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|  | EUROPEAN COMMISSIONDIRECTORATE-GENERALREGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY |

**CALL for expression of interest**

**for managing authorities/Intermedate BOdies to participate in a Pilot action on capacity building of BENEFICIARIES**

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. EU Cohesion policy aims to support a balanced regional development across the EU. Achieving this goal depends on more than funding. The best possible use of cohesion policy funding requires a high performing eco-system for fund management and implementation.
2. New provisions giving more weight to administrative capacity/capacity building have been included in the regulations for cohesion policy 2021-2027. Member States have been encouraged to make full use of these.
3. The responsibility for effective administration and use of the cohesion policy funds does not rest only with the programme authorities responsible for managing the funds. In addition to competent programme authorities success will depend on well-informed capable beneficiaries who are able to develop operations contributing to fulfilling the objectives of individual programmes and to implement them in an efficient and effective way. Smaller beneficiaries with limited resources are frequently the weakest link in this chain.
4. In the 2019 Country Reports of the European Semester the capacity of beneficiaries was highlighted for many EU Member States as an important factor for effective delivery which should be addressed in the 2021-2027 programmes.
5. Capacity building of beneficiaries has been identified as a challenge that needs to be addressed in most of the roadmaps for administrative capacity building developed by Member States/managing authorities for the 2021-2027 period.
6. The importance of well capacitated beneficiaries, and a strong, positive relationship between managing authorities/intermediate bodies and beneficiaries was a main finding in both phases of the OECD’s work with DG Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) in its pilot project “Strengthening Administrative Capacities of Managing Authorities for Effective Use of EU Regional Policy Investment Funds for the Post-2020 Programming Period”.
7. Under shared management it is the responsibility of Member States to ensure adequate capacity of beneficiaries to develop and implement projects. For this Member States have at their disposal funding for technical assistance. Capacity building linked to investments can also be funded under the specific objectives of the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund. Furthermore, project costs can include funding that beneficiaries need for both project preparation and implementation.
8. DG REGIO supports Member States in their efforts to strengthen the administrative capacity of the entire cohesion policy ecosystem through a number of tools and concrete actions. Focus is on activities that are difficult for Member States to carry out on their own. Programme authorities can for example exchange experience and good practice on how to support beneficiaries using the peer exchange tools TAIEX-REGIO Peer2Peer and REGIO Communities of Practitioners. Furthermore, capacity of beneficiaries was one of four key topics covered by the 2nd Forum for Managing Authorities on Building Administrative Capacity 2021-2027 on 18 April 2023.
9. To complement the support referred to in the previous point DG REGIO will launch a pilot action with the aim of supporting managing authorities/intermediate bodies in their efforts to build capacity of beneficiaries.

