

# REGIOSTARS 2015

## The awards for innovative projects supported by EU cohesion policy

### Guide for applicants

(Application forms are provided separately)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of RegioStars is to identify good practice in regional development and to highlight original and innovative projects or support schemes that could be inspiring to other regions and project managers. Eligible projects or support schemes have been co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund, or the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance.

All finalists are invited to the Award Ceremony and will receive a certificate.

One main prize is awarded per category. It consists of a trophy and a certificate presented by the Commissioner and the President of the RegioStars jury on the day of the Award Ceremony in Brussels. For each winner a short video is produced, which can be used for promotional purposes.

## 2. GENERAL RULES

### 2.1 Award Categories

There are four RegioStars Award categories for 2015:

**Cat. 1 Smart Growth: Unleashing SME growth potential for a digital economy**

**Cat. 2 Sustainable Growth: Mobilizing investments in energy efficiency for the benefit of citizens and society**

**Cat. 3 Inclusive Growth: Integrating in society those at risk of social exclusion**

**Cat. 4 CityStar: Transforming cities for future challenges**

### 2.2 Applicants

The 274 NUTS-2 regions<sup>1</sup> in Europe are eligible for EU structural and Cohesion Fund support from a variety of national, regional or cooperation programmes. Either the Member State or the most relevant structural funds managing authority<sup>2</sup> for the national or regional programmes – for the period 2000-2006 or 2007-2013 - may submit not more than one entry per category and region.

### 2.3 How to submit an application form

Applications should be submitted by, or with the endorsement of, the Managing authority (national or regional) responsible for the co-financing decision on behalf of the project leader / developer.

Applications must be sent to the following e-mail address: [REGIO-STARS@ec.europa.eu](mailto:REGIO-STARS@ec.europa.eu).

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<sup>1</sup> NUTS is the "[Nomenclature of Statistical Territorial Units](#)" a single, coherent system for dividing up the European Union's territory in order to produce regional statistics.

<sup>2</sup> To find your structural funds managing authority check on RegioAtlas: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/atlas2007/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/atlas2007/index_en.htm) In some cases national Managing Authorities delegate responsibility to regional bodies ("Delegated Managing Authorities"). In such cases the delegated Managing Authority may apply.

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Municipalities or cities wishing to submit an EU co-funded project should seek the endorsement of their relevant managing authority<sup>2</sup>.

Applications will be examined by an independent jury taking into account the eligibility and award criteria. Only applications which satisfy the first phase of the evaluation (eligibility) will be admitted to the second phase (pre-selection of finalists/award by the jury).

See below for further details.

### 2.4 Deadline

Applications should be sent no later than **28 February 2015**.

### 2.5 Contact information

All enquiries should be sent by e-mail to this address: [REGIO-STARS@ec.europa.eu](mailto:REGIO-STARS@ec.europa.eu)

## 3. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- a) The application has reached the RegioStars secretariat no later than **28 February 2015** on the following e-mail address: [REGIO-STARS@ec.europa.eu](mailto:REGIO-STARS@ec.europa.eu)
- b) The project has been co-financed under the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund or the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) after 1 January 2007.
- c) Applications must be submitted or endorsed by an EU structural funds managing authority<sup>2</sup> for a regional or national programme. Managing authorities are free to use whatever selection process they deem appropriate to choose their candidates.
- d) Applications must be made by completing the relevant entry form and be submitted preferably in English - where not possible, in French or German. This will allow the applications to be processed more rapidly.
- e) The project description must be clearly related to the selected category.
- f) The project is finalised or is sufficiently advanced (i.e. it can demonstrate progress in the achievement of the original objectives in the region, locality or urban area).
- g) The project has not been proposed for a RegioStars Award before.

## 4. AWARD CRITERIA

- a) **Innovative character of the project**
- b) **Impact (or expected impact) of the project in terms of initial objectives**

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- c) **Expected financial sustainability of the project:** Evidence could include development towards self-financing or demonstration that the project has or will be part of a succession of projects sequentially funded by other EU financial instruments;
- d) **Possibility to extrapolate good practices of the project to other regions. Project's results in enhancing local, regional and interregional partnerships:** Evidence could include demonstration that the project has inspired other regions' projects/programmes or that good practices were shared with other regions.
- e) **For category 1:** results on **ICT sector indicators** in the [Scoreboard of the Digital Agenda for Europe](#), in particular eCommerce , eBusiness , eHealth , ICT Research and Development or ICT sector related DAE indicators.

