of Reference

## Third call for classic project proposals

Approved by the Programme Committee on 9 April 2025

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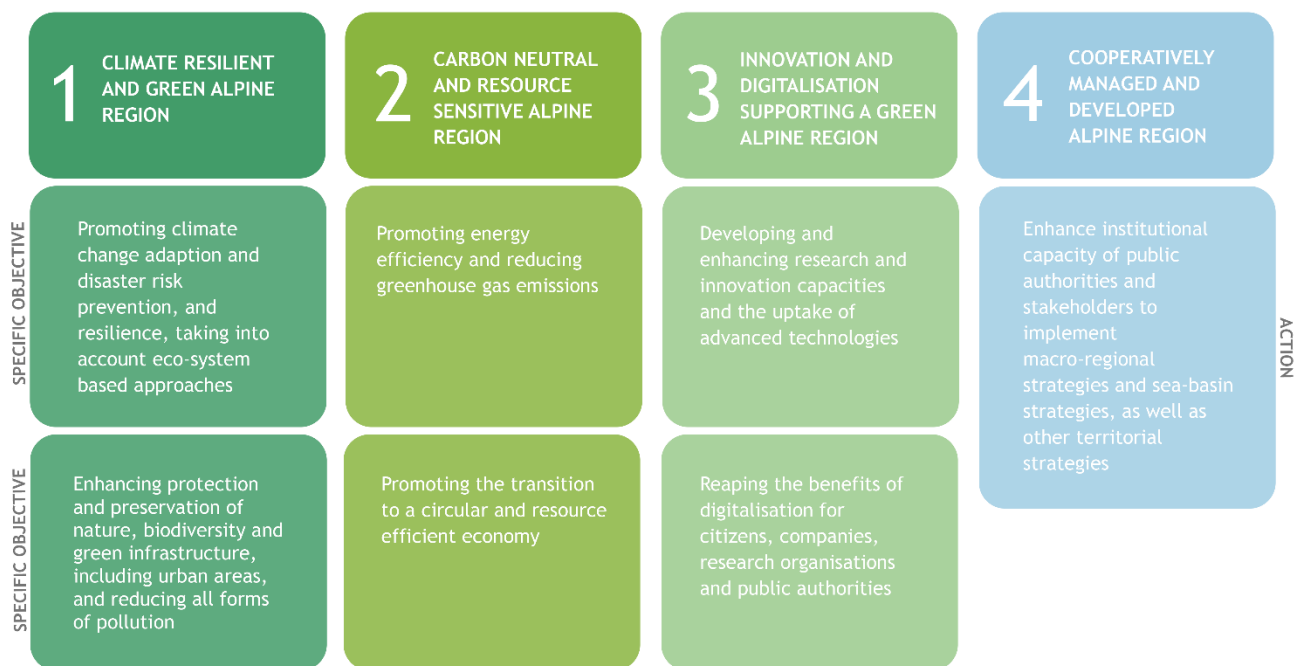




# Interreg Alpine Space programme 2021-2027

## 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. It is composed of four funding priorities: climate resilient and green Alpine region, carbon neutral and resource sensitive Alpine region, innovation and digitalisation supporting a green Alpine region, and cooperatively managed and developed Alpine region.



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 the EU strategy for the Alpine Region ([EUSALP](#)), please refer to the [Interreg programme](#) document.

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.

Our cooperation area corresponds to that of EUSALP. 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, as well as aligned with the Alpine Convention.

The present Terms of Reference describe the types of projects expected from the Interreg Alpine Space programme in the current call.

## Characteristics of the call

After five calls for project proposals, the programme has already supported [45 small-scale and classic projects](#), which are addressing a wide range of shared challenges across the alpine area and helping the programme to reach the specific objectives set for its funding.

The programme has analysed the topics covered and solutions provided by the projects approved so far, compared to the areas of relevance and type of actions of each priority of the Interreg Alpine Space programme 2021-2027 and its performance framework. In addition, the programme has considered the developments that have taken place in the Alpine region since the programme document was drawn up, the multiple transformation processes that the region is currently facing, as well as the needs for cooperation expressed by other relevant actors in the region, such as EUSALP and the Alpine Convention. Furthermore, the full remaining budget per priority is allocated to this thematically focused call.

This call for project proposals is aimed at co-financing classic projects under the thematic priorities 1, 2 and 3, limited to the following specific objectives (SO):

- 1.2 - Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution,
- 2.2 - Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy,
- 3.2 - Reaping the benefits of digitalisation for citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities.



