



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY

**CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST
ON INNOVATIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE IN
COHESION POLICY**

*Strengthening citizen participation through collaboration between public authorities
and civil society organizations*

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- (1) Citizens and civil society are central to ensuring good governance, and they have an important role to play in shaping the European Union and its policies. Looking in particular at cohesion policy, engaging with citizens and relevant civil society organisations (CSOs) in decision-making processes brings added value to the implementation of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Cohesion Fund (CF) and Just Transition Fund (JTF). Managing authorities (MA), intermediate bodies (IB), and beneficiaries of 2021-2027 programmes have a key role to play in this regard as initiators and leaders, but have also a lot to gain from it. Citizen participation can improve the delivery and quality of investments, e.g. by bringing in thematic knowledge and technical know-how as well as greater transparency, accountability, and social inclusion in the implementation process.
- (2) National and regional governments decide on the involvement of stakeholders relevant for programming and management of ERDF and CF in their territory. The “European Code of Conduct on Partnership”¹ supports Member States to organise such cooperation, as partners should be involved throughout the whole programme cycle, from programming and planning of investments to evaluation of results in monitoring committees.
- (3) From July 2020-December 2021, the European Commission and the OECD partnered to explore how five authorities across Europe could place citizens at the centre of their investment decisions. These five selected authorities were the regional government of Cantabria in Spain; the Emilia-Romagna region in Italy; the Centre for EU Transport Projects in Poland; the Interreg Flanders - The Netherlands programme; and the Interreg Romania-Bulgaria programme. The final report concluded that citizens should be involved at all stages of the cohesion policy cycle.
- (4) During the same period, European Commission offered financial support to civil society organisations to engage with citizens. One of the general elements that emerged was the importance of collaboration with public authorities to achieve results.
- (5) The OECD has gathered evidence that support the idea that citizen participation can improve both the process and the outcomes of public decisions. Innovative citizen

¹ Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 of 7 January 2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds

participation approaches such as deliberative assemblies or co-creation mechanisms, can foster cooperation between public authorities and civil society organisations. Such processes could be tested at different stages of the cohesion policy cycle by public authorities responsible for management of EU funds in cooperation with civil society organisations. See annex I for more information about the OECD's understanding of citizen participation a non-exhaustive list of practices that could be relevant for cohesion policy.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE CALL

- (7) Under this Call, the Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission (hereinafter DG REGIO) aims to cooperate with up to 10 public authorities responsible for managing or implementing ERDF, CF or JTF either as managing authorities, intermediate bodies or beneficiaries (hereafter public authorities) and 10 CSOs, to engage citizens in cohesion policy.
- (8) Through this cooperation, DG REGIO seeks:
- a) Test and assess the application of innovative citizen participation approaches for managing and implementing EU funds for cohesion policies.
 - b) Identify conditions, actions and resources necessary to build strong and long-lasting partnerships to promote citizen participation in cohesion policy.
 - c) Collect good practices of citizen participation in cohesion policy to be shared among and beyond project partners.
 - d) Promote peer learning and support community of practitioners.
- (9) To achieve this objective, DG REGIO will cooperate with and use the expertise of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for implementing the pilot. The OECD experts will:
- a) Accompany public authorities and CSOs in establishing the right methodology for participation.
 - b) Support public authorities and CSOs in building an enabling environment for collaboration and partnership.

- c) Advise both public authorities and CSOs in the implementation of participatory processes.
- (10) Work will be carried out in the framework of a pilot action. Public authorities and civil society organisations will receive support for their joint proposal to implement in an innovative way the partnership principles in the context of design, implementation and/or monitoring at the level of programme, strategy specific for one of the five policy objectives and/or investment under programmes 2021-2027.
- (11) Innovative character of project proposals will be assessed taking into account existing best practices on innovative citizen participation, including deliberative processes (see for example the OECD publication “[Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions](#)” and Annex I for more examples), and specific context and challenges in order to determine the potential lessons that can be learned.
- (12) The maximum of ten proposals selected will offer different angles to look at implementation issues, because of the geographical focus and/or the decision making level.
- (13) The experiences from the pilot projects will contribute to improve operational knowledge to be disseminated through publication, training, and REGIO Peer2Peer+.
- (14) The pilot will require active participation of the selected public authorities and civil society organisations. They will need to delegate employees to participate in interviews/discussions/meetings/workshops and to contribute to/review documents in English. They are expected to commit to make necessary resources (financial and human) available to participate in this pilot.
- (15) This Call will not result in the award of funding to the public authorities and civil society organisations expressing their interest in participation in this pilot. The costs associated with the participation in this pilot may be covered through technical assistance funding of the concerned operational programme.
- (16) Assistance will be provided by the OECD to public authorities and civil society organisation in two phases:

phase I (review of project proposals/training/assistance to plan and set-up activities):
June 2022 – February 2023

phase II (assistance to complete activities and feed-back to beneficiaries): March 2023 –
October 2023