# OBJECTIVE OF THE CALL

1. Under this Call, DG Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) seeks expressions of interest from managing authorities and/or intermediate bodies of ERDF, Cohesion Fund, and Just Transition Fund programmes wishing to take advantage of expertise support to enhance further their administrative capacity to support capacity building of beneficiaries and strengthen partnership and collective work with beneficiaries.
2. DG REGIO aims to cooperate with and support up to six managing authorities/ intermediate bodies in the framework of a pilot action that will focus on reinforcing the capability of managing authorities/ intermediate bodies to tackle the challenge of having to support a wide spectrum of different categories of beneficiaries which may have very different needs.
3. Specific attention will be given to how managing authorities/intermediate bodies can help beneficiaries that have limited resources or limited access to support functions, such as local authorities and civil society organisations/NGOs or other types of beneficiaries facing specific challenges.
4. DG REGIO will cooperate with and use the expertise of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for implementing the pilot action. The OECD experts will:
	1. Provide advice to six pilot managing authorities/intermediate bodies;
	2. Accompany the pilot managing authorities/intermediate bodies in analysing and understanding the concrete capacity building needs of different categories of beneficiaries in different stages of the programme cycle;
	3. Support and inspire the pilot managing authorities/intermediate bodies on how to engage and work in partnership with beneficiaries, and how to encourage beneficiaries to work jointly with other beneficiaries on developing and implementing projects;
	4. Support the managing authorities/intermediate bodies to develop support mechanisms and an action plan on how to address the identified challenges and needs of beneficiaries;
	5. Engage representatives of beneficiaries and other relevant stakeholders in the process and further strengthen cooperation between them and managing authorities /intermediate bodies;
	6. Based on the experiences collected from the pilot action: identify good practices and develop a methodological approach for how to best support different categories of beneficiaries that will be included in an inspirational toolkit/handbook with a self-assessment component;
	7. Organise a closing event in Brussels.
5. Work will be carried out in the framework of six pilot projects implemented in cooperation with each participating managing authority/intermediate body. The experiences collected and knowledge generated from these pilot projects will be widely disseminated to all programme authorities responsible for cohesion policy programmes through various means.
6. It is expected that the pilot action will start in autumn 2023 and be concluded in the first quarter of 2025.
7. The pilot action will start with a kick-off meeting in Brussels in October 2023 (indicative timing). This event will bring together the six pilot authorities, the European Commission team, and the OECD team to begin building the relationship between all actors, to give the pilot authorities an opportunity to introduce themselves and provide an overview of their profiles and that of their beneficiaries, and to permit the OECD to describe in detail the pilot action and working methodology.
8. Each of the six pilot projects will include local workshops involving the pilot authority, beneficiaries and other relevant stakeholders.
9. The pilot action will require the active participation of the managing authorities/intermediate bodies. They will need to delegate employees to participate in workshops and interviews and to contribute to/review documents. Further, they are expected to host the local workshops referred to above.
10. After conclusion of the pilot action the participating managing authorities/intermediate bodies are expected to implement the action plan developed and keep it updated as necessary, involving relevant stakeholders.
11. The pilot action will include elements of exchange of experience and knowledge between the participating pilot authorities. Representatives from any relevant REGIO Peer2Peer Community may also be invited to join if deemed useful. In addition to the kick-off meeting, two workshops involving representatives of all pilot authorities will be organised in Brussels. Travel and hotel will be covered for all participants.
12. The managing authorities'/intermediate bodies’ costs associated with the pilot that go beyond the costs for travel and hotel for meetings/workshops in Brussels may be covered through technical assistance funding of the concerned operational programme.
13. Interested managing authorities/intermediate bodies should in their expression of interest demonstrate their commitment (including to involve representatives of beneficiaries in the process) and organisational readiness (e.g. appointment of a dedicated team involving both the managing authority and any relevant intermediate bodies) to participate in the pilot action.
14. The expected result of this Call is **a shortlist of six managing authorities/intermediate bodies** from those who submitted their expression of interest.

# EXPECTED OUTCOMES

1. The action plans for the individual pilot authorities should be completed in the 4th quarter of 2024.
2. The inspirational toolkit/handbook with the self-assessment component will be finalised in January 2025 and presented at the closing event in Brussels in the first quarter of 2025.

# WHO CAN APPLY UNDER THIS CALL? ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

1. The Call for expression of interest targets managing authorities/intermediate bodies for **national/sectoral, regional** or **cooperation programmes** co-financed by the ERDF, the Cohesion Fund and/or the Just Transition Fund.
2. To be eligible, the expression of interest will have to meet all the following eligibility criteria:

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|  **ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA** | **REFERENCE IN THE APPLICATION FORM** |
| **1.A**  | The managing authority/intermediate body has **appointed a dedicated coordinator** to work with the European Commission and the OECD on the pilot project. The managing authority/intermediate body is **strongly motivated to further strengthen its capacity to support capacity building of beneficiaries and is committed to make necessary resources available for this.** This includes having a strong interest in self-assessment/evaluation and openness to peer expertise and working with internal and external stakeholders/expertise.  | Section 2 |
| **1.B** | The managing authority has informed the relevant national coordinating body/ministry (or equivalent) about the application.The managing authority (if applicant) commits to include any relevant intermediate bodies in the project team.The intermediate body (if applicant) commits to include the managing authority in the project team. | Section 3 |
| **1.C**  | The managing authority/intermediate body has identified the different types of beneficiaries it is working with and specified those which need specific attention/support. | Section 4  |

# CRITERIA FOR SHORTLISTING EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

1. The eligible expressions of interest will be assessed against the following **assessment criteria**:

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| **CRITERIA FOR SHORTLISTING EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST**  | **REFERENCE IN THE APPLICATION FORM**  |
| **2.A**  | The level of **motivation and commitment for participation in the pilot action** as demonstrated by the expression of interest.  | Section 2  |
| **2.B** | **Previous experience** of working with different categories of beneficiariesand **motivation to explore how to best support their capacity building.** | Section 4 |
| **2.C**  | **Relevance** – extent to which the managing authority /intermediate body is facing challenges that need to be addressed.  | Section 5  |
| **2.D** | **Overall quality of the proposal** | Sections 2-6 |
| **2.E** | **Dissemination:** the MA/IB is willing to disseminate the outcomes and results of the pilot project/action | Section 6 |