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## Thematic focus

Compared to previous calls of the current programme period, the present call focuses on a limited set of topics to be addressed under each of the three open specific objectives. Applicants should be aware that proposals falling outside the themes outlined below will not be considered relevant in the evaluation and selection process.

### Priority 1 Climate resilient and green Alpine region

- Under SO 1.2:
  - Piloting and testing solutions for **biodiversity restoration** (e.g. improving transnational coordination and vertical policy integration) and enhancing **ecological connectivity**;
  - Applying **Nature-Based Solutions (NbS)**, for example to improve the quality of air, water or soil; raising awareness on their co-benefits and fostering their **horizontal integration** into public policies, especially in land-use and spatial planning.
  - Deepening support to **Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI)** specifically in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas (e.g. integrating social, cultural, and economic positive impacts);
  - Valorising **natural and cultural heritage** to safeguard landscapes or reduce their fragmentation;
  - Developing mitigation and adaptation measures addressing the consequences of **permafrost thawing** and **glacier retreat**, especially relating to ecosystem changes and hazard mitigation, as well as foresights on the **adaptation** of territories in **post-glacial Alpine region**.

### Priority 2 Carbon neutral and resource sensitive Alpine region

- Under SO 2.2:
    - Testing **consumer engagement** methods and horizontal initiatives supporting the **transition** to a circular economy and resource-efficient economy through **behavioural change**.
    - Promoting a **balanced development** of the Alpine region, to ensure synergetic territorial transformations across both rural and urban areas, **countering polarization** tendencies through pilot actions.
    - Fostering **stakeholder integration** and consolidation of economic clusters, including creation of joint approaches for circular products. Such initiatives should aim at supporting circular undertakings by pooling resources, facilitating their contribution to policies, and market development.
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## Priority 3 Innovation and digitalization supporting a green Alpine region

- Under SO 3.2:
  - Developing, testing or mainstreaming **digital solutions**, including in **areas not yet explored** by projects, such as education, public administration and the renewable energy sector.
  - Developing or rolling-out solutions for **data monitoring** and **cybersecurity**, with a particular interest for harmonised data collection across borders, privacy and data protection (e.g. in public administrations).
  - Testing solutions to reinforce **user inclusivity** towards non-digital natives and marginalized groups in digital transformations.
  - Developing and testing joint **solutions to support SMEs**, associations, citizens in their **digital transformation**, with the overarching aim to increase environmental sustainability, especially in the areas of tourism, mobility and social innovation.

## Our expectations for classic projects

Interreg Alpine Space 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 which are:

- **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.

In light of the broad knowledge that has already been acquired in past and ongoing projects, the Programme welcomes proposals including pilot activities taking place at local level and seeking a positive territorial impact.

Projects shall deliver tangible results to the challenges identified above, embedded in a broader strategic context, such as EUSALP or other EU or Alpine-wide policies. In addition, projects shall also contribute to national and regional strategies and refer to these in the application form. Further information on classic projects can be found in section A.3 of the [programme manual](#).

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Projects shall develop new insights, approaches and solutions for future-proofing the Alpine region. The project submission follows a 2-step approach. In the second step of the application process, proposals are required to elaborate on their communication action. This is essential to inform and involve target groups in the activities, to communicate the findings, results and impacts of the projects and to enable stakeholders to uptake the solutions developed. Project proposals should define communication objectives for each work package and specific communication activities/deliverables across the work plan (e.g. transfer action plan). They may also take advantage of synergies with forthcoming events or campaigns (e.g. EUSALP, Alpine Convention, regional/national level) and should earmark sufficient resources for project communication and dissemination.

All projects are expected to contribute with innovative solutions to help the programme reach its objectives. To address efficiently the thematic focuses defined above, the following approaches have been identified as pertinent, and project applicants shall consider at least one of them.

- Cross-sectoral solutions: the thematic focuses present challenges to the Alpine territories and involve a diverse range of stakeholders. The solutions developed to address these issues require collaboration across different sectors and the integration of various actors' perspectives to facilitate effective implementation (incl. piloting and customizing successful approaches from other projects/regions to specific territories).
- Transformation pathways: projects are expected to develop or roll out cross-sectoral approaches to address large-scale transformation processes such as the green, digital, and just transitions. These pathways require collaboration across different economic sectors and stakeholders aiming to develop joint solutions and strategic vision (incl. definition of objectives, specific implementation steps, roles and responsibilities). The solutions developed by projects should strive to align with and make a positive contribution to these larger processes.
- Explorer/innovation networks: projects are encouraged to make use of existing innovation approaches (e.g. creativity methods like design thinking or strategic exploration) and structures like innovation clusters that have potential for implementation in other sectors, merging topics that would profit from a cross-sectoral viewpoint, fostering transfer between innovation ecosystems.