(17) The pilot is expected to be completed in December 2023 with the publication of the final report and public presentation of results.

3. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

(18) The Action provides a basis for the dissemination of good practices across EU Member States in citizen participation. It encourages public authorities to collaborate with citizens and CSOs throughout the cohesion policy cycle, which can be replicated in other policy areas and by other authorities in the same Member State. In general terms, this action aims at raising awareness and building skills at the EU level on citizen participation, CSO collaboration, and open government.

4. WHO CAN APPLY UNDER THIS CALL

(19) The Call for expression of interest targets public authorities responsible for managing or implementing ERDF, CF or JTF either as managing authorities, intermediate bodies or beneficiaries (hereafter public authorities) jointly with Civil society organisations (CSOs). A CSO is a non-profit organisation (private or public). Natural persons are not eligible.

(20) Selected public authorities and civil society organisations will commit to minimize the environmental impact of activities necessary for the implementation of pilot projects. They are also invited to set up gender balanced teams and to ensure an inclusive workplace during the entire duration of cooperation with OECD experts.

5. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

(21) To be eligible, the expression of interest will have to meet all the following eligibility criteria:

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA		REFERENCE IN THE APPLICATION FORM
1.A	<p>The proposal is jointly presented by a public authority and a civil society organisation.</p> <p>Public authority and civil society organisation have appointed a dedicated interlocutor to work with the European Commission on the pilot project.</p> <p>Application form is signed by representatives of public authorities and civil society organisation with the power to commit resources for this pilot for a duration of 24 months.</p>	Part one: section 1 and signature
1.B	<p>The public authority has informed the relevant national coordinating body/ministry (or equivalent) about the application.</p> <p>The public authority has also received political commitment / support from the relevant national/regional/local government. Political commitment is important to pursue the project to completion.²</p>	Part one: section 2
1.C	<p>Public authority and civil society organisation have pre-identified the area to improve the participation of citizens in cohesion policy and at which level they intend to apply partnership principles in an innovative way.</p>	Part one: sections 3 and 4

6. CRITERIA FOR SHORTLISTING EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

(22) The eligible expressions of interest will be assessed in a two-step selection process:

(23) As a first step, expressions of interest will be checked according to the following criteria:

CRITERIA FOR SHORTLISTING APPLICANTS		REFERENCE IN THE APPLICATION FORM
2.A	Clarity in the identification of areas where to implement innovative citizen participation mechanisms.	Part one: section 3
2.B	Clarity in setting operational objectives to reach through innovative citizen participation mechanisms.	Part one: sections 4 and 5
2.C	Clarity in the description of scope of envisaged cooperation between public authority and civil society organisation.	Part one: section 6

² Political commitment is part of the OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision Making.

(24) In the second step, expressions of interest will be checked against the following criteria:

CRITERIA FOR SHORTLISTING APPLICANTS		REFERENCE IN THE APPLICATION FORM
2.D	30-minute interview where applicants explain their motivation to cooperate in the pilot action and support expected from the OECD.	N/A
2.B	Clarity in the project proposal for cooperation between the public authority and civil society organisation.	Part two: sections 2
2.C	Clear identification of adequate and balanced team coming from public authority and civil society organisation.	Part two: section 3

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- (25) Expressions of interest will be checked against the eligibility criteria and assessed according to the selection criteria of this Call.
- (26) The assessment will be carried out by a selection panel consisting of representatives of the European Commission. The OECD representatives will participate in the selection panel as observers in an advisory capacity. The final decision on the shortlist will be taken by the European Commission.
- (27) The selection panel Commission aims at a diverse shortlist in terms of Member State coverage and types of projects.
- (28) All applicants will be informed about the decision taken on their application after completion of each step of the assessment process.
- (29) The selection panel will inform eligible applicants which are invited for interviews at least two weeks in advance of the day of interview.
- (30) Applicants invited to interview will have to send part two of the application form four weeks after the date of their interview at the latest.
- (31) At this stage of the Call, the shortlisting of an expression of interest does not constitute a binding commitment – either implicit or explicit – on the part of the European Commission to provide support to public authorities and civil society organisations.