### 5. SUPPORTING GUIDANCE ON THE AWARD CATEGORIES

A general description of the categories and an indication of the projects that could be relevant for meeting the award criteria are presented below.

#### **CATEGORY 1: SMART GROWTH: Unleashing SME growth potential for a digital economy**

Digital technologies are omnipresent in various aspects of our lives, from shaping our way to work over influencing our shopping habits to socializing and entertainment, among others. They have the power to completely re-shape industries and value chains, reduce barriers to market entry and increase productivity of business operations. Besides blurring and taking down boundaries, also on an international level, they offer a big chance for new generations of entrepreneurs and innovators.

ICT is the most significant driver of innovation and growth on a global scale and plays a horizontal cross-cutting role by enabling the spread of innovation, sustainability and competitiveness in economic activities and social inclusion. It enables economies to create more jobs, improve people's lives, and build better and greener societies overall. Important part of this is also the access to broadband technologies. In Europe, the digital economy is the fastest growing one<sup>3</sup> and still holds a huge potential that is only partially exploited so far. On the European scale the ICT sector constitutes 5% of the total GDP and 20% of productivity growth overall. In some economies, it contributes to as much as 8% of the GDP.

Innovative and dynamic SMEs can benefit greatly from digital technologies, enabling them to grow faster when doing so and increase productivity. This is owed to the fact that new technological developments allow for new products and services to be conceived, developed, produced and accessed easier and in a shorter period of time than with more traditional approaches.

To fully exploit the potential of ICT, support is needed both in terms of supply of new digital products and services, and concerning content and demand creation for those technologies<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> [Europe's Digital Competitiveness Report](#)

<sup>4</sup> See Digital Entrepreneurship initiative, as part of the [Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan](#)

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The awards are open both, to actual projects of firms and for the policy designers and managers of SME support schemes. The awards will go to projects and policy designers/managers that help SMEs of all sectors to unleash their growth potential by building a competitive advantage through uptake of ICT.

The successful projects could for instance address one or more of the following issues:

- unleashing the growth and competitiveness potential of ICT application to transform processes in a traditional sector (e.g. in textiles, tourism, agro-food, pulp and paper, energy consumption, etc.);
- ICT-enabled innovation in SMEs, including co-creation, organizational innovation, marketing innovation, innovative business models, etc.
- possibility of a diversification of economic activity and access to new markets thanks to ICT uptake (e.g. e-commerce, new value chains, etc.);
- opening and exploiting the possibility of a transition from a low-added-value area to higher added-value and knowledge intensive area via ICT products or services (e.g. digital textiles, smart construction materials, Quick Response code (QR codes) in new contexts, RFID tags for innovative purposes);
- developing and implementing breakthrough solutions in ICT (e.g. graphene driven revolutions in ICT)
- Boosting start-ups and growth of SMEs in the IT sector, in particular combining different EU funding programmes;
- broadband take-up in a strategic and demand-oriented manner, and in cooperation with SMEs, including for instance measures to reduce the cost of high-speed broadband access in line with Directive 2014/61/EU.<sup>5</sup>

### **CATEGORY 2: SUSTAINABLE GROWTH: Mobilizing investments in energy efficiency for the benefit of citizens and society**

A major and sustained increase in public and private investment is needed for the European Union to meet its 2020 and 2030 climate change and energy targets and to take forward its 2050 decarbonisation agenda. Cohesion Policy funds are a crucial tool for helping Member States to achieve these targets.

Buildings are central to the EU's energy efficiency policy, as nearly 40% of final energy consumption – as well as 36% of all greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions – is attributable to buildings across the public and private sector, and provide a large untapped cost-effective energy savings potential.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are key drivers of growth, job creation and cohesion. Resource efficiency, including energy efficiency, is an important aspect of their cost structure and thus of their competitiveness. Investment in product development and production processes should go hand-in-hand with investment in energy efficiency, both in the SMEs' premises and processes. Cohesion Policy supports SMEs in particular because they might suffer from information gaps and difficulties to access finance.

