

Terms of reference

Open call for interregional peer reviews

1. Introduction – the Policy Learning Platform

The Policy Learning Platform provides access to the wealth of knowledge and expertise generated by the Interreg Europe projects, offering **shortcuts to smart policy solutions**.

Ranging from **thematic publications** and **good practice database** to an **interactive community of peers** and **individualised expert support services**, the Platform supports continuous policy learning. It is open at any time to any interested regions across Europe.

For further information about the services offered by the Policy Learning Platform, please visit:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/>.

2. The peer review service of the Policy Learning Platform

Interregional peer reviews supported by the Policy Learning Platform allow **managing authorities and public bodies in charge of local or regional development policies** to receive **hands-on advice from other European regions (peers)** to better address their policy challenges. Whether you are struggling with your public measure on energy efficiency, searching for new ways to support the internationalisation of SMEs or intending to invest in digital rural mobility solutions, exchanging with policy experts and practitioners from other regions can help you to find **new inspiration and solutions**.

Selected peers are invited to your region – the beneficiary region – to examine the specific policy challenge you are facing. They will provide you with recommendations based on their experience and expertise. An interregional peer review is usually carried out onsite over two full days in the region calling for peer support. However, the peer review can also be organised online upon request.

Whether onsite or online, the peers analyse the regional situation, discuss approaches, solutions, and recommendations, draft a “to-do list” for follow-up action and provide immediate feedback to the beneficiary of the peer review. Some preparation is required on all sides to ensure the selected peers are well matched to the needs of the beneficiary organisation.

Driven by the spirit of European-wide learning, peer reviews require an overall **readiness to share, reflect and improve among all parties** involved. You can also be a beneficiary receiving advice on one occasion and provide your expertise as a peer the next time around. This is a true win-win exchange!

To ensure that the recommendations presented by the peers will be translated into concrete policy actions, the beneficiary organisation should pay attention to the **follow-up process** from the first day onwards. This may already require the **active involvement of key decision makers and stakeholders** during the application phase. Key stakeholders for the addressed policy are also invited to contribute to the peer review, supporting the **dissemination, endorsement, and uptake of its outcomes** in the beneficiary region.

3. How does an interregional peer review work in practice?

The schedule in **Annex 1** specifies the **different tasks, steps, and deliverables** of the peer review process. This should however be treated as an indicative guide which may require adjustment to the specificities of each individual peer review.

The beneficiary organisation is expected to appoint a coordinator/contact person for the peer review process. Moreover, when onsite, the beneficiary organisation is responsible for the practical organisation of the meetings on the spot (invitations, agenda, venue, equipment, catering, et al.).

4. What kind of support can you expect?

The **Thematic experts** of the Policy Learning Platform will support the thematic exchanges between the participating regions, in particular by:

- Identifying suitable peers
- Briefing the beneficiary coordinator and the selected peers
- Supporting the preparation of content input (if desired)
- Supporting the coordination and moderation of the exchanges during the onsite or online sessions (if desired)
- Supporting the preparation of stakeholder interviews (if applicable and desired)
- Supporting the finalisation of the peer review report.

Moreover, the Policy Learning Platform can cover the **travel and subsistence costs (including local transport, accommodation, and food) for up to six peers** per peer review for their participation in the onsite meetings. In duly justified cases, the number of peers can be increased (e.g., outermost regions as beneficiaries). Catering and translation costs for the beneficiary can also be covered, if needed.

5. For which thematic priorities is the call open?

As stipulated in the strategic documents for Interreg Europe 2021-2027, the Policy Learning Platform shall support ongoing EU-wide regional policy learning covering all the thematic areas addressed by the programme. Therefore, the call is open for the six EU Cohesion Policy priorities covered by the main objective of Interreg Europe – “A better cooperation governance”:

- Smarter Europe
- Greener Europe
- More connected Europe
- More Social Europe
- Europe closer to citizens
- Better governance

6. Who can submit an application?

Only Public bodies responsible for the local or regional development policies can submit an application for peer review support.

Organisation already involved in an Interreg Europe project (as partner or stakeholder) can apply for a peer review as long as the policy challenges addressed in the peer review do not overlap with the issue tackled by the project.

7. How to submit my application?

Applications can only be submitted by **registered members of the Interreg Europe community**. Hence, should you not be registered yet, please join our community of policymakers, stakeholders, and practitioners:

<https://interregeurope.eu/onboarding/prehome>

Applicants are invited to exchange with the [Platform experts](#) prior to the submission of their applications (not compulsory)

In order to submit your application for evaluation by our thematic experts, please fill-in the respective **online form** available in the policy advice section: <https://interregeurope.eu/peer-review/submit>

Please be as **precise and concrete as possible** when describing your policy challenge, needs and motivation.

8. Timing of the call

The call for interregional peer reviews is launched on 9 October 2019 and remains open permanently.

Applicants can submit their application at their earliest convenience. Applications are subject to the evaluation process on a rolling basis (see point 9).

9. How will the submitted application be evaluated?

The requests for peer review will be selected based on their overall quality, soundness, and potential for policy impact. In particular, the application will be evaluated against **the following criteria**:

- the policy area addressed (thematic relevance for the programme)
- the motivation of the applicant to participate in an interregional peer review
- the involvement of relevant local and regional stakeholders (if relevant for the addressed policy area)
- the potential for policy impact and follow-up action
- the clarity, completeness, and overall quality of the proposal.

In case of high number of applications, priority will be given to institutions that are not already beneficiary of Interreg Europe by being partners in projects, or by having benefited from a Policy Learning Platform service.

10. How will applicants be informed about the decision?

In case an application is selected for a peer review support by the Policy Learning Platform, the applicant will be informed by the Platform team on the next steps via email (see also Annex 1).