(32) Shortlisted public authorities and civil society organisations should be ready to start cooperation with OECD as from June 2022, following finalisation of the agreement between OECD and the European Commission.

7. PROCEDURE FOR SUBMISSION OF EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

(33) Public authorities and civil society organisations expressing their interest to participate in this pilot should complete jointly part one of the application form provided in Annex 1 of this Call.

(34) Only applicants invited for interview should complete part two of the application form. Part two should be sent no later than four weeks from the date of the interview.

(35) The application form is to be completed in English.

(36) The expression of interest should be submitted electronically to the following email address: REGIO-E1-ADMINISTRATIVE-CAPACITY@ec.europa.eu

8. DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

(37) The deadline for submitting an expression of interest is **30 April 2022**.

(38) Expressions of interest submitted after the deadline of this Call will not be considered.

9. CONTACT

In case of any questions, please contact REGIO-E1-ADMINISTRATIVE-CAPACITY@ec.europa.eu

ANNEX I – INNOVATIVE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

1. The OECD definition of citizen participation

Citizen Participation includes “all the ways in which stakeholders can be involved in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery”. It refers to the efforts by public institutions to hear the views, perspectives, and inputs from citizens and stakeholders. Participation allows citizens and stakeholders to influence activities and decisions of the public authorities at different stages of the policy cycle.

The [OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government \(2017\)](#) distinguishes between three levels of citizen participation, which differ according to the level of involvement:

- **Information:** an initial level of participation characterised by a one-way relationship in which the government produces and delivers information to citizens and stakeholders. It covers both on-demand provision of information and “proactive” measures by the government to disseminate information.
- **Consultation:** a more advanced level of participation that entails a two-way relationship in which citizens and stakeholders provide feedback to the government and vice-versa. It is based on the prior definition of the issue for which views are being sought and requires the provision of relevant information, in addition to feedback on the outcomes of the process.
- **Engagement:** when citizens and stakeholders are given the opportunity and the necessary resources (e.g. information, data and digital tools) to collaborate during all phases of the policy-cycle and in the service design and delivery. It acknowledges equal standing for citizens in setting the agenda, proposing project or policy options and shaping the dialogue – although the responsibility for the final decision or policy formulation in many cases rests with the investor or other authorities.

Citizen participation can support the daily activities of public servants as well as public institutions’ decision-making process.

- **Citizen participation can help public authorities solve problems or address specific situations, such as:**
 - public problems that require careful consideration from a diversity of perspectives;
 - when there is a vacuum of ideas and solutions;
 - addressing complex issues that require informed public judgment;
 - preparing long-term plans.
- **Citizen participation can help public authorities in their daily activities to take better decisions and provide services and policies that respond to citizens’ needs, especially:**
 - As a way **to gather information, data and public opinion.**

- As an opportunity **to tap into the collective intelligence** to co-create solutions, services or projects.
- As a mechanism **to collect public feedback** on proposed solutions such as draft legislations or plans.
- As a tool **to adapt and design public services** that respond the real needs of citizens.
- As a way to **involve citizens and stakeholders in the implementation** of policies, projects, and research.

2. Citizen participation in cohesion policy

Citizens can support the process of cohesion policy:

- It contributes to ensuring that projects funded through EU cohesion funds **take into account and use citizens' experience and knowledge** to address citizens' most pressing needs.
- It creates opportunities to **enhance the inclusion and diversity** of actors who take part in the planning and implementation of programmes linked to EU cohesion policy funds.
- It increases **awareness and understanding amongst the public** about the implementation of EU cohesion policy in their country, region, and community.
- It can **help pre-empt public conflict or stalemate situations**, which could arise during implementation stages of EU cohesion policy programs.
- It is good for policies, services and projects: the inclusion of citizens in the design, implementation and evaluation of the projects can **support the quality of the outcomes**.