The programme also welcomes new or even experimental approaches. The programme is therefore particularly suited to testing new methods in a transnational network.



## 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.
- Eligible expenses from **EU Members States are co-financed and reimbursed up to 75%**.<sup>1</sup>
- In order to ensure transnationality, the partnership must **involve at least four different countries** of the programme area (including the lead partner).

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.
- The partnership shall involve 7 to 12 partners (including the lead partner).
- The work plan shall be composed of 3 work packages.

Deviations from the reference values may be accepted in duly justified cases, at the latest two weeks in advance of the submission of the project proposal. In such cases, please contact [js@alpine-space.eu](mailto:js@alpine-space.eu).

## Budget allocated to the call

With its 3<sup>rd</sup> call for classic project proposals, the Interreg Alpine Space programme offers up to 27,8 million EUR ERDF for transnational cooperation projects, broken down as follows:

Programme specific objective	Indicative ERDF (m EUR)
1.2 Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution	12,7
2.2 Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy	6,6
3.2 Reaping the benefits of digitalisation for citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities	8,5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27,8</b>

<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.



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## Composition of the partnership

The Interreg Alpine Space programme welcomes organisations from the public and private sector. A wide range of bodies can take part in a project, such as national, regional, local authorities, universities, R&D-agencies, companies, NGO, etc.

Transnational cooperation projects bring together project partners from the seven countries participating in the programme (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovenia and Switzerland), to work on a shared challenge and achieve innovative solutions that can be applied transnationally but also regionally or locally. The project partnership shall be composed in a way that is adequate for the objectives, which the project intends to follow.

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.

All information can be found in the [programme manual](#) (chapter B.2.1 Project Partners, page 29-30).

## 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](#).

For any technical issue you might experience with the Jems platform, please contact the helpdesk at [jems@alpine-space.eu](mailto:jems@alpine-space.eu).

## How to design a good project?

The following advice should be considered for the project development and application:

- Visit our [“How to apply” webpage](#), where the application kit for classic projects and all the relevant documents and information are gathered.
- Read our [programme document](#) carefully, where you can find information about the mission and





objectives of Interreg Alpine Space.

- Read our [programme manual](#) and its [annexes](#), 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 focus of this call.
- Discover the results already delivered by the Interreg Alpine Space programme in the [output library](#).
- 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. In addition, please make explicit possible contributions to national and regional strategies.
- Please consider that purely scientific project proposals will not be funded by the programme.
- Before submitting your application form, use our checklist for classic projects ("How to apply" webpage, Application kit section) to ensure you meet the programme requirements.
- For step 2, present communication objectives that are coherent with your work packages and supported by specific activities and/or deliverables: How do you plan to reach your target groups and involve them in the project activities? 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 project proposals 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 Interreg 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.

The ACP may organise (online) national information events. Consult the programme [events webpage](#) and participate in the national info days to learn more about the framework conditions for the call and key points for a successful project development.

This call will be officially launched on 13 May in Salzburg on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the programme. [Register](#) and attend the event to learn more and get hands-on advice in the Idea Lab workshop.



Join the network of the Interreg Alpine Space [Partner Search Platform](#) to connect with other organisations and develop project ideas.

As part of the project development support, the managing authority and joint secretariat will provide online support to all potential applicants in developing high standard applications. A “Lead Applicant Seminar” to improve project proposals is foreseen for all applicants invited to the second step of the application procedure.

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 indicative timeline?

Step	Description	Indicative date or period	Calendar week
1	Publication of the call	22 April 2025	17
2	Opening of submission on Jems	13 May 2025	20
3	<b>Deadline for submitting (AF step 1)</b>	10 July 2025 at 13:00	28
4	Assessment	July - October 2025	29 - 42
5	PC decision and invitation to submit full proposal	Mid-November 2025	46
6	Lead Applicant Seminar	End of November - Early December 2025	48/49
7	<b>Deadline for submitting (AF step 2)</b>	29 January 2026 at 13:00	5
8	Assessment	February - April 2026	6 - 14
9	PC decision	End April - early May 2026	18 - 19
10	Get started seminar	May 2026	
11	Project start	June 2026	