The eligible applications that will not be selected for a peer review, will be treated as requests submitted to the expert helpdesk of the Policy Learning Platform. Consequently, the thematic experts of the platform will still provide policy advice to the applicants, using the most suitable sources and services to meet their needs.

The results of the evaluations are expected within two months after the submission of the application.

11. Further information

For further information on the open call for interregional peer reviews, please contact the thematic manager of the Policy Learning Platform: Elena Ferrario: e.ferrario@policylearning.eu

Annex 1: the peer review process in practice

Indicative schedule for an interregional peer review

(for illustration purposes – to be adjusted to the specificities of each individual peer review)

1. First briefing by the thematic expert and finalisation of the beneficiary's demand

- **Info about the selection** of the peer review by the responsible thematic expert
- **Appointment of an overall** coordinator and contact person for the process by the beneficiary organisation
- **First briefing** of the beneficiary organisation by the thematic expert (phone)
- **Preparation of a thematic background paper (3-5 pages)** by the beneficiary organisation

Aimed at preparing the ground for the selection of suitable peers, the thematic background paper shall further specify the expressed need for interregional learning, by describing the faced policy challenge as well as the demand for support in further detail (based on the information given in the application form). The paper should also contain four to five questions on which the beneficiary would like to elaborate with the peers during the meeting.

Besides the purpose of providing the responsible thematic expert with the information necessary for the identification of suitable peers, the background paper shall serve as the key briefing document for the peers and stakeholders involved in the peer review.

The thematic background paper shall be prepared in English language.

2. Peer selection and preparatory works for the onsite peer review

- **Identification of potential peers** by the thematic expert

Building on their thematic expertise as well as their portfolio of good practices and solutions, partners and stakeholders of Interreg Europe projects serve as the first source for identifying suitable peers. In principle, registered members of the Interreg Europe community could also become peers, if their profile is relevant. Through targeted calls for interest, relevant project partners and stakeholders will have the possibility to directly signal their interest for becoming peers. Proposals for peers can also be made by the beneficiary organisation (see section 5 of the online template for expressions of interests).

As a general rule, between three and four peers from at least two partner states of Interreg Europe (EU28, Norway and Switzerland) should participate in a peer review.

The Policy Learning Platform can cover travel and staff costs for participation of peers in the onsite peer reviews. Travel and accommodation costs can be claimed within certain ceilings. A Flat Daily Allowance (FDA) of EUR 350 can also be requested by the peer's organisation for up to three working days.

- **Verification and confirmation of the proposed peer group** by the beneficiary
- **Joint online meeting** between the coordinator of the host region and the selected peers to clarify the tasks, focus and expectations. Furthermore, the exchange should lead to an agreement on the dates for the two-day onsite visit in the beneficiary's region.

- **Preparation of inputs** for the peer review by the beneficiary:

- *the above-described **thematic background paper***
- *a **presentation** featuring the encountered policy challenge, the region's policy environment and the host's overall expectations from the peer review.*
- *if applicable, a **list of relevant policy stakeholders** for interviews on the spot. Ideally, a limited number of stakeholders should be chosen, based on their relevance for the policy addressed by the peer review (example: selected cluster managers if the peer review addresses the cluster policy of the region). An academic perspective might also be considered. The need and value of stakeholder involvement will depend on the addressed policy framework and should thus be decided on case-by-case basis.*

As far as possible, the beneficiary coordinator should provide the peers with the above-listed inputs prior to the peer review meeting. Of course, she/he is free to provide the peers with further inputs such as strategy documents or regional action plans. Though, bearing in mind the additionality of the peer review exercise in relation to each participant's regular duties, an overload of information should be avoided.

3. Onsite or online peer review

- The peer review sessions are at the heart of the learning process. In general, **two full working days** should be reserved and planned for face-to-face meetings on the spot (excluding travels) or online meetings. If onsite, the beneficiary is responsible for the **practical organisation** of the peer review (invitations, agenda, venue, equipment, et al.). As mentioned in the terms of reference above, the costs for catering and translation can be reimbursed by the Policy Learning Platform, if necessary.
- **Indicative agenda** (to be adjusted to the needs and specificities of each individual peer review):

Day 1:

- Internal pre-meeting of the peers (0.5 hours) - if relevant
- Joint welcome and plenary session, focusing on the challenges of the host and the experiences brought in by the peers (3 hours)
- Involvement of relevant stakeholders (if applicable) and further discussion of the thematic challenges/questions raised by the host region (2-3 hours)

Day 2:

- Internal meeting of the peers – preparation of draft recommendation (2-3 hours)
 - Joint peer review session – validation and final conclusions (2-3 hours)
 - Preparation of a “to-do list” for follow-up action (2-3 hours)
 - Short evaluation survey among the participants
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4. Follow-up process

- Preparation of a **draft peer review report** by the beneficiary (including the developed “to-do-list”).
 - **Review** of the draft report by the peer and the thematic experts
 - Review and, if possible, endorsement of the developed **‘to-do list’ for follow-up action** by relevant policymakers of the beneficiary organisation
 - **Short summary of the peer review results** for public use
 - The Platform team will contact the representative of the beneficiary organisation again few months after the completion of the peer review. The aim is to have an open exchange on the follow-up process and the **impact of the drafted recommendations** on the policy addressed by the peer review.
 - When possible and relevant, the Policy Learning Platform may organise an **onsite meeting to follow up on online peer reviews**. At the occasion of an EU-wide event (e.g. Interreg Europe annual event, EURegionsWeek) the beneficiary organisation and the peers will have the opportunity to meet physically, network and exchange on the impact of the peer review recommendations on the beneficiary's territory.
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