Citizens can support the outcomes of cohesion policy:

The funds dedicated for cohesion policy are managed and delivered in partnership between the European Commission, Member states, and stakeholders at the local and regional levels. Success of these investments relies on robust and capable institutions, as well as effective partnerships between governments, stakeholders, and citizens. Citizens have a key role to play in shaping decisions of public investment, as well as making public authorities more transparent and accountable.

1. Citizen participation can increase public awareness and understanding about cohesion policies and the allocation of European funds in their country, region, and community.

2. Citizen participation can improve the quality of cohesion policy outcomes by supporting the inclusion of citizens' experience and knowledge to address citizens' most pressing needs.

3. Citizen participation can increase diversity and inclusion in cohesion policy by broadening the stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation of programmes linked to EU cohesion policy funds.

4. Citizen participation can support transparency and accountability in cohesion

policy by creating opportunities for the public to monitor and evaluate the use of resources and the outcome of projects

3. How to involve citizens in cohesion policy?

There is not a one-solution-fits-all approach to citizen participation in cohesion policy, as it strongly depends on the needs of the public authority, the timing and the space available for citizens inputs. However, the list below can give you some examples of participatory practices in the implementation and evaluation stages of cohesion policy:

During the **implementation stage**, citizens can provide help in deploying the solutions or projects decided in the previous stage.

- Citizen participation in the implementation stage refers to opportunities for citizens and stakeholders to be involved in the delivery of projects or services.
- Co-production is an overarching term to describe how public authorities can harness the skills, capabilities and energy of citizens and stakeholders to deliver services that best meet the needs of future users.
- In the context of cohesion policy, public authorities can include citizens in the implementation phase by:
 - Engaging citizens and stakeholders in the creation of solutions or prototypes for services or projects, through hackathons, collaborative workshops, or maker spaces.
 - Creating spaces for co-creation between public authorities and citizens and stakeholders as a way to continuously involve them in the implementation of projects or services. For example, open innovation labs, open spaces, recurrent public meetings, etc.
 - Allowing citizens and stakeholders to be involved throughout the implementation phase, by publishing information and data about the progress of implementation and by providing opportunities to provide feedback on the implementation through digital platforms or in-person mechanisms.

In the **evaluation stage**, citizens can be engaged to evaluate or monitor the implementation of the solution and to measure its outcomes and results.

- Citizen participation in the evaluation stage refers to opportunities for citizens and stakeholders to see, monitor and reward or sanction public authorities in the delivery of projects or services.
- Participation in the monitoring and evaluation of a policy's outcomes can provide valuable information for governments to adjust policies and make sure they correspond to citizens' needs.
- In the context of cohesion policy, public authorities can include citizens in the evaluation phase by:
 - Providing information and data on the selected projects, the expected outcomes, the implementation progress, and the results. For example, through open data platform, communication campaigns, open meetings, websites, etc.

- Soliciting citizen feedback on services or projects implemented as part of the cohesion policy program to support efficiency and improve results. Various methodologies can gather citizens' opinions and perceptions, such as polls, surveys or Community Scores Cards.
- Involving citizens in the continuous monitoring of projects or programs funded as part of the cohesion policy, through public hearings, citizens' advisory groups, or digital tools.
- Empower citizens to monitor and evaluate the allocation of public funds as part of the cohesion policy program through release of information and data or community led audits.

4. OECD's understanding of innovative citizen participation

The OECD has gathered evidence and data that support the idea that citizen participation can improve both the process and the outcomes of public decisions. To support its member and partner countries, the OECD has launched a new area of work to explore the paradigm changes already underway towards more impactful participation and a more inclusive public decision making. The OECD is gathering evidence and good practices to promote new forms of deliberative, collaborative and participatory decision making that allows citizens to be involved throughout the policy cycle. There are many different types of innovative citizen participation, for the scope of this project, the OECD is interested in supporting public authorities to implement processes which can include:

- Representative deliberative processes such as Citizen Juries or Assemblies.
- Co-creation mechanisms such as hackathons, public challenges or maker spaces.
- Co-governance arrangements such as co-operatives, digital commons, or shared spaces.
- Civic monitoring such as social auditing or communal evaluation.
- Open innovation practices, such as crowdsourcing, hackathons or public challenge
- Participatory budget as a mechanism to allow citizens and CSOs to influence public decisions through the direct allocation of public resources to priorities or projects