



Terms of reference

Open call for interregional peer reviews

Update as of November 2020

1. Introduction – the Policy Learning Platform

Through the interregional cooperation projects co-financed by Interreg Europe, more than 200 regions are working together for better policymaking and improved structural funds implementation.

As the second pillar of the Interreg Europe programme, the Policy Learning Platform provides access to the wealth of knowledge and expertise generated by these projects, thus offering **shortcuts to smart policy solutions** without the need to reinvent the wheel.

Ranging from thematic publications and an online good practice database to an interactive community of peers and individualised expert services, the platform services for **continuous policy learning** are implemented by a European team of thematic experts covering the four thematic priorities of Interreg Europe:

- Research and innovation
- SME competitiveness
- Low-carbon economy
- Environment and resource efficiency

The Policy Learning Platform explicitly encourages the participation of regions and managing authorities which, for different reasons, do not have the possibility to participate in Interreg Europe projects. Hence, the ad-hoc services provided by the platform complement the opportunities for project funding offered by the programme, thus underlining Interreg Europe's ambition to be **at the disposal of all regions in the EU, Norway and Switzerland**.

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 feedback and advice from other European regions (peers)** on the implementation of their policies and programmes. Whether you are



struggling with your programme 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 receive **new inspiration and solutions with an unbiased view from “outside”**.

Peers from a selected number of regions are invited to your region – the host region – to examine the specific territorial and thematic context, and make 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, following the current sanitary situation in Europe, the Policy Learning Platform can also propose an online format to its beneficiaries.

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 host region.

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

In order to ensure that the conclusions and recommendations presented by the peers will be translated into concrete policy actions, hosts should give 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. Naturally, key stakeholders for the addressed policy are also invited to contribute to the peer review, thus supporting the **acceptance, dissemination and uptake of its outcomes** in the host 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.

As the peer review exercise is for the benefit of the host region, the coordinator/contact person is expected to proactively prepare and lead the peer review process. Moreover, when onsite, the host region 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 host 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 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. Catering and translation costs for the host region can also be covered, if needed.

5. For which thematic priorities is the current call open?

The call is open for the **four thematic priorities of Interreg Europe**:

- Research and innovation
- SME competitiveness
- Low-carbon economy
- Environment and resource efficiency

N.B. Covid-19: Within these thematic priorities, the Policy Learning Platform encourages applicants to submit requests for peer reviews on challenges related to the short-term or long-term impacts of the Covid-19 crisis on their regional or local development policies. For example, reaching from innovation in health care, the economic recovery of SMEs and green urban infrastructure to concepts for sustainable tourism, interregional cooperation can help local and regional decision-makers to find solutions together.

6. Who can submit an application?

As stipulated in the strategic documents for Interreg Europe 2014-2020, the Policy Learning Platform shall support ongoing EU-wide regional policy learning in the four thematic priorities of the programme, mainly with regard to the implementation of the Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, ETC goals.

- As the key target group of Interreg Europe, **managing authorities and intermediate bodies** responsible for the management of structural funds (both mainstream programmes at national/regional levels and ETC programmes) are strongly encouraged to submit their requests for peer review support under the present call.
- Other **public bodies responsible for local or regional development policies** are equally welcome to submit an application for peer review support. However, for peer reviews targeting other local or regional development policies (not related to the management of structural funds), solely applications submitted by the local or regional authorities directly responsible for the addressed policies can be considered.

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 feel invited to join our growing community of policymakers, stakeholders and practitioners:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/account/registration/>

In order to submit your application for review and evaluation by our thematic experts, please fill-in the respective **online template** available in the expert support section of the platform:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/expert-support/>



When filling-in the form, please **be as precise and concrete as possible** when describing your policy, need 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 host region 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.

The evaluation will be based on the information provided in the application forms only. No process of requesting clarifications or additional information is foreseen.

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 has been selected for a peer review support by the Policy Learning Platform, the applicant will be informed by the relevant thematic expert on the next steps (see also Annex 1).

The eligible applications that will not be selected for a peer review, will be treated as support 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 host region's demand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Info about the selection of the peer review by the responsible thematic expert
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Appointment of an overall coordinator and contact person for the process by the host region
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ First briefing of the host region by the thematic expert (phone)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preparation of a thematic background paper of max. three pages by the host region <i>Aimed at preparing the ground for the selection of suitable peers, the thematic background document shall further specify the expressed need for interregional learning, in particular 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 document should also contain four to five questions on which the host would like to elaborate with the peers during the onsite meetings.</i> <i>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.</i> <i>The thematic background paper shall be prepared in English language.</i>
2. Peer selection and preparatory works for the onsite peer review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identification of potential peers by the thematic expert <i>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 Policy Learning Platform 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. At the same time, proposals for peers can also be made by the applying host region (see section 5 of the online template for expressions of interests).</i> <i>As a general rule, between three and four peers from at least two partner states of Interreg Europe (EU28, Norway and Switzerland), other than the country of the host region, should participate in a peer review.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notification of the identified peers by the thematic expert ▪ Verification and confirmation of the proposed peer group by the host region
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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 host region.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preparation of inputs for the peer review by the host region: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>the above-described thematic background paper</i> - <i>a presentation featuring the encountered policy challenge, the region's policy environment and the host's overall expectations from the peer review</i> - <i>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.</i> <p>As far as possible, the host coordinator should provide the peers with the above-listed inputs prior to the peer review meeting. Of course, the host coordinator 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</p>



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

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 host region 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 (1-2 hours)
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)

4. Follow-up process

- Preparation of a **draft peer review report** by the host region (including the developed “to-do list”)
- **Review** of the draft report by the peers and the thematic expert
- Review and, if possible, endorsement of the developed **‘to-do list’ for follow-up action** by relevant policymakers of the host region
- **Short evaluation survey** among the participants (brief questionnaire)
- **Short summary of the peer review results** for public use, subject to the approval of the host region
- **The PLP team** will contact the representative of the host organisation again around 12 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 a EU-wide event (e.g. Interreg Europe annual event, EURegionsWeek) the host organisation and the peers will have the opportunity to meet physically, network and exchange on the impact of the peer review recommendations on the host organisation's territory.