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<sup>5</sup> See [OJ L 155, 23.5.2014, p. 1–14](#)

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Energy efficiency investments also have great potential for important benefits in terms of local and regional development, competitiveness, growth and jobs, as well as to alleviate energy poverty. Cohesion Policy can play a key role in providing the needed funding, but also support in terms of strategic planning, technical assistance, governance improvements or interregional and cross-border cooperation. Moreover, Cohesion Policy assists Member States and their regions in supporting innovation, not least through the national or regional smart specialisation strategies in which energy-related research and innovation is among the most frequently identified priorities.

Cohesion Policy investments to improve energy efficiency in public, commercial and residential buildings, or in SMEs more generally, have already been carried out in the

2007-2013 programming period.

Projects could for instance address the following issues:

- Investments in energy efficiency supported as part of broader low-carbon and urban development strategies or sustainable energy action plans, e.g. developed under the Covenant of Mayors, in order to facilitate optimisation and coordination of investments, i.e. demonstrating an integrated approach.
- Public authorities taking an exemplary role, engaging in state-of-the-art renovation of public buildings for improved energy efficiency and use of renewable energy, thus strengthening the innovation demand side, e.g. building on results from research projects under the Energy-efficient Buildings (EeB) PPP supported by FP7/Horizon 2020 or other relevant EU level and national research programmes and projects, including research and innovation financed by Cohesion Policy funds in the context of the research and innovation smart specialisation strategies.
- Investments in energy efficiency in residential buildings particularly successful in contributing to alleviating energy poverty.
- Support for energy efficiency in SMEs that contribute to the overall economic development of the SME, e.g. in terms of added value and employment, possibly embedding support for resource efficiency, including energy efficiency, and the use of renewable energy in SMEs within broader SME support schemes, addressing several aspects of their competitiveness at the same time.
- Successful use of financial instruments, such as loans, guarantees or venture capital, including e.g. the use of Energy Performance Contracting (EPC).

### **CATEGORY 3: INCLUSIVE GROWTH: Integrating into society those at risk of social exclusion**

As described in the Europe 2020 strategy, inclusive growth aims to provide Europe's citizens with more and better jobs, and to reduce the number of people in poverty (or at risk of poverty) by at least 20 million people. Alleviation of poverty and closing the societal gap are essential preconditions for economic growth in all Member States of the EU. The targets of Europe 2020 Strategy can be only reached if targeted actions are implemented both on national and local level in the context of the social inclusion strategies. Projects financed by the European Structural and Investments Funds can make a significant contribution in the field of education, employment, health and housing (amongst others) in order to help integrating people at risk of social exclusion.

Under the inclusive growth category of RegioStars 2015, projects may focus on the following areas:

- Targeting people in poverty (beyond the general poverty indicators);
- Implementing territorial approaches which address poverty challenges: focus on least developed micro-regions, deprived urban or rural neighbourhoods, etc.;
- Integrating people at risk of poverty by implementing comprehensive approach (linking up actions in different fields);
- Experimenting innovative models and mainstreaming them.

### **CATEGORY 4: CITYSTARS: Transforming cities for future challenges**

Future evolutions will put the current organisation of cities to the test. Aging and more diverse population, changing relationship with citizens, effects of climate change, an economy that needs other skills, persistent pockets of deprivation, challenge to pay for public services, etc. Cities will need to adapt to tackle these challenges and make the most of new opportunities. One thing is clear: cities will need to come up with innovative ideas and tackle these complex challenges in an integrated way. The 2014-2020 programming period recognises this and puts special emphasis on integrated sustainable urban development and a stronger role for cities themselves.

Projects that have already prepared cities for these challenges could include activities that involved

- Innovative approach that coupled resource efficiency with the promotion of social equity;
- New governance models that engaged citizens by using new technologies;
- Initiatives that have transformed cities into circular economies (resource efficiency).