# ASSESSMENT PROCESS

1. Expressions of interest will be checked against the eligibility criteria and assessed according to the selection criteria of this Call.
2. The Commission aims at a diverse shortlist in terms of geographical coverage and coverage of different types of programmes and categories of beneficiaries.
3. The assessment will be carried out by a selection panel consisting of representatives of the European Commission. The final decision on the shortlist will be taken by the European Commission.
4. All applicants will be informed about the decision taken.
5. 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 a managing authority/intermedaite body.

# PROCEDURE FOR SUBMISSION OF EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

1. Managing authorities/intermediate bodies expressing their interest to participate in the pilot action on capacity building of beneficiaries should complete the application form provided in the Annex 1 of this Call.
2. The working language of the pilot action will be English.
3. The expression of interest should be submitted electronically to the following email address: REGIO-E1-ADMINISTRATIVE-CAPACITY@ec.europa.eu

# DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

1. The deadline for submitting an expression of interest is Monday **7 August 2023**.
2. Expressions of interest submitted after the deadline of this Call will not be considered.

# CONTACT

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

# ANNEX 1: Application Form

**Call for expression of interest for managing authorities/intermediate bodies to participate in a pilot action on capacity building of beneficiaries**

Please complete this form electronically and send it to: REGIO-E1-ADMINISTRATIVE-CAPACITY@ec.europa.eu

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| 1. **Information about the applicant**
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| 1.1. | Name of managing authority/ intermediate body |  |
| 1.2. | Name of programme |  |
| 1.3. | Contact person for this application | Name, surname |  |
| Job title |  |
| Phone (e.g. +000-00000000) |  |
| E-mail |  |
| 1.4. | Language portfolio/profile of the contact person and core team members | Language(s) used for daily work |  |
| Knowledge of other languages  |  |

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| 1. **Motivation and commitment**
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| a) Please explain why your managing authority/intermediate body is interested in participating in the pilot action. b) Please provide an indication of the resources that your administration can make available for the duration of the pilot action. Explain also to what extent your administration would be able to commit to the pilot action, including commitment to work in partnership with beneficiaries, and to its follow-up (implementing the action plan that will be the result of the pilot project, sharing experience with other programme authorities in your country or other EU Member States etc.). c) In what way will your senior/top management be engaged in or informed about the pilot action?  |
| *Max. 500 words* |
| 1. **Interaction with relevant national coordination body/ministry and cooperation between managing authority and relevant intermediate body/bodies**
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| a) Please indicate whether the relevant national coordination body/ministry (or equivalent) is informed about your application. What role do you envisage for the relevant national coordination body/ministry in the pilot project? b) If the managing authority is applicant: Please also describe how you intend to cooperate with relevant intermediate bodies (if such exist) throughout the pilot phaseb) If an intermediate body is applicant: Please also describe how you intend to cooperate with the managing authority throughout the pilot phase. |
| *Max. 300 words* |
| 1. **Categories of beneficiaries that your administration is working with and support currently provided**
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| a) Please describe the different categories of beneficiaries that your administration is working with. Which of those, in your view, need particular attention/support? b) Could you also describe different forms of support that your administration has provided to beneficiaries so far? How do you identify what actual needs your beneficiaries have? c) Is capacity of beneficiaries covered in any national, regional or programme specific Roadmap for Administrative Capacity Building or any other strategic document? |
| *Max 500 words* |
| 1. **Main challenges faced as regards capacity gaps/capacity building of different categories of beneficiaries**
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| Please provide a description of **the main challenges your administration needs to tackle as regards capacity building of the different categories of beneficiaries under your responsibility.** What are **your specific needs** that you would like to be addressed?  |
| *Max 500 words* |

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| 1. **Dissemination**
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| Please explain to what extent you are willing to share and how you envisage to disseminate the outcomes and results of the pilot project with other managing authorities/intermediate bodies in your country or the EU that would potentially be interested in adopting a similar approach. |
| *Max 500